Pedagogika Społeczna Nova ● tom 5, nr 9 ● 2025
https://doi.org/10.14746/psn.2025.5.9.7

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Exploring Discursive and Linguistic Barriers to Social Inclusion through the Lens of Family Traditions in Latino American Poetry

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate tapestry of Latino American poetry, specifically examining the multifaceted dimensions of discursive and linguistic barriers within the context of family traditions. Through an in-depth exploration, the study seeks to unveil how these barriers intersect with and impact social inclusion. The methodology involves a comprehensive analysis of a diverse range of Latino American poems, scrutinizing linguistic nuances and discursive patterns embedded in the portrayal of family traditions. By elucidating the ways in which these elements contribute to or hinder social inclusion, the research aims to shed light on the often-unexplored dynamics shaping the Latino American experience.

Key themes revolve around the negotiation of identity, intergenerational communication, and the evolving nature of cultural expression within the poetic realm. By contextualizing family traditions as a pivotal lens, the study unravels layers of meaning that extend beyond the literary, offering insights into the broader socio-cultural implications. The findings not only contribute to our understanding of Latino American poetry but also provide a nuanced perspective on the intricate interplay between language, discourse, and social dynamics. Ultimately, this research serves as a valuable resource for scholars, educators, and policymakers interested in fostering a more inclusive understanding of Latino American experiences. It underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing linguistic and discursive barriers as integral components of the broader discourse on social inclusion within this vibrant literary tradition.

Keywords

social inclusion; Latino American poetry; linguistic barriers; family traditions; negotiation of identity

PSN 5(9), 2025: 141–155. © The Author(s). Published by: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2025.

Introduction

Latino American communities have long struggled with issues of social inclusion, particularly as they navigate the complexities of cultural identity in the context of American society. One significant aspect of this struggle is the presence of discursive and linguistic barriers that hinder social integration and perpetuate marginalization. These barriers, deeply rooted in language and cultural narratives, are often articulated in the literary expressions of Latino American poets, whose works serve as windows into the multifaceted experiences of their communities.

Among the many aspects of Latino American life that these poets explore, family traditions hold a particularly important place. As fundamental components of cultural identity, family traditions act as both a source of strength and a potential barrier to inclusion. They embody the values, stories, and customs passed down through generations, yet they also reflect the tensions between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to the dominant society.

This paper seeks to examine the intersection of discursive and linguistic barriers with family traditions in Latino American poetry, offering a critical analysis of how these elements affect social inclusion. Through a close reading of selected works by key Latino American poets, the study will explore how linguistic nuances and discursive patterns related to family traditions contribute to or hinder the broader goal of social inclusion. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which poetry not only reflects the Latino American experience but also informs and shapes ongoing discussions about identity, belonging, and cultural expression.

Latino American Poetry: An Overview

Latino American poetry is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical experiences of Latino communities in the United States. Emerging from a complex blend of indigenous, African, and European influences, this poetic tradition is characterized by its focus on identity, resistance, and cultural memory. Many Latino poets, such as Julia de Burgos, Sandra Cisneros, and Gloria Anzaldúa, use their work to explore themes of displacement, marginalization, and the negotiation of bicultural identities. Latino poetry often serves as a vehicle for expressing the struggles and resilience of Latino communities in navigating the cultural and linguistic barriers they encounter in a predominantly English-speaking society.[1]

[1] G. Anzaldua, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco 1987, p. 59.

The Chicano Movement of the 1960s played a pivotal role in shaping modern Latino poetry, encouraging a new generation of poets to embrace their cultural heritage while addressing the socio-political challenges faced by their communities. Poets like Alurista and Lorna Dee Cervantes drew attention to issues such as racial discrimination, economic inequality, and the erasure of Latino voices from mainstream cultural narratives. These poets sought to challenge the dominant discourse by writing in both English and Spanish, highlighting the bilingual nature of their experience and the linguistic barriers they face in a society that often privileges monolingualism.[2]

In the contemporary era, Latino American poetry continues to evolve, reflecting the diverse experiences of Latino communities across the United States. As poets explore themes such as immigration, gender, and familial traditions, they contribute to a rich body of work that addresses the ongoing negotiation of identity and inclusion in American society.[3]

