Vilnius University Press

Contents lists available at Vilnius University Press

Respectus Philologicus
2026, no. 49 (54), pp. 53–64

eISSN 2335-2388
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15388/RESPECTUS.2026.49.4

Puerto Ricanness and Americanness: developing bicultural identity in Quiara Alegría Hudes's memoir "My Broken Language"

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Research interests: U.S. Latinx literature and culture, American crime fiction

Abstract. This article analyses how the notion of language serves as a framework for illustrating the development of bicultural identity in Quiara Alegría Hudes's memoir *My Broken Language* (2021). Firstly, the analysis illustrates Hudes's determination to separate English and Spanish, which leads to her acceptance of her bicultural identity and the development of a unique variety of Spanglish. Secondly, the text investigates how acceptance of biculturalism parallels explorations of Hudes's ethnic culture, with its traumatic history, and how this leads to manifestations of cultural heritage. The article demonstrates that biculturalism as an approach to acculturation varies across generations. While the first generation of Puerto Ricans in the USA tends to retain their indigenous culture and native language, the second generation develops a bicultural identity combining Puerto Ricanness and Americanness.

Keywords: Puerto Ricanness; Americanness; biculturalism; identity; Spanglish.

Introduction

The term "broken language" refers to a non-standard form of language spoken or written by non-native speakers, characterised by inappropriate grammar, syntax, or diction (Nordquist, 2020). The earliest use of the term "broken English" can be traced to the sixteenth century, with Shakespeare's references to the accents of English-speaking foreigners (Lacroix, 2017, p. 63). A prime example of broken language is Spanglish, a linguistic variety resulting from the interaction of English and Spanish and from extended contact between Anglo and Hispanic civilisations (Andrade, 2019, pp. 17–19). Puerto Rican journalist Salvador Tió is said to have coined the term "Spanglish" in the mid-1950s to describe the deterioration of the Spanish language due to contact with English (Dumitrescu, 2012, p. 1). Spanglish develops when people with a certain degree of fluency

Submitted 01 September 2025 / **Accepted** 21 November 2025
Įteikta 2025 09 01 / **Priimta** 2025 11 21

in both English and Spanish switch back and forth between the two languages (Fought, 2010, pp. 44–45). There are different versions of code-switching: e.g., one speaker speaks in one code, and the reply comes in another, or conversation participants code-switch intersententially or even intrasententially. It can be a straightforward Spanish-English blend, where sentences begin in English and end in Spanish, or vice versa. However, it can also be more complex, including words created by the collision of the two original languages. English-Spanish code-switchers tend to focus on phrases in one language that would be difficult to substitute in another or use Spanglish to soften formal language and evoke an emotionally positive response (Martínez-Brawley, Méndez-Bonita Zorita, 2000, pp. 59–60; Usborne, 1997, p. 19). The use of Spanglish raises controversies, being criticised for delaying the acculturation of Hispanics and praised for its dynamic creativity (Stavans, 2008, p. ix).

U.S. Hispanics frequently use Spanglish to express their bicultural identity (Andrade, 2019, p. 23). Biculturalism is likely to emerge in social contexts that emphasise the values of heritage and mainstream cultures. People exposed to two cultures do not necessarily mix them, and the original culture does not need to be replaced by the new one (Schindler et al., 2016, p. 234). As observed by Schwartz and Unger (2010, p. 27), biculturalism endorses the cultural practices characteristic of the individual's ethnic and mainstream cultures and involves "synthesising the heritage and receiving cultures into a unique and personalised blend". Benet-Martínez (et al., 2002, p. 495) describes two types of individual bicultural experience. The first type refers to people who successfully manage to develop a compatible dual cultural identity and tend to switch their behaviour in response to situational cues. Even though they do not perceive the mainstream and ethnic cultures as mutually exclusive, their level of identification with each culture may differ. The second type of bicultural experience relates to individuals who see the discrepancies between mainstream and ethnic cultures as highly conflicting and oppositional. Therefore, those bicultural individuals separate their two cultural identities.

