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Introduction: Translingual Work

Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner

The term *translingual* has entered the commons of discourse inhabiting *College English* as one possible entry point for work contesting the monolingualism that continues to dominate the teaching and study of college writing and reading in the United States and elsewhere. But like other terms proposed as alternatives to *monolingualism*—for example, *multilingual*, *plurilingual*, *translanguaging*, *code-meshing*—*translingual* as a point of entry with no predefined, predetermined outcome is subject to competing inflections. And in fact, the 2011 essay that is arguably responsible for introducing the term to the pages of *College English* itself presents "a translingual approach" only as something "toward" which we might work, and its authors caution that "we are still at the beginning stages of our learning efforts in this project, which by definition will require the ideas and energy of many" (Horner et al., "Language Difference" 310).

Since then, many have taken up just such efforts, in the pages of *College English* and elsewhere, in predictably diverse ways and with diverse results (see for example Arnold; Canagarajah, *Literacy*; Canagarajah, *Translingual*; DePalma and Ringer; Gonzales; Horner, Donahue, and NeCamp; Horner, Lockridge, and Selfe; Jordan; Kilfoil; Sohan; Lorimer Leonard; Lu and Horner; Lueck and Sharma; Marko et al.; Massimo and Tomasso; M. Williams; Zawacki and Cox). Continuing what may be an emerging tradition of *College English* as a key site for such considerations, this symposium both reflects and builds on the efforts prompted by that 2011 *College English* essay.

The symposium had its immediate genesis in a 2014 conversation among four of us—Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Anis Bawarshi, and Juan Guerra—in which we reflected, again, on the multifaceted differences and interconnections we kept

Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, thirty year NCTE veterans, have co-authored numerous journal articles and book chapters, including "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach," co-authored with Jacqueline Jones Royster and John Trimbur, and "Translingual Literacy, Language Difference, and Matters of Agency" (*CE* 2013).

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noticing in our work. That conversation led us to begin entertaining the idea of a forum for folks with expertise in different pockets of composition studies to share their positions on a translingual approach in a more sustained manner that allowed for something closer to a roundtable format.

We came up with a tentative list of potential participants, comprised of people fluent not only in the conversation of a particular pocket of the field but also in translating-transforming languages or approaches and methods of knowledge making and teaching that are institutionally housed in different conferences, organizations, programs, and parts of the curriculum; people whose research and reputation officially have assigned them to a particular field—for example, genre or media studies, writing assessment, composition historiography—but who have deliberately situated themselves at the intersections of that field and various others. And for the letter inviting contributors to the forum, we agreed to use as a point of departure a list of bullet points Lu had developed when presenting her own position on the main tenets of translingual reading and writing practices ("Metaphors"). After several rounds of email exchange, the four of us agreed on the version of the invitation letter that Bawarshi and Guerra sent out. In that letter, we identified the following tenets for a "translingual" approach. A translingual approach to composition is concerned with how to treat:

- language (including varieties of Englishes, discourses, media, or modalities) as performative: not something we have but something we do;
- users of language as actively forming and transforming the very conventions we use and social-historical contexts of use;
- communicative practices as not neutral or innocent but informed by and informing economic, geopolitical, social-historical, cultural relations of asymmetrical power;
- decisions on language use as shaping as well as shaped by the contexts of utterance and the social positionings of the writers, and thus having material consequences on the life and world we live in;
- difference as the norm of all utterances, conceived of as acts of translation inter and intra languages, media, modality during seeming iterations of dominant conventions as well as deviations from the norm;
- deliberation over how to tinker with authorized contexts, perspectives, and conventions of meaning making as needed and desired by all users of language, those socially designated as mainstream or minority, native or first, second, foreign speakers, published or student writers;
- all communicative practices as mesopolitical acts, actively negotiating and constituting complex relations of power at the dynamic intersection of the social-historical (macro) and the personal (micro) levels.

