The Rules of the Road: Negotiating Literacies in a Community Driving Curriculum

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Abstract

This article is an ethnographic case study of a community literacy project that teaches immigrants to the U.S. how to get their driver's licenses. The article shows how perceptions of literacy change when project participants encounter the "rules of the road"—unspoken rules that are highly social, deeply embodied, and usually pitched by the powerful as clear, neutral, and necessary for survival. Based on qualitative analysis of written materials and interviews gathered during the project, we demonstrate how the community project activated analogic thinking about literacy. That is, realizing that driving rules are negotiable leads learners to realize that literacy rules are negotiable, too.

Keywords

community literacy, immigrants, literacy studies, mobility studies, multilingualism

I n studies of immigrant literacy, driving is a quiet but persistent presence: immigrants in the U.S. describe the "textual vulnerability of driving" without documentation (Vieira 131); students discuss the pressures of unwarranted traffic tickets (Auerbach et al.); a custodian-college writing collaborative drives their autobiographies around town—printed and wrapped on a minivan—when the student newspaper won't print their writing (Marko et al.). These studies show that the practice of driving often inserts itself into immigrants' literate experiences, with repercussions for literacy users' papers, status, or bodies. This article proceeds from the center of this phenomenon, asking how driving shapes immigrants' literate experiences. Drawing on an ethnographic case study of a community literacy driving project, we show how perceptions of literacy change when project participants encounter the "rules of the road"—the unspoken social and literate rules that regulate literacies in the car and on the streets.

The "rules of the road" were brought to our attention at the start of our partnership with a community language school, whose students in a free English program for immigrants and refugees asked for literacy support in earning driver's licenses. In an initial interview about the driving project, a school staff member, Kathy,[1] explained that their students needed to learn about driving in the U.S. because she believed they had "trouble acknowledging the rules of the road." She explained:

> [In] different countries, people have different styles of driving, different rules—or they have no rules, which were getting in the way of them successfully driving here…You have to respect the rules, even though you think they might be stupid. We all have rules in this country that we think are stupid, but if we don't follow them, we are going to get stopped, get a ticket… They think they can negotiate; there's no negotiation.

In this staff member's understanding, driving rules are necessary for success, safety, order, and fairness; lack of rules seems to invite disorder and danger. However, our immersion in curricular design and subsequent study of the curriculum shows that road rules are saturated in complexity, with negotiation at their very center. The deployment and acceptance of rules depends on who wields and receives them; a driving context of "no rules," in fact, indicates *other* rules, often implicit and culturally normed. Thus, the "rules of the road" are belief systems through which literacy users must physically move. This means that the "rules of the road" refer to the systems of both driving *and* literacy being learned: both are highly social, deeply embodied, and usually pitched by the powerful as clear, neutral, and necessary for survival.

This article explores how negotiating driving rules leads participants to a more complex understanding of literacy, asking: What are the rules of the road? How do literacy users resist, negotiate, or change these rules? How does making literacy mobile—literally putting it on the road—shape understandings of literacy itself? Based on qualitative analysis of written project materials and interviews with project participants, we argue that the curriculum activates analogic thinking about literacy through driving. That is, realizing that driving rules are negotiable leads participants to realize that literacy rules are negotiable, too. In the sections below, we explain the driving project in full, describe our qualitative study of it, and share analytic findings that respond to each of our research questions in turn. Each section narrates the process by which project participants come to recognize rules, and then manipulate them.

A Community Driving Curriculum

Our article draws on a study of an ongoing community literacy partnership between the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the International Language Institute of Massachusetts (ILI).[2] Over four years, the partnership has engaged in several literacy projects, including the driving curriculum that is the subject of this article. Throughout the partnership, literacy projects have been guided by models of community literacy that de-center universities as the locus of language and literacy expertise, build coalitional energy at the community school, and work toward a shared vision of social change (Campano et al.; Mitchell). When ILI requested the driving curriculum, curriculum designers were drawn from Lorimer Leonard's community-engaged course that introduces undergraduates to literacy studies through the lens of language diversity.[3]

