

Navigating Culture Crossroads And Language Dynamics In Julia Alvarez's *How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*

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Abstract

In her autobiographical book, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* Latin American writer Julia Alvarez explores the themes of language and cultural barrier. The story follows the lives of Garcia sisters as they suffer for adapting new language and culture while migrating from Dominican Republic to United States. This shift leads not only geographical but emotional struggle while the characters in the novel caught themselves in the web of misunderstandings and conflicts that underscore the difficulties of immigrant experiences. This novel clearly depicts the complexities of holding one's cultural root and blending into new society, providing how language and cultural shifts, affects individual and familial connection. Alvarez skillfully highlights the challenges faced by Garcia sisters while adapting new environment while holding their cultural heritage and revealing the complex nature of their identities between two distinct worlds. Through the lens of language, the novel displays the complexities of identities and intricacies of communication in various landscapes, portraying the sister's journey.

Key words: Garcia Girls, Language, Immigrant, Culture and Navigation.

Julia Alvarez, an American poet and novelist was born on 27th March 1950 in New York. Alvarez family transpose to their homeland Dominican Republic and lived there until her parents becomes a part of movement to vanquish Trujillo, the dictator and Dominican Military leader who ruled the island from 1930-1961. In order to avoid being incarceration, due to her father's failed attempt to overthrow the Island dictator, Alvarez family had move from the Island to United States when she was just ten years old.

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent, a first novel of Julia Alvarez tracks the lives of the Garcia sisters-Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofia. They migrated from their native Dominican Republic to United States. This novel structured in reverse chronological order, starts with their encounters in U.S. and delves their earlier lives in Dominican Republic.

The narratives navigates the complexities of identity, cultural assimilation, and difficulties of exploring two different worlds. As the Garcia sisters try to maintain a balance between Dominican heritage and their new American lifestyle as they struggle to adapt new language, culture and society.

Throughout the novel, the effects of political turmoil, familial agitation, and generational conflict in the Dominican Republic are intertwined. Through the distinct perspectives of each Garcia sisters, the readers witnesses the transformations and challenges faced by their Garcia family.

The title *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, reflects the journey of diffusing aspects of their cultural identity, depicting through various narratives, struggles, and self-reflecting moments. The novel delves into the lavishing exploration of difficulties, that evolves when an individual navigate the crossroads of language, culture and personal identity.

In the novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, language barrier serves as a prominent theme, in which the Garcia family struggles to adapt new culture. Having being raised in Dominican Republic, the sisters faced difficulties with English when they come to the United States. This obstacle is evident when ingenious details are lost in translation, which may leads to misunderstanding and sense of alienation. The novel delves into the complexities of assimilation and influence of linguistic challenges on the struggle with language which in relation to the characters identity.

Every individuals have the opportunity to learn another additional language other than their first language, whether in personal interest or necessity. However, it is difficult to erase ones mother tongue which acquired from birth. In her article, "*How language Molds Our Thoughts*, Lera Boroditsky proves that how language profoundly impact our minds:... verbal activities direct every aspects of cognition, subconsciously shaping us from the fundamental thinking and perception to complex ideas and crucial decision in life" (Boroditsky 143). In this novel, Alvarez encounters the problems faced by the protagonist, Yolanda and her sisters who were compelled to flee from the nation Dominican Republic and relocate to United States. The girls are fluent in Spanish, their first language and are now they are eager to learn English, in United States. This research paper delves into the topics of linguistic confusion, the word used by the characters, the difficulties of using words and language, and the impact of culture on individual identity.

The novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, explores the challenges of communication encountered by Garcia family, while they were adjusting to live in United States. A case in point that sister's struggle with mastering English,

which often results lots of misunderstanding and sense of isolation. The complexity of linguistic challenges is poignantly shows through the characters, who faces challenges to explore a new linguistic landscape and how they create impact on their connections and fitting to society.

