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# Crossing Linguistic Borders: Teaching Writing Skills in Two Languages to Translators-in-Training

Gabriel Gonzalez Nunez

*The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*, [gabriel.gonzaleznunez@utrgv.edu](mailto:gabriel.gonzaleznunez@utrgv.edu)

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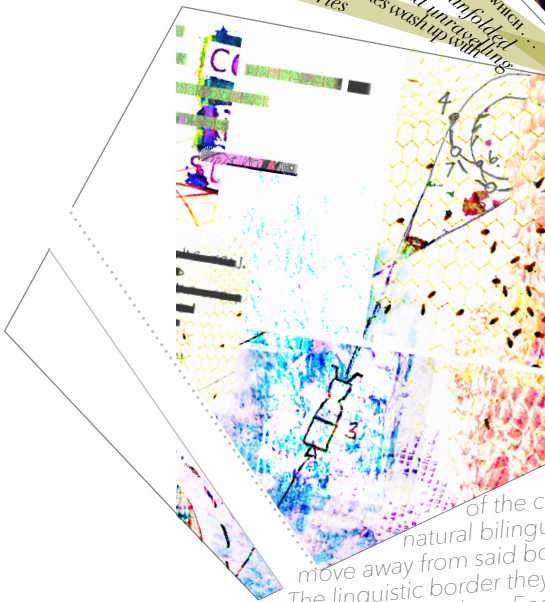
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Crossing linguistic borders: teaching writing skills in two languages to translators-in-training



gabriel gonzález núñez

*tristram*  
*borders are folded and unfolded*  
*interstitially stitched and unstitched*  
*through translation: rhizomes wash up with*  
*silt and memories*



In essence, one of the challenges faced in training natural bilinguals on the border is teaching them to move away from said border as they write across language varieties. The linguistic border they inhabit is a physical place but also a linguistic space where English and Spanish bleed into each other . . .

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## 1. Introduction

The term border can mean many things. It implies a boundary of some sort. Take political borders. The world is filled with them. They delineate the boundaries of states. These boundaries often serve as a line of demarcation that separates us from them. Political borders tend to be seen as the outer edges, the periphery, of political entities which are often defined by traits such as a shared history, culture, and language. At least that is how they are usually understood from the center. But at the border, standing in the periphery, this space that serves as a boundary is perceived differently. It is not a sharp line of demarcation in the sand but a place of transition. It is a place where elements from two histories, cultures, and languages blend together to create a third option, one which may be situated in either side of the border but that borrows freely from both.

Institutions of higher education located on such borders can use this feature to their advantage. They can take the particular skills that students on such borders possess and build upon them. A clear example of this is to be found in The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Spanish/English translation program. Students walk into UTRGV's translation courses with key assets, including their bilingualism, and are trained to become translators and interpreters. They are trained to stand at the border and look to one side and then look to the other side, away from the periphery, from the third option. This becomes especially evident as they learn to expand and perfect their writing in two languages. Translators are, after all, in the business of producing texts for individuals who either want to or, more often, need to access certain information through translation. This requires that students learn to write like monolingual professionals in not one but two languages, and then in not one but countless varieties of those languages. This paper will explore that process. First it will comment on the role of translation in the classroom. Then it will consider the profile of students in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a political and linguistic border, who choose to study translation at UTRGV. And finally it will describe how UTRGV's translation program builds upon the skills

brought by said students and trains them to become professional writers in both English and Spanish.

## **2. Translation in the classroom**

If one is to engage in the teaching of translation, it may be worthwhile to have an understanding of what translation is. The challenge lies in that, like democracy, translation is very hard to define satisfactorily. On this point, it can be said that an objective definition of translation may not be possible because no definition of it can be all inclusive or uncontested (Chesterman & Arrojo 152). However one chooses to define translation, there is at its core the idea of the transfer of meaning. At its essence, translation is about taking a message and moving it across some sort of linguistic border so that it can be accessible to those on the other side of such a border. This is evident in the three types of translation generally identified by translation scholars, namely interlingual translation, intralingual translation, and intersemiotic translation (Jakobson 114). In interlingual translation, a message in language A (say, Spanish) is rendered in language B (say, English). In intralingual translation, a message in a variety of language A (say, English legalese) is rendered in a different variety of language A (say, Plain English). In intersemiotic translation, a symbol (say, a traffic sign) is rendered in a different coding system (say, in written English). All of these very different types of translation take a given message and transfer its meaning<sup>1</sup> from one language, language variety, or coding system to another. Translation, then, can be a number of different things, all of which share the common element of transfer (the trans- in translation). For purposes of this paper, the discussion will focus on interlingual translation, as defined above.

Such translation can be useful in a classroom setting. Of course, how translation is used will depend to a great extent on the purpose of the activity at hand, which in turn will depend on the kind of classroom the students find themselves in. There are at least three types of classrooms where translation can, or must, be used. These are the second-language-acquisition classroom, the composition classroom, the translator-training classroom. The role of translation in each of these classrooms should briefly be considered before moving on.