ILI's immigrant students expressed wanting a driving curriculum for reasons both pragmatic and political. Students knew that driving offers access to medical care,

community classes, and events at children's schools. They also knew that living in a car-dependent region often means that "people who drive are more likely to find jobs, work more hours, and earn higher wages" (Hendricks 2). In other words, they knew well that physical mobility and social mobility are linked, with driving independence often leading to better jobs, schooling, or community support (Kerr et al.). Beyond these pragmatic motivations, students' literacy work, such as poster projects displayed in school hallways, showed that they also were aware of local advocacy around the Work & Family Mobility Act, which grants undocumented people access to driver's licenses.[4] Such advocacy efforts assert that driver's licenses ensure public safety on roads, support immigrants' economic contributions, and positively affect immigrant families' well-being (Amuedo-Dorantes et al.). Given the political moment (2018-2020) immigrant students also may have experienced a heightened racialization of their status under Trump's 2017 Executive Order on immigration, which made driving without a license a deportable offense and linked it to racial profiling.

In later stages of curriculum development, the COVID-19 pandemic made access to a car unusually important, wherein car use became differently consequential: social protests were conducted as car parades; drive-throughs were created for virus testing and vaccinations; choir rehearsals and political rallies took place by sitting on top of cars; vehicles became sanctuary for frontline workers or office space for working parents with children at home. Access to driving became more necessary for anyone wanting to engage in advocacy, social life, or healthcare. In asking for help in getting their licenses, then, ILI's students anticipated the kaleidoscope of literacy and language knowledge necessary to earn a license in this time and place. Therefore, during the fraught social conditions of 2018-2020, the driving curriculum evolved as project participants collaborated on curricular content and structure. As undergraduate participants read, wrote, and discussed literacy research and theory, ILI's staff and teachers met regularly with them, brainstorming together what a driving curriculum should include and why. While the project never aimed to eulogize a car culture that may be receding amidst climate change, or uncritically enact narratives of car-based freedom, it became clear that a politically pragmatic approach to driving meant treating driving literacies as more than speed limits and traffic signs.

Studying Driving Literacies

Even in early stages of the project, discussions of a driving curriculum revealed surprisingly complex notions of literacy. This complexity echoes across research on driving in the field of mobility studies, which frames driving as a multi-layered phenomenon in which bodies, feelings, and objects are "kinaesthetically intertwined" (Sheller 226-227). Driving requires a "disciplined 'driving body'" because drivers' "eyes, ears, hands, and feet, [are] trained to respond instantaneously and consistently" (Urry). Drivers enact civility like turn-taking through hand waves; incivility is enacted through rude gestures sometimes proudly expressed. Car communication expressed via the body like the hand wave or signal flash can involve heightened emotion, such

as "anger at assumed rule-breakers," and can thus demand "the capacity to read" gestures and codes of politeness (Featherstone 12).

Because driving is "tied to patterns of gender expression, racial and ethnic distinction…national identity and transnational processes" (Sheller 236), judgments of driving norms and resulting behavior are highly gendered (Murray), racialized (Purifoye), and culturally negotiable (Redshaw and Nicoll). For example, urban sociologist Gwendolyn Purifoye notes that "even as low-income Blacks and Latinx do travel on what limited systems they do have" their movement through cities is "controlled by others through policies and rules" and "they are continually reminded that their time and comfort are of little importance to those outside their communities" (496). Such rules discipline movement across space as well as languages: in this study, participants often described racialized experiences of driving in terms of language, as when they felt judged by white listeners' assumptions of their communicative abilities. Negotiating such judgments requires literacies beyond the memorization of car parts and street signs.

The sociomateriality of driving also suggests why driving literacies are complex (Hamilton; Rowsell and Pahl; Vieira). Connecting the social nature of literacy—cultural practices, value systems—to its material—bodies, tools, artifacts, environments—suggests that the complexity of driving may be found not only in literacy learners' use of a license or car, but also in the way those materials are "endowed with energy and agency" that shapes what users can do with them (Micciche 497). For example, driver's licenses empower drivers, but social institutions determine what that empowerment means, granting primary power to the license, not to the driver. This "diffuse, unstable" relationship between literate material, literacy user, and literacy-regulating institution shows why driving literacies need to account for the complex agencies among things, people, and possibilities (Micciche 491).

