

Developing Translingual Disposition through a Writing Theory Cartoon Assignment

Xiqiao Wang

ABSTRACT: This article explores the pedagogical implications of translingualism by offering writing theory cartoon as a pedagogical tool to support basic writers' development of translingual dispositions. In a curriculum that challenges the supremacy of standard English over other languages and modalities, this assignment supports basic, multilingual writers' representation of and inquiry into their own language practices. Drawing on analysis of interviews, student-generated writing theory cartoons, and written reflections, I discuss how such a pedagogical approach shifts our attention away from textual evidence of translanguaging to surfacing basic writers' struggles and triumphs in negotiating linguistic, rhetorical and cultural differences, thereby complicating our understanding of translingualism.

KEYWORDS: basic writers; multimodal composition; translingual pedagogy

Writing teachers have begun to explore how multilingual students draw on rich semiotic and linguistic resources to engage in translingual practices, with negotiation of difference at the core of such language work (Canagarajah, "Shuttling"; Lorimer Leonard; Lu and Horner). But theoretical recognition of and empirical investigation into translingualism have yet to fully explore concrete teaching strategies to facilitate students' inquiry into language differences or offer ways to help students develop an attitude of openness toward such differences. In this article, I offer a writing theory cartoon assignment as one pedagogical enactment of translingualism, with its emphasis on helping multilingual, basic writers develop translingual dispositions through multimodal representations of and inquiry into their language practices. The assignment aims to create a space for teachers and student writers to describe, analyze, and strategize ways of negotiating language differences.

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With the increasing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of students enrolled in U.S. institutions of education, how to better support such students' literacy learning through strategic leverage of their rhetorical repertoire has become a critical question for literacy teachers across all levels. In writing studies particularly, scholars have called for a sharpened definition of translingualism and a nuanced understanding of the two inter-connected dimensions of the translingual phenomenon (Gilyard; Guerra; Matsuda). On the one hand, writing teachers should investigate what language users perform, often through specific practices such as code-meshing or translanguaging (Canagarajah, "Multilingual"; Creese and Blackledge). On the other hand, writing teachers need to explore what language users understand, often described as translingual disposition (Horner et al.) or rhetorical sensibility (Leonard, "Multilingual"). Such a distinction, which positions students' negotiation of language differences at the center of scholarly inquiry, has important implications for basic writing teachers. Particularly, scholars have invited basic writing teachers to examine the negotiative acts performed by "powerfully translanguaging students" (Gilyard 284) and to facilitate students' development of "critical awareness of language as a contingent and emergent [practice]" (Guerra 228).

While echoing translingual scholars' arguments that all acts of linguistic performance are essentially translingual (Horner et al.), I offer the writing theory cartoon as one pedagogical tool to help international, multilingual students analyze their struggles and triumphs when working through linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical differences. The design of the assignment is grounded in writing scholarship that maintains that our ability to move between, across, and within languages involves the creative and adaptive uses of linguistic and rhetorical strategies as well as the continuous tuning of translingual dispositions toward multiplicity (Canagarajah, "Shuttling"; Creese and Blackledge; Hornberger and Link; Leonard "Multilingual Writing"). Scholars have described translingual dispositions as consisted of an attitude of openness toward language differences and an understanding of all language acts as ongoing processes of negotiating linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural differences. Accordingly, the writing theory cartoon assignment uses multimodal composition to surface students' discovery and theorization of the negotiated nature of their own meaning making. Drawing on writing theory cartoons created by basic writers, I further develop the notion of translingual disposition as an attitude of openness toward language difference and negotiation, through which students develop metalinguistic awareness of their rhetorical repertoire and cultural knowledge as resources

for learning, and meta-vocabulary to describe, theorize, and strategize translingual practices.

