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Living-English Work

Min-Zhan Lu

In “American English: Quest for a Model,” Shirley Brice Heath reminds us that efforts to standardize English have been around since the beginning of our nationhood. John Adams, in a series of letters to the Continental Congress and in the midst of his mission to gain money for continuing the American Revolution, proposed that an institution be formed and charged with two responsibilities: to prescribe a language standard and to consider political and economic forces critical to the international spread of American English (Heath 220, 221). I see Adams’s proposition as a classic example of English-only projections. It illustrates that English-only efforts involve geopolitical, economic, and cultural transactions. They aim to control not merely which language can be used, where, and when, but also and always how that language is to be used by its actual, possible, or imagined users. And they discipline users to be preoccupied with two and only two questions: *What counts as correct usage in the eyes of those in positions to withhold educational and job opportunities? How might I best learn to work English strictly according to these rulings?* Both questions render ambivalence toward standardized uses of English a deficit to personal and social *development*.

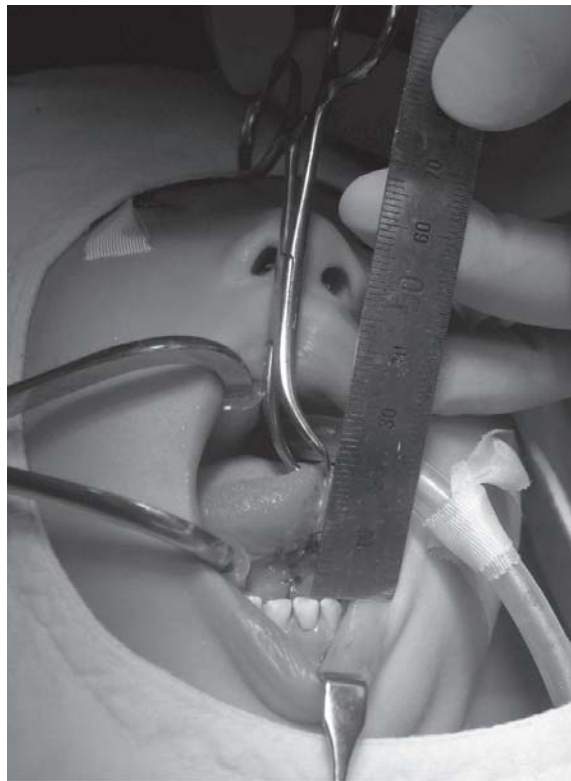
We get a glimpse of the global spread of U.S. English-only projections since Adams’s time from two media reports on the popularity of tongue surgery (a snip of tissue—the frenulum—linking the tongue to the floor of the mouth, using local anesthetic) in two “developing” countries: the People’s Republic of China and South Korea—an archenemy and an ally, respectively, of the United States during the

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Korean War and the Cold War. One report, titled “Accent Axed with a Snip,” states that one mother’s “hope” of turning her son into “a fluent English speaker” recently “drove [her] to take her six-year-old son for surgery aimed at ridding him of his Korean accent when speaking the language of choice in global business” (Kim). Another report, titled “Chinese Find Learning English a Snip,” claims that “[w]ith China’s growing internationalisation,” people are “begging for” tongue surgery because “they’re taking interpreters [sic] exams or wanting to go abroad or get a job [in China] with a foreign company” and because they want to be freed “from that tonguetied feeling” when using English (Markus). When shown the photographs attached to these two reports (see Figure 1, for example), the first reaction of most readers, me included, is: “Yuck!” “Gross!” While the photographs still invoke an involuntary shudder in me, I am increasingly convinced of my need to see the “popularity” of tongue surgery in “developing” countries as intricately informed by what we in “developed” countries do and do not do when addressing our own and our students’ ambivalence toward English-only rulings.