This article analyses how the notion of language serves as a framework for illustrating the development of bicultural identity in Quiara Alegría Hudes's memoir *My Broken Language* (2021). The first section of the analysis shows how a determination to separate Spanish and English transitions into Hudes's acceptance of her dual cultural identity, articulating a harmonious combination of Latinness and Americanness. The text elaborates on the unique variety of Spanish spoken by Puerto Rican islanders, which has evolved into the complexity of Spanglish in the multicultural environment of Philadelphia. The second part of the analysis investigates how acceptance of biculturalism parallels explorations of Hudes's ethnic culture and how traumatic recollections become manifestations of cultural heritage. Subsequently, the collective identity of Puerto Ricans intertwines with spiritual motifs. The meaningful trope of Santería and Hudes's distinctive variety of broken language are interconnected with her playwriting creativity.

Quiara Alegría Hudes is a playwright, essayist, and screenwriter based in New York. She is the author of the scripts for the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *In the Heights,* a Pulitzer-winning play *Water by the Spoonful*, and the animated film *Vivo*. Her essays

have appeared in *The Nation*, *The Cut*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *American Theater Magazine* (Q.A. Hudes, Q. A. Personal Website). The memoir *My Broken Language* follows Hudes's childhood in Philadelphia to her adulthood at Yale and later at Brown University, where she took playwriting workshops under the guidance of a famous playwright, Paula Vogel. The author's bicultural identity derives from having a Jewish American father and a Puerto Rican mother with Taíno heritage. Hudes's maternal side, the Perez family, significantly influences her life and writing. The parents, Luis Hudes and Virgina Sanchez, evoke contrasts regarding their ethnic belonging, cultural background, native language, and attitude toward religion. Hudes's atheist father links religion with the genocide of the Holocaust, while her spiritual mother is a devoted Santería practitioner. In the memoir, the author associates the English language experiences with Luis Hudes and Spanglish's involvement with Virgina Sanchez. The author's name – Quiara Alegría Hudes – with its complex meaning, relates to her dual cultural heritage and the significance of language in her life. The first name – Quiara – derives from the Spanish verb *querer*, meaning "to love," but the author's mother created a conjugation of *querer*, translating as "beloved" (Hudes, 2021, p. 24). Her middle name – Alegría – honours Puerto Rican anthropologist Ricardo Alegría, who described the Taíno ceremonial grounds in his revolutionary publication. The surname – Hudes – comes from her Jewish father, whose ancestry is not further explored in the memoir.

1. Language and identity

According to the report of Moslimani et al., published by Pew Research Centre (2023), Puerto Rican Americans constitute the second-largest Latinx group in the USA, accounting for 9 per cent of the U.S. Hispanic population. The collective identity termed "Puerto Ricanness" is "a mixture of characteristic elements such as customs, traditions, history, and language" (Morris, 1995, p. 80). Nieves-Squires links the concept of Puerto Rican identity with three types of linguistic performance: islanders who speak only Spanish, Nuyoricans who speak only English, and those who can speak both languages (1998, p. 42). Nonetheless, mainland-based Puerto Ricans usually have limited Spanish skills, particularly among the U.S.-born generation (Kerkhof, 2001, p. 261).

Puerto Ricans' attachment to Spanish parallels a broader tendency among ethnic minorities in the United States to preserve their native languages. The memoir elaborates on the unique linguistic variety of Spanish spoken by Puerto Ricans, denoting a fusion of colonial Spanish with the languages of indigenous Taínos, speaking "various Arawakan languages and dialects" (Hudes, 2021, p. 237) and enslaved Africans, using "Yoruba, Igbo, and other West African languages" (Hudes, 2021, p. 238). The narration frequently shifts between Puerto Rico and the multicultural landscape of West Philadelphia, with residents descended from Asian, African, and Latin American countries. The first-generation representatives of minority populations, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Ethiopians, and Puerto Ricans, retain their vernacular languages. However, the second-generation immigrants demonstrate a higher acculturation into the U.S. mainstream by using mainly

English: "We all spoke English, unlike our parents, who all spoke different languages from one another" (Hudes, 2021, p. 3). As Garrett observes, language plays a prime role in identity construction in multilingual contexts, and "a speaker's use of particular linguistic resources in a particular context" is meaningful to distinguish him/herself from others (2007, p. 234). U.S. Hispanics who choose to speak Spanish rather than English demonstrate their belonging to Latinidad.