In the letter to initiate symposium participants' contributions, we also posed the following questions:

- Which of the above concerns are central to your work and the work of others? In fore-grounding such concerns, which particular residual notions and practices in each area are being challenged?

- In what ways might more deliberative attention to acts of transformation, transaction, translation involved in reading/writing in response to differences intra and inter diverse languages, varieties of Englishes, discourses, media, and modalities enhance the work of composition in each of the areas?

- In what ways might recent work in each area advance work currently taking translingual approaches?

In this introduction, we highlight and reflect on the contributions making up this symposium. Those contributions contextualize the emergence of a translingual approach, explore the tension and interconnections between a translingual approach and a variety of fields, and explore the viability of a translingual approach in light of existing academic structures. In "Translingualism and Close Reading," John Trimbur traces the approach to language difference identified as "translingual" to the reorientation toward error and language differences that emerged during the era of open admissions, an orientation that redeployed "close reading" by applying it to the writing of those deemed "other" and at best peripheral to the academy—basic writers, L2 writers, and first-year composition (FYC) students—in order to challenge common distinctions among these as well as between all these writers and "literary" writers, whose apparent difference from language norms was taken as a sign of their superiority to the norm.

Juan Guerra, in his contribution, suggests that teachers might pursue a similar reorientation to language difference among their students. Cultivating such a rhetorical sensibility, he argues, would help counter tendencies to reduce a translingual approach to requiring or encouraging production of specific glossal forms—for example, writing recognizable as code-meshing—by engaging students themselves in the ongoing "battle" of contending language ideologies or, rather, by bringing to consciousness their inevitable engagement in that battle in the choices and responses they make through their reading and writing practices.

Guerra's argument for cultivating what we might call a "translingual sensibility" aligns with Ellen Cushman's argument for the potential of a translingual paradigm to allow for decolonial thinking and open up what, quoting from Walter Mignolo, she identifies as the "splendors of the human imagination and creativity" (234). Defining the translingual paradigm in terms of three epistemological moves—languaging, translating, and differencing—Cushman argues for ways of ensuring that a translingual approach does not merely offer a substitute content, in line with previous attempts at emancipatory projects, but instead addresses the imperialist legacy of English and the structuring of that legacy by denaturalizing the imperialized logic surveillancing how we conduct our everyday practices of writing, learning, teaching.

For Cushman, the decolonizing of composition that translingualism might seem to promise is not an automatic effect of adopting "translingualism" but instead requires active working of a translingual approach in our theory and practice.

Anis Bawarshi's contribution shows what such active working of a translingual approach might entail as he takes up the question of how such an approach leads us to treat difference in our teaching and theorizing of genre, not as deviation from the "patterned or recurrent norm" of a genre but, instead, as the norm of genre performance. Such an epistemic move works against the stabilizing, even "for now," of genre, and the preoccupation about which genres to teach, when, and to whom—the "grammar" of genres—and toward consideration of the performance of genre: beyond Bakhtinian sentences toward utterances, thereby allowing us to more fully recognize agency and transformation in genre uptake.

Jody Shipka develops the epistemological shift that a translingual perspective might allow, insisting that we need to attend not only to changing our, and our students', dispositions toward language practices, but also to altering those practices themselves insofar as engaging with different "modes, genres, materials, cultural practices, communicative technologies, and language varieties" (251) itself changes what we know and how we come to know it and opens up new possibilities for knowing and being. Engaging in composing practices less immediately familiar to us, she argues, can bring back into consciousness the translingual, multimodal aspects of all communicative practice—familiar and not—that a focus on finished products tends to obscure—and the role of "things" in shaping those practices and performances. Such efforts, Shipka argues, can broaden the focus on a translingual approach by redefining writers as "composers" and thereby "opening up for consideration communicative/compositional modes, materials, and practices that may include, but are certainly not limited to, writing or the production of written texts" (254).

