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*Talking to Myself, Looking in the Mirror:
Insights into Language Use and
Self-Representation in Personal Narratives*

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Abstract

In 1994, Alice Kaplan put forward the term ‘language memoir’ to refer to those personal narratives written from the perspective of a life lived in a multiplicity of languages, where those languages were understood as an essential part of personal development. This dissertation uses Kaplan’s coinage as a basis to focus on the multifaceted realm of memoir writing in second languages with four main pillars of research: writing as a process and as a product, bilingualism and linguistic hybridity, cultural difference, and migration experiences. Key concepts to be explored include the performance of memory in writing, the importance of testimony and truthfulness for personal narratives, the healing of ‘exile spaces’ (Bracewell, 2002) through the choice of a second language for writing, and the experience of migration as a catalyst for self-identification.

The analysis was performed on five memoirs written in English by self-described Hispanic authors living in the United States: Richard Rodriguez, Julia Alvarez, Ariel Dorfman, Ilan Stavans, and Quiara Alegría Hudes. Their base similarities (English-Spanish as a linguistic combination, as well as experiences of migrating to and from the United States) allowed for comparisons in terms of diasporic migration experiences and linguistic self-understanding, while at the same time remaining distinct enough to establish a chronology of Latinx understanding of their relationship with the United States, from the publication of Rodriguez’s memoir in 1982 to the publication of Hudes’ in 2021.

This study represents the first attempt to analyse Alvarez and Hudes’ writing from the perspective of language memoirs, as well as a new conceptualisation of a group analysis of autobiographical writing that focuses on the Latin American diaspora living in the United States.

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A mi familia, que me quiere y a la que quiero. Gracias por apoyarme siempre.

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Introduction

Memoirs are a key part of understanding people's lived experiences. This hybrid genre welcomes personal essays, academic criticism, chronological life writing, and other forms of introspective writing (Rak, 2004), thus opening up personal lives for audience examination and understanding. The genre of life writing can be perceived as contested, its truthfulness questioned (Gilmore, 2001), yet its reflective and personal aspects make it an asset in the search for an understanding of self-identification and identity-formation from a wide variety of perspectives. Moreover, the glimpse that memoirs offer into personal understanding allows for a deeper look into what constructs an identity: the mix of linguistic, sociocultural, and life experiences that uniquely shape each person are put forward and presented as justification for behaviours and beliefs. It is in this context that memoirs will be studied in this dissertation.

Starting from this base, the focus of the analysis will be on the multifaceted realm of memoir writing in second languages, and how dynamics of bilingualism, language hybridity, and second languages influence perceptions of the (written) self. The topic of language in memoir-writing has been brought to academia under the term of 'language memoirs' (Kaplan, 1994) for those life writings that explore the meaning of language in an individual life, with the addition that linguistic pluralism is almost always a reflection of a migration experience. As such, this scope will also allow for the exploration of migration experiences understood as transformative, as well as linguistic, journeys that work as a catalyst for self-introspection and have an impact on cultural belonging.

Subsequently, this research aims to explore the links between first and second languages, migration experiences, self-expression, and identity-construction processes as viewed, and portrayed, through a literary medium, in this case that of memoirs. In order to do so, the methodology employed will be a qualitative approach that draws on textual analysis, where the writing process will be interpreted as both an expressive and a situated activity (as per Hyland, 2016), and understood as a contextual performance of inner feelings.

The data for the analysis will come from five memoirs, all chosen due to their having three characteristics in common. One, they were all written in English by self-described Hispanic or Latinx authors; two, all of these authors and/or their families had, at some point, migrated to the United States; and three, these texts were published in different decades, and therefore are useful for establishing a chronology of Latinx understanding of their relationships with the United States. Otherwise, all of the authors chosen come from a variety of backgrounds and interpret their relationship with English and Spanish, as well as their migrant experience to and from the United States, through starkly different ways.

The first on the list is *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, by Richard Rodriguez (1982). Rodriguez's parents immigrated from Mexico to San Francisco in the 1940s, where he and his siblings would be born and raised. Spanish, their native language, would be forsaken at the age of six at the school's recommendation: from then on, in Rodriguez's household only English would be spoken, which caused feelings of family disconnection, guilt and linguistic shame. Later on, he would be moved to pride at his English 'public persona' and subsequent class evolution. His memoir's publication attracted feelings from all sides of the political spectrum (Segura, 2019) due to him verbally and publicly opposing bilingual education to instead advocate for complete cultural assimilation.

The analysis will be continued with *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey* (1998), written by Ariel Dorfman and self-translated for its publication in Spanish that same year. Dorfman, born in Argentina to a diplomat father, spent his childhood in the United States, where he decided to identify as American and forsake both his past and his native language. When he was twelve years old, the family moved to Chile, where Dorfman went through a process of re-learning his native Spanish to become a convinced lover of it. Political upheaval and the Pinochet dictatorship forced him into exile, once again, to the United States, where he described his two monolingual worlds battling for acceptance into a final, balanced bilingualism.

1998 was also the year in which *Something to Declare: Essays* was published by Dominican-American Julia Alvarez. As the title implies, this is a collection of essays that transcends chronological order because Alvarez focuses on specific topics that she feels

might especially interest her readers: her migration to the United States when she was ten to escape from the Trujillo dictatorship, growing up among family struggles to fit in, bilingualism, and writing, particularly writing in English.

The fourth memoir is *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language* (2021), by Mexican-American Ilans Stavans, who describes his Jewish upbringing in Mexico, embedded in Yiddish and Spanish, and his subsequent migrations around the globe until his eventual establishment in the United States, as well as his adoption of both an American nationality and English as a main writing language.

And lastly, published in 2021, *My Broken Language: A Memoir*, by Quiara Alegría Hudes. Hudes, born to a white American father and a Puerto Rican mother in Philadelphia, describes her childhood among her Puerto Rican family, and stresses how Spanish, as a ‘failed’ mother tongue, represents in many ways a struggle for her. She grew up at a crossroads of language, between English, Boricua Spanish, Spanglish, and the Yoruba used for her mother’s religious rituals, but also at a crossroads of identity: working class, but educated in Yale and Brown; with a passion for music and storytelling, and yet unable to find in the Western canon those that looked or felt like ‘her’.

Much has been written on Rodriguez, Dorfman, and Stavans’ memoirs, from many different perspectives (Filer, 2010; Antunes, 2018; Segura, 2019; Van Hecke, 2020; Dolle, 2020; Vidal Claramonte, 2022; Espino Barrera, 2022). However, to date there is a clear literature gap in terms of Alvarez and Hudes’: there seems to be no scholarship available for *My Broken Language*, whereas what little is available for *Something to Declare*, particularly in terms of identity formation, is analysed in conjunction with other fiction works by Alvarez (Blauman, 2012; Bautista, 2013). This can be understood when one takes into account the relatively recent publication of Hudes’ memoir, but less so in regards to Alvarez, who has written other autobiographical works such as *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (2007) that could provide further material for analysis.

This dissertation will aim to fill the existing research gap in regards to both texts, as well as provide a comprehensive analysis of the different perspectives present in all five memoirs in

terms of their pursuit of identity in a bilingual context. The analysis may be extrapolated to the language memoirs genre as a whole to fill in the lack of comparative analysis of Hispanic texts present in the literature.

After a literature review, the first focus of analysis will be on the act of writing, especially of life writing, and how the audience is considered when (re)constructing a life or fixing a self in paper for external appraisal, as well as the significance of writing in a second language. Secondly, the five memoirs will be analysed in order to understand the writing process in practice and glimpse into self-construction in distinct situations and contexts. Afterward, the importance of languages for the authors will be analysed in more depth, in order to comprehend the different approaches to speech present in plurilingual repertoires (Lüdi, 2021) that drive the authors to identification in one or multiple ways. This will be followed by an analysis of the migration experiences represented in their writing, and how they act as the starting point for an in-depth introspection of identity that culminates in memoir writing.

And so, this dissertation will perform a circular analysis that starts and ends with memoir writing at its core, where the intersections of language, culture, migration and self-identification will form the four pillars of analysis.

Literature Review

To discuss language memoirs it is essential to first define what constitutes a memoir. Their status in regards to autobiography and other life writings has been a source of contention for decades, and Rak (2004) points out that, due to their sudden influx of popularity in the mass market at the turn of the millennium, their name has become conflated with that of autobiography. The same stands true twenty years later.

A memoir is a form of life writing that, as the name suggests, focuses on memory, both public and private, about the writer's self in relation to others (Rak, 2004). Memoirs, plural, can be a collection of one's memories, or they can be organised autobiographically in a

consecutive narrative. Their hybrid nature, which speaks of writing as a process and writing as a product, is a reflection of their popularity: they are ever-changing and hard to conceptualise, thus providing people with what they need at the moment they need it. Memoirs, as a concept, have changed with time, and within that time they have become marginalised within the genre of life writing.

Memoirs' status as the discredited sibling of autobiographies comes, Rak (2004) argues, from the Romantics: memoirs were, and still are, accessible forms of writing that everyone, from women to non-literary men, partook in, and they were extremely popular with their readership. As such, they were not considered suitable for reflecting on public figures' inner lives, unlike autobiographies. Autobiography as a term, and moreover, as a conceptual form of writing, became an 'aesthetic' that transcended life writing in itself. Much like with other forms of literature, autobiography possessed a canon of writing, from St Jerome to Rousseau and beyond, which confirmed its legitimacy and moral uprightness.

Centuries afterward, memoirs are as popular as ever, with dozens being released every year by writers, celebrities, politicians, and the lay public. Jarczok (2020) further argues that there is more and more difficulty in distinguishing a memoir from an autobiography. Putting the concepts of literary quality and populist mass media to the side, since both could arguably be understood as elitist, the result is thousands of inner lives open for exploration, for connection, for the shared human experience, and even, sometimes, for the romanticisation of what could have been but was not.

And yet, embedded within the genre is the key question of truthfulness. Freeman (1999) argues that any form of life writing is a fiction of the self due to the written portrayal of a life as a linear narrative with causes and consequences, which is inherently different from the way those experiences were perceived as they were being lived. However, this fiction of the self need not be untrue; in fact, Freeman (ibid) suggests the idea of an unspoken contract, or pact, with the audience, to tell the truth. Any autobiographical writing, as per Gilmore (2001), becomes an act of confession, as well as an act of testimony. The author reveals biases and subjectivity, selects names and places, and historialises the interpretation of

events. In life writing, much as in traditional religious confession, memories are ‘exorcised’ from one’s body into a form of tangibility.

And it is here, in the link between physical life and emotional memories, that language comes into stage. Language, as per Stuart Hall (1997), is where ideology and culture are inscribed. Moreover, it is in ideology and culture that identities are positioned. Identities, understood as one’s sense of self in relation to the world (Herlevi, 2020), are encoded within the sum of temporary social positions that one is offered or that one takes for oneself. There are collective identities as much as personal and social ones (Snow, 2001), all determined through language. For Budwig (2000), there is a close connection between language and participation in any given society. This, in turn, means a close connection between language and the construction of one’s personhood.

