

The apparent
misplacement of the
word "strong" in the
house on mango
street



The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros presents a Mexican-American principal character (who is also the narrator) that appears to make slight mistakes with the English language, but acquires to convey different meanings by this. These slight mistakes can be the apparent misuse of collocations, the strange use of pronouns, or the curious conjugations of some verbs. One of these cases is presented in page 13 when the narrator states that " the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (Cisneros 13). This unusual use of the word " strong" in the quotation appears to be a misplaced collocation, but it achieves to acquire multiple meanings that are reflected throughout the entire text.

The use of the word " strong" appears to be a misused collocation, but, instead, conveys the idea not only of " much", which would be the usual collocation and what appears to be replacing, but of food, smell, weakness, and being influenced by the society. The unusual collocation by conveying these ideas creates an apparent relation between the conveyed ideas and the noun being modified by the word " strong", which is women. It relates women to food, smells, weakness, and it shows how the narrator has been influenced by the society in which it is developing.

" Strong" is not normally the word that follows the direct object of " like," but this is seen in some occasions like with food or with smells (as shown in chart 1). The normal collocation would be " much" (as seen in chart 3 where " much" is following all kind of nouns), but the text works because " strong" functions to acquire the meaning of " much," and still be unusual enough to achieve acquiring different ideas. " Strong" accomplish to work both as an adverb and an adjective, an adjective for women and an adverb for " like" as <https://assignbuster.com/the-apparent-misplacement-of-the-word-strong-in-the-house-on-mango-street/>

if it were "much". "Strong" is normally an adjective that precedes the noun, but that misuse also represents other ideas. "Strong" is not really being misused but the apparent misuse of it is working in many ways. "Much" would be, then, the usual word instead of "strong". Having "much" would mean that "the Chinese, like the Mexican, don't like their women [much]," not that they dislike them, but they do not completely like them either. Having the word "strong" substituting "much" acquires this same meaning, but with the addition of all the others.

So, "strong" is working as "much". However, having it after the noun also shows how it is not working as "strong" normally does when preceding the noun, but it is, instead, remarking the differences from both meanings. "Strong" is normally used preceding the noun it modifies, so, the fact that in this case it is not, remarks that the Chinese and Mexican women are not conceived as strong nor by the speaker nor by the Chinese and Mexican society, which is the opinion of whom the narrator is supposed to be talking from. In fact, the word "strong" is mentioned four times throughout the book, this being the first one, the second referring to the legs of someone, the third to the stars and the fourth to the protagonist, who is also the narrator, somehow establishing herself as the only strong woman, or even person, in her society. The other women, instead, are being qualified as not strong at all, as weak, they are so not-strong that the use of the adjective is inverted to remark it.

"Strong" works as "much" and remarks how it is not working as "strong", but "strong" can be seen after the noun it modifies, in certain occasions.

"Strong" after the noun that it is modifying is a collocation more commonly <https://assignbuster.com/the-apparent-misplacement-of-the-word-strong-in-the-house-on-mango-street/>

used when talking about food, or even about smells (chart 1). "Strong" is, then, relating food and smells to women, making them gain the food and smells characteristics. Food is something you devour, something you can choose as you like, and throw away when it is no good anymore. Strong smells are something you want to get away from; there are no good strong smells; if it is too strong, it is bad.

Even the construction is relating women to food; writing the adjective after the direct object is usual when stating your order at a restaurant (chart 2). Food, as women, is something needed in order to maintain life, and women have often been seen only as a tool to have an heir and legacy. Food expires, and there is, also, the idea that women's value is also determined by their time, by their youth. Most of the food characteristics that can be transferred to women are negative, but recognizable in the Mexican society.

The narrator is establishing this negative relation between women and food; she is a woman talking for two cultures, the Mexican and the Chinese, but is also being influenced by one of them, the Mexican, which is part of the culture in which she is growing up. The narrator voice is making an apparent unconscious connection created by the ideas that her culture has raised her with; ideas that she can be consciously aware of, but unconscious of how deep these are a part of her, how deep is this idea planted in the society, deep enough for her to make an apparent unconscious connection with negative meanings.

The multiple meanings of these extract can be seen and perceived through the whole text, because throughout the text man get away from women as

they get away from strong smells, being young, as in fruit, is in the book seen as something positive, as being smart: " Alicia, [...] is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university" (Cisneros 31), but it is also used, as in fruit, as a synonym of not being ready: " you girls too young to be wearing shoes like that " (Cisneros 39). There is also presence of man not completely liking women, of society not completely liking women, of weakness.

In *The House on Mango Street*, the narrator appears to make an erroneous use of words that actually expresses what appears to be her unconscious ideas towards women, or the ideas of a society towards women. It relates them to food, smells, weakness, unlikeness, and the meanings of these relations can be perceived throughout the text. The apparent mistake from the narrator is, then, a clever use of collocations by the author. It acquires to convey meanings that can be reflected through the book without having the necessity to explicitly point at them. Sandra Cisneros makes of her book the reflection of a society that hides its negativity and appears to be as unconscious of it as the narrator is.

Cited Works:

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage Contemporaries, 2009.

" Don't like Much." Ludwig. guru, ludwig. guru/s/don't+like+much.

" Meat medium." Ludwig. guru, ludwig. guru/s/meat+medium

" Don't like Strong." Ludwig. guru, ludwig. guru/s/don't+like+strong
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“ Eggs Scrambled” Ludwig. guru, ludwig. guru/s/eggs+scrambled