Rebecca Lorimer Leonard and Rebecca Nowacek broaden work on translinguality in a different way by exploring the concern with movement across contexts, practices, and meanings, and the politics of such movement, that is shared by scholars of both translinguality and transfer of writing knowledge and skills and how work in each could benefit from consideration of the questions, theoretical frames, and research methodologies of the other. For example, research on transfer can benefit from consideration of the role negotiation of language ideologies might play in transfer of writing knowledge and of what constitutes either "success" or "failure" in such transfer, and longitudinal and cross-classroom research might help scholars of translinguality better demonstrate the relevance of translingual approaches to writing and language difference, and the movement of writing and writing knowledge across time and space.

Suresh Canagarajah's account of his course on second language writing teaching provides a concrete illustration of both the role negotiation of language ideologies

plays in students' (here, students of second language writing teaching) "transfer" or use of the affordances of past writing, language, and other resources, and the ways that a translingual approach to difference runs counter to teacher-centered and -fronted pedagogies that the dominant ideology of monolingualism has structured into writing curricula and programs. In line with Shipka, Canagarajah argues for a pedagogy that likewise draws on all the potential semiotic resources of classrooms and courses, including the students and the knowledge they bring to a course as well as multiple communicative modes and material actants.

Dylan Dryer's contribution directly confronts the structuring of monolingualist ideology into writing assessment, describing both the "invisible architecture" with which efforts at translinguality must contend and ways we might deconstruct such architecture. Noting how criteria for writing assessment tests for those assumed to be "native speakers" vs. "multilinguals" set language difference and cognitive achievement at odds—setting the goal for "multilinguals" as diligence and for "native speakers" as creative and critical thinking—Dryer suggests we might give different inflections to such criteria as "facility" and re-emphasize criteria of rhetorical dexterity and communicative resourcefulness in our assessment instruments to advance a translingual perspective on language difference as (potential) resource for meaning making rather than deficit and impediment to communication—in keeping with, and to ensure, consequential validity to those assessments.

Keith Gilyard's contribution offers a bracing response to the symposium and the larger body of work identified with "translingual." Identifying the emergence of translingual perspectives with a long tradition in composition (and beyond) combating monolingualist ideology, he cautions against temptations to turn translingual theory's insistence on difference as the norm of language practice into a flattening of all difference through abstraction that elides the negotiation of differences in power from communicative practice, a removal that would lead to overlooking which differences in language have what effects on whom. And, in alignment with Lorimer Leonard and Nowacek, Gilyard calls for documenting the language efforts, struggles, and triumphs of students, such as those active in the Black and Puerto Rican students' push for open admissions at City College of the City University of New York, to build models for radical, translingual engagement.

Gilyard's response, and this symposium as a whole, show how "translingualism" can, might, and needs to be always put to work. This is all to the good, whatever differences arise in the work that results. For, as the symposium contributions and previous efforts demonstrate, translingualism is itself always emergent and variable, and (therefore) those attempting to align themselves with "translingualism" always face the task and responsibility of consciously, deliberately, and most importantly continuously recreating that to which they are aligning themselves.

Given the difficulty this work entails, and given the history of the development of translingual theory in challenging heretofore dominant conceptualizations of language, language relations, and language "users" (for a sampling of such challenges, see, for example, Calvet; Firth and Wagner; Kramsch, "Privilege"; Pennycook), it is not surprising that, instead of taking up such work, notions of translingualism have arisen that conflate it with L2 writing (and/or vice versa) or with specific kinds of writers (the "translinguals"), or specific textual features (most notoriously, code-meshing)—anything other than what is supposed to be the norm, and therefore kept at a safe remove from what are imagined to be the ordinary concerns of ordinary people. Alternatively, a translingual perspective shows itself in the full light of day as present, albeit if hitherto going unrecognized, in the normal transactions of daily communicative practice of ordinary people. The translingual approach is thus the "other," not to normal language use, language users, and language relations but, instead, to what monolingualist ideology would have us understand normal language use, users, and relations to be. For example, as Dryer's analysis of assessment criteria for the writing of "native-speaker" vs. "multilingual" (a.k.a. EFL/ESL) speakers demonstrates, deeply troubling notions linking intellectual development (and expectations for it) to specific kinds of language users inhere in the taken-for-granted criteria for assessing the writing, and hence the placement of and, likely, curriculum assigned to specific students, all of which work against what we would like to think most writing teachers believe about the intellectual capacities and achievements of all their students (and their colleagues). Likewise, Shipka highlights the ways that not only conventional "SLMN" ideology but the conventional treatment of "language" as discrete from "modality" run counter to all communicative practice, including, importantly, kinds of such practice deemed conventional and identified strictly with only "language" or "(multi)modality" (but not both).