This pedagogical innovation therefore adds to current conversations in translingualism in several ways. First, it shifts our emphasis from the production of code-meshed texts toward students' theorization of complex language negotiation that happens in all communicative acts, even those that seemingly adhere to and replicate standard conventions. Second, it positions basic writers' linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical knowledge as resources for learning and their linguistic performance as sites of innovation and inquiry. Centering on students' experiences and languages not only facilitates the development of rhetorical awareness—an understanding of how situations constantly influence linguistic performance—but also positions basic writing students as agents who draw on their multilingual repertoire to navigate such rhetorical situations. Lastly, its emphasis on multimodal representation provides basic writers with multiple pathways toward meaning making as negotiated across codes, modes, and languages. In so doing, the assignment gives writing teachers a glimpse into students' translingual lives. The strategic representation of student experiences also provides nuanced accounts of how writers negotiate language differences in distinct and similar ways, thereby responding to Keith Gilyard's call to complicate the tendency to "flatten language differences" in translingual scholarship (286).

The Need to Theorize Translingual Disposition

Basic writing researchers have long challenged the political, economic, and institutional parameters that position basic writers as the linguistic other (Bartholomae; Jordan; Lu, "Professing"; Lu and Horner; Shaughnessy; Trimbur). Instead of seeing basic writers as constrained by their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds in performing a certain type of writing, basic writing scholars have sought to explicate the linguistic and cultural logic informing ordered patterns in basic writers' individual styles of making meanings and mistakes (Horner, "Sociality"; Salvatori; Shaughnessy). In so doing, these scholars not only examine the linguistic and stylistic features that inform errors in students' writing, but also reposition such errors as linguistic innovation, thereby fundamentally challenging a deficit view of language difference.

The translingual turn in composition broadly seeks to highlight the practice-based, adaptive, emergent, and mutually constitutive nature of

languages (Lu & Horner; Canagarajah, “Translingual”). In particular, Lu and Horner challenge a monolingual view of languages, such as English, Chinese, or French, as “discrete, preexisting, and enumerable entities” bound to geographical territories, nation states, or speech communities (587). While a static view of language provides the ideological foundation for privileging standard English as the dominant dialect, translingualism approaches language as inherently dynamic, evolving, and varied. Recognizing languages, including standard English, as historical codifications that change through dynamic processes of use, translingualism focuses on the innovative ways in which language users shape language to specific ends. Such a perspective not only recognizes the increasing linguistic heterogeneity as the norm, but also values the rhetorical and linguistic resources non-dominant students bring to their writing. Accordingly, language differences, manifested as accented Englishes in the basic writing classroom, are not interpreted as deviations, but as valuable resources that writers work with and against.

Translingualism provides a way to access and develop basic writers’ language performance through local, situated practices of communication, which involves dynamic negotiation of fluid and hybrid codes and cultures. The need to develop students’ translingual dispositions is central to a translingual approach. Horner et al. distinguishes translingual disposition from knowledge of multiple languages, highlighting an open and inquiry-driven attitude toward language differences (“Language Differences” 311). Similarly, Suresh Canagarajah emphasizes the importance of writers’ meta-awareness of the “possibilities and constraints of competing traditions of writing” as central to writers’ abilities to carve out a space for themselves within conflicting discourses (“Toward” 602). Using “rhetorical sensibility,” Rebecca Lorimer Leonard attributes multilingual writers’ success to their understanding of the inherent instability and contingency of languages as well as of the underlying material, emergent, and agentive nature of writing practices (“Multilingual Writing” 229-230). In important ways, the emphasis on translingual disposition recognizes that all students, multilingual and monolingual alike, already mobilize multilingual resources and deploy translingual practices to make sense of their life worlds, construct meaning across differences, and forge agentive identities. Continuous fine-tuning of such dispositions of openness and negotiation is critical to successful performance of translingual practices.

