The Effects of Code-Switching:
How *Bless Me, Ultima* Explores Chican@ Culture and American Identity

by

Alaina Berry

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Faculty Mentors:  Dr. Linda Joyce Brown, Associate Professor of English and
Dr. Sharleen Mondal, Assistant Professor of English
Additional Reader: Dr. Pravin Rodrigues, Associate Professor of Communications
Abstract

In his novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya explores the New Mexican territory and Chican@ culture through the eyes of the protagonist, a young Chicano boy named Antonio (Tony) Márez. With the help of Ultima, a curandera staying with his family, Tony navigates his tumultuous childhood riddled with challenging dichotomies within his education, future occupation, and religion. Anaya tells this story predominantly using English language but also code-switches using Spanish language for specific words, phrases, and dialogue. While the presence of Spanish language within the novel is important, the code-switching methods that Anaya uses in addition to his placement of his code-switching applications challenges the construction of American identity as monolinguistic and Anglo American; Anaya’s novel presents the idea that Spanish language and Chican@ culture are intrinsic to American identity, not separated from it. The American Southwest, particularly New Mexico, was inhabited by Native Americans and Mexicans but was colonized by the Anglo Americans in the nineteenth century which perpetuated the suppression of cultures and languages not associated with the Anglo American culture and English language respectively. This marginalization is recognized in the novel, and the novel also acknowledges how the history and culture of Chican@’s has been obscured and separated from the constructed American identity. Furthermore, the novel combats that suppression by asserting that American identity is not racially exclusive nor monolinguistic because Chican@ culture and Spanish language are also part of American identity. Research regarding code-switching, the power of language, and the Chicano Rights Movement as well as close readings of Anaya’s use of both English and Spanish languages through his code-switching reveal the political and cultural value of Chican@ culture as an American identity in the novel *Bless Me, Ultima*.

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1 The term Chican@ (as opposed to using the terms Chicano, Chicana, or Chicano/a) is a convention that has been applied to recent scholarship as a means of avoiding the binary limitations of gender (especially when this term is applied to a culture).
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Introduction: Challenging American Identity

Language is often not thought about unless there is a misunderstanding. Perhaps someone who uses Spanish as her first language says “chicken” when she meant “kitchen” while speaking English or someone who knows English but is learning Spanish refers to juice as “juicio” (which is similar to the English word in sound though not in meaning) when he actually meant “jugo.” These everyday errors may result in pondering how language in general works, but the study of more than one language, such as English and Spanish, opens multiple doors of understanding and exploration that otherwise may have been unopened. Rudolfo Anaya, author of the classic Chican@ (Mexican American) novel *Bless Me, Ultima* that was published in 1972, experienced the wonder and frustrations of learning a different language firsthand. According to his biography written by Abelardo Baeza, “[Rudolfo Anaya] was reared in Santa Rosa, [New Mexico], a small farming and ranching community. He was under the impression that the entire world spoke Spanish. ‘It was a struggle to learn English at school,’ he says, ‘but learn I did….Later, I was to include many of the experiences of those years into my first novel’” (3). And he did. In his novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya tells the story of a young Chicano boy who is not unlike himself. He uses the protagonist, Antonio, as a vehicle to describe some of the struggles he faced as a Chicano himself—living in the borderlands and finding his identity as both Mexican and American. His novel soon became regarded as one of the most iconic Chican@ novels to date. While there are countless cultural and literary reasons that this novel

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2 Important note regarding the use of the words Chican@, Mexican American, Latin@, and Hispanic: These words do not all carry the same meaning, and I will not use them interchangeably throughout this thesis. The word Chican@ specifically refers to a Mexican American culture/person and emerged from the political Chicano Rights Movement in the 1960s whereas Mexican American was the term used before Chican@ appeared as a result of the movement. Latin@ refers to anyone and/or anything that comes from Latin America, and Hispanic refers to anyone/anything associated with Spanish language. As language is a particular focus for this essay, and words in both English and Spanish languages hold certain significance in my analyses, it is crucial to explain the differences among these terms.
has created such an impact not only on Chican@ community, but throughout the United States Anglo American population as well, a unique attribute within Anaya’s novel (and within other Chican@ novels as well) is his decision to code-switch. To code-switch is to change languages within a text, and in the case of Anaya’s novel, written mainly in English, this code-switching refers to his use of Spanish language. It may seem strange that Anaya would write a novel predominantly in English after admitting to having difficulty learning the language as a child; however, the education he received in New Mexico was conducted in English. Thus, Anaya learned to formally read, write, and speak in English and went on to obtain his Masters in English (Junquera 101). He is proof of how writers possess the ability to use more than one language in order to create a deeper meaning and cultural experience in fiction.

Through his code-switching, Anaya invites readers and critics to consider how code-switching in a novel carries deeper cultural and literary significance. This significance will be explored using the methodology of intersectionality, a historicist approach, and close readings in order to reveal the history of Chican@ culture and how that applies to the code-switching methods that Anaya uses in his novel. While many American texts would portray an American identity as linguistically structured around English language and culturally structured around narratives that have erased histories of Anglo American conquests, I argue that Bless Me, Ultima challenges that. By presenting Spanish language through code-switching as well as a Chicano protagonist, the novel asserts that American identity is not limited to monolingual standards or an Anglo-centric American identity.

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3 The approach of intersectionality is explained by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her work “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” She describes this concept as an interaction of dimensions within identity such as race, gender, class, culture, and language.
Anaya’s use of English language in his literary work also seemed to influence his writing style early on in his career. Potentially as a side effect of his using English, Anaya tried to write fiction using “Anglo American writers as role models” (Baeza 19). This tactic did not bring success to Anaya’s work. He admits that he had to create his own writing style in order to share his stories: “in the sixties when I first began to work, I used Anglo American writers as role models. But I really couldn’t get my act together until I left them behind. They had a lot to teach me and I don’t underestimate that – you’re learning whether you’re reading a comic book or Hemingway or Shakespeare or Cervantes – but I couldn’t tell my story in their terms”” (19).

While his acknowledgment that he “couldn’t tell [his] story in their terms” may seem to be an obvious revelation for a writer, it is quite a powerful notion. Anaya references Hemingway, Shakespeare, and Cervantes – all prolific writers with two of those (Hemingway and Shakespeare) who wrote in English and the other (Cervantes) who wrote in Spanish. By admitting that the styles of these writers do not allow him to write in his own “terms,” Anaya illustrates that there is something unique and indescribable within Chican@ culture that often meshes together both English and Spanish languages as well as the Mexican and Anglo American cultures. The fact that he felt the need to leave the Anglo American writers behind is not a rejection of their work; rather, Anaya is asserting that American identity is not limited to the Anglo American culture nor English language that accompanies it. He uses code-switching as a means to portray Chican@ culture and Spanish language as characteristics of American identity.

The purpose of this project is to investigate how Rudolfo Anaya uses Spanish language in his primarily English language novel Bless Me, Ultima and how this code-switching affects the way the reader understands the novel. His method of Spanish language use, including how
frequently Spanish language is used, in what context it is used, and which words are/are not translated represents not only his style as a writer, but showcases Chican@ culture behind the language with its familial, religious, and educational values seen with the vaquero and farmer familial occupations, the dichotomy of Catholicism and paganism, and how English is taught at schools. Additionally, his code-switching shows how American identity is not monolingual (regarding English language) nor is it Anglo American; the Anglo-centric construction of American identity fails to acknowledge the history of Chican@s and those who occupied the United States before Anglo Americans, particularly the history of conquest as many Mexicans were forced to give up their language and territory. This is important in American history and thus, important to American identity and how it is constructed. I would not argue that Chican@s should be invited into the Anglo-centric construction of American identity; however, I would argue that the implicit construction of American identity should be changed in order to recognize the historical and political plights and accomplishments of Chican@ culture. Instead of arguing that Chican@s should be included within dominant constructions of American identity, I am asserting that the problem lies within the construction of Anglo-centric American identity itself. I am critiquing such narratives because they disregard the racial and linguistic violence that occurred as a result of Anglo American conquest within the Southwest United States that is now present-day New Mexico. Code-switching novels, such as Anaya’s, present a new way of thinking about what “American” means, one that goes beyond language and acknowledgment of the past.

In addition to his use of code-switching methods, it is clear that Anaya has literary prowess through the attention that his novel has received for its innovative writing techniques such as magical realism and symbolism; while Anaya’s expert use of these literary techniques
has been deservedly praised, the reason that Anaya’s novel is groundbreaking politically and culturally for Chican@s is due to his use of code-switching that remains unexplored. While it is important to note and analyze how Spanish language is used by Anaya, the characteristic of the novel that makes it distinct from monolingual texts is that the code-switching occurs. Code-switching allows English and Spanish languages to share a textual space and provides a voice to the many Chican@s who use both languages in their daily lives, but this voice had been suppressed for many years throughout the United States and is still actively fighting to be heard. Chican@’s fight for a voice in American society can be traced back to the history of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement – and much before that.

Of all of the American Southwest, the territory of New Mexico has had the highest Spanish-speaking population and has experienced a tumultuous history. Mexicans had inhabited this area for hundreds of years (before the statehood of New Mexico and the independence of the United States), but tension arose between Mexicans and the Anglo Americans during the Mexican American War in the middle of the nineteenth century regarding the colonization of the territory of what is now New Mexico (following the annexation of Texas) and when the Gold Rush brought more Anglo Americans westward. Mexico lost this territory to the United States following this war though “an estimated 75,000 Spanish-speaking people lived in the Southwest: 60,000 in New Mexico…Spanish was the dominant language and a combination of Spanish-Mexican-Indian culture dominated the region's life style” (“Language Rights and New Mexico Statehood”). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was passed in 1848 as an attempt to guarantee “certain civil, political, and religious rights to the Spanish-speaking colonists” (“Language Rights and New Mexico Statehood”). Unfortunately, these guarantees were often ignored as the increasing population of Anglo Americans began to suppress Mexican culture and Spanish
language through the influx of Anglo Americans arriving westward during the Gold Rush. The Anglo Americans had begun to colonize the New Mexican territory, and once New Mexico officially joined the United States, the suppression and discouragement of Mexican cultural practices, including Spanish language, rapidly took effect. Since then, the topic of the presence of Spanish language and its place within the United States and New Mexico has been a source of contention and debate. While this cultural and linguistic suppression went on for decades, it was not until the 1980s, when Latin American emigrants began to arrive in the United States more frequently, that “English-Only” policies and “the push for making English the official language of the United States” became more prominent (Gershon and Pantoja 1525). This sparked a great deal of tension in New Mexico, and New Mexicans, particularly Chican@s, began to promote the importance of retaining Spanish language within the territory. According to Rosina Lozano in her work about Spanish language in New Mexico:

Native Spanish speakers used the Spanish language as a political gift. New Mexicans—in advocating for greater power within their state—insisted their citizens’ Spanish language abilities were indispensable to U.S. international policy and goals. Puerto Ricans claimed Spanish as a means to signal their independence from the United States and better position themselves in opposition to it. In furthering these two distinctive goals of identity construction, minority language politics provides a space outside of race to claim and advocate for different versions of American identity. (Lozano 293)

Here, Lozano identifies how Spanish language gave not only Chican@s, but other Hispanic cultures a platform to speak out against a narrow-minded version of what American identity is often thought to be. Arguing that Spanish language was a part of the culture for those who were
also American citizens sparked the idea that American identity is not only associated with English language; America is home to people from many different nationalities and languages, and the limitations of advocating for only one language is diminishing the value of American identity with which other Hispanic and Chican@ people identified. Those living in the New Mexican territories strain against narratives of Anglo American identity which marginalize Chican@s racially and linguistically. This continued cultural and linguistic suppression eventually initiated the Chicano Rights Movement that had advocated for Chican@ culture in the 1960s. The publication of Rudolfo Anaya’s literature in the 1970s was so poignant and relevant because it was influenced by this movement.

*Bless Me, Ultima* was written at a critical time regarding the emergence of Chican@ culture. Published in 1972 and now perceived as “the most recognized Chicano novel of all time,” Anaya’s novel reached readers on the tail-end of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement (Baeza xi). This historically important movement, a push toward promoting Chican@ culture, is often overlooked in educational settings and is virtually unknown by people who have no link to Chican@ culture. Its media coverage in comparison with the African American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s was minimal. The Chicano movement took place from the 1960s through the 1970s, during and following the African American movement, and the article “No Golden Age: Television News and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement” explains a possible reason for this media coverage discrepancy:

Governed as they were by the black-white binary that has animated U.S. history, the corporate-owned networks largely ignored Mexican American activism during these decades, and when they did cover the movement, they tended to represent
the Chicano movement not as a complex campaign for equality, but as one of several forces destroying America from within. (Ontiveros 898)

This misperception of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement’s mission, as portrayed by the media, discredits all of the effort and energy Chican@s and their supporters put into this movement because it is shown to the public as individual attacks against the security of the U.S. rather than as an organized group of people fighting for justice and equality. History remembers specific, structured events led by African American political leaders such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, but the actions led by Chican@s are typically remembered as sporadic and chaotic. Many events that attempted to shed light on the often-misunderstood Chican@ culture, such as the 1969 Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, were never formally publicized by the media (Ontiveros 897). However, the few events that did receive public attention in the U.S. were then often misrepresented by the media, conveying Chican@ liberators and protesters as threats to national security. This type of portrayal of Chican@ people further ostracized them from American culture as well as diminished the importance of their history and culture from the perspective of an American citizen⁴.

However, rather than polarize the work of Chican@s and African Americans by contrasting how their political movements have been represented historically, it is imperative to acknowledge that both are groups of people in the United States working toward equal representation and justice for their people. Gordon Mantler’s book Power to the People: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Justice, 1960-1974, illustrates how both groups were striving for similar goals though they had differing methods, and he challenges:

⁴ The historical misrepresentation of Chican@ culture calls for the urgency of maintaining Mexican American studies and programs, as well as other ethnic studies and programs, in the present day.
the traditional time frame placed on the Chicano movement, the black freedom struggle, and the federal War on Poverty by highlighting how multiracial and identity politics reinforced each other throughout this period…While both African Americans and Mexican Americans [or Chicanos] viewed poverty as a dangerous obstacle to freedom and full citizenship, they often desired vastly contrasting solutions to inequality. Their solutions clashed not only with each other but also with federal officials, who had settled on a War on Poverty that stressed elite-driven incremental changes to the economy. [This book] explores the mid-decade transition from mostly separate but parallel black and Mexican American civil rights movements to tentative efforts at multiracial antipoverty coalition building.

While Chican@ and African American cultures advocated for their people during the same timeframe and had similar motives, because their methodologies for overcoming these obstacles differed, the outcomes and the way that the groups were conveyed also differed. What is important to gain from this understanding, however, is not that one culture was more successful than the other but that readers understand the plights of each culture and how they worked and continue to work to defend their cultures and, in turn, their identities. These movements are interlinked in many ways, and an exploration of both is necessary in order to better understand social movements of marginalized people in America. However, in this thesis, I am continuing Mantler’s broadening and understanding of these movements by particularly focusing on the Chicano Rights Movement.

Undoubtedly, this Chican@ movement greatly influenced Anaya’s work and is a testament to how crucial it is for Chican@ culture to be accurately portrayed in literature,
especially as it is conveyed through the conventions of code-switching from English language to Spanish language. The fact that Anaya, a Chicano himself, chose to incorporate non-translated lines of Spanish language within his novel indicates the authority of Chican@ culture within the American culture. Code-switching with Spanish and English languages shows how they are able to share a textual space, what has often been referred to as the “contact zone” by scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt, a professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literatures. In her work, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, Pratt “use[s] this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (617). What is crucial to understand regarding the importance of code-switching and the presence of Spanish within an English novel relates to the historical power struggle which also continues to occur in individual Chican@s who are struggling with their dual-culture identity\(^5\). This fight for power that every culture has encountered, whether by dominating or being dominated, influences how other cultures perceive one another. Specifically, in the United States, English is perceived to be the accepted public language, and all other languages are less widely accepted. While other languages exist, they are often not used for professional communication (or in the majority of workforces) and are often not used in academic settings except when taught as a “foreign” language. Kathryn Woolard, a professor who specializes in linguistic anthropology, explains that language authority is not determined by majority, but that “the test of legitimacy is the extent to which the population that does not control that variety acknowledges and endorses its authority, its correctness, its power to convince, and its right to be

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\(^5\) While the specific context of code-switching and the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* critique the conquest of the Anglo American in New Mexico, Spanish language in literary works does not always represent a critique of colonial violence. This is especially true given the long history of conquest by Spaniards who spoke the same language.
obeyed, that is, the extent to which authority is ceded to those who do control that variety” (741). Thus, the dominance of English comes in part from the acceptance of English as the dominant language from those who speak other languages. While this explanation is not meant to cast blame on those who choose to use English language, this expresses how the power of language works both ways – both the colonizer and the colonized play a role in which language becomes dominant in society. In the United States, English language has emerged and remained dominant though Spanish language use and presence has increased dramatically within the past few years. Nonetheless, American identity is still Anglo-centric and monolinguistically based in English; Anaya’s novel suggests that this should be otherwise through its code-switching methods and Chican@ perspective.

As a way for Anaya to share important aspects of Chican@ culture, he wrote novels in which he identified with Chican@ characters within those novels. In an interview with Anaya conducted by Professor Carmen Flys Junquera, Anaya explicitly states that “writing is a way for a writer to give his personal ‘journey through life’ to the character. And so the character reflects the author” (Junquera 97). More specifically, Anaya identifies with Antonio (Tony) in *Bless Me, Ultima* which speaks to how the conflict of identity that Tony experiences in the novel is potentially a common theme for Chican@ people. This is further discussed in the interview when Junquera asks Anaya if his work is “a bildungsroman….in search of that Nuevo Mexicano [New Mexican] identity” (98). To that, Anaya replies that he believes it is. He discusses his “very Nuevo Mexicano life,” transitioning from a farming community to the Anglo American “mainstream culture” (98). This follows closely with what Anaya’s characters experience within the novel. They struggle with dual identities as Mexican Americans and with how to accept Anglo cultural practices in addition to preserving Mexican traditions. Anaya, whether
consciously or not, is preserving his Mexican heritage through the use of Spanish language when he refers to his New Mexican life as his “Nuevo Mexicano” life. He does this a few other times, including his use of the words “Mexicanos” (Mexicans), “Españoles” (Spanish people), and “Indios” (Native Americans, in this case). These references represent the historical presence of Spanish language within the New Mexican territory. In this way, the identity of the land itself is tied to Spanish language and to the identities of the people (such as the aforementioned groups) by extension. Also, when Anaya says “mainstream culture,” when referencing Anglo practices, he is conveying the idea that there is an expectation that Anglo practices should be embraced and accepted; because these practices are dominant, they have authority over Mexican or Chican@ culture. According to this narrative, Mexican or Chican@ practices should be suppressed or hidden in order to become part of the more socially acceptable Anglo-centric American society. However, because the United States seized New Mexico as an American state and this state is tied to Spanish language and Chican@ and Mexican culture, these cultures and Spanish language challenge the Anglo-centric construct of American identity and the proposed obligatory acceptance of it. Anaya uses his novel to explore American identity and the identities of his characters (and himself) more thoroughly.