During the beginning stage of relocation to the United States, the Garcia sisters experiences difficulties with learning English, a typical hurdle for new arrivals. As time passes, after they are expert in English, they gradually started to float away from their native language, Spanish. The author Julia Alvarez typically illustrates this incident through the character, Yolanda. The shifting moment occurs when the Garcia family goes back to their homeland for a vacation, and it becomes vivid to family that the girls have no longer speak Spanish fluently. Yolanda's interest about the meaning of the word "Antojo", which evident when her aunt Tia Carmen asks "if they have any little Antojo's". The term "Antojo" is deeply grained in Dominican culture, representing the intense desire or cravings, often associated with pregnancy. This interaction underscores the linguistic and cultural complexities woven into the anecdotes, emphasizing the loss of their first language Spanish, which Yolanda forgotten after years of abroad, United States.

Yolanda's linguistic perplexity symbolizes the metaphor for the complex nature of identity in a multicultural environment. During the journey to the foothills, Yolanda came across a car accident, prompting a moment of hesitation as she whether to ask help in Spanish or English. This event make Yolanda to remember a poet she met at her cousin, Lucinda's party who pondered, "In the throes of strong feelings, one tend to return to their mother tongue." This reflection leads Yolanda to question her which language she loves truly.

The controversy regarding names between Carla and Yolanda occurs when Sandra, their sister calls Yolanda by her nickname, 'Yo,' but Carla object and prefers to use her full name. This makes Carla enraged because Yolanda has experienced numerous mispronunciations of her various nicknames. Even though 'Yo' is a miniature of Yolanda's name in Spanish, which is often mistakenly misconstrued as "Joe" in English and further transformed into "toy," "yoyo," and "joey." These mispronunciations greatly affects her life, especially in her relationship with John. Yolanda's life is complicated by falter of her name, which makes her unsure about her name and romance. Her partner, who is proficient in only one language, becomes irritated. Names have various meaning in different languages, as Doris Sommer noted to Jacques Derrida. Derrida believes that fluent in multiple language is about finding an ideal way to express one self, a unique language or poem. Sommer disputes this, saying bilinguals may use different language to complete missing information, and the mixing of language can be deliberate, creating a unique effect.

The novel explores Yolanda's difficulties of self-expression and internal connection, delving into how these issues impact to the erosion of her relationship with John. As the lovers lying in bed one fine evening, engaging an amorous play, John lovingly questions, "Are You a Little squirrel?" this cause Yolanda to urge John to find a word that rhymes with her name, because 'squirrel' does not. John in light-hearted manner asks "joe-lan-dah" wondering about the potential rhymes. Then Yolanda herself prefers some rhyming words like 'doe,' 'roe,' and 'buffalo.' It shows Yolanda's self-belonging with her name which she consider it an emotional connection. She thinks changing her names pronunciation changes her by both physically and mentally.

Yolanda's uneasiness and itchiness when she hears the word "love" reflects her emotional struggle of being close to someone. Throughout the anecdotes, Yolanda struggle with the significant of cultural supplant and the hurdles of adapting to a new language and diverse. When some words reaching her ears, it evokes a sense of irritation which she finds difficult to identify the word. On the occasion when John gives her a bunch of blue flowers, Irises-her favorite, she smells them and says "thank you, love" in a grateful manner. On the moment she says 'love,' her hands starts irritating and itching sensation, which lead her to realize that 'love' is the word is the reason for her uneasiness. Her response to the word 'love' hints an awkwardness towards emotional openness it needs. Yolanda's journey includes exploring the difficulties of relationship, identity, and communication, and her response to the certain words or concepts provide an insight into her emotional struggle and the effects of her cultural adjustment.