Therefore, in trying to make sense of how the driving curriculum shaped participants' literacy learning, we designed an ethnographic case study to understand how the literate complexity of this driving project, including its sociopolitical conditions, shaped understandings of literacy more generally (Dyson and Genishi). Our use of case study also sought to trace how social forces and contextual conditions shaped individual participants' experiences and perceptions of literacy. In terms of driving, this meant understanding how increasing xenophobia, shifting economic conditions, and pandemic-era isolation shaped how participants understood the seemingly routine task of learning to drive. It's important to emphasize that "participants" here means everyone involved: undergraduate and community students, graduate student tutors, community and college teachers. All of these literacy users offer insight into how mobility shapes literacy because their differing positionalities cause them to move through the world in differing ways.

In pursuit of this understanding, we collected two types of data: textual artifacts such as unit and lesson drafts, curriculum meetings notes, and written reflections about the curriculum from 12 participants; and semi-structured interviews with undergraduate curriculum designers (n=3), grad student curriculum tutors (n=2), and ILI students (n=3) and staff (n=3). We also conducted one interview with a local driv-

ing instructor who is an immigrant to the U.S. for his insights into the multilingual communication that occurs during driving lessons and exams. Collected textual data tracked participants' sense-making in process, while interviews sought to elicit participants' recollections of how a driving "event in the present is informed by an ontological and/or discursive event in the past" (Merriman and Pearce 503). As researchers, our positionalities are distinct from some participants—as white, middle-class women, we likely experience driving in the U.S. in less marked ways than others—but our positions in the project also are enmeshed with participants': we taught the course and designed the curriculum alongside participants. Our analysis below is thus shaped and limited by our close and far proximity to participants' experiences of driving literacies.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis was structured through rounds of thematic and focused coding that sought to respond to our three research questions: 1) What are the rules of the road? 2) How do literacy users resist, negotiate, or change these rules? 3) How does making literacy mobile—literally putting it on the road—shape understandings of literacy itself? Each coding round was collaborative, wherein coding was conducted independently by each author and then refined through discussion.

To answer our first research question, we used deductive codes that simply cataloged different driving, writing, or language "rules." To respond to question two, we used inductive codes that characterized participants' lived experience of the driving curriculum, often in their own terms. The consistent coding of emotion, affect, and embodiment was a topic of discussion across rounds; we often used the terms and theory of affect to code the complex lived and felt experience of learning to drive. Our conversations that compared codes helped us distill them into four categories: literacy rules, mobility rules, rules of the road, and discernment. Along the way, we generated memos to make sense of how participants' literate experiences (question 2) impacted how they understood literate rules (question 1). Finally, a round of focused coding attended to our third research question: How does making literacy mobile—literally putting it on the road—shape understandings of literacy itself? Coding just for "understandings of literacy" showed us that our "discernment" category was too limited. While "discernment" had followed Lagman's use of "emotional discernment" to gather participants' critical stances toward "existing structures and ways of being" (Lagman 12-13), our analysis showed that participants' ongoing rule-breaking and making was less receptive and more active.

To make sense of this strong feature our coding left us with—namely, the physicality of negotiating rules—we turned to scholarly understandings of rule negotiation in literacy and language studies. Most traditionally, "rules" in literacy and language learning are treated as guidance by which writers can avoid error. In this conception, rule-breaking means form-breaking resulting in error, whereby error is "morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms that deviate from rules of the target language, violating the expectations of literate adult native speakers" (Ferris 3). Others suggest that engagement with prescriptive and descriptive rules can serve as content in critical

language learning that "allow students to engage intellectually and personally" with rules (Curzan 878; also see Delpit). Writing researchers agree that when writers unthinkingly follow rules, they do not engage with the problem-solving or creativity of composing (Dufour and Ahearn-Dodson; Rose). In fact, critical language approaches like translinguality treat writers' engagement with rules as a space where literate innovation occurs. For example, Blommaert and Horner treat rule-breaking not as "the absence of clear and applicable norms" but as "the production of new, alternative ones" that account for "innovation and creativity" (14-15). They argue that when writing is "at odds with the hegemony and therefore continually open to negative sanctioning and misrecognition," this is not a display of error but rather evidence that the "rules do not fit the system they are supposed to direct" (14).