Contrary to most authors, Anaya openly identifies with his characters and uses them to explore not only his personal identity, but the overarching identity of what it means to be a Chican@ living in the United States. In order to achieve this, the novel Bless Me, Ultima does not necessarily focus on dramatic character development for characters outside of the protagonist, Tony, but on archetypes that portray typical Chican@ traditions; this reflects the “bildungsroman” method that Junquera had referenced. The character of Ultima, for example, is not one that deviates significantly from a conventional curandera. She embodies the wise,
elderly, potentially magical healer who guides Tony not just through life events but through his spiritual journey as well – and she is just one example. In his work *Tender Accents of Sound: Spanish in the Chicano Novel in English*, Ernst Rudin has analyzed various Chican@ novels that feature code-switching and created a generalized list of the types of themes, characters, and settings a reader would be likely to encounter while reading Chican@ literature. Among many other characteristics, a few aspects that Rudin highlights can be found in *Bless Me, Ultima*:

- a realistic time and place, in a Chicano village or barrio...the wars in which the United States was involved in this century (with the obvious exception of Operation Desert Storm) and in which many Mexican Americans fought and died as foot soldiers...the main character is a male Chicano who shows autobiographical traits of the author and is presented as an exemplary figure...traditional Mexican-Hispanic customs and values dominate...catholic religiousness and Mexican cooking appear through the mother of the protagonist; and in various novels, Mexican (American) folklore, healer wisdom, and magic find their expression in the grandmother or another elderly female family member who is a good storyteller...exposure to English in school came as a shock, and initially the protagonist feels ill at ease in the classroom. Soon, however, he starts to like the English language, becomes a dedicated student...the themes of language conflict and of giving up Spanish for English are thematic constants in the texts and part of the more general constant of culture conflict and acculturation. Cultural conflict, the search for one’s “true” roots, one’s identity, and the step from a Hispanic environment into an Anglo-Saxon one. (32-35)
A few of these characteristics may be more prevalent in *Bless Me, Ultima* (such as the traditional Mexican customs, the search for identity, and the healer wisdom) than others (such as the presence of U.S. wars) but all play a significant role not only in the plot development, but also in the character development of young Tony. While this is not an exhaustive list, even when not provided with every aspect that Rudin has compiled that is also in Anaya’s novel, a reader can gain a better understanding of what a Chican@ population values in literature. This also reinforces why the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* is particularly rich for analysis and exploration – because it is a great representation of a classic Chican@ novel, “an anthem for Chicano literature” (32). In fact, Rudin concludes that, compared to more than twenty other Chican@ works, “Ultima is the text that corresponds most faithfully to the stereotypical and hypothetical Chicano novel” (36). Additionally, Anaya was formally recognized for his talent as a writer by gaining awards including, but not limited to, The National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1979, 1980); National Chicano Council for Higher Education Fellowship (1980); and the New Mexico Governor’s Award for Excellence in Literature (Baez 35). Anaya’s use of code-switching coupled with the political topic of Chican@ culture and American identity made the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* a powerful challenge to of the construct of a monolingual and Anglo-centric American identity.

*Bless Me, Ultima* tells the coming-of-age journey of young Antonio (Tony) Márez, a Chicano boy from 1940s New Mexico conflicted between multiple opposing views – his father’s love of the llano and his mother’s farmer family heritage, his appreciation for the Catholic Church and his interest in a pagan religion (specifically the golden carp which was a god disguised as a carp), and his innocence and curiosity. His investigation of these themes is intensified when Ultima, an elderly woman rumored to have magical abilities, moves into Tony’s
home. Ultima provides stability and guidance in Tony’s chaotic world as he is witness to several deaths, including those of war veteran Lupito, town drunk Narciso, villainous Tenorio, and Tony’s classmate Florence, all while trying to navigate the conflicting opposites of his childhood world. Ultima teaches Tony the ways of an authentic curandera, a woman in Chican@ culture who uses herbal medicines to heal people, and they form a unique bond (Portilla 23). Anaya uses Ultima’s friendship with Tony as a way for Tony to explore not only his parents’ and society’s expectations for himself, but also his own ideas and set of beliefs. The death of Ultima at the end of the novel leaves Tony, and the reader, to make life decisions for themselves – decisions about one’s identity, the future, destiny, and how to take charge of them.

In a broader sense, Anaya’s personal representation of Chican@ culture through *Bless Me. Ultima* can shed light on a perspective that may be overlooked in a classroom. In the present day, his novel is often a required reading assignment for high school and college students throughout the United States. Though the following example may not be connected directly to Chican@ culture previously discussed, it is important to understand the idea that one’s upbringing can affect one’s learning in the classroom; different cultures offer different interpretations and perspectives which is why the diversity of cultures should be embraced rather than suppressed. Marcos Pizarro, a professor of Mexican American studies, proved this point through his interaction with his students regarding a simple red apple. After asking the students to “analyze an apple in writing,” Pizarro received dozens of generic responses one would expect to receive regarding an apple’s description: “red, shiny, smooth, and so on” (Pizarro 152).

Despite the fact that proper MLA format would require a “foreign” language (such as Spanish) to be italicized, I am choosing to abstain from that and to allow the words/phrases in Spanish language to be untreated. This is because I do not want the words to appear as “other” or seem as though they do not belong within English language text. Spanish language was present before the Anglo Americans arrived and established English as the dominant language, making Spanish part of American identity and, therefore, not foreign to the United States.
However, one student surprised everyone by sharing that the apple reminded him of “his parents out in the fields suffering in poor working conditions and for low wages as they picked these apples” (152). Pizarro went on to describe how:

There was an educational silence that was followed by many students expressing their anger at not learning how to think critically in school. What all of us realized was that within our own communities there is knowledge and forms of knowledge production that are embedded in familial and community histories and that provide a completely unique intellectual approach to the subject matter covered (or ignored) in school. (152)

By facilitating this activity, rather than lecturing on the importance of cultural perspective, Pizarro allowed his students to conclude for themselves that academic settings are often structured for students to think a certain way. Once the standards have been established, deviations from those standards are often discouraged. For example, a student may receive a gold star for “correctly” describing an apple as a delicious red fruit whereas a student who described the apple as a seed capsule, because the student likes to plant seeds in his/her garden, may be discouraged from using that description. This could be because it is an unexpected interpretation that could potentially complicate how others understand what an apple is; however, this rejection of other perspectives teaches students to only think inside of a specific type of box which limits creativity and critical thinking. Also, the student who had identified the apple as connected to his parents’ working conditions refused to see the red fruit as isolated from its cultural connection; this practice indicates the importance of respecting the historical and cultural connections that an object can have between land and people and encourages students to acknowledge that Mexican American history that is often misunderstood, misrepresented, or
ignored completely. However, Anaya’s novel embraces the ideology that American identity, like the student’s interpretation of the apple, does not fit inside of one specific type of box; it provides a new interpretation of American identity that challenges the constraints of monolingualism and Anglicization through his Chican@, code-switching novel.

Anaya’s work is not only literary, but it contains political significance as previously mentioned. Whether intentionally or not, any time a writer composes a piece, it sends a message, and when a writer uses a code-switching method, whether consciously or not, he/she is sending a political message – because language facilitates power. Language is either implicit or consciously working towards understanding; this is especially true for people who are not bilingual and are learning another language. However, because of language’s often implicit state for those who do not learn another language (meaning that they often do not think about how to use language) most may not realize the authoritative power that language holds. Sociologist and expert in societal power, Pierre Bourdieu explains (in a translated text) the power that language has regarding legitimacy within a culture:

To speak the language, without further specification, as linguists do, is tacitly to accept the official definition of the official language of a political unit. This language is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit, imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language, especially in situations that are characterized in French as more officielle (a very exact translation of the word ‘formal’ used by English-speaking linguists)…the legitimate language no more contains within itself the power to ensure its own perpetuation in time than it has the power to define its extension in space. Only the process of continuous creation, which occurs through the unceasing struggles between the different
authorities who compete within the field of specialized production for the monopolistic power to impose the legitimate mode of expression, can ensure the permanence of the legitimate language and of its value, that is, of the recognition accorded to it. (45 and 58)

In this text, Bourdieu is explaining the colonizing power that language can have, that it operates within “territorial limits.” This means that language can be used as a tool to influence a group of people within a specific domain or culture. It is not language itself that oppresses people but how that language is used that is critical. Bourdieu asserts that it is the “unceasing struggles between the different authorities who compete...for the monopolistic power to impose the legitimate mode of expression” that causes language to have control over a culture or group of people. This places responsibility on the people rather than on the language itself and illustrates the interaction of language. Control of a language is not static; it has the potential to be overturned or changed though this is emphasized as a “struggle,” proving that this control of a language is not easily switched or maintained. This struggle is relevant today as seen through the struggles between English and Spanish in its portrayal in literature.

When Hispanic writers code-switch, they challenge the implied dominance of English language by presenting Spanish language as a legitimate alternative. How these writers employ Spanish language and the different code-switching methods that they apply is dependent upon a number of factors (that will later be explored in this essay) and is an issue that most Hispanic writers have to work through while composing their pieces. To continue the discussion on the power of language, in their work *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain this power structure in the section titled “Language”: 
One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities…Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchal structure power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and reality’ become established. (7)

When English and Spanish share a textual space, the importance of both languages is accentuated. This is especially significant for Spanish because, in the United States, though it is a growing language, it is not considered the dominant language. Its presence in Anaya’s novel, therefore, challenges the linguistic standard that has been established throughout the United States’s history. As a Chicano himself, Anaya uses his novel to assert the authority and duality of both Chican@ and Mexican culture within the United States by composing a novel that contains both English and Spanish languages. Spanish language should not be viewed as an “impurity” as the historic suppression of Spanish language by Anglo Americans would suggest, nor should it be marginalized because it is different. The misconception is that, often times, a non-dominant language is equated with an inferior language. As a country made up of a multitude of cultural histories (including the New Mexican history that featured Mexican heritage), the United States should have a heightened awareness of the fact that this is an inaccurate representation.

While the presence of the language itself sends a political message about Spanish language within the culture of the United States, the way that Spanish is used through various code-switching strategies, ranging from the use of Spanish words followed by an English translation to radical bilingualism that code-switches seamlessly between Spanish and English, is
important to the message that is conveyed. Therefore, it is not only that Spanish language is present within the text, but the way Spanish language is applied through these code-switching strategies that affects the reading of the text, as sociolinguistics professor, Lourdes Torres, explains: “The appearance of ‘foreign’ terms in a text does serve to underscore the cross-cultural nature of the text, but how they are employed matters. Foreign words can be used in ways that support mainstream culture, just as English words can be used in ways that resist standard usage and connotations” (Torres 82). Here, Torres points out that, while the appearance of Spanish language in a predominantly English language text has the potential to emphasize the text’s “cross-cultural nature,” the way it is used is equally important because words in Spanish can (and often do) send a political message about language dominance within the United States. The application of code-switching can drastically affect readers’ perceptions of politics in these texts because how the words are employed along with what type of words are used can create a political statement about cultural and linguistic dominance and the tumultuous history regarding land conquest.

Torres continues to explain how crucial it is to make conscious code-switching decisions when she writes: “Untranslated words in a text seem to have a special power to signify a culture and an identity, but it is important not to be carried away by the romantic notion that they always operate in ways that empower a minority culture” (82). She argues that while the language itself makes a statement about the identity of a culture, not just any words from the language should be used as a means to represent another culture. They must be used in a thoughtful and strategic manner, just like words in English. However, code-switching strategies offer an additional layer of complexity to word choice as a different culture is attached to the new language that is being used when code-switching does occur. Anaya is conscientious of this idea which is noticeable
through his code-switching methods. The novel is in English, but he code-switches to Spanish during key moments of the text to challenge the construction of the Anglo-centric American identity such as during the dialogue of Tony’s parents while discussing living arrangements for the elderly curandera (Ultima), during the dialogue of Tony’s friends while they are in an English-speaking school, and with descriptions of the New Mexican territory. These overt representations of Chican@ culture through code-switching show how significant the use of language is to make the political statement that American identity is not monolingual or only Anglo American. Spanish language appears much less frequently in the novel than English, but when it does appear, it powerfully challenges the narrative construct of this American identity.

While Anaya’s novel uses code-switching to challenge the construct of American identity, there is not only one code-switching method. Because there are multiple code-switching methods to choose from, the one that the writer employs displays a conscious decision of how he/she wants to convey the text. However, in her article “The Limitations of Code-switching in Chicano/a Literature,” Margaret Schmidt asserts: “Rudolfo Anaya’s _Bless Me, Ultima_ undermines his desired social purpose, even though his text may appeal to a wider audience since it is written almost exclusively in English. Because only minimal Spanish is included, Chicano/a identity, an essential aspect of the text, is almost immediately dismissed” (Schmidt 50). The “social purpose” that Schmidt mentions is referring to the political message previously discussed – that Chican@ culture contributes to American identity. She claims that the “minimal” use of Spanish within _Bless Me, Ultima_ detracts from the cultural significance and importance of Spanish language within the novel. Schmidt’s view would have been more relevant had there only been one factor that influenced Anaya’s selected code-switching method. Factors that influence a writer’s code-switching method include (but are not necessarily limited
to) the intended audience (which, in the case of *Bless Me, Ultima*, might be a white high school or college student), the political viewpoint of the author, the writer’s upbringing/education, the writer’s preference/style, and the type of text that is written. Each of these factors is important regarding the writer’s choice of a particular code-switching method. One should not place more value on one of these factors over the others nor should any of the factors be overlooked. The political purpose of a text should not solely be assessed by the use of a code-switching method in a novel because there are multiple reasons that an author would choose that specific code-switching method. For example, Anaya chose to use Spanish that was not offset or italicized from English and was not followed by an English translation though he did surround Spanish with English context. The majority of the novel is in English, but upon closer readings and analyses, it is clear that the Spanish he does use has literary significance and/or cultural value. Thus, the previously mentioned factors, one of them being the intended audience, regarding why a writer would choose this code-switching method, must be considered. By failing to consider them, Schmidt undermines her own point because Anaya is not dismissing Chican@ identity at all. In fact, after extensive analyses of specific passages concerning how Anaya used Spanish language in *Bless Me, Ultima*, it is clear that Anaya’s text presents a new interpretation of American identity, particularly with aspects such as the llano, religious history, Spanish language, and curanderas, and his code-switching method actually reinforces the message that American identity is not monolingual or Anglo-centric.

While Anaya’s work depicts the duality of Tony’s character, Anaya is not the only writer who has set out to do this. As I will address in the next chapter, celebrated Latina writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Nicholasa Mohr, and Judith Ortiz Cofer all use varying code-switching
methods in order to display their pride for their Latin@ cultures. Their successes and literary prowess indicate that, despite their stylistic choices, their writing purposes are socially acceptable and culturally relevant. Of course, writers do not necessarily have to obtain public success to be socially acceptable and culturally relevant, but their recognition by other scholars further affirms their expertise. However, it is crucial to first understand the different code-switching methods that they and other code-switching writers use.

While the differences between the terms Chican@ and Latin@ were outlined earlier on in this essay, there is a reason why I am using Spanish application from the work of the Latina authors was used to compare with the code-switching method of Anaya, a Chican@ author. According to Dolores V. Tanno, in her article “Names, Narratives, and the Evolution of Ethnic Identity,” using one label to describe a person would be similar to how the use of the terms “mother, wife, sister, and daughter is to admit to the complexity of being female” (40). People are not, and should not, be simplified by being assigned one specific label. However, what unites these groups is not necessarily their specific heritage but their Spanish language application and the literary and political issues that they chose to write about in their works. All of these authors describe their characters’ struggles of dual identity, and language is a key feature in this discussion as well – which is evident through their application methods of Spanish language. Thus, it is what their works offer that connects these writers.
Chapter 1: Code-Switching Strategies

A tax on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the first amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out.

-Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2007)

It was decided that Ultima should come and live with us. I knew that my father and mother did good by providing a home for Ultima. It was the custom to provide for the old and the sick. There was always room in the safety and warmth of la familia for one more person, be that person stranger or friend.

-Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972)

This chapter will explore the different code-switching strategies and the factors that influence a code-switching writer’s decision to use one or more of those applications. Factors such as fear of lack of mainstream publication, writers’ perspectives, and readers’ expectations (among many others) contribute to this decision, but the use of all code-switching strategies challenge the monolingual and Anglo-centric standard of American identity that has been established following the conquest by Anglo Americans.

1a. Overview of Code-switching Strategies and Why Writers Choose Them

While code-switching may seem to be an easily understood concept, the forms that code-switching can take when placed in conjunction with history, culture, and politics make this multi-language application method dynamic and much more complex than initially anticipated. It is even possible, as it is the case with *Bless Me, Ultima*, for code-switching writers to employ more than one type of code-switching strategy within their works which displays the versatility of this linguistic practice and how it can be molded to serve the cultural critiques that writers are attempting to convey. These critiques, more broadly, can be applied to cultural movements, like the Chicano Rights Movement, that challenge linguistic structures that dominate a culture such as how an Anglo-centric and English-based monolingual American identity has suppressed Spanish language within the United States. Anaya and three Latina writers (Anzaldúa, Ortiz
Cofer, and Mohr) use differing code-switching strategies that all combat this issue though also serve different literary and cultural functions as well.