It is essential now to examine plurilingualism¹ and the possibilities it offers for self-construction. One possible answer, the one that will be explored throughout this dissertation, is encoded in the so-called language memoirs. The term ‘language memoirs’ was first coined by Alice Kaplan (1994), and she likens this genre of life writing to the *Bildungsroman* of language. They are, as per Kramersch (2004), personal accounts of cross-linguistic experiences, in many cases due to migration, as well as analyses of how these multilingual experiences have shaped the author’s understanding of their own self. Jarczok (2020) explores how language at the core of a memoir usually reflects the exploration of an identity crisis: in the understanding that language and narrative are important to our sense of self, there is also an understanding that a lack of language, a change of language, or a new language, means a disestablishment of this same self.

The self may be reestablished in writing, and yet it is noteworthy that plurilingual authors occupy narratorial positions that are distinct from monolingual memoirists. These authors, Kramersch (2004) argues, are retelling in one language what may have happened in another since, more than being proficient in any given number of languages, they have *lived* through

¹ Lüdi (2021) argues in favour of ‘plurilingualism’ being the correct term for individuals, while ‘multilingualism’ refers to societies, institutions, and nations. By contrast, Myers-Scotton (2006) suggests that both may be used interchangeably. Myers-Scotton’s suggestion will be the one used during this dissertation, in order to accurately represent the variable perspectives and terminology present in the literature.

them. Their experiences are inseparable from the linguistic and cultural contexts they lived them in. As such, Kramsch (2004) argues that language memoirs are no more than literary creations for an audience, where the account of events may be truthful, but their retelling has been linguistically altered.

And yet, the alteration of life events for a literary composition is at the core of memoir-writing and, arguably, of any form of writing (Crosman, 1988). Jarczok (2020) cites that, since memoirs are pieces of collective memory embodied within any given society, they are not necessarily static or universally agreed upon. One retelling may disagree with another, yet both may remain true. Furthermore, Jarczok claims that memoirs reconstruct selves that no longer exist in an attempt to fix one's current self in time (ibid). These selves that no longer exist can, thus, be other-language-selves.

The idea of different languages representing different selves has long been discussed in the literature. Wierzbicka (2004) argues that since the vocabulary and the cultural context surrounding emotions varies from language to language, the conceptualisation of an event depends on the language 'at hand', or the language it was lived in. The experiences of bilingual or plurilingual people are thus conceptualised through their living with others via different languages. In practice, this can usually mean that plurilingual people perceive themselves to be lost in the space between languages, or torn among them; furthermore, the L1² is usually preferred for more visceral feelings and speakers feel increasingly 'alien' in subsequent foreign languages (Panicacci and Dewaele, 2018).

Even with this self-alienation due to a linguistic rapture, Herlevi (2020) studies how some people look for the feeling of belonging in their polyglotism. Multilingualism, Herlevi argues (ibid), can be endorsed within a wider context of cultural meanings, including a sense of pride, triumph, and satisfaction at reaching language proficiency via one's own means, thus proving to oneself and others that this complex social practice is achievable. Kaplan (1994) discusses the wide variety of contexts, motivations and emotions embodied in the practice

² L1 refers to a person's first language, established in early childhood; while L2 refers to a second language, acquired after the L1 (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Lx will be used to refer to an unspecified language, which may refer to a L1, L2, or any other number.

of language learning. As such, this practice is especially important in migrants, where their L1 might be a source of discomfort or disjointment from their host society, and where their Lx might help them feel better integrated and connected to their new community. Berry (2023) reinforces this statement via the so-called language hypothesis: knowledge of the host community's language, he affirms, ensures better participation within the wider society. This is especially important when taking into account that individuals' identities cannot be constructed without the support from an external society or culture: Gawinkowska et al (2013) ground language changes and choices as motivated via sociocultural norms. Language shapes culture shapes identity.

Moreover, the way the self is conceptualised, according to Fivush and Nelson (2004), will influence the way in which the past is constructed; especially since to construct the past there is a need for linguistic references that will represent it. This links to what Grosjean (2016) understands as the complementarity principle, where fluency in a particular language is domain-specific and memories are linked to the language they were lived in. As such, the retelling of one's memories in a particular language that was not the one they were lived in necessarily involves a degree of self-translation and, by extension, self-transformation. Jarczok (2015) argues that the conceptualisation of a coherent self relies on being able to present a consistent narrative of our life and past events. Memoir writing, in this sense, gives a space for the deconstruction and reconstruction of the self through language.

This space for what we could call multilingual self-invention, or self reinvention, allows for what Bracewell (2002) describes as the healing process of a multilingual dissonance via the filling in of 'exile spaces' in the self, whether or not due to physical exiles or migration processes. Storytelling, as argued by Bamberg (2010) is more than a sequencing of events: it implies character development to suit the narrative, but also character stability in terms of permanence and identity recognition. Stories, especially self-stories, are embedded in interaction, and narratives are a form of social accountability (ibid). In terms of the memoir context, social accountability connects with Gilmore's (2001) acts of confession and testimony through writing.

Lastly, it is key to give some attention to the exploration of migration in literature. Language memoirs are almost uniformly migration narratives. These migrations need not be forced exiles: they might have been a trip for pleasure, a year of education abroad, or generational migrations that affected one's heritage linguistic repertoire. And yet, international encounters are key parts of the self-transformation process detailed in language memoirs (Kramsch, 2004; Jarczok, 2015) in many cases due to, precisely, the linguistic differences encountered in them.

Isabelle de Courtivron (2003) argues that exile can be understood, and portrayed, as a metaphor for the human condition, where 'home' becomes the (literary) place from which to tell stories about the self rather than a physical place. John Glad (1990) speaks of the trauma of exile as an artistic stimulus, and analyses the concept of migrant literary tradition. The question of choosing an audience (the native country, the host country, or the fellow migrants in the same circumstances) dominates the question of in which language to write, but it also introduces discourse regarding the style and the themes discussed, and the circumstances to which a migration is alluded to or, on the contrary, hidden. Vladislav (1990, ed. Glad) argues that the concept of 'home' goes further than a birthplace, or a specific place: it can be multiple places, as delineated by multiple migrations, but it is always fixed in place by language.

On the other hand, Minh-ha (1994, ed. Robertson et al) suggests that a journey implies a negotiation of what is 'home' versus what is 'abroad', and that both memory and language act simultaneously as places of dwelling and of travelling, of 'sameness' and 'otherness'—what Harte (2017) understands as a complicated complicity between native and adopted cultures. Sarup (1994, ed. Robertson et al) points out that identity is not about being, but about *becoming*: this transformation process is somehow reinforced in the life of the migrant, who are portrayed and performed as eternal 'homeless' wanderers. In Harte's edited collection (2017), McCormack describes an everlasting homesickness: 'You're a stranger wherever you go. It's not home.' (p. 52).

As such, missing home, looking for home, and portraying home are essentials in migrant literature. Following the argument of home as a non-physical part of our consciousness and

home embedded in our language(s), 'home' becomes essential to an examination of language memoirs, and how the concepts of familiarity and 'otherness' are negotiated in writing via the identity-construction processes present in them.

Perspectives of Memoir Writing: (De)Constructing a Life

Writing, it is often said, is a solitary experience and a deeply isolating process. The fear of the white page, the doubts of not being able to choose the correct words, the guilt over storytelling that hits 'too close to home', the envy of other narrators, and a plethora of other feelings and experiences are encompassed in the writing experience. This is multiplied in the writing of personal narratives: what gets told, about whom, and in what detail, is something that authors need to consider in order to protect or sometimes even destroy their personal relationships.

In this section, two perspectives related to memoir writing are discussed. Firstly, that of the role of the audience in literature, and the task of representing oneself and one's life for external appraisal and judgement; and secondly, the role that language plays in the writing of plurilingual authors.

1. Self-Representation Before an Audience

The act of writing a memoir stems from memory itself (Jarczok, 2020): memories, whether individual or collective, personal or social, are the starting point and the narrative link that shapes the writing of an autobiographical memoir, and trace the author's life through an understanding of their self in relation to others. Scholars (Freeman, 1999; Gilmore, 2001; Rak, 2004; Kramsch, 2004; Jarczok, 2015, 2020;) have long analysed the hybridity of the form and how it welcomes academic essays, life writing, personal criticism, and other personal and reflective forms of writing that, in a way, aim to transform the living self into a written self and conflate the intimacy of selfhood with the public sphere. The changeable human experience demands a coherent written self: this is why autobiographical writing, of any kind, is often seen and performed as a negotiated process (Freeman, 1999; Gilmore, 2001) where authors can give meaning to their lives, name their traumas, and make the private

public. To Rodriguez (2003), the sharing of one's most intimate thoughts can only happen when one's recipient is the nameless, faceless general public. In fact, in his memoir, he asserts:

Despite the fact that my parents remain even now in my mind a critical, silent chorus, standing together, I continue to write. [...] But unlike my parents, I have come to think that there is a place for the deeply personal in public life. This is what I have learned by trying to write this book: There are things so deeply personal that they can be revealed only to strangers. I believe this. I continue to write.

(Hunger for Memory, 1982/2022, p. 166)

Gilmore (2001) argues that the existence of a dual culture of confession and testimony creates an innate need to both represent an own personal uniqueness while also being relatable, or at least resonant to, the readers: the interface of singular but shareable experiences borders on political representation, one that is very well-known to the authors themselves, especially those belonging to minority or underrepresented groups.

Representation, it could be argued, is a sensitive topic in many different aspects, including ethnically. From the authors chosen, Rodriguez has very vocally established that he is not to represent anyone but himself, while Alvarez, who understands herself as a transnational writer, is wary of representing one or other extremes of writers, that is, only-Dominicans or only-Americans (Bautista, 2013). In an interview with Quiara Hudes, Harvey Young asked her the infamous representation question, answered as follows:

It's always a good drinking topic: the annoying interview questions about "Do you write Latino plays?" It can be so relentlessly about everything but the content of the material. This is not just me. This is a lot of my writer friends who are women but most especially who are Latino, who are black, who are Asian. It can be almost tyrannical.

(2015, p. 193)

Bearing this in mind, it is important to stress that the examination of all these authors, and by extension their personal narratives, will not be done with the intention to understand them as 'simply Latinx', 'simply Hispanic' or, indeed, 'simply' anything: they, as will be seen, have led complex and different lives that deserve careful attention and analysis. And yet, even in their distinctiveness, Yuval-Davis (2006) maintains that identities are individual and collective narratives that happen simultaneously, where we ask questions of ourselves and others about who we are and, subsequently, where we stand in society. By analysing these life narratives and further establishing thematic links between them, the goal is to better understand, portray, and, to an extent, represent, how these questions are asked in writing –and more importantly, how they are answered.

However, it is not as simple as putting metaphorical pen to paper to represent or misrepresent one's life or one's cultural community. Scholars, among them Kramsch (2004), argue that the author of a memoir occupies a complex narratorial position since, as per Fivush and Nelson (2004), the way in which the past is conceptualised will influence the way in which the self is constructed, and vice versa. If the way we talk about ourselves determines who we are (Jarczok, 2015), then language memoirs deserve special and attentive consideration.