While research guided by translingualism has thus far approached the issue of negotiation through researchers’ inductive reading of students’ writing samples for textual evidence of translanguaging or code-meshing

(Canagarajah, “Negotiating”; Hornerberg and Link), there has been less effort in documenting and analyzing students’ inquiry into their own meaning- and error-making experiences. Indeed, the subtle and invisible acts of composing across differences often evade our attention because they function as such a routine part of our language work that they often recede into the background of our consciousness. If untapped, such cultural and linguistic knowledge that shapes basic writer’s language practices may very well remain invisible and never turn into transferrable meta-knowledge of writing (DePalma and Ringer; Leonard and Nowacek; Wardle). It is with such concerns that scholars have argued that the focus on visible examples of translanguaging risks flattening the nuanced ways in which writers from distinct backgrounds engage with language differences, thereby overshadowing the subtle examples of language negotiation (Gilyard; Matsuda). Inherent to such conversations has been an increasing attention to translingual dispositions and translingual practices as inter-connected aspects of the translingual phenomenon, with inquiry-driven dispositions guiding strategic practices and ongoing practices providing opportunities to enrich such dispositions. Weaving together and extending such insights, I use the writing theory cartoon to highlight students’ perspectives on their translingual practices and to sharpen the definition of translingual dispositions. As I will discuss, translingual dispositions encompass metalinguistic understanding of language as historically-conditioned linguistic, cultural, and ideological structures, meta-awareness of multilingual repertoire and cultural knowledge as resources for learning, and meta-vocabulary to describe, theorize, and strategize translingual practices.

Multimodality and Translingualism

Similar to the less-bounded conceptions of language, proponents of multimodality have argued that students need to develop a full mastery of the rhetorical and semiotic resources at their disposal to address the “wickedly complex communicative tasks” in an increasingly globalized and digital world (Selfe, “Movement” 645). Jodi Shipka emphasizes the importance of using rhetorical analysis of multimodal genres as a way of helping students develop as “rhetorically sensitive individuals” who understand that meaning can be rendered in multiple ways in response to variant contingencies (“Including” 78). Such a view is coherent with translingual theorists’ arguments that all meaning-making acts involve “traffic in meaning,” where one negotiates “ideas, concepts, symbols, [and] discourses” (Pennycook 33) as well as

“competing ideologies, resources, representations, and assumed expectations of readers” (Horner and Tetreault 19). Scholars have also urged us to go beyond the symbolic dimension to include affective, bodily, and material connections that shape the work of the human rhetor (Canagarajah, “Lingua”; Gonzalez; Jordan). As such, translingualism and multimodality both encourage us to view writing as socially situated, emergent, and negotiated rather than as static, rule-driven phenomena. A translingual, multimodal view thus considers meaning-making as involving layers of translation across codes, modes, languages, and cultures. That is, an expansive view of composing explores the expressive affordances of multiple modes, including visual (Kress and van Leeuwen), auditory (Halbritter; Selfe), gestural (Prior et al.), and spatial (Leander et al.) as the first step toward understanding rhetorical situations as permeated by materials, places, bodies, and languages.

In similar ways, translingualism and multimodality speak against a monolingual/monomodal ideology that subsumes nonstandard languages, modes, and genres in ways that deprive students of access to valuable linguistic and semiotic resources. Cynthia Selfe, for one, calls for strategic scaffolding of multimodal composition as a means of cultivating students’ rhetorical sovereignty--their “right to identify their own communicative needs, to represent their own identities, to select the right tools for the communicative contexts within which they operate, and to think critically and carefully about the meaning that they and others compose” (“Movement”618). Indeed, researchers have documented how multimodality enhances the expressive power of young authors (Hull and Nelson), affords productive identity play (Vasudevan; Yi), and engenders creative cultural production (Knobel and Lankshear). The development of translingual dispositions is central to negotiating meaning across hybrid ways of knowing, communicating, and performing identities.