In order to explore Anaya’s Spanish language application and other code-switching methods, I will refer to sociolinguistics professor Lourdes Torres who determined six strategies that Hispanic authors often employ when code-switching: 1. Obvious Spanish words with context, 2. Spanish followed by a direct English translation, 3. The use of calques: “creative English renditions of Spanish words and phrases translated literally or figuratively,” 4. Spanish without any translation but italicized or offset from the rest of the text, 5. Spanish without translation that is not italicized or offset, and 6. Completely bilingual text (Torres 77-83). By acknowledging each of these approaches, whether they are more or less radical regarding their use of Spanish (frequent or “sustained code-switching” within a novel is referred to as “radical bilingualism” within Torres’s article), Torres’s article critiques the construct of monolingualism within American identity because it presents methods of Spanish language use that are employed in American narratives (Torres 86). Code-switching writers use applications of Spanish language strategically and as writing devices. They portray an identity outside of the Anglo-centric American and remind readers of the complexity of American identity. These strategies are selected and used based upon a number of different factors, including how the writer wants to convey a particular message or how the writer wants a reader to understand that message. In addition to her concise outline of bilingual writing strategies, Torres also considers both the authors’ points of view and the readers’ perceptions. She is aware that the use of Spanish within an English text has political power and that there are “divergent opinions concerning the inclusion and function of Spanish in the works of Latino writers [which] suggests they choose a variety of strategies to portray a bicultural and bilingual world and that they may have different
readers in mind as they craft their texts” (Torres 77). This is Torres’s way of exploring the reasons behind the different aforementioned methods of Spanish use. Contrasting with Schmidt, Torres understands that Spanish functions differently depending on the context surrounding it and that there is not only one way of using Spanish in literature. Each author has a different view of his/her bicultural world with varying intended audiences.

For example, Nicholasa Mohr expressed a concern for her non-Hispanic audience in an interview when she noted that she followed up her Spanish in English “in a way that is clear” (Torres 80). While this explanation is rather vague regarding code-switching methods, after looking at her work, one could deduce that Mohr adopted the first and second methods outlined by Torres, meaning that she followed some of her Spanish use with English translations and others with English context. This is not to say that she uses English as a way to devalue her use of Spanish; it expresses that she wants an English-speaking monolingual reader to fully understand the message that describes her Latin@ culture. Mohr’s code-switching reminds the reader of the characters’ linguistic backgrounds but also allows better comprehension for anyone who does not know Spanish. One implication of Mohr’s decision to accommodate the English-speaking monolingual reader, however, would be that she could be accused of allowing the linguistic expectations of a dominant group within society to dictate how she writes. This shows the pressure that Mohr, and other Hispanic writers like her, have when writing and publishing their works. Additionally, it shows how Anglo-centric society has historically suppressed Hispanic culture. This society has set the linguistic and cultural standards about American identity, and Hispanic and code-switching writers have often accommodated their writing styles (such as using more English than Spanish) for English-speaking monolingual readers. This presents the white hegemony as well as the monolingual hegemony that has been established
throughout the United States since the Anglo American conquest of the southwest; hegemony itself is problematic because it represents a powerful expectation that the hegemonic culture or language is the norm and that any deviation from that is a threat, a critique of the hegemonic culture.

Any person who attempts to defy the standards set by a hegemonic culture risks destabilizing the power established by that culture which is why deviations from other cultures are often discouraged or suppressed. Another implication of using English context following Spanish code-switching would be that a reader who knows both languages would feel bogged down or bored by the repetitive nature of the text. These readers would recognize the Spanish words without needing the English context which slows down the reading pace for them. While comprehension should not be an issue for either an English-speaking monolingual reader or a reader who is at least familiar with Spanish, the English context could prove to be a detriment to the natural progression of the story. By catering to the expectations of an English-speaking monolingual reader through explicit English explanation, this potentially places the reading comfort of this type of reader as more important than the reading comfort of one who knows Spanish. This is significant because it portrays the problem of hegemony previously discussed. Those trying to work outside of the norms set by the hegemonic culture would be suppressed and potentially persuaded to believe that because their culture is not the dominant culture that it is less important. The power structures created as a result of linguistic and racial hegemony as well as the intended audience’s perspective cause code-switching writers to consider how they want to approach their work, whether that be to focus on how English-speaking monolingual readers will experience the work or to more overtly combat the linguistic and racial hegemonic structures.
The work of Gloria Anzaldúa, compared to Mohr, is radically different. She employs the fourth method that Torres outlines in her article: code-switching without translations but with Spanish text that is italicized (though not offset) when used. Anzaldúa is fluent in both Spanish and English with neither language being dominant in her mind. Thus, she wanted to apply that point of view to her work by conveying both languages of Spanish and English and by switching between the languages without context or warning. Her point of view is that she should not have to accommodate the English-speaking monolingual reader even though, according to an English-based monolingual and Anglo-centric society, her “tongue will be illegitimate” (Anzaldúa 81). Additionally, Anzaldúa’s lack of translation could inspire others to become more active in their pursuit of understanding her work by attempting to find translations or going as far as learning Spanish language. Provided translations do the work for the readers in that the authors inform the readers what should be gleaned from the specific word, phrase, or sentence. This creates clarity regarding the communication between writers and readers; however, it limits the readers from having to adjust to a different environment where English is not the dominant language. They do not have to experience the discomfort of navigating a new language and feeling a different schema of power. Additionally, instead of an exchange between writers and readers, it becomes more of a direct offering from the writers to the readers; a direct translation does not leave much work for the reader regarding finding more meanings that could be accessed through different languages, nor does it require the readers to have to reorient themselves in a domain where English is not dominant. While Anzaldúa’s political message is that both English and Spanish languages should naturally coexist within American culture as means of destabilizing established power structures, she risks restricting her message to a very limited audience. There are fewer people in the United States who are completely bilingual in English and Spanish
compared to those who speak only one of either language (“Language Use in the United States: 2011”). Because of the radical and frequent code-switching in her work, at times she switches languages mid-sentence without any precursors; few people would have the ability to fully comprehend her political message. While this technique is essential to proving the idea that English and Spanish should be able to share textual space in a fluid and seamless way, her readership will be reduced compared to a writer who would write primarily in English or primarily in Spanish. While Mohr is able to reach not only bilingual readers but English-speaking monolingual readers as well, Anzaldúa is less convenient for English-speaking monolingual readers to read because her use of code-switching is more radical and complex. Because it could be inconvenient for English-speaking monolingual readers to read Anzaldúa’s work, her road to publication could be more difficult compared to Mohr’s work.

For Latin@ writers’ perspectives to be conveyed more widely, they must become published. Torres’s article can help the readers understand the challenges readers face regarding the editing and publication process. Groundbreaking work such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s would not have been published had it not been for her dedication, the institution of her own printing press, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, and the dedication and persistence of Latin@ writers before her. Even so, many texts that integrate untranslated Spanish or Spanish without English context can have difficulty becoming publicized if mainstream publishing institutions do not see the text as profitable. Much of this goes back to the issue of power and politics in language. As English is the dominant language in the United States, texts with Spanish could potentially reduce the readership because fewer people would be able to understand it. The lack of publishing through mainstream presses creates a lack of awareness and availability of code-switching texts to the Anglo American population (who make up the largest audience of the
works of mainstream presses as the majority of people within the United States identify as Anglo American) which is unfortunate as this group could benefit from experiencing this type of reading (“Language Use in the United States: 2011”).

Torres notes that the diligence and hard work of these Chican@ and Latin@ writers pay off when they are able to express deviations from English language freely. Once the community among Chican@ writers had been established, this opened the gateway for writers to incorporate new Spanish application methods into their work.8 This community needed to work hard and diligently in order to overcome the “linguistic norms” that have been established in the United States (Torres 87). Any deviation from English presents itself as “other” or “foreign” to a monolingual and English-speaking population. Because code-switching writers offer a different linguistic method, they are asserting that, in the United States, English does not have to be the only language within a text. Also, from the writer’s point of view, the struggle to become published puts into question the importance of Spanish language application within the work. Is it worth the risk that the work might not be published by a mainstream publisher because the English-speaking monolingual reader could not definitively comprehend it? On the other hand, does the way that Spanish language is structured in a text support a specific point of view or make a particular political statement? The response to the latter question could assert that the use of radical bilingualism supports that Spanish language should share a textual space with English language in American culture. Depending on the individual work, Latin@ writers had to consider these possibilities (such as the potential of using different methods of code-switching, providing translations, etc.) – possibilities that English-speaking monolingual people may not

8 This is not to say that all Chican@s and Latin@s know Spanish or that all Chican@s and Latin@s know both English and Spanish. My argument is structured around cultural recognition of language and power; I am asserting that linguistic and racial dominance of English and Anglo American identity should not overshadow Spanish and Chican@ culture in the United States.
have ever considered for the publication of their own work. However, because there are a number of reasons that a code-switching writer may choose to employ a particular code-switching method, factors other than the writer’s intention/preference must be acknowledged by the writer before publication.

In addition to considering the authors’ perspectives, how the readers will react to Spanish in a text and also how English-speaking monolingual readers can benefit from Spanish that is accompanied by English context must be considered in order to understand why code-switching writers choose the code-switching methods that they employ. This understanding helps to determine the political message their work is trying to convey. From her article describing work from Latin@ writers who claimed to write for a more monolingual audience, Torres notes:

[Al]though Spanish is used, the text is familiarized for the monolingual reader. Such texts might be valuable because they introduce Spanish to monolingual readers in an unintimidating manner. Ideally, monolingual readers would learn that the Spanish language is an intrinsic part of Latino/a life and thus of the American multilingual reality. Having Spanish alongside the English text provides one more public site where Spanish shares textual space with English. It might also encourage second and third generation Latino/as who are English dominant or monolingual to become reacquainted with their heritage language.

(Torres 81)

Readers can very easily benefit from reading Spanish that is accompanied by English, according to Torres, even if it may receive academic criticism. Encountering a different language in literature, or in any context for that matter, can be an intimidating experience because it places the readers outside of their comfort zones. If readers feel discouraged or like outsiders during
the reading process, they would be less likely to continue reading the material. However, this discomfort that the readers face while reading a new/different language could open their eyes to the possibility of attempting to understand a different culture and experience what it would be like to encounter an environment where English is not the dominant language. This type of humbling experience could develop an empathy between an English-speaking monolingual reader who is encountering “foreign” material and groups of people who often felt similarly while trying to enter the English-dominant literary world.

Writers may risk reducing their readership by a grand margin by not accommodating the English-speaking monolingual reader (as the lack of publication of code-switching works by mainstream presses is a symptom of marginalization) but the purpose of maintaining important aspects of their cultures, such as their languages and teaching others what it is like to feel like outsiders, display why writers take the risk to write in Spanish. This power shift is critical in asserting how language has been used to suppress the cultural and linguistic practices of Hispanic writers and helps Anglo-centric readers to understand the linguistic and racial suppression that Chican@/as have experienced following Anglo American conquest and its subsequent course of marginalization of non-Anglo people. Torres is also sure to mention that familiarizing an English-speaking monolingual reader with Spanish alongside English demonstrates the “American multilingual reality” that is present for Latin@ writers and readers – that not just the individual definitions of Spanish words, but the language as a whole, has significance for Latin@/a culture. The presence of Spanish challenges the monolingual American identity and acknowledges the Hispanic culture as part of American identity, even before/if the word is translated.
Despite the presence of Spanish language within many Chican@ novels, the majority of Chican@ novels is written mostly in English which may be a reaction to the constructed “hierarchy of English over Spanish” in the United States (Rudin 7). This does not mean that texts in English language are “inherently non-Chicano or mainstream” nor does that imply texts in Spanish are the opposite (7). While stating that the use of Spanish language within a novel supports Chican@ culture is an oversimplification of code-switching, Rudin does not disregard the importance of having Spanish language present. Whether a Chican@ novel has Spanish language present or not (because a Chican@ novel could describe Chican@ culture and be in English), it is making a political statement about Chican@ culture; that statement could be based upon the intended audience, the author’s upbringing, the message that the plot is sending, or many other reasons, but because Chican@ culture is associated with two different languages, the writer’s choice to employ one, the other, or both send a political message. I would, however, disagree with Rudin when he claims that the “subversiveness” of “Spanglish or bilingual text…remain an empty gesture within [Anglophone North American] culture” because those texts do impact what he calls “the Anglophone North American culture” (8). Anzaldúa’s work is proof of that as she revolutionized how people viewed writing, Chican@s, women, and lesbians. Her work is not only recognized within Chican@ communities, but worldwide. Thus, it is inaccurate to dub her work, and the work of many other bilingual writers, as an “empty gesture” when clearly her influence has proved otherwise.

Much like Anzaldúa, there are several Latin@ writers who believe that Spanish and English should coexist inextricably as part of American identity, like in radical bilingualism, because that is what best represents a multicultural and multilingual life in the United States. While writers such as Anzaldúa who use this method are praised for their academic prowess,
their work is not without disadvantages. In one succinct sentence, Torres shows the pros and cons of such a drastic linguistic style: “These texts, which cannot be translated into Spanish or English without losing the essence of the intercultural message, are not easily either decipherable by monolinguals” (Torres 90). When a writer code-switches, the accessibility of multiple languages allows them to convey the exact phrase that is desired because there is more than one language to choose from. Because the languages’ connotations and cultures accompany these languages, writers are more likely to express precisely what they mean. If one language cannot portray the intended message, the answer could very well be found in another language.

There is also the importance of the “essence of the intercultural message” that would simply cease to exist if the text were written in only one language (Torres 90). This means that any puns in Spanish would not have the same effect when literally translated to English, and any interaction between Spanish and English languages would be lost if only one language were used. For example, there is a joke in English about a Hispanic man who walked into a store to buy socks. He asked the cashier where he could find socks, but he does not speak English and she does not speak Spanish, so the language barrier resulted in confusion. Another patron walked in to buy socks as well and located the aisle immediately. Relieved to have figured out where the socks were, the Hispanic man remarked, “Eso sí que es!” (which translates to “That is what it is!”). The cashier heard the exclamation and replied, “If you could spell, why didn’t you say so?” The punchline is that the phrase “Eso sí que es,” when said aloud, would sound similar to the spelling of the word “socks”: S-O-C-K-S. The humor of the joke is achieved only through the interaction of the two languages: through the Spanish phrase sounding similar to the pronunciation of English letters. One drawback to this extreme code-switching method, however, is how an English-speaking monolingual reader would respond to this type of work.
Without Spanish education or experience with Spanish language, much of what would be written by these Latin@ writers, that could not be directly translated or would need further cultural context, would be lost on these readers and keep them even further from understanding more about Chican@ culture. This presents the problem that English-speaking monolingual readers are presented as the standard to which code-switching writers should comply based on a multilingual and Anglo-centric American identity. The work of Anzaldúa, and other bilingual writers, challenges this American identity and presents a different standard where Spanish language and Hispanic culture are not marginalized for a default English-speaking monolingual reader. The novel Bless Me, Ultima, though it does not use radical bilingualism, makes that same assertion by effectively using other code-switching strategies.

Generally, Anaya’s use of Spanish follows the fifth strategy that Torres mentions: the non-italicized and non-offset type of text. In comparison with the other methods from Torres’s article, excluding a completely bilingual text, Bless Me, Ultima does not cater to the monolingual reader. Anaya does not follow his Spanish with a translation or close English equivalent nor does he separate Spanish from the rest of the text by offsetting or italicizing it as other Hispanic writers have done. Translations, explanations, and/or references are not provided to the reader when Spanish is present though English is more prevalent in the novel. With a few exceptions, Anaya incorporates Spanish seamlessly into the work. This style effectively prevents Spanish from being blatantly viewed as “other” when juxtaposed with English because it is not marked as something different (Torres 82). Italicized and/or offset text calls attention to the readers to inform them that there has been a shift – that this text is different from what precedes or follows it.
Anaya’s decision to keep Spanish within English paragraphs, without any obvious differentiation, makes the novel more realistic to the world that Anaya, and many other Chican@s who grew up in the southwestern United States, experienced because Spanish and English both existed within their worlds. Though there are a few characters in the novel who only know English and there are some characters that speak more Spanish than others, many of the characters speak both English and Spanish. According to Anaya’s work, the Chican@ world is interwoven with English and Spanish so tightly that neither language is perceived as “other.” While there are times that the general society, more broadly, disputes how interwoven English and Spanish are through the less frequent availability of Spanish texts and though there are times in the novel where Spanish and English are starkly divided between home and school, in the mind of an individual Chican@, such as Tony or Anaya, these two languages often merge with one another – sometimes inexplicably so. Both languages contribute to an American identity because Spanish language was established within the American southwest before Anglo American conquest and the present dominance of English language. Thus, by writing a novel that includes both English and Spanish languages while not portraying Spanish language as “other,” *Bless Me, Ultima* is effectively displaying the political message that Spanish language and Chican@ culture contribute to a new American identity where Spanish language and Hispanic culture are not obscured by English and Anglo American culture.

*Ib. Anzaldúa, Ortiz Cofer, and Mohr: Code-Switching Strategies in Action*

Written mostly in English with some Spanish throughout, Anaya uses more English than Spanish in *Bless Me, Ultima*. Unlike bilingual author Gloria Anzaldúa who code-switches mid-sentence, Anaya applied a different code-switching strategy that was less radical. Anzaldúa’s work is a political statement regarding the importance of bilingualism in the United States. Her
frequent code-switching portrays that Spanish and English are equally important and belong together as part of American identity – not set apart. She uses the fourth strategy that Torres outlines: Spanish without translation but is italicized (though not offset). People who are completely bilingual are not as common as those who are monolingual or even those who are monolingual and are familiar with one or more other language(s); few people are able to speak two or more languages with the same level of control and comfort because the majority of people who know multiple languages learn one dominant language during childhood and then learn another (or more) later in life. The situation regarding having a primary language relates back to the history and politics of Spanish within the United States that was previously discussed.

Through Anglo American conquest, English is the language that has been the most widely accepted in the United States; most people who live in the United States speak English. The work of Anzaldúa challenges the expectation that only one language should be the most dominant. She is known for her work *Borderlands/La Frontera* that describes the bicultural life in the United States that exists in the in-between space known as the borderlands as well as the obstacles she faces as a woman, a writer, a lesbian, and a political activist. Her voice is distinct and powerful; she claims that she should not have her work belittled because she employs the non-dominant Spanish language that is used as carefully and strategically as English language.

While describing the unique nature of Chican@ culture, it is clear that Anzaldúa has an academic, bilingual audience in mind when she laments, “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).

Anzaldúa is concerned that, because she does not alter her writing habits to “accommodate the
English speakers,” that her bilingual application will be ill-received as it is considered “illegitimate.” While reading her work may be tedious for a monolingual reader because she code-switches so frequently, changing her strategy would not support her purpose. Her work directly represents her belief that Spanish and English should coexist as part of American identity without apology and without translation of either language, and her code-switching reflects that when she writes: “Do work that matters. Vale la pena” (Anzaldúa 109). *Vale la pena* literally translates to “It is worth the pain.” Anzaldúa is aware that her work may not always be well-received and that it may take some work on the reader’s part to gain a more comprehensive understanding of her text. However, she writes for a bilingual audience, and it is important to her that she maintains that – despite the pain that that could result from the criticism of her work. She is resilient in the way that she challenges the Anglo American and English language standard of American identity through her bilingualism and has paved the way for other bilingual writers to express their voices in their own terms rather than adhering to the English dominant conventions that resist code-switching. Anzaldúa is one example of the impact of bilingualism and how audience is important to how writers use Spanish in literature.

