1. **Institutional Description:** Currently, I work as an assistant professor at Syracuse University, a large private research institution in Central New York. My research, however, occurs in Northern Qazaqstan. Universities in Northern Qazaqstan have historically undergone and continue to undergo considerable linguistic and demographic changes. Although Qazaqstan witnessed a mass exodus of self-identifying ethnic Russian residents to Siberia post-independence, a large Russian presence remains in this borderlands province. Since the mid-twentieth century, the Russian language has also served as the lingua franca in eastern cities despite the Qazaq language’s growing prominence in the country’s southern and western regions. Language policies since the early 2000s have openly called for increasing the status of Kazakh, a Kipchak Turkic language, as a Qazaq rights project; many Qazaq language speakers feel they are correcting nearly a century of Soviet Russian oppression by reclaiming Qazaq as the language of all Qazaqs.

In the borderlands region that includes Northern Qazaqstan, where Qazaq language use is much less common, many local Russian speakers conversely lament federally funded migration and educational programs that require Kazakh language proficiency and provide either repatriation or scholarships to Kazakh speakers willing to settle in North Qazaqstan specifically. Several minority groups, including Koreans, Tatars, Uighurs, and Volga Germans, also were displaced to or historically resided in the region and generally speak Russian in addition to their heritage languages, while Mongolian Kazakhstani residents—many of whom can trace kinship ties to Qazaqs and historically engaged in nomadic pastoralism throughout the oblast—speak Mongol and often Qazaq. Against this diverse linguistic backdrop, federal trilingual language policies promote learning of English, Qazaq, and Russian; public and private institutions alike group students by the medium of education (MoE) through which they will receive the majority of their instruction, typically Qazaq or Russian.

1. **Key Theorists:** 
   1. Anna Tsing (2005), whose theory of *friction* helps conceptualize the push and pull of the local and the global in moments of translation. Tsing (2005) understands friction as the “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference… a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency” (p. 6). Using paved roads as a metaphor, Tsing describes how friction both makes movement easier while also defining/limiting where we can travel. For Tsing, it is critical to understand that friction cannot be entirely overcome—mobilization, protest, and activism are no longer necessary if one gives purchase to the belief that globalization has “remove[d] layers of cultural superstition, distinction, and hierarchy to create a free—and frictionless—world” (p. 214). Moreover, while people, languages, genres, etc. are always only “stabilized-for-now” (Schryer, 1993), they depend upon friction and asymmetrical power relations to remain in motion.
   2. Juldyz Smugalova (2020) is a Qazaq theorist and sociolinguist who regularly researches processes of language revival. Her text, “When Language Policy Is Not Enough” served as an exigency for this work and called for understanding the sociomaterial and special consequences of language change and revival beyond simply measuring students’ progress in learning multiple languages, including Qazaq and English.
   3. Anne Freadman (2012), whose theory of *uptake,* or the complex, intersubjective interplays between genres, has been expanded into a vernacular of complexity by Dylan Dryer (2016). In RGS, *uptakes* conceptualize generic mobilities. For Freadman (2012), uptakes are the “bidirectional relations that hold” genres together, and for the past two decades, RGS has drawn from Freadman’s scholarship to complicate our understanding of generic mobilities from uptake’s prior evocation in speech-act theory (Austin, 1962). As traditionally understood, uptake refers to how an illocutionary force (such as “we find the defendant innocent”) elicits a perlocutionary effect (an individual being released from custody). This definition also diverges from second language acquisition (SLA) research, in which uptake refers to a measurable use of a skill (e.g. Ene & Upton, 2018). Alternatively, RGS approaches uptake more dynamically to explicate “the inter- and intra-generic relations that shape individuals’ genre performances” (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2021, p. 2). This more critical approach not only extends our understanding of genres as social actions in a society mediated by genres (Miller, 1984), but also shifts the locus of agency from genres themselves to complex scenes of agency that include both individuals and more-than-human agentive forces. So while uptakes are secured through a complex process of selection, they “are less automatic [than early genre research imagined] and can be much more dynamic, unpredictable, and subject to transformations” (Bawarshi, 2016, p. 246).
   4. Laura Gonzales (2018), whose theory of translation as inherently multimodal and embodied praxis strongly informed my approach to translation in this text. Gonzales also argues for locating translation practices through participatory and community engaged ethnography, a practice I follow in this book.
2. **Glossary:**
   1. *Genre:* I am drawing from a rhetorical genre studies’ (RGS) approach to genres as typified, only ever “stabilized for now” responses to situations; genres are dynamic social actions (Miller, 1984) with agency, but they are also mediated by uptakes (Schryer, 2003; Freadman, 2011; Bawarshi, 2016; Reiff and Bawarshi, 2021).
   2. *Uptake affordances* consider the degree to which negotiation is possible: the conditions and constraints that influence response.
   3. *Uptake artifacts:* what is produced because of uptake affordances, or the genre typified by rhetorical action.
   4. *Uptake enactments* get at the performative and laborious aspects of uptakes, what writers do as they respond to uptake affordances.
   5. *Uptake capture* acknowledges how agency is distributed in translations across genres. For Dryer, uptake captures reflect the degree of automation in which uptakes are performed and which impact the (in)visibility of such practices to the individual(s) involved in the uptake. More importantly, uptake captures become automated as knowledge becomes embodied or ritualized. This automation reflects not only the embodied, cognitive, and affective affordances available to an individual responding to a genre, but the institutions and structures of power that discipline that body and the extent to which those habituations are internalized.

**Chapter 5: Locating Alternative Relationships in the Labor of Translation**

*5.1 (Un)comfortability in a Context of Translation*

In a 2015 panel entitled “Translation as Writing, Writing as Translation,” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Christiane Donahue argued that writing studies needed to further grapple with translation as a mode of analysis as well as with translation scholarship more broadly. Going as far back as Jakobson (1959), a move also made by Gentil (2018) and that I repeat in this book’s first chapter, Donahue traced a lineage of translation scholarship that complicated what Jakobson called the meaning of equivalence, operationalized via three forms– intralingual equivalence (within a language), intersemiotic equivalence (oral discourse to textual discourse), and interlingual equivalence (how we typically think of translation, and defined as such). In that panel, Donahue showed how these notions of equivalence predated Bakhtinian thought that forwarded all speech as incorporating others’ words (1986), a trajectory of linguistic theory that continues today through translation scholarship that incorporates discourse analysis, issues of power, and questions of the role of the self and the vulnerable affective entanglements translators encounter in active and embodied ways as they overtly transform meaning using others’ words.[[1]](#footnote-1) In her talk at CCCC, Donahue focused on intralingual translation as particularly productive for putting translation theorists/practitioners and rhetoric and writing researchers into conversation, but before turning to a discussion of paraphrase in the writing process as connected to intralingual translation, she paused and said, “Let me just stop here to say that this ever-so-brief evocation of some of the developments in translation should feel comfortable to you. They are embedded in our views of composing.”

In this chapter, I too, like Donahue, grapple with translation as a mode of analysis, considering the various translation epistemologies and relationships embedded in participating student writers’ views and labor of composing. Specifically, this chapter responds to the following research questions:

* How can attention to displacements invite us to rethink how we conceive of agency in translation?
* How do writers leverage translation to integrate into, transform, or resist classroom and/or institutional literacies and outcomes?

These questions invite us to foreground friction to understand its products, including what Lorimer Leonard refers to as navigation of the literate game, what translingual scholars such as Horner and Alvarez (2019) might refer to as writers’ concrete labor, or which Vieira (2019) succinctly refers to as learning. By foregrounding displacements, both questions further ask about what is not produced, as well as how we might locate multiple agencies and allies that language users take up in translation moments (Gonzales, 2018). It is these allies–from genres to bodies to rooms to communities historically excluded from academic spaces–that I refer to in this chapter as alternative, relations sustained to the side of neoliberal outcomes or translation artifacts. These questions speak to alternative relationships by looking beyond integration alone and toward resistance and displacement (Donahue, 2017), as well as looking beyond outcomes and English language standards externally imposed by institutions and other neoliberal structures (Sultanalieva, 2019).

Just as in Chapter 4, to answer these questions requires a horizontal approach that seeks to orient to local translation epistemologies in place before defining scales or moving vertically. So before responding to these questions, I also want to pause to consider and extend Donahue’s observation by asking: what does it mean to feel comfortable with global developments in Translation Studies, and, subsequently, to be comfortable in a context of translation? One way of reading comfortability in relation to this study of translation, for example, could have been to enter into this research context, identify potential bridges between my own pedagogical and research training and the language and translation epistemologies of the faculty in this Northern borderlands region where I served as a guest teacher, and assert the value of my prior knowledge to that context. But there’s a risk of being too comfortable. Collaborating with the Translation Studies faculty at multiple universities in Northern Qazaqstan– faculty often responsible for the lion’s share of literacy education at their institutions–alternatively reoriented my pedagogy toward local academic initiatives and translation epistemologies (as opposed to my own training to that point) as a way of interrogating my own assumptions about writing and literacy and revising my course design.

Before responding to my research questions, then, I also want to pause and first make visible my own uncomfortability in this context of translation as well as the meaningful collaborations that shaped my own conceptions of translation as I learned from faculty in this region, recognizing that such perspectives are limited by my positionality and situated perspective. Certainly, some Translation Studies faculty in the region still view translation as a neutral practice between two named languages; moreover, I did not have time to learn extensively from faculty with specialities in literary translation. However, I was fortunate to learn from the mentorship of faculty who often engaged in academic and technical translation and were very aware of the negotiations of power embedded in their translation praxis. To account for these knowledges and where they come from, as well as my non-linear trajectory to research, this first section offers what may appear as a detour as I trace how my thinking evolved toward these research questions. I cite not only those publishing in academic spaces but thinkers of translation from the communities where this chapter’s participants live and engage in everyday exigencies for translation– recognizing that such epistemologies are not monolithic but rather always situated in the bordering practices that figure into multiple facets of daily life in the region.