Discursive and Linguistic Barriers in Latino American Poetry

Discursive barriers refer to the ways in which certain groups are excluded from dominant forms of communication and cultural narratives. In the context of Latino American poetry, discursive barriers often emerge from the marginalization of Latino voices within the broader American literary canon. This exclusion can be traced to the hegemony of English-language literature and the limited visibility of bilingual or multilingual works in mainstream literary spaces.[4]

Linguistic barriers, on the other hand, pertain to the challenges posed by the use of multiple languages – particularly the intersection of English and Spanish. Many Latino American poets navigate the tension between these languages, often employing code-switching or Spanglish as a means of expressing their dual identities. Code-switching, the practice of alternating between languages within a single text, is a common feature in the work of poets such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros. While this technique reflects the lived experience of bilingualism, it can also serve as a barrier to inclusion, as readers who are not fluent in both languages may struggle to fully engage with the text.

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[2] E. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, New York–London 2006, p. 206.

[3] E. Morales, *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture*, London–Brooklyn, NY 2018, p. 645.

[4] L.V. Aranda, *The Languages U.S. Latino Literature Speaks*, ERIC, February 2000, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED454526 [accessed: 7.05.2024].

The discursive and linguistic barriers present in Latino American poetry are not merely obstacles; they also function as sites of resistance. By subverting traditional linguistic and discursive norms, poets assert their cultural identity and challenge the exclusionary practices of the dominant society. In doing so, they create a space for the voices of marginalized communities to be heard and acknowledged.

The Lens of Family Traditions: A Bridge or Barrier to Social Inclusion

Family traditions are central to Latino American poetry, serving as both a source of cultural pride and a means of preserving the values and customs passed down through generations. In many poems, family traditions are portrayed as a bridge to social inclusion, providing a sense of continuity and belonging in a rapidly changing society. For example, in Sandra Cisneros' poem "My Wicked Wicked Ways," the speaker reflects on the expectations placed upon her by her family, as well as the ways in which these traditions shape her understanding of identity and cultural heritage.[5] In another poem, Cisneros, for example, writes "Abuelito Who" (1987) to pay tribute to her aging grandfather, "her abuelit," who "throws coins like rain/ and asks who loves him," who never gives up his native language, as he "tells" Cisneros "in Spanish you are my diamond." Though he "can't come out to play / sleeps in his little room all night and day" because he is "sick," he will forever remain talking to her "inside [her] head."[6]

Vicente Gerbasi (1913–1992) writes a long poem "Mi padre, el inmigrante" (1945) [My Father the Immigrant], in which he evokes memories about his father, an immigrant, settled in Venezuela, elevating his spirit to mythical levels by linking him with the cycle of birth and death, "We came in the night and toward the night we are going."[7] Mistral describes her deep grief over the death of her mother in the poem "Muerte de mi madre" [Death of My Mother] (2003). She expresses her feelings through images of three different mountains. Her mother that offers "joy" and happiness inhabits the first mountain. The second one is an earthly one; "a black mountain" that the poet lives on. The third is a "round mountain," suggesting a heavenly one, which she has to pass and "pay the toll" in order to reunite with her mother.

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[5] S. Cisneros, *Loose Woman: Poems*, New York 1994, p. 94.

[6] S. Cisneros, "Abuelito Who," [in:] *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, Bloomington 1987, p. 7.

[7] V. Gerbasi, "Mi padre, el inmigrante," [in:] *Mi padre, el inmigrante*, C. Ocampo (trans.), Caracas 1945, p. 57.

Mother, in my dream
I walk purplish landscapes:
a black mountain that sways
trying to reach the other mountain;
and you are always in it vaguely,
but there is always another round mountain
to be walked around to pay the toll
to get to the mountain of your joy and mine[8]

However, family traditions can also serve as barriers to social inclusion, particularly when they come into conflict with the values of the dominant society. This tension is often explored through the lens of intergenerational communication, as younger generations grapple with the expectations of their elders while seeking to forge their own identities. In Julia de Burgos' poem "A Julia de Burgos," the speaker confronts the traditional gender roles imposed upon her by her family and society, ultimately rejecting these norms in favor of self-empowerment and personal autonomy.[9]

Negotiation of Identity and Intergenerational Communication

The negotiation of identity is a recurring theme in Latino American poetry, as poets explore the complexities of navigating multiple cultural identities within the context of family traditions. This negotiation often plays out in the dynamics of intergenerational communication, where younger generations must balance the expectations of their elders with their own desire for autonomy and self-expression. The tension between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to the values of the dominant society is a central concern in many Latino American poems.