In contrast, Judith Ortiz Cofer, an award-winning Latina author, writes her work in English with selected words in Spanish. Spanish words are italicized and are either preceded or followed by English context/translation. In an interview asking how she uses Spanish within her novels, Ortiz Cofer said:

> What I do is to use Spanish to flavor my language, but I don't switch. The context of the sentence identifies and defines the words, so my language is different from that; it's not code-switching. It is using Spanish as a formula to remind people that
what they're reading or hearing comes from the minds and the thoughts of Spanish-speaking people. I want my readers to remember that. (Torres 80)

Ortiz Cofer is very careful to clarify that the Spanish use in her novel is not code-switching. The fact that she uses Spanish to “flavor [her] language” indicates her less frequent use of Spanish but also that she is writing for an English-speaking monolingual audience who would be able to follow her mostly English text with translations. Her attention to her Spanish application displays her preoccupation with how her readers will perceive her work. In her short story “Corazón’s Café,” Ortiz Cofer uses her italicized Spanish accompanied by an English translation/context technique (a combination of the first and second methods outlined by Torres) in the second paragraph: “From where she sat she could read the labels of cans that reminded her of Manuel’s special way of doing things. *Habichuelas rojas*, the can of red kidney beans they stacked in a little pyramid” (Ortiz Cofer 715). While the names of most colors in Spanish are common knowledge to English-speaking monolingual readers, allowing the word “*rojas*” (red) to be easily deduced, the word “*Habichuelas***” could prove to be more difficult to decipher. However, Ortiz Cofer does not allow the reader to worry or wonder. Immediately following her italicized phrase, which indicates to the reader that she is using Spanish, Ortiz Cofer provides the literal translation of the word “kidney beans” so that English-speaking monolingual readers can understand. Her Spanish application style is very beneficial to an English-speaking monolingual reader because her Spanish is immediately clarified by English translation or helpful context. The reader does not have to worry about experiencing a language barrier within the text. Thus, her Spanish application is clear and concise for an English-speaking monolingual reader. In this way, though Ortiz Cofer is a Latina author, she is able to share her work with a wider audience.
and ensure that there is better understanding for English-speaking monolingual readers with her multi-language method.

However, Ortiz Cofer could be critiqued for her less frequent use of Spanish language in her work because this is often an indicator of an author catering to English-speaking monolingual readers. The readers will not have to experience any sort of discomfort while reading, so they will miss the opportunity of understanding what it would be like to be in an environment where English is not the dominant language. Also, they could potentially garner the expectation that all multilingual texts will provide translation or context so that an English-speaking monolingual reader will understand which further critiques the Anglo American and English-based monolingual standard of American identity. Ortiz Cofer uses Spanish to “flavor” her work and to “remind people that what they’re reading or hearing comes from the minds and the thoughts of Spanish-speaking people” which indicates that Spanish language is not the most prominent aspect of her work. To her, it is important that readers learn and comprehend the experiences she conveys in the stories that she writes. By providing translations following Spanish language, she is assuming that the readers are not able to comprehend Spanish without context or translation. While this may be a fair assumption because her work has been published in the United States where English language is spoken and read by the majority, it demonstrates the power dynamic of English language throughout the country. Because English language dominates her work despite the fact that the stories come from Hispanic backgrounds, it is conceivable that Anglo-centric American society expects literature, even literature from other cultures, to be easily understood for English-speaking monolingual readers. Ortiz Cofer provides the translations after the appearance of Spanish language which eliminates the need for readers to look up specific words or phrases. This allows the English-speaking monolingual readers to stay within their
comfort zones while reading text in Spanish; however, this ease could prevent the readers from further engaging with the text by doing their own research and exploration, and it could also create the expectation that the English-speaking monolingual readers do not need to do any extra work while reading another language because a translation will be immediately provided. Though Ortiz Cofer does not claim to code-switch, her Spanish application still contributes to the discussion on challenging Anglo-centric and monolingual American identity because she presented a multilingual and multicultural identity in America as the Spanish “flavor[ing]” in her work reiterates the Hispanic heritage of her characters that is not silenced by Anglo-centric or monolingual suppression.

On the other hand, Nicholasa Mohr, a Puerto Rican author who has developed an impressive, long-lasting literary career through her publications by major publishing houses, has adapted yet another style that was described previously. When she does “use words in Spanish, [she follows] them up in English in a way that is clear” (Torres 80). In this way, Mohr does not leave the translation up to the reader. She makes sure that her message comes across clearly so that both reader and writer are on the same page. In one excerpt from her collection of *In Nueva York* called “Old Mary,” Mohr gives context surrounding the Spanish word “*Nueva*”: “…at the hotel all the workers ever talked about was going to New York City. In *Nueva* York, they said, the wages were high and opportunities greater…” (Mohr 12). While Mohr does not translate “*Nueva*” directly following its use, she prefaces the word by writing “New York City” in the previous sentence. Any English-speaking monolingual reader, without translation, would be able to infer that “*Nueva*” means “New” in this case, not only because it is a commonly-used word in Spanish, but also because Mohr substituted the Spanish word after using the word in English first. This use of Spanish is clear and does not require the reader to consult outside references in
order to understand the Spanish that Mohr used. However, Mohr’s use of the word “Nueva” in place of “New” regarding the place of New York City demonstrates the Hispanic community attempting to claim a sense of belonging in this new city. By using Spanish language, the Hispanic people (especially Puerto Ricans like Mohr who made up the largest portion of the Hispanic population in New York City until they were surpassed by the Dominican Republic population in 2014) are making the city their own (“NYC’s Dominican population”). This is important considering that this is a new and unfamiliar place to them that was established by Anglo Americans. Creating familiarity in a location where they may be regarded as “foreign” is important in retaining major aspects of their culture.

Mohr’s Spanish use is similar to Anaya’s because, like Mohr, he also does not provide translations for the reader, and he surrounds his Spanish with English context as well. However, Anaya’s code-switching differs from Mohr’s because, excluding a few exceptions, he does not italicize his Spanish. Comparatively, this makes his Spanish application more seamless within the novel which could indicate how the Mexican and American cultures both contribute to American identity because the languages are not easily or neatly separated. This method does not isolate the words from the rest of the text nor does it make it seem “foreign” or “other.” While this code-switching is not quite as radical as Anzaldúa’s, it is still an effective code-switching method; its value as a political and literary device conveying the necessity of both languages’ presences within American identity should not be diminished because it does, in fact, challenge the authoritative dominance of English language. The fact that Anaya does claim to code-switch and that his methods challenge Anglo-centric and English dominant nature of American identity emphasize the differences between his work and Ortiz Cofer’s since she
blatantly admits that her Spanish application is not code-switching; her Spanish use serves as a reminder to her readers that they are reading stories from a Hispanic heritage.

When juxtaposed with these three other Latina writers, Anaya’s code-switching is most similar to the technique used by Nicholasa Mohr. The point here, however, is not that one code-switching method is better than the others or that one code-switching method more successfully critiques Anglo-centric American identity and English-centered monolingualism. This analysis proves that each writer has a particular perspective in mind while composing his/her pieces which heavily influences the way that he/she applies Spanish. For example, Anzaldúa was making a political statement and using her bilingual background to claim that Spanish and English both have legitimacy as languages that can be used in literature in the United States. Thus, her work consisted of bilingualism that did not provide English translations when she featured Spanish. Conversely, Ortiz Cofer was writing for an English-speaking monolingual audience which is why all of her Spanish was followed by English translations. Additionally, Mohr was concerned about her audience, so she applied her Spanish language with English context though not as directly as Ortiz Cofer does. With a better understanding of the different code-switching strategies and the reasons why code-switching writers choose particular methods, Anaya’s code-switching methods, and the reasons behind those methods, will be explored and analyzed in *Bless Me, Ultima* in order to gain a deeper understanding of the novel itself.
Chapter 2: Anaya’s Repertoire of Code-Switching Strategies

“A curandera cannot give away her secrets,” [Ultima] said, “but if a person really wants to know, then he will listen and see and be patient. Knowledge comes slowly.”

-Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972)

Rudolfo Anaya: “She is unforgettable [sic] because, it's as if she tapped into my creative spirit and told me ‘write my story.’ And that, in fact, is the way I have sometimes explained *Bless Me Ultima*, by saying one night Ultima came to visit me. In that visitation, she told me who she was and therefore the story began to flow with its natural rhythm.”

-Carmen Flys Junquera’s Interview with Rudolfo Anaya (1997)

In this chapter, the code-switching strategies that Anaya employed in the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* will be explored in order to determine how they challenge the limitations of the monolingual and Anglo-centric American identity. First, a passage containing the code-switching application that Anaya uses the most in the novel, that integrates Spanish language seamlessly and does not provide English translation, conveys how Tony’s parents use both English and Spanish in a manner where one does not dominate the other - asserting a multilingual American identity. A close reading of a code-switching application that Anaya uses less frequently of offset and italicized Spanish will follow that features Tony’s experience heading to a funeral and how Spanish language comes to him naturally. The political and literary reasons why Anaya uses two different code-switching strategies within the novel will be explored as well. The more frequently used code-switching method that Anaya employed portrays how his work challenges the Anglo-centric, English-only construct of American identity as he uses both English and Spanish language to reveal the cultural significance of Chican@ culture in the United States. The code-switching method that Anaya used less frequently represents a literary shift. While the code-switching is still challenging the Anglo-centric and monolingual construct of American identity because Anaya is connecting the code-switched
passages to Chican@ culture, he uses a different code-switching method in order to show how Tony is experiencing the language in a subconscious manner rather than the conscious way that he encountered language before. Anaya’s code-switching presents an American identity that is multicultural and multilingual, but his decision to code-switch differently is not dependent upon political motives but is a literary choice based upon how Tony is experiencing language in a subconscious way. This reveals how versatile code-switching methods can be when applied differently as Anaya was able to apply two code-switching methods within one work that served different purposes: one as a political critique regarding monolingual and monocultural American identity and the other as a literary shift about Tony’s subconsciousness.

Anaya was aware that his audience would be English-speaking monolingual readers, but he chose to employ a code-switching method in which Spanish words were not italicized and not followed by English translations. This allowed the plot of the story to flow more seamlessly while displaying the intercultural workings of both English and Spanish languages often found within Chican@ culture. One of the first examples of this type of code-switching that the reader encounters in the novel is Tony’s mother describing the goodness of the curandera, Ultima:

“There isn’t a family she did not help,” she continued, “no road was too long for her to walk to its end to snatch somebody from the jaws of death, and not even the blizzards of the llano could keep her from the appointed place where a baby was to be delivered—”

“Es verdad,” my father nodded. (Anaya 3)

While the Spanish that is used may seem insignificant because it is used in a short phrase that is easy to translate (the translation of “Es verdad” being “It’s true”), the context surrounding its use reveals a more important meaning. First, Tony’s parents are able to have a conversation
that begins in English and then switches to Spanish without any dramatic or thematic shift. Anaya uses code-switching to portray how English and Spanish are able to coexist within this textual space, and there are no comprehensive barriers. As husband and wife, Tony’s parents share an intimacy and equal partnership. By using both English and Spanish to communicate with one another, this effectively displays that both languages can be intertwined in a conversation without one language dominating the other. It is imperative to note, however, that the Spanish used is not consistent with the plot and is a stylistic choice by Anaya – meaning that all of the dialogue between Tony’s parents would have been in Spanish because Tony reveals that the older people spoke Spanish and that he did not know English until he went to school for the first time (10). This important detail reveals not only that Anaya’s code-switching is more conscientiously applied, but also that Tony and his family are able to maintain their use of Spanish language in their homes and neighborhoods despite the English language being imposed upon their culture through schools and other official institutions. With this in mind, Anaya’s code-switching decision becomes even more necessary to explore. If, as readers, we are meant to assume that any of the English dialogue between Tony’s parents would technically be in Spanish, why would Anaya choose to write Tony’s father’s (Gabriel’s) response in Spanish? This is where the significance of the context of the conversation comes into play. Ultima was a curandera without a place to live - a woman who had cultural value because she had the practical knowledge of natural medicinal remedies (a Mexican American practice) and who had personal value to Tony’s family because she helped Tony’s mother, María, deliver her children. Tony’s parents felt indebted to her and wanted to uphold Mexican (and Latin@) traditions of caring for the elderly who were highly revered for their wisdom. The relationship between Spanish
language and Chican@ culture is connected through Gabriel’s response that verifies the goodness of Ultima and reveals the budding of his decision to invite her into their home.

Furthermore, Anaya’s code-switching reinforces the role of the curandera in Chican@ culture because “curandera” is a term that does not have a direct English translation; however, the significance of curander@sa9 within Chican@ culture will be more fully analyzed in the third chapter. María conveys how Ultima was vital during the delivery of her children which indicates Ultima’s usefulness, how Ultima was able to “snatch somebody from the jaws of death” which indicates her power, and also how Ultima was persistent and always present when someone was in need which displays her devoted and loving nature. The history of curander@sa dates back to the times of the Native Americans and has become embedded within Chican@ culture, and María’s respect for Ultima as this elderly and legendary figure falls in line with how Chican@s revered the elderly for their wisdom. Additionally, as a curandera, Ultima has maintained this way of life that is part of Chican@ history and culture despite Anglo American conquest in New Mexico. Her resilience is a testament to her dedication in keeping the practice of curander@sa alive as she very evidently portrays the effective and skillful role that they play in supporting life. Maria notes that Ultima would travel throughout the llano in the worst conditions in order to help others, and the mention of the word “llano” is significant because it displays Ultima's connection with the land. More extensively, she was connected with the land through her practice as a curandera. She used the resources available to her from the land, particularly plants and herbs, in order to heal and cure people from their injuries and ailments.

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9 The term “curander@sa” is used when referencing the culture, history, and role of curanderismo (which is a practice not bound by gender) while the term “curandera” will be referring specifically to Ultima or one specific female curandera.
In addition, the fact that Ultima was present to birth the children of María emphasizes the theme of rebirth, or the continuation, of Chican@ culture and community. As Ultima assisted with bringing new life into the world, this is symbolic of how Chican@ culture lives on in new generations. Through the children, there is hope that the customs and traditions of Chican@ culture will endure. The theme of community is accentuated because María had Ultima, a figure of the community, help her give birth to her children; this emphasizes how people from Chican@ culture come together to help one another, and María would be returning the favor by allowing Ultima to live with the family. Ultimately, however, Gabriel’s acknowledgement in Spanish, that the goodness of Ultima is true, is key in exemplifying the significant role of Ultima as a curandera. The practices of curander@s has long been devalued by Anglo American culture possibly because of the spiritual element that is part of the rituals. There is a belief that a spiritual, as well as natural, healing occurs through the works of curander@s though this spiritual element is often identified as pagan and/or un-Christian. As Anglo Americans often uphold Christian values, this moral disagreement very likely resulted in the rejection/suppression of curander@ practices by Anglo American society (Portilla 47). As evident in the novel itself, the practices of curander@s were also seen as a form of dark magic because they could have such powerful healing capabilities that were not always easily understood by Western medicinal practices which led to curander@s being associated with evil and brujas (witches). Because Gabriel verifies the goodness of Ultima as a curandera and verifies the goodness of her work, he is legitimizing the Chican@-cultural practice of curander@s. Anaya uses English in order to share cultural information and then presents Spanish language afterward to show how this interwoven exchange of languages represents both the Anglo and Mexican ancestries of Chican@ culture and that Chican@ practices hold significance within American identity and
culture. Therefore, Gabriel’s reply in Spanish and María’s dialogue in English reinforce the fact that Spanish should have a presence within American identity.

While the aforementioned quote represents the code-switching strategy that was used more frequently in *Bless Me, Ultima*, this is not the only way that Anaya incorporated Spanish language into his work. Four times within five pages of the 1972 edition of the novel, Anaya deviates from his more-frequently-used code-switching method throughout the novel. In these sections, the text is both offset and italicized, isolating Spanish from the rest of the English descriptions. For example, these code-switching deviations appear when Tony and his family are preparing to go to church on a Sunday morning. However, mass in this instance is different from usual because they are also attending a funeral which is indicated when María requested that the children pray for the “dearly departed souls” (Anaya 30). She is referring to the sheriff, who had been killed by Lupito the previous night, as well as Lupito himself. Lupito was a war veteran mentally scarred by his experiences in the war and who had been shot and killed by the frightened neighbors the previous night because he had killed the sheriff (30). Tony had witnessed the men shoot Lupito, and he had been agonizing over the condition of Lupito’s soul since. This was especially stressful to him because his mother had the hopes that one day Tony would become a priest. Despite his youth, Tony developed a feeling of responsibility regarding the conditions of people’s souls, meaning that he felt badly whenever he could not help someone confess or absolve their sins. This point relates to Tony’s connection with community as his concern for others endures past the spans of their lives; his concern continues with their deaths and also with their afterlives. The italicized, offset Spanish first appears when Tony is sent off to feed the animals before mass while the adults, Tony’s parents and Ultima, discuss his future. It
is while Tony is alone looking out across the river that Anaya wrote in italics and offset the text from the rest of the paragraphs:

_Ya las campanas de la iglesia están doblando..._ (31)

Literally translated, this quote reads: “Already the bells of the church are ringing…” Tony is presumably alone when this text appears, and it implies a reference to mass; that is where Tony’s family is headed for Lupito’s funeral. It could be assumed, then, that the ringing bells are a reference to Lupito’s funeral. This is further supported when, immediately following the offset text, Tony thinks to himself: “I wanted not to think anymore of what I had seen last night” (31). Tony had witnessed the death of Lupito because he had followed his father to the river where Lupito had been. Tony had remained hidden in the grass where no one could see him and had retreated back to the house after watching Lupito get shot by men of the pueblo who had feared that Lupito would harm them. This had been a very traumatizing event to witness for a boy of Tony’s age, and he was so shaken by it that he wanted to keep the image out of his mind. The bells of the church, however, reminded him of the funeral and then reminded him of what happened to Lupito that night. Spanish and Catholic mass are, historically, intertwined very tightly due to the Catholic heritage of Spain. Also, as Tony mentioned earlier, many people of the pueblo spoke Spanish, so it would be likely that the mass would have been conducted in Spanish. This would explain why this reference appears in Spanish. What is more difficult to determine is why Anaya chose to offset and italicize this portion of the text.