Therefore, negotiating literate rules can be cast as innovation, but such innovations are subject to social forces that can affect their outcome, including the social positions of those engaging in rule negotiation. As Deborah Cameron notes, "the social function of the rule is not arbitrary…rules of language use often contribute to a circle of exclusion and intimidation, as those who have mastered a particular practice use it in turn to intimidate others" (12). Flores and Rosa frame this exclusion in terms of the white listening subject, challenging claims that "being told explicitly the rules of the culture makes acquiring power easier" (Delpit 24). They instead argue that acquiring power through language depends on the willingness of those in power to provide it: "rules of the culture" are not "objective linguistic practices" but are instead "ideological phenomena" (Flores and Rosa 164-165). Indeed, the participants in this study specify the "social function" of literate rules by pointing explicitly to the bodies attempting to negotiate them. That is, the rules limit the literate innovations of some bodies, but not others (Cedillo). In our findings sections below, we offer two takes on what these conditional negotiations look like in the lived experience of the driving curriculum's participants.

Breaking Rules and Making Mistakes

Common-sense understandings of writing education follow the thinking that a writer must know the rules before they break them. This linear understanding of development, in which a rule is learned and only then challenged, also applies to more than writing. For example, as driving instructor Victor said about exceeding speed limits: "First, you have to learn how to follow the rules; then you are able to break the rules if you want." Nevertheless, the relationship between rule-breaking and mistake-making was a strong theme across the study, defined by the calculus of who was allowed to break rules and whose breakage was forgiven as a mistake.

In response to our second research question—*How do literacy users resist, negotiate, or change the rules of the road*—we found that participants engaged with rules across a range of intentionality, from breaking the rules of monolingualism in lower-stakes contexts to witnessing how "broken" English rules can have higher-stakes consequences. For the undergraduate curriculum developers who spent a semester reading critical approaches to literacy and discussing how those approaches might

shape a driving curriculum, their written course materials and post-course interviews were not surprisingly imbued with resistance to language rules. One undergraduate, Marissa, wrote in a class reflection that "as a person who has a high value on my own academic literacy" she came to realize that "other forms" of literacies beyond standard Englishes "count for myself and for other people too." She wrote that she doesn't "have to be as rigid" with herself or with others regarding language standards, supporting "having the freedom to break the 'rules' and say what you need to say."

Other participants negotiated literate rules for immediate social needs. For example, during driving curriculum sessions, Amare, an ILI student from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, created what he called his multilingual driving "dictionary." Amare's tutor, Aaron, described Amare's dictionary as a "running list that [Amare] would reference constantly," which tracked driving phrases across four columns: a visual representation, a Swahili translation, a French translation, and an English phonetic pronunciation. Both a multilingual composition and a reference guide, Amare's dictionary is reminiscent of the bilingual glossaries created by multilingual migrant workers in Tomas Kalmar's ethnography, *Illegal Alphabets and Adult Biliteracy*. In Kalmar's study, the migrants' glossaries exhibited "a paradigmatic writing system, a mental chart of relations between letters and sounds in one or more known languages," created by "collecting, manipulating, and fixing new data… [materializing] the chart into a diagram, a plan" (Kalmar 90). Just as the migrants negotiated literacy learning "between two legal systems, two economies, two sovereign states, two languages," so did Amare negotiate the rules dictated by the multiplicity of driving laws, cultural norms, and languages he used to learn how to drive (77). Importantly, in Kalmar's study it is the language learning context of a classroom and a teacher that deems biliterate glossaries as breaking the rules of English-only pedagogy. Amare's dictionary provides a counter example, created in a community language learning context for the learner's immediate self-determined needs.