Figure 1. A South Korean oral surgeon checks the length of a 4-year-old patient's frenulum after the operation, which slices 1 to 1.5 centimetres off the frenulum to help give the tongue more flexibility for fluent English speaking (Seoul, October 16, 2003). (© Ho/Reuters)



The reports on tongue surgery also illustrate the domination of English-only assumptions in popular representations, what Braj Kachru has called fallacies of English users and uses (“Alchemy”). Although both news reports question the surgery’s effectiveness in ensuring “clear” English, they imply a consensus among all users of English that only one way of using English counts as accent-free and, thus, proper or good. Furthermore, the only motivation for learning English is to improve one’s career prospects in the capitalist global market. The reports can also serve as reminders that we live in a world increasingly ordered by the interests of “developed” countries such as the United States in globalizing their hypercompetitive, technology-driven market economies, what critics have termed “flexible, information economies” or “fast capitalism” (Castells; Harvey). People from all strata of the world are living under exponential pressure to use English and use it only with the kind of “demeanors”—accent, lexicon, grammar, rhythm, pitch—that appeal to the few with the cultural, political, and economic capital to dispense “job and educational opportunities” (Lu, “Essay”). By the same token, how to make learners feel tongue-loose in the “English of global business” is increasingly becoming the *a priori* and only relevant question for language education. For example, according to a CBS News report, the College Board’s National Commission on Writing turns to the hiring and promotion personnel of corporations affiliated with the Business Roundtable to identify the English “skills” college students need to “acquire” (“Too Many”). The spokesperson of the College Board asserts that instructional “responsibility” for these sought-after skills lies in three sites: grade schools, universities, and training programs. Given the currency of such commissions in the current-day United States, all of us in English studies need to wrestle with our charge to produce only bodies (with a particular length of frenulum) and affects (such as tongue-tied or tongue-loose feelings) that are useful for a “biopolitical structuring of the world” according to the “business” logic of “developed” countries (Hardt and Negri 32). We need to raise and pursue two related questions: What gross actions and inactions on our part might have directly and indirectly pressured users of English to see symbolic and surgical fixes as the only viable resolution to their own and their children’s tongue-tied feelings? How might we best go about problematizing English-only rulings on the uses and users of English?

ENGLISH AS A *YUYAN*: LIVING-ENGLISH WORK

The Chinese character-combination for the term “language” is *yuyan*. Used alone or in combination with other characters, both *yu* and *yan* can mean “a language”; elements of a language (words, phrases, or expressions); the act of “speaking” or “meaning”; and a written or spoken text (a saying or proverb). So images of a living language, in actual use by actual users, are never absent in any reference to language

as a system or *yufa* (the laws of language—its grammar). My lived difficulty in not seeing English as a *yuyan* has triggered an interest in representations of living English. Let me invoke a few examples of such representations to delineate four lines of inquiry consistently blocked by the focal point of English-only projections.

My first example dates back to about fifty years after John Adams made his American English-only propositions to the Continental Congress. Francis Lieber, a political philosopher and the first editor of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, had this to say about English: “A *living language* does not only mean a language spoken by a *living people*, but also a living thing itself with all the capacities, rights, and necessities of life, that is, of *change, expansion, and elimination*” (qtd. in Heath 231; emphasis added). The second example comes from a 1975 essay by Chinua Achebe titled “The African Writer and the English Language.” Achebe writes: “The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use” (432). In the same essay, Achebe quotes James Baldwin as saying that

Perhaps [English] was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test. (433)

My last example comes from Toni Morrison’s 1993 Nobel Prize lecture. Morrison states, “The vitality of language lies in its ability to *limn* the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers” (20; emphasis added). “We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we *do* language. That may be the measure of our lives” (22).

The ideal user of English posed in these examples is someone who is not only acutely aware of the pressure to function as an English-only user but also attentive to the capacities, rights, and necessities of change in all living things: people, their lives, society, culture, the world, and the language itself. These examples depict English as kept alive by many and by many different ways of using it, each of which is itself a living process in-the-forming: informing and informed by the specific, different and dynamic, historical and social contexts of individual acts. We can use such depictions of living English to pose four lines of inquiry against the grains of English-only instructions.