While Anaya’s use of code-switching for this phrase is now better understood, his method is more mysterious. He does use italics in other parts of his novel, but those are used
whenever he discusses the “presence” of the river, “the people” from the legend of the golden carp, or during Tony’s dream sequences. The “presence” refers to this indescribable quality of the river that Tony visits sometimes, and what this means is never fully articulated in the text. The term “the people” comes from the legend of the golden carp in which the cultural heritage of these ancient people, who lived in a time when gods lived with them, is never divulged. Tony’s dreams are always italicized, magical, symbolic, and often have a direct connection to the plot of the novel. Even with these examples, the italicized words and sections are not offset, and they are consistent with those themes throughout the novel. It is not clear where the previously analyzed, italicized, and offset text is coming from.

Due to its lack of clarity, there are several ways that this text could be interpreted, but I argue that this code-switched section denotes a literary shift. This section occurs when Tony’s thoughts continue to drift to the night that Lupito was killed though Tony is consciously trying to avoid thinking about it. Derived from (but not the same as) the dream and “presence” of the river threads, it is possible that the italics represent the subconscious. Dreams occur as a result of the workings of one’s subconscious mind, and the other-worldly, indescribable characteristic of the river could relate to how Tony feels a subconscious, though not overtly clear, connection to the river. This being the case, Anaya could be attempting to do something similar (though it is not the same) in the italicized, offset text; he could be trying to use italics as a means of conveying information that is not happening in line with the chronology of the plot and that resurfaces because Tony is subconsciously recalling it. The theory that this is a dream is ruled out because Tony’s dreams tend to be on the mystical side and encompass insight about his

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10 This subconscious is alluding to the Freudian term in psychology which is also known as pre-consciousness. It “contains thoughts and feelings that a person is not currently aware of, but which can easily be brought to consciousness. It exists just below the level of consciousness before the unconscious mind” (McLeod).
identity that Tony cannot or does not process in his conscious life. For example, Tony has had dreams of overseeing his own birth where his mother’s family and father’s family fought over his destiny though only Ultima knew it because she was the one who buried Tony’s afterbirth. According to the text, if a character knew the location of a child’s afterbirth, then the character knew the child’s destiny and what he/she would become. However, the situation surrounding the text is too realistic. There is a very real possibility that Tony could hear the church bells, and this offset, italicized phrase does not seem to be implying any type of deeper meaning for Tony’s future that would support it being Tony’s dream. The dream sequences also tend to be longer and more continuous. They are several sentences or even paragraphs long and are not separated by non-italicized sections of text. Thus, I would deduce that this italicized and offset text is not a reference to Tony’s dream. Because it is not overtly clear how the offset, italicized passage is meant to be understood, eliminating potential reasons that could explain this method, through analysis, is crucial.

In an attempt to determine what is occurring here, I would hypothesize that this text derives from a mix of Tony’s subconscious thoughts and his inattentive listening to an outside voice, meaning that Tony was subconsciously thinking about something another person had said. Though Anaya does not overtly express that this is the case, he implies that there is a dreamlike quality to the exploration of Tony’s journey, stating in the introduction of the 1990 edition of the novel that when Ultima entered the novel “a boy’s adventure novel became an intense exploration of the unconscious” (Anaya vii). The unconscious is not the subconscious, but both imply that there is a deeper layer of understanding below the face-value, conscious surface. However, I argue that this is subconscious rather than unconscious because while unconscious thoughts can influence emotion and behavior, the information from unconscious thoughts is not
accessible like subconscious thoughts can be (McLeod). The offset and italicized text, while it may affect Tony’s emotions, also gives distinct information about bell tolling. The reason it seems logical that this offset and italicized passage is information that derives from thoughts and outside voices is that it could be Tony recalling something that he had once heard from someone else. These phrases about ringing bells could have been said to him in a number of ways through his experiences near the church such as by a flustered priest who was telling Tony and his friends that they had better hurry to mass because they were late, which would have been likely considering the mischievous nature of Tony’s friends, or it very well could have been part of hymn sung by the church as an introductory song. This association with music favors that these offset references come from a song, such as a hymn or a sung response, as it is typical with Catholic mass for the priest and congregation to sing responses. Thus, these sections could easily have been something that Tony would have heard or even sung during mass. This would also make sense as to why they had entered into Tony’s subconscious mind. Catholic masses have the reputation for upholding tradition and, therefore, repetition, and music and repetition make phrases more memorable and easier to recall. Sometimes particular images or words can trigger these phrases from the subconscious mind without the person fully understanding why. For Tony, Lupito’s funeral goes beyond how an average young boy would feel while preparing to attend it because witnessing Lupito’s death connected Tony with him in a way that cannot be articulated by Tony but can also not be ignored. Because he is having such a difficult time facing the reality of Lupito’s death and is trying to not think about the event as mentioned before, it would seem logical that Tony would resort to the familiar to soothe him. What familiarity would come from his subconscious the most quickly?: a phrase he would have heard/sung in mass because Tony attended mass frequently, and his mother even had hopes that he would
become a priest someday. Hence, the reader could infer that Anaya used a different code-switching strategy to bring attention to this particular section, not for a political purpose that challenged Anglo-centric and monolingual identity, but as a literary device that showed how Spanish phrases could subconsciously be revealed to Tony.

With Lupito’s death being his first traumatic experience, this offset and italicized Spanish code-switching could be Tony’s distanced approach to handling the upcoming funeral, and Anaya emphasizes this different approach with a different code-switching method. Additionally, Tony reverts to Spanish in place of English because it contains a familiarity that he is desperately seeking in this confusing and difficult time. Spanish is the language of his childhood, what he learned from birth and from his family. It is typical for children to find comfort in the familiar, and it is likely that Spanish fills that role for Tony at this juncture. Therefore, Anaya’s code-switching deviation is able to portray how Tony is distancing himself from the situation through the offset text, experiencing thoughts from his subconscious mind as displayed by italics while reaching for the familiar through Spanish language. Anaya is code-switching differently because Tony is engaging with the language differently - in a subconscious way. The reason that Anaya uses a different code-switching method is not because of a particular linguistic or political reason; it is a literary one that conveys subconsciousness. While I would hypothesize that the offset and italicized text could be a song or sung response from Catholic mass, this idea is not foolproof because how it is presented is unclear. However, this interpretation identifies an additional layer of complexity regarding code-switching strategies - that not all methods are chosen as means to portray a significantly different political message about language as Anaya changed code-switching strategies in a literary way, as means to portray Tony’s subconscious
thoughts. The expression of Tony’s subconsciousness in Spanish reveals the multilingual identity that is prevalent in American identity.

Now that potential reasons for the italics and offset text have been developed, Anaya’s use of ellipses in this section should be explored as well because they are part of the code-switching structure in this case. Ellipses insinuate that there could be more to follow or that the speaker has trailed off and is unable (or would prefer not) to complete the thought. Ellipses allow words to hang in the air without any type of punctuation to pin them down and structure them. In the case of the offset and italicized texts about the church bells, the ellipses could represent the echoing of the ringing bells. Even when bells ring only once, their spreading echoes resound - offering more sound than just the initial point of impact. The sound of the bells, in this passage, is meant to reach across the llano and float to the ears of all in the vicinity to tell the people of Lupito’s funeral. Thus, a funeral, a mass, a wedding, or any type of church service has the opportunity to bring people together who are not physically together because the sound permeates the lives of everyone who can hear the bells. There is no way to control whose ears hear the echoing bells just as the ellipses are unable to contain the sentiment of Tony thinking about these bell-ringing references. The community is united by the ringing of the bells which is described in Spanish. Chican@ characters all come together through a common sound that is portrayed by a culturally significant symbol and all understand its meaning which conveys how the use of Spanish in the novel can have the same effect. Spanish language also possesses the power to unite an American community which Anaya portrayed through code-switching, and if readers do not know Spanish language, they risk losing the connection to community that has been established in this instance through code-switching.
Though the code-switching application of italicized and offset text is the same, the following italicized and offset text from the novel that also describes the ringing bells contain striking differences. The subsequent passage occurs when Tony and his family are walking to the church, and the church bells are ringing in order to indicate the beginning of mass. The first of these two references, from page 31, is plural (with more than one bell ringing) and has an emphasis on the past with the use of the word “ya” which means “already.” On the other hand, the next reference on page 34 omits “ya” or “already,” only mentions one bell, and is immediately followed by three asterisks:

“La campana de la iglesia está doblando...” (Anaya 34)

***

Though asterisks tend to imply that a transition within the plot is about to take place in the following paragraph, this does not seem to be the case in this section. After his code-switching in Spanish in the aforementioned text, Anaya code-switches back to English, following the asterisks, and continues to describe the effect of the bell: “The church bell tolled and drew to it the widows in black, the lonely, faithful women who came to pray for their men” (Anaya 35). Despite the presence of the asterisks, there is still a focus on the bell (as there is a shift from bells to bell) and how people react to its sound. In the first reference to the ringing, more than one bell was involved; multiple bells were involved and symbolized the communal effect of the bells – how they reached far across the llano, uniting everyone through their sound. However, this switch to one bell is more in tune with the widows that Tony describes in the second bell-ringing reference. The word widow alone represents a singularity as she is one who has lost her husband. She has gone from being one half of a couple to her solitary self. The word “lonely” in
the description further emphasizes how alone widows are; yet they are all alone together. There is not only one widow, but more than one, plural; there are widows who are coming which means that they could not be attending completely alone – others are joining who know and have suffered their pain. Therefore, though the multiple bells from the first reference are reduced to only one bell in the next, a unity among the people and the bells still exists. As previously mentioned during the analysis of the ellipses, the sound from bells does not stop after the bells have been struck. The echo spreads far and wide to the ears of many. Everyone may experience the bell-ringing in his/her own way and develop an individual feeling from it, but a communal effect from its sound still remains. The effect of grief is unique in that way as well. All may feel it but in many different forms. While Tony may not have been able to express that sentiment consciously, his subconscious thoughts had the capacity to bring this realization to light: that, whether multiple bells or solely one, they/it represent/s that anyone can feel completely alone yet share the experience with everyone.

Because these thoughts are so revolutionary, expressing the ideology of collectivity that is so important to Chican@ culture in a subconscious way as well as asserting that Spanish language must be known in order for readers to understand this connection to collectivity, Anaya chose to employ a different code-switching strategy as a means to convey the subconscious thoughts that Tony could not express consciously. This strategy contrasts with his code-switching strategy that integrates Spanish more seamlessly, and it seems likely that this is because the code-switching strategy that seamlessly integrates Spanish is more political in challenging the constructs of Anglo-centric and monolingual American identity. Anaya used the more frequently used code-switching method that integrates Spanish seamlessly to accentuate his political message of critiquing monocultural and monolingual American identity while the
offset and italicized code-switching that was used less frequently was based on a literary decision to portray Tony’s subconscious thoughts. He used the former strategy more than the latter because he wanted his argument of challenging this constructed Anglo-centric and English-only American identity, rather than a literary shift to portraying subconsciousness, to remain the focal point of his political message.
Chapter 3: Language and Power in the United States

Power is often known for its physical dominance and authority - one culture, for example, battling with another to gain more control of a territory. There is a struggle to determine who will emerge dominant; a conflict ensues. The two groups are clearly at odds in order to obtain this coveted power. Language, on the other hand, is widely understood as a means to connect people. Using and learning language opens the doors to communication and can bridge gaps across cultures when multiple languages are used. While this is certainly true, language can also be used as a medium that suppresses the linguistic and cultural identity of another culture. The power of language in the United States should not be overlooked because the construct of Anglo-centric and English-only identity has used its dominating power to suppress Spanish language and Chican@ culture despite their relevance within American identity. In his novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya uses particular themes when code-switching in order to accentuate the power of Spanish language and Chican@ culture within American identity.

This chapter opens with an overview of how English and Spanish interact with one another politically in American texts and how those political messages that are portrayed depend upon which language is used but also upon how those languages are used. Language has often been used as a tool by dominant cultures as a means of suppressing non-dominant cultures, and Anaya’s code-switching in *Bless Me, Ultima* works to combat that suppression by asserting a multilingual and multicultural American identity. Four subchapters that focus on themes of power related to Chican@ culture include land, religion, women, and community. The focus on land reveals how the conquest of Anglo Americans has affected Chican@s’ placement within American identity, the theme about religion emphasizes the historical background of Christianity, Catholicism, and paganism within Anglo American and Mexican history, the focus
on women features Ultima and how her role as a curandera is crucial to Chican@ culture and its preservation, and finally the theme of community portrays how Chican@s are able to establish unity with one another despite the suppression that they have faced. Through a method of close readings, the analyses of these themes will critique the Anglo-centric American identity that has maintained a monolingual dominance within the United States.

3a. Overview of the Political Power of English and Spanish in the Novel

While politics may not seem to be at the forefront of Anaya’s novel at a superficial glance, his conscious decision to integrate Spanish language within his mostly English work speaks volumes regarding the history of Chican@ culture. Especially when it comes to texts that contain code-switching, the political power of a written piece about Hispanic culture is influenced by not only the content that the author chooses to share but also by the style or method that the author employs. In his article “Constitutive Graphonomy,” Bill Ashcroft explains that “The written text is a social situation” (Ashcroft 298). First one must understand that constitutive graphonomy is “the constitutive ethnography of writing systems” (or the establishment of how different cultures record the written word) and his reference to text as a social situation means that text has three primary factors that influence how the text is understood: the language, the speaker/writer, and the listener/reader (Ashcroft 298). Due to multiple participants within a text (speaker/writer and listener/reader), the comprehension of meaning is complicated. It becomes even more complicated when a writer decides to code-switch because language comes from multiple sources, and the speaker/writer or the listener/reader could have even greater likelihood for misunderstanding as a result. Because language itself is a technique for conveying information, code-switching is as well. Ashcroft argues that it is not the language that creates misunderstanding in the interaction between
speaker/writer and listener/reader but the fact that these two groups did not share the same experiences, and, therefore, will never fully be able to comprehend the situation that is being conveyed. He refers to this cultural distance as “a product of the metonymic gap” because it is not the language that is failing to communicate when it is used to represent a particular culture. The responsibility of understanding falls to the participants of the language rather than the language itself. Whether it is the responsibility of the speaker/writer or the listener/reader when a misunderstanding occurs would need to be investigated on a case by case study, and it has not yet (and probably never will be) definitively determined. In addition, this clash of understanding between the listener/reader and the speaker/writer would beg the question of how to/who should compromise in order to obtain some type of understanding. Is it those who are part of the non-dominant cultures who need to adapt or is it those who are part of the majority that need to change? In *The Bounds of Race: Perspective on Hegemony and Resistance*, Samia Mehr describes how colonization has affected the way language has been used by dominant and non-dominant cultures and what that means for the bilingual writers and/or decolonized cultures:

Is it sufficient for [postcolonial bilingual/bicultural writers] to ‘dare speak’ in the master language in order to expose the atrocities of the colonial fact? Or is it more crucial for them to determine how they speak in the dominant language? The answer to decolonization or contestation is not simply to wrench away a speaking subject-position. For the crucial questions are what kind of subject-position is being sought, what are the implications of such a choice, which voice(s) do the colonized subjects adopt, where will they position themselves vis-à-vis the dominant language and dominant discursive modes? How will they transform their own stagnant traditions rather than simply reproduce them in the
same manner defined by colonizers? And, ultimately, can the colonized
decolonize both themselves and their colonizer as well, while still writing in the
master language? (Mehrez 264)

Here, Mehrez is questioning whether bilingual writers should use the “master language” (which
in this discussion would constitute as English language) while writing their works. While many
of these points have been discussed within my essay previously, the final point about whether
writers can “decolonize both themselves and their colonizer as well, while still writing in the
master language” expresses the dilemma faced by many Hispanic writers today as well as in the
past. Is it the responsibility of the colonized (Chican@s) to decolonize not only themselves, but
also the colonizers (Anglo Americans)? (This decolonization is in reference to the
deconstructing of the colony that was formed by Anglo Americans - a colony that asserted an
Anglo-centric and English-speaking monolingual construct of American identity.) Is it wrong to
attempt to do this in English, in this case? There is no clear-cut right or wrong answer to this
question, which makes determining the solution quite difficult, but it is important to understand
what is at stake. Bilingual writers will be criticized for any choice that they make – whether it is
to write completely in Spanish, completely in English, or any variance of code-switching.

However, does the responsibility of decolonizing, specifically for Chican@s fall only to the
colonized? I would argue that this is not true. The responsibility of resolving this issue of
hegemony should not go to those who did not assert this hegemony, particularly the Chican@s.

This is why challenging the Anglo-centric and English-only American identity is so crucial,
because a different American identity must be presented that is multilingual and embraces
multiple cultures in order to destabilize the hegemony established by Anglo American conquest.

As mentioned previously, code-switching writers can be criticized for whichever code-switching
method/s that they choose to use, but their choices reflect differing political messages. This is apparent in Ortiz Cofer’s perceived lack of political message with her Spanish-language use for few and select words, Anzaldúa’s bilingualism that portrays a distinct and unwavering voice, and Mohr’s code-switching that is conscientious of the English-speaking monolingual reader which explains the context surrounding her use of Spanish words.

