# Dialectal Reflections

*Institutional Description*:

During my tenure as a doctoral graduate student at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I took several classes on translingualism which shaped my thoughts and understanding about my own languaging practices. More importantly, when I started paying attention to my languages, I noticed how the Bangla (a language I grew up speaking) I speak is mixed of dialects. Especially, I wrote a paper about this in one for one of those graduate classes. Also, professor Rachel Bloom-Pojar helped me with her seasoned feedback to find my niche in this area.

*Key Theorists*:

a. I use definition of "dialect" from Baker, Collin., *The Care and Education of Young Bilinguals: An Introduction for Professionals* to argue about how we all are multidialectal.

b. I reference the point of multidialectalism that Canagarajah, Suresh mentions in his 2006 article called "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued."

c. The point of "metadialectal" awareness that I raise in my argument is based on the concept of metalinguistic awareness referenced from Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, B. M., *Dual Language Development & Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism & Second Language Learning*.

d. I reference Leonard, Lorimar Rebecca's "Multilingual Writing Rhetorical Attunement" to cite how multilinguals sometime only think about language as a whole instead of the meta aspects of language such as languages are often a mix of multiple dialects.

e. My research borrows a great deal from Young, Vershawn Ashanti's *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching and African American Literacy*.

*Glossary*: Multilingualism, multidialectalism, meta-linguistic awareness, meta-dialectal awareness.

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Being a multilingual, I did not really think about dialects much since my focus on "perfecting" my English, besides Bangla—the language I grew up speaking. However, while writing a

graduate seminar paper in Fall 2018, Suresh Canagarajah's point about 'multidialectalism' got me thinking about the dialects of my own. Also, reading about the theory of "code-meshing" proposed by Vershawn Ashanti Young that "exploit and blend those differences" in between languages (43) made me reflect on the dialects of my linguistic repertoire. In other words, I have been started to notice that I speak a dialect of English—a language that I started learning as my second language. This dialectal reflection made me critically look at my other language—Bangla—the one that I grew up speaking. First time, I noticed how my Bangla is dialectal as well—the 'trans'-ness of languages—how it (language) is not one thing but a thing in flux. I realized how I am *multidialectal* before I am *multilingual*, or how I am *trans-dialectal* before I am *translingual*. This way, looking at Bangla—my other language through the lens of code-meshing helped me notice this even though code-meshing scholarship, I argue, does not quite expand on multilinguals' other languages in this regard.

Code-meshing while discussed in multilingual contexts falls short of its potential use since those discussions and studies mostly reflect on English but hardly ever multilinguals' other languages or, more importantly the *dialects* of their other languages. For example, while elaborating on code-meshing, Young illustrates how "…the concept is applied variously to Chinese English, White-working-and-middle-class English, Appalachian English, Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans, online German hip-hop performances, Cajun English, inner-city Black students." (8). While Young does mention Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans and German hip-hop performers, the discussion centers mainly around English. Also, Suresh Canagarajah, another proponent in code-meshing theory, who according to Young himself "further theorized" code-meshing does not really discuss code-meshing beyond the scope of English language. For example, in his 2006 article, "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued" he does talk about his own *dialect* of English—Sri Lankan English that he uses as opposed to American standard dialect, "Should we call a person who has been speaking Sri Lankan English since his birth a non-native speaker of English? Granting even the use of the term *nonnative* is difficult to apply to me in relation to English. (588). Referring to the native-nonnative dichotomy, Canagarajah asks intriguing questions about the native-ness of his own dialect of English. However, I was eager to learn his reflection about dialect of his other languages, Tamil for example, that he speaks. He does mention Tamil, his other language, "I may be called a *balanced bilingual* who has acquired *simultaneous*

*bilingualism* in a case of *childhood bilinguality*. That is, I have acquired Tamil and English in parallel, with equal facility, since my earliest days of linguistic development". (589). This assertion leaves me wondering about his reflection on Tamil since it (Tamil), apart from Sri Lanka, is also spoken in parts of India. Another scholar, Melissa E. Lee contemplates about varieties of English using the code-meshing theoretical framework, "I describe my shift from teaching "English," the very idea of which implies the simply inaccurate supposition that there is only one "real," grammatically and syntactically organized variety of English, to teaching within a (World) Englishes conceptual framework, positioning my students and myself amid the multitude of varieties that exist around the world." (314). English is still the center of code-meshing here, too.