Line 1: English-only instruction parades the (seldom delivered) promise of ensuring access to wider communication and better educational and job opportunities. But living-English users weigh dominant stories of what English-only instructions can do *for* them carefully against what such training has historically done *to* them and to peoples, cultures, societies, and continents whose language practices do not match standardized English usages. For instance, Achebe depicts English as having become a “world language” and a “national language” in countries like Nigeria as part of a “package deal” that includes the “atrociousness of racial arrogance and prejudice

which may yet set the world on fire” (430). He thus reminds us to ask what specific, historical atrocities have made English the “language of choice for global business” in China, South Korea, and the United States. Living English users of English situate their relations to diverse languages and diverse uses of English in the context of a reading of history and of the world which treats intra- and international transactions on all levels—military, geopolitical, economic, cultural, technological, linguistic—and in all areas—school, home, paid work, civic, life worlds—as co-constitutive.

Line 2: Living English users also weigh the promise of better educational and job opportunities against what English-only instruction *cannot* do: it cannot address their needs to use English to articulate—work out meaningful connections across—experiences and circumstances of life consistently discredited by standardized English usages. If we approach “experience” in terms of socially constructed relations between individual selves, others, and the world, then the act of trying to “limn” or make a language “bear” or “carry” the burden of a particular lived experience would necessarily involve efforts to use language to interpret and represent such relations and their interrelations: to not only make sense of such relations while describing and legitimizing them but also shape how one lives such relations in light of one’s interpretation and representation (Lu and Horner). I thus read Achebe to mean by “peculiar” and Baldwin to mean by “my own” those lived relations which are “particular,” that is, socially and historically specific to the individual user, his or her people, culture, and region, but rendered “odd” and thus “nonrepresentative” and “irrelevant” by English-only projections. Living-English users keep deliberate track of the “peculiar” experiences they are having difficulty limning in a specific standardized usage. They thus comprehend English-only usages as resulting from voluntary or involuntary efforts to fix the contexts and purposes of using English, efforts not always in the interests of all its users and certainly not on all occasions. To Achebe, the “value [of English] as a medium of international exchange” or a “universal” language—that is, its communicative power—depends on its ability to “carry [the] peculiar experience” (432) of its diverse users rather than its ability to universalize the language practices of all its users according to the logic of global business. When employing a standardized usage on a particular occasion, living-English users refuse to treat the tongue-tied or the tongue-loose feelings they and others experience as a sign of their failure or ability to access “communicative power.” Instead, they approach our different experiences when using the same usage from the perspectives of the particular but different social, historical experiences each of us is interested in limning.

Line 3: Living-English users are also always conducting research on how diverse users have grasped their “problems” with English-only instruction. Achebe, for instance, turns to Baldwin to map alternative ways of presenting the challenges facing living-English users. By posing the word “use” as an antonym to the word

“imitate,” Baldwin foregrounds individual users’ rights to transform rather than mechanically reproduce standardized usages. The image of a user actively fashioning a different way of using English, making it do things it has not been historically geared to do, puts the formation of English in the hands of all its users. By identifying his “[having] *only* learned to imitate” as the source of his problem with English, Baldwin suggests further that whether people see a language as their own depends on whether they have “learned to imitate” or to “use” it. Baldwin thus marks all sites of learning as potentially “benign or coercive sponsors” of English-only dispositions (Brandt). Baldwin’s use of the word “own” suggests that those of us committed to *Students’ Right to Their Own Language*[s] would need to fight not only for the students’ rights to use their “home,” or “first” languages but, more important, their right to own the “language of wider communication”: to learn to use it—actively fashion and transform it—rather than merely imitate its standardized rules. That is, we need to fight for students’ right to fashion an English that bears the burden of experiences delegitimized by English-only usages. Moreover, we need to “challenge” ourselves to unlearn a “learned” disposition: our fear that attention to the needs and rights to transform standardized usages will interfere with rather than enhance the ability of individuals to learn English.

Line 4: Living-English users focus energy on how to tinker with the very standardized usages they are pressured by dominant notions of educational and job opportunities to “imitate.” For instance, Achebe uses standardized pronouncements such as “The price nonnative English speakers (or non-standard English speakers) must be prepared to pay for better education and job opportunities is to learn the English of wider communication.” Achebe opts for the familiar sentence pattern: “the price such-and-such must be prepared to pay is to do such-and-such.” Yet he names standardized English rather than its so-called nonnative, nonstandard users as the party paying the price: “The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use” (432). By substituting the word “submission” for the verb “to learn,” Achebe also reminds us that subjugation is the end objective of any instruction underwritten by the fantasy of a world using one language, English, and using English strictly according to a fixed set of usages. Furthermore, he highlights the agency of users worldwide by depicting them as submitting English to many, and many different, uses.