For instance, Gary Soto's poem, "Mexicans Begin Jogging" from *Where Sparrows Work Hard* (1981), reflects an identity crisis that many Latino-Americans experience, that is of being neither Mexican nor American, "jogging" the path between the two. The poem describes an incident in a factory, which employs Mexican illegals. Since the speaker (probably Soto himself as his name is mentioned in one of the lines of the poem) is a brown skinned factory worker who lives in a border culture, it is assumed that he could not be a "real" American.

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[8] G. Mistral, "Muerte de mi madre," [in:] *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral*, U.K. Le Guin (trans.), University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque 2003, p. 128.

[9] J. de Burgos, *Song of the Simple Truth: The Complete Poems of Julia de Burgos*. Curbstone Press 1997, p. 199.

In a few short lines, the history of the speaker's life is disclosed, "At the factory I worked / In the fleck of rubber, under the press / Of an oven yellow with flame."[10] This brief setting allows the reader to see a little further into the depths of a poverty-stricken man. The poem shifts, then, to the unnecessary escape of the speaker of the poem, who is supposed to be an American citizen, from a border patrol raid in the factory where he works. Because of his brown skin and his class, the boss assumes he is illegal and urges him to run with the others, "my boss waved for us to run / 'Over the fence, Soto' he shouted."[11] The speaker tries to explain that he is "American," yet, the boss does not believe him telling him there is "no time for lies,' he said, and passes / a dollar in my palm, hurrying me / through the back door." Therefore, the speaker is forced to run away along with other workers "and became the wag to a short tail of Mexicans."[12]

The ironical element in the poem lies in the title as Julian Olivares observes: "the fleeing aliens engage in an American middle-class activity: jogging," which is both "comic and pathetic."[13] As Latino workers are trying to escape the border patrol, they maintain the slow, casual pace of a jog through the neighborhoods of comfortable houses "I ran from that industrial road to the soft / houses."[14] It seems that the illegal workers flee the border raid by an apt show of assimilation into the American mainstream rather than a high-speed chase. Jogging in "the amazed crowds that lined / the street and blurred like photographs, in rain"[15] "paled" the inhabitants of the street at the sight of the brown race. In desperation, the speaker tries to convince them that he, too, is American by saluting and embracing the symbols of the United States, "people paled at the turn of an autumn sky / what could I do but yell vivas / to baseball, milkshakes."[16] The cheer is only a pathetic attempt to be identified with the icons of "America." While jogging, he also salutes "those sociologists" who may "clock" him, or measure "into the next century" his degree of assimilation with "a great, silly grin."[17]

Although the runner in the poem does not want to run away from the factory, he discovers a personal and cultural space in the American mainstream, to which he is still not a part of because of his brown skin and a poor social class.

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[10] G. Soto, "Mexicans Begin Jogging," [in:] *Where Sparrows Work* Hard, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 1981, p. 24.

[11] *Ibidem*.

[12] *Ibidem*.

[13] G. Soto, quoted in J. Olivares , *The Streets of Gary Soto*, "Latin American Literary Review" 1990, *18*(35), p. 45.

[14] G. Soto, "Mexicans Begin Jogging," [in:] *Where Sparrows Work* Hard, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 1981, p. 24.

[15] *Ibidem*.

[16] *Ibidem*.

[17] *Ibidem*.

Olivares comments on the dilemma of the runner, saying: "On the one hand he is rejected by the dominant society because he is Brown and insists on affirming his bicultural values – being »American« means casting aside one's cultural and ethnic inheritance –; and, on the other, the Mexicans know he is not one of them, an illegal alien."[18]

Another example, in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*, the poet, a Chicana scholar, poet, and novelist, delves into the difficulties of navigating a hybrid identity, shaped by both Mexican and American cultural influences. Anzaldúa's use of code-switching throughout the text reflects the linguistic and cultural negotiation that characterizes the experience of many Latino Americans.