The broken language of the Perez family reflects the diverse ethnicities of its members, who have never exhibited the typical immigrant tendency to form endogamous marriages but have partnered with "Afro Boricua, African American, and white men alike" (Hudes, 2021, p. 240). The multicultural neighbourhood further shaped the hybrid language of the Perez when "Black Philly's dynamic speech patterns folded into the Perez tongue" (Hudes, 2021, p. 241). The young members of the family were raised as bilinguals due to constant exposure to Spanish and English at "English-first kindergarten and Spanish-second oral histories and Sunday chatter" (Hudes, 2021, p. 241). Therefore, the language of the Perez family manifested the unique complexities of Spanglish: "Spanglish's ever-shifting syntax and double-rich sonority became the common tongue of Perez generations" (Hudes, 2021, p. 241). As O'Connor observed, the positive aspect of Spanglish is its potential to pan-ethnically unite diverse populations from Anglo and Hispanic cultures (1992, p. 8).

The memoir links the Spanglish-speaking Latinx with otherness confined within the borders of *el barrio*. The trip to the amusement and water park – *The Six Flags* – brings Hudes's Spanglish-speaking family to the proximity of the English-speaking visitors, as if "insiders and outsiders traversed blocks together" (Hudes, 2021, p. 58), creating the commonality between the U.S. Latinx and other representatives of American society. The experience at *The Six Flags* makes Hudes feel like "being of two cultures" (Hudes, 2021, p. 58) and marks the moment she acknowledges her bicultural identity. She realises that residential segregation confines the Afro-Latino population within the borders of the ethnic ghetto where "motions and commerce were strictly internal" (Hudes, 2021, p. 58). Residential segregation isolates the Latinx from the American mainstream population and stigmatises them with a "scarlet letter" (Hudes, 2021, p. 58) , corresponding with their otherness. As stated by Bottia in her report on "Residential Segregation and Immigrants' Outcomes," residential segregation causes immigrant children to be "isolated by ethnicity, poverty, and language" (2019, p. 20).

Hudes changes her view of Philadelphia's ethnic composition when she enrols at Central High School. Central is known for its high academic standards and is popular among students from all the city's districts; therefore, students should reflect the city's ethnically diverse population. However, surprisingly for Quiara, the racial landscape evokes a black-and-white dualism. At the same time, the Hispanics and Asians represent ethnic otherness: "It was a competitive school with four-digit enrollment whose milieu was decidedly African American and white. US few Latinos and a smattering of Asians contributed to the "other" portion of the pie chart" (2021, pp. 71–72). Hudes's experience of residential segregation and living in proximity to people of colour misleads her conceptualisation of the city's ethnic diversity.

The black-white binary of *el barrio* in Philadelphia intrinsically interconnects with the issue of shaping one's identity through language. Americans tend to identify individuals by phenotypic appearance, which marks racial belonging. Virginia's skin tone is darker than Quiara's; thus, the mother's Latinx background juxtapositions with her daughter's whiteness. When school children ask Hudes, "'What are you?'" (Hudes, 2021, p. 25), she responds, "'I'm half English, half Spanish'", suggesting she is not made "of flesh and blood but language" (Hudes, 2021, p. 25). As observed by Flores and Jiménez Romàn, Afro-Latinx in the USA exhibit "triple consciousness" due to their belonging to Hispanic, Black, and American communities simultaneously (2009, p. 319). The trifold identity of the U.S. Afro-Latinx facilitates the construction of pan-ethnic identities among groups that were previously differentiated by distinct identities. Nonetheless, despite bearing phenotypical resemblance to African Americans, the U.S. Afro-Caribbeans frequently do not accept the pan-ethnic label and construct their Latinness as separate from Blackness (Nieves-Squires, 1998, p. 43). Quiara's mom, Virginia, finds it difficult to distinguish between Black Puerto Rican girls and Black non-Latinas, who identify their gang membership according to ethnic belonging: "In Arecibo, Black girls spoke Spanish, and were Boricua same as mom. But in Nuevayol, she learned, there were Black people beyond Puerto Ricans, and the gangs signalled that separation." (Hudes, 2021, p. 151). The memoir emphasises that the ability to speak Spanish becomes the primary means of distinguishing African Americans from U.S. Afro-Latinx.