Fluid and flexible use of language user's code is what code-meshing aims for. Young details in his book *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching and African American Literacy* how code-meshing in rooted in the ideas of meshing two (or multiple) codes as opposed to treating them separately as in code-switching. For example, he asserts, "…the idea of code-switching we are concerned with throughout this book is one commonly accepted in general public and also among elementary through college English teachers, where students are instructed to switch from one code or dialect to another, that is to switch from using African American English to Standard English according to setting and audience (1-2)." It probably goes without saying that this dialect-centric reflection surrounding standard versus non-standard and code-meshing as a way to minimize (for lack of better word, maybe) this problem that Young highlights in his book also pertains to other languages, too. However, the problem is code-meshing is usually discussed within the scope of English to English dialects (standard to so-called non-standard/African American) and English to other languages.

Young in his book, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity,* articulates, "True linguistic and identity integration would mean allowing students to do what I call code meshing based on what linguists have called code mixing, to combine dialects, styles, and registers." (7). As much as it is important to integrate' "true linguistic" identity, it just makes sense to reflect on it first. I propose when comes to code-meshing, the scholarly discussion should include reflections on dialects in the multilinguals' other languages, too. This way, the concept of "code or dialect" needs to be expanded—hence, *globalized*. The focal point could be intra-linguistic (Bangla to Bangla) in addition to inter-linguistic (English to Spanish). I

remember Rebecca Leonard's "Multilingual Writing Rhetorical Attunement" in this regard. Hers (rhetorical attunement) is another interesting and very relevant concept that refers to the "multiplicity" of languages in relation of the multilingual writers of English. She denotes, "Rhetorical attunement is a literate understanding that assumes multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning across difference." (228). She has her multilingual students think about the different languages they speak which confuses some of her students and one (Alicia) finds this experience of being a multilingual as a "mess". While reading this I was wondering what Rebecca Leonard's multilingual student would think about the other languages they speak—which dialects of those languages they speak. How is that dialect of other language/s her students speak different and/or similar from/to standard dialect of those languages? Language itself by its inherent nature is messy just like humans. However, we should value this "mess" of "linguistic repertoire" that we humans have.

Code-meshing theory, seen in this light can make language users reflect on their non-English languages or the *messy-ness* of them. Also, we must be cautious that code-meshing, while meshing other languages with English, or English with other dialects of English, does not *other* languages other than English, especially when it comes to multilingual English. Code-meshing, seen in this angle can be seen as a "decolonizing practice" since it can potentially shift the center from English to other languages and, more importantly, the dialects of those languages.

Any language user, I propose, should reflect on dialectal aspect of  with language/s. Linguist Colin Baker holds, "Every language variety can be described as a dialect, even the standard form. No one variety is linguistically superior to others." (63). Seen in this light, we should first come to terms with the fact that no matter how micro-level it is, each of us use language a bit differently from the other—a language variety. Language inherently is different just like one human being is inherently different from the other. Such individual differences are termed as "ideolect". The dialect we speak of a language form, are "really a collection of ideolcts, similar varieties of language with common features, spoken by a number of individuals." (63).  Therefore, it is crucial to remember that each of languages we speak be it Spanish, English or Bangla—is actually a dialect in its essence. If we are aware of our own individual dialectal (or linguistic, for that matter) differences, we may be *open* to *accept* other

dialectal differences. Also, this self-awareness of dialectal differences may also help to counter the *stigma* that are attached to the term "dialect".

I think excluding language user's other languages, especially in context of multilinguals from the conversation of code-meshing can be read as critical un-seeing or worse yet, "selective" *seeing*. Perhaps, it has just been an oversight. Whatever the case may be, it is absolutely crucial to include multilingual's other languages in the conversation of code-meshing. It is important to *see* their *other* languages, so that they are not other*ed*.

Code-meshing *revisited* in dialectal frames can reinforce this metalinguistic awareness in order to see how language use vary from person to person even though they are user of the same dialect. Johanne Paradis, Fred Genesee and Martha B. Crago define "metalinguistic awareness" as "the ability to reflect on and manipulate the elements of language independently of their communicative use" (51). For the rhetorical purpose of this paper, I would call this awareness *meta-dialectal awareness* since from the definition of dialect, the word *language* itself can be a misnomer and reinforce biases. Last but not the least, in reference to Asao B. Inoue's address to 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication, this *metadialectal awareness* practiced through code-meshing may be a step towards "stop killing each other" over how "we language".

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