Translation can be used in the second-language acquisition classroom. In other words, it can be employed as a pedagogical tool for 2L acquisition. This statement should be qualified, because starting in the 18th century, translation as a tool for language teaching became shunned (Pym et al. 12-13). Translation in this sense was understood very narrowly to mean exercises where dictionaries were used to translate specific sentences or words, etc., a method which was construed to be

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<sup>1</sup> Translation scholars have long understood that there is some uncertainty to meaning, that it is not fixed per se, but translation can take place nonetheless due to the many different ways meaning can be built and negotiated (see Pym 2010:90-113).

the opposite of natural methods of language learning (ibid. 12-14). As natural methods of language learning became preferred for second-language acquisition, this type of translation activity became the sort of thing instructors could be laughed out of a room for. Starting in the 1980s, however, scholarly publications have been reporting on the use of translation in the second-language acquisition classroom more favorably (ibid. 14-26). Translation in these studies is understood to encompass a broader range of activities (e.g., the creation of subtitles) linked to intercultural competence. This use of translation can provide “a communicative activity that can enhance the learning of an L2,” especially as combined with other teaching approaches (ibid. 135)

Translation can also be used in the composition classroom. Here translation can be employed as a pedagogical tool for developing writing and other skills. Specifically, translation becomes “an analytic framework” for student reflection on the writing process (Horner and Tretreault 21). This use of translation in the composition classroom derives from the idea that all communication, all speaking, all writing is at its core an act of translation. Thus, using translation exercises in the composition classroom helps students understand how meaning is constructed and negotiated, which in turn can lead to discussions on power and its associated dynamics (ibid.: 18-19). This type of translation is neither that used in the second-language acquisition classroom nor the type that translators-in-training engage in (Pennycook 43). Rather, this type of translation derives much of its value from its accompanying reflective exercises, which can help develop “a repertoire of skills towards productive negotiation with linguistic codes, identities, and cultures” (Kiernan et al. 102).

Finally, translation can, actually must, be used in the translation classroom. Here translation is not a means to an end, as in the previous two classrooms, but rather the thing itself that is being taught and learned. Thus, the objective of the translation classroom is usually to help produce “qualified and highly competent translators – transforming students with certain language competences into professionals able to translate, localize, revise, etc.” (Gambier 164). Translation is ever-present in this type of classroom, as becoming a highly competent translator requires a great deal of practice. Translation activities in such a classroom can be process-centered (carrying out specific translation-related processes), situationally oriented (simulations of, or immersion in, real-world, translation-related situations), or text-based (working with different text types) (ibid. 164-167). This type of use of translation is quite different than that which might be found in second-language acquisition classrooms or composition classrooms. This paper will focus on the translation classroom and not the other two.

Clarifying which type of classroom this paper addresses is important, because the interests pursued by translation in each of these classrooms are different. And if different interests are being sought, different pedagogical approaches can be

justified. In the case of the second-language acquisition classroom, translation activities are combined with other teaching methods in order to serve the interest of teaching students a language they do not yet master fully. In the case of the composition classroom, translation activities are designed to serve the interest of teaching students something about the writing process itself. Some scholars feel, additionally, that the composition classroom is a good place for bilingual students to develop “fluid border identities” (Flores & García 248). This is an identity interest. It is part of a movement in the United States to bring multilingual perspectives into the composition classroom (Kiernan et al. 89). Finally, in the translation classroom, exercises are carried out in the interest of turning bilinguals into professional translators. This implies the development of specific translator competences, including the ability to function as professional writers in at least two languages. While there is some overlap in all of these, the interests sought in each of these classrooms is different enough that the approaches to translation must of necessity be different. This means the type of translation activities carried out will be different. Of these three, this paper will focus on the third type of classroom. And more specifically, it will focus on helping students develop professional writing skills in two languages, namely, Spanish and English.

### **3. Translators and linguistic borders**

There are many political borders in the world, and due to different language policies adopted by some neighboring states<sup>2</sup>, a good number of these political borders also become linguistic borders. These linguistic borders, however, tend to not be air-tight. Often, language contact becomes a fact of life in such borders, as populations move back and forth to engage in commerce, visit family and friends, and look for employment or other opportunities. Such is the case of Brownsville, a border town on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border. In this city, language contact is taken for granted by all its inhabitants, as Spanish and English are heard openly in its streets and houses. In Brownsville, a largely diglossic society has developed in which most residents speak both languages, albeit with varying degrees of fluency (González Núñez, “Law and Translation”; see, generally, Valdés). Brownsville has developed into a community in which “being bilingual is vital to daily communication” and even educated professionals will use both Spanish and English (Mejías et al. 121-122).

Thus, in border towns such as this one, with its vibrant bilingualism and uncontested diglossia, individuals are often raised as natural bilinguals. In other

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<sup>2</sup> National languages are, to a great extent, political constructs that arose from different concerns centered around nation-building (see González Núñez, “Translating” 3-5). Thus, when a country like Mexico chooses to make Spanish its de jure official language and a country like the United States chooses to make English its de facto official language, the use of Spanish in Mexico and English in the United States expand from their respective centers of power toward the periphery. It is at the border that these constructed linguistic communities come face to face and bleed into each other

words, they are raised in situations of simultaneous bilingualism where children are exposed to two languages from birth and learn both at the same time. In the case of Brownsville, children grow up hearing and learning, to one degree or another, the local varieties of English and Spanish. Depending on one's perspective on how to achieve a linguistically just society, this situation may be interpreted as being potentially problematic (see, e.g., Weinstock) or as something to be built upon (see, e.g., De Schutter). No matter what side of the issue one takes in the debate about bilingualism in certain linguistic communities, there is no question that an opening is provided in terms of educational opportunities. Namely, natural bilinguals can be trained to use their linguistic skills as an asset to themselves and their communities.