Similarly, the driving instructor, Victor, negotiates both driving and language rules for self-determined social needs. Having lived in Latvia, Israel, and the United States, he described himself as a multilingual, transnational driver who both does and does not mix Russian, Hebrew, Latvian, German, and English. He explains that he uses "a set of scripts" that "are all grammatical" during driving instruction but also notes that when instructing a multilingual student, they always find shared pieces of language "to [understand] each other" often having to "stray away from the script" to discuss something more. Straying from his scripts seems not only to help Victor's teaching but also to mitigate moments when, as he says, "his English needs improvement." He explains that "every time students sit next to" him in the car, he apologizes saying, "my English is not so good, so take it easy; don't pay attention too much, or if you think it is necessary, fix my mistakes." While Victor seems to be operating from a deficit perspective about his English language use, he also is creating a careful communicative context in each driving lesson: he sets the terms for negotiation by simultaneously telling students to "take it easy" and inviting them to "fix my mistakes" if they must. He initiates a language relationship wherein his instructor position maintains power that he mitigates by offering students the English upper hand. This kind

of complexity—seemingly doubled approaches to mistake making and correcting—is Victor's strategy for negotiating much of the literacy necessary to teach driving.

In fact, Victor defines mistakes as the slippage between his belief that "the rules never change" and his recontextualization of those rules into "it depends." For example, he holds tight to the notion that "if you follow the rules, you save not only your life but the life of your passengers and the people around you,"—but then admits that this "depends on the person, on his ability, on her ability, to get information, to communicate, to understand what is most important." He grants that once students "have experience as this old man" they "will be able to speed or break the rules." He reiterates that passing the driving test "depends on the person":

> The inspector can be very picky. Small mistake, and [makes a choking noise] hasta la vista, baby. Sometimes, instructor doesn't pay attention on small things, but if you repeatedly make the mistake, you cannot hope to pass . . . [but] it depends on the inspector when you take the test.

During the road test that Victor conjures here, rules are deployed by an examiner but performed interpersonally. Therefore, Victor seems to locate non-volatility in the rules but not in the people who enact them. The rules persist but always depend on those who take them up with their communicative abilities, including rule-negotiation.

Indeed, this relative quality—that what is deemed an error or mistake depends on the rule-breaker—echoes across participant accounts, particularly of police interactions on the road. Because mistakes frequently came up in the context of being pulled over by police, negotiating literacy mistakes included physically knowing how to place one's body, searching for the resources to reframe mistakes as something other than error, and monitoring one's emotions in hopes that the mistake wouldn't be punished. For example, Benicia, an ILI student from Guatemala, described an incident of her husband encountering the police while she was in the passenger seat:

> A few years ago, my husband was not sure about a bus stop [and asked], 'I will go, I will stop?' So he went, when a police was there, and said 'You didn't see the bus?!' He said "Yes, but you know, what is the rule?' 'The law is you have to stop!' 'I didn't know.' 'For now, it's fine, but next time, put a ticket.' That is something he didn't know . . . if the law said you need to stop or not.

Benicia narrates this incident as a back-and-forth conversation between her husband and an officer. In her role as an observer, she narrates the law her husband didn't know, the negotiation between her husband and the officer, and the officer's decision to let it go "for now." Benicia's husband broke a rule, and the officer treated it as a mistake.

In contrast, Riya, an Indian American undergraduate curriculum designer, describes her mother's recalled interactions with police as emotionally intense and rule-bound, with mistakes marked as "scary":

> My dad for driving . . . just always followed the rules, never got caught . . . but my mom—she was telling me the first time she got into an accident, she start-

ed crying and I was in the backseat, and she didn't know what to do and she got really nervous because the police came . . . I used to always get so frustrated with her, being like, you know English. You know this protocol. Why are you stumbling? Why are you getting so flustered? Why can't you just speak normally? You know how these words work.

In her interview, Riya explains that recalling this incident while working with other participants on the driving curriculum heightened her empathy for her mother, saying that such conversations about language and literacy changed Riya's understanding "from me not wanting to understand, to, oh wow, that's like super scary, for anyone if you get into an accident, but especially when…you think someone's not gonna understand you and you made a mistake."

As Benicia and Riya's examples show, the social context of mistake-making contains distinctly uneven power relations between driver and officer, in which the officer decides what constitutes a mistake, as well heightened fear and worry stemming from not knowing the rules or the outcome of breaking them. Both Riya and Benicia are observing the scenes they describe from another seat in the car; they watch their loved ones' attempts to navigate the car even as they navigate perceived communication errors. In this context, mistakes exist along a sliding scale of consequence: sometimes "it's fine" and other times it's "scary." Knowing, as Riya says, "how these words work" gives literate dimension to how mistakes are treated. Everybody makes mistakes, but not everybody is given the same leeway.