In Hudes's conceptualisation, Spanish serves to distinguish her Puerto Rican kin, such as "mis primas y tias" (2021, p. 26), from English-speaking white Americans. Moving into a "monolingual, pale world" (Hudes, 2021, p. 23), the town of Malvern involves separation from an extended family in Philadelphia. She perceives the linguistic uniformity of her new town as "creepy, zombie-esque" (Hudes, 2021, p. 23) and worries that her mother's broken language transcends into her otherness. "My Ingles was as good as the next Malvernite's but mom's wasn't, and I sensed trouble ahead" (Hudes, 2021, p. 23). Although Virgina Sanchez speaks Spanish, she never does it in her husband's presence: "Whenever dad was in earshot, mom kept to English" (Hudes, 2021, p. 10). The father's whiteness excludes Spanish, making it "reserved for backyard rituals" (Hudes, 2021, p. 31). Additionally, the Perez family from Philadelphia never visits them in Malvern, and the only guests who come are "English only" (Hudes, 2021, p. 26). By the immediate connection of the white neighbours to the language they speak, Hudes demonstrates that Spanish is the primary means by which her Latinx family identifies. The ethnic ghetto in Philadelphia becomes the Spanish-speaking space where "at Abuela's or Titi Ginny's, Spanish was common as a can opener in a kitchen" and the town of Malvern confines Spanish to "an outdoor-only language, a mom-and-me secret" (Hudes, 2021, p. 10). Hudes develops her bicultural identity by preserving the Hispanic language in the Anglo-American mainstream.

Travelling between Malvern and Philadelphia symbolises the separation between English- and Spanish-language spaces. After her parents' divorce, Quiara moves back in with her mother in Philadelphia and takes the train to visit her father in Malvern. Hudes narrates that during those journeys, she feels like an "unattended nine-year-old commuter"

(Hudes, 2021, p. 31), implying the obligation to visit Luis Hudes rather than father-daughter closeness. The train journeys evoke a migratory experience when she writes, "I was a migrant in my own life" (Hudes, 2021, p. 30). The distance between her hometown and Malvern parallels Hudes's acknowledgement of her linguistic disparity, which she expresses in words: "an hourlong gulf stretched between English me and Spanish me" (Hudes, 2021, p. 31). The duality of linguistic spaces manifests the cultural hybridity of the diasporic Puertorriqueña, shifting between Latinidad and whiteness.

The author of the memoir shows a determination to keep her cultural heritage separate from the American mainstream. Moreover, she wishes her Latinx mother had acculturated to a greater extent to the Anglo-American environment: "For years I had felt aggrieved by mom's Afro Rican path, by her aggressive refusal to assimilate. For years I had wished she would worship a little bit whiter" (Hudes, 2021, p. 160). Virginia's Hispanic accent on the phone indicates her and Quiara's Latinx identity and signifies their otherness, as expressed by Hudes's friends: "I thought you were white, but your mom sounds pure Spanish Harlem" (Hudes, 2021, p. 179). The author believes that her friends from Yale had achieved upward mobility because English was "a generations-old mastery in their homes" that shaped "their conceptual reality" (Hudes, 2021, p. 236). Her conceptualisation of social advancement asserts diminishing otherness by replacing Spanish with English in the domestic space. Hudes exemplifies the observations of Schindler et al., who claim that some bicultural individuals find their ethnic and mainstream cultures "oppositional and contradictory" (2016, p. 234).

Puerto Rican culture with Spanish as a prime characteristic is preserved in the Perez family through matrilineal lines because only women are the permanent members of their family: "In Perez homes throughout Philly, womanhood was rampant. Girls, cousins, tías, abuelas, primas, hermanas, madrinas." (Hudes, 2021, p. 105). The concept of *marianismo* reflects the attributes of the Virgin Mary and refers to Latinx women's prime identification as mothers who sacrifice for the sake of their children (García-Leeds, Schneider, 2017, p. 314) despite being abandoned by men: "Most men – Boricua, white, or African American – fathered a kid or three, then took off, leaving the Perez Women to their insular bubble." (Hudes, 2021, pp. 106–107). Hispanic females demonstrate a strong commitment to the family, defined as *familismo*, which involves prioritizing "family cohesiveness" over individual needs (Nolasco, 2022, p. 7).