In Chapter 4, I described how many Translation Studies faculty often were encouraged by administrators to go as far as to acquire degrees in “content areas” such as ecology so that they could teach those courses in English, perhaps with a literacy framework in mind. These faculty were also often viewed by their institutions as the people most likely to interface productively with K-12 teachers, and Translation Studies faculty spent considerable time recruiting students to their institutions. Moreover, these teachers continue to play a vital role in realizing the Qazaqstani government’s trilingual language policies of universal fluency in English, Qazaq, and Russian. As a result, my own teaching of writing and literacy at these institutions necessarily meant collaborating and even co-teaching with faculty in Translation Studies from whom I learned much about the nature of language, of translation, and of social literacy practices in the region. Throughout our collaborations, informal discussions about pedagogy as well as more formal conversations for research reiterated how faculty thought about translation and how their disciplinary backgrounds and professional translation experiences influenced their teaching. In one conversation with three teachers at a state university in the region, the teachers all discussed the ways they made visible the messiness of translation by highlighting meaning in equivalence. The faculty contended:

There is often not equivalence in translation. We are always thinking about how the meaning changes. Some different words have different definitions and we maybe have to, so sometimes we have not equivalent, a word that has the same meaning but not the whole meaning of the word. And we have to think about what to do with that with students. We think about the text with them. We analyze and work together.

While many teachers had different strategies for thinking through equivalence that did not necessarily result in codemeshing practices, thinking together with Translation Studies’ faculty about the messy, necessarily collaborative nature and failures of navigating and understanding meaning in translation often became one productive way to learn about local translation epistemologies that centered their expertise, and these conversations helped me adapt my own teaching to their institutions and contexts. As the teachers in the above quotation recognize, this work involves more than teaching but working together with students to navigate a context of translation. Such work is an ongoing process–I am still finding new ways to become less comfortable with the theories of translation embedded in my own pedagogies and views of composing. One important point acknowledged in nearly every interview with a local translation faculty in Northern Qazaqstan, a point that has influenced my current pedagogies and views of composing as evidenced by this chapter, however, is that we cannot take equivalence in translation for granted or expect individual translators to have the agency to both secure equivalence in translation perfectly alone. Instead, as Aisulu and Svetlana demonstrated in Chapter Four, negotiations in translation involve complicated relationships to technologies, systems, and bordering practices often outside of the individual translator’s control.

One faculty member who particularly shaped my understanding of local translation epistemologies in the place where I worked in Qazaqstan is a Translation Studies faculty pseudonymed Dina. In the spring of 2023, I had an interview with Dina, with whom I had worked alongside during my Fulbright grant in 2018. I had learned so much from Dina about local translation epistemologies and bordering practices, and in this interview we also discussed places where we had tried and succeeded ourselves in understanding one another’s meaning of overlapping but separate disciplinary vernacular– meaning making practices we both recognized as a form of translation. We discussed how Dina conceived of interlingual translation, which she defined as, “the process of rendering information and other properties of the text, stylistic properties, into a different language and different culture” –a definition that later led to a conversation about how her understanding of culture (per her definition of translation) had changed over the course of her career. We also discussed the messiness of translation in relation to culture and evolving bordering practices, and how occupying this messiness had shaped both of our thoughts on revision in writing. As Dina had just been assigned an evening course on academic literacies, she invited me to co-teach with her as a volunteer, both as a means of reciprocity and to give us an inductive context to continue these discussions, and so we taught together.

These conversations on translation often centered on memories of our prior teaching experiences, both individually and collaboratively. Once, while teaching together, Dina had discussed the messiness of translation with her students, describing her own process:

I just draft a part of the text. Then, I do something else. I can work with some other texts, do something else, it is best not to see this text for a day. After that you never take the original text, you always look at your translation and you will see the Rus-lish, this accent English, and then you start editing it. And you edit it, and then you take and just translate another part of the text and then again you sleep on it, and then you post-edit it, you edit for style.

Accompanied by this description, Dina showed her students examples of her own translation praxis and the many editions and the considerable time she spent navigating her translation work, and the class considered the differences between interlingual written translation and intersemiotic or simultaneous interpretation using her own revisions as a point of discussion. In a conversation in the teachers’ lounge that followed, Dina and I compared her approach to teaching editing to how I had approached teaching revision in the past, and she encouraged me to share my own feedback from editors while writing articles for publications so that students could see the long list of revisions and messy negotiations that I navigated in my own writing process.

A mentor as much as a collaborator and co-teacher, Dina often told stories, shared professional translation and interpretation experiences (as I approached this work with no professional simultaneous interpretation experience), illustrated how those experiences differed before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and gave constructive feedback on my teaching after observing my courses. Some of that feedback involved creating authentic contexts for students to practice translation beyond academic settings in ways that grounded theories and writing practices in this region. She described over three decades of navigating shifting bordering practices, from negotiating the Soviet system of institutional governance, to the economic turmoil of the 1990s that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, to the development of private universities in her city after it assumed new regional significance, to the development of a new *oblast* and designations of state universities there as liminaly private as well. Her pedagogies had adapted to these new bordering practices. During the 1990s, for example, she would take students to watch newly available American films and discuss how television would impact translation, while she framed her own prior professional translation experiences that preceded/accompanied her formal teaching experiences in the 1990s as a means to survival. Sometimes, she noted, she had to travel over new geopolitical borders to Russia for work, and she was sometimes paid in bread or yogurt for her professional translation when such products were difficult to secure in her city during the economic crises that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. These experiences shaped the stakes she articulated to students concerning navigating shifting cultural practices in translation as well as the ways she grappled with the outcomes expected by her institution, including that certain courses be taught entirely in English, as another major adjustment to bordering practices she felt she must support students in navigating.

In addition, she invited me to learn alongside her students in and outside of the classroom. While I finished a series of guest lectures on writing that she had invited me to offer to one of her classes, she asked me to sit in on her simultaneous interpretation classes, as these seemed most distant to her from the work that I found familiar, and I experienced the messiness of translation in a new (to me) way as I worked to simultaneously translate English to Russian or vice versa, as well as what Dina called the “cultural specific” understanding of translation when particular phrases and idioms that I translated did not land with her and her students. These experiences were initially deeply vulnerable and uncomfortable for me as I initially stumbled through simultaneous translation exercises, and they enriched our collaborative work. To support students' practices of envisioning and thinking critically about their translation practices beyond the classroom, Dina encouraged me to leave the comfort of traditional digital and written modalities and travel with both herself and her students on field trips. She regularly arranged for students to tour particular local cultural sites with professional tour guides. Students served as simultaneous translators for the guides and also translated signs and other multimodal exhibits at those sites. Referencing my research, Dina invited me and a few others along for these excursions; among other reasons, our presence afforded students a human audience for students’ translations. She argued that these excursions showed students that her “goal is not just to teach [students] to be perfect; I have no time for that, but to make them feel what it is like to work with guides, what opportunities this career gives, how they can develop their language, to make them motivated.” Much like place-based pedagogies (Nordstrom, 2015), these experiences also allowed students to recognize the connections between translation and the place of their work, which Dina posited would be difficult to teach within the walls of a classroom, and to translate and tell stories of the land to reframe students’ understandings of a potential technical translation career.

While Dina had worked as a professional translator and simultaneous interpreter and enjoyed literary translation as well, she further described her own current transdisciplinary pedagogical labor and her discomfort with the material conditions and extra time demanded by that labor. These teaching assignments often resulted more from administrators’ recognition of her English proficiency than her translation expertise. Having acquired additional degrees late in her career at the request of such university administrators, Dina frequently taught courses outside of Translation Studies to fulfill English-medium course requirements by the institution in line with education standards, yet she adapted course curriculum to also center translation as a form of analysis. Concerning her diverse teaching load, she argued:

I should not say that even if I call the course “Economic and Political Discourse,” “World Information and Economics”– this is all about translation. This is us studying the phenomenon and then you practice translation, and so I tried to insert translation everywhere because it was not just tests it was analysis. It teaches both content and language.

By emphasizing the role of analysis and language, Dina posited that she could teach critical thinking skills and a critical approach to literacy even in discipline-specific courses where she was assigned for her English language proficiency rather than her translation skills, and where students did not see themselves engaging in any future translation work, beyond the stated outcomes of those content courses.

This chapter consequently extends from collaborations with Translation Studies faculty such as Dina to center local curricular challenges and questions about translation in academic contexts, such as how students make use of space, navigate shifting bordering practices, and make the most of the messiness of translation labor within and beyond the classroom. I sought to follow the literacy transformations of students in WAC courses themed on translation that take up and respond to the transdisciplinary labor expected of Dina and other translation professionals in post-secondary institutions in the region. As I describe in the next section, these courses drew inspiration from Gentil’s (2018) WAC course themed on translation and that centers students’ multiliteracies and community negotiations of those literacies toward metageneric awareness. In the story of this section, I hope to have foregrounded the nonlinear inquiry and collaborations that shaped my horizontal orientation to these research questions.

Moreover, I include Dina’s pedagogical practices/perspectives as well as our collaborations in this introduction to show that such courses did not operate in a vacuum or a traditional first-year composition setting but across and adjacent to Translation Studies programs responsible for vital literacy education initiatives at their institutions– programs I believe offer much value to ongoing literacy teaching and research at their institutions and much to contribute to transnational conversations on social literacies. Moreover, I hope that this introduction also helps to make visible my own place in this ecology– I was by no means a neutral observer of faculty and students’ translation practices. It is important to note that the findings I share are specific to the institutions in the region where I resided in Northern Qazaqstan and not universally applicable to or applied evenly across the country– in fact, the translation epistemologies delineated in this chapter contrast from those of the English language and writing faculty I interviewed in other regions, such as Almaty, who often viewed translation through the lens of 20th century written-translation teaching methods that such faculty understandably sought to replace with more communicative or constructivist approaches. As I discussed in Chapter 1, such perspectives are being well documented in Qazaqstan through the lens of translanguaging to show teachers’ resistance or ambivalence toward such pedagogies as well (Alzhanova, 2020; Tuskeyeva, 2022). Rather, this work necessarily considers translation in transdisciplinary and borderlands spaces often under-represented by research that identifies with Qazaqstani education systems and thus contributes important perspectives to those conversations.

In the section that follows, I engage my research questions more directly by illuminating how four students enrolled in WAC courses in this region leveraged translation not only to improve their writing, but to cultivate and sustain alternative relationships. Foregrounding students’ multimodal and place-based learning and translation practices that, like Dina’s translation exercises, moved beyond the walls of individual classrooms ultimately reframes our understanding of loss in relation to friction and implicates considerations of agency and transmodality. In highlighting these students' translation labor via critical ethnographic practices that foreground both ontological and epistemological orientations to meaning making (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022), I believe we can learn much about translation’s frictions and displacements concealed by final textual products, as well as how students might leverage translation to connect with others. Finally, these findings contribute to the often behind-the-scenes work of Dina and other Translation Studies faculty in the region who find themselves tasked with literacy education across new or adjacent disciplines.

*5.2 Students’ Translation Labor while Conducting Undergraduate Research*

In this section, I return to the research questions I introduced earlier:

* How can attention to displacements invite us to rethink how we conceive of agency in translation?
* How do writers leverage displacements to integrate into, transform, or resist classroom and/or institutional literacies and outcomes?