Achebe, Baldwin, and Morrison remind us in both the content and the style of their writing that it is “neither necessary nor desirable” for users of English to “imitate” a standardized usage simply because it has been marketed as native, proper, accent-free, most sought-after, and thus correct. Instead of seeking symbolic or physical surgical procedures to “free” one another from our tongue-tied feelings or to treat our tongue-loose feeling with standardized usages as a life-insurance policy to be clung to and gloated over, we need to use them as critical resources—motiva-

tions—for pursuing the goals of “critical affirmation” (Lu, “Redefining” 173). We need to probe the ways our sense of ease with a particular usage might inadvertently sponsor systems and relations of injustice, even and especially when that usage seems to make normal and standard a particular experience that appears common, natural, beneficial to us. We need to affirm our yearning for a better world for all by critically engaging with all words and deeds that present symbolic or physical tongue surgery as the only alternative for the subjects of domination. English can be a link language for users committed to social justice if, and only if, we combat English-only projects by pursuing living-English work.

NOTES ON LIVING-ENGLISH COMPOSITION

The four lines of living-English inquiry are in keeping with work in U.S. composition that marks as assets—critical resources—two aspects of individual users’ lives: (1) their actual, often complex, and sometimes conflicting relations with diverse languages and diverse ways of using English; and (2) their interests in using English to articulate aspirations for life that are consistently delegitimized by the logic of global business but critical to the well-being of peoples bearing the cost of existing structures and relations of injustice. To further explore how U.S. composition might actively pursue the four lines of living English, I turn to some of my notes to delineate two potential points of departure.

One cluster of my notes centers on scholarship across the disciplines which takes a relational and historical approach to the world we share with other users of English, such as *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures* (Kachru), *The Cultures of Globalization* (Jameson and Miyoshi), and *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization* (Mudimbe-Boyi). I am particularly interested in scholarship that approaches the transrelations of nations, cultures, peoples, and language(s) in terms of transactions that transform, transfuse, translate, transport, traverse, transubstantiate, transvalue, transpose, and transplant established ways of doing things and in terms of multidirectional transactions—not merely top-down but also bottom-up and sideways. Here are two sets of questions I see this body of scholarship posing for my work in U.S. composition:

How can I stay vigilant toward my professional training and thus often inadvertent sponsorship of the various English-only fallacies? As Kachru cogently illustrates, the “fallacy” that “English is essentially learned to interact with native speakers of the language” crumples as soon as we learn to study (instead of ignore) the diverse ways English is used outside the so-called native-speaking countries, in regions where English is used as a “second language” (for example, India, Kenya, or Zambia) or a “foreign language” (for example, China, Korea, the former Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, or Zimbabwe) (Kachru, *Other* 357–58). For instance, English is being used

in multilingual countries such as South Africa as a “link language” for collective struggle against long and complex histories of intra- and international injustices along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and class (see Trimbur; Desharzer). The Cojti Cuxil in Guatemala are interested in learning English because they see it as a potential force for counteracting the residual hegemony of Spanish-only instruction on the national scene (Mignolo and Schiwy 266). Speakers of Tlingit on Prince of Wales Island in the Gulf of Alaska are fighting the threat of the extinction of Tlingit by translating into Tlingit anything they can get their hands on, including Christmas carols like “Jingle Bells” or nursery rhymes such as Hickory Dickory Dock (Cronin 142). Subaltern groups across the world are using English and transnational information networks to initiate what critics have termed “globalization from below”—building national and international alliances, including the “internationalization of indigenous organizations” in Latin America, to affect national language and education policies, human rights struggles, and fights for women’s rights, workers’ rights, and environmental well-being (Mignolo 43). How might U.S. composition tap into the knowledge and theory emerging from such a wealth of living-English work by users of English as a “second” and “foreign” *yuyan* so that accounts of the planetary scope of the hegemony of English are complicated by accounts of the ways in which English has been continually and consistently “broken and invaded”—and thus kept alive—by users using it in and in the interest of “developing,” “underdeveloped,” or “undeveloped” areas of the United States, the Americas, and the world (Mignolo; Mudimbe-Boyi; Pratt; Harvey; Trouillot; Dirlik)?