With this insight in mind, college professors in Brownsville have been teaching courses in translation to local students for three decades. Currently, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has both graduate and undergraduate programs in Spanish/English translation and interpreting.<sup>3</sup> Most graduate students in UTRGV's program are not from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where Brownsville is located. In a striking contrast, undergraduate students who declare their major to be Spanish Translation and Interpreting are almost universally from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, either because they were born there or because they have come from neighboring Mexico and have taken up residency in Brownsville or nearby areas in "The Valley," as the region is referred to. Thus, undergraduate students in UTRGV's translation program inhabit a border space, both politically and linguistically—they physically often cross the border, and additionally, they continually move back and forth between Spanish and English without much thought.

In this sense, they are well-positioned to become translators. They exhibit varying degrees of bilingualism, which is a bare minimum requirement to become a translator. They also are in a position to gain an understanding of how two cultures operate, namely, Mexico's and the United States'. For translators, the ability to move back and forth between cultures is as important, if not more so, than the ability to move back and forth between languages. Translators are not simply replacing words in one language with words in another. Rather, they are trying to communicate a message across languages and cultures. Translators take a text created in culture A and then recreate that text in culture B. Thus, when Suzanne Jill Levine translates Julio Cortázar from Spanish into English, she must have a profound understanding of the culture that Cortázar is writing in so as to have a full grasp of what Cortázar means to communicate; additionally, she must have a thorough understanding of the

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<sup>3</sup> As any introductory textbook on translation will quickly point out, translation and interpreting are two different activities (see, e.g., Child 1). Translation refers to the written transfer of meaning between languages and interpreting to the oral transfer of meaning. This distinction is lost to most individuals outside the language services industry. (This paper is about writing skills in naturally bilingual students, so it will not focus on interpreting.)

American culture that will receive her translation, including the expectations of readers, so as to know how best to communicate Cortázar's messages. Then she can recreate, in essence rewrite, Cortázar in a different language and culture.<sup>4</sup>

Undergraduate translation students from the Lower Rio Grande Valley can be taught to do this, because they have the advantage of seeing the world from what Pym has termed an "interculture" (see Pym, "Method" 177-192). An interculture is the "beliefs and practices found in intersections or overlaps of cultures, where people combine something of two or more cultures at once" (ibid. 177). This is not to be confused with multiculturalism, which is the co-existence of several cultures within one geographical space (ibid.). There is plenty of evidence that Brownsville is an apt example of such an interculture. It goes beyond people growing up with two languages. The evidence can be found in the blend of cultural traditions. For example, people here celebrate Halloween on October 31 and then on November 2



Figure 1. This photo shows charros, elegant horsemen from Mexico's center and West, in a parade that includes the all-American tradition of marching bands and cheerleaders. Notice also the signs in the back, including one that reads 'Welcome to Mercado Juárez' and another one that reads 'Centro Naturista Fame.' This photo, taken in 2016, provides visible evidence of Brownsville's interculturalism.

celebrate Día de los Muertos. The most important local celebration is called Charro Days, and its main parade proudly shows off cheerleaders and marching bands alongside horse-riding vaqueros and chinas poblanas. The evidence of interculturalism is also etched into the city's linguistic landscape<sup>5</sup>, as billboards and other commercial signs appear in English, in Spanish, or in some mix of both languages. (See Figure 1.)

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<sup>4</sup> For an interesting look at the work of literary translators and their keen insights on cultures, see Levine.

<sup>5</sup> The term "linguistic landscape" is used to describe "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" as a way to provide insights into the different linguistic communities in said territory or region (Landry and Bourhis 23).



Because Brownsville and its surrounding areas constitute such an intercultural, undergraduate students training to become translators are physically situated in the middle ground between two cultures, in a place where Mexican and U.S. cultures bleed into each other. They can be trained then to move from this place-at-the-border into one direction or the other. This includes training in the writing conventions that are employed not in the intercultural itself, not in that third place, but in the Anglo-American and Latin-American cultures between which the translators will move texts.

#### **4. Training translators on physical and linguistic borders**

Translators<sup>6</sup> need to be many things, only the most basic of which is that they need to be bilingual. There is some controversy as to what it means, in terms of cognition, to be bilingual. The traditional model of bilingualism is one where “speakers are said to ‘add up’ whole autonomous languages or even partial structural bits of these languages” (García & Wei 12). In this model, the bilingual brain has L1+L2. Recently, a more dynamic model of bilingualism has gained traction. This newer model “posits that there is but one linguistic system [...] with features that are integrated [...] throughout” (ibid. 15). In this model, the bilingual brain has L1/2. Thus, bilinguals may at times act like monolinguals, but in their brain there is simply one language system (ibid.). It is hard to know with certainty which of the two models more accurately describes what happens inside the bilingual brain. The topic itself “stirs up a hornets’ nest of contradictory research findings” (Pym et al. 23). Whatever bilingualism may look like inside the brain, individuals who work in the translation profession have long concluded that bilingualism is merely a starting point (see, e.g., Johnson).