This points to an apparent conundrum faced by those of us interested in making better sense of "the translingual," signaled by a question Guerra poses—"When we as teachers take a translingual approach to difference, are we expecting students to produce a particular kind of writing that mimics what we call code-meshing, or do we instead want students to develop a rhetorical sensibility that reflects a critical awareness of language as a contingent and emergent rather than a standardized and static practice?"(228) Or, as Gilyard asks, "What problem is there to address" by a translingual perspective not already addressed by various species of critical pedagogy if, in fact, translinguality is simply the norm? (285) On the one hand, translinguality appears to offer what many of us see as a more judicious way of making sense of existing, extant communicative practices, and (therefore) might seem to call for no significant changes to those practices, given its continued (if hidden) presence in them—except for undertaking them with "rhetorical sensibility," something others have long advocated for without reference to "translingualism." On the other hand,

it would seem that this different way of making sense of those practices should lead to changes to those practices to somehow bring out their translingual character and to combat the deleterious sociocultural effects of the monolingualist ideology that has kept that character hidden. (Shipka, in her contribution, explores a parallel in noting that SLMN ideology ignores the multimodal character of many, more "conventional" kinds of texts.)

For, after all, a translingual approach is meant to combat, and to offer a counter to, a "monolingualist" approach to language and language relations, and it arises not simply or only as a consequence of having arrived at a different understanding of these but out of a rejection of the deleterious treatment of specific groups of language users on the basis, at least putatively, of tenets of monolingualist ideology (as in, "It's not you I object to, it's your language"): using recognizable differences in language as justification for prejudicial treatment of these groups by denying the mesopolitics of all communicative practice (see Mao), as illustrated by, again, Dryer's discussion of assessment rubrics. Trimbur's careful location of translingualism's roots in the "new kind of reading on the part of composition teachers and a new understanding of what error or language differences might mean" (220) precipitated by the open admissions movement and basic writing suggests the dynamics of that new understanding as one prompted not merely or primarily by clinical observation of data—errors and other kinds of language differences in student writing, say—but rather by a sociopolitical movement, one that, as Shaughnessy observed, not only led teachers to develop "greater respect for [their] students' linguistic aptitudes and for the subtle, stubborn, yet mercurial quality of language itself" but also "pedagogically radicalized" teachers by helping them "come to know, through [their] students, what it means to be an outsider in academia," leading them to "reject in [their] bones the traditional meritocratic model of a college" (113, 114).

To sort through this conundrum, it is worth recalling Louis-Jean Calvet's observation that, while, on the one hand, and in keeping with what we take to be a translingual approach, "*languages do not exist*; the notion of a *language* is an abstraction that rests on the regularity of a certain number of facts, of features, in the products of speakers and in their *practices*." Nonetheless, Calvet continues, and also in keeping with what we take to be a translingual approach, "Coexisting with these practices there are *representations*—what people think about languages and the way they are spoken—representations that act on practices and are one of the factors of change. They produce in particular *security/insecurity* and this leads speakers to types of *behaviour* that transform practices" (241, emphases in original). Thus it is, Calvet explains, that "*the invention of a language* and consequently the *way it is named* constitute an intervention in and modify the ecolinguistic niche" (248, emphases in original). How we think language and language relations shapes the practice of these—that is to say, language and language relations understood as practices.