Basic writing teachers have drawn on such ideas to develop pedagogical tools that support students’ sustained examination of language differences. Scholars have explored the use of translation practices (Horner, et al.; Horner and Tetreault; Jiménez et al.; Kiernan, et al.; Orellana and Reynolds), border-crossing narratives (Lewis et al.; Medina), and multilingual texts that encourage students’ reflection of translanguaging practices (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”; DeCosta et al.). Among practical teaching strategies that support basic writers’ theorization of differences, my colleagues and I have explored the pedagogical affordances of translation exercises and multimodal representation in supporting basic writers’ negotiation of semiotic, stylistic, and rhetorical differences (Kiernan et al.; Kiernan “Multimodal”). To disrupt

the profound invisibility of immigrant writers' voices in public and scholarly discourse, Marko et al. ("Proyecto Carrito") has worked with janitorial workers and undergraduate students to create a textually decorated mobile bus capturing immigrant workers' struggles and resilience. Others (Shapiro et al.; Williams) have created authentic and relevant rhetorical contexts of writing (e.g. using twitter, film, writing beyond the classroom, and inquiry into religion) for students to develop greater awareness of and vocabulary for deploying rhetorical resources.

Considered together, such pedagogical work has explored ways to help students complicate language difference as entangled in drastically different material conditions and contexts. In so doing, basic writing teachers work to help students recognize negotiation across languages and modes as the norm and to develop meta-awareness and meta-vocabulary for describing and strategizing such negotiative moves. By the same token, such pedagogies reposition basic writers as agents of their learning and call into question what John Trimbur called the "unmarked hierarchies in US college composition that have long assumed basic writing and second language writing were ancillary activities and institutions at the margins, orbiting around the mainstream English at the center in first-year composition" ("Close Reading" 226).

Shifting Contexts of Basic Writing

Like many institutions of higher education across the U.S., the public, midwestern university under discussion here has witnessed a rapid increase of international students: from 5 to 8% each year for each of the past five years, so that as of 2017 international students constituted 14.5% of the entire undergraduate student body ("University Registrar"). Such demographic changes have transformed the cultural and linguistic realities on and off campus--Asian restaurants and grocery stores flourish in the college town; license plates on students' vehicles are customized to reference linguistic codes and cultural tropes from diverse countries of origin; in and out of classes, students constantly switch between languages, dialects and distinctly accented Englishes as they engage each other in conversations around academic and social issues; instructors receive writing assignments completed in various approximations of standard, edited, written English.

WRA 1004: Preparation of College Writing (hereafter referred to as PCW), the basic writing course I regularly teach, is the only remaining remedial course at the university and currently serves approximately 900 first generation, heritage language, and English language learners annu-

ally. In the past five years, close to eighty percent of this student population were Chinese international students, the increase of which was motivated by the university's active recruitment strategies targeting a newly mobile and emerging Chinese middle class that desires global citizenship (Dong and Blommaert; Fraiberg et al., "Inventing"). On the fringe of this new demographic "mainstream" was a scattering of international students from countries such as Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Colombia, and Zimbabwe, as well as a few domestic African American students from a nearby metropolis that had suffered from steady economic decline and population loss. For most students, completion of the course is required prior to taking a regular first-year writing course. The small size of the class provides an opportunity for basic writers to engage in meaningful encounters with peers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

While the linguistic reality of the classroom reflects an increasing linguistic heterogeneity as the norm (Canagarajah, "Place"; Horner & Selfe, "Negotiating"), the institutional context surrounding PCW has historically adopted monolingual and deficit ideologies and pedagogies. The curriculum for the basic writing course has traditionally replicated the assignments used for first-year writing, with additional contact hours worked into the curriculum to allow longer time for completion, additional instruction on grammar and mechanics, and opportunities to "rehearse" for the same assignments expected in first-year writing. Such a curriculum actively marginalizes open-ended, negotiated semiotic performances that play an important role in basic writers' academic and social lives. More broadly, it does not recognize the unique needs and expertise of multilingual, international students and therefore fails to support their literacy learning and broader transition at the university.

Since 2013, a team of teacher researchers has engaged in a program-wide, collaborative re-invention of the curriculum and pedagogy for PCW, which now feature a series of assignments that reflect principles of translingual pedagogy. The re-invented curriculum foregrounds students' linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural resources as assets through such assignments as: 1) translation narrative assignment, which invites students' individual translation of cultural texts from home language into English and collaborative reflection on translation processes and strategies (Kiernan et al.); 2) culture shock assignment, which invites students to describe and analyze personal stories of adjusting to a new culture (broadly defined to encompass university, disciplinary, and national cultures); and 3) remix assignment, which invites students to remix previous writing assignments into multimodal artifacts.

