

Special Character

By Marcela Garcés

“Your message wasn’t accepted by the system because it contained a special character.”

-An error message received one day when submitting something to a computer system.

Maybe I am a special character. My last name contains one, a written accent mark over the “e.”

Not to be confused with – but often confused with – an apostrophe.

Sometimes my last name is erroneously written GRACES. It’s a recognizable word in English, graces. In your good graces. In my bad graces, though, no es mi apellido.

Nope, it’s GARCÉS. I’m a special character, yes.

Special characters don’t work in the system, isn’t that interesting? My last name, its spelling, doesn’t compute, doesn’t register.

People look at it and write GRACES because that’s within the realm of the familiar to native English speakers. That’s what they see—or want to see. It’s easier, maybe.

Look a little closer and you’ll see a special character, though. It gives emphasis, strength to the second syllable.

Not being recognized/not being seen, understood. Nos pasa, sí.

But maybe it’s not a bad thing to be a special character, todo un personaje.

Maybe I—we—can exist outside the system, which doesn’t accept my/our messages sometimes.

Yo sé que soy fuerte, from the first to the second syllable.