The concept of "splitting words" can be seen as symbolizing the inner conflicts and identity predicament that faced by the protagonist Yolanda. While adapting to a new linguist and culture, she begins to feel dividing into her. The language and cultural transformation engender a division between her Dominican heritage and American life. When Yolanda decides to leave her husband, she pens her note that says, "I'm going to stay with my folks until my head-slash-heart clear." Which means she is going to stay with her parents till she can able to think clearly and to heal internally. Then, she sends a message to read, "I need some space, some time, till my head-slash-heart-slash-soul." Which means she needs some time and space till she sort out her thoughts and emotions. As she learn the handwriting analysis, Yolanda used to write in slanted manner and this slanting style indicates "self-assurance", means confident. However, she consider that she don't want to divide herself into three, through dividing into the word "Yo", admitting that dividing the words is like spitting herself. This understanding is further strengthen when she uncover a list made by her to her spouse, John, dividing her thoughts and feelings. She finds a list to her husband John, where she bifurcates her statements, "for-and-against-slash-joe-slash-wife." The initial 'for' is means 'smart,' and 'against' is means 'too much for her own benefit,' the second 'for' is means 'curiosity,' and 'against' is means 'insane,' which concludes by question mark, indication a stage of unpredictable. This split is not merely physical but also emotional, create an impact on Yolanda's perspective on self-belonging. The novel explores how linguistic and cultural adjustment influence one's identity, on weaving a complex

narration about the blending of assimilation, the search for belonging and the displacement of individual and family relationships.

The idea that literature operates as a mysterious code that implies that novel contains profound levels of consequences, symbolism, and cultural allusions that go beyond the superficial anecdotes. Julia Alvarez uses literature as a vehicle to explore the complex themes, analyze identity, and examine the difficulties of adjusting culture. Yolanda's professor validates the concepts that literature resembles the secret code, which she unweave by giving the academic task to the class students with writing a critique to his love poem. When Yolanda doing her assignment, she is intermitted by a knock on the door from Rudy, one of the classmate of Yolanda, who once borrowed pencil from her. Rudy invites Yolanda for lunch and she responds with an uncertain word "sometime," indicating a feeling of hopelessness. Here, the word sometime resembles hopelessness.

On the occasion when Rudy unable to complete his task of criticizing poems, seeks help from Yolanda who helps him on doing it. On doing this, Rudy design "pornographic poem," which means a smutty poem crafted with double meaning. In order to screen his flirting, he style his poem in cloak method which hides its meaning. In the final line of the poem, "the arrival of the spring upon the boughs," implies that the season spring is ejaculated green leaves to the tress, while the fresh crocuses are standing stiff on the grass, indicating they are aroused.

Yolanda often mention Rudy's eyes as "bedroom eyes", a colloquial term which is used to describe seductive or flirtatious look due to their ironic expression of romance. On the attempt of flirting, he uses the word "bed" which holds a hidden meaning, often linked to "ovary," 'vagina,' and "cervix," that already running into her mind.

In the chapter titled "Trespass," the author Julia Alvarez describes an incident in which Carla, an oldest daughter of the Garcia family, misunderstands the term "Trespass." Once Carla and her mother encounters a sign on the fence of a vacant land of their neighborhood that says "PRIVATE, NO TRESPASSING," Carla don't recognize the symbol because she was only heard the word 'trespass' in the context of Lord's prayer, which means people ask forgiveness for their sins and wrong doing. Carla feels hilarity in this confusion, makes her to laugh at that sign. Recognizing Carla's perplexity, her mother clarifies that the words from English linguist have multiple meaning. In this context, "Trespass" refers to unauthorized entry, indicating that the property belongs to someone, that is not for public use and it requires permission to enter. These are the proofs that the author Julia Alvarez explores not only the language difference, but also meaning of the words can be vary through pronunciation which may leads to relationship breakdowns and words used in literature, which have hidden meaning and one should be more careful while using words, literature and language.