To do so, I want to highlight the translation labor students performed through and beyond their Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) courses, many of which were themed on Gentil’s (2018) translation-centered approach.[[2]](#footnote-2) When framing that approach (and similar to Dina’s perspectives as described above and Donahue’s statements in her 2015 CCCC panel presentation), Gentil argues that writing instructors and specifically WAC/Writing in the Disciplines (WID) professionals would benefit from further integrating translation scholarship and approaches directly in their classrooms. Using his own teaching practices as a point of departure, Gentil describes a model for a WAC course themed on translation, which includes three key components. First, a “biliteracy autobiography,” which drew from second language (L2) writing scholarship such as Belcher and Connor’s (2001) work, functioned as a kind of literacy narrative where students could articulate their socially-situated language learning practices across languages. Second, students collectively generated a bilingual glossary by considering the messy and idiosyncratic translation labor involved in moving the meanings of more obviously culturally contextual terms, such as gender or literacy, across languages. Finally, Gentil’s course culminated in a final paper that centered students’ own movements across literacies, drawing from a range of artifacts such as videos or a corpus of their own texts. Gentil explains the goals of his course design by clarifying, “...the overall intent of these assignments was to foster self-awareness of one’s strategies, resources, and challenges as a student writer learning to write in English, French, and possibly other languages in specific disciplinary, professional, and social contexts and genres” (p. 120), foregrounding translation’s active connections to culturally specific notions of language representations and genres.

Gentil’s course was designed for a North American context with French and English proficient Canadian university students in mind, but the course instructors for the WAC courses highlighted in this chapter had heavily adapted this design for a Qazaqstani context. For example, courses were connected to the broader Translation Studies curricula of their institutions, they foregrounded multiliteracy in Qazaq, English, Russian, and other languages spoken in the region rather than biliteracy, which assumes two heavily sedimented languages, and they pushed against in class discussions and reflections Bourdieu’s notion of linguistic habitus, which, as I argued quoting Smagulova (2020) in Chapter 2, assumes that the State language is both heavily sedimented and inherently connected to those with the most power in a given society. They also understood translation as a collective process, and they treated the final paper as a collaborative project. Similar to Dina’s course designs in Translation Studies, these WAC courses took up the genres of the multiliteracy autobiography, multilingual glossary, and qualitative research project and invited students to showcase their own communities’ translation practices beyond the walls of the classroom and with special attention to place. Many groups from these courses submitted their findings to an undergraduate research conference attended by students from multiple universities, where the English-medium of the course no longer held priority and where they felt they must consider the local language practices of the community members and/or students of the region engaging their work.

Each of the four students highlighted in this chapter enrolled in a section of this WAC course as one of their only writing courses labeled English-medium, and they each presented their results at the undergraduate research conference. I want to keep identifiers to a minimum because of their involvement in this particular event and given the social critiques they wanted made in relation to language practices, but I also want to acknowledge that I met each of these students through collaborative work *outside* of their courses, such as through a local library and literacy HUB, through hiking, at a local swim club, or through local Ted Talk seminars. Finally, this undergraduate research conference allowed students to make use of whatever language resources they had available to them to communicate meaning, and such openness allowed the institutions to further educational policies and goals for developing students’ literacies in English, Qazaq, Russian in-tandem. This conference thus seemed an important space for students to translate not only the texts and research findings from their WAC course via intersemiotic translation across both language representations and genres and into an oral presentation, but also an opportunity for students to consider the critical approach to translation they had fostered in their writing courses.

*5.2.1 Zere and Transnational Relationships of Care*

Perhaps few cities in Northern Qazaqstan have experienced the shifting nature of bordering practices more obviously than Semey, which at the time of writing has recently been made the capital of a newly drawn Abai *Oblast*. The namesake of the *oblast*–likely the most famous historical Qazaq poet and a prominent figure of contemporary academic, cultural, and literary discourse – resided close to the city, and a beautiful museum dedicated to his life and work is located downtown near the banks of the Irtysh River. Despite this historical and literary significance, and despite Semey’s associations with important Russian literary figures such as Doestevsky and Qazaq playwrights such as Mukhtar Auezov, much of Semey’s both national and international notoriety comes instead from its proximity to the Soviet Union’s nuclear program, which polluted the soil and air and which still causes considerable health challenges for the city’s residents (e.g. Genova & Hatcher-Moore, 2017)– medical challenges well documented by international researchers and photographers who often reduce the city’s diverse communities into a singular, passive narrative of struggle and suffering. However, conversations with the city’s residents, including Zere, who generously invited me to her hometown of Semey, tell a different story. As residents I met there requested that I note, not only does the region boast important historical ties to cultural and literary figures, the city also maintains one of the best medical universities in Central Asia: a medical university that draws students not only from across Qazaqstan but from across Central and South Asia, Russia, and beyond. Thus in a place often narrated in popular media primarily as a site where Soviet occupation brought incredible health crises to both communities and the land, Zere countered that her city also trained students from around the world to heal.

Zere, who identifies as Qazaq, wanted to go to medical school herself for much of her life, and she excelled at biology. At the same time, she grew up in a family of teachers, including two grandmothers who were Qazaq language teachers, so when national examinations were adapted to privilege chemistry (which she did not enjoy) as much as biology, she pivoted to teaching/Translation Studies and selected English as her focus language, with a secondary focus of Mandarin Chinese. She also made the decision to leave Semey for her studies and selected another university in Northern Qazaqstan with a strong reputation for these majors. When she enrolled in the WAC course described above as her first English-medium class, she was also in her first year of post-secondary study and felt somewhat overwhelmed. Unlike most students in the course who identified as a local insofar as they had grown up in the city where they studied, and unlike many other majors who had known for some time that they would study foreign languages, Zere had only recently decided that she wanted to pursue English education/Translation Studies and attend this university. She described the process as “an adjustment,” and the residents of her new city as somewhat culturally different from her communities in Semey.

These experiences shaped Zere’s composition of her multiliteracy autobiography for her WAC course as well as the literacy narrative she reiterated when we spoke in an interview some time after the completion of her course. In these stories, she described her mother and two grandmothers in Semey as matriarchal figures who deeply valued the Qazaq language and who were proud of their region’s historical significance to the language’s more poetic/traditional registers, and Zere spoke Qazaq in her home with her mother and grandmothers even as she learned Russian through interactions with her neighbors. In her multiliteracy autobiography, Zere described her school and current language practices as necessarily moving across Qazaq and Russian, similar to urban youth in Smagulova’s (2016) study. But in an interview that took place much later and after the global pandemic, Zere suggested that a move away from the region to one of Qazaqstan’s larger cities allowed her to adapt her language practices. She reiterated that from childhood:

I spoke Qazaq, actually, but I was like mixing it with Russian, but I spoke Qazaq. Till five years old I was only speaking Qazaq, but then I started to speak Russian. Then I moved to mixing languages because in cities people do not speak only Qazaq, well did not. Now this is not so. For example, people in [my current city, outside Northern Qazaqstan] are changing their minds and trying to speak Qazaq if they can because of their right to speak Qazaq. But before that, people had to mix Qazaq and Russian. Using some Russian words.

Zere clarified that she did not want to shame people for using some Russian words, but rather that she herself had found contexts to mostly speak Qazaq in her new major city and had worked to expand her Qazaq lexis. Thus her multiliteracy autobiography became like a snapshot of her literacy narrative at the time. Her language practices continued to evolve after that composition and her WAC class to parallel the shifting sociolinguistic landscape of the region, but also to bring joy to her relatives who took pride in her Qazaq language use. “My mom,” she added, “was obsessed with making us speak Qazaq, so it was good news for her.”

Zere’s move to a major metropolitan city outside of the region in Qazaqstan helped render invisible to her some of the frictions surrounding the maintenance and revision of Qazaq she perceived in the North. However, it was actually friendships with Qazaq-speaking people from outside of Qazaqstan while studying in Northern regions, in addition to her relatives in Semey, who motivated and sustained her labor in revising and maintaining Qazaq. These relationships included Qazaq friends studying abroad in places like Hong Kong, as well as Qazaq-speaking friends from China and Mongolia who were studying at her institution in Northern Qazaqstan. Since some of her classmates in her WAC course’s final project group also had friends from abroad, the group ultimately decided to interview these friends. These interviews became the basis for her group’s final project report and conference presentation, which involved collaborative, interview-based research on her group’s research question related to ideologies about language in Qazaqstan and abroad.[[3]](#footnote-3) This project thus required Zere to engage in translation on multiple fronts: translation across language representations in the interviews, which Zere conducted in both English and Russian (due to insecurity over her own Qazaq fluency at the time), translation of interview transcripts for group members (typically into English), translations of one’s own analysis and representations of those interviews into a final research paper that used a single register of English, and ultimately intersemiotic translations from research paper to oral presentation at the conference. These translation practices were messy and regularly subject to collective revision. She described her linguistic and generic translation of interviews to a formal paper in her WAC course as:

…like a puzzle to make up that full picture. You should take parts like to make a call, and at the end we were all analyzing all the work that we had done and realizing it was like partially, to come to one conclusion and keep doing corrections.

By “it was like partially,” Zere explained that she could not fully explain the nature of her friendships to her classmates, but that they could only get a partial understanding of one another’s’ meanings and interview analysis practices, especially as they translated interview transcripts and notes into a single narrative in their final project.

Zere also described the labor of working across languages in this project as greater for English and Qazaq than for Russian. The English interview still posed challenges, however, because the participant moved back and forth across different registers of English and used some academic terminologies. When working with her group members to write the final paper, she described translating her English-medium interview transcript across genres as more difficult than the entire process of translating the Russian-medium interview transcript across both languages (Russian and English) and genres. Unlike her translations of the Russian transcript, she felt she must consult dictionaries and other tools to translate academic English terms, and she noted that she did not feel comfortable clarifying these translations with her participant, “because I already asked him a lot of things, I could do the work.” In considering the time and energy her friend had already committed to her project, Zere describes not only the labor of translating English terms on an interview transcript but also makes an evaluative judgment about *who* ought to take responsibility for that labor, reflecting questions of power and relationships in the *who* of social literacy practices foregrounded Power-Carter and Zakeri (2019) as discussed in Chapter 3.