In his article, "Hispanic American Literature: Divergence and Commonality" (2000), the poet and novelist, Virgil Suárez (1962–), observes that many Latino-American writers "use Spanish in their work because it is an integral part of their experience." He asserts, "The intermingling of the two languages is an effective means of communicating what otherwise could not be expressed."[19] That is to say, the writers are able to think and feel in both languages, English and Spanish to resist the destruction of their culture.[20] They believe that in the lives of their characters, Spanish is not a "foreign" language, but a vital part of everyday speech. It "should not be emphasized with the use of italics."[21] Anzaldúa clarifies,

> If you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language … 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.[22]

Similarly, in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, the protagonist's struggle to assert her identity within the confines of family expectations highlights the challenges of intergenerational communication in the context of cultural traditions.[23]

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[18] G. Soto, quoted in J. Olivares, *The Streets of Gary Soto*, "Latin American Literary Review" 1990, *18*(35), p. 46.

[19] S.M. Hart, *Latin American Poetry*, [in:] S. Castro- Klaren (ed.), *A Companion to Latin American Literature and Culture*, Hoboken 2008, p. 428.

[20] R.A. Anaya, quoted in V. Suarez, *Hispanic American Literature: Divergence and Commonality*, Contemporary U. S. Literature: Multicultural Perspectives, "U. S. Society and Values: Electronic Journals of the U.S. Department of State" 2000, *5*(1), p. 33.

[21] *Ibidem*. p. 32.

[22] G. Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands / La Frontera…*, *op. cit*., p. 59.

[23] F.R. Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*, Wesleyan University Press 1998, p. 796.

Latino-American poetry often treats themes related to community, politics, religion, language, family relationships, and family traditions that are explored again and again due to the wave of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. During the late 1960s and throughout much of the 1970s almost all Latino-American writers, and particularly the poets felt an intensified sense of ethnic pride in their cultural history, and yearning "for a homeland to which they cannot return"[24] in reality, but they can through writing – poetry in this case.

Evolving Cultural Expression in Latino American Poetry

As Latino American poetry evolves, so do the ways in which poets engage with cultural traditions and social inclusion. The depiction of family traditions in contemporary poetry reflects not only the desire to preserve cultural identity but also the shifting dynamics of Latino American life in the face of migration, assimilation, and globalization. Family traditions in these poems serve as both a source of stability and a means of negotiating new cultural realities.[25]

For instance, contemporary poets like Ada Limón and Javier Zamora explore how migration affects family dynamics and cultural identity. In Limón's poem *The Contract Says: We'd Like the Conversation to be Bilingual*, she navigates the tension between cultural expectation and personal expression, highlighting how language can be a barrier or a bridge in the process of communication and identity formation. Similarly, Zamora's work often grapples with the experience of displacement and the ways in which family ties both anchor and complicate the migrant experience.[26]

The evolution of cultural expression in Latino American poetry also reflects the impact of digital media and transnational connections. With the advent of social media and online literary platforms, younger generations of poets are able to share their work across borders, engaging with both their local communities and a global audience. This has allowed for a diversification of voices and perspectives within Latino American poetry, as poets from different Latino backgrounds (e.g., Dominican, Cuban, Salvadoran) contribute to the broader conversation on identity, inclusion, and tradition.[27]

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[24] S.M. Hart, *Latin American Poetry*, *op. cit*., p. 435.

[25] J. Bruce-Novoa, *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos*, University of Texas Press, Austin 1982, p. 123.

[26] F.R. Aparicio, *On Sub-Versive Signifiers: U.S. Latina/o Writers Tropicalize English*, "American Literature" 1994, *66*(4).

[27] A. Epstein, *Diversity, Identity, and Poetry from 1970 to 2000*, [in:] *The Cambridge Introduction to American Poetry since 1945*, Cambridge University Press 2022, p. 175.

At the same time, these poets continue to grapple with the question of how to preserve family traditions in the face of modernity. In some cases, the portrayal of family traditions in poetry reflects a deep nostalgia for the past, while in others, it represents an effort to reimagine or transform these traditions in ways that are relevant to contemporary life. The negotiation of these evolving cultural expressions ultimately sheds light on the ways in which Latino American poets are reconfiguring their identities and contributing to the broader discourse on social inclusion.