Beyond that starting point, translators need to be able to do many things competently. On this topic, scholars in the field of Translation Studies have developed a good number of models of translator competence, which for purposes of this paper is to be understood as the set of skills exhibited by expert translators in producing professional translations. In an insightful paper, Kelly (2002) provides an overview and analysis of the major competence models. These include a wide range of different competences, and in all of them, the ability to produce texts of a certain

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<sup>6</sup> The term “translator” in this article will be used to refer to a professional who makes a living by translating written texts for clients. This is different from an “interpreter.” Interpreters work with the spoken word, while translators work with written texts. In this paper, no mention or thought will be given to the training of interpreters. While there is a lot of overlap between these two activities, only translators are required to write. And writing is what’s relevant for this article.

<sup>7</sup> This brings to mind the well-known quote: “Essentially, all models are wrong, but some are useful” (Box & Draper 1987: 424). Studies conducted on this particular issue do not seem to conclusively settle which of the two models is more accurate, so the more helpful question seem to be which of the two models is more useful for specific purposes.

quality in the target language<sup>8</sup> is present in one way or another. For example, Wilss (1976) includes “productive competence in the target language,” Roberts (1984) lists “qualité d’expression de la langue d’arrivée,” Nord (1991) speaks of “competence of text production,” and Pym (“Translation Error Analysis”) describes “[t]he ability to generate a target-text series of more than one viable term (target text<sub>1</sub>, target text<sub>2</sub> ... target text<sub>n</sub>) for a source text” and the ability to choose the best one (Kelly 10-13). Thus, translators are, among other things, writers. Ultimately, what the paying client wants to receive from the translator is a written text. Translators who cannot provide texts that meet the expectations of their clients will need to find a different line of work.

Now, students on the border who would be translators come into the classroom with an important asset—their bilingualism. But, as stated above, that in and of itself is insufficient—students need to be trained to develop a number of competences, including writing skills in the language into which they will be expected to translate. Translators in training have traditionally been instructed to translate only into their A language, or the language they are more competent in, usually their native language, but the reality on the ground is that translators often work into both their A and B languages (Pokorn 37-38). And, of course, there are translators for whom it is difficult to tell which language is their A language. Thus, translator training programs should train students to develop writing skills in at least two languages. For students in UTRGV’s undergraduate translation program, that means that their bilingualism, whatever it looks like, needs to be built upon to develop writing skills, in both Spanish and English, that meet the expectations of a wide range of clients.<sup>9</sup>

As stated earlier, these students are for the most part the result of an intercultural, and this is reflected in a particular student profile with particular language skills. Based on the population of students taking introductory translation courses in UTB/UTRGV<sup>10</sup> between 2014 and 2016, some observations can be made regarding the linguistic skills that such students initially bring into the classroom. For the most part, these students are natural bilinguals who live on the U.S. side of the border (the occasional student will live in Matamoros, Mexico, and cross over the

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<sup>8</sup> The term “target language” refers to the language the translator is drafting their translated text in; in other words, this is the language into which they translate.

<sup>9</sup> These clients will generally expect that the documents translators produce meet the writing conventions of a specific speech community. For example, if a translator is tasked with translating a Spanish company’s *escritura de constitución* for filing before the US Securities and Exchange Commission, the translator will be expected to draft a document that is similar in style and tone to any set of articles of incorporation drafted by an English-speaking lawyer in the US.

<sup>10</sup> On August 2015, The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) was merged into The University of Texas Pan-American in order to create a new university known as UTRGV. UTRGV’s Translation and Interpreting Programs were transferred into the university from UTB only.

bridge). All of them have done some schooling in English, often the bulk or even all of it (it is rare that they have not done at least their high school in the United States). Some claim English as their A language and others claims Spanish, while occasionally a student will struggle to distinguish which of the two is their strongest language. Generally, the variety of English they speak can be termed Chicano English<sup>11</sup>, even if a few students acquired English as a second language after grade school. The variety of Spanish they speak can be described as Mexican-American Spanish<sup>12</sup>, with the exception of the few students who live in Mexico and speak Mexican Spanish. Additionally, no matter what language is dominant for them individually, students often engage in code-switching, moving seamlessly and effortlessly from Spanish to English and vice versa. It is in this extensive practice of code-switching that the interculture becomes audible evident.

In this interculture, students are used to hearing Spanish and English mix and interact in different contexts. This is sometimes reflected in the translations they produce, especially early on in their coursework. What becomes evident in these texts is that, in the students' minds, the distance between stylistic and rhetorical elements in English and Spanish is greatly reduced. One might argue that there is a convergence of stylistic and rhetorical elements. This is a faithful representation of the linguistic setting that the border offers to them, and of course, there is nothing wrong with such writing in and of itself.