At the core of such assignments are opportunities to recognize and analyze one's cultures and languages as resources for learning. Operating with the same translingual emphasis, I offer the writing theory cartoon assignment as an extension of the translation narrative assignment, using it to extend students' inquiry into language and cultural differences.

Reconfiguring Writing Theory Cartoons as Translingual Pedagogy

Responding to institutional exigencies while paying attention to translingualism and multimodality, I offer the writing theory cartoon assignment as one way to support students' multimodal representation and analysis of their own translingual practices. In working with students on the remix assignment in previous semesters, I had witnessed "struggling writers" flourish when they used infographics, stop-motion animations, cartoon drawings, and videos to create successful remixes of cultural stories. Such observations were mirrored in empirical research my colleagues and I conducted of multilingual, international students' informal literacy practices, which revealed distinct cultural logic that powerfully mediated students' multimodal composition but often remained invisible for instructors (Fraiberg et al., "Shock"). For example, when reading one student's rage comics rendition of her literacy narrative, we struggled with the organizational principle of her visual, where she used remixed images of popular cultural icons to represent herself. Recognizing my lack of understanding of students' multimodal composition, I began to explore pedagogical means to surface and leverage such expertise, such as using children's books as models for retelling traditional cultural stories, helping students create digital book trailers, or using infographics to represent cultural differences.

In the fall of 2014, I first introduced the writing theory cartoon assignment as a way to extend such pedagogical work. My intention was to offer more scaffolded instruction that moved students from random to strategic incorporation of the visual mode and facilitated collective exploration of our translingual practices. According to Prior and Shipka ("Chronotopic"), writing theory cartoons can be a useful tool in helping writers access a range of rhetorical options at their disposal, negotiate conventions and rules, and understand such choices as tied to identities, values, and interests. In their study, where the researchers sought to describe the writing processes of writers across formal and informal contexts, Prior and Shipka used student-generated cartoons to capture the "territory of the writer's consciousness

[and] interior practices” (181). Writers (college students, graduate students and professors) engaged in the creation of cartoon drawings, which became “visual metaphors of thought processes and emotions” and were used to elicit accounts of the material, cognitive, and affective dimensions of writing experiences (182). Writing theory cartoons, when used as a research procedure, allowed these researchers to explore literacy practices as co-constituted by social worlds, historical trajectories, and identities. As these authors argue, writing theory cartoons help to capture the multiple layers of historical, personal, and social meanings encoded in acts of writing (183).

Indeed, the socio-historical emphasis described by Prior and Shipka in their theorization of writing as a distributed phenomenon is consistent with translingual scholars’ concern to understand writing as unfolding through the intersecting forces of histories, social worlds, and affective contingencies. It is in this spirit that I adapt the writing theory cartoon into a pedagogical tool, which encourages basic writers to understand their semiotic repertoire as fluid historical, cultural and ideological structures. Multilingual and monolingual students alike create cartoon drawings to represent and reflect on important aspects of their translingual practices. In rendering such insights into multimodal forms, students engage in complex representational practices, as they discover, clarify, and transform meaning across multiple modes (e.g. writing metaphors, writing theory cartoons, written explanations, class discussions, conferences, and reflections). The primary learning objective is therefore the development of translingual dispositions through basic writers’ recursive discovery of meaning across modes/languages and inquiry into their own multimodal representations as sites for translingual practices.

The assignment involves a sequence of activities that typically unfolds across six regular class meetings. The recursive process creates a space to sustain and deepen conversations around translingual practices, introduce grammars of visual composition, and leverage students’ informal literacies. Each of the stages in the composing process offers opportunities to explore translingual relationships (see Appendix). Throughout the process, principles of multimodal design are discussed and practiced to extend students’ multimodal skills.