Kramsch (2004) states that in the conceptualisation of a language memoir the language of a prospective audience plays a key narrative role, which necessitates a careful consideration of the relationship between the writer and the audience. Crosman (1981; 1988) theorises on a double-bound structure of exchanges that occur between the reader and the text, where the first is the actual interaction during the reading process, and the second is the already presupposed exchange for a so-called Model Reader, i.e., a reader that the author had in mind when writing. The theory of the Model Reader can be explained by the idea of frames of reference (Crosman, 1988) that shape our experience and understanding of the reading process: they can be external to the text, such as genre conventions; internal to the text, such as the narrative discourse that shapes the story world; or in a third in-between space, such as the intertextual references that locate the text within a scale of other texts. To Crosman, the reader shapes the crafting of the written text, both knowing- and unknowingly.

However, writing can go further than an understanding of genre conventions. Long (1980) argues that writing is not a passive experience, either as a process or as a product, since the reader plays an important and active role. It is imperative, Long (ibid) continues, to move past the classical-rhetoric understanding of what an audience is: the writing process is not to exist for an already-designated audience that the writer is focusing on (Crosman's Model Reader), but rather for an *ideal* audience, an audience that only exists during the reading process. This audience, in turn, will shape the text: the text would only attract the reader prepared for it instead of trying to conform to the reader's expectations.

Lastly, the question of a truthful narrative should be revised by acknowledging that, while what has been portrayed in a memoir should be understood as the truth (Krasnch, 2004), not all the truth has been written. Crosman (1988) argues that the impression of truth is an important force in Western literary theory: if, he proposes (ibid), we believe that our cultures and societies see the truth as expected or desirable, then verisimilitude becomes a key dimension of any written text. This goes further when, as in memoirs, the text has been designed to give the impression that it portrays the truth or, at the very least, the truth as interpreted by the author –which is what moves the narrative forward.

Mami, primas, hermana, no one else qualifies for the job. We must be our own librarians because we alone are literate in our bodies. By naming our pain and voicing our imperfections, we declare our tremendous survival.

(*My Broken Language*, 2021, p. 313)

Furthermore, even with all that is untold, embellished, or reframed for the benefit of an audience, memoirs are to be understood, as per Jarczok (2020), as cultural products of a context, a people, and a time, which in itself has inherent value when looking to understand a naturally multifaceted identity.

2. *The Language of Writing*

Lennon (2010) argues that since the publishing industry forbids or obstructs the use of multiple languages in a narrative, a language memoir becomes a language death: the memoirist of multiple languages becomes simply the memoirist of one life. This retelling, which requires a new (single) language for a new (single) cultural context, comes with what Wierzbicka (2004) calls a set of language-related emotional scripts. What was lived through one language may not be accurately portrayed through another: not for lack of words, but for lack of a conceptualisation of those words. That the vocabulary of emotions is different from one language to another has been well-documented by scholars (Wierzbicka, 2004; Gawikowska et al, 2013; Panicacci and Dewaele, 2018), but it need not be negative, especially in terms of personal narratives. In fact, Bracewell (2002) argues that the ability to portray a unified self through writing in one specific language can help heal ‘cognitive dissonances’ and fill in ‘exile spaces’ that were created through language difference.

What finally bridged these two worlds for me [the United States and the Dominican Republic] was writing. But for many years, I didn’t have a vocabulary or context to write about the issues I had faced or was facing. Even after I discovered female models and found my own voice as a woman writer, I did not allow my “foreignness” to show. I didn’t know it could be done. I had never seen it done. I had, in fact, been told it couldn’t be done.

(Something to Declare, 1998/1999, p. 167)

As previously established, all five authors use English as the main language to portray their lives in writing. This was, in several cases, not the expected or even the desired conclusion:

I think of the challenge ahead of me. **I’m aware that crafting my memoir in English will, in and of itself, be a form of treason.** For shouldn’t it be written in at least three if not four languages (Yiddish, Spanish, Hebrew, and English), the four tongues in which -and through which- I’ve experienced life? But no publisher in his right mind would endorse such an endeavor. It is perhaps an unrealistic dream, and ridiculous, too. My aim, nonetheless, is to convey not my nationality but my *translationality*.

(*On Borrowed Words*, 2001, p. 88; bold emphasis added)

Firstly, Jarczok (2020) reiterates that an identity crisis is at the core of a memoir that focuses on language: since both language and a coherent narrative are crucial to our sense of self, the lack of one upsets the other. Derrida (1996) argues that any autobiography presupposes an identification of the self, where the one who writes the story is capable of stating an 'I'. But, in a multilingual life, in what language is 'I' to be expressed? For all five of the memoirists chosen, it has been English; so was English for so many other writers, from Hoffman to Nabokov. Lennon (2010) views this as the only natural conclusion of the argument that language is a form of social capital and, in today's world, English is the most valuable form of it. English, Lennon argues (*ibid*), has institutionalised cultural capital due to the political, economical, and cultural power of the United States, so its dominance becomes central to literary visibility. By extension, literary history belongs to those who switch to English.

And yet, not all forms of writing can be understood as focusing on social, cultural, and/or literary capital. All of the authors chosen have expressed a clear affection towards the English language; their living, working, writing, and loving in the United States at the time of their writing makes it, undoubtedly, the language of choice. Moreover, the close interdependency between language, narrative, and our sense of self has a fourth link: that of memory.

Both Grosjean (2016) and Jarczok (2020) argue that memory is language-specific: memories are formed within one linguistic, and by extension cultural, context, which is how we remember them. Their translation into a different linguistic context breaks their social characteristics and thus isolates them. However, even that does not negate what Bracewell (2002) calls the 'rhythms' of an L1 remaining in the newly-translated L2 memory. This is true, for instance, of Julia Alvarez's writing:

But what most surprises me—especially since I am now working in another language—is to discover how much of my verbal rhythm, my word choices,

my attention to the sound of my prose comes from my native language as spoken by la familia.

(Something to Declare, 1998/1999, p. 126)

The 'rhythms' of extra languages entering the English-text can be understood through what Maria Lauret (2014) calls 'wanderwords'. These wanderwords, understood as non-English words appearing in a mostly-English text, are a product of migrant writing caused by the use of English as a lingua franca to look for an international audience (Lauret, 2014). Since cultural difference is necessarily inscribed in linguistic difference, these words matter in terms of textual configuration and cultural contextualisation. Moreover, to Lauret (ibid), exploring literary words looking for the presence of 'foreign' words necessarily means exploring the author's other languages, and as such delving into situational and contextual linguistic contexts that have influenced the author's life experiences.

By extension, it also means delving into their understanding of the world:

Titi Ginny turned the key and every version of dios-te-bendiga rolled off her tongue. There were a million ways to say godbless in Spanish. Dios te cuide, dios te favorezca, dios te this and te that. There was only one way to say it in English, and you only said it after a sneeze.

(My Broken Language, 2021, p. 4)

Insights from Five Memoirs: Lives in Context, Writing in Practice

Since it is the aim of this dissertation to analyse the multidimensional links between language, identity, culture, and personal narrative as exemplified in these five memoirs, it is imperative to discuss such memoirs now: the authors' lives, their language-switching, their understanding of themselves in relation to their bi-culturalism and migration processes, and how all of this is reflected in their introspective writing.

Keeping at the forefront of analysis their language-related traumas, experiences, and even skills, each of the authors will be delved into separately in order to more accurately understand their writing representations of themselves, their cultures, and their migration experiences. After a brief summary of the structure of each memoir, the analysis will focus on different aspects of each author's language, cultural upbringing, education, migration history, and understanding of writing, living, and their own identity.

1. *Richard Rodriguez in Hunger for Memory*

Richard Rodriguez was born to Mexican parents in San Francisco, United States. His memoir opens with a short prologue where he affirms his identity as a middle-class American and rejects the idea of him representing Mexican-Americans or their culture; he is writing just as himself and everything he says should not be extended to a group understanding of a single culture. For Lauret (2014), his claims have the ring of looking for 'white freedom': the wish to be just himself, not linked to or understood as a member of a particular ethnic group. What follows is divided into six parts, where he reflects on his life from different perspectives: his understanding of language, his education, his relationship with Catholicism, his race and skin colour, his critique of affirmative action, and the value of privacy and family.

His critique of class is already a powerful entrance to the memoir. He openly talks about his position as an established middle-class American, which is completely unrelated to his own parents' position, and different to many other Mexican-Americans'. This affirmation of class-based identity reappears in later parts of the memoir, but never as powerfully as in the beginning, where Rodriguez completely rejects the stereotype of the struggling working-class Mexican-American. In a way, this is linked to the arguably stereotypical view of Mexicans by American society, which extends to his own family: there are many instances where family members scold Rodriguez and his dark skin tone because he resembles '*los braceros*', the undocumented Mexican field workers who spend many hours in the sun and are, thus, very tanned. However, his views on race and class, as well as on privilege and

affirmative action, have been discussed at length by other scholars³ and will not be explored in this research.

Moving on to language, his reflection and understanding of it is equally powerful. Born into a Mexican family, his mother tongue and first language is Spanish, which he portrays as linked to intimacy and the family:

But then there was Spanish. *Español*: my family's language. *Español*: the language that seemed to me a private language. I'd hear strangers on the radio and in the Mexican Catholic church across town speaking in Spanish, but I couldn't really believe that Spanish was a public language, like English. Spanish speakers, rather, seemed related to me, for I sensed that we shared –through our language– the experience of feeling apart from *los gringos*.

(1982/2022, p. 17)

Language is categorised into private, intimate, and familiar (Spanish) versus the outsider voice he cannot yet imitate but that seems to dominate his life (English). Van Hecke (2020) argues that, in Rodríguez's view, the world functions in dichotomies: private versus public, Spanish versus English, silence versus speech, Mexico versus the United States. This is especially interesting to analyse when considering that with the concept of language and intimacy comes the concept of authority: as a young child, Rodríguez claims to have lost faith in the authority and capacities of his parents when he would hear them speaking accented, unclear English. For him, as a child and hereafter, authority would be inextricably linked to a public voice. In the United States, a public voice means speaking English: Rodríguez reiterates this in an interview with Segura (2019), where he argues that different languages exist in different contexts, and his becoming a public person was through, for, and due to English.

And yet, Rodríguez started school as a Spanish-speaking student. This shaped his experience of arrival and communication: so uncomfortable was he in English, that the school staff

³ Van Hecke (2020) mentions Muthyala, Beltrán, Pérez Firmat, and Durán as the main critics of Rodríguez and his work.

spoke to his parents and asked them to communicate with their children in English. And so began a chapter of accented English in Rodriguez's life. It was, as well, a chapter of silence.

Matching the silence I started hearing in public was a new quiet at home. The family's quiet was partly due to the fact that, as we children learned more and more English, we shared fewer and fewer words with our parents. Sentences needed to be spoken slowly when a child addressed his mother or father. (Often the parent wouldn't understand.)

(1982/2022, p. 23-24)

Silence meant, in many cases, guilt: guilt on the part of the parents, unable to keep up with their children, but also on the part of the children, unable to switch to Spanish to communicate with their parents. In fact, Van Hecke (2020) argues that the loss of ability to speak in Spanish through lack of practice and exposure caused deep contradictory feelings. On the one hand, the loss of Spanish meant the loss of intimacy and the arrival of nostalgia for what was no longer; on the other, through the adoption of English as his primary language, Rodriguez became a so-called 'public' person, able to speak in class and at shops, indistinguishable from other Americans and, as such, socially mobile.