As she considered her own multiliteracy autobiography, learned more about the literacy narratives of her study’s participants, and engaged in translation labor herself across language representations and genres for her WAC course, Zere became increasingly sensitive to the frictions that her international student friends faced in their day-to-day translation practices at their university. As I suggest in Chapter 6, we might understand this sensitivity as a kind of *friction literacy.* These sensitivities continued beyond the course and through the global pandemic, and they were sustained by her own family history and connections to the greater Altai region beyond Qazaqstan. Specifically, she described Qazaq speaking friends from China and Mongolia studying in Qazaqstan as similar to those labeled *Қандас* (or returnee, a politically-charged term for a Qazaq person from the Qazaq diaspora who has returned to reside permanently in Qazaqstan), and how these friendships motivated shifting language practices:

They were sharing with me the experience of being like oppressed, because they do not speak Russian well, and it's really like you know, make me feel like it's not fair towards them that they do not speak Russian, that it's okay, actually. But people who live there actually in [the North of Qazaqstan], and Russian people think that like they have to speak Russian. But like they did not speak Russian just because they came from China, and I was communicating with them a lot, and I changed my mind about it. Like it’s ok if people speak only Russian, but it’s also ok if they speak only Qazaq. My grandmother is from China as well but she speaks Russian, but she prefers speaking Qazaq now. Because I was telling her story, so more than *Қандас* who being criticized here by Russian speaking people. It's gonna make sense.

Thus while she acknowledged that most people viewed her region as a place of Russians, both her interview and multiliteracy autobiography drew from her own family’s history to show the historical presence of Qazaqs in the region, many of whom fled to Xinjiang to escape occupation by the Soviet Union. She viewed contemporary criticism of her Qazaq-speaking international student friends’ lack of Russian proficiency as connected to this history.

While Zere’s relationships with Qazaq-speaking international student friends extended far beyond her WAC course and brought virtual companionship during the global pandemic, she also explained how she had considered these relationships in her group’s presentation for the undergraduate research conference. During that presentation, she argued that using English was important “so everyone would understand it,” but also noted that “we did mix up. We added some translations in Qazaq, and some sentences to clarify something, and translations of the meanings of the words, just like that.” When asked about specific moments of translation into Qazaq, Zere explained these choices and the online resources and friends she consulted to support those translations, followed by a contradiction of her earlier statement about English, as well as by a clarification about her Qazaq language use:

Zere*:* I know most students would understand Qazaq and Russian, but at that time I know that some people really don’t understand English, simple English words even, simple English sentences, easy to speak in Russian. At that time I would even speak in Russian…

*Joseph: That makes sense, so why did you pick Kaakh and not Russian to put on the PowerPoint to translate?*

Zere: To give some parallels between the languages, to show the connection between the languages, and there were some students who spoke Qazaq more than English… Qazaq is my mother tongue, and… *Қандас,* they came from China, Mongolia, they want to move back to their countries; they you know find friends there. Here they cannot communicate with their teachers, and they feel like their life is actually in China or Mongolia, and not here in their historical homeland!

By “some people,” Zere refers to her international student friends learning both English and Russian at her university. Thus while someone (including myself) listening to Zere and her group members’ presentation might accurately assume that her choice of an English-medium presentation– with some Qazaq translations incorporated throughout– reflected a desire for her audience to comprehend her presentation or a demonstration of her English language learning/fluency, such listeners would only understand a slice of Zere’s rhetorical negotiations of power via translation. They might also assume that everyone in the audience spoke English. Moreover, the final textual and oral presentation product included no Russian language text or spoken material, so an outside observer would perhaps wonder if Zere even used Russian in her daily life, despite Zere feeling most confident in her Russian language use/proficiency. However, this dialogue with Zere shows that displacing Russian was intentional as she chose to privilege relationships not only with those in the audience, but also with the international student friends whose perspectives were at the center of her project. These translation practices were rooted in perceptions of the Qazaq language as connected to the historical and present homeland of the Qazaq people, including Qazaq students without citizenship, Russian language proficiency, or a sense of community. Finally, Zere’s translation practices were also grounded in a desire to show care by taking on the labor of translation herself, as she reiterated, “I thought about my groupmate who spoke only Qazaq. I thought, I want you to understand. I want to make this easier for you.”

Instead, as Zere moved through the translation expectations of her WAC course, her developing critical awareness of language signaled an early shift away from the language (Russian) she had grown comfortable using in academic and social spaces. While she regularly referenced Russian language use via metaphors that indicated (seemingly frictionless) ease in movement across both registers of the language and genres composed in that language, Zere began to take Qazaq language practices more seriously because of relationships generated and sustained outside of her WAC course. As stated earlier, these relationships inflected nearly all her activity in that course but would not have been obviously visible to her instructor or peers with exclusive access to the final textual products submitted as part of the curriculum. Moreover, this shift highlighted a representation of Qazaq as simultaneously transnational and a language of a people studying or residing beyond the geographical borders of the Qazaqstani state on the one hand, and place-based and concatenated to the Qazaq people’s present and historical homelands on the other.

Since her WAC class, Zere has continued a long process of converting her thoughts and speech into mostly Qazaq. She described to me how this process helped her to connect with other Qazaq people from around the country in addition to those from outside Qazaqstan. For example, when discussing her conversations that week with Qazaqs from Southern regions, she said, “I speak only Qazaq to them, because they say that they do not understand Russian, and they say that they are scared to speak Russian because they are, because of their accents. It's okay for me.” At the same time, Zere also continues to improve her Qazaq language with English in-tandem. While her Qazaq language use is rooted in relationships to Qazaq friends and family and to the land, she described English as a way to maintain a career, and eventually travel out of the country to meet new communities, similar to how her groupmates from Hong Kong, Mongolia, and Xinjiang had traveled. She associated English with physical and socio-economic mobility, but she also hedged that such mobility was always only hypothetical, and likely its rewards only temporary. “Only maybe I will go,” she hedged, citing the isolation of the pandemic and grappling with the long train ride from her family. Moreover, she expanded that she did not enjoy teaching in her current position, and while she wanted to travel, she intended to return to Qazaqstan. “I will come back to Qazaqstan of course,” she said, “because there is my mother and my relatives. I just want to try to live in different countries.”

This statement brought us back to a discussion about Semey, its history, and Zere’s family, and I asked her why issues of language change, literacy, and migration both specifically related to Semey and broadly in relation to language education mattered to her. She stated that she hoped for more opportunities to include Qazaq in education programs in the ways she had modeled in her conference presentation. She reiterated her desire for all Qazaq-speaking people to find positive relationships and good communities in Qazaqstan, regardless of their country of origin, and she argued that others would benefit from incorporating Qazaq into their language repertoires. “Maybe if they try to understand, to learn the Qazaq language,” she suggested, “they would be able to read a little of the works of our poets and writers. They would understand our poems and other works, and they would understand our history because our history is *here*, and here in these poems.” Here, Zere connects literacy not to an academic genre or research project but to poetry and great works of Qazaq writers– genres she locates in place in Semey and in Northern Qazaqstan alternative to the region’s associations as a place of Russian language, culture, and scientific experimentation and disaster. Rather than positing a pain narrative, Zere’s linking of genres of poetry and great works to Qazaq literacies, language socialization, and translation practices suggests that she understands such genres as agentive allies in navigating the frictions of competing language ideologies and conditions of power. Just as Zere sought to leverage the linguistic and relational loss implicated by the frictions of academic genres in her WAC class by making displaced Qazaq lexis visible on her PowerPoint presentation for her conference presentation, Zere frames Qazaq poems and works as actively capable of locating Qazaq language representations in relation to a collective Qazaq identity and place on the other.

*5.2.2: Aidana and Representations of English*

So far in this book, I have highlighted the perspectives of faculty and students who engaged in translations across language representations through their courses, professional translation work, and daily writing practices. Whether teaching in the classroom or presenting at a conference, these social literacy practices would visibly code as translation by most definitions, or alternatively as translanguaging when undergone in pedagogical contexts (as defined by scholars such as Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Tai & Dai, forthcoming; Wei & Ho, 2018). However, not all students felt comfortable moving/desired to move across language representations in their work. Aidana, who speaks primarily Russian in her daily life and English in academic contexts, has only recently begun learning Qazaq. The child of a Qazaq father and Russian Qazaqstani mother, Aidana has only ever used Russian when speaking with her family and friends, and she reserves English for academic and professional spaces. Aidana’s final project group presented at an undergraduate research conference and gave their presentation entirely in English.

Aidana embraced local and governmental efforts to support the Qazaq language even as she struggled to speak Qazaq herself. Having grown up in a bilingual household where one parent spoke both Qazaq and Russian and the other spoke only Russian, Aidana grew up speaking almost exclusively Russian with her family and friends so that everyone could understand. Like many other participants in this book, she grew up perceiving this borderlands space as (primarily) culturally and linguistically Russian, and her language practices contributed to sedimenting that reality. When I asked her why issues of language change, migration, and place mattered to her, she began with a story of her childhood and recalled, “Our region was like more for Russians historically and it’s why historically people here speak more Russian than Qazaq. But now, that’s changing, and now our people are starting to speak more Qazaq.” In evoking history twice in this statement, Aidana grounds language practices in locally constructed ideologies of ethnicity, temporality, and place. In acknowledging that “that’s changing,” Aidana pointed not only to a shift in language practices that she described later in the interview, but also a shift in ideologies about place. She welcomed these changes specifically because they elevated the status of Qazaq in Northern Qazaqstan. These ideologies and their connection to the Qazaq language help us understand the language representations, or ideologies about language, that Aidana moves across when translating.

Aidana described these changes to me initially by sharing her WAC course’s multiliteracy autobiography, and again over a year later via an interview. She often framed language change through the lens of shifting policies about public schools’ languages of instruction. First, she described a shift from almost entirely Russian-medium schooling, as Svetlana described in Chapter 4, to an option for Qazaq- or Russian-medium education, as well as the opening of a Nazarbayev School for high achieving students in the region (where the medium of education is English) and her knowledge of some Turkic language schools. Aidana felt she had missed out on these educational developments. Having attended a Russian-medium school herself, she found few opportunities to learn Qazaq growing up and lamented that her teachers did not take seriously the limited Qazaq language classes to which she did have access. She expanded on her multiliteracy autobiography in our interview, through which she described how she had regularly been socially discouraged from studying or using the Qazaq language on her own. She recalled:

When we were children, it was like we were uneducated if you don’t speak Russian, even though you obviously know Russian. Like if you speak Qazaq, it means that you are probably from village or, I don’t know, like if you are living in the city, like [city where interview took place] is a Russian city so you should speak Russian. In the past it was like that. Yeah. And Qazaq was like the village language. It was like why don’t you speak Russian then, you are in the city...