The central figure overseeing the family's integrity is a grandmother, who denotes permanence: "None of us knew Abuela's age. Far back as I recall, she was ancient" (Hudes, 2021, p. 63). Quiara describes her grandmother as the person holding "una cuchara de cosine" (Hudes, 2021, p. 63) – a soup spoon – representing the role of the meals consumed together that foster the family's integrity. Quiara emphasises the role of the grandmother in transmitting the Spanish language in the family: "But I still spent weekends and after-schools at Abuela's, where Spanish surfed on bus fumes – crashing on every corner and through open windows" (Hudes, 2021, p. 32). Subsequently, the grandmother becomes an "oral historian" (Hudes, 2021, p. 143) who transmits ethnic heritage to her granddaughter through cooking and storytelling. Quiara asks her grandma for cooking

lessons, an excuse for "one-on-one time, a way to hear her stories" (Hudes, 2021, p. 143). Hudes acknowledges her grandmother's familiarity with the family history when she narrates: "When I touched Abuela's hand, I touched ten thousand yesterdays" (Hudes, 2021, p. 144). The transmission of knowledge from the older generation demonstrates respect for the Caribbean legacy.

After the childhood years of reinforcing Virginia's outsider status through constant corrections of her pronunciation, Quiara finally acknowledges that repeated rejections of "incorrect mother tongue" constituted her "deepest personal failing" (Hudes, 2021, p. 242). By accepting Virginia's broken English, Hudes expresses her bicultural identity, combining English-speaking Americana with Spanglish-speaking Puertorriqueña. She manifests her in-betweenness through the juxtaposition of contrasting terms: "the inflictor and the inflicted" and "The mother tongue robber and the mother tongue holder" (Hudes, 2021, p. 241).

Through directly addressing her mother in the memoir and calling her a "language genius" (Hudes, 2021, p. 181), Hudes praises the creative potential of Spanglish: "Mom, if you ever read this book (and make it this far without disowning me), I ask you one favor: break this English language today and tomorrow and the day after and bestow it new life with each breaking" (Hudes, 2021, p. 181). Finally, Hudes understands that Virginia's Spanglish linguistic expressiveness is a vital part of her mother's identity. Quiara acknowledges that her feeling of in-betweenness stems from her inability to express herself in familiar languages, so she begins "searching for better languages" (Hudes, 2021, p. 104) that can express her hybrid identity.

2. Ethnic heritage and identity

The concept of ethnicity as a collective identity assumes "a common history and origin as well as shared traditions," which define a culture as "different from (all) others" (Antweiler, 2015, p. 27). Hudes's acceptance of her bicultural identity parallels the explorations of her ethnic heritage and the traumatic events in her family history. According to Krondorfer (2016, p. 92), the effect of trauma can "transcend individual lifespans and continue on as subterranean anxieties" in subsequent generations

The phenomenon of the apparent transmission of traumatic patterns and memories from a trauma survivor to their descendants is called intergenerational trauma. Individuals showing symptoms of intergenerational trauma exhibit emotional and psychological consequences of the distressing events their ancestors experienced (Balaev, 2008, p. 154).

The story of the Perez family evokes intergenerational trauma of the Puerto Rican population, which is passed on through the process of collective remembering. The traumatic events occurring in the lives of Boricuas are transferred through subsequent generations and become a source of empowerment and resilience for their descendants. Virginia explains to Quiara the legacy of genocide that reoccurs within different generations of her Puerto Rican American family: "*You are a child of three catastrophes. You are born of three holocausts. The Native. The African. And the Jewish. You are a descendent of the survivors. It's in your blood. The resilience. The deep memory and experience of survival*"

(Hudes, 2021, p. 241). Virginia's words suggest that trauma survivors gain strength to endure dramatic events through collective remembering.

The theme of trauma also relates to the abusive practice of female sterilisation in Virginia's hometown, Arecibo, where poor Puerto Rican women received vouchers for cash and services in exchange for "cutting-edge birth control" (Hudes, 2021, p. 45). The memoir refers to coercive sterilisation programs implemented as part of the health reform in 1937, when the widespread violations of informed consent led to numerous women being misled and unknowingly sterilised (Long, 2025). Quiara wonders if she carries "sterilization abuse in cellular memory" (Hudes, 2021, p. 51), referring directly to Latinas' intergenerational trauma. Virginia connects sterilisation abuse with collective trauma, stating that "Health and sickness were shared by the collective, not siphoned individually" (Hudes, 2021, p. 51). Quiara believes that her "inherited trauma" (Hudes, 2021, p. 241) is the duty to respect Virginia's broken language, which stigmatises her with otherness. Despite acknowledging the benefits of acculturation, Hudes cannot reject her heritage, encoded in her identity through "epigenetic memory" (Hudes, 2021, p. 241).