How might I put my work in the context of escalating U.S. political and economic interests in harnessing information technology to maintain its global hegemony (Harvey)? What is the viability of approaching our word-work in English or across languages not only in terms of fixed territorial spaces (the United States, China, Zimbabwe) but also in terms of the technologically constructed “time zones”—relations defined “chronologically” by access to the kind of telecommunication and information networks providing the infrastructure underwritten by and underwriting the post-Fordist economic logic (Cronin 82–83, 112)? How might I best attend to issues of class, gender, place, and history as well as race and ethnicity when approaching the agency of peripheralized users and avoid the danger of “unmooring” concepts such as “hybridity,” “in-between-ness,” and “global flow” from the actual, specific, physical-social-historical contexts of particular language use—the different realities facing the small number of winners and the majority of losers in the global restructuring of capitalism (Dirlik 102, 104–07; Hardt and Negri 150)? How might U.S. composition articulate a global perspective that attends to rather than blurs the actual, specific, physical-social-historical contexts of individual students’ life and work?

In the second cluster of my notes, I read texts to glean materials conducive to living-English inquiry when teaching courses labeled business and technical writ-

ing, BW, ESL, EFL, or first-year composition and under rubrics such as cultural, genre, and literacy studies or rhetorical or discourse analysis. I am interested in materials that call into question our English-only fixation on “fluency” in the “skills” sought after by the hiring and promotion practices of members of the Business Roundtable. For instance, in a section in Achebe’s essay “The African Writer and the English Language,” Achebe starts with a passage from his novel *Arrow of God* where the Chief Priest is telling one of his sons why it is necessary for the Chief to send the son to church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow. (432)

Achebe then poses a standardized version of the passage from *Arrow of God* to make a case that it is neither necessary nor desirable for all users of English to mechanically abide to English-only rulings:

I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight. (432–33)

Using the two passages, we might engage students in identifying the words, expressions, and sentence structures in the standardized version that fall within our sense of colloquial English and those in the passage from *Arrow of God* that appear “thick”—not immediately “intelligible,” and “dense” or even “dumb” to our native-trained ears. Then we might reread *Arrow of God* to consider the ways in which the original, less idiomatic-sounding version carries the burden of the specific circumstances, experiences, thoughts, feelings, actions, and relations the novel is trying to limn, plus the ways in which these conditions and relations are being dismissed or trivialized in the second version. We might use the passages to consider the value of reading methods which pay “thicker”—closer and more “intimate”—attention to the historical, social, geopolitical, economic, cultural, and linguistic reasons for a particular user of English—in this case, a self-identified African writer, Chinua Achebe—to act—to produce a text (oral or written)—in a particular way on a specific occasion (Appiah; Spivak). We might use the two versions to call into question our learned distaste toward nonidiomatic English lexicons and grammar—our learned inclination to view them as either exotic or downright stupid, nonsensical, incorrect. And we might use such passages to consider the ways in which various usages in the English-only, standardized version might also directly and indirectly undercut conditions and relations critical to the day-to-day being of individual students.