In "*How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, cultural obstacles are vividly depicts the struggle of Garcia Family while adapting the transition from their life in Dominican heritage to United States. An instance is the generational conflict between their parents, who are deeply rooted in their cultural customs, and the daughters who encounter the challenges in blending their roots in American life. The cultural shift is evident in the confusion, miscommunication, and the struggling through values as the family tries to adjust and explore their identity in a various cultural context.

The immigrant experiences of Garcia family in the United States are associated to the sense of being "Second-hand stuff." This term exhibit their feeling of displacement and the difficulties they encounter in adapting to a various culture. This was verified when the family migrated to the States, as the girls first felt like second-hand stuffs while, residing in the rented house in one redneck Catholic neighborhood, watching an impairment black and white TV. They don't believe that they ever had the top choice in the United States.

Sandra, one of the sisters of Garcia family, and her adaptation of using sanitary napkins symbolizes the cultural shift and difficulties of Garcia sisters experienced when adjusting to American lifestyle. The way she uses the sanitary napkins reflects the larger themes of her cultural adjustment, where their everyday practices are influenced by the new cultural environment. At the school in United School, a few girls introduce Sandra to use sanitary tampons, which her mother found out and consider it as forbidden in the Dominican Republic, as they were using cloth napkins in their Island. This is evidently straight forward action to convey the shift in cultural tradition and a deviation from conventional norms.

The novel explores how people, particularly immigrants, balancing and adjusting into new culture while maintaining their own cultural heritage. At the preparatory school, the girls socialize with "Right-Americans," which means proper Americans. The phrase "Right-Americans" implies the dominant culture, indicating the sisters attempt to blend into the broader American culture, which often involves adopting popular customs and behaviors. They integrate seamlessly, each bringing their own assumptions and gaps in communication. They consider that the foreign students are perceived as rich, and arriving with the recommendation of dictators and government officials. The phrase "Right-Americans" also represents their efforts to integrate socially and professionally. The phrase "Mami's signature" is consider as the commitment to sister's heritage which mirrors and offer a sense of continuity and relationship between the cultural transformations they go through. The sister's learn to mimic their mother's signature, allowing them to get their independence to move where they want. They find out that they can engage in kissing without a risk of getting pregnant. The sisters enjoy their American teenager life. They acquire the ability to adapt various things. Their parents are worry that their daughters are being losing to America. Here, although the sisters are adopting a basic life of American girls, their traditional mother think that as an offense and want to get back their daughter to Island things. She can't able to accept the cultural change that her daughter undergoes.

The desire of Garcia parents for their daughter to marry a man from their own cultural background, symbolizes their allegiance to uphold and encourage their Dominican heritage. By marrying within their own cultivates, the Garcia family vindicate a strong bond between their homeland, representing their roots and maintaining cultural customs to pass on the further generations. Therefore, their further procedure is to relocate in their Island on summer. In order to keeping their relation with their homeland, the sisters are aspire to marry a man from their Dominican heritage, because as per their parents through marrying from their roots their future grandchildren will speak English as well as Spanish without lose touch with their mother tongue. But the Garcia sister's vision on their Island, is a place of where they can get suntan easily, resembles that the regional climate of Dominican Republic. They want to wander without any protection, as they representing the lives and values of American customs they are adopted. The term "suntan" is alluding that their hot climate of their tropical region and how their country commonly connected with suntan. However, their mother consider that the summer is family time where they spent peaceful vacation. This shows although they live in America, they want to spend their valuable time in their native country. Due to the opinion of the family as a decisive support system, which plays an important role in maintaining a strong family foundation and cultural unity. They spend their time hanging out with their cousins, while their mother and father suggest, "Perhaps what you require some time at home to help yourself to get back."