Quiara's Jewish culture appears through her father's silenced trauma of the Holocaust. The memoir's portrayal of Luis Hudes is inconsistent in his self-identification with his ethnic heritage and spirituality. On the one hand, he is a "manicured Americana" (Hudes, 2021, p. 31) and an atheist, believing that "Religion is the root of all evil." (Hudes, 2021, p. 19). On the other hand, he is "Dad the mystic" (Hudes, 2021, p. 22), deeply attached to the earth, his farm, and "sun, air, water, moon" (Hudes, 2021, p. 12). Luis is traumatised by the Jewish legacy of the Holocaust, and his collective trauma manifests itself as an "unvoiced depression" (Hudes, 2021, p. 73). Quiara compares her father to Willy Lowman, the suicidal character from Arthur Miller's novel *Death of a Salesman*: "Willy Loman and dad. American archetypes. A crisis of inconsequence" (Hudes, 2021, p. 73).

While Quiara's traumatic family history relates to both aspects of her bicultural identity, spirituality mainly refers to Puerto Rican culture. Jewish ethnicity is linked with the genocide of the Holocaust, and this issue is not further explored, contrary to Puerto Ricanness, which strongly intertwines with spiritual motifs. Puerto Ricans are known for syncretic religious beliefs, combining Catholicism with Santería rituals, which becomes a meaningful trope of the book, illustrating Quiara's evolving perspective on otherness. Santería is a syncretic religion rooted in the practices of the Yoruba people, brought to the Caribbean from West Africa. Worshipping orishas, the divine spirits ruling over the forces of nature, is the central element of Santería practices (Beyer, 2017). Increasingly, the term "Santería" is being rejected for its emphasis on Catholic elements and replaced with the Afro-Caribbean term "La Regla de Lukumí" (Lavery, 2021, pp. 1–2). At first, Hudes perceives spiritual Santería practices as a combination of dance and possession, which should be separated from her English-language life space: "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" (Hudes, 2021, p. 98). Virginia, a recognised Santera and shaman, teaches Hudes about the spiritual legacy of a Taína-Lukumí-Boricua. The mother places the statue of Eleguá on a Santerían altar in the living room and performs

ceremonies with a Batá drum, embodying the voice of an orisha. The deity Elegua is believed to open doorways to opportunity; he is also known as the ruler of crossroads, protecting homes and controlling people's destinies (Canizares, 1999, p. 30).

The altar exemplifies a heritage display that evokes misunderstanding among residents and highlights the family's cultural exotism. Hudes expresses her embarrassment over her family's otherness: "I yearned for a home that required no explanation, for a Western frame so I might see *that stuff* like my white friends saw it" (Hudes, 2021, p. 99). Ashamed by her mother's spiritual practices, Hudes writes: "So I wanted to take my dad's side, join his disavowal of any god, his assertion that religion was the root of all evil" (Hudes, 2021, p. 100). Nonetheless, the initial rejection of ethnic spirituality gradually transcends into an understanding of Santería practices. Virginia introduces her daughter to Santería through English-language books: *Four New World Yoruba Rituals* by John Mason and *The Way of the Orisa* by Philip John Neimark. Then, the mother gifts Quiara the Spanish-language advanced manual *Ofrenda a los Orichas* and a Spanish-English dictionary to comprehend the book's specialist terminology. Hudes finally understands the deep meanings behind Santería and accepts its cultural exotism. Virginia's support for Quiara's interest in Santería confirms the thesis of Schwarts and Unger, who claim that parents' willingness to socialise their children with the heritage culture is crucial to developing their dual cultural identity (2010, p. 28).