Rodriguez's understanding and uses of language can be likened to a double-monolingualism: his languages do not coexist because he does not allow them to. He links Spanish to family intimacy, and yet, there is no intimacy left when English becomes the language of their family and he becomes unfamiliar with expressing himself through Spanish. Nevertheless, he states that he is a Catholic Latino writer (Segura, 2019), or even Catholic Mexican (Van Hecke, 2020), and his religion comes side by side with his language and his culture: his connection to religion comes through, by, and from Spanish, and is indistinguishable from it.

Lauret (2014) states that this iron double-monolingualism, this staunch refusal of connection between languages and cultures, is shown to be lonely and isolating in his writing.

Regardless, he rejoices in the success his English-public persona has brought him to the point of performing a sort of self-mutilation by removing the accent from his surname:

Rodríguez turns into Rodriguez, for and by the American man. He has completely assimilated.

2. *Ariel Dorfman in Heading South, Looking North*

Ariel Dorfman was born in Argentina and moved with his family to the United States when he was two years old. When he was twelve, the family moved back to Latin America, this time to Chile, to escape McCarthyism. A few years later, having acquired Chilean nationality, Dorfman moved to the United States with his wife Angélica to pursue a postgraduate position at UC Berkeley for a little under two years before returning to Santiago de Chile. The arrival of the Pinochet dictatorship to Chile would force Dorfman, cultural attaché in Salvador Allende's government, to escape the country once and for all: Argentina, France, Netherlands, and, finally, the United States, where he and his family still reside.

His memoir is divided into two overarching parts: *North and South* (part one) and *South and North* (part two). In each of the parts, he alternates chapters between a semi-chronological approach to his life leading up to 1973, and chapters focused on the 1973 coup d'État that would, once again, upheave his life. Migration and its subsequent personal connotations are key themes of his writing: Antunes (2018) describes his as a trajectory of exiles, starting with his family history. Dorfman belongs to a wealthy Jewish family, where both of his parents emigrated from Eastern Europe to Argentina. In his writing, he reflects on his parents' migration journeys, their family's joint migration to and from the United States, and the subsequent exiles Dorfman, with his own family, would be forced to execute.

And with migration comes language. In almost every chapter that deals with his personal life, he mentions the words 'life and language', e.g.: 'Chapter 6: A chapter dealing with the discovery of life and language during the years 1945 to 1954 in the United States of America' (1998, p. 60). Espino Barrera (2022) argues that, through language, Dorfman presents a sort of 'double self' or 'double consciousness', where his English and his Spanish are represented as being in a constant state of fight. This is especially true because, as Dorfman himself narrates, he swings from extreme to extreme, starting from a very young age.

Upon his first arrival in the United States, Dorfman fell deeply ill and had to be admitted to a hospital. Two years old and unable to speak English, he perceived this lack of a Spanish atmosphere like violence; he could not communicate and his care was dependent on words he could not speak. As such, when he emerged, he renounced speaking Spanish and devoted himself to English, the language through which he had been healed. During all of his years in the United States, he wanted to be an American, and even went so far as to call himself Edward. Later, when his family relocated to Chile, he could understand Spanish but could not speak it –partly because he refused to, partly because he was, simply, unable to give voice to words he had rejected for many years.

During his first years in Chile, he was educated in British schools while he re-learned Spanish. It was there where he started to appreciate Spanish in its own right as a language as worthy of being spoken as English. And yet, he, a precocious reader and writer, continued to express himself and write in English:

By the time I disembarked in Chile, English had become the efficient instrument of my intimacy, the inner kingdom I could control, and also the foundation for what I already called my profession, convinced as I was that my place in the world and in history would be determined by the way in which I affected and shaped that language permanently.

(1998, p. 86)

Growing up in Chile, he started to become more politically conscious: like his father before him, his political inclinations were anti-Capitalist, and, by extension, anti-American. He despised and publicly condemned American culture and American political influence over Latin America, but could not bring himself to stop reading or, indeed, writing in English, not even when he finally adopted a Chilean nationality. His staunch refusal to ever write in English came while living, precisely, in the United States, in the midst of writing a book on Latin American literature. He was no longer used to writing in English, he felt, after such a long time of reading, writing, and thinking in Spanish. Why would he continue to give voice to a language that had too much power, when his family and his community lived through another?

Repeating more than twenty years later my childhood gesture in that hospital, reacting in Berkeley just as I had back in New York, I drastically broke off relations with the language in which I had sought refuge from solitude all my life, I embraced a tongue that would link me to the community that was imagining a different history for itself and for me, I chose to become a contiguous human being. I told myself, and anybody else who cared to listen, that I would never again write another word in English as long as I lived.

(1998, p. 220)

For Dorfman, as pointed out by several critics (Antunes, 2018; Files, 2010; Espino Barrera, 2022), bilingualism and biculturalism were lived as a battle, a continuous geographical and cultural dissonance that needed to be resolved through a firm stance: no more English, no more Spanish; choosing just one and devoting himself to it. In this way, Dorfman lived through a double-monolingualism that formed opposing and contradictory personalities; his English-language persona was distinct from its Spanish counterpart, and so his identity was twofold but unclearly defined.

The coming back to Chile was triumphant. He felt now secure in his Spanish-speaking identity, in his Chileanness, and continued being publicly anti-America; he had completely renounced who he was, or had ever aspired to be, in English. Salvador Allende won the elections, and life continued on, like that, at a linguistic standstill, until the 11th of September of 1973: Augusto Pinochet's coup d'État would force Dorfman to go into hiding and ask for refuge at the Argentinian embassy. Throughout his life, Dorfman's personality had been split into the United States and Chile and now, suddenly, his birth country, the country of his parents, had come to 'save' him. The subsequent exile is, finally, what to Antunes (2018) is a recognition of his true, hybrid identity —he writes both in English and in Spanish now, and has accepted a multihyphenate identity (Argentinian, Chilean, American; bilingual writer and critic) as a symbol.

An interesting aspect of Dorfman as a bilingual writer is that everything he writes is shaped in the language of the other: his English works have Spanish in them and vice versa.

Moreover, he goes further and, more than self-translates, rewrites his books in the other language (Filer, 2010), thus creating new original books. An example of this can be seen in his memoir. *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey* was re-written and published in Spanish in the same year of its publication, 1998, under the title *Rumbo al sur, deseando el norte: Un romance bilingüe*. The use of *romance*, according to Espino Barrera (2022), is a clear indication of his complex linguistic story (and history): on the one hand, he has had a love story with language, first with one, then with another, and finally with both; on the other, his is, at its core, a bilingual narrative. Furthermore, Antunes (2018) points out that normally Dorfman translates his works into English, and yet, this time, for his memoir he chose to do it into Spanish. Perhaps, one could say, this is a nod to his roots: he did, after all, start his literary journey in English.

3. Julia Alvarez in *Something to Declare*

Julia Alvarez, who arguably also performed a linguistic self-mutilation by removing the accent from Álvarez, was born to a wealthy Dominican family and emigrated to New York with her parents and sisters at the age of ten. They aimed to escape the Trujillo dictatorship and return to the country once the political instability settled, but, to date, no member of the family has gone back permanently. Alvarez was educated in Middlebury College and the University of Siracusa, and afterwards spent close to twenty years travelling across the United States as a creative writer and teacher. She settled in Vermont, where she still lives and, in fact, considers crucial to both herself and to her literature.

Her collection of autobiographical essays, *Something to Declare*, is dedicated to her readers and aims to answer many of the questions posed to her over the years, including but not limited to her past, her education, her learning English, her writing through English, and her family history. It starts with an introduction to welcome the readers, and is then divided into two parts: *Customs* and *Declarations*.

Starting with language, Alvarez explains that she was raised in a Spanish-speaking family, but since her mother had been educated in American schools, her parents used English to share secrets with each other without the children understanding them. This was the author's first contact with English: as a language of secrecy, a 'hard Spanish' that could not be deciphered.

This changed once the children were sent to an American school; they, according to Alvarez, became a bilingual family:

It was very important, she [her mother] kept saying, that we learn our English. She always used the possessive pronoun: your English, an inheritance we had come into and must wisely use. Unfortunately, my English became all mixed up with our Spanish.

(1998/1999, p. 24)

Once an elite language to the family, English's status changed once the family settled in New York City to take refuge from the Trujillo dictatorship: everyone in the United States spoke English, or seemed to, and yet *her* English was wildly different from that of natives. In the 1960s, the climate was not favourable for bilingualism, so Alvarez and her family tried to integrate and become the 'perfect' Americans. Bautista (2013) points out that migrants often feel pressured to keep a sense of who they are with an understanding of strong social-cultural ties to both their places of origin and of living; since this is not always possible, it causes feelings of cultural isolation and alienation. As a consequence, she and her sisters refused to speak Spanish even on visits back to the Dominican Republic, instead preferring to form language-ghettos around their Spanish-speaking family.

Our growing distance from Spanish was a way in which we were setting ourselves free from that old world where, as girls, we didn't have much say about what we could do with our lives. In English, we didn't have to use the formal usted that immediately put us in our place with our elders. We were responsible for ourselves and that made us feel grown-up.

(1998/1999, p. 63)

She goes on further to add that this linguistic difference was, for her and her sisters, a way of setting themselves apart from their native culture: their two cultures and two languages kept battling for attention, and English was winning, perhaps because they felt that Spanish could not really be 'lost' in the process –how can one lose a mother tongue? It was not

really lost: to Blauman (2012), the use and understanding of two languages is at the heart of Alvarez's dual self and, by extension, that shows in her writing.

English is, and was, an integral component of both social integration and her writing process. Much as Rodriguez did, Alvarez constructed her public persona through English, but moreover, through English she joined the ranks of so-called Latina *testimoniadoras* (Blauman, 2012) that use English as the medium to share their origin stories and act as the voice of the people. As such, she continues to draw back to her Dominican roots and uses her family as both source of inspiration and sense of self-identification, thus constructing a hybrid, trans-national identity and (re)building herself as a Dominican-American that refuses to engage in national borders or, even, in linguistic ones.

This is especially shown in the chapter called 'With Your Permission, Doña Aída'. It is dedicated to Dominican writer Aída Cartagena Portalatín, who had once shamed Alvarez at a conference for writing in English instead of her native Spanish:

I am *not* a Dominican writer. I have no business writing in a language that I can speak but have not studied deeply enough to craft. I can't ride its wild horses. Just the subjunctive would throw me off. I know the tender mouth of English, just how to work the reins. [...]

But, you're right, Doña Aída, I'm also not una norteamericana. [...] I don't hear the same rhythms in English as a native speaker of English. Sometimes I hear Spanish in English (and of course, vice versa). That's why I describe myself as a Dominican American writer. That's not just a term. I'm mapping a country that's not on the map, and that's why I'm trying to put it down on paper.

(1998/1999, p. 172-173; emphasis original)

For Alvarez, boundaries constrict her identity-building process and her understanding of herself, but moreover, boundaries constrict the world. In a way, Bautista (2013) argues that Alvarez's understanding and dominion of English ran parallel to her establishment of a self, as well as of a writing self; however, it must be acknowledged that 'the translations and

interspersal of Spanish words in an otherwise English text published in the United States have Latina roots' (Blauman, 2012, p. 120), and the one is inseparable from the other.