Despite the inherent connection between code-switching and political messages, Ortiz Cofer does not view her code-switching as political. When discussing her code-switching method, she commented on the politics behind the language: “‘My English is not a political choice; it's a choice of expediency’” (qtd. in Hernandez 102). While Ortiz Cofer may not have been consciously making political choices, her choice to employ code-switching, in any way, sends a social and/or political message to the reader. Because a text is influenced by the interaction of language, a writer, and a reader, Ortiz Cofer is only able to take charge of two-thirds of the text’s meaning. Though she can control (to an extent) the information that she is conveying through her writing and in what format/style readers will receive the message, she is unable to control how readers will react to her message. Despite her intent, language is still political. It is crucial to understand that language is an exchange and that both the giving and receiving end of interaction influence the conveyed political message. Given that writers cannot demand the readers to experience the work in precisely the same way that they would like for them to experience it, writers must employ writing strategies (and in this case, code-switching writers must employ code-switching methods) that are able to convey those messages (which are intrinsically political despite Ortiz Cofer’s intentions) as accurately as possible. Regarding Ortiz Cofer’s position of predominantly using English language in her literature, the fact that she finds English to be a more expedient language sends a political message.
Though Ortiz Cofer has a Hispanic background, she has also experienced an American upbringing (Poetry Foundation). Like Anaya, her education occurred within the United States and was conducted in English. Having lived most of her academic life where she would have been exposed to English more frequently than Spanish caused her to become more comfortable with writing in English. This influenced her decision to code-switch, with her work primarily in English, and the political message displayed is that it was easier for her, as a Latin American, to use English than it would have been to use Spanish. This speaks to the possibility of how those who grew up with Spanish may have a difficult time consistently maintaining that Spanish while living in a country where English is the primarily spoken and written language. Unless they are consistently surrounded by people who also are able to speak Spanish and understand their histories and cultures, it would potentially be easier for Latin@s to revert to English for the sake of convenience because that is the language that is widely accepted in public domains in the United States. This speaks to the political message that Anglo-centric and monolingual society has suppressed Spanish language to the point that speaking and writing Spanish as a Hispanic person has become less convenient and more difficult than doing the same in English. It could be argued that Latin@ writers who are not using Spanish as the primary language in a written text are not taking a stand against the normative standard of English as the dominant language; however, it is important to remember the challenges that Latin@ writers, especially women, face when challenging the Anglo-centric and monolingual construct of American identity in the publishing industry, how intended audience influences code-switching choices, and how the perspective of the writer also contributes to the decision of what code-switching method a writer employs.
Additionally, these writers should not be pigeonholed into writing in a specific language because that particular language is associated with that culture – meaning that Latin@s should not be expected to write in Spanish just because that population typically speaks Spanish. Especially for Chican@ culture, which is a representation of both American and Mexican cultures, writers should not have the expectation to write in one particular language because, historically, that language has been associated with them. It is true that Latin@ writers who use Spanish language that supports Latin@ communities’ interest throughout a major portion of their works should be praised for doing so, because they are radically challenging the Anglo-centric and English-only construct of American identity, but this does not mean that Latin@ writers who do not make that choice should be criticized. All writers, Latin@ or otherwise, should have the opportunity to employ the writing styles that best fit their circumstances, motives, and audiences – regardless of language. The message the reader gleans from the writer’s work is dependent upon both the style that the writer chose as well as the perspective of the reader. In the case of Ortiz Cofer, her choice to use Spanish words and phrases less frequently than Anzaldúa, for example, should not be assumed to mean that Spanish language is less important than English language to her. Rather, it represents a version of an American identity – one that contains both English and Spanish language. Whether an intentional political message is attempting to be conveyed by the writer or not, language, specifically code-switching application, holds political power in challenging a construct established by linguistic hegemony.

Similar to Ortiz Cofer and Mohr, Anaya was aware of who would likely be the audience of his written communication in the United States (English-speaking monolingual readers) as they are the majority of the readership within the country. This is evident through his code-switching methods. Spanish language code-switching in *Bless Me, Ultima* introduces readers to
Chican@ culture who could potentially have limited or virtually no knowledge of it. In this case, Anaya’s work is crucial because it is bringing to light a history and viewpoint that is often overlooked by an Anglo-centric population. His choice to describe the life of a Chican@ family living on a llano in New Mexico portrays that the exploration and understanding of their ways of life is important in American culture because Chican@s are also part of American identity. This territory endured many political battles in attempting to maintain Spanish language as well as Mexican practices that had been used/held there historically. Steadily, these lifestyles that differed from the Anglo American ways of life became suppressed and led to the Chicano Rights Movement described in the introduction. This culture is still relevant to people living in New Mexico (and other parts of the world) today, and a reader who could be ignorant to Chican@s’ plight (historically and contemporaneously) should be enlightened and understand how American identity should not be monolingual nor Anglo-centric. With an English-speaking monolingual audience that is potentially unaware of Chican@ culture in mind, Anaya’s code-switching methods reflect how audience plays a role in selecting a code-switching method. However, Anaya’s work still challenges Anglo-centric and monolingual American identity through the subject of a conflicted Chican@ identity (particularly Tony) and through the method of Spanish code-switching for pivotal sections that relate to Chicano@ culture that will be analyzed by the themes of power with which they are associated: land, women, religion, and community. Each theme of power is connected to Chican@ culture and conveys how Anaya’s code-switching effectively critiques American identity that is Anglo-centric and monolingual.

3b. Themes of Power: Land

For centuries, land has been representative of power and control within cultures across the world. This has been the case for Chican@ culture as well, and its connection to the land in
the American southwest, via the occupational livelihoods of Chican@s and via the loss of land through Anglo American conquest, has affected how cultural texts approach the subjects of land and power. Many Chican@s value the physical land for the resources that it provides them (especially ranchers and farmers) and they understand the loss of power that came as a result of the appropriation of their land. In the novel, Anaya is able to create vivid imagery and evoke an irreplaceable connotation with the word “llano,” often translated to the word “plains” in English. This word is meaningful to the political power structure in Chican@ culture, and Anaya conveys its importance through code-switching. For example, llano is the first Spanish word that appears in the novel and appears frequently throughout. This word choice is a great example of how Anaya uses context in English in order to convey the meaning of the word that is in Spanish. The first few times the word is mentioned, it is surrounded by descriptions:

[T]he llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth…beauty from the raw, sunbaked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl which was the white sun’s home…returning from the llano where she gathered the herbs that can be harvested…after the big rancheros [ranchers] and the tejanos [Texans] came and fenced the beautiful llano, [Tony’s father, Gabriel] and those like him continued to work there…because only in that wide expanse of land and sky could they feel the freedom their spirits needed. (Anaya 2-3)

Without actually defining or translating the world, Anaya is able to create an image in the reader’s mind of what this llano could be. It is obvious that it relates to the land when Tony mentions it alongside the river and the “turning earth,” but the words “sunbaked” and “wide expanse of land and sky” coupled with the fact that Tony mentions the rancheros and Tejanos
verifies that Anaya is describing American southwestern terrain – the plains of New Mexico. All of this occurs within two pages so that the reader, particularly an English-speaking monolingual reader, is able to establish the location before the novel’s plot becomes more complicated.

However, the significance of this word goes beyond just the word “llano” itself. First, the fact that Anaya does not attempt to directly translate the word llano represents its untranslatability. While most translations would offer the word “plains” as the English-language equivalent, this one word cannot evoke the connotations or encompass the history that the llano has for Chican@ culture. One word in another language could never accurately and fully contain the meaning of the word in the original language. The llano, these plains, this territory, what Anzaldúa has referred to as the Borderlands, represent how Chican@s have identified with this area. By referring to the plains as the llano, similar to how Anaya calls New Mexico “Nueva Mexico,” Chican@s are reclaiming the territory and establishing Spanish language within American identity. This combats the monolingual suppression that English names represent which are often associated with this territory because an English-speaking monolingual speaker would not use those Spanish language names. This use of code-switching by Anaya portrays how the power of Spanish language cannot be colonized. Despite the fact that, technically, the land belongs to the United States and is often referred to as plains or New Mexico, Chican@s may use Spanish language as a way to assert their identities as Chican@s and challenge monolingual American identity. They are resisting to abandon their culture and are resisting Anglo American and English-only hegemony by using Spanish language. Thus, this power structure between the use of the word “plains” in English and “llano” in Spanish goes beyond simply the use of the individual words; the choice to use either word exposes the underlying power structures and political history between the United States and Mexico as well as English
language and Spanish language. Anaya’s choice to use the word llano along with the connotations that it possesses demonstrates the resistance of Chican@ culture to being suppressed by Anglo American society.

Additionally, Chican@s have a long-standing history of working the land as cowboys, farmers, and ranchers. This is especially true in the United States in New Mexico. The llano is known for its vast expanse of land; its open plains work well for ranchers and farmers due to the flatness of land and the warm climate. These occupations (and lifestyles) are part of the working class, but they also involve a close connection with the people and the land. People have been using the land to support their livelihoods for hundreds of years, and though this practice seems potentially antiquated, it is still relevant and very much a part of Chican@s’ lives as per Anaya’s line: “those like [Tony’s father] continued to work [the land]” (2-3). There is a continuity as well as a unity that comes from the work that these men do on the land with one another. The fact that Anaya mentions “those like” Tony’s father were the ones who “continued” to work the land indicates that Mexican Americans have been a people deeply connected to the land for generations. This connection allows them to feel as though they have a claim to the land, but the appropriation of their land by Anglo Americans took away that ownership; this annexation of land is especially grievous considering that Chican@s are often the laborers of the land as opposed to the property owners, but it explains why Chican@s call the land “llano” in place of the English word “plains” (“The Latino Labor Force in Recovery”). The land that they work so hard on, that they have invested so much into, has become a part of their Chican@ identity, and their Chican@ identity is also often rooted in Spanish language because of the Mexican history associated with the territory that they had inhabited. The work that Chican@s do as cowboys, farmers, and ranchers allows them to connect with the land in a way that has embedded itself into
their identities; however, these occupations are not the only ones that relate to the land or have a Chican@ tradition.

The practice of curanderismo has long been a part of Mexican American culture, dating back to Native American practices before Anglo American conquest in the American Southwest. This practice of using the earth’s natural resources as a medium for treating injuries and illnesses is not only a treatment, but it also has a spiritual element and belief system attached to it. In her novel *They All Want Magic: Curanderas and Folk Healing*, Elizabeth de la Portilla describes that there are four levels regarding the practice of curanderismo: material, mental, spiritual, and emotional (52). These levels, or niveles, all make up a person’s well-being, and each aspect is just as important as the other. She goes on to explain the cultural significance within the spiritual and physical worlds: “Curanderismo gives us a way to understand certain aspects of cultural life as they are reflected in the structure of the realms. That is: objects and materials contain energy; people can manipulate energy; the spiritual world and the physical are closely aligned and are in contact with one another. Therefore, attitude and state of mind can affect one’s state of wellness” (53). The fact that these healing methods are so closely tied to a culture and belief system keep them distinct from traditional, Western-medicinal practices that function on the principle that they are causing a direct physical effect – something that, theoretically, is not linked to the spiritual world.

The significance of this spiritual connection with the land in curanderismo indicates how, in Chican@ culture, Chican@s are able to greatly appreciate the land and use its resources in a manner that extended beyond the natural world. The “gathered herbs” that were mentioned in the passage about the llano, while they could have been used for cooking, were more likely used for healing purposes because of the presence of a curandera within the text. This transition from
earthly to spiritual healing demonstrates how Chican@es were able to use the land in a positive way that went beyond the one-dimensional, only-physical application of Western medicine. Additionally, the gentle method of gathering indicates that Chican@es were not attempting to dominate the land, but, rather, they were willing to work with and/or alongside of it. This harmony is in stark contrast with the blatant colonization and urbanization that occurred as a result of Anglo American conquest. Though Chican@es are often suppressed by Anglo American society, they did not set out to dominate other cultures in the same manner. In fact, the preservation of this curanderismo practice indicates Chican@es’ attempt to preserve their culture and identities instead of combatting other cultures as means to suppress or destroy them. Their continued practice of this healing method, as displayed through the powerful character of Ultima in the novel, shows Chican@es’ resistance of Western medication that had no connection with the land and lacked a spiritual healing element, and, therefore, shows Chican@es’ resistance to adhere to the limiting restriction an Anglo-centric and English-only identity. While the land has the power to give to people through the yielding of crops for farmers as well as grass for the cows and horses of the ranchers, its use as a tool by a dominant group to control power keeps Chican@es from gaining political power through the process of land ownership.

Land is property, and property is power. This is not a new power dynamic, and it is a structure that Chican@es have been fighting against for decades. Despite how closely many of them work the with land and the intimate, knowledgeable relationship that they have developed with it, the fact that many of them do not own their own land to grow crops or start a ranch, as a result of the seizure of the land from Mexicans during Anglo American conquest, has significantly impacted how they have been able to gain power in the United States (“The Latino Labor Force in Recovery”). This restriction of power has resulted in a restriction of economic
wealth and social standing, and, ultimately, has the potential to prevent Chican@s from being able to identify as Americans because they are marginalized economically and feel excluded from dominant constructions of American identity. This in turn affects the Chican@s’ social status, and this lower social status has further affected how they are suppressed culturally, linguistically, and racially within the United States. Thus, while Anaya describes the llano as “that wide expanse of land and sky [where] could they feel the freedom their spirits needed” it was Chican@s’ lack of ownership of this llano that caused Chican@s to feel restricted instead of liberated (Anaya 3). It is true that Chican@s may have felt freedom while working in that “wide expanse of land and sky” but it was only an illusion; the truth was that many were fenced in by the colonization of the Anglo American society that prevented them from gaining any power through lower class labor. However, despite this suppression, Chican@s were still able to retain their culture, and through this, the practices of that culture – including language. Therefore, their use of the word llano in place of plains was a method of resistance; it was their claim to the land that they could not own but understood so well. The novel’s repeated use of the word reflects this resistance and reinforces that while land is property, and property is power, language is also a power that can resist hegemony.

3c. Themes of Power: Religion

Historically, like language, religion has played a powerful and influential role in society. In the novel Bless Me, Ultima specifically, Tony is forced to reconcile his love for a Catholic God and his interest in the golden carp, a pagan god. Also, because Tony’s mother has the hope that one day Tony will become a priest, Tony battles with the moral gray areas presented through death and sin at a very young age. When he witnessed the death of Lupito at the river, he struggled to understand whether Lupito would be able to enter heaven because of his un-
absolved sins which is apparent in one of the code-switching sections that is offset and italicized.

Before going to church, Tony goes out to feed the animals on their family farm. When Tony let out the cow to feed on grass, he was relieved that the cow had not wandered toward the river. He did not want her to see the blood near the river from Lupito’s death. Though he had tried to keep his mind off of this topic, it seemed impossible for him to escape it. The potential wandering of a cow toward the river in which Lupito was killed triggered this memory for Tony. The thought of Lupito’s blood brings forward the following lines that could have potentially originated from Tony’s subconscious thoughts:

“Por la sangre de Lupito, todos debemos de rogar,

Que Dios la saque de pena y la lleve a descansar…” (Anaya 32)

This phrase best translates to “By the blood of Lupito, all should pray, /May God take away the pain (of Lupito’s soul) and give it rest.” While the word “soul” is not explicitly stated in the second line of this phrase, it is implied because of the use of the feminine word “la.” Had “lo” been used, it could have been assumed that this direct object pronoun referred to Lupito because “lo” is used for masculine terms. Because “la” was used in place of “lo” as the direct object pronoun of the phrase, and the phrase about giving rest still refers to Lupito, it would make sense that it was referring more specifically to what God would put to rest, what truly made up Lupito’s identity: his soul. In Spanish, the word soul is “la alma” which is a feminine word and explains the switch to “la.” This holy discourse, with a heavy reflection on the afterlife of Lupito, would most likely be spoken by a priest performing a funeral service. Catholic masses are known for their traditions and repetition. It is more than likely that Tony had heard these
lines on more than one occasion as funerals bring communities together. Therefore, even if Tony had not been listening intently during Lupito’s funeral (likely because he was distracted by the memories of Lupito’s death) there was a chance that his subconscious mind was able to bring these lines forth because of their familiarity. Also, the fact that the lines rhyme indicate a musical element which allows phrases to be recalled more easily. Thus, it fits the idea that these lines had come from a voice Tony would have heard during a Catholic funeral. In this case, the ellipses from the text suggest that there was more to follow after these two lines, but it is possible that Tony only recalled the mentioned ones – perhaps because they carried a certain importance to Tony. Where Lupito’s soul would end up became a great concern for Tony.

Because Tony had been given the weighty expectation of possibly becoming a priest as his future lifestyle, (as his mother was adamant that he should make the family proud and do so) he considered where a person’s soul would go following death very seriously and with great thought, probably more than the average child would. Tony had a special preoccupation with the situation of Lupito’s soul following his death because he had witnessed Lupito’s death, and Lupito had been involved in a morally complex situation during the time of his death. Tony wavered between four possibilities for the final resting place of Lupito’s soul; he considered hell initially because Lupito had committed a mortal sin (killing the sheriff), then Purgatory if God had decided to forgive Lupito (which Tony concluded that God had not because “God didn’t forgive anyone”), next that, according to Tony’s dream, “the waters of the river had washed his soul away” which allowed Lupito’s soul to become a part of the water cycle, and finally that Lupito’s soul would wander near the river indefinitely, simulating the Chican@ legend of la LLorona (Anaya 27-28). This in-depth exploration is important for two critical reasons. The first is that it proves how the text is a subconscious viewpoint as it is something that Tony would
have recalled a priest saying during a funeral, and this section would have been especially significant for Tony because he had been worried about Lupito’s soul. Secondly, the analysis showcases one of the many opposites that plague Tony in the novel – his support of Catholicism and his curiosity for other religions. The options for the afterlife of Lupito’s soul as either purgatory or hell have Catholic origins. They stem from the belief system regarding how the sins or good deeds of one’s life affected what happened to one’s soul following death. Tony’s initial reaction is that Lupito’s soul went to hell because the sin he had committed was a mortal one. However, Tony also contemplates that Lupito’s soul was able to enter Purgatory despite his sins – although, ultimately, he negates this idea when he concludes that God would not forgive Lupito because Tony has never witnessed God forgive anyone.

Tony has a very complicated relationship with God in the novel. As much as he respects Catholicism, he does not view God as a particularly compassionate god. This distance allows him to consider other gods and ways of thinking in order to fill that void. Though there are nuances of Christian narrative within this section of the text (as the water is reminiscent of a baptism) this new interpretation of religion via this pagan story presents how Tony is willing to look outside of the Catholic and Christian religion in order to find a faith that aligns with the forgiving characteristics that he was seeking. Thus, Tony’s exploration of Lupito’s soul being washed by the water of the river represents his exploration of a pagan religion which Tony becomes more curious about later in the novel when he learns about the golden carp.

According to legend, a lake near Tony’s town is home to the golden carp. This golden carp is a pagan god described by Tony’s friend, Samuel, and is an unnaturally large and gold carp that was originally a god who became a carp. According to this legend, from when the earth was new, people had angered the gods and, as punishment, they wanted to kill all of the people.
However, one god spoke out on the people’s behalf, and the people were converted to carps instead of being killed as a compromise. When this happened, the kind god worried that the people would not know how to navigate the waters, so he became a carp as well in order to protect them (Anaya 80-81). The compassion of the golden carp appealed to Tony because it contrasted so sharply with his perception of a Catholic God. Unlike the God Tony understood who would condemn Lupito’s soul, the golden carp gave up everything to help mere mortals, to help the people he cared about. While the legend has a Native American root, it relates to Chican@s because much of Chican@ culture comes from Native American culture, and both groups inhabited the land of the American Southwest as well as the land mentioned in the legend. This story has a regional heritage, and because Tony is from that same region, this folktale has cultural significance to him.