Socio-Cultural Implications

The socio-cultural implications of the intersection between discursive and linguistic barriers, family traditions, and social inclusion are profound. Latino American poetry, by exploring these themes, offers valuable insights into how language and culture function as both tools for inclusion and mechanisms of exclusion.[28]

In the realm of education, for instance, these poems reveal the importance of recognizing and embracing linguistic diversity in the classroom. Bilingual education programs and culturally responsive teaching are essential for addressing the linguistic barriers that many Latino students face. Poetry, with its emphasis on linguistic play and cultural expression, can serve as a powerful tool for fostering empathy and understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds. By incorporating Latino American poetry into curricula, educators can provide students with a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the Latino experience.[29]

Pat Mora, a Latino poet, believes that discrimination of language could be a handicap, a problem. Her intimate love and relationship with words and language begin early in her life as both her parents are bilingual. "I grew up in a bilingual home,"[30] she declares. Being bilingual is a family tradition in Mora's household as she spends much of her childhood listening to stories told by her mother, aunt, and grandmother in Spanish.[31] As long as she can remember there are always "two languages sort of streaming in and out of [her] mind"[32] and she has always

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[28] E.R. Auerbach, *The Role of Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Factors in the Literacy Practices of Latino Adults*, "TESOL Quarterly" 1996, *30*(2), p. 337.

[29] A.C. Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York*, Oxford 1997, p. 7.

[30] P. Mora, "Pat Mora: Poet, Writer, and Educator," [in:] K.R. Ikas, *Chicana Ways: Conversations with Ten Chicana* Writers, University of Nevada Press, Reno 2001, p. 128.

[31] J.M. Wood , *Pat Mora*, [in:] J.M. Wood , *Latino Writers and Journalists: A to Z of Latino Americans*, New York 2007, p. 150.

[32] H.A. Torres, *Chicano Writers: Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 82, F.A. Lomeli, C.R. Shirley (eds.), Detroit, MI 1989, p. 248.

had a "sense of being at home in two languages."[33] To Mora, "language nurtures … and it also frees,"[34] "Quien habla dos lenguas vale por dos / if you speak two languages, your value is doubled."[35] Mora's views concur with the Latino poet Gloria Anzaldua who believes, "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself."[36]

Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak and Nancy Sullivan, in an interview, ask Mora why she uses Spanish words in her poems. She answers, insistently, "I'm interested in including Spanish because it's part of my world, it's part of my mind. On the other hand, I am not writing for a primarily Spanish-speaking audience, or I would be writing in Spanish … There is subversion in the use of Spanish, very consciously."[37]

In Mora's poetry, the unique blend of the two languages includes shifts from English to Spanish and vice versa. Instead of considering Spanish as a secondary language, she encourages Latino-American students to communicate with one another in both languages. Mora, herself, had that wrong experience in her school years as she spoke Spanish with her grandmother and aunt but tried to hide her bilingualism at school, hoping to assimilate and be like other American children as she was educated mainly in English and considered it her dominant language. She mistakenly thought that Spanish did not "belong in school"[38]; Spanish was more of a home language or family language as it "can often be a very affectionate language."[39] Thus, Mora's main concern is to correct the mistaken "perception that the home language could be a handicap,"[40] to dismantle the fear of having two languages accepted at home but not in school, and to dispel the anxiety of Latino people so "that we could have a multiplicity of languages."[41]

Mora notes that having more than one language can help people figure out the world around them and understand it. Being bilingual "allows [her] to name the world in two different ways and also gives [her] two registers in which to work when writing."[42] This can be achieved, Mora believes, when teachers encourage La-

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[33] *Ibidem*, p. 244.

[34] P. Mora, "Interview with Pat Mora," interview by Liz Gold, *Conversations with Texas Writers*, F. Leonard, R. Cearley (eds.), University of Texas Press, Austin 2005, p. 154.

[35] P. Mora, *A Poetry Workshop in Print: Pat Mora*, interview by Lee Bennett Hopkins, "Teaching Pre-K-8" 2006, January, p. 61.

[36] G G. Anzaldúa, [in:] *Borderlands / La Frontera…*, *op. cit*., p. 59.