Sampling multicultural texts. At the outset of the assignment, students bring short, multilingual texts from their home cultures for sharing and discussion. When explaining and retelling a story, a song, or an idiom, students often encounter the difficult task of unpacking and translating key cultural

concepts to a diverse audience. The class discusses how similar themes might be delivered in different linguistic and genre forms across cultures.

Constructing writing theory metaphors. Drawing on initial exploration of translingual relationships, students create metaphors as a pathway to theorize languages as linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical structures. As Wan Wan argues, instruction and construction of explicit metaphors are particularly useful in broadening ESL writers' conceptions of various aspects of academic writing ("Constructing"). For example, identification and articulation of influential metaphors, such as "writing is a tour," allow ESL writers to identify their beliefs about their own writing practices and to grapple with abstract conceptions of writing (62). By the same token, the use of writing metaphors here functions as an inventive activity that generates ideas to be taken up in cartoon drawings that represent students' beliefs, attitudes, and theories about writing.

Drafting writing theory cartoons. After sharing and revising writing theory metaphors, students are invited to use flockdraw.com, an online drawing tool, to generate the first drafts of their writing theory cartoons. The basic task is described in these terms:

Using metaphors you have generated, draw a set of two pictures to represent your experiences with and relationships to multiple languages. These images might show how you feel about writing in different languages, memories of reading and writing in different languages, or characteristics of different languages. Also, you are encouraged to consider why you feel in certain ways.

The drafting process involves little guidance and encourages students to creatively explore their complex feelings about and experiences with multiple languages. While most students struggle with visual representations of their metaphors at first (with most first drafts featuring clumsy sticky figures and smiley/grouchy faces), frequent informal sharing often leads to chuckles, discussions, and ultimately a collective recognition of the attributes of successful visual representations. It is often through continuous, seemingly random experimentations with colors, shapes, and visual symbols that students gradually work toward more insightful and pointed representations of their ideas.

Constructing grammars of multimodal composition. Upon the completion of the first cartoon drafts, principles of "grammar of visual design" (Kress and van Leeuwen) are introduced to frame collective discussion of exem-

plary student work and peer review, with attention given to what, how, and why symbols, shapes, colors, and spaces are arranged to articulate certain meanings. Using frames of ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (15) of visual elements, students discuss and evaluate each other's visual designs for rhetorical effectiveness. Multimodal design is revisited during written explanations and text-based interviews, where students explain their ideas and visual design in both written and verbal forms. This recursive process provides multiple opportunities to play with personal theories of translingual practice.