Embodied Literacy and Racialized Rules

Participants' disparate experiences of rules often pointed them directly to, as Riya says, "The people, the people!" This means that in response to our third research question—*How does making literacy mobile shape understandings of literacy itself*—our study shows the extent to which the rules of the road are not only metaphorical, but are experienced in the body, in motion.

As Mimi Sheller notes, drivers "not only feel the car" but feel the world "through the car and with the car" (228). Driving studies show how cars place bodies—"who sits where, beside whom and with their back to whom"—in ways that condition inner car communication (Laurier et al. 9). Spatial arrangement restrained by seats and seatbelts impacts eye contact, turn-taking, topic choice and change (Laurier et al. 20). Our study concurs with mobility scholars' claims that the "bodily competencies" built by learning to drive include intertwined "motion and emotion, movement and feeling" (Kerr et al. 26; Sheller 226-227). The traumatic repetition of police killing Black drivers during traffic stops specifies such feeling to include real, imminent danger.

Data in this study show the extent to which such intense physicality and literacy learning are linked. For example, in reflecting on their driving curriculum experiences, ILI students Araceli and Benicia shared stories primarily focused on bodies in danger, treating driving as an inescapably embodied act. When asked about their memories of driving, Benicia shared a story about a car not stopping for her son in a parking lot, while Araceli shared a deeply tragic explanation of her markedly phys-

ical experience of learning to drive in the United States. Araceli explained that as she moved through the driving curriculum's lessons, she was simultaneously processing the loss of her brother due to a motorcycle accident in Colombia six years prior. After this loss, Araceli "stopped driving" and hadn't "touched a car since." Araceli expressed being rendered immobile, both physically and emotionally, but also described a forward motion dependent on both driving and immigration status:

> My brother is not going to come back. I am building my new life in the U.S., and to get along and to get forward with that, I need a driver's license. So I say, I need it at this time. Next month is going to be his sixth anniversary; I say, I think it's time. I will be a better driver than the person.

Araceli's motivation to learn to drive is indeed pragmatic, but also highly symbolic for her and embedded in concepts of independence, citizenship, happiness, and the "good vibes" she often evoked. Learning driving literacies for Araceli is an opportunity to "get along and to get forward" in building her new life. She expresses conviction that through this literacy learning she "will be a better driver than the person" who broke the driving rules that ended her brother's life on a road.

In this way, participants' experiences learning to drive underline the extent to which literacy learning is associated with and experienced in the body. Further, across the study's data, negotiating rules often was described as a process by which one's or others' bodies became racialized. For example, for undergraduate curriculum designers, race-based police violence shaped how they understood what it meant to teach the literacies necessary to drive within, as one undergraduate said, "the current climate and what's happening right now with police and immigrants and driving." In research interviews, several explained that ongoing racist incidents involving driving and cars directly impacted their conversations about what belonged in a driving curriculum. One student wrote a reflection that described his growing awareness that literacy "can be this physical thing, too, and then become embodied in us" and how "what our bodies are doing…can be forms of navigating the world" that also depend on literacy. Eventually, undergraduate curriculum designers began to explicitly include considerations of racialization in the curriculum's lessons. Undergraduate curriculum designer Riya explained that while they started with just "this fun diagram, and this little tutorial, whatever," their growing awareness of how "where you're from, how good your English or language skills are, the way you look" began to ground lessons in lived experience inflected by race. She said, "Once we actually thought about the physical people, and picturing, at least for me, myself in a car…putting people into the equation changed everything." For example, undergraduate curriculum designer Marissa, who identified as a white student from Texas, explained how race-based understandings of driving were connected to literacy and language:

> The things we tried to think about with the driving curriculum, when you can have a lot of interaction with authority or police that can be dangerous or very nerve-wracking…When you're doing something that's already a little bit inherently physically dangerous, and then to encounter a person who is also physically dangerous. It felt very high stakes…[for] immigrants who

cannot just truthfully, for a lot of reasons that are horrific, cannot afford to misspeak to a police officer. Cannot afford to be pulled over by a police officer, because they don't know what "use yah blinkah" means.