Translingualism, to use this awkward neologism, intervenes precisely in this representational practice in order to transform practice and, itself, represents a different representational practice, as illustrated by its continued redlining on the computer monitor screen by Microsoft Word. Thus the apparent awkwardness of the term is a manifestation of the friction induced by the lack of "fit" between what translingualism proposes and the claims of dominant monolingualism about language—and by the effects of what it proposes on language practice. The conundrum posed earlier can thus be resolved once we recognize representations of language—monolingualist or translingualist—as language practices themselves that contribute to shaping what they represent.[1] It is only in this sense that it is possible, as Cushman suggests, that the introduction of translingualism might begin, or contribute to, "the process of revealing and potentially transforming colonial matrices of power. . . . decolonizing thought," and offer an avenue for a decolonial option within composition's imperial modernity (235, 240, and passim). That process begins in and requires friction.

The symposium contributions of Bawarshi and of Lorimer Leonard and Nowacek illustrate, in one sense, the effects of this intervention both on language practice and representations of that practice. So, for example, Bawarshi notes that a translingual approach to genre as performances not only "enables students and instructors to examine the meanings and relations conditioned by genres," but also "open[s] up genre actions to new *interplays* of possible meanings and linguistic relations" (245). And Lorimer Leonard and Nowacek, in considering the interplay between notions of transfer and translingualism, argue that these provide not simply "small theories" with "explanatory value" but that these theories "help open up changing practices in our writing lives" (262).

A further resolution to the apparent conundrum, and an answer to Guerra's question, lies in how we locate "practice." Those who would identify translingualism with a specific set of textual features locate practice in space, in the form of those features, found on the page (or screen). But if, as Guerra notes, the rhetorical sensibility encouraged by translingualism involves a "critical awareness of language as contingent and emergent rather than standardized [. . .] and static," (228) then practice must be located in time as well as space. We can understand this temporal-spatial location in two senses: first, in the sense of practice to include the ongoing activities of those engaging in it, in the sense that the "work" of writing does not inhere simply in texts that are produced but in the entire cycle of production, distribution, and reception (as Shipka observes is true of all "composition" [254–255]), with texts themselves to be understood at best as mere "notations" which, Raymond Williams reminds us, "have then to be interpreted in an active way" (47). And second, locating practice temporally requires even the character of these notations to be understood as always emergent, however much that emergent character is obscured by their apparent physical permanence and, hence, removal from time as "time-less."[2] That timelessness is itself

another feature of monolingualist ideology, a feature that marks it as coterminous with the ideology of what Brian Street has famously identified as the "autonomous" model of literacy, according to which literacy and literacy phenomena exist outside and independent of the activities and beliefs of those engaging in them. Following Street's critique of that model, we can argue that the different orientation to language and language relations represented by "translingualism" (including its broadening of "language" to include the full range and interdependence of communicative practices [see Calvet 7 and passim]) is inseparable from actual practices, but also that these practices must themselves be understood as always emergent—inevitably different by virtue of their location in time (as performances or Bakhtinian "utterances," as Bawarshi notes, whatever form taken by the notations produced as part of those practices. That is the significance of the translingual orientation's identification of difference as the norm, rather than a deviation from the norm, of all communicative practice, and (hence) what Bawarshi identifies as its "horizontal" location of agency as "in play in all language use, across the spectrum" (244).