Here, Aidana argues that most Qazaq speakers in her city have historically spoken Russian, yet they faced social stigma for revealing their bilingual repertoire. In referring to people from villages, Aidana connects linguistic prejudice to class prejudice. She did not offer this statement as prejudice toward residents of local villages but rather as an acknowledgement that Qazaq-speaking villages have historically been afforded less resources (Smagulova, 2020) and therefore faced social stigma and class prejudice from wealthier urban residents. While such prejudices still remain among some communities, Aidana expanded on her argument that “but now, that’s changing,” as mentioned above, by saying:

But now I think it also is an issue of generation. Like our generation is more open to such things and our friends, even as I, we just identify ourselves as citizens of Qazaqstan, as Qazaqstani people, and it doesn’t matter if you are ethnically Russian or Qazaq or Turkish, it doesn’t matter, just if you live in Qazaqstan, that’s why you need to speak Qazaq… at least at a basic level.

Through this framing, Aidana points to a social transformation that involves more than just language representations and social class, but also notions of ethnicity and governance. Similar to Aisulu in Chapter 4, who pointed out in a conversation while participant checking that, “If there are 10 people in a room, and nine speak Qazaq as their first language and one speaks Russian, everyone in that room will speak Russian,” Aidana notes an uneven distribution of the labor of speaking in one’s heritage language, Qazaq, which also serves as the State language, in a region where everyone is assumed to speak Russian. To mark contrast from this perspective and from historical language representations, Aidana argued that she now associates Qazaq with a developing cosmopolitan Qazaqstani identity. She described Qazaq in reference to her own multiethnic and bilingual family as beneficial and perhaps necessarily for inter-ethnic solidarity and cosmopolitan relations.

Given these representations of the Qazaq language, Aidana’s aspirations for the development of her own Qazaq language skills, and the ease she described in speaking Russian, it may seem surprising that she and her group members only spoke English in their conference presentation–especially since the group felt that some people in attendance may not be entirely proficient in English. Aidana explained this choice in terms of the labor she associated with translation. She suggested, “I think it is because English, it is difficult to switch between languages and when you give presentation you need to be careful not to trip up. When I speak English I think in English, and when I need to switch in giving the presentation, it may be difficult then to speak in Russian than to speak in Qazaq than all in English.” Aidana here describes avoiding translation across language representations because such labor appeared too difficult, and she sought to avoid frictions implicated by the translation of the written final paper genre to the conference presentation. Nervous to present her research for the first time and having dedicated so much work to her English-medium final paper for her WAC course, Aidana felt that presenting in English made sense; translation that involved language resources beyond English, including both Qazaq and Russian, could jeopardize her ability to convey meaning and slow down her presentation. Similar to Lorimer Leonard’s (2021) Nimet, who felt that she was constantly being sped up in the process of translating and composing English via her nursing program, Aidana felt that a conference presentation genre would place temporal demands on her translation praxis across genres such that she would rather avoid the demands of translation across language representations. Specifically, a conference presentation offered little time for revision and feedback with her intended audiences. Moreover, she noted that she had already done considerable translation work across languages for the project anyway, as all of her interviews for that project were conducted in Qazaq or Russian. Ultimately, Aidana’s anticipation of friction in the conference presentation, which, in Chapter 5, I will refer to as a kind of friction literacy; here, Aidana’s anticipation of friction in the presentation modality played an agentive role in her translation choices, including what to occlude from public view. An academic or professional setting with specific temporal demands was not the place where Aidana felt the need to make the messiness of translation visible. She had already done enough labor for her audience.

Not only did Aidana want to avoid the labor of moving across language representations in her conference presentation, she also described how, at the time of her presentation, she was motivated by a perception of English’s potential for frictionless linguistic and geographical mobility. This perspective informed her group’s approach to their conference presentation and evolved slightly only after her German (not English) language proficiency afforded her an opportunity to study abroad in Europe for a semester and to meet other communities proud of their heritage languages. She recalled:

[In Europe,] I was always excited to talk about Qazaqstan when people were interested in it, and I was especially excited because I wondered like if people have everything, like their life, for example if we take the USA there is a lot of climate zones, and so different so landscapes and oceans, mountains, lakes, so you don’t need to learn another language to travel, like it’s your language and you can travel everywhere, and you just live so easily. Everything is easy. And I was surprised there when people from the USA or EU, when they’re interested in Qazaqstan, because I thought they shouldn’t have been interested, like because they don’t want this 3rd world knowledge. But now I realize I can just say that it’s a beautiful country, you know, it’s the ninth largest country! In the world! That people here are also people, that we don’t live in yurts, a lot of them even speak English, you can come and communicate and travel. We have a beautiful country and I can share that, that I am Qazaq and that’s that. That I speak Qazaq.

I have quoted this excerpt of Aidana’s interview at length as it highlights multiple language representations, evolutions in ideologies, and references to land and place. With “you can travel anywhere,” Aidana describes initially associating English not only with a higher social class but also with mobility– an ideology similar to what Park (2015) describes as an ideology “of pure potential” (p. 454). She frames English as the language of Europeans and Americans, and she feels that English language use affords mobility across different landscapes without the frictions associated with translation or visa regimes. Specifically, she later contrasts this seemingly frictionless mobility with her own struggles to learn Qazaq in a region where Russian, and increasingly English “is everywhere.” With “everything is easy,” Aidana connects a perception of socioeconomic mobility with linguistic mobility, a kind of frictionless-ness she hoped to benefit from herself, as English provided less difficulty communicating during her conference presentation on the one hand and a better job in the future on the other. Through her use of second person when saying, '`you can come and communicate and travel,” she likely references my presence as a non-Qazaqstani citizen and my own translation practices which she had witnessed in my time in the region, which involved movement across English, Qazaq, and Russian. The collective pronoun in “we have a beautiful country” signifies a shift to a collective national identity. Finally, the phrase, “But now I realize,” highlights her evolving representation of Qazaq and of her own mobility. Now eager to share Qazaq culture with others, Aidana hopes that English might facilitate movement of interested international guests to Qazaqstan, but that Qazaq might alternatively facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue and mobility within the country, and she described her more concerted efforts to learn Qazaq so as to make this vision a reality.

Thus a snapshot of Aidana’s translation practices in the WAC course and conference alone would not have revealed the fuller picture of her language ideologies and translation practices that continue to evolve. Instead, tracing shifting ideologies about language and translation that occurred as she composed her multiliteracy autobiography and negotiated meaning while translating interviews from Qazaq and Russian before her conference presentation revealed considerable translation labor that would have been hidden by a final product as an uptake artifact (both textual in terms of her final paper and spoken discourse in terms of her conference presentation). Specifically, the English-medium of Aidana’s WAC course contributed to the frictions that sustained the “bidirectional relations” that held the genres of the class together (Freadman, 2002). If throughout the class, *uptake captures* resulted in English-medium genres as expected by administrative and educational oversight stipulations regarding medium-of-education policies, then even the opportunity to make use of multiple linguistic resources to conduct research did not engender empowerment to continue to use multiple linguistic resources in the conference presentation. At the time of writing, Aidana is still learning Qazaq, and much like the language learners of other studies (Mehisto, Kambatyrova, & Nurseitova, 2016), she finds it challenging to locate Qazaq language acquisition teaching and learning materials that she deems of high quality compared to English or Russian materials.

Instead, we might locate the displacements of frictions sustained by academic genres and English and Russian medium-of-education programs in her tactical translation practices beyond educational institutions and the composition of genres associated with those spaces. For example, Aidana noted that she is grateful for modalities that allow her to connect with other Qazaq people across the country and the Qazaq diaspora, ease the friction of her travel around Qazaqstan, and that support her efforts to realize broader goals for human rights for Qazaq people, and especially Qazaq women. In one conversation, for example, she pulled out her phone and showed me the popular Instagram page *Batyr Jamal*, which advocates for both Qazaq and global women’s rights projects and which archives videos and activist information in Qazaq as often as in Russian. These posts provided language learning opportunities, but they also were accessible when she could not understand the Qazaq lexis but wanted to make sense of a post. Just hitting the translation button on Instagram for Qazaq pages allowed her to confirm the meaning of some posts– one of many tools that helps her to comfortably share activist content to her own Instagram page and to “get by” while she remains in the “bottleneck phase” of language learning. She also described a women’s rights event that she attended in a city a few hours away near the border of Russia, where activists spoke in Qazaq, and simultaneous translators provided recorded Russian translations via headphones for those who requested such accommodations. Through these translation strategies and dependence on the agency of others, Aidana continues to realize her commitments to Qazaq language revitalization as well as to Qazaqstani-run human rights projects even as she struggles to learn Qazaq herself. Instead, she feels comfortable leveraging these multimodal affordances to navigate the frictions of translation while acquiring new Qazaq language literacies and literacies associated with developing feminist movements in Qazaqstan in-tandem.

In this section, I have described Aidana’s efforts to translate literacies across language representations and genres through her WAC course, their conference presentation, and beyond. While she claimed fluency in both English and Russian as well as some proficiency in Qazaq and German, her group opted to speak only English in their conference presentations after the completion of their WAC course. Their motivations for doing so extended from the hypothetical labor they envisioned in translating across language representations, their actual labor in brokering disciplinary and/or extra-institutional literacies, and the constraints and intersemiotic negotiations demanded by the spoken genre of the presentation. These practices suggest that not all translation labor is perceived as equally demanding by students and reveal how Aidana anticipated frictions. At the same time, the conference presentation as an *uptake artifact*, as well as the conference as a *literacy event*, if taken on their own, would have occluded Aidana’s day-to-day translation practices as well as the negotiations of power implicated by such practices, including efforts to participate in Qazaq language reclamation. They also reveal that genres assigned in coursework designed to support students’ developing critical awareness of language through writing tasks, such as this WAC course, may still resemble too closely the high-stakes assignments of other coursework and bump into *uptake captures* that lead students to anticipate frictions and occlude their negotiations of literacies in the writing process. The covering up of these negotiations was ultimately by design, as Aidana worked to give the appearance of a professional and polished final project, to limit perceived frictions in their translations, and to integrate into institutional and academic literacies. Moreover, Aidana’s description of her practices demonstrates how some students may perceive English as promising seemingly frictionless mobilities.

Beyond the conference presentation, however, Aidana’s literacy practices continued to evolve, and she was quick to detail frictions she encountered when engaging in everyday translation labor. In fact, when German rather than English allowed her to travel abroad, she began to realize how Qazaq literacies had not been taken up in her prior academic labor, and she began allying with social media translation tools to help ease the frictions of language learning in a context where she felt few quality Qazaq language resources were available for adult learners in her region. These social media technologies, unlike the genres of the WAC course and her conference presentation, enacted agency in such a way as to support Aidana in leveraging the displacements of her translation practices. In the next section, I turn to the translation practices of Zhannat and her group members, who alternatively worked to make translation’s frictions highly visible and subject to critique, and I consider the limits of translation research that privileges the individual writer and their integration of social literacies into academic or institutional settings.