Incorporating Santería and music into Hudes's playwriting offers her a way to process her cultural confusion. She chose music as her major at Yale University because this field of study offered her the feeling of permanence: "Music was the only language I'd chosen. It offered safe harbour to feel confused, depressed, lonely, alive" (Hudes, 2021, p. 243). Additionally, the author's language has been enriched by the specialist terminology of the Lukumí ceremonies, giving her "access to a vocabulary of power outside the language of the everyday" (Hudes, 2021, p. 265). Therefore, Quiara's school application combines two fields of her interests – music and Santería – and includes her musical centred on a Lukumí shaman. Realising that the university canon excludes Puerto Rican music, Quiara decides to broaden her knowledge about the cultural pillars of Latinx heritage: "Héctor Lavone, Ruben Blades, Mongo Santamaria, Celia Cruz" (Hudes, 2021, p. 217). She conducts thorough research on Puerto Rican music and plans to "disassemble those songs like a vintage engine, lay all the parts on my front lawn, reassemble it from scratch. To master the mechanics, to get at the crux of my hometown tunes" (Hudes, 2021, p. 217). While a sophomore, Quiara writes a salsa musical about Afro-Caribbean characters and their Lukumí pathways. The combination of language, Santería, and music manifests her ethnic heritage and serves as an effective tool for Hudes's creativity in playwriting.

Quiara's experimentation with writing evolves into a style of "broken Spanish" (Hudes, 2021, p. 273), and this unique literary genre gets the unexpected approval of Quiara's university professor and a renowned playwright, Paula Vogel. When Hudes applies for Vogel's program, she has to describe the process of writing her text, which includes "blunt exclamatory dialogue inspired by Yoruba incantations" (Hudes, 2021, p. 264). Quiara acknowledges that the complexity of her broken language derives from the inclusion of

the specific Santería vocabulary: "My first language was English, my second Spanglish, my third Spanish, and my fourth a bookish, rudimentary Santería – Lukumí" (Hudes, 2021, p. 245). Hudes's linguistic expressiveness gives voice to the English-, Spanish-, and Spanglish-language familial stories. She explores the in-betweenness in the themes of searching for belonging, facing inequality, and discovering the importance of storytelling. Her integration of bicultural identity exemplifies what *The Oxford Review* calls "a sense of belonging and coherence across different cultural contexts". Surprisingly for Quiara, Vogel contradicts the notion that a playwright needs to be loyal to standard English: "Language that aims toward perfection, she told me, is a lie. Shakespeare knew this, she said, and broke English until its dictionaries grew by a thousand entries" (Hudes, 2021, p. 275). When Vogel encourages Hudes to write in broken language, she explicitly calls her linguistic variety "broken Spanish" (Hudes, 2021, p. 273), not "broken English," suggesting that Quiara's creativity stems from ethnic, not mainstream background. The professor's support exemplifies a contemporary tendency to encourage ethnic minorities to retain their heritage.

Conclusion

The memoir traces the history of Quiara Hudes's family and presents the heritage of Puerto Rico with its traumatic history and colonial past. The narration frequently shifts between past events on the island and the contemporary Philadelphia setting, underscoring the vital impact of Puerto Rico's history on present-day Boricuas. The collective identity of Puerto Ricanness, encompassing a distinctive version of Spanish, traumatic history, and spirituality, is a vital expression of pan-ethnicity for islanders and mainland Puerto Ricans. The memoir demonstrates that one of the reasons why Puerto Rican Americans retain their ethnic culture is the intergenerational trauma of colonialism, which remains in their collective memory. Although mainland Puerto Ricans tend to acculturate to the U.S. mainstream, this process varies across generations. Virginia Sanches represents the first generation of Puerto Ricans in the USA and is deeply attached to her native language and indigenous culture. Quiara Alegría Hudes belongs to the second generation of Puerto Rican Americans and develops a bicultural identity that combines Puerto Rican and American identities.

Schindler et al. observe that bicultural individuals shift their cultural identification toward their ancestral heritage. Bilingual speakers of Spanglish do not use both languages on equal terms; one language usually prevails over the other, with Spanish usually dominant (2016, p. 233). From her early years, Hudes communicates with her mother and grandmother in a hybrid Spanish-English language, switching between the two simultaneously. In the non-domestic space, she speaks English and occasionally inserts Spanish-language terms into her conversations. Repeated attempts to exclude Spanish from the English-speaking American mainstream denote a determination to separate brownness from whiteness. While searching for "better languages," Hudes realises the creative potential of her broken language. Gradually, she comes to accept Spanglish as

an inherent part of her bicultural identity, articulating a harmonious blend of Latinness and Americanness.

The memoir reflects the recent trend of popularising Spanglish, which results from the growing number of Hispanics in the USA. Languages typically develop through oral discourse, and Spanglish has been mainly considered an oral language, not used in official contexts, such as job interviews. Quiara Alegría Hudes's memoir *My Broken Language* incorporates Spanglish into formal spaces of American culture.

Source

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