Chican@ historical relevance goes even further with Tony’s final consideration: his comparison of Lupito’s soul to that of la Llorona. This myth has a background that extends far into the history of the Mexican culture though; according to Domino Renee Perez who wrote *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*, “La Llorona is an important part of Mexican storytelling traditions on both sides of the US/Mexican border” (ix). Thus, La Llorona is not simply a Mexican myth but a Chican@ myth. The legend goes that la Llorona is “a ghost said to haunt the river banks and lake shores” (Perez x). She is also known as the Wailing or Weeping Woman. There have been countless interpretations of this character, including painting la Llorona as a victim whose children accidentally drowned or as a murderer who drowned her own children (Perez ix). However, the main idea is that a female ghost haunts the waters, and the story serves as a warning to not linger near water at night. Because she still haunts the natural world, this legend emulates Lupito’s situation because his soul was not
completely clear of sin following his death as he had left many unresolved issues on earth before being killed. Because of her inability to escape the natural world during her afterlife, La Llorona is viewed as a tragic ghost in many interpretations, and Lupito’s death was tragic indeed. Despite all of the questions that Tony raised about Lupito’s soul, the Catholic funeral rites were still conducted for Lupito, and the offset and italicized lines display how Tony’s analyses of Lupito’s soul raises important points about Catholicism and Chican@ legends that are associated with Chican@ culture. The importance of tradition, as displayed by the Catholic Church, is also prevalent in Chican@ culture which Anaya presents in scenarios such as María’s and Gabriel’s insistence that Tony follow the occupational paths that they chose. Additionally, Chican@ legends about la Llorona and the golden carp fall in line with how Chican@ culture is deeply connected to the land.

Both the golden carp and la Llorona are associated with water and their legends originated from the presence of water. Though water is important to every group of people, water is particularly significant to Chican@s as the borderlands area is notorious for being hot and dry. Theoretically, this would make their culture have a greater appreciation for water because of this, but the point is that the land (and water) make up a crucial aspect of Chican@ culture. The fact that Tony incorporates the analyses of the golden carp as well as the Catholic God indicates how both of these seemingly dichotomous aspects are able to coexist within one culture. Tony is struggling to choose between them, but his conclusive decision to pursue one or the other is not revealed in this novel. The message from the lack of a final decision could be that both Catholicism and Chican@ legends can exist together – it is not a type of situation in which the belief in one negates the existence of the other. Tony’s incorporation of both of these belief systems demonstrates the complex and interwoven religious history of Chican@ culture.
This incorporation of belief systems speaks to the diversity of religion found within the United States and how American identity is not bound by only one, and the idea of diversity pertains to language as well. Because this section was code-switched to Spanish, this code-switching asserts that American identity does not have one language to explain its religious history; it is multilingual. Furthermore, the portrayal of women in Chican@ culture through code-switching, such as the presence of la Llorona previously mentioned, represents the power women can have within a culture as well.

3d. Themes of Power: Women

One of the main characters in the novel, as evident in its title, is Ultima who carries great literary and cultural significance. This is evident through her role as a guide in Tony’s life but more importantly through her role as a curandera in which she has the power to use the natural resources of the llano to heal people. Readers are first introduced to Ultima during the discussion that Tony’s parents have about her coming to live with the family. When Tony’s father expresses concern about how the children would feel about Ultima living with them, Tony’s narrative voice explains the complexity of Ultima’s character:

Ultima was a curandera, a woman who knew the herbs and remedies of the ancients, a miracle-worker who could heal the sick. And I had heard that Ultima could lift the curses laid by brujas, that she could exorcise the evil the witches planted in people to make them sick. And because a curandera had this power she was misunderstood and often suspected of practicing witchcraft herself. (Anaya 4)

This passage summarizes the history of the words “curandera” and “bruja.” Literally translated, “curandera” would most closely mean “healer” or “curer” while “bruja” means “witch” in English. While these words could be viewed as similar because the power of healing is often
associated with magic, the novel, as well as Chican@ culture, very carefully maintains a stark
difference between the two words. In the aforementioned passage, Tony associates a curandera
with healing, “a miracle-worker” who knew “herbs and remedies of the ancients” (Anaya 4).
This reflects a positive image regarding the work that Ultima, a curandera, does because it
benefits others. Though the word “miracle” calls to mind the spiritual element of healing that
was mentioned earlier, the fact that it was done with herbs and ancient remedies accentuates how
natural the work of a curander@ is as well. It is a historical science of healing that comes from
Chican@ ancestors who used the land to their best advantage (Portilla 23). Curander@s often
used natural remedies which contrasted with Western medicine that often came in the form of
lab-created pills. However, despite the natural and organic influences of their healing methods,
curander@s were often used as a last resort when someone was suffering from a physical ailment
because of the stigma that surrounded their power as Tony mentions. This stigma comes from
the history of the word “bruja” or “witch.” Witches are often known to experiment with dark
magic, casting spells that alter objects in the natural world or playing with the notions of life and
death. When Tony describes the witches, he uses words such as “curses,” “evil,” and “sick.”
These words oppose the healing power of the curander@ because the power of the witches
comes in a negative form. It directly combats what curander@s do. Anaya himself asserted the
goodness of Ultima as a curandera when he wrote, “These witches (I prefer the term shaman) are
people of power whose work may be viewed as good or evil, depending on the needs of those
who ask for their assistance. Ultima is a shaman who uses her positive power to do good” (viii).
Anaya shies away from using the term “witches” because he understands the negative
connotations that surround them. Historically, witches have brought pain and suffering, and
they grotesquely change people physically for vengeful or selfish reasons. People in Chican@
culture were often scared of anyone who held the power of prolonging life or postponing death because the idea seemed unnatural to them. Therefore, curander@s developed a poor reputation, despite the good that they did, because they were often stereotyped as witches or brujas. This misunderstanding suggests yet another dichotomy in the novel: brujas and curander@s. Is Ultima a curandera who uses her knowledge and healing power to help save people, or does she harm others for vengeful gain? The answer to this question is complicated by Ultima’s behavior when she is curing Tony’s uncle.

In contrast with Ultima’s healing capabilities, the characters who serve as Ultima’s foils are Tenorio and his three daughters. Tenorio is known as being a hateful man throughout the town, and his daughters are infamous for practicing witchcraft – which is not to be confused with the work of a curander@. It becomes clear that the witchcraft of Tenorio’s daughters puts Tony’s uncle, Lucas, on his deathbed, and it is Ultima’s cure that saves him from death. However, shortly after Ultima has cured Lucas, and shortly after she made three clay dolls that she stuck pins into, Tenorio’s daughters began to die. These conflicting practices call to question Ultima’s motives and practices. The dolls were made during the Lucas’s healing process and just before he vomits the hairball that was causing his sickness. Ultima had Lucas breathe on the dolls, and then she dipped pins into one of her remedies and stuck them into the dolls while she sang,

“You have done evil,” she sang,

“But good is stronger than evil,

“And what you sought to do will undo you...” (Anaya 101)
Because Lucas is cured soon after this occurs, it is unclear whether the ritual was necessary in order to heal Lucas. The healing would represent the curandera aspect of Ultima’s character, and the fact that she emphasizes the power of good over evil in her song reinforces her goodness. What complicates matters is the implication that Ultima is inflicting the evil back onto Tenorio’s daughters. The relay of evil activity is associated with a bruja or a witch, and it could potentially serve as a vengeful purpose – revenge on the daughters for their wrongdoings. Arguably, it is not Ultima’s decision to punish Tenorio’s daughters; as a curandera, her focus should be on the healing of Lucas rather than their punishment. Also, the fact that they die later on shows the range of Ultima’s power regarding life and death; the novel suggests that she has the power to save life and cause death. Though the novel implies that, overall, Lucas is morally better than Tenorio’s daughters, Ultima’s practices must still be questioned because her less-conventional methods potentially caused three deaths indirectly while saving one life. However, because Ultima sings that what Tenorio’s daughters sought to do would “undo” them, she could mean that the natural order of the universe will right the wrongs of the daughters by punishing them for hurting Lucas. Multiple interpretations can be gleaned from this passage with Ultima which is what makes it such a rich literary and cultural text. The origins of the practices of curander@s is embedded within Mexican ancestry and the Spanish language, to the point that there is no word in English that is equivalent or carries the same cultural connotation. Thus, Anaya’s choice to code-switch for the word curandera is crucial to the argument that it is only through exploring the historical nuances of Chican@ culture and Spanish language in the text that a reader is able to better understand the inherent connection that Spanish language has not only to culture and the roles of the curander@s, but also to the land itself. This connection between language, land and culture solidifies the multicultural and multilingual identity within the United States. In further
analyzing Ultima, Anaya code-switches to allow other characters in the novel to discuss Ultima’s character.

In keeping with the theme of the complexity of Ultima’s character, her abilities as a curandera brings into question the source of her power. When Ultima is leaving El Puerto after curing Lucas, she is received by a crowd. People have heard of what happened to Lucas and have come to see how he healed:

“La curandera!” someone exclaimed. Some women bowed their heads, others made the sign of the cross. “Es una mujer que no ha pecado,” another whispered.

“Hechicera.” “Bruja-”

“No!” one of my aunts contested the last word. She knelt by Ultima’s path and touched the hem of her dress as she passed by.

“Es sin pecado,” was the last I heard, then we were outside. (Anaya 104)

The code-switching in this context is important because it shows the contrast in word choice, and it also accentuates the religious imagery that is obviously present in this scene. The phrase “Es una mujer que no ha pecado” is translated to “She is a woman who has not sinned” while “hechicera” would closely relate to sorceress or magician. The phrase “Es sin pecado” means “She is without sin.” Upon the utterance of the word “curandera,” several women responded in a devout manner, with bowed heads and signs of the cross. This is typically what would occur during prayer or in a church – holy or religious occurrences. This puts Ultima in a holy disposition, which is further emphasized when someone whispers that she has not sinned. While no human being can be without sin, as sin is what marks a person as human, the comment implies that Ultima has a goodness that is nothing short of saintly, that her goodness exceeds the goodness of the average person. In contrast with this holy interpretation, others from the crowd
claim that Ultima uses tricks and dark magic in order to do her healing. Magicians are associated with illusions and fraudulence that trick people into believing something that is not true, and brujas or witches are associated with evil. These remarks represent how Ultima’s work is often not fully appreciated, even if it heals or cures someone, and how people often doubt certain healing practices.

Further exploring Ultima’s goodness and power within a religious context, the kneeling of the aunt and the touching of Ultima’s hem represent Catholic/Christian imagery respectively. First, kneeling is often a sign of acknowledging authority or power as well as reverence and is done quite frequently during Catholic mass – specifically during times of prayer. Prayer is a time to focus on humility and offer thanks or request help from God which displays how highly Ultima was regarded. Secondly, the touching of the hem comes directly from a story in the Bible. When Jesus is walking through a crowd of people, a woman suffering from hemorrhaging has a desperate desire to be healed by Jesus. She is unable to reach Jesus, but she touches the hem of his cloak and is immediately healed. This story is an example of the healing power of Jesus – that just by touching his clothing, one could become healed. There also seems to a gender role-reversal at play within the novel as it is a woman who seeks healing and a man who heals in the Bible whereas the novel has a man healed by a woman - further asserting the feminine and healing power of Ultima. This holy and healing imagery supplied by this narrative fits well into the context of Ultima’s character because the aunt wants to make certain that people understand the goodness of Ultima’s work. She follows up this action with the phrase in Spanish language “She is without sin” as further testament to her goodness. Theses code-switching sections relate to Ultima’s perceived identity as a curandera, a hechicera, or a bruja; while hechicera and bruja have negative connotations, they also relate to this religious imagery as Jesus
himself was often doubted and called blasphemous names because of his healing abilities. The words also carry cultural significance as previously explained which is why they must be written in Spanish language. In English language, a reader could understand the idea behind the words, but it is less convoluted and more precise to use the words in the original language. Thus, it makes more sense to retain words in the original language whenever possible.

Continuing with the literary analysis, the phrases about the lack of sin reflect back to Ultima’s position as a positive force, and they also tie back to the religious imagery. In Chican@ culture, and in Catholicism, sin is taken very seriously. It is grave and terrible when a person commits a sin, and, therefore, when someone claims that a person is without sin, it is more than a compliment. It is placing that person in the same caliber as saints and God. Anaya code-switched to explain the holiness of Ultima due to the cultural significance of Christianity. The Biblical allusion in the novel allowed Ultima to be perceived in a positive light from the viewpoint of an Anglo American population, making Ultima revered from a Christian perspective rather than viewed as a witch. Her character emphasizes the power that women can have within a culture as positive, powerful figures, and because historically women in Anglo American culture (as well as other cultures) have also been undervalued, the passages that reveal Ultima’s goodness appear in Spanish reinforce the significance that women, particularly curanderas, have within Chican@ culture. The novel’s assertion that Ultima is good, through the use of code-switching, challenges Anglo-centric and English-only American identity that suppressed the practices of curander@es and other aspects of Chican@ culture.

3e. Themes of Power: Community

While facing this cultural and linguistic suppression, Chican@s have historically maintained a strong sense of community. A central aspect of any culture is its sense of
community and how the people interact with one another. Especially compared to the often-sought-after American dream that focuses on Americans creating their own, distinct identities within society, Chican@ population has a strong sense of communal life (Rudin 48). This fact is evident in Bless Me, Ultima in a number of ways, including how Tony’s family ushered in Ultima when she was without a place to stay and how they had the expectation that the three oldest sons would live in New Mexico with them rather than branch out and live on their own.

This sense of community is also accentuated through the applications of Anaya’s less-frequently-used code-switching method. An example of an italicized and offset passage from the novel is a continuation of Tony’s subconscious thoughts that were earlier discussed within the second chapter. During the scene of this passage, while the bell is tolling for Lupito’s funeral and Tony’s family is hurrying on their way to church, Tony is thinking about the widows gathering together at the church in response to the bell tolling. Then, Anaya code-switches, offsets and italicizes the following phrase:

“Arrímense vivos y difuntos
Aquí estamos todos juntos…” (Anaya 35)

In English, this section would read: “Gather ‘round, the living and dead / Here we are all together…” This phrase would seem to indicate the beginning of a funeral service, something that a priest would say to a congregation. He is reminding the people that, even in death, they can all still come together. While the chronological order that the offset, italicized passages would follow within the plot is unclear (as the first section of offset and italicized text that was analyzed regarding the tolling of the bells could be indicating either the end or the beginning of
the funeral though it appeared in the novel before this passage) this further emphasizes the point that they come from Tony’s subconscious mind. Oftentimes, one’s thoughts venture off into different tangents that do not immediately seem to relate to current situations outside of the subconscious. While these priestly words about life-and-death unity do not seem to fit with what is occurring in the present time of the novel’s plot, and could, arguably, be illogically placed because they do not advance the plot, they appear where they do because they are relevant in Tony’s mind. The widows who were arriving at the church represented unity – in one way because they were all physically coming together to meet at the church and in another because they all had common ground via the loss of their husbands. This latter part, about unity even in death, is what triggered this dialogue to come to Tony’s subconscious thoughts. The widows, the women who carried on in life, were united through death because it was the deaths of their husbands that made them widows, that brought them to this common ground. This reminds Tony of when the priest, during Lupito’s funeral, gathers everyone together – including the dead – to begin the funeral. This sense of community that goes beyond death relates to the previously analyzed discussion about communal Chican@ culture and the faith of the people. Because the Catholic faith believes in places where the souls of the deceased go to rest following death, these people, despite death, are able to live on forever. Anaya’s offset and italicized code-switching of this section not only showcases that the text is from Tony’s subconscious, but also that Spanish language and the Catholic faith that are often associated with Chican@ culture are subconsciously part of Tony’s identity. The fact that Tony thinks in Spanish and that his mind is drawn to moments from a Catholic mass show that these aspects of his life are familiar to him, that these aspects would probably be familiar to many other Chican@s as well. These cultural themes are intricately tied to Spanish language as portrayed through the code-switching
strategies that explore important aspects of Tony’s psyche and identity; they represent how American identity is not limited to one language or culture construct.

The theme of community continues throughout the third chapter in the novel when Tony’s narrative voice is weaving in and out of the past. He describes a majority of the plot as it happens, but he often transports the reader back in time to recount the memories that these events and places evoke, such as when he passes Rosie’s house, a local brothel, and proceeds to tell about its history and reputation from the past (Anaya 34). Tony then ducks back into the present immediately afterward. It is the ringing of the church bell for Lupito’s funeral that brings him back to the present tense. However, this transition brings with it not only a time shift, but an example of code-switching as well – and it is the only time that Anaya uses this particular method throughout the novel. This code-switching is italicized like the previously analyzed texts about the church bells and the Catholic priest’s words, but it is like the rest of Anaya’s code-switching because it is not offset from the rest of the text. However, its true unique quality comes from the fact the code-switching occurs mid-sentence. While it is true that Anaya has implemented select Spanish words and phrases (no more than four words at a time) into English sentences and that he has code-switched from sentence to sentence, this is the only time in the novel when he begins a sentence in English, code-switches to Spanish midway through, and then continues with Spanish for the remaining half of the sentence. In this case, the part in Spanish contains eleven words which is significantly longer than any other time when he code-switched within a sentence. As mentioned, this text directly follows Tony’s description of Rosie’s house from past experiences, and the church bells bring Tony back to reality: “The bell of the church began to ring, *una mujer con un diente, que llama a toda la gente.* The bell called the people to six o’clock mass” (Anaya 34). Though Anaya provides enough context that English-speaking
monolingual readers are able to understand what is written, those who understand Spanish language gain a deeper understanding of what Anaya is writing.

Regarding plot, it is important to understand that the church bell was ringing and that it was drawing people together. The italicized Spanish relates to this concept, but its literal translation would take a reader in a completely different direction as it reads, “a woman like a tooth, that calls to all of the people.” Without any context or knowledge of a Hispanic culture, this could greatly confuse not only English-speaking monolingual readers, but also those who know Spanish as a second language and are less familiar with the culture. In this case, the direct translation is fairly easy to determine through a Spanish/English dictionary, but its significance may be less obvious. The Spanish here refers to a riddle. One could deduce that, because Anaya repeats that the bell is ringing before and after the code-switching, the Spanish text relates to this bell-ringing concept – which would be an accurate assumption. The answer to the riddle of the woman’s tooth that calls to the people is the church bell. This phrase comes from Chican@ folklore, so it is imperative that it be written in Spanish language. The ringing relates to the woman’s mouth or tooth because that is what a woman would use, had a bell been personified, in order to call to people. Anaya emphasizes this idea by his use of the word “calling” to describe the bell’s ringing. Before he code-switched in order to write the Chican@ riddle in Spanish, Anaya wrote, “The bell of the church began to ring” (Anaya 34). However, following the Spanish riddle, the phrase was “The bell called the people” (34). Once Anaya had established the riddle, he described the bell as calling instead of as ringing which ties into the significance of the riddle. It is also likely that the church bell is referred to as a woman because, especially within the Catholic faith, the Church is often referred to as a woman – as the bride of Christ.