The challenge lies in that in the translation classroom students need to be taught to write not just for the interculture but for cultures far removed from their daily experiences. This might include writing for highly educated monolingual speakers in Madrid, middle-class women in Buenos Aires, or low-income Spanish-speaking residents of inner city Dallas. Translators need to be able to reproduce the language that will most effectively communicate with an array of communities of speakers, many of which have their own stylistic and rhetorical elements that range from the use of very specific words to the frequency of repetitions in a given text.

Thus, translation students on the border need to be exposed to a wide range of geographic, social, and situational varieties of their working languages. In essence, one of the challenges faced in training natural bilinguals on the border is teaching them to move away from said border as they write across language varieties. The linguistic border they inhabit is a physical place but also a linguistic space where English and Spanish bleed into each other in ways that are vibrant and effective in their own context, but the texts competent translators are expected to produce are generally not meant for such a place; rather, they are usually meant to be read by monolingual speakers of other varieties of Spanish and English, where the lines of demarcation between the two languages are more clearly drawn.

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<sup>11</sup> For a definition and analysis of Chicano English, see Santa Ana.

<sup>12</sup> For a description of Mexican-American Spanish, see Valdés.

In order to help students develop writing skills in both languages, UTRGV's undergraduate program in Spanish and English translation takes a two-pronged approach (see Table 1). The first prong consists in strengthening their monolingual

**Table 1. Courses in UTRGV's Spanish/English translation major that help develop writing skills**

	<b>Mandatory</b>	<b>Elective</b>
<b>Courses in <i>monolingual</i> writing</b>	SPAN 3300 - Advanced Spanish Grammar and Composition I SPAN 3301 - Advanced Spanish Grammar and Composition II Students must choose <u>one</u> of these three: ENGL 3342 - Technical Communication ENGL 3343 - Business Communication ENGL 4344 - Writing for Lawyers	SPAN 3302 - Creative Writing in Spanish ENGL 3342 - Technical Communication ENGL 3343 - Business Communication ENGL 3344 - Advanced Composition ENGL 4344 - Writing for Lawyers
<b>Courses which include instruction in <i>writing across languages</i></b>	SPAN 2389 - Academic Cooperative – English/Spanish Translation TRSP/SPAN 3342 - Advanced Spanish to English Translation TRSP/SPAN 3343 - Advanced English to Spanish Translation	

writing skills. To achieve this, students are required to take writing courses in both languages. The requirements include two writing courses in Spanish and one writing course in English. The reason students are required to take one more writing course in Spanish than in English is because most of these students have developed more standard writing skills in English through primary and secondary education on the U.S. side of the border. In addition to this requirement, students must select a number of elective courses from an approved list which includes an additional writing course in Spanish and up to three additional writing courses in English. In short, students will take a minimum of two writing courses in Spanish and one in English and a maximum of three writing courses in Spanish and four in English. These requirements are intended to develop monolingual writing skills, which is essential for translators in training.

Even so, on the linguistic border the challenge for training translators is that students often amalgamate elements from both languages, particularly in terms of style and rhetoric. For this reason, a second prong in UTRGV's approach to training translators in the Lower Rio Grande Valley becomes necessary. This second prong is helping them write from one language into the other while respecting each language's standard writing conventions. This is achieved by including writing components in the introductory translation courses. These courses are requirements for the major, and while they do not focus exclusively on writing, their curricular design includes helping students distinguish between stylistic and rhetorical elements in both languages. There are three introductory courses in Spanish/English translation, and each of them builds the skills of writing across the languages in a different way. The next few paragraphs will describe how this is achieved.

The first course in the sequence is SPAN 2389. This course is an introductory course in English-to-Spanish and Spanish-to-English translation for bilingual students. It is assumed that students possess basic grammar and writing skills in English (obtained at least in high school) and in Spanish (obtained at least through SPAN 2313, a pre-requisite). The course focuses on general translation notions, basic instruction for translating into English, and basic instruction for translating into Spanish. Students work at the sentence level only, and teacher efforts are focused on helping students learn to separate the two languages in their minds. The most important objective in this course is to help students realize that translating is not about changing words from one language to another but about transferring the meaning behind those words in a way that will make the most sense to the readers, generally monolingual speakers of English or Spanish, for whom they are translating. In essence, this course, while not about writing, is geared toward developing skills that will allow students to write across the linguistic border. This is achieved through helping students learn to specifically distinguish areas of contrast between their working languages. Students are instructed that it is neither necessary nor usually desirable for professional translators to reproduce English syntax and grammar in Spanish or vice versa. For example, they are shown that often the Spanish indirect object must be translated as the English subject (see Example 1) or that the passive voice in English does not need to, and often should not, be translated as a passive voice in Spanish (see Example 2). Thus, the students in this introductory course learn that in order to write adequate sentences in Spanish or in English, they need to stop thinking in the structures of the other language. This is not always simple for them to do, because they see the source sentence and seek to imitate that sentence in the target language simply by changing words across the linguistic border. Learning that Spanish and English often express the same idea through different vocabulary, syntax, and style can be difficult. Some students actively resist moving away from the structure of the source language. For that

reason, skills for writing across the languages are addressed in the following two general translation courses.