War Talk is a collection of articles and print versions of speeches by Arundhati Roy, some initially published in India and others in the United States. We can use the collection to engage students in exploring ways of reading that treat glossaries or annotations as integral rather than appendages to be glossed over. Take, for example, two sentences from the book. The first sentence comes from “Democracy: Who Is She When She Is at Home?” which the footnote tells us was “[f]irst published in the May 6, 2002, issue of *Outlook* magazine (India)”:

Once the Muslims have been “shown their place,” will milk and Coca-Cola flow across the land? [. . .] Or will there be someone else to hate [next year]? Alphabetically: Adivasis, Buddhists, Christians, Dalits, Parsis, Sikhs? Those who wear jeans or speak English or those who have thick lips or curly hair? (22–23)

In “Ahimsa,” which the footnote indicates is “based on the version published in the *Christian Science Monitor* on July 5, 2002” but “[f]irst published in the *Hindustan Times* (India), June 12, 2002,” we encounter this sentence:

It [the government] says quite openly that if it were to give in to the demands of the Maan “oustees” (that is, if it implemented its own policy), it would set a precedent for the hundreds of thousands of people, most of them Dalits (untouchables) and Adivasis [. . .]. (11)

The glossary to the book provides a “thick” translation for the term “Dalit”:

Those who are oppressed or literally “ground down.” The preferred term for those people who used to be called “untouchables” in India. (113)

Webster’s New World Dictionary (third college edition) defines “untouchables” as:

In India, any member of the lowest castes, whose touch was regarded as defiling to higher-caste Hindus; discrimination against these people (now called *Scheduled Castes*) was officially abolished in 1955.

Using the passages from the two essays, the entries from the “college edition” of the “new world” dictionary, the glossary to *War Talk*, and the footnotes to the essays, we might ask students to consider the loss of meaning if we ignore the glossary when making sense of the sentences. For instance, in what ways does the Dalits’ preference for a term of self-naming that bears the literal meaning of “ground down” (over the standardized label “untouchable”) and Roy’s use of that term in her writing make English better bear the burden of the Dalits’ lived experiences both before and after the 1955 “official” abolishment of discrimination against the “untouchables”? Using the footnotes on the publishing history of a piece such as “Ahimsa,” we might also consider how and why a standardized English translation-reduction would be attached to the term “Dalits” when the article appeared in a publication such as the *Christian Science Monitor*. And we can ask what we can do as readers of popular magazines to intervene with such standardized practices.

In *Globalization and Translation*, Michael Cronin tells of the efforts of translators in recent decades to use e-mail, bulletin boards, newsgroups, and mailing lists to get instant help globally when encountering problems in translating something (45). For instance, in her description of the Russian translation of Bill Gates's *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, Natalie Shahova talks about a query she and her colleagues posted on Lantra (an international forum for translators and interpreters) concerning the "contemporary meaning" of the term "knowledge worker" (qtd. in Cronin 45). Instead of a definitive answer, they found that "even natives have different opinions" (qtd. in Cronin 45). Using such stories as points of departure, we might ask students to compose a series of replies to the query, including one that offers a definition of "knowledge worker" from the perspective of Microsoft headquarters, another defining "knowledge worker" from the perspective of a lifeworld critical to their sense of self and life but peripheralized by dominant notions of "educational" or "career" prospects, and a third that tinkers with the Microsoft headquarters' definition of the term from the peripheralized perspective.

This type of assignment is in keeping with the goal of a whole range of classrooms housed in English studies: requiring students to perform close analyses of the content and style of a written text—Bill Gates's book; to conduct research by gathering policy statements, commercials, and so on from Microsoft and related Web sites while performing discourse analyses to get a sense of dominant goals and values of global business; and to compose autoethnographic accounts of their own language practices as users of English in lifeworlds critical to their sense of self and life but peripheralized by English-only rulings. This assignment can also initiate "thick" descriptions of the peculiar circumstances and relations endorsed by the kind of vocabulary and lexicon standardized by U.S. corporations such as Microsoft and generate deliberations over the need and right of diverse users within and outside the U.S. to "use rather than imitate" such hegemonic usages.