This personification of the church bells, specifically the personification of a female, has
particular importance to Chican@ culture and to Tony’s religious position. The Virgin Mary is one of the most highly revered saints in Catholicism – especially so among Chican@s, and Tony’s mother is the religious representation among the characters in Tony’s family because she prays so frequently. Because Church has the power to bring people together, it would only make sense that it would have its own identity and be able to relate to the people. The church bell is the liaison between the church and the people – it is able to communicate the events of the Church to the rest of the population. Similarly, this mirrors the role of the Virgin Mary who is specially respected in Catholicism. Though still a mortal, she was able to give birth to the Son of God which made her accessible to the ordinary person while she still had divine connections. While Jesus lived as a man, ultimately and according to Catholic faith, he was God. It was Mary who was the connection between God and the rest of the world. It was through her that the people had gathered together to come to know God after she gave birth to Jesus. Likewise, the church bell is also inviting the people of the natural world to come learn about God and Jesus, and in this case, to come before God to pay respects to the departed Lupito. This emphasis on community and Hispanic folklore in this section helps readers understand why Anaya would choose to code-switch. Because the riddle best makes sense in Spanish, it aligns with the ideology that texts about Hispanic culture should be expressed in Spanish language. The historical background of Chican@ culture is related to this riddle which is in Spanish, and this further asserts that Spanish language has its place as a part of an American identity. While code-switched cultural phrases regarding Chican@ culture challenge Anglo-centric and monolingual American identity, Anaya’s selection of character names also portray a multicultural and multilingual American identity.
Though names are not intrinsically one language, the heritage and pronunciation of various names reflect the cultures from where they derive. The names in Tony’s family reflect both an English heritage and a Hispanic heritage. His mother, María, and his brother, León, represent names that have a Hispanic background which is visually obvious with the presence of accents. Tony’s brothers Andrew and Eugene and his sisters Deborah and Theresa represent the Anglo American side of their heritages. However, there are occasions when María calls Eugene, Eugenio, showing the name’s versatility. Tony’s father, Gabriel, and Tony’s own name (his birth name being Antonio) share both cultures. Gabriel has long been recognized as a common name in the United States and throughout Spain and Latin American countries. The name Tony is common in Anglo American culture while Antonio represents the Hispanic heritage. This selection of names was a conscious decision and gives representation to both the Mexican and Anglo American cultures, showing the duality of Chican@ culture. Particularly for Tony, it was important that his name share both cultures not only because he is the main character and a Chicano boy, but also because Tony endured numerous dichotomies throughout the novel. He had one foot on each side of the cultural divide – one foot in Anglo American culture upon entering school for the first time and one foot in Mexican culture through his home life.

The care that was taken to choose these names further supports how Anaya’s code-switching methods claims that American identity is not monolingual nor Anglo-centric. Because he hand-selected the names, names that have Mexican heritage, Anglo American heritage, and even represent both, it only makes sense that the Spanish language he incorporates has equal significance and was employed just as thoughtfully. Furthermore, names are associated with a person’s identity, and as the names given are to Chican@ characters, though some may have names more often associated with a Mexican culture, all names are part of an American identity.
Anaya is a conscientious writer who carefully crafted his culturally-laden text with special attention to not only names, but also specific words that are significant beyond the plot of the novel alone – that represent the Chican@ culture as part of American identity. Anaya’s code-switching and his use of Chican@ names represent how Spanish language has the power to share linguistic importance with English language and that Anglo American identity does not broadly represent American identity in the United States. This power shift can also be witnessed within the domains of home and school life for Tony and his classmates.

While many of Anaya’s characters in the novel are bilingual, there are still distinctions between Tony’s life at home compared to his life at school. Because Tony’s parents lived in a Spanish-speaking community, they spoke Spanish in their home. Tony only knows Spanish before going to school, and his parents only spoke in Spanish at home. Thus, the sections where there is English dialogue amongst Tony and his parents is actually taking place in Spanish which reflects how Anaya chose to wrote the majority of the novel in English. The sections of their dialogue that he chose to code-switch to Spanish, therefore, do not definitively represent the times when the characters themselves are code-switching. They represent Anaya’s conscious decision to code-switch to Spanish as was previously discussed.

Most of Anaya’s Spanish language use comes from dialogue. In fact, the first spoken words in the novel are in Spanish by Tony’s parents in reference to Ultima: “‘Está sola,’ my father said, ‘ya no queda gente en el pueblito de Las Pasturas –’ ‘Qué lástima,’ my mother answered” (Anaya 2). This scene occurs very early on without much information about Tony’s parents, so Spanish language is the reader’s first encounter with María and Gabriel. Thus, Anaya quickly relays the importance of Spanish language within the novel and culture. That Anaya would choose this scene to be in Spanish is relevant to Chican@ culture as well. Gabriel and
María are discussing how Ultima is alone and without anyone to care for her. Because Ultima was the midwife present at all of their children’s births, the couple feels indebted to her and that it is their personal responsibility to take her in. This is very representative of Chican@ culture as it is not uncommon for Chican@ homes to contain multiple generations – including a grandmother-like figure in the case of Ultima. The elderly are viewed as wise so it is considered an honor to have such wisdom living in the home. Ultima comes with a bit of history, however, as she is rumored to be a bruja which would explain why she is without a place to stay. Gabriel’s and María’s decision to invite Ultima to live with them simultaneously is representative of Chican@ tradition and counters Chican@ society’s expectations because there is a moral responsibility that they should care for the one who so cared for María and their children yet there is a risk of being ostracized by Chican@ society for supporting someone who has been known to use magic. Their choice to allow Ultima into their lives indicates that they value people over societal viewpoints, and by discussing this situation in Spanish and then reaching a morally respectable consensus of allowing Ultima to stay, Gabriel and María suggest that Spanish language was necessary to use in order to discuss an issue based on the nuances of Hispanic heritage of which are not accessible in English. By practicing Chican@ customs and traditions and by maintaining the use of Spanish language, Gabriel and María challenge that American identity is limited to an Anglo-centric and monolingual construct.

Anaya introduces the novel to the readers in English potentially as a means to slowly ease them into the culture, but the use of Spanish within the first words of dialogue emphasizes the linguistic importance of the language. As most of Anaya’s intended audience is not expected to have much background with Spanish, there is a possibility that they have not read anything in the language. If the reader has had any experiences with Spanish, it is likely from overhearing
Spanish conversations or is some type of auditory experience. Reading or writing in Spanish is usually associated with an academic setting because it is a more conscious studying of the language whereas listening or overhearing is considered more passive. Therefore, the first application of Spanish as dialogue makes sense regarding the intended audience as well as for expressing its cultural relevance among Tony’s parents.

Continuing with the dialogue of Tony’s parents and how it represents a multicultural and multilingual reality in the United States, his mother María repeatedly uses religious exclamations when she is surprised, upset, or does not know what to say. These exclamations, variations of “‘Ave María Purísima’” and “‘Madre de Dios,’” are reactionary which indicate that Spanish comes naturally to her character (Anaya 3, 11). In relation to Chican@ culture, these religious references convey the power Christianity, specifically Catholicism, had among the people. However, the use of these exclamations can be interpreted in multiple ways. First, they can portray the piety of Tony’s mother. She is the one who is constantly making her children pray and is a strong advocate for Tony to become a priest (Anaya 31). She is so religious that she reaches for God when she does not know what else to say or do. The first encounter with María’s religious exclamations occurs within the first few pages of the novel when Gabriel is explaining Ultima’s situation – that there is no one left to care for her because “‘…the people are scattered, driven like tumbleweeds by the winds of war. The war sucks everything dry…it takes the young boys overseas’” (Anaya 3). María’s response is “‘Ave María Purisima’” and she makes the sign of the cross while saying so in order to send blessings to their three sons, Andrew, León, and Eugene who are away at the World War II. Despite the fact that Chican@ culture has been suppressed within the United States, Tony’s brothers still went to fight as Americans in the war. There is not much mentioned within the novel about the war or the
brothers’ experiences within it, but Anaya added this element to the novel to acknowledge the
time period as well as reveal how the brothers struggled with adapting to Chican@ lifestyle after
returning from the war. Before the boys returned, however, María worried for her children
because they were in apparent danger, and she consulted the Virgin Mother in desperation. It is
a request to keep her sons safe because, though María cares deeply for her children, there is no
way for her to protect them while they are away at war. Thus, she must rely on her faith that
God and Mother Mary will bring her children home to her. Chican@ culture is often intertwined
with pious Catholicism, so Spanish religious exclamations remind or inform the reader of this
fact.

On the other hand, these exclamations do not always have a positive religious affiliation
— meaning that María is not using the words to honor God, but to express her frustration. When
Ultima is first arriving to their home, Antonio, Deborah, and Theresa are very nervous, and
María wants them to make a good impression. When they start to become anxious, María’s
reaction is “‘Madre de Dios, but mind your manners!’ [she] scolded” (Anaya 11). Her scolding
comes from her frustration regarding her children’s behavior, and her call to the Mother of God
is not a request but exasperation. It is not a sincere plea. However, no matter the interpretation,
Catholicism permeates the life of María to the point that she exudes prayers and religious
phrases. She upholds the traditions set in place by Chican@ culture, which in the case of the
Márez family includes Spanish language as well, and this explains why she and her husband,
Gabriel, both speak Spanish while living in the United States. They are continuing the traditions
of the past. They have deep ties to their Mexican heritage and are determined to hold onto them
while living in the United States. However, the fact that María encourages Tony to learn English
and even requests that he pray in English after attending school for a year shows how they are
open to the idea of their children establishing an identity in both the English-speaking world and
the Spanish-speaking world. They want their children to become successful despite the limits of
Chican@ identity that have been established within the United States, and encouraging English
is not asking that he must assimilate to Anglo-centric culture, but it gives him the ability to
navigate the power structure established by English. This practice of both English and Spanish
languages conveys the multilingual and multicultural American identity. Tony and his friends
show the power and playfulness that the knowledge of two languages has through their
interactions at school.

Anaya makes it a point to code-switch on several occasions when Tony is with his friends
from school. The group of boys grew up with families from a lower socioeconomic background
and with parents who spoke Spanish. After attending school for a few years, the boys learned
English as well. This allowed them to communicate with both those from their rural, Spanish-
speaking communities and with those from the more formal, educational communities. These
boys, however, did not take their education as seriously as Tony. In the scene where they are
attempting to put on a nativity scene, all of the boys, excluding Tony and an older boy named
Red, do not cooperate at all. With their profane comments and horseplay, the boys create a
chaotic and stressful situation for their teacher, Miss Violet, who does not understand Spanish.
While Miss Violet acknowledges and attempts to dissuade their roughhousing, because she does
not know what the boys are saying, she does not scold them for their language. While
determining how the play will continue despite the weather conditions, Miss Violet discusses
practice schedules with the students: “‘We could practice all morning,’ Miss Violet said. She
looked at me. ‘I think it’s a great idea,’ Red nodded his head vigorously. He always tried to
help the teacher. ‘¡A la veca!’ ‘What does that mean?’ Miss Violet asked. ‘It means okay!’”
(Anaya 152). Despite the “translation” that is given in the text, the phrase “a la veca” does not mean “okay” though the character in the novel tries to convince Miss Violet otherwise. It is a slang term that refers to the penis (“Spanish Words and Phrases”). The reader would be able to imply that this is not the correct translation because, leading up to this part, the boys had been complaining about the play, and one of the boys, Abel, had cursed in English. The way that the boys are able to fool their teacher indicates the usefulness and playfulness of knowing two languages. It is useful because it allows the boys to have a secret communication with one another while in a less-familiar place. It helps them build camaraderie and establish a sense of identity and belonging where they would ordinarily feel like outcasts as there are implied domains of language. Because English is the language that is used for education and was not what those boys grew up using, it is often viewed as a more formal and proper language for Chican@ students. This can very intimidating and frustrating for them as it is often difficult to learn English as a second language and also because it would have been unfamiliar to many of the boys. Thus, for this group of boys, Spanish would be considered a familiarized and less formal language because it is the language they grew up using; it is the language in which they can use slang and make jokes without getting into trouble. It reassures them of their identities if they ever feel uncomfortable or uncertain while at school.

Additionally, the fact that Anaya does not name a specific character who used the profanity with Miss Violet reiterates the communal importance of the language. It is not just one student that is able to tease Miss Violet in another language, and is likely that multiple students would have done this (as many of them do so later throughout the play’s practice session). These moments unite the boys as they create exclusivity in a place where they themselves could often feel excluded. What would ordinarily cause them to feel like outsiders in an English-speaking
environment brings them closer to each other. Because the dialogue with Miss Violet is not specified by Anaya with a particular student, it shows that the students share a similar experience. This experience represents Chican@ community because those from Chican@ culture would understand this situation. It is unique to them specifically to have identities based on English and Spanish languages and Mexican and American cultures, and the fact that Anaya promotes the communal aspect of Chican@ culture by not indicating the speaker further emphasizes how Anaya is positively portraying Chican@ culture. Though the words that are code-switched to Spanish are less appropriate for a school setting, the fact that Spanish language was used to show power in an English-language setting promotes the importance of the non-dominant linguistic and/or cultural group. The boys are able to understand something that the teacher, their superior and the person who is educating them, is not able to understand. As many of the boys struggle with their grades in school (which is made quite clear when Miss Violet offers higher letter grades to the boys as rewards for behaving during the practice and the play itself, and some have never achieved such a high grades before) these jokes allow the boys to feel intelligent in an atmosphere where they often feel substandard. They dominate the atmosphere of the room and have the teacher at their mercy; she offers them high grades in order to appease them. Therefore, Spanish language and Chican@ culture are portrayed as powerful in conjunction with English language in this section of Anaya’s novel. There is a linguistic struggle here between the Chicano boys and Miss Violet, and through the method of code-switching, Anaya presents how American identity is not monolingual as these characters are able to navigate both languages. He further critiques the Anglo-centric and monolingual construct as Miss Violet is shown as overpowered and naïve because she did not know Spanish and, therefore, did not understand the joke that was made. The destabilization of Anglo-centric and
monolingual hegemony, that Anaya is contributing to, is necessary in order to construct an American identity that is inclusive of multiple languages and multiple cultures.

Conclusion

Though one, lone novel could never fully represent an entire culture, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* shows the political power that one novel can have. Anaya used his knowledge of English and Spanish languages as tools to convey the multilingual lifestyle he experienced as a Chican@ himself. He applied those experiences to the protagonist, Antonio (Tony), and explored the dichotomies of identity, religion, purity, and other life events through Tony. In doing so, Anaya presented a different perspective of American identity. By composing the majority of the novel in English (despite the fact that most of the conversations within the novel took place in Spanish) Anaya exposed the depth and richness of Chican@ culture and experiences to the United States population – a culture that has often been inadequately represented and explored by the media and in educational settings and has been suppressed through the construct of American identity as Anglo-centric and monolingual through English language.

American identity is not just limited to English language and Anglo Americans. American identity belongs to anyone who lives in the United States, and American identity embraces customs and cultures from groups of people who do not identify as Anglo Americans or with the English language that was dominantly established as a result of Anglo American conquest. Through his use of code-switching, Anaya opens the door to Hispanic cultures, particularly Chicano cultures, that could contribute to a new American identity that is multicultural and multilingual - one that is not hegemonic and does not suppress language and culture.
Code-switching can be applied a number of ways, as has been demonstrated by Anzaldúa, Mohr, and Ortiz-Cofer, and all of them hold their own cultural significance for Chican@ culture and Latin@ communities respectively. Though each writer has a different message, audience, and viewpoint in mind while composing her works, each also has the opportunity to challenge the monolingual and Anglo-centric construct of American identity and share her perspective of what an American identity could be. Spanish language is intrinsic to Chican@ culture (though Chican@s do not need to know Spanish language in order to identify with Chican@ culture) because it has historical significance within Chican@ culture. Mexicans and Spanish language have a history within New Mexico as their culture and this language were established there long before the conquest and influence brought by Anglo Americans. Thus, Spanish language and Chican@ culture have their place within American identity, and this triggers the idea that other languages and cultures that were suppressed through conquest within the United States are entitled to do the same.

The assumed construct that American identity only pertains to the Anglo population, established by the historical hegemony of power and emphasized by the attempt to require schools to only speak English in New Mexico, is a skewed representation and devalues those who come from other cultures - especially those who had been marginalized through the conquest of Anglo Americans. The recognition of Chican@ culture as American (through code-switching methods and culturally-based close reading analyses) challenges the construct of what it means to be American and presents the necessity of constructing a new American identity that is inclusive, not suppressive, and is multilingual and multicultural.

Though the publication of Anaya’s novel and the Chicano Rights Movement occurred in the past, this does not make his work irrelevant in the present. Actually, it is quite the opposite.
Despite some of the strides that have been made regarding the promotion and understanding of Chican@ and Mexican American studies (as well as additional ethnic studies), monolingualism within the United States is still prevalent and threatens to devalue cultures outside of Anglo American cultures. This linguistic and cultural suppression is not a past issue but a contemporary issue that needs to be publicized in order to spread awareness and inspire change. The work of code-switching writers, such as Anaya, Anzaldúa, Ortiz Cofer, and Mohr, have paved the way for other writers to apply Spanish language to their works, but this is only the beginning. Until an American identity that is not solely focused on Anglo-centric and English monolingual ideals is established, until Americans are able to speak their languages and practice their cultures without being marginalized, it will be necessary to challenge the current construct of American identity.
Works Cited


Author’s Biography

Alaina Berry is from Norwalk, Ohio where she graduated from Norwalk High School in 2011. While attending Ashland University, Alaina majored in both English and Spanish, was secretary of the Honors Society, was an Honors Intern, was an editor for The Honors Bugle, was secretary of the English honorary Sigma Tau Delta, worked as an individual tutor for English and Spanish courses, was a Writing Assistant in the Writing Studio, was on the executive board of the community service organization AU G.I.V.S., traveled abroad to Costa Rica during the summer of 2014, and held the position of Community Service Intern. Alaina was on the Dean’s List every semester and was the recipient of the Volunteer Hall of Fame award, Outstanding Junior in the Foreign Language Department award, Outstanding Junior in the English Department award, and the Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges award.

Following graduation, Alaina is pursuing a career working with volunteers and nonprofit organizations and hopes to do program/event coordinating as well.