Example 1. Spanish indirect object translated as English subject

Spanish: Esa actitud me da fastidio. (Indirect object: me)

English: I am disgusted by such an attitude. (Subject: I)

Example 2. Different Spanish options for the English passive voice

English: Trees were planted.

Spanish: Los árboles fueron plantados.

Se plantaron árboles.

Plantaron árboles.

Alguien plantó árboles.

In the two courses that follow, students move in one direction only. They now work beyond the sentence level, with texts ranging from 200 to 400 words. TRSP 3342 focuses on translation into English. The curriculum for this course includes, besides a great deal of instruction on translation, specific instruction on writing in English. Specifically, students are given instruction about a) the characteristics of English prose and b) how to revise texts in English. Due to the short duration of the 15-week semester, instead of providing students with an extensive review of English prose, the course focuses on areas where it diverges from Spanish. Specifically, students are taught that modern English prose values the joining of ideas through simple clauses and coordinating conjunctions, i.e., parataxis, while Spanish prefers more explicit connections between ideas through embedded clauses and subordinating conjunctions, i.e., hypotaxis (see Washbourne 328).

In order for students to actually appreciate this, they are presented with real-life examples of texts in Spanish and English that help illustrate this difference. In the Teaching Artifact annexed to this article, one such example is shown. An authentic text in Spanish is presented alongside an authentic text in English. In order for the styles to be as similar as possible, the texts come from two heads of state, namely, Guatemala's President Pérez Molina and the United States' President Obama. Additionally, both were uttered at the same event, the Seventh Summit of the Americas held in 2015 in Panama City. Further, both texts deal, in their own way, with the warming up of relations between the United States and Cuba. Then students are asked to work with the Spanish text first. Specifically, they are asked to count how many sentences and words comprise the text. In this case, they indicate they find a single sentence with 45 words. At that point they are asked to spot the subordination that makes such a sentence possible. Then they are asked to count the

Table 2. Lanham's Paramedic Approach as adapted for revising English translations from Spanish

Step	Example
	I should make the statement that I believe that I am working along the same lines as Orrego-Carmona, but with a different focus.
1. Circle the prepositions	I should make the statement that I believe that I am working along the same lines as Orrego-Carmona, but with a different focus.
2. Bracket off any form of the verb "to be"	I should make the statement that I believe that I [am] working along the same lines as Orrego-Carmona, but with a different focus.
3. Ask "who is kicking whom?"	I should make the statement that I believe that I [am] working along the same lines as Orrego-Carmona, but with a different focus.
4. Put the kicking verb into a simple (not compound) verb, if possible.	I believe my work is similar to Orrego-Carmona's, but with a different focus.

words and sentences in the English text. They find 43 words divided among five sentences. At that point they are asked to identify the simple clauses and the coordination that make these sentences possible. With environmentally valid illustrations such as this one, students can see English parataxis and Spanish hypotaxis in practice.

The next step is to instruct students on how to recreate such parataxis in English. To do this, students are provided with a long English sentence that resembles Spanish in its structure. This one is 97 words long and has only one period, the one at the end. (The sentence was artificially created by combining a number of sentences from the same English text used earlier.) Students have to rework the sentence into a paragraph through the use of simple clauses and coordination. They are specifically instructed that the meaning cannot change. After they have all attempted it, the teacher and his or her students analyze different student-generated options. This exercise helps students break away from the syntax and punctuation of Spanish in order to create more authentic, and generally more adequate, texts in English.

Students are also taught to revise their English prose. They are asked to do this in two steps. The first is an editing phase, where they read a text they produced in English and compare it, sentence by sentence, to the Spanish source text. At this stage, they are expected to focus on places where meaning was either added or lost in

the translation process. In the next phase of the revision process, they focus on style, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Because Spanish style tends to be more elaborate than style in English, students are taught to revise their texts using part of Lanham's "Paramedic Approach" to revising prose (1-21). In class, students read from Lanham, and then they are provided with a series of sentences that need to be revised using this method (see Table 2). This is a particularly helpful method to revise texts translated from Spanish into English because Spanish sentences tend to include more prepositional phrases than English, and the Paramedic Approach helps eliminate some of this from the English texts produced by students. Through this process students begin to understand that English is not like Spanish in that the former prefers parataxis and avoids structures that include long strings of prepositional phrases. This helps students' English writing sound less like Spanish and more like English.

In TRSP 3343, students move in the opposite direction. They begin with texts in English and produce versions in Spanish. This course focuses mainly on different translation procedures. It also deals with aspects of Spanish grammar which are different from English grammar and may present translator pitfalls. More importantly for purposes of this paper, it also includes instruction on stylistic features that are specific to Spanish writing. Once again, the semester's short duration makes it impossible to provide students with a comprehensive overview of Spanish stylistics and rhetoric. Consequently, the focus is on a) the way Spanish creates cohesion and coherence and b) the way Spanish texts tend to be structured. Regarding the first of these two items, the work students do is based on observations found in Lopez Guix and Wilkinson. Students are taught that a text has cohesion when each element in a text is related to other elements in the text. This is achieved through, for example, exophoric references, endophoric references, repetition, parallelism, etc. (Lopez Guix & Wilkinson 213). Additionally, they are taught that a text has coherence when there is some sort of progression of ideas, the text is not self-contradictory, etc. (ibid. 231). In order for students to appreciate how this plays out in English and Spanish, they are shown authentic texts in both languages. The texts were created in comparable circumstances. They come from two heads of state, in this case, Venezuela's President Chávez and the United States' President Obama. Further, both texts come from each author's first inaugural address. Students are divided into groups, and each group is tasked with a different activity: group 1 underlines all elements of cohesion in the Spanish text, group 2 underlines all elements of cohesion in the English text, group 3 underlines all elements of coherence in the Spanish text, and group 4 underlines all elements of coherence in the English text. Then the class is brought together so that each group may present their findings. The teacher moderates the interaction to make sure that each of the elements mentioned during instruction is included and correctly instructed.