4. *Ilan Stavans in On Borrowed Words*

Ilan Stavans was born in Mexico to devout Jewish parents. Much like Ariel Dorfman, his family history is one of migration, with grandparents who arrived from Poland and Ukraine to settle in Mexico during the Second World War. Perhaps due to this, Stavans' life was fairly settled: born and raised in Mexico, his first move was to study in the United States at the age of eighteen. Afterwards, he would move around in a fit of youth self-discovery and zest for new experiences: Mexico, Israel, Europe, United States, Mexico with his family, back to Europe, back to Israel, and, finally, once again to the United States, where he would settle, marry, and even adopt American nationality. His memoir is divided into five parts: Mexico, the Yiddish language, his father, his brother, America, and, lastly, the act of writing a memoir.

Unlike Dorfman, Jewishness is a great part of Stavans' life and identity-construction, starting with the feeling of being Jewish-Mexican and not just Mexican: he grew up fairly isolated from gentiles and at the beginning of the book he wonders how 'Mexican' he really feels, or could feel, or what even is being Mexican. Part of that is due to language: he grew up in a Yiddish-speaking family, or at least in a family that preserved and valued Yiddish. He likens it to his mother tongue, while Spanish, he considers, could be interpreted as a sort of 'father' tongue: the language of intimacy versus the language of the public, a duality seen with Rodriguez but interpreted differently. Both languages are portrayed as equally important and alive in both his mind and his society. To Yiddish and Spanish, his formative languages, Stavans adds two more: Hebrew, learnt in school and loved first through the prism of religion and then through the prism of Jewish School in his first United States stay; and English, which would become more important for him through literature on his second American journey and would end up being his main and favourite language. This connects to what Vidal Claramonte (2021) considers a living palimpsest of languages and cultures. Stavans considers these four languages, and by extension the cultures he associates with them, to be crucial in his self-interpretation.

Furthermore, Stavans reflects about autobiographical writing, in part thanks to his grandmother Bela, who writes her own life story in a diary and sends it to him. This diary is written in Spanish, arguably one of Bela's weakest languages. Stavans, thus, wonders about her choice of language, which feels inauthentic to herself and to her life. Dolle (2020) denotes Yiddish as Bobbe Bela's sort of 'portable ghetto', the one constant in her life of migration and linguistic change, so her choice of Spanish leaves Stavans at a loss: 'Life is experienced through language, isn't it? Gestures, voices, words.' (2001, p. 87). How to pick one language, when life has been experienced through several, and how to convey the feelings that those languages inspire is key to the concept of a language memoir, but especially key in Stavans' case.

The choice of English as his writing language is influenced by his experiences of migration, as well as by the linguistic feelings these brought. His first literary experiments, he says, were written in Yiddish, but he soon felt uncomfortable in and bound by this, effectively, old-person tongue, a language that was soon to disappear. Spanish, on the contrary, was chaotic and imprecise, a tongue where historically the Jews have not been welcome in. It was, moreover, a peripheral language, 'a language that flourishes in the outskirts of culture, more reactive than active' (2001, p. 223). Hebrew had been appropriated by Israeli Zionism. English, he felt, was 'the language of *true* literature' (2001, p. 43; emphasis original), but moreover, as a newly-minted American man, he felt like he should try to embrace America as *his* America, and become an American writer.

And yet, that was doomed to fail, he argues, since as a Jew, a descendant of wanderers, he could not inhabit a tongue and make it fully his. All of his languages were 'borrowed' or 'rented'. It is in this context that he found an understanding of sorts:

As time went by, I began to see myself not as a speaker of Yiddish, Hebrew, Spanish, and English, but as their conduit. For instance, it became easier for me to think of myself as having been born into Yiddish and Spanish and then having been lured away by English. It was the only way I could explain the singular feeling of having found my true self the moment I spoke Shakespeare's tongue.

(2001, p. 226)

This conviction reached, he embarked upon a writing journey: of himself, of his life, and of his languages. All of his languages feature in his memoir, from complete untranslated passages in Yiddish and Hebrew to Spanish idioms, phrases, or references. And yet, that is not enough: in the final part of the book, he relays a conversation he had with Richard Rodriguez on, precisely, the topic of memoir-writing. His book, Stavans says, is a chimaera: he wonders how to explain his life, but, especially, why turn himself into a fictional character for someone else's reading pleasure. He argues that his book was never intended to be a 'conventional' memoir; it acts more as a series of snapshots of his life that focus on what he found important at the time. And yet, to Stavans, it is full of imperfections.

Memory. Is there a more fragile human faculty? Without it, what are we? It is the only record we have of who we were and who we want to become. Take it away and only a spiritless machine is left, free of conviction, free of purpose.

(2021, p. 263)

5. *Quiara Alegría Hudes in My Broken Language*

Quiara Alegría Hudes is, like Rodriguez, a second-generation American: born to a Puerto Rican mother and an American Jewish father in Philadelphia, she describes herself as 'Philly Rican'. Her father soon became absent from her life, and she was brought up with and by her mother's large Puerto Rican family: grandmother, aunts, cousins, parents, and little Qui Qui, all together in the arguably ghetto neighbourhood of Northern Philadelphia, a known Latinx enclave of the Philadelphia of the 1980s and 1990s when Hudes was growing up. Her memoir is divided into four parts: the first is dedicated to language; the second to her family and the discrimination suffered by the Puerto Rican community in the United States; and the last two, to her education and establishment first as a musician and then as a writer.

Following the memoir, it seems natural to talk first about her language. The title of this section is 'I am the gulf between Spanish and English' (2021, p.1) and in it Hudes expands on her relationship with both languages: her first language is English, and Spanish, once her

parents moved away from Philadelphia for their own house in the countryside, soon became a 'secret' language between her mother and her:

Our hilltop rituals were the only Spanish I had now. Back in Philly, at Abuela's or Titi Ginny's, Spanish was common as a can opener in a kitchen. But on the Malvern horse farm, it was an outdoor-only language, a mom-and-me secret. Whenever dad was in earshot, mom kept to English.

(2021, p. 10)

This disconnection from what should have been, effectively, her mother tongue, in all senses of the word, is not unique to her: the rest of her second generation cousins also struggled with Spanish but none to the extent that Hudes did. Even once her parents divorced and Hudes moved back to Philadelphia, next to her maternal family, her Spanish continued an unfamiliar part of herself that she was not fully confident in or comfortable with:

"What piano piece are you playing now?" she asked, and clung to my hand the entire response. "Pregúntala en español," mom said, so that all the bingo elders looked up, eager to see me bumble. "Ay, Virginia, déjala quieta," Titi Ginny cooed. "Coño, I can ask my niece however I want!" said Tía Toña. In Spanish, I described my recent piano recital until the elders, mom included, nodded in approval.

(2021, p. 67)⁴

Spanish was associated with, in many ways, a feeling of inadequacy and a betrayal of her Puerto Rican origins by not being able to communicate with her own family members in a way that felt natural to all of them. It is in this sense that Hudes writes a language memoir of, from the title, 'a broken language': from the perspective of what de Courtivron (2003) terms an absence of language(s), instead of a perspective of a multiplicity of it. Hudes feels

⁴ 'Pregúntala en español' means 'Ask her in Spanish.'

'Ay, Virginia, déjala quieta' means 'Leave her be.'

'Coño' is a vulgar interjection, in this case to express frustration. (Translations mine).

these losses acutely and, moreover, feels that they shaped her understanding of herself and her identity as much as a double first-language would have.

But Spanish is not the only language present in her family: her mother, an avid practitioner of Santería⁵, fills their house with Yoruba and other words from African languages that correspond to the practice. But more than that, she fills the house with acts and religious practices that she does not teach or share with her daughter, so that Hudes feels constantly alienated by something that she perceives as far away, as belonging only to her mother and not to the both of them:

Yes, it was true, and here lay the evidence: dance and possession were dialects of the same mother tongue. English, my best language, had no vocabulary for the possession nor the dance. And English was what I was made of. My words and my world did not align. That, perhaps, made me a lost soul.

(2021, p. 98)

Regardless, Hudes reinforces time and again her feelings of connection with her Puerto Rican family, even more so in the wake of her father's absence. Puerto Rico, she acknowledges, seems a distant part of her maternal family history: first her great-aunt moved to the United States, and then her grandmother followed, bringing her daughters with her. As such, Virginia, Ginny, and the rest of Hudes' aunts grew into teenagers and then adults in the United States, never going back to the island but instead bringing the island with themselves: their cooking, their dancing, their songs, and their way of creating a community with the rest of the Latinx present in the area were formative parts of Hudes' growing up and understanding of what a community was. Ybarra (2017) argues that in many Latinx, and especially in many Puerto Rican households, the absence of the men in the family, reasons notwithstanding, encourages them to forge strong matrilineal family bonds. This is certainly true for Hudes, whose memoir is dedicated to 'the grrrl [sic] descendants of Obdulia Perez, past, present & future'.

⁵ Santería is a polytheist religion that originated from African slaves in Cuba. It used to be an Afro-Caribbean religion but it has spread to the United States and now encompasses all kinds of ethnicities, including white people. (Canizares, 1994).

The last two parts of her memoir deal with the act of her creative expression, first in music with her education at Yale University, and then in writing, with an MFA in Playwriting at Brown University, where her connections with Puerto Rico, especially with Santería practice, are reexpressed and reimagined.

Language(s) in Use: English, Spanish, and the Distance in Between

To talk about language, and more specifically about language division, it is imperative to start by introducing Yildiz's work on postmonolingualism (2012). Yildiz argues that although multilingualism has been, historically, the way our societies have developed and interacted, the eighteenth century brought what Yildiz calls the 'monolingual paradigm', a belief that societies are, or should be, monolingual. Monolingualism works as the *structuring* principle of modern societies (Yildiz, *ibid*), in form if not in content, organised around the core idea that one has a mother tongue, which is a language that links to a family and, by extension, to a specific culture and nation (the 'mother tongue' is inextricably connected to the 'motherland'). It is in this way that language forges linguistic and kinship ties to a nation that inevitably clash against the concept of multilingualism within it.

Building on this, Yildiz (2012) presupposes a postmonolingual condition in societies, which can be understood as the field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to structure societies that are increasingly more multilingual. This postmonolingual space acts as the basis for this linguistic analysis: as previously seen, all five of the authors chosen grew up with different linguistic affiliations to one, another, or a third or fourth languages, and it is these differing affiliations that they ponder upon when choosing to write, as well as when choosing to identify themselves:

"Then what are you?" he said, genuinely curious. Truth was, I hadn't a clue. To me, Puerto Rico was a past-tense island. Jewish was murkier, no place at all, and dad shrugged any time the word was spoken. [...]
 "I'm half English, half Spanish," I ventured, as if made not of flesh and blood but language. And it felt okay. The kids seemed satisfied by my declaration.

(*My Broken Language*, 2021, p. 25)

To both Kramsch (2004) and Dorfman himself (2003, ed. de Courtivron) this is due to linguistic affiliations going further than just a medium of communication: people live, inhabit, reside in languages. Languages are understood as the place where bodies and minds collide, and allow for interaction with the physical world as much as with a mental space. Moreover, inside a language is a history, both social and personal (Kaplan, 1994). Norton (1997) and Hall (1997) argue that identity constructs and is constructed by language; this theory will be further explored in this section.