*5.2.3 Zhannat and the Alternative Relationships Nurtured via Translation’s Loss*

Zhannat and her group members saw their presentation at an undergraduate research conference as an opportunity to stand out. As they approached a shared podium at the front of a large lecture hall, they spent a minute getting their technology running and then projected a detailed outline of their presentation onto a PowerPoint screen in English. As they began their presentation, they read a script in English that closely paralleled the words on the screen. Drawing from their own identities, Zhannat and her group members began by introducing their inquiry into local perspectives on language reclamation projects, and they articulated their study’s emphasis on the ambivalence toward such projects as expressed by self-identifying Qazaq, Tatar, and Russian people in their Northern borderlands region. This brief script allowed each student to closely replicate the academic register of English they had used in their WAC course’s final paper– mirroring the English-medium composing practices of Aidana’s presentations. Beyond this brief introduction, however, Zhannat and her group members rarely used English.

As they moved into the literature review section of their talk, Zhannat introduced not only her theoretical framework but also the concerns of local self-identified ethnic Qazaqs who speak or are literate in Russian Sign Language (RSL), such as herself. As she laid this groundwork for the presentation, she translated her findings across English and RSL, especially when quoting RSL speakers’ perspectives, RSL community vernacular, or arguments she made concerning her local RSL community’s experiences. As she moved across English and RSL, Zhannat would occasionally translate verbally and occasionally expect her audience members to translate themselves by looking at the English on the PowerPoint to understand. This latter practice kept the room in silence– at times for several minutes– and immediately drew the attention of even the most distracted students in attendance. As Zhannat wrapped up her section, the group offered their methodology in English, and then one of her group members engaged in similar translation practices through her partial presentation of findings and by oscillating between English and Tatar. One student offered a slide of findings in Russian as well. The presentation wrapped up with translations of the group’s English conclusion section into Qazaq. Having completed this project for their WAC course, Zhannat and her classmates were motivated to share their qualitative project with audiences beyond their teacher, but they wanted to do so on their own terms. They had goals in mind beyond a simple sharing of findings, demonstration of learning, or achievement of a participation certificate, and translation helped them achieve those goals.

Many local observers to the presentation expressed surprise that RSL existed at all and wondered how Zhannat had come to learn this language (as she did not identify as deaf), and a few Qazaq speaking students with whom I had conversations after the conference discussed having fun trying to make sense of Tatar even as they looked at the English on the PowerPoint, since Qazaq and Tatar share some lexical and syntactic similarities. To understand Zhannat and her classmates’ translation labor in this presentation, however, requires attention to her and her classmates’ learning, revision, and translation practices throughout their WAC course, as well as the agency of the genres, modalities, and space that they leveraged to make friction visible. I highlight Zhannat’s perspectives in particular here because we had worked together before she even enrolled in this course. A pedagogy major with experience in translation courses rather than a Translation Studies major, Zhannat and I regularly volunteered together at a local literacy HUB, so I had the opportunity to have multiple informal conversations with her throughout the semester when she enrolled in the WAC course about topics ranging from her multiliteracy autobiography to the conception and development of her research project. We also talked regularly about her own literacy history, her visions for the future of Qazaqstan, and her interests in both American and Qazaqstani media, and we collaborated on presentations and workshops at the literacy HUB on local issues and teacher training and development. Throughout this work, Zhannat regularly worked to resist reductive assumptions about her identity made by teachers, classmates, and other community members, and she often framed her literacy practices through her WAC course as contributing to that resistance.

Zhannat leveraged the initial assignment for her course, a multiliteracy autobiography, to articulate not only her own language learning practices but the relationships that nurtured her learning. Similar to Zere and Aidana, affective ties to friends and relatives moved Zhannat to construct a multilingual repertoire in ways that made language learning and primary and secondary school experiences challenging. She wrote in her multiliteracy autobiography:

When I was born in my parents’ family, my grandparents decided that they were going to live with us: with my deaf mom, deaf father, and me. My Qazaq grandparents were afraid that I would never speak in my life and that I should know Qazaq even though my parents don’t speak Qazaq. Qazaq is the language of Qazaqstan now. While my parents spoke in Russian Sign Language to me. My parents had taken me to a Russian Kindergarten, and my grandparents moved me to a Qazaq school at the age of 7[[4]](#footnote-4). Then I messed and mixed languages and spoke them mostly at the same time, but amazingly I did speak.

This excerpt of Zhannat’s multiliteracy autobiography speaks to the considerable linguistic repertoire she needed to cultivate simply to maintain relationships with relatives, classmates, and teachers, as well as the challenges she faced and confidence she ultimately gained in moving across multiple languages. Like many of her classmates, her retelling of her literacy history speaks to the considerable linguistic diversity of this borderlands space as well as shifting language representations and understandings of the status of Qazaq and Russian. She describes learning Qazaq to speak to her grandparents and to envision with them a future for herself in Qazaqstan, but how such choice engendered linguistic dissonance between herself and her parents who had been historically excluded from learning Qazaq. Moreover, even as she acquired multiple languages and made sense of her multiple literacies and contexts of learning and communication, she felt a sense of loss. This loss was not cognitive–Zhannat only gained fluency in each language she acquired even as she later scaffolded English and Korean as well– but rather affective as she felt that people excited that she could speak also criticized her actual language practices.

Zhannat viewed her WAC course as an opportunity to interrogate the social and material conditions through which she and those in her RSL speaking community had acquired and negotiated multiple literacies, and the multiliteracy autobiography supported these efforts by offering a way to make these negotiations visible in her literacy history. The first time that Zhannat articulated to me an effort to explicitly resist assumptions about her language use, she was instead working on her final qualitative project, but she cited what we might understand as the agency and uptake affordances of the multiliteracy autobiography as supporting such resistance. Engaging in qualitative inquiry for the first time, she described translating a developing critical awareness of language from her multiliteracy autobiography to her composition and use of an interview protocol for her group’s final project. In fact, Zhannat claimed that she found the multiliteracy autobiography one of the most beneficial writing activities of her course. She acknowledged that while she speaks five languages, and while she uses all of those languages in her daily life professionally, academically, and/or personally, she had never really been asked to reflect on her languaging practices or consider how and why she had acquired those literacy skills. In one interview, she noted:

The first thought I had was, “I never thought of my languages in this way.” Like, I never had to explain each language that I spoke, like how it happened, why, and stuff. Like nobody asks that. People say, “How many languages do you speak?” I say, “Five,” and they’re like, “Wow, you’re so smart. You’re a genius.” Of course from the USA especially. And when we were writing that paper, I thought, “That’s good, now I kinda appreciate the languages I speak.” I put like frames in my head, like I’ll use this language this way. That’s good… I think [the multiliteracy autobiography] helped me to understand the languages that I speak and explain to the interviewee. For example as for me, I know that I speak Korean this much, but for example if I didn’t speak Qazaq but I understood it, I would know it. I would know what this person felt here and what this person is trying to explain to me.”

Zhannat here explains how the multiliteracy autobiography moved her to reflect on her language practices for the first time in an academic setting. She organized these reflections by named language for that assignment. In this conversation, she referenced her organization by acknowledging my presence and positionality as a White American researcher with a wink through the phrase “Of course from the USA especially,” a rhetorical gesture toward White Americans’ stereotypically monolingual identities. Her move to describing the “frames” she used to understand her language choices reflects an ongoing consideration of the *how* and *why* of her daily translation practices, including considerations of audience, ethnicity, social class, and access. Her multiliteracy autobiography often centered Russian Sign Language to make explicit how these considerations often only accounted for the three languages of Qazaqstan’s trilingual policy in ways she felt minoritized other communities. Moreover, this genre became an ally for Zhannat as she sought to make visible the frictions implicated by her own daily literacy practices.

Such critical reflections came into stark relief when Zhannat began constructing her interview protocol, as evidenced by the more challenging to understand sentences at the end of the above block quotation. In this instance, Zhannat describes an interview with a self identifying Qazaq student who speaks primarily RSL. The interview protocol as a genre afforded negotiation for Zhannat and her interview participant such that the two were able to find shared meaning making practices. Here, she compares Korean and Qazaq to play down notions of proficiency as defined by academic metrics that only take into account the acquisition of English, Qazaq, and Russian, as well as to acknowledge and ameliorate any shame her participant might feel for making mistakes while speaking Qazaq. Specifically, the statement “If I didn’t speak Qazaq but I understood it, I would know it” seeks to affirm to a participant– a Qazaq-identifying RSL speaker– that she need not feel ashamed of any limitations to her Qazaq language proficiency. Aware that her participant likely speaks Russian well because of both social stigma and lack of access to a Qazaq sign language, Zhannat instead argues to her participant that her ethnic identity alone secures the knowledge necessary to be considered a legitimate Qazaq speaker. Moreover, the phrase, “I would know what this person felt here and what this person is trying to explain to me” speaks to an affective and relational orientation to the labor of revising and sedimenting language (in this case via translation across RSL and Qazaq), as Zhannat assures her participant that she feels what she feels and understands the negotiations of power she navigates in her daily languaging praxis. In other words, Zhannat recognized the frictions that her participant might feel, and when enacting the interview protocol, made visible such *friction literacy* to show care and understanding.

When participant checking this narrative, Zhannat added that in addition to Qazaq and RSL speakers, Korean people in her region needed to grapple with similar frictions. Although she does not identify as Korean, Zhannat learned to speak the Korean language initially because of her love for K-pop music and Korean television shows but also out of concern for how such media continues to be translated and dubbed in Russian. For Zhannat, these dubbed videos and dubbing technology by Russian language speakers perpetuates such frictions. For example, she described once instance in a Korean film where characters reference a grandmother in Korean using respectful language:

Koreans, they always respect. Like in Qazaq language, we also respect elders, right? All our culture is like based on what elders will say. And in Russian translation, the respect gets lost when they dub it. They said, literally they said *бобка.* so like, they were supposed to like *бабушка,* or a sweet word like *бобуля,* but like granny kinda. But they translated as *бобка,* like that old bad person kinda. It doesn’t mean bad, but it has that kinda bad note to it, you know?