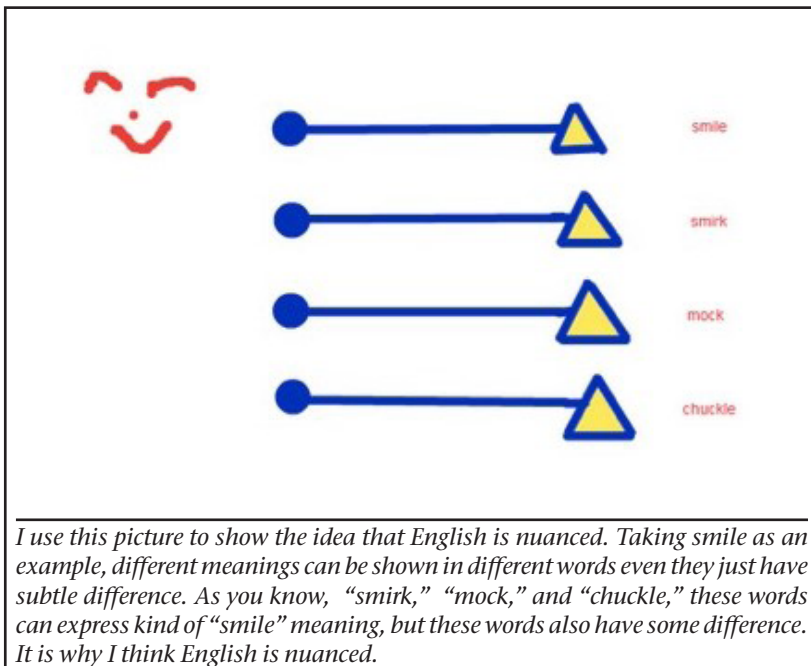
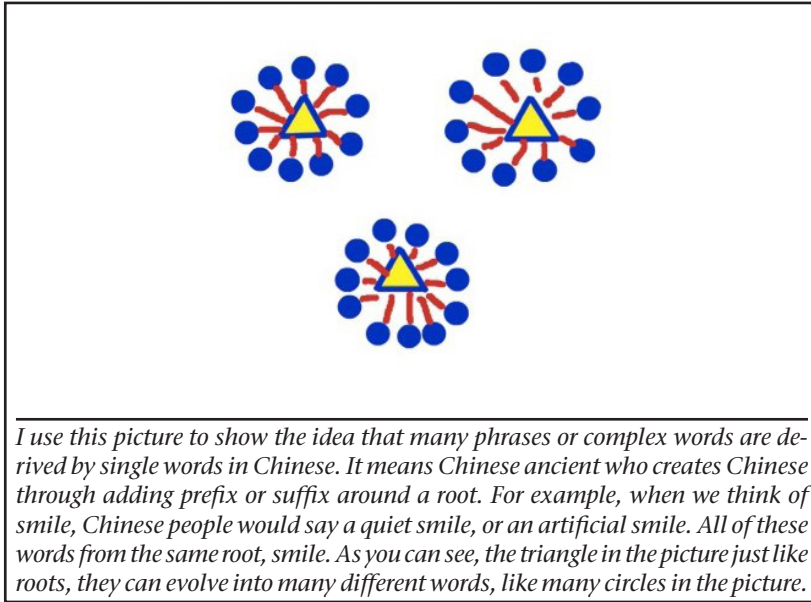
As the following examples will show, the assignment recognizes that meaning making is negotiated through translation of meaning across languages and modes. Such traversal literate activity serves as a pathway to describe and strategize translingual practices. By highlighting students' languages and translingual practices as a highly nuanced form of knowledge, this assignment offers one way to disrupt institutional and disciplinary circumstances that position the writing classroom as a monolingual space. By centering students' literacy experiences from home communities and cultures, the assignment positions the writing classroom as a space to negotiate meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Making Sense of Language Difference: Ru

Many students approach the writing theory cartoon as an opportunity to examine linguistic differences that contribute to their own struggles with language learning. In this section, I offer an example of such linguistic inquiry from Ru¹, a sophomore marketing major from China, who uses the assignment to reflect on lexical features of Chinese and English. Before the writing theory cartoon assignment, Ru worked with two other Chinese students to translate a fable written in classical Chinese into English. In this process, they engaged in a heated discussion about finding the right English equivalent for the Chinese word (狡猾), an adjective used to describe a fox in the original text. They differently translated the Chinese word into "crafty," "sneaky," and "smart" without being able to reach a consensus. Such in-group discussions ultimately directed Ru's attention to the linguistic features of Chinese and English.

Ru's cartoon attends to distinct lexical rules for inventing words across linguistic systems. As Ru points out, one of the major distinctions between English and Chinese was that "English words perform functions individually, while Chinese characters act in group and combination." Ru describes how

Figure 1. Ru's Writing Theory Cartoons and Explanations²



Chinese root words, such as 笑 (smile/laugh), can be used in combination with different adjective characters to render different types of laugh such as smile (微笑) and chuckle (窃笑), while English denotes close meanings of laugh through distinct lexicons such as smirk, chuckle, and mock. Her visual design mirrors such distinctions: her purposeful juxtaposition of the images visually demonstrates the linguistic difference; the replication of yellow triangles allows her to represent the importance of root words across languages; the flower design for Chinese versus the one-one match for English allows her to visually demonstrate the lexical features of the two languages, with colors (blue, red, and yellow) strategically orchestrated to highlight similarities and differences. Ru's metalinguistic understanding of languages as rule-governed systems arises from a systematic comparison of and reflection on the two languages she constantly manipulates in everyday and academic circumstances.