Both clusters of my notes, as does my other work, speak to the peculiar circumstances of my life and thus are best used to call attention to rather than obscure the actual but different circumstances facing each of us in spite of the general encroachment of the fast-capitalist logic of "space-time compression," "time-to-market," and the "trinity of quality, price, deadline" on the visions and operations of all U.S. colleges and universities (Cronin; Reading). To animate exchange of the different turns those of us interested in living-English uses and users of English must continue to improvise in our day-to-day lives, let me close by pointing to the aspect of my own work I am having the most difficulty with and therefore am most concerned to interrogate. Composition courses are traditionally housed in English departments and often taught by people with training in areas of study titled "literature," "linguistics," "comparative literature," and so on. However, there has been a longstanding tradition in these departments and areas of study to treat "thick" inquiry into the

politics of reading-writing-translation as bearing primarily or solely on the study of “literary” texts while assigning “nonliterary” work—so-called scientific, technical, commercial, legal, and administrative writing—to “the realm of no-nonsense, commonsensical instrumentalism” (Cronin 1–2). For instance, most of the works informing my own reading of the politics of language use, including most of the texts I discuss in this essay, focus on the reception and production of “literary” texts across historical and national borders. In fact, my own difficulty in coming up with examples of living-English work other than the writing of established figures in “literary” studies—Achebe, Baldwin, Morrison, Roy—speaks to my own inscription in that tradition. (For “nonliterary” examples by unpublished writers, see my “Professing Multiculturalism” and “Essay.”)

However, so long as U.S. composition continues to identify as its central objective writing *in* or *across* the disciplines or professions, teachers and researchers like me must continue to challenge ourselves to construct a global perspective on the politics of “nonliterary” uses of English. In their aspiration to join the professions or gain access to career prospects, students across the disciplines, along with professionals—research scientists, engineers, systems analysts, investment bankers, authors, editors, and so on—are increasingly pressured to perceive and market their competence in terms of their ability to process and manipulate information—to deliver products and services in the form of data, words, and images and to do so in the English most sought-after by the hiring and promotion practices of corporations surveyed by the College Board’s Commission on Writing. A global perspective on the work of U.S. composition in a world driven by the logic of fast capitalism must address the politics of language practices in scientific, technical, commercial, legal, and administrative writing. I call attention to my own difficulty in moving in that direction to mark it as an imperative for all of us interested in using English to build a more just world for all.

C O D A

While working on this essay, I read a front page report in the *New York Times* titled “For Mongolians, E Is for English, F is for Future” (Brooke). The report covers a national drive in Mongolia to make English its official foreign language (and, eventually, its official second language). It begins by citing Mongolia’s prime minister as stating, in an “American English honed in graduate school at Harvard,” “We see English [. . .] as a way of opening windows on the wider world.” The report then cites Mongolia’s foreign minister (“speaking American English, also honed at Harvard”) as saying: “If there is a short cut to development, it is English.” The report ends by citing Mongolia’s Minister of Education, Culture, and Science, “a graduate of a Soviet University,” who “laboriously explained in English,” “If we

[can] combine our academic knowledge with the English language, we can do outsourcing here, just like Bangalore.” The report also claims that what’s taking place in Mongolia is “a reflection of the steady march of English as a world language,” a phenomenon “[f]ueled by [. . .] the growing dominance of American culture and the financial realities of globalization.” Other evidence of English “taking hold” across the world includes the establishment of six private “English villages” in South Korea where “paying students can have their passports stamped for intensive weeks of English-language immersion, taught by native speakers from all over the English-speaking world.” “In Iraq, where Arabic and Kurdish are to be the official languages, a movement is growing to add English, a neutral link for a nation split along ethnic lines.”

Given the continued currency of “native speakers” from the “English-speaking world” in the English-language industry, how U.S. composition represents English, its uses, and its users will have intense and lingering effects on the future of the world. If we continue to sponsor English-only assumptions in our day-to-day practice, chances are that English will be used as a supposedly “neutral” tool for perpetuating the logic of a “free market economy” rather than as a link language for Arabic and Kurdish speakers to exchange among themselves and peoples of the world their experiences combating ethnic divisions on the local, regional, and global levels. If we continue to sponsor English-only assumptions in our day-to-day practice, chances are that the paying students in South Korea seeking “immersion” in “English villages,” once they get their “passport stamped” by the “native-speaking” villagers, will continue to see physical and symbolic tongue surgery as the only viable resolution to their trouble with the usages standardized by the English of global business. All of us interested in the future of a world sustainable not only for the few of us benefiting from the logic of fast capitalism but also for the majority grossly impoverished by it need to get involved in living-English work.

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