The temporal location of all language practice applies, of course, to the work of the term/concept of "translingual" itself as an intervention and participation in that practice. And this poses challenges to efforts to imagine and engage in a "translingual" pedagogy. Transmission models of pedagogy assume the stability of that which they would transmit to students, a stability that the translingual orientation to language practice calls into question (though recognizing the fact of the ongoing sedimentation of practice). Both Canagarajah and Guerra confront this challenge, albeit focusing on two different sites—teacher education and undergraduate education, respectively. What is promising in their recommendations is the ways these allow for the inevitable reworking of the translingual by students at the pedagogical site. Canagarajah, for example, notes that students in his course did not merely offer additional, and often unexpected, learning resources but also participated in the making of new knowledge about translingual writing, and thus "were not only learning about translinguality [but] also practicing it and informally 'researching' it" (272). Likewise, Guerra, pushing against "a concept of translingualism as [. . .] an empty performance meant to fulfill a particular set of teacherly expectations about how we use language" (228), argues for a pedagogy that calls on "the rhetorical sensibilities many [students] already possess but put aside because of what they see as a jarring shift in context." That shift is one that both Guerra and Canagarajah acknowledge from a set of expectations for a transmission pedagogy—the expectation and structure supporting what Canagarajah refers to as a more "technicized" approach to the teaching of writing (and its teaching)—to a more dialogical course of study.

While Canagarajah writes here about graduate students learning to be teachers of second-language writing and Guerra focuses on engaging students at "lower" college levels in exploring translinguality, there is no reason not to see students at

all levels also working not only as "learners" of some ostensible, stable knowledge about translinguality but also as researchers and rewriters of translinguality through their engagement of—practice and reflection on—translingual writing. Even that rewriting that appears to be what we might later identify as entirely conventional understandings of translinguality are, by virtue of their temporal-spatial location, different. That their "different" recreations of knowledge of translinguality may appear to be "the same" rather than "new" is a consequence of the removal of those recreations of knowledge from their temporal-spatial location.

This is not, it's worth emphasizing, simply to align oneself with the now-tired slogan that dialogical pedagogy is the solution to all that ails composition. To do so would contradict the emergent character of translinguality as something always and always in need of being "reworked." So, for example, while Guerra presents his students with the three ideological perspectives on language for them to con-sider, including what he identifies as a translingual perspective, it is more the case that what constitutes the "translingual" perspective he outlines for his students is necessarily subject to and in need of constant reworking by students, rather than existing outside time and space as a predefined choice for writers to select (or not). And the "new" knowledge about translingual writing that Canagarajah rightly sees his students producing is itself not to be understood as stable but as also subject to and in need of continual recreating/rewriting, here most obviously as his students attempt to teach, and thereby must recreate, translinguality and subject *that* writing to recreation and rewriting by *their* students.

In this sense, while a translingual approach may have the potential to contribute to the project of decolonization, as Cushman hopes for, and while we would want to have that potential realized, it remains the case that insofar as translinguality is itself vulnerable to and in need of constant reworking, the most we can in fact claim of (and for) translinguality is that it can be reworked toward that end. It is neither the lure, cure, nor threat that some might imagine. Rather, it is an occasion for labor, the labor of revision that is always what we, in concert with our students, take up, and take responsibility for (whether or not we acknowledge that responsibility) in our thinking, teaching/learning, writing. Thus to Lorimer Leonard and Nowacek's important call on scholars of translinguality to take up long-term studies like the best of research on transfer, we would add that such studies need to explore precisely the various kinds of engagement of writers (and the scholars studying them) in taking up such labor and responsibility in their reworking of translinguality. For the term *translinguality* cannot by itself take on that labor, nor that responsibility. It serves neither as recipe, nor ingredient to a recipe, for redressing our dominant practices in mediating language and language relations. Rather, it is at most, and at its best, an occasion and invitation for us to work to do so. The contributions to this symposium show us how we might take up such work.

Notes

1. On this conceptualization of representation (in Louis-Jean Calvet and others), see Claire Kramsch, "Contrepont"; Danièle Moore and Laurent Gajo; and Danièle Moore and Bernard Py.

2. We explore this in the iteration of seeming clichés in the (in)famous "White Shoes" student essay (discussed in David Bartholomae), different when located in time despite the apparent timelessness of those clichés (leading to their designation as clichés) (Lu and Horner).

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