The phrase "use yah blinkah," a Massachusetts-ism that winks at a New England accent as well as the region's proud flouting of driving rules, was displayed on highway alert signs around the state at the time of curriculum design. The curriculum designers discussed how multilingual language users new to the region might misunderstand such a written version of a New England accent and its assumptions of in-group humor. Shared personal experiences of encountering this sign and other powerful codes on the road, including "their interactions good and bad with police and getting stopped" were pooled among curriculum designers and compiled "as a central [curricular] theme of being misunderstood on a very basic level." Curriculum designers realized that driving students' "being misunderstood" would not be an "arbitrary" slip in communication but might instead be a communicative tool of powerful, often-white listeners—examiners, instructors, police—who may use misunderstanding to maintain "exclusion and intimidation" during car-based communication (Cameron 12). As Riya wrote in a class reflection, "It seems as though the rules are created with restrictions to further define and distance people who are simply trying to live respectfully by these very rules."

Curriculum tutoring sessions between ILI student, Amare, and his tutor, Aaron, a white graduate student from Connecticut, further demonstrate the racialization of both driving and literacy rules due to the physicality involved in learning both. Aaron worked one-on-one with Amare on each of the curriculum's lessons over the course of several months. Amare recounts appreciating this personalized learning as he learned "vocabulary, organization, news, and writing" in English language discussions about driving. But Amare and Aaron's interactions during the lesson on driving fines also showed Aaron sorting through his white-privileged experiences of fines, tickets, and police encounters while discussing these topics with Amare.

Amare was motivated to seek language support in preparing for the driving test because his brother's experience with the examiner during his own test had been "rude" and had involved "language discrimination." Amare wanted to know "how to be in the car with the guy" during the test, so he and Aaron created a norm in their sessions of making literacy learning physical, using techniques like role playing to prepare for the test. Aaron explained that they practiced "the actual actions of all the things you do when you're in the car," from the "motions you have to make" for a "three-point turn" to "remember your blinkers" to enacting the "combative presence" that can be a norm on Massachusetts roads. In later sessions, Amare and Aaron conducted sessions sitting in Aaron's car. Recalling his experience with the driving test, Aaron remembered that to pass, "it's not just performing the maneuvers, it's moving your body that performs the maneuvers in the right way."

The racial aspects of such driving performances were brought into focus during the curriculum's lesson on fines, which introduced the concept of being pulled over by police. Following the physicality enacted in previous sessions, Aaron said he "parodied" for Amare what to do "when you get pulled over." He explained to Amare,

"they [the police] want your hands where they can see them." In his interview, Aaron provides more context for choices he was making throughout the lesson:

> This is also in the middle of a time when it's very clear that the rules for getting pulled over for a white person are very different than the rules for getting pulled over as a Black person. And it came up a bit. If he wanted to talk more about it, we could have gone down that road, but I'm not going to be the one to be like, 'How do you, a Black man, deal with getting pulled over?' Although, we did talk about the fact that it's different.

Aaron was frank in thinking through what he felt he should assume in his conversations about racist police interactions with Amare. He sought to follow Amare's lead, noting Amare did not often raise race-based issues or questions. But Aaron also felt a responsibility to explore the racial tensions around driving given the contemporary political context and his resulting conclusion that the literacy rules of driving are "built in all these secrets," one of which is the racialization of the social and physical mobility promised by a driver's license. In Aaron's thinking, a license is "protection against…political infractions" that inhibit mobility, but accessing a license "opens you up to other" forms of immobility in that "once you are on the road, you're subject to more policing."

Although Amare's original request for language support was informed by the linguistic discrimination his brother experienced during the driving test, his desire to know "how to be in the car with the guy" moves beyond the "objective linguistic practices" of driving rules, toward the "ideological phenomena" the rules also entail (Flores and Rosa 165). Amare wants to know how to *be* in a car: how to precisely adjust mirrors, turn to look, or reach for something or stay put; alongside the disproportionate, sometimes violent, reactions to errors in such moves; alongside knowing what to say or not say in English to powerful others while moving. Learning about driving makes it impossible to ignore the physicality of these layers of literacy.