Sofia, one of the Garcia sister, after her life transforming encounter to the Caribbean Island is dubbed an acronym S.A.P., which stands for 'Sexual Animal power.' On her sister's arrived, they gave her a pet-name as a playful manner, but in tending to describe the changes they detect in Sofia's behavior and truculent following her time on the Island, Once when Sofia, stays on Island for Christmas during her semester vacation. The Garcia's mother comments that Sofia is elegantly exploring her life in Island, participating in shorthand and typing class. Remaining Garcia girls fear about that if their father discover this, he may send the girls to the Island and make them to abandon their school course. However, Sofia has changed significantly, she now resembles like Australian milkmaid, they girls think. Sofia, once who used to avoid wearing makeup and grooming herself, is now represents as S.A.P., Sexual Animal Power, they all murmurs. The Garcia sisters uses this nickname as a hilarious and daring way to tease Sofia in a playful manner because of the changes they notice on her. It captures the core of her changing behavior, particularly in the realm of romance and sexual intimacy. The sisters are scared if their s transform into a third world girl who is traditional, uneducated, and sexually aggrieve. Here, their mother description of Sofia after she settled in Island, resembles her wish of being all other girls also want to settle in Island to preserve their cultural heritage. But the other sister's point of view is totally different from their mother, because they saw their own sister in different sight.

However, women rights in Dominican Republic still remains skepticism. Sofia encounters a sense of freedom and liberation during her time on Island. The novel explores whether this recent freedom is truly empowered or if it is constrained by social expectations. It evokes the questions about how much the rights and liberations that women can have in their cultural norms. It delves into the cultural standards that are placed on the women in Caribbean diverse. The real definition of freedom is unknown to them. This is evidences with the scene when their cousin, Manuel Gustavo comes for a meal and when he found Sofia is not available, he comes for searching. So the girls begin to chat with him, as taking advantage of their sisterly bond. Yoyo inquires about the name of some author that she have read it once, which was unfamiliar to him. The cousins and aunt consider this act as an advantage of hidden bond of sisterhood, which is seen as offensive on the Island. Once when Carla ask Manuel about his act of upset when Sofia being independent, saying that women too have rights, according to Dominican law. However, he replies the simple phrase with clever smile, "but men are the one wear pants." This phrase captures the issues related to gender roles and cultural rules in the novel. Manuel's statement mirrors a customs, strict conformity and conservative perspectives of specific gender clothing, pants, are only used by males. The word but in that statement implies a contradiction or deviation from expected norms.

In this novel, Yolanda as a part of younger generation, potentially observes the generational differences between her and her partner Rudy's parents. Variances in attitude, values and opinion could contribute to her perceives of their actions. Once, Yoyo spot Rudy's parents, they were young and relaxed. Then, she thinks of her elderly parents, who was old and customized by their tradition norms. Rudy's parents encouraging him to explore the relationship with girls, in a cautious way. When he shows Yolanda to his parents and tells them that she is belong to Spanish accent, they interestingly encourage them to navigate different culture. She thinks that they treated her as a geographical lesson. She even lacked the vocabulary to explain the comment. On this interaction her opinion on relationship and familial expectations in United States might vary, depending on the nature of understandings. As she begin to differentiate her parents with Rudy parents, she is most inspired with the behavior and customs of new culture parents whom she able to accept and dislike eventually. Having spent a substantial part of her childhood in the Dominican Republic, before relocating to the United States, Yolanda may have experienced a different cultural attitude towards sex. This could influence her opinion that contrast with Rudy, particularly because he grew up in United States with his own cultural standard. Yolanda keep her mind on Rudy's statement that, boys utter physical pain when they don't have sex, thinking of her in this situation. However, Yolanda states her desire of making love as intimate relation with a serious attitude according to her tradition. On hearing this, Rudy interrupted and says his understanding of Spanish tradition as, "I thought you'd being passionate because you're Spanish, and that under all the catholic bullshit, you'd be really liberated, instead of all hung up like this reserved girls

from prep school, but Jesus you're worse than a fucking puritan." (Alvarez 99) It reflects his assumption of how Yolanda caught under stereotypes, followed by his disappointment. The phrase "Catholic Bullshit" indicates his discontent with the religious doctrines and customs that may limit individual freedom. Rudy compares his expectation of Yolanda's carefree attitude with his perception of cotillion girls from prep schools. Cotillions are refers to as formal dances or formal events where Rudy implies that the girls are overly uptight or inhibited. This states Rudy's opinion on Yolanda's Dominican culture and his expectation towards her cultural change. But although Yolanda slightly adapt the culture she can't able to feel free to disrespect her own cultural norms, which shows her love towards her Dominican culture.