[37] Pat Mora, "Interview with Pat Mora," interview by Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak and Nancy Sullivan, in *Conversations with Mexican American Writers: Languages and Literatures in the Borderlands*, p. 39.

[38] H.A. Torres, *Chicano Writers: Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *op. cit*., p. 252.

[39] *Ibidem*.

[40] *Ibidem*.

[41] *Ibidem*, p. 248.

[42] *Ibidem*.

tino "people to sing out their names, sing out their lives without embarrassment"[43] in their home language better than oblige them to speak in one language. When Mora includes Spanish in her poems and/or her essays, she provides translations either at the bottom of the same page or by including a special glossary for them at the end of the book, allowing readers to understand how Spanish and English are both essential to the text's meaning.[44]

The poem "Immigrants" from *Borders* (1986) for instance, tackles this frustrating problem of language Latino immigrants face in the United States. The poem begins with a list of stereotypical American actions and items. Instead of encouraging the Latino sons and daughters to remember their own culture, the parents do everything in an American way. They "wrap their babies in the American flag, / feed them mashed hot dogs and apple pie, / name them Bill and Daisy."[45] They buy them "blonde dolls that blink blue / eyes or a football and tiny cleats."[46] It is clear that the immigrant parents try to assimilate at the price of their heritage, not realizing enough that "many who have assimilated by changing their names and forgoing their roots have no way of estimating their spiritual loss,"[47] as Eileen Simpson confirms.

The idea formed in the immigrants' perception is to be American; the child must not be different. They force their children to learn the English language, "before the baby can even walk / speak to them in thick English, / hallo, babe, hallo."[48] As the poem progresses, the parents try to hide their own origins from their sons or daughters, refusing to speak in their native tongue. Only in the privacy of their bedrooms, do the parents allow themselves to voice their fears in their native tongue and "whisper in Spanish or Polish / when the babies sleep."[49] Interestingly, the entire poem is one sentence, listing the fear of the immigrants with no clear punctuation, except for a question mark at the end to indicate this long frustration of the immigrants' lives. The question remains if the child will ever be an American, or remain an immigrant living in the United States "Will they like / our boy, our girl, our fine American / boy, our fine American girl?"[50]

The feelings of struggle and isolation, because of language, are explored fully in Mora's poem "Elena" (1984). The poem is about a Latino immigrant, Elena, living

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[43] K.A. Barros, *Pat Mora*, [in:] C. Cucinella (ed.), *Contemporary American Women Poets: an A-to-Z Guide*, Westport, CT 2002, p. 238.

[44] *Ibidem*.

[45] P. Mora, "Immigrants," [in:] *Borders*, Houston 1986, p. 15.

[46] *Ibidem*.

[47] E. Simpson, *Orphans: Real and imaginary*, New York 1987, p. 225.

[48] P. Mora, "Immigrants," [in:] *Borders*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[49] *Ibidem.*

[50] *Ibidem*.

in the United States. To Elena, the narrator of the poem, the English language is an obstacle in her efforts to understand her children, who have learned to speak English fluently, whereas she, the Spanish-speaking mother, has not. She feels nostalgic to the happy days in Mexico; there she could understand her children when they said "Vamos a pedirle dulces a mama," let us ask Mama for sweets:

> I remember how I'd smile
> listening to my little ones,
> understanding every word they'd say,
> their jokes, their songs, their plots,
> Vamos a pedirle dulces a mamá. Vamos.[51]

The sentiments of exclusion, humiliation, and fear start when Elena makes the transition "But that was in Mexico."[52] Her problem is heightened by remembering her life in Mexico, where she could communicate with her children in Spanish, but "Now my children go to American high schools. / They speak English."[53]

Elena, the mother, decides to learn English because she feels excluded from her children's conversations and laughter. "They sit around / the kitchen table, laugh with one another," and "they speak English," while she stands "by the stove, feel dump, alone."[54] She attempts to learn English, despite her husband's disapproval, "I bought a book to learn English / My husband frowned, drank beer."[55] Despite Elena's mispronunciations and her embarrassment regarding her shortcomings, "I'm forty embarrassed mispronouncing words, / at the laughter of my children, / the grocer, the mailman,"[56] she remains brave and persistent.