The metalinguistic awareness Ru demonstrates here is mirrored in a design research conducted by Jimenez et al., where middle school students learned to collaboratively translate carefully selected excerpts from grade-appropriate literature in Spanish. Jimenez et al. not only observes how translation activities encourage students to “draw on their cultural and linguistic knowledge to derive meaning and use information found in written text” (249), but also argues that translation is an especially important metalinguistic activity because it requires students to compare, reflect on, and manipulate multiple languages (251). Similarly, Ru's theorization of her everyday translation practices (notice her choice of mundane and everyday vocabulary) brings to the surface linguistic skills Ru already practices. Among a host of other metalinguistic skills researchers deemed critical to students' development of translingual competence (Hall et al.), Ru's reflection provides a window into her metalinguistic knowledge of vocabulary as partially determined by grammatical overlap and divergence between English and Chinese. The assignment, in strategically targeting students' experiences juggling such differences, helps Ru recognize that meaning making is negotiated through flexible uses of and translation of meaning across languages and modes, a view raised in Pennycook (“English”), who sees English as a language always in translation. Ru's cartoon reflects her consideration of different ways in which grammar and lexicon are formulated and defined to allow the passing to and from of social, cultural, and historical meanings and how such linguistic conventions need to be reconfigured to allow such passing.

In addition to helping Ru surface her meta-awareness of language differences, this assignment also encourages her to consider her multiple

languages as equally important components of a holistic linguistic repertoire, which not only works in concert to help her deliver meaning, but also presents tensions that should be carefully resolved. In important ways, the assignment encourages an analysis that uncovers the logic of linguistic differences present in her own writing. In exploring how different languages distinctly organize lexical elements to articulate similar meanings, Ru approaches language differences as logical and historical choices. Additionally, she begins to strategize her own negotiation with language differences to better support her writing.

Vocabulary is a major problem. My vocabulary does not catch up with what I want to say. How am I to memorize all these miscellaneous words? In China, teachers just tell you to memorize new words in the textbook, but Americans don't use these textbook words in everyday conversations. I need to read more newspapers and I use my dictionary more often. Dictionaries tell me how to use words with close meanings in sentences. I especially study and copy these examples. (Ru. Personal interview. 14 March 2014)

Ru's reflection challenges a monolingual view of her lack of a sophisticated English vocabulary as a deficit, as she begins to attribute much of her struggles with English learning to lexical features of the language, which leads to the abundance of "miscellaneous words." Also, she begins to see this "problem" as the product of language acts sanctioned by institutional structures unique to traditional Chinese education. In so doing, Ru performs the difficult task of determining "what kinds of difference to make through [her] writing, how, and why" (Lu and Horner 585). This understanding in turn helps Ru strategize her learning to facilitate such linguistic crossing (e.g. extensive reading, strategic use of dictionaries, and imitation). As such, the assignment allows Ru to take up an issue from group discussion (finding the English equivalent for the Chinese word) and turn it into an opportunity to deepen her understanding of language differences as partially derived from linguistic features and educational backgrounds. It also helps Ru develop metalinguistic awareness of languages as rule-governed structures, meta-awareness of her everyday "working" across languages as sites for learning and innovation, and a meta-vocabulary to name and strategize negotiative moves that she already possesses and can further develop.

Theorizing Language as Cultural Structure: Fan

Foregrounding translingual practices as resources for learning, the assignment not only invites critical consideration of languages as rule-governed, linguistic structures, but also leads to discussions of how meanings are derived in socioculturally ascribed ways. In the following, I provide Fan's example to illustrate how students make sense of language differences in light of a dual set of cultural sensitivities. Fan, a freshman business major, worked with two Chinese peers to translate a classical Chinese poem that utilized various rhetorical devices to construct a moment of solitude. During their translation process, the three students recognized the inadequacy of literal translation, which failed to capture the subtle expression of the poet's feelings of nostalgia. Fan used his writing theory cartoon to continue his ongoing consideration of the rhetorical tradition that informed the literary work.