Conclusion: Negotiating Literacy's Layers

In its current form, the driving curriculum is fully designed and available online, with ten lessons sequenced as individually paced tutor-learner sessions, culminating in a lesson that features critical reflection on the entire curriculum. In accordance with its goals, the curriculum treats driving literacies not only as vocabulary items to be learned but also as social practices upon which drivers should critically reflect. The curriculum teaches language and literacies related to driving but includes opportunities to critically consider the ways that driving situations and literacies can intersect to marginalize people. For literacy users whose bodies and language are racialized every day, thinking about the body in relation to literacy is not optional but a given. In this way, the study suggests that linguistically and culturally responsive community-based literacy projects should include considerations of literacy's intense physicality.

Further, the rule negotiations demonstrated in the two findings sections above suggest that treatments of negotiation in literacy theory also should include analysis

of the people who are negotiating. To say that literacy's rules are embodied is to stress that the act of literate negotiation happens not only between a writer and imagined readers on the page, but also among physically present literacy users negotiating with and through text. Intentional theoretical inclusion of the last aspect means analyzing not just texts, or texts in context, but also "positions of enunciation and reception"—the social positions of those creating and receiving the texts—particularly of "marginalized speakers' shared, racialized positions of enunciation and particular listeners' hegemonic positions of reception" (Flores and Rosa 172).

One participant, graduate student tutor Victoria, thought of this phenomenon in the context of teaching driving literacies as navigating "layered literacies." Speaking about her experience tutoring ILI students through the driving curriculum's lessons Victoria said, "There's just so many different layers of literacy happening":

> It's part of what makes this curriculum and tutoring . . . more complex than it seems on the surface. [It's] not just that you're helping [tutees] understand what a no right on red symbol means, you know? You're also helping them understand that . . . these words mean something, but there's also this physical driving action that relates to those words, and . . . this social context, where if you don't do this thing, you might get pulled over, what does that mean for you and your body that's unjustly marked linguistically and racially.

Resonant with literacy's chronotopic laminations (Prior and Shipka) as well as literacy's "layered simultaneity" (Blommaert, *Discourse*), Victoria's literacy "layers" include facets that recall sociomateriality: a material or textual layer, such as textual "words" like signs; a social layer, which includes cultural and linguistic norms mediated through social interactions and exchanges; and a physical or embodied layer, including senses and feeling. Moving through the driving curriculum alongside immigrant literacy users helped Victoria to see that "those layers [of literacy] happen in a very lived way." Victoria explained that she and her tutees were "always negotiating these three things, that balancing act of understanding the rules but also critiquing [them]." In other words, literacy theory must consider embodiment, of course, but also must consider how embodiment is an extricable element of literate negotiation, not just in but around texts.

Scholars note that negotiating language rules in texts is difficult due to the lack of paralinguistic cues and the fixed temporal dimension of writing (Canagarajah "Multilingual"; Canagarajah "Negotiating"; Donahue). They further note the difficulty of negotiating the expectations of multiple unknown readers across wide-ranging "literacy regimes" (Blommaert, *Grassroots*). But we have yet to fully explore writing-related negotiation around a text, including the role that bodies play in these negotiations. While driving, for example, literate negotiations occur in response to texts (highway signs), in the enactment of read texts (following directions), during the production of texts (deciding to keep silent while police write a ticket). In experiences of driving, multiple literate negotiations happen all at once. By considering how people enact literacy in real time with others in motion—during driving, marching, migration, or

other mobile activities—the concept of literate negotiation expands to include physical experience.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. All participant names are pseudonyms.

2. The International Language Institute of Massachusetts (ILI) is a non-profit community language school whose mission is to promote intercultural understanding and strong, diverse communities through language instruction and teacher training.

3. For a full description of this course, see Lorimer Leonard, Rebecca, Danielle Pappo, and Kyle Piscioniere. "Course Design: English 391ml, Multilingualism and Literacy in Western Massachusetts." *Composition Studies,* vol. 48, no. 1, 2020, pp. 103–114.

4. For example, see https://miracoalition.org/get-involved/drivers-licenses/.

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