Students are also given some basic instruction on some observations regarding contrastive rhetorics between Spanish and English. To do this, students are introduced to the idea that monolingual “[s]peakers of different languages use different devices to present information, to establish the relationships among ideas, to show centrality of one idea as opposed to another, to select the most effective means of representation” (Kaplan, “Contrastive Rhetorics” 140-141). To help students visualize this idea, Kaplan’s own doodles are used.<sup>13</sup> (See Figure 2.)

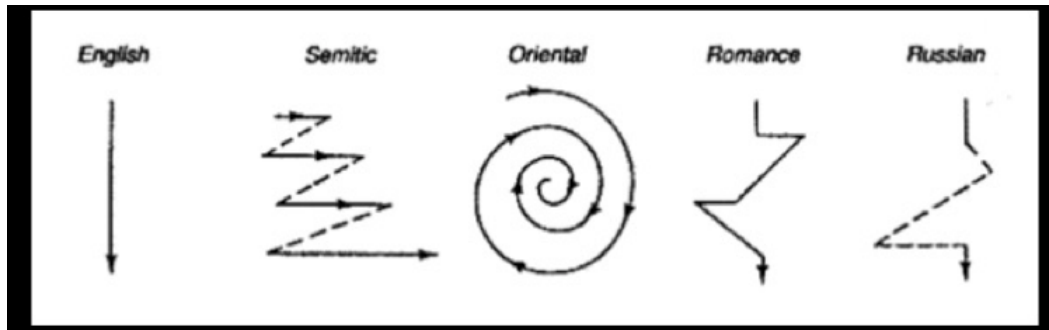


Figure 2. “Doodles” showing Kaplan’s (“Contrastive Rhetorics” 15) understanding of how rhetorical structures can vary from culture to culture.

In order to help students think through the implications of this, students are asked to mentally move away from the interculture and travel from a monolingual, English-speaking culture to a monolingual, Spanish-speaking culture. To do this, the teacher asks them to recall their English courses prior to coming to college, specifically the five-paragraph essay (sometimes known as a three-tier essay). As they do, they become aware that they have been instructed, as is typical in school systems where English is the medium of instruction, that a good essay is built by creating an introductory paragraph, developing and supporting the main thesis, and closing with a conclusion. This linear way of writing essays reflects a positivist approach to writing: the rules are written by those in authority and then writers in training are instructed to follow those rules. This is, of course, not the only way to build an essay, but the cultural assumption is that the linear presentation of ideas is the best way to develop such ideas. This implies that the responsibility of properly communicating a message falls on the writer. Switching cultures, students are then instructed regarding

<sup>13</sup> Students are warned this is not a scientific description of cultural thought patterns. It is a simplified illustration which can be criticized on several grounds, including ethnocentrism. Students are shown the doodles simply as a helpful illustration, an approximation, and not as a scientific description. Kaplan himself has indicated that “I tried to represent, in crude graphic form, the notion that the rhetorical structure of languages differs [...] it was not my intent then, and it is not my intent now, to claim more for the notion than it deserves” (Kaplan, “Cultural Thought Patterns” 9). That is precisely the key, that students understand that rhetorical structures in English and Spanish are different.

how the Latin or Romance world deals with writing. Here, the approach is less positivistic and more intuitive. In the Romance world, including countries where Spanish is the medium of instruction in schools, it is generally assumed that good writing is the result of good reading. Writers learn to write not so much through instruction about how to structure essays and so forth but rather through reading other writers and learning to emulate the way they structure their ideas. Reading and writing are understood to be “las dos caras de una misma moneda” where by reading the student learns how to decode messages and by writing the student learns how to code them (Valverde 83). Thus, erudition is understood to result in good writing. This places the responsibility of properly understanding a message on the reader.