Both English and Spanish appear as part of the linguistic landscape that these authors inhabit and it is a landscape that allows for multiple articulations of feelings ranging from devotion to shame to political outrage, as viewed and processed through differing life narratives. This section will look at the conflicting feelings created first by Spanish, then by English, then to a warring and insecure bilingualism, and lastly by the inclusion of other languages, portrayed by the five authors to varying extents.

1. *Spanish: The Wayward 'Mother Tongue'*

Arguably, Spanish is, or should be, what Yildiz (2012) calls the 'mother tongue', understood as the language that connects to one's family and ancestors, learnt through their mother, for all five of the authors: Rodriguez and Stavans' families are Mexican, Dorfman's Argentinian, Alvarez's Dominican and Hudes' Puerto Rican. If the connection between one language and one nation were to be true, Spanish is these authors' connection to a nation-state via kinship ties. And yet, it is not so: Hudes' mother speaks to her in English, as do Rodriguez's parents when he first starts going to school. Stavans' family, whose grandparents settled in Mexico from war-ravaged Eastern Europe, uses both Yiddish and Spanish, or Yiddish-and-Spanish, indistinguishably, as connecting languages.

Furthermore, these are narratives of migration as much as of language: Hudes and Rodriguez grew up as second-generation immigrants in the United States, whereas Dorfman, himself a second-generation immigrant in Argentina, moved from Argentina to the United

States at a very young age, only to migrate again, this time to Chile. Alvarez's migration was at ten years of age, old enough to have complete control over Spanish, but young enough to 'lose' her growing up into the language:

The inevitable, of course, has happened. I now speak my native language "with an accent." What I mean by this is that I speak perfect childhood Spanish, but if I stray into a heated discussion or complex explanation, I have to ask, "Por favor ¿puedo decirlo en inglés?" Can I please say it in English?

(Something to Declare, 1998/1999, p. 66)

Stavans' migration from Mexico to different parts of the world, with the final destination of the United States, happened as an adult. As such, at no point did he feel in danger of losing his Spanish. His is a unique case among the writers chosen.

Spanish, then, represents many things. As a frustrated mother tongue, its status as what could have been and was not brings feelings of inadequacy, of guilt at not mastering it perfectly, and even of shame at its loss. This, following Yildiz (2012), is due to its status in connecting a family: the emotionally charged dimension of having a 'mother tongue' creates feelings of lack of familial care when one's maternal language is not as good as one would have wished.

Abuela was suspicious of my Spanish. No sooner had she launched into a story than she paused mid-tale and asked, "Repeat what I just said." She wasn't gonna waste a good climax on half-ass comprehension. So, I paid close attention and earned what I had come for. I memorized her sentences as she spoke them, ready to repeat whenever asked. Always mentally translating, filtering her history through English's roughness.

(My Broken Language, 2021, p. 145)

And yet, it is precisely these feelings of familial connection that imbue the language with positive significance: Spanish is, in many cases, connected to intimacy, to family, and to childhood. In his memoir, Dorfman says: 'I was conceived in Spanish, literally imagined into

being by that language, flirted, courted, coupled into existence by my parents in a Spanish that had not been there at their birth.’ (1998, p. 14). To his family, in particular, Spanish represented a new being and a new way of living, away from Poland, Russia, and the Jewish pogroms. So his family history is one of adapting themselves into Spanish, opposite to his own history, which moves away from it. Furthermore, Lauret (2014) argues that for Richard Rodriguez intimacy functions not in Spanish but *as* Spanish: any and all uses of the language immediately qualify as private, intimate, and familiar.

I couldn’t really believe that Spanish was a public language, like English. Spanish speakers, rather, seemed related to me, for I sensed that we shared—through our language—the experience of feeling apart from los gringos. It was thus a ghetto Spanish that I heard and I spoke. Like those whose lives are bound by a barrio, I was reminded by Spanish of my separateness from *los otros*, *los gringos* in power. But more intensely than for most barrio children—because I did not live in a *barrio*—Spanish seemed to me the language of home. (Most days it was only at home that I’d hear it.) It became the language of joyful return.

(*Hunger for Memory*, 1982/2022, p. 17)

Spanish is, then, a complex language that brings up warring feelings in all of these authors. Lauret (2014) argues that any given linguistic combination carries within itself a linguistic history and emotional baggage; this applies in myriad ways to first- and second-generation migrants that have evolved, linguistically, in distinct ways.

2. English: The Dominant Second Language

English may be represented as the other side of the metaphorical language coin for all of these authors. Firstly, English represents the language of power and public use, not only in the United States but also across the globe, precisely due to the United States’ power and influence (Lennon, 2010). This is something that Dorfman feels very strongly about during his youth: he protests against the Americanisation of Chilean society, against the U.S.’ growing influence in the governments of Latin America, and against its determination of global politics. And yet,

You want to know the truth? I'm still attracted to the United States and who knows if I won't end up there, I may hate its politics but I love its jazz and its movies and its people and the language they gave me, which is still the language I use to make sense of the world.

(*Heading South, Looking North*, 1998, p. 153)

Dorfman, who had refused Spanish during ten years in order to become the 'perfect' American child, finds himself losing his sense of self once he moves to Chile. He grows, receives his education, loves, lives, and works in Spanish; and yet, he feels unable to abandon English as the language of intimacy, the language he took and adopted for himself as a symbol of identity. Norton (1997) argues that people who learn another language as immigrants may be understood as people whose social needs and aspirations are inseparable from their linguistic needs. As such, Dorfman, who would become a professor of English Literature, had conceptualised a life for him through the English language that was inseparable from his sense of self.

In a similar way, Rodriguez argues that for him leaving Spanish behind to immerse himself fully into English was a way of becoming a public person in the U.S., which was the only country he'd known: 'What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right—and the obligation—to speak the public language of *los gringos*.' (1982/2022, p. 20). Gawinkowska et al (2013) argue that language change and choice *can be* motivated by sociocultural norms; in this case, it may be affirmed that it *was*. Moreover, Rodriguez becomes a fervent defensor of non-bilingual education: he believes that since embracing English is the only pathway to education and success, and as such of social mobility, family languages should only be addressed in the family to not distract the children from this goal (Rodriguez and Cooper, 2003; Lauret, 2014; Segura, 2019; Van Hecke, 2020).

A different approach to English is that of Alvarez's: she grew up in an affluent family that considered knowledge of English essential to success, and was educated in an American school prior to her migration to New York. Once established in New York, English gradually

absorbed her linguistic repertoire: she and her sisters became fully assimilated with the confidence that Spanish would always be there for them, which proved to be false.

By now, we couldn't go back as easily as that. Our Spanish was full of English. Countless times during a conversation, we were corrected, until what we had to say was lost in our saying it wrong. More and more we chose to answer in English even when the question was posed in Spanish. It was a measure of the growing distance between ourselves and our native culture—a distance we all felt we could easily retrace with just a little practice. It wasn't until I failed at first love, in Spanish, that I realized how unbridgeable that gap had become.

(Something to Declare, 1998/1999, p. 64)

Jarczok (2015) argues that language change causes a deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the self through language: this is how Alvarez turned from a Dominican with Spanish as dominant language into a Dominican-American with English as dominant language. Her linguistic change was, naturally, brought on by cultural change and change of her surroundings, to the point that English became the language of *choice*.

Something similar could be argued with Stavans, who, as an adult, received American citizenship after several years living in the United States and marrying an American woman. Derrida (1996) argues that citizenship is usually understood as a legal affiliation to a language; in Stavans' case, a citizenship that he had applied for, voluntarily, marked an affiliation to a language that had started years ago:

A language is a set of spectacles through which the universe is seen afresh: Yiddish is warm, delectable, onomatopoeic; Spanish is romantic, perhaps a bit loose; Hebrew is rough, guttural; English is precise, almost mathematical—the tongue I prefer today, **the one I feel happiest in...** [...] Changing languages is like imposing another role on oneself, like being someone else temporarily. **My English-language persona is the one that superimposes itself in all previous others.** In it are the seeds of Yiddish and Hebrew, but mostly Spanish.

(*On Borrowed Words*, 2001, p. 249; bold emphasis added)

And, lastly, much as Stavans' Spanish was a unique case, Hudes' English is another one: she was brought up in English, and it is, effectively, her 'mother tongue', since it is the one her mother educated her in.

3. The Bilingual Figure: A Linguistic Duality

Bilingualism and its linguistic effects on personal life have been studied in scholarship through a myriad ways, from code-switching (Gardner-Chloros, 2009) to translingualism (Kellman and Stavans, 2015; MacSwan, 2017). Jarczok (2020), as well as Panicacci and Dewaele (2018), understand it as a person being 'captive' by their languages, 'trapped' in the space where one ends and the other begins, with no way for only one language to fully capture the bilingual's sense of self. As previously seen, this is fully supported by the idea that the vocabulary of emotions differs from language to language, thus changing the perceptions of events depending on the language they happened or are being retold in (Fivush and Nelson, 2004; Wierzbicka, 2004). Bilinguals are constantly constructing and reconstructing themselves, with two monolingual 'minds' inhabiting one body, at constant war with one another:

I knew that there was something monstrous in the way I was becoming Latin American without fully divorcing myself from the United States, the back and forth in my mind as I delved deeper into Chile [...]. There was something monstrous and bizarre and twisted in my journey.

(*Heading South, Looking North*, 1998, p. 191)

Dorfman's 'something monstrous' echoes de Courtivron's fragmentation anxiety (2003): the bilingual is 'broken' in linguistic pieces that are glued together to form one mismatched whole. Derrida (1996) argues that a hyphenated identity is the cause of a disorder of identity; we can derive from this that bilinguals, who reject the One Language One Nation concept (Yildiz, 2012) just by existing, are uneasy everywhere they go. This is true of Dorfman, who likens his languages to his countries; it is also true of Rodriguez, who eliminated traces of Spanish of his life until his very name was deformed:

Rodriguez. The name on the door. The name on my passport. The name I carry from my parents—who are no longer my parents, in a cultural sense. This is how I pronounce it: *Rich-heard Road-ree-guess*. This is how I hear it most often.

(*Hunger for Memory*, 1982/2022, p. 6)

His parents are no longer his 'cultural' parents because he no longer carries his heritage culture with him, embodied in a language. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) analyse the clashing of ideologies related to language and identity when it comes to deciding what languages should be spoken by whom, and in what context: to Rodriguez, this manifested in the hurt of his family members and fellow Mexican-Americans at his Americanisation, as if his linguistic heritage forever forced him to only speak Spanish.

And yet, that is not the only possible way of understanding bilingualism. Grosjean (2016) and MacSwan (2017) speak of what can be called 'holistic bilingualism': a bilingual person is not two monolingual selves 'glued' together, but rather *one* self with *one* linguistic repertoire that happens to be externally represented through two different languages, which in themselves coexist and contribute to one another. Furthermore, Grosjean (ibid) argues that fluency levels, regardless of the language, are usually context-specific: if one receives schooling in a Lx, then one will be able to explain their field of knowledge in that Lx with much more confidence than in any other language. This is true, for instance, of Julia Alvarez's writing process:

Finally, I use this time for reading only in English. I made a discovery one summer when I was reading poetry in Spanish in the early morning. I'd move on to my writing and find myself encountering difficulties, drawing blanks left and right as I tried to express a thought or capture an image or strike the right tone in a passage. I finally figured it out: the whole rhythm of my thinking and writing had switched to my first, native tongue. I was translating into, not writing in, English. I could hear the ropes and pulleys and levers and switches in what I was writing, as if I were unloading the words off a boat that had just come in from another language, far away.