Zhannat recognized this loss in translation as exemplifying a form of cultural erasure she often faced herself when Qazaq ways of knowing are translated into Russian by educators or other community members. She further described an instance when a Korean coworker faced discriminatory language and prejudiced jokes for maintaining Korean cultural practices, despite Koreans having lived in this borderlands region for decades due to displacement by the governments of Japan and the Soviet Union, respectively. Zhannat attributed these translation moments as contributing to her developing friction literacy. Although she did not emphasize Korean language learners or communities during her WAC course, Zhannat wanted me to include in my book a reference to her sustained interest in minoritized language communities that she felt were entitled to translation on their own terms, even if they did not express the same historical claims to sovereignty, and she argued that engagement with Korean films shaped how she understood the frictions she encountered in her daily translation practices.

When Zhannat and her group members approached their conference presentation, they wanted to make visible such frictions and negotiations of identity and meaning in which they regularly engaged through their daily translation praxis as well as through their research process for their project. In other words, they recognized and sought to enact translation through a growing friction literacy. In her sections of the presentation, Zhannat moved across language representations that included English, RSL, and Qazaq.[[5]](#footnote-5) She explained these choices by articulating the particular audiences to whom she and her group members sought to include and to whom they spoke directly, noting:

Zhannat: We were speaking to people who speak Tatar, or people who have some Tatar heritage, people who have some relatives who are deaf in Qazaqstan, they could also relate. And they could be like, “Oh, this person kinda knows what I know.”

*Joseph: Did you think of that before you began your presentation?*

Zhannat: Well, I thought, we’re gonna get like get in there, like in their hearts… I’m thinking like yeah that was about discourse community, the discourse communities of these language groups.

Here, Zhannat demonstrates a relational approach to translation. Through translation across language representations, she and her group members seek to center the very communities whose language resources and meaning making practices have been displaced by institutional and geopolitical frictions reinforced by medium of education practices and other language policies. Having regularly navigated the frictions surrounding translation across her linguistic repertoire, Zhannat anticipated these frictions in her conference presentation and considered what literacies to both enact and displace. In seeking to highlight the perspectives of the RSL community using RSL, she enacts a form of relational care while displacing assumptions that RSL perspectives must be communicated to others exclusively through other literacies or oral speech. Moreover, she lets her embodied practice of communicating via RSL communicate these frictions.

Through her simultaneous translations across genres, Zhannat makes visible the *displacement artifacts* of her translation practices for the sake of understanding. Put another way, she made sure that the language representations and literacies her audience members might have expected to encounter in her presentation, in this case English script and charts/graphs of her qualitative findings, were visible on the PowerPoint slides behind her even as she communicated using RSL. While many participants in my study described their use of technology as peripheral to their presentation, for Zhannat and her group members, the PowerPoint served a vital role in meaning making as it allowed her and her group members to translate their final project paper into RSL, Tatar, and Qazaq without having to worry about their participants understanding. They thus allied with the agency of the PowerPoint and its notable placement behind them and their ongoing translation practices. She described these practices in the following terms:

We used our languages as Easter eggs. Well, not exactly Easter eggs, but we didn’t give it all at the beginning. We didn’t just slap people with the facts that we had. We just started showing something different, that you don’t understand, but to understand that you have to look at [the graphics on the screen], an active look at the research, and actively engage with it. And realize what the RSL community is.

In this interview excerpt from a few weeks following Zhannat’s conference presentation, she begins with a statement that might code as linguistic tourism (Matsuda, 2014). She begins by describing using languages as Easter eggs, as objects, to attract attention. However, she immediately qualifies this statement. With “We didn’t just slap people with the facts,” she argues that she expects active engagement from her audience members, that they much “actively engage with it,” rather than passively expect Zhannat to undergo the labor of translation by articulating the experiences of RSL speakers using a language other than RSL. To follow up and explain what the “RSL community is,” Zhannat also spoke of her body’s positioning near the PowerPoint and how her audience members witnessing her RSL languaging practices would presumably read her body as ethnically Qazaq and recognize that she needed to resort to a signed language representation associated with Russian to communicate. Through embodied translation strategies (Gonzales, 2018) such as gestures and targeted eye contact, Zhannat helped facilitate her audiences’ translation practices while privileging her own multiliteracies and expecting her listeners to engage in translation labor themselves. Thus Zhannat’s translation practices equated to more than attention grabbing linguistic tourism. Instead, she leverages the agency of genres and language representations themselves, demands recognition of her body read as Qazaq and engaged in embodied multimodal practices (Gonzales, 2018) of RSL, of the organization of the lecture hall situated in a borderlands space, and of her audience members positioned in front of her to distribute the labor of translation.

In a conversation some time after our interview, Zhannat and I discussed the RSL community both in Qazaqstan and across the region. We talked about her ambivalence to her parents’ efforts to learn English in addition to RSL, as well as her own volunteer work with the deaf community in her region. She stated:

I think, the RSL community is more than Qazaqstan, it is a cross national community, but it's only because deaf people in all of those separate communities are victims of a careless [set of policies]. I don’t know why we still don’t have a Qazaq Sign Language, it’s been 30 years and it’s time to start teaching our deaf people Qazaq language. Because it seems to me like they’re trying to “Qazaqalize” everything which is a great thing! But the deaf community is left behind. I don’t see people doing something about this in the very close, upcoming future.

In this statement, Zhannat juxtaposes her own efforts to use Qazaq more regularly (and the sense of joy and connection to Qazaq history, media, and culture that she has gained through her learning of Qazaq), with the RSL community’s lack of access to Qazaq language revitalization projects. She associates an affective and relational loss to all her accumulations of Qazaq as well as the other language resources in her repertoire, and she describes her community’s transnational ties not through a rhetoric of globalization and connection but rather as a necessary product of policy (and ultimately translation) failure. Thus even as Zhannat’s translation practices operate in concert with the agency of multiple genres, modes, bodies, places, and texts, and even as she and her group members secured their desired uptake through the conference presentation (which she directly acknowledged in an interview through the statement, “the goal was accomplished”), Zhannat did not claim to overcome translation’s frictions. While she sought to resist (rather than singularly integrate) both institutional literacies and ethnolinguistic assumptions of her literacy practices, mobility without friction was ultimately never her intention. She instead sought what Tsing (2005) might call mobilization– “to get in there, like in their hearts.”

*5.3 Translation, Agency, and Transmodality*

This chapter’s findings invite us to complicate how we conceive the relationship between translation and transmodality. In Chapter 2, I cited Shipka’s (2016) theory of transmodality, which foregrounds the “highly distributed, embodied, translingual, and multimodal aspects of all communicative practice” (p. 253) to lay the groundwork for a more dynamic approach to agency than currently afforded by transnational/translingual orientations to writing and literacies that center the individual writer’s concrete labor. Many of these theories also undergird the approach to critical ethnography I delineated in Chapter 3, which Fitzpatrick and May (2022) argue must contend with concerns for local *ontologies* in addition to epistemologies. I positioned this work across both chapters in line with Gonzales’ (2018) community-engaged research on translation moments through which she expounds upon the multimodal and recursive nature of all translation activity. While Shipka’s perspective on transmodality has genealogical ties to postprocess and posthuman thought in rhetoric and writing studies and parallels work in second language (L2) writing (Atkinson, 2002; Jordan, 2014), Gonzales’ theories of translation approach multimodality by also drawing from North American Indigenous epistemologies that center community engaged research approaches to move beyond a focus on the individual translator alone. For Gonzales, words and orthographies themselves have agency that translators attune to and must grapple with as they transform meaning regardless of their production via sounds, texts, or digital devices (from iPhones to hand gestures, which Haas, 2012, reminds us require the digits of our fingers) and other technologies. This perspective further refuses expectations and pressures for the individual to secure equivalence in translation across stable named languages, as such a project will always fail. Similar to the perspectives of Dina and the other Translation Studies faculty with whom I spoke in Northern Qazaqstan, Gonzales argues that we cannot take equivalence for granted or expect the individual translator to secure equivalence alone. Instead, she contends that translation through Indigenous frameworks alternatively centers embodied “attunement to the relationships between language, land, and positionality” (Gonzales, 2021, p. 1) to make meaning through translation moments.

In her work with Indigenous technical translators, Gonzales (2021) demonstrates the agency of words via spoken discourse in part by describing a conference roundtable somewhat similar to Zhannat and her group members’ presentation. At this roundtable, a Quechua-Spanish interpreter from Peru, Shara, spoke Quechua for several minutes after her introduction despite anticipating that those in attendance would likely not understand. She explained this choice as “want[ing] to ensure that her language, like her body, [was] present in the room” (p. 8), before moving to a Spanish-medium discussion of her Quechua radio show. Shara wanted to ensure that she foregrounded her collective “cultural identity with dignity, pride, and cultural sovereignty” (p. 9) through the Quechua language before engaging in transnational dialogue with other translators about her work. In doing so, she invited her participants to acknowledge the frictions against which she and many Quechua speakers regularly grapple when expected to translate the meaning of their speech into Spanish while on Indigenous lands or via transnational dialogues. Further, Shara’s introduction did not operate as an isolated event but rather signaled her ongoing practice of speaking Quechua in any context regardless of the proficiency in Quechua of those in the room. In attuning to language, land, and positionality, then, Gonzales and her collaborating translators such as Shara invite us to think about the agency of words and bodies in-tandem and their positioning in relation to the spaces of our work.

In addition to the agency of words via genres typically associated with spoken discourse such as roundtables and conference presentations, orthographies also enact agency. In a recent study by Canagarajah (2023), a student participant engaged in codemeshing through the inclusion of Arabic script into a writing assignment. This student expected that her classmates in an American university would find that script unintelligible, and she hoped that such codemeshing would communicate to her peers the extra linguistic labor that multilingual students such as herself must perform to succeed academically at United States universities. In other words, for certain selections of her essay, she made the orthography rather than the lexis primarily responsible for meaning making. As Canagarajah describes, this student achieved her goal, as her classmates recognized the limitations of their own linguistic repertoires as expressed to both the student herself and the researcher. Moreover, the student’s classmates often relayed their appreciation for the script as “beautiful” and thus worked to appreciate the text even if they could not understand the lexis. Canagarajah’s findings offer a complimentary and somewhat reparative reading to Bou Ayash’s (2019) work with Nasser, a university student in Lebanon who found his Arabic language proficiency displaced from an English-medium first-year writing course into adaptations of Arabic orthographies via multimodal genres in his graphic design coursework.