> Sometimes I take
> My English book and lock myself in the bathroom,
> say the thick words softly,
> for if I stop trying, I will be deaf
> when my children need my help.[57]

The English language represents Elena's future, while Spanish is the language of her past. She struggles to find a way to implement both languages successfully in the present. Hector A. Torres, in his comment on the poem, remarks that Elena's desire to learn English "hints at Mora's pursuit of her own calling to write and

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[51] P. Mora, "Elena," [in:] *Chants*, Houston 1984, p. 58.
[52] *Ibidem.*
[53] *Ibidem.*
[54] *Ibidem.*
[55] *Ibidem.*
[56] *Ibidem.*
[57] P. Mora, "Legal Alien," [in:] *Chants*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

make a difference in the lives of other women, Mexicans and Chicanas alike."[58] For Elena, her persistence to learn English keeps her close to her children and asserts her role as a mother for them when they need help.

"Legal Alien" from *Chants* (1984) is another poem about a Latino- American individual who represents the shared experience of Latino- Americans' life of doubleness in language and culture. Though the speaker in the poem is an American citizen by law, he still feels an alien, as he is constantly singled out for his Latino roots. Consequently, he is torn between "two worlds," "Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural"—an experience which highlights the tension in the individual's life. Mora uses Spanish expressions juxtaposed with English to highlight the speaker's ability to speak eloquently and fluently in both languages.

> Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,
> able to slip from "How's life?"
>
> to "Me'stan volviendo loca,"*
> able to sit in a paneled office
> drafting memos in smooth English,
> able to order in fluent Spanish
> at a Mexican restaurant.[59]

When the speaker is asked in English "How's life?" s/he is "able to slip" and respond in Spanish "Me'stan volviendo loca," (they are making me crazy). The cultural tension caused by being a member of a Latino community in which most people within speak Spanish let the speaker be a Latino figure but officially s/he is legalized as an American person. Hence, being bilingual has its benefit as the speaker works successfully at an American's office due to the "smooth English" s/he uses. At the same time, when s/he would like a Mexican dish, he can "order in a fluent Spanish / at a Mexican restaurant."[60] He is not only capable of switching languages, but also the change includes a medium of communication from the written "drafting memos" to the spoken "order in fluent Spanish."[61]

Furthermore, the socio-political implications of addressing discursive and linguistic barriers are significant. The marginalization of Latino voices in mainstream discourse perpetuates a system of exclusion that limits opportunities for social mobility and political participation. By amplifying the voices of Latino American poets, society can begin to dismantle these barriers and move toward a more inclusive understanding of what it means to belong in America.

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[58] H.A. Torres, *Chicano Writers: Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

[59] P. Mora, "Legal Alien," [in:] *Chants*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[60] P. Mora, "Bailando," [in:] *Chants*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[61] *Ibidem*.

From a policy perspective, recognizing the role of language in shaping social inclusion is critical. Immigration policies, language access services, and community outreach initiatives must be designed with an understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Latino communities. The experiences of poets, as articulated through their work, offer a unique lens for understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by these communities in their efforts to achieve full inclusion in American society.[62]

Conclusion

The exploration of discursive and linguistic barriers through the lens of family traditions in Latino American poetry reveals the intricate ways in which language, culture, and identity intersect to shape the Latino experience in America. By examining the works of poets like Julia de Burgos, Sandra Cisneros, and Gloria Anzaldúa, this paper has shed light on the ways in which family traditions serve as both a source of strength and a barrier to social inclusion.[63]

The themes of identity negotiation, intergenerational communication, and evolving cultural expression demonstrate that family traditions play a complex role in the lives of Latino Americans. These traditions provide a sense of belonging and continuity, but they can also reinforce the linguistic and discursive barriers that hinder full participation in society. By highlighting these tensions, Latino American poets offer valuable insights into the broader socio-cultural dynamics that shape the Latino experience.

Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of addressing linguistic and discursive barriers as integral components of the broader discourse on social inclusion. By amplifying the voices of Latino American poets and recognizing the role of family traditions in shaping identity, we can foster a more inclusive understanding of what it means to be Latino in America. This work contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about the intersection of language, culture, and social dynamics, offering a nuanced perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by Latino communities in their quest for inclusion.

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[62] A. Epstein, *Diversity, Identity, and Poetry from 1970 to 2000*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[63] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera…*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

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