(*Something to Declare*, 1998/1999, p. 286)

The dominant language need not be the mother tongue or first language, either, since it will depend on the language the person 'lives in' more often (Lauret, 2014; Grosjean, 2016). As such, if we exclude Hudes, all of these authors' dominant languages have switched along their lives: Dorfman, Rodriguez and Alvarez changed from Spanish to English, but Dorfman made a shift once again to Spanish to become, perhaps, a 'balanced' bilingual; while Stavans, already plurilingual from birth, maintains a strict control over all of his languages.

Furthermore, bilingualism can be understood as the celebration and vindication of a hybrid self. De Courtivron (2003) wonders if being bilingual means situating oneself in, between, or in the overlap of two languages; for many of these authors, it is shown instead through the use of practices such as translingualism (Kellman and Stavans, 2015; MacSwan, 2017) as a way of acknowledging themselves outside of a particular linguistic boundary.

Lastly, it may be said that bilingualism need not be understood as 'perfect mastery of two languages'. Indeed, Canagarajah (2009) argues in favour of the concept of 'functional bilingualism', i.e., linguistic knowledge that allows for perfect and understandable communication, but is not free from mistakes. Such is Hudes' Spanish, whose English, as argued by Canagarajah (*ibid*), can be understood as 'plurilingual English': an English influenced by her and her family's linguistic background. Her English is full of Spanish, and vice versa, in a sort of translingual code-meshing that embodies a range of ideologies and positionings in its sheer existence (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

4. Other Languages At Play

It is crucial now to address the rest of the languages present in these author's linguistic landscapes. To Hudes, 'if you're fluent in a language, there's a place you belong' (2021, p. 127), and yet, her linguistic repertoire is not a comfortable space. Puerto Rico, where her family is from, has a long, rich linguistic history, from native *taíno* languages smothered under Spanish rule, to the African languages slaves brought with them on trader ships, to

the imposed English at schools under the United States' cultural and political takeover of the country. All of this is reflected in the way she is brought up, knowing or unknowingly:

But I couldn't parse it then, which strand of my work—of me—came from where. It was too complicated and messy, all the disparate parts coming into and out of me without any clear traffic pattern. My first language was English, my second Spanglish, my third Spanish, and my fourth a bookish rudimentary Santería-Lukumí.

(*My Broken Language*, 2021, p. 264)

In an essay written for Isabelle de Courtivron's *Lives in Translation* (2003), Ilan Stavans states that he believes in multiple 'loves'. He further argues that a language no longer needs to be exclusive, and should be allowed to be additive: Stavans, then, does not speak Spanish or English, he speaks Spanglish. And Yiddish. And Hebrew. And a mix of all of those languages, put together, and understood as the only possible way to convey his 'translationality' (2001, p. 88). Translationality is an interesting term to address: in his memoir, Stavans argues that his goal when writing was to make it seem as if it had been translated from and into multiple languages, with no existing original.

Language, as has been seen, plays a fundamental role in the construction of personhood (Budwig, 2000): different languages may indeed offer different resources to construct oneself through discourse and, as such, allow us to exist in more than one world of language (Lennon, 2010). Plurilingual speakers, in fact, have a qualitatively different language competency than that of monolinguals (Canagarajah, 2009), since they retain linguistic distinctiveness in social encounters, co-construct subjective and supportive norms for communication through hybrid codes, and use and learn language interconnectedly. And so, to quote Hudes, 'With Spanglish and Yoruba braided through my dialogue, spell-check was hardly an ally' (*My Broken Language*, 2021, p. 280).

Migration, Culture, Language, and Writing

For language memoirs, migration is a crucial part of the linguistic journey undertaken: if there were no physical journey from one place to another that inevitably requires a new language acquisition, meditating about how to explain a life lived in different languages would be an entirely different endeavour. This is especially since, for all of these authors, their linguistic journeys were triggered by their migration experiences, or that of their families'. Therefore, it is essential to explore the topic of migration as a catalyst for identity-searching and language acquisition, and see how that is represented in autobiographical writing.

John Glad (1990) discusses a multidimensional model of literature in exile, applicable to any literature produced in the diaspora due to the author's personal migration experience. There are, Glad (ibid) argues, different factors to consider when analysing the work of migrant writers: the circumstances, the place(s) of production and publication, the intended primary readers, the literary differences between the countries of origin and of reception, the language(s) used, and the repatriation possibilities. As such, the concept of migrant literature also should deal with the context surrounding the exile: who leaves, to where, from where, and for what reasons is essential to the understanding of a literary work. This is especially important in terms of autobiographical or experience-based literature, since the experience of migration will, undoubtedly, prove to be a poignant part of the narrative.

In this section, migration will be discussed in two ways. Firstly, it will be understood in terms of the authors' lived experiences and their acculturation or assimilation processes, which subsequently triggered the formation of their current linguistic and cultural landscapes. Secondly, migration will be analysed as a catalyst for identity-searching in writing that touches on themes of homeland, nostalgia, and confronted reality.

1. Acculturation, Assimilation and Being 'A True American'

The main difference between these authors is their status in terms of generational migration history. To start with, Stavans and Dorfman are dual first- and second-generation migrants: born to first-generation migrants in their respective countries, they ended up migrating

themselves to finally settle in the United States, and thus becoming first-generation migrants there. As to the rest of the authors, Alvarez is first-generation, while both Rodriguez and Hudes are second-generation migrants to whom their families passed on migration lived experiences as well as distinct linguistic and cultural heritage.

Moreover, neither family history nor personal journeys may necessarily be linear. As to the first, Rodriguez's parents settled in California and stayed there, while Dorfman's father moved from Russia to Ukraine to Argentina, and then, once Ariel himself was born, to the United States and finally to Chile. As to the second, Stavans migrated from country to country for several years until finally establishing himself in the United States, where he would also move between cities a few times. A migrant may therefore be a peregrine migrant, always looking for a new place, whether that is within one country or several.

Each migration experience is unique and shapes individual journeys in distinct ways, in tandem with the variety of settling and relocation experiences undergone in the process. One of such distinct ways of shaping is inherently related to culture: that of the migrant, and that of the new society. Berry (1974; 2005; 2023) has repeatedly analysed migrants' sense of well-being after integrating a new society, which to a great extent depends on the levels of adjustment and inclusion in the host society. To Berry (2005), acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that occurs in two cultural communities that come into contact with each other: any migration will result in a process of integration into a society, if only tangentially, but acculturation would necessitate the host community to reciprocate. Furthermore, Berry (2023) points out that in today's culturally diverse societies, strategies for adaptation vary, but the most successful and significant can be termed as the integration strategy, where a double-engagement in both the host and the heritage cultures would guarantee a better adaptation.

At the individual level, Berry (1974) points out that there are usually behavioural and cultural adaptations to fit into the host society, which may involve a continuum of reactivity to proactivity at the time of cultural learning, as well as of cultural conflict. While reciprocity is important, migrants usually undergo 'acculturative stress' (Berry, 2023) as the result of their two or more cultures coming into contact and conflicting with each other. All of these

authors, knowing- or unknowingly, adopted very different acculturation and integration strategies in their migration journeys. These were partly informed by their families' approach, and partly unique to themselves and their aspirations in the new society.

To start with the second generation authors, Rodriguez and his family very clearly assimilated into the United States: although at the beginning they tried to maintain their Spanish language and their Mexican cultural traditions, at a certain point they all began to feel more American —this does not apply to all traditions, and in fact Rodriguez would consider himself a Mexican Catholic (Segura, 2019), but to a certain extent all culturally distinct and non-Americans traditions were pushed away by the family.

On the other hand, Quiara Alegría Hudes, who was brought up as mixed-race in the United States, considers herself culturally Puerto Rican: 'They left me two options that night in the living room: be white or be Puerto Rican. Their rules. They forced my hand. Fine.' (2021, p. 194). As such, she proudly upholds and publicly shares in her works her family's cultural and religious traditions, from food to music to sacred celebrated days, all encompassed in the context of the North Philadelphia area where she grew up and where her maternal family lives.

Continuing with the dual first- and second-generation authors, their understanding of acculturation is very different as well. Ariel Dorfman, as previously discussed, grew up with the full intention of becoming a model 'American', fully integrated into American culture and society, and without any traces of Latin American in him. And yet, upon his education and political transformation in Chile, he slowly shed his American personality, feeling like his Latin American roots were his 'true' roots.

And a few miles away, at home, our three-year old Chilean son was sleeping, and he would not have to live the dislocations of his father and his grandparents. **I had sworn he would be the first of his family in many generations to be born and grow up and have children of his own under the same Southern constellation of stars.**

(1998, p. 155; bold emphasis added)

Meanwhile, Ilan Stavans grew up in Mexico feeling disconnected from Mexicanness: his family's focus point was their Jewishness, and so his education was focused on the Jewish life and diaspora. His memoir starts, in a way, wondering about death: if he were to die, where would he be buried? He has no cultural affiliation to Mexico, even if it was his country of birth. Where does the Mexican Jewish end and the American Jewish start?

Furthermore, his travels around distinct countries were what Berry (2005) would classify as 'sojourning': tourism, international study, or overseas posting. He did not migrate in search of a better life or to escape political upheaval, he migrated to *experience*. As such, his cultural connections and language dynamics were left unchanged until his final, and to date permanent, settling into the United States: he married an American woman and obtained an American passport. And yet, he wonders:

What does it mean to be an American? English was not, as I had heard, the great equalizer, at least not at the moment when a citizen is sworn in. Is immigration not, first and foremost, about reinventing oneself in a different land, not only socially and culturally but also verbally?

(2001, p. 184)

Reinventing oneself went hand in hand with Julia Alvarez's experience. A first generation immigrant to the United States, she points out that in the 1960s the political climate was not favourable for bilingual education or first-language retaining: the goal was to fully assimilate and become a perfect American citizen. This is partly told in her essay 'I want to be Miss América' (1999/1998, p. 37), which further explains the cultural differences in fashion and beauty between her two countries that shaped her teenage years. Furthermore, as has been discussed, her writing is in English because she does not feel confident in her Spanish: it is her mother tongue but not her dominant language. And yet, she feels very strongly as Dominican-American, where both of her nationalities have united to create one cultural identity.

On par with this new cultural identity, migrants are usually forced to reckon with a shift in their linguistic positioning (Dailey-O'Cain and Liebscher, 2011) brought on by their new

space. This positioning is a result of language attitudes⁶: language is a phenomenon constructed in interaction (Dailey-O'Cain and Liebscher, 2011), so the value ascribed to a particular language or variety by a community will be integral to its maintenance (Suek, 2014). In many cases, the language attitudes in a migrant community will depend on external social judgement towards their heritage language (Suek, 2014); in the United States, the Latinx population is seen as a cultural and linguistic threat to the country (Casielles-Suárez, 2017) and therefore English has become the main language of most Hispanics living in America. This has been illustrated repeatedly by Alvarez, Rodriguez, and Hudes.