Conversations ongoing in Qazaqstani contexts have also discussed the challenges of grappling with spoken words as well as orthographies that have changed multiple times in the past century: changes that have included Cyrillic, Latin, and Turkic scripts. Mawkanuli (2023) has acknowledged, for example, how engaging in translations of historical documents requires attention to both written texts and oral speech dictations. His translations of 18th century Qazaq texts depend not only on Russian translations written and preserved for official purposes but also oral dictations of “Qazaq Steppe Chaghatay,” a negotiation necessary for making visible the “historically situated, linguistically distinct genre of written communication the texts represent” with implications for making visible Qazaq governance structures and presence at the time. The contemporary translation teachers and faculty with whom I collaborated in Qazaqstan also continue to navigate relationships among spoken words, orthographies, and the land. Dina’s pedagogical practices, for example, as discussed in this study’s introduction, foregrounded the ways culture was negotiated in her simultaneous interpretation classes, and she brought her students out onto the steppe to practice translating for guides and to recognize their translation practices’ connections to the land.

Many of my study’s participants further lamented the labor of learning and composing with multiple orthographies even as some embraced transnational Turkic identities associated with Turkic orthographies in particular. Selecting an orthography for one’s own Qazaq language use has become a political decision with implications for writing and literacy education. In my own teaching in this context, for example, students often described how Anzaldua’s (1987) borderlands piece both resonated with their own multilingual experiences yet when taken alone overly simplified the ease of incorporating codemeshed literacies via writing because of orthographic similarities. In sum, negotiating the agencies of spoken words and orthographies additionally makes visible the translation frictions of composing, and words and orthographies themselves consequently enact agency in ways that cannot be taken for granted in this study.

Zhannat’s translation practices via her conference presentation make visible her own grappling with the agencies of spoken, signed, and written words in ways that speak to the frictions she navigates in her Qazaqstani borderlands region and comparable to those of the participants of Gonzales’ (2021) and Canagarajah’s (2023) studies. For example, even if one of Zhannat’s group members predicted that her audience members would use any Qazaq language proficiency in their linguistic repertoires to help decipher her Tatar speech, Zhannat expected that most in the audience would not understand Russian Sign Language (RSL). Similar to Shara, then, Zhannat’s use of RSL helped articulate a claim to cultural sovereignty as a Qazaq person by bringing her own language into the room regardless of her audience’s proficiency in that language to, as Tsing (2005) describes, co-produce culture via friction. Unlike Shara, however, Zhannat did not bring the titular language of her people into the room; instead, she expected that her body, read as ethnically Qazaq in her community, could communicate an affective loss and exclusion from such projects that other Qazaq-identifying RSL users experienced due to the ongoing lack of uptake to a Qazaq sign language. As Zhannat does not identify as deaf and described fluency and ease in using Qazaq, relationships to the deaf community, including to her parents, mediated these choices beyond her individual experience. Her translations of RSL community speech into RSL in particular offered a refusal of finding equivalence in Qazaq or Russian, opting for English on the PowerPoint to make such frictions as visible as possible.

At the same time, Zhannat’s animacy that she wanted her audience members to understand her presentation speaks to the ways that modalities enacted agency to communicate language ideologies and representations as she moved across scales as well. These included embodied translation strategies (Gonzales, 2018) such as hand gestures and targeted eye contact that simultaneously reinforced Zhannat’s association with both Qazaq claims to sovereignty and RSL-medium discourse that could not be fully understood by most audience members without attention to the PowerPoint. She also negotiated the conventions of a spoken presentation genre that traditionally framed audience members as passive receivers of knowledge. In arguing that she wanted audience members to “actively engage” with her presentation and recognize their inability to cross the boundaries of RSL speech without the support of other technologies, she offers a kind of lesson on frictional literacy firsthand. The agency of an English orthography on the PPT behind Zhannat becomes what I am reading as an intentionally identifiable uptake displacement of her translation practice. Zhannat leverages this displacement to invite her audience into her presentation while simultaneously privileging her own embodied meaning making practices via translation into RSL to get into the hearts of deaf community members in attendance. Put another way, Zhannat leverages translation’s displacements to connect with others.

This dynamic approach to agency helps us connect transmodality to translanguaging as well as locate what I have been calling uptake displacements along horizontal trajectories in addition to vertical scalar trajectories (a distinction I discussed in Chapter 3). The concept of uptake displacements is important to translation research because it recognizes that even as writers such as Zhannat encounter the frictions of their languaging practices, they can leverage the loss (reframed as displacements) of those frictions horizontally to transform social relations.[[6]](#footnote-6) These practices were most visible in yet not limited to Zhannat’s presentation. Zere, for example, only engaged in translation across language representations a few times at the conference, yet those moments signaled an ongoing translation praxis that moved toward Qazaq ways of knowing and more frequent Qazaq language use to connect with her grandmothers and international student friends. While she perceived her writing for her WAC course as privileging English and Russian (via course assignments and class discussions, respectively), the conference presentation afforded an opportunity to leverage translation across modes to make negotiations of genres and language representations visible early in this personal shift to predominantly Qazaq language use. Her conference English-to-Qazaq translations operated as kinds of oral paratexts, a concept from translation studies that has been adopted to analyze negotiations of race, ethnicity, and other conditions of power embedded in written texts by multilingual students in traditional first-year writing classrooms (Bou Ayash, 2020). When viewed through the lens of friction and understood as translated intersemiotically, these paratextual practices mirror Zere’s day-to-day languaging practices in such a way as to generate affective connections of care to international students in the audience of the presentation and to highlight the ongoing displacements that occur through Russian language use as the norm in the institutional settings where she studies. While participant checking Zere’s narrative, she noted that in 2023, now a year after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and subsequent influx of (often pro-invasion in this context) Russians into Northern Qazaqstani towns and cities, many Russian-speaking citizens engage in similar translation practices by adding some Qazaq words to dialogues with Zere so as to avoid association with the pro-invasion, Russian migrants driving up the cost of living in the region and perceived as showing little concern for local cultural practices or language epistemologies.

Thus to understand Zere’s translation practices requires following her projections of meaning via paratextual practices, but to recognize these paratextual practices as uptake displacements further necessitates attunement to the political-historical sociolinguistic landscape of the borderlands region of Northern Qazaqstan where she studies, a transnational perspective of Zere’s efforts to sustain relationships with international student friends both studying at her institution and returning to their home contexts; her co-production of culture via the incorporation of a lexis from Qazaq poetry and literary practices; and the complicated history of Semey where she considers home. Aidana considered the technologies and stakeholders valuing their translation practices and ultimately decided against translation across language representations–opting instead for English-medium presentations. In addition, she cited the pressures of a spoken genre such as a conference presentation as motivating their decisions. Aidana described the labor of translation as too great, suggesting she did not want to “trip up” in the presentation. Considering that she had already translated interviews for analysis for her final paper, she professed little desire to further resist technologies and stakeholders in her writing. Moreover, translation into either Russian or Qazaq meant fraught political negotiations that she felt were amplified by her biethnic identity as a Qazaq-Russian Qazaqstani woman. Only after traveling and cultivating relationships abroad did she gain a greater motivation to learn Qazaq and decide that Qazaq language proficiency might ease rather than augment the frictions experienced by her day-to-day languaging practices. These findings echo critiques such as that of Gevers (2018), who suggests that translanguaging and translingual orientations to writing pedagogy overlook “the immediacy and performative quality of many spoken genres… in which language is produce in real-time,” with implications for how instructors invite students to engage in similar translanguaging practices across written genres without such affordances and where discourse markers such as pseudo-clefts may pose challenges to reader understanding of meaning. Aidana’s perspectives reveal the reverse to pose difficulties as well, for they explained how translation across *both* language representations and genres posed too great a demand on them as students. These findings indicate that we need to be careful about how we frame translation to students across spoken and written genres, which themselves enact agency in different ways, and we need to be mindful of the labor we expect of students– especially when such labor might implicate acts of resistance.

Following Dina and other translators in these Northern regions, a centering of relationships in translation research would place instructors and students as co-navigators of the frictions implicated in all translation activity and in brokering meaning in equivalence. Following Zere, Aidana and Zhannat, we might ask how the agency of genres such as poems, technologies such as Instagram and its translation tools and communities of practice, and of bodies capable of communicating through embodied multimodal strategies might reframe the technologies implicated by literacy’s frictions. Centering these multiple relationships allows us to respond to institutional technologies and stakeholders that Lee (2016) described through a relational lens that sees more than an individual writer’s concrete labor through a Western Marxist approach alone. In addition to questions such as who might be assessing students’ literacies, or about the legibility of their translation labor, or concerning the (uptake) affordances of that labor via the conference presentations, we might first ask whose interpretive authority students sought to grant via their translations, how questions of interpretive authority are mediated by other agents that may reinforce or help resist conditions of power, including ability, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and social class, how students’ accumulations of literacies generate affective conditions of loss via friction, and how we might locate that loss as displacements leveraged to connect with others. These foci move us beyond first-year writing classrooms, literacy events such as a conference presentation alone, or our own goals as teachers and researchers for students’ learning. Finally, to understand how students transform and/or resist institutional literacies is to foreground translation epistemologies in the places of their translation practices, as well as to look beyond particular outcomes or artifacts from those frictions in university or classroom settings.

In my concluding chapter, I will turn to additional implications for pedagogy by considering the value of translation to transnationally oriented pedagogical approaches to writing and literacy. In the next chapter, I turn from the mobilities of teachers and students to that of policies that inflect the (lack of) mobility of particular bodies (both physical and of knowledge, again using Atwill’s 2006 sense of the term) through pedagogical spaces and across borders, and I highlight the Serpin-2050 program in particular. This chapter considers the agency of policies as texts along trajectories of translation alongside trajectories of migrant student writers implicated by such policies. By focusing on a textual translation trajectory, I hope to maintain the emphasis on translation, transmodality, relationships, and interpretive authority at the center of this chapter. Ultimately, I work toward a concept of *friction literacy* as a way of understanding these negotiations of agency alongside frictions of the global and the local.

1. At the same time, the distinction between intersemiotic and inter/intralingual translation helped sediment a distinction between interpreting and written translation now common to Translation Studies scholarship (Pym, 2012; Stern, 2012), a distinction I have alternatively grappled with through discussions of generic and individual and collective agency rather than written and spoken discourse. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These courses were labeled differently depending on the institutional context; I am referring to them as WAC courses as an umbrella term and given their adaptations of Gentil’s WAC course. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The project was much more focused in scope, but I maintain a more broad description to preserve anonymity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We discussed this change while participant checking, as Zhannat noted that her school was full at 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. While she did not speak Korean, she acknowledged that this community too ought to have more linguistic resources in education. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This framing further situates translation as a rhetorical practice. Similar to Gonzales, I am conceiving translation as a kind of rhetorical techne, which by Atwill’s (2006) definition always leads to changes in bodies (both physically and of knowledge) that blur or upend relations of power. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)