By the time students finish these three introductory translation courses, they have received instruction on how to write across languages. This requires them to first understand that writing from English into Spanish or from Spanish into English often requires the discarding of the syntax and grammar of the source language. To some individuals, especially those not trained in translation, this concept can be hard to come to terms with, so plenty of practice at the sentence level becomes necessary. Students are then given specific instruction for writing into English and for writing into Spanish. This includes learning to see parataxis in English and hypotaxis in Spanish, as well as distinguishing between the stylistic features of good prose in English as contrasted to good prose in Spanish. Through contrasting examples and directed practice, students begin developing different writing skills for two different languages.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has argued that linguistic borders are also cultural borders. But they are not sharp lines of demarcation. Instead, they are places where one culture fades into the other. They become a middle space, a place where cultural and linguistic elements from two different cultures meld into an interculture. One of the traits of this interculture as found in Brownsville, Texas, is a high incidence of natural bilingualism. A number of naturally bilingual students walk into translation classes at UTRGV. They have a basic building block for becoming translators, which is their ability to switch back and forth between languages. Other important translator competences include the ability to write professionally in at least two languages—translators are, after all, professional writers. This ability must often be developed in naturally bilingual students, because their upbringing in an interculture makes it hard for them to intuitively distinguish between what is seen as good writing by monolingual speakers of English on the one hand and what is seen as good writing by monolingual speakers of Spanish on the other.

To help students learn to tell “good English” apart from “buen español” when writing, translator trainers at UTRGV take a two-pronged approach. The first prong is simple enough: have students take writing courses from English faculty and

writing courses from Spanish faculty. The second prong takes a contrastive stance. Along with other translation instruction, students are taught how English and Spanish differ stylistically and rhetorically. The focus is clearly on the differences, so that students can learn to move from the periphery, where intercultural differences are found, to the center in both Spanish and English. This is achieved through a simple method of lecturing, showing examples, and guiding students in practice. This method is intended to help students develop strong writing skills in two languages through highlighting where the languages are dissimilar.

By the time students are in the final of their three introductory translation courses, something begins to happen. Some students stop resisting the idea that good writing in English and in Spanish follow the same rules. They stop feeling that a sentence in Spanish should be worded exactly like a sentence in English (and vice versa). Instead of looking for ways to simply move words across languages, they start thinking in terms of ideas and concepts. When faced with a sentence in the source language, they begin to wonder how to present the same idea in the target language while complying with the expectations of monolingual readers in that target language. For example, a string of three short sentences in English might become one highly subordinated sentence in Spanish. The results of this training are seen when students are no longer afraid to completely alter the syntax of a Spanish sentence as they write it in English.

What this all means is that on the U.S-Mexico border, the natural bilingualism of many students is an asset that can be developed into professional writing skills in both Spanish and English. Thus, the population of areas such as the Lower Rio Grande Valley is well situated to become proficient in not one but two different sets of writing skills. This can result in professional and also personal enrichment. In other words, their bilingualism should be seen as an asset with great potential. Developing that potential takes hard work and willingness on the part of both the student and the instructor, but the results are well worth the effort.

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*Translators need to be many things, only the most basic of which is that they need to be bilingual.*

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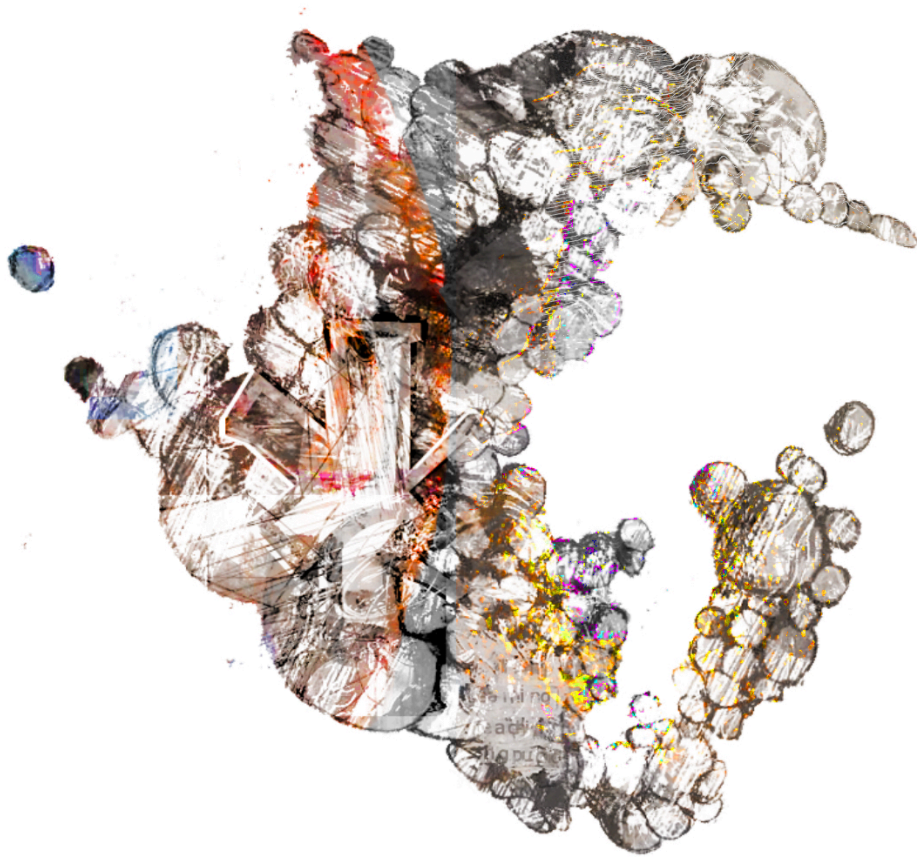
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A JOURNAL OF TRANSITIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL + COLLEGE WRITING TEACHERS



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