Lastly, ideologies may be inscribed in language (Hall, 1997), but a group's sense of self, as expressed through its language ideology, is seen as crucial to the maintenance of that language even in the face of a dominant culture (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Moreover, Myers-Scotton (ibid) points out that in many Latinx communities, there is a separation of language maintenance from cultural maintenance, as seen in the prevalence of Chicano culture and the hybridity of Spanglish (Casielles-Suárez, 2017). The best example for this would be Richard Rodriguez's memoir, where he details his loss of Spanish while maintaining Mexican cultural and religious traditions.

2. Migration as Catalyst for Identity-Searching

Scholars (Bracewell, 2002; Jarczok, 2015) have argued that autobiographical writing can potentially be healing when it deals with the trauma of exile. It may be, or become, a psychoanalytic experience where the author has the freedom to explore cultural clashes and reflect on leaving, arriving, and settling in an introspective space. Autobiographical writing allows for self-disclosure, self-understanding, and the projection of an external image of the self. Furthermore, writing, solitary as it may be, constructs a communal experience that speaks of writing as testimony (Gilmore, 2001) and forms metaphorical bonds between authors who have undergone the same process, finding support in each other's journeys.

⁶ Language attitude is the assessment that speakers make about the value of a Lx (and, hence, of the people who speak it), while language ideology is the perception of a Lx in the interest of a specific group. (Myers-Scotton, 2006).

Minh-ha and Sarup (ed. Robertson et al, 1994) argue that autobiographical writings about exile essentially function as refuge places while at the same time working as a representation of the condition of the migrant: eternal strangers, physically close but culturally remote, homeless. The concept of 'home' is much discussed in migrant literature (ed. Glad, 1990; ed. Robertson et al, 1994; ed. Harte, 2017) because it is linked to the concept of identity, and often inseparable from it: 'home' is where we can be ourselves, regardless of who that is.

Home. That's where I was, where I had chosen to be: I was swinging low
sweet chariot, come to carry me home, I was home, home on the range, I
was in the land of the free and the home of the brave, this land was my
land and it was made for you and me, but especially, I felt, it had been
made for me.

(Heading South, Looking North, 1998, p. 48)

Home, to Isabelle de Courtivron (2003), can be understood as the place where our stories are told, regardless of the language they are told in. Language, in particular, is discussed by Vladislav (ed. Glad, 1990) as the way with which to fix a 'home' in time, as well as a mark of identity for migrants: they are the people who lost, left, or forgot everything except their accent, since language is perceived, by Dorfman himself (ed. de Courtivron, 2003), as a 'baggage' that comes along on one's journey. And yet, Herlevi (2020) points out that the L1 in migrants may prove to be a source of discomfort or acute homesickness. Immersion in multiple linguistic worlds can bring forward divided or conflicting affections; for writers, in particular, it may be understood as the worst of the exile, since the writer is 'speechless' until a new literary voice is acquired in the new language (Bienek, ed. Glad, 1990).

Harte (2017) argues that the concepts of home and elsewhere are not necessarily binaries, but imply a complicated negotiation that is constitutive of the human condition. Author Julia Alvarez, in fact, refuses to conform to simple understandings of her identity or her work, since she found writing to be what bridged her home with her adopted country, and propelled her towards a feeling of calm and belonging: 'Maybe after years of feeling caught between being a "real Dominican" and being American, I shy away from simplistic choices

that will leave out an important part of who I am or what my work is about' (1999/1998, p. 169).

Bautista (2013) argues that the diasporic experience can also be one of loneliness. While migration is in many ways a transformative and collective experience, especially that migration to the United States that implies settled migrant communities in the place of arrival, it can also be a deeply isolating experience, since no journey is the same. Furthermore, Bautista (ibid) argues, migrants may feel pressured to keep a stable and non-evolving sense of identity that maintains sociocultural ties to their home society, which in many ways can be as alienating as the acculturative stress (Berry, 2023) felt at cultural clashes with the host society. Hence, diasporas are made of different combinations of histories, transnational encounters, hybridity, and language(s), which inherently refuse a cohesive diasporic identity. This, in many cases, can also contribute towards feelings of isolation and lack of belonging to anywhere.

When one belongs, however, or feels like they belong, the upheaval caused by yet another exile might prove heartbreaking. If exile is to be a metaphor for the human condition (de Courtivron, 2003), then so is the desire to plant down roots and achieve stability, to feel like one has a place to 'be'. A trajectory of exiles, like Dorfman's, first due to his father's political leanings and then due to his (Antunes, 2018), calls for Harte (2017), who argues that migration and movement are synonymous, and both imply a rupture of the continuum. And so, Dormfan writes:

Paradise, a word that, originally, meant a walled-in garden, full of fruit. To lose that promised land is like dying, and to return there is to be redeemed. I swore to myself, up there above Latin America, that I would return [...], I swore that I would be back. That was the myth of my return with which I tried to keep sane and whole on that plane that was taking me farther and farther away from **my origins**.

(1998, p. 275-276; bold emphasis added)

'His origins', established in Chile, in Latin America as a whole, regardless of his family's origins or his own history of movement. Derrida (1996) suggests the existence of a

colloquium of language, nationality, and cultural belonging as ascribed by death, as opposed to that of a country of birth: life is too long, its paths too warped, to limit oneself to where one was born. Citizenship is precarious and artificial, and yet, to Derrida (ibid), the possession of it is crucial for identity-formation processes; a passport seems to answer the eternal question of belonging.

And so, writing and literature function as the bridge between the past and the present, the left and the acquired, as well as a place for belonging, all the while allowing for discussions of personal experiences, diaspora living, identity, and introspection.

[...] yes, literature was the answer -my Promised Land, an authentic home, and a portable one at that, which I was able to carry around with me. [...] Herein, I concluded, lay the true utopia: finding *raison d'être*, inventing your own private homeland.

(*On Borrowed Words*, 2001, p. 221)

Conclusion

It's my story, the story of my many exiles and my three countries and the two languages that raged for my throat during years and that now share me, the English and the Spanish that I have finally come to love almost as much as I love you.

(*Looking North, Heading South*, 1998, n.p.)

This dissertation has looked into autobiographical memoirs written in second languages by migrant authors. Specifically, how these personal narratives become spaces for self-construction and identity-formation where authors transform their lives into cohesive narratives that justify their choices and beliefs. Five memoirs by self-described Hispanic authors who live or have lived in the United States of America were analysed in order to research into the unique dynamics of language memoirs, with four main pillars of research:

writing as a process and as a product, bilingualism and linguistic hybridity, cultural difference, and migration experiences.

To start with, it was imperative to establish that writing, of any kind but especially that of personal narratives, may be studied as both a process and a product. The writing process, as per Crosman (1981), calls on the understanding of genre conventions and audience expectations that will shape the text; while the product may be studied, as per Hyland (2016), as a contextual performance of inner feelings. Memoir has been understood by scholars as both the genre of memory (Jarczok, 2020), as well as that of testimony (Gilmore, 2001), where the expectations of verisimilitude and truthfulness are crucial to the reading of the text.

Language memoirs, as coined by Kaplan (1994), are personal narratives where the thematic focus goes further than a lived experience: it is a life experienced through multiple languages, or in the in-between spaces of different languages. Grosjean (2016) argues that memory is language-specific; as such, this negotiated re-expression of a multilingual context into a single-language context may prove to be controversial (Lennon terms this a 'language death', 2010). Nevertheless, it has also been argued to contribute to the healing of 'exile spaces' caused by linguistic dissonance (Bracewell, 2002) by providing a safe space for authors to self-express and (re)construct their lives. The authors analysed had a multilingual heritage landscape where the two shared languages among them all were English and Spanish: dynamics of bilingualism, as well as social and linguistic capital (Lennon, 2010) in the United States are equally crucial to the understanding of why choose one language over another at the time of writing. And yet, as per Lauret (2014), the use of wanderwords is frequent in bilingual writers, so regardless of the main language used for the text, snippets of the author's other languages will always appear as a demonstration of their linguistic hybridity.

Furthermore, migration is a crucial part of the linguistic journey undertaken. On the one hand, migration experiences involve necessary acculturation processes: one's heritage culture comes into contact with an external society's, which involves reevaluating ways of looking at and understanding the world in order to better 'fit' in the new sociocultural

environment. This may cause acculturative stress (Berry, 2023) or feelings of isolation or loneliness as a diaspora member that feels unconnected to both the new and the heritage cultures (Bautista, 2012). On the other hand, the migration experience may also function as an inspiration for literary works that deal with self-identification and belonging: the meaning of 'home' is much explored (ed. Robertson et al, 1994; ed. Harte, 2017; ed. Glad, 1990) due to its unavoidable linkage to the concept of identity, and so homelessness and homesickness become key concepts that may trigger introspective reflections on expectations and life.

By performing these thematic analyses in a group of five Hispanic authors, it was thus possible to contribute to the extensive literature on language memoirs. As previously established, for two of those authors (Julia Alvarez and Quiara Alegría Hudes) there was little to no scholarship on their specific memoirs; this research represents a first step into focusing on their autobiographical narratives from an academic perspective, much as other scholars (Filer, 2010; Antunes, 2018; Segura, 2019; Van Hecke, 2020; Dolle, 2020; Vidal Claramonte, 2022; Espino Barrera, 2022;) have extensively done for Stavans, Rodriguez, and Dorfman. Furthermore, the group analysis of five Hispanic authors calls attention to the multiple diasporic experiences of migrants in the United States, and their varied linguistic landscapes, as well as on the evolution of sociocultural linguistic understanding through the decades.

As to the methodology, it was highly useful to employ a qualitative approach that drew on textual analysis: the thematic similarities between the memoirs as well as the elements of Hispanicity on the authors made it possible to draw parallels that contributed to the analysis. Originally, the focus of the analysis was set out to be on the multifaceted realm of memoir writing in second languages, and how dynamics of bilingualism, language hybridity, and second languages influence perceptions of the (written) self. While linguistic prowess was undoubtedly a key focus of the analysis which allowed for discussion on the bilingual figure as well as on the multiple understandings of plurilingual living, it was not the only structural link: much of the focus was spent on untangling the writing process of personal narratives, both from a theoretical and a practical perspective by using the five memoirs as a case study. Therefore, memoir writing functioned as a structuring principle of the research, from where the branches of language, culture, and migration extended.

Isabelle de Courtivron (2003) wonders about the bilingual's positioning in regards to their languages, and whether they exist in, between, or in the overlap of their linguistic makeup. This research put at the forefront the myriad ways in which bilingualism is understood and lived through, as well as how one's plurilingual repertoire may be interpreted as a whole, as opposed to two-monolingual 'sides' inhabiting one body (Grosjean, 2016). There is no perfect answer to de Courtivron's musings, but it might be useful to note that 'wholeness' and 'brokenness' are perspectives that change from person to person, and evolve with time; moreover, bilingualism need not be perfectly 'balanced' languages existing in one's repertoire and speech.

This study has primarily focused on language choices for self-representation in introspective writing, and how those choices are a result of differing cultural, linguistic, and migratory experiences. However, several areas remain unexplored and could prove fruitful for potential new avenues of research, including but not limited to moving away from a Spanish-English dichotomy to understand dynamics of language hybridity in different linguistic pairs, especially that research performed away from the United States as a melting-pot of migrant communities. Different types of theoretical frameworks, scopes, timelines, and authors will yield new results that could enrich our understanding of language and identity in memoir writing, as well as shape how authors reflect and represent themselves in future writing.

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