She explains that no one who understands her unique combination of Catholicism and Agnosticism, mixing Hispanic and American style, which reflects the difficulties of the identity while exploring various cultural and religious influences. Her Hispanic heritage and cultural impact she encounters in the United States shapes her identity. The combination of Catholicism and Agnosticism in Yolanda's life indicates a religious ambiguity. She may struggle with the conflicting belief or uncertainties about religious teachings, representing an individual difficulties with faith and spirituality. Yolanda's recognition of a "strange-mix" indicates a sense of cultural dissonance and challenge of reconciling various cultural elements. The contrast of Hispanic and American influence could create a tension between her feelings of self, reflecting the broader immigrant experiences. She claims herself as a "stuffed-animal," who intricate into her tradition and this term implies sense of being restricted by the cultural and traditional norms. Stuffed animals are often consider as lifeless items, which is like feeling confused and mold by external force like society. Yolanda prefers to carry Catholic Cross as a charm of good luck, symbolizes the various aspects of her complex connection between spirituality, identity, and heritage like a security blanket. This shows although Yolanda tries to adjust for her new American culture, her wish to following her own root tradition and culture is clearly portrayed throughout the novel. As said one should adapt and change according to their current cultural norms, but it is hard to disobey for forgot their root tradition and culture which follows throughout their life and journey.

In the novel "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent" language functions as a strong tool that similar to their cultural identity. Shifting linguistic inclinations implies by the sister acclimatization to American culture, and occasions of code-switching underscore the delicate harmony of maintaining their Dominican heritage. The novel highlights the complexities of cultural identity, illustrating how language conjoined with one's sense of self in the mid of hurdles of digesting assimilation. The process of exploring cultural identity is perplexing and dynamic. While integrating with American Society, the Garcia sisters, fight with the pressure between Dominican heritage and its weights to conform. Alvarez gives attention to the continuous transaction of identity, portraying it as an intricate journey or may be than a direct transformation. This book's conclusion invites perusers to consider the complicated nature of cultural adaptation and self-discovery.

The hyphen in the term "Dominican-American" typifies the delicate adjustment of the characters aim to accomplish. On exploring the hyphen, grasping the lavishness of both cultures while fighting with the difficulties of slouching the divide. As a Garcia sisters navigate the crossroads of their Dominican legacy and American background, the novel weaves an embroidered artwork of experiences, challenges, and the changes. The Garcia sister embody a bilingual identity, in unfixed Spanish and English. Reflecting the arrangement of cultural dualities and the combination of linguistic landscape, their etymological duality serves as metaphor for the broader immigrant encounter. Language acts as an effective cultural maker, shaping the characters sense of belonging and self-identity. The novel illustrates how the dialect is not merely a means of communication but a storage of cultural subtleties, familial bond and memories.

The novel ensnare the generational resort in language utilize and cultural hones throughout the narrative. The younger generation, raised in the United States, spectates a progressive shift towards English dominance, whereas the older generation holds onto Spanish as an interface to their heritage. The Garcia sisters struggle with the misfortunes and recovery of their native dialects. The novel delineates how linguistic choices gotten to be symbolic of broader social adaptation, loss, and the attempt to reclaim a sense of cultural genuineness. Language becomes a focal point through which the characters explore minutes of cultural distance and looks for paths for reconnection.

The sister's linguistic travel parallels their broader journey, for self-discovery, acknowledgment, and the reconciliation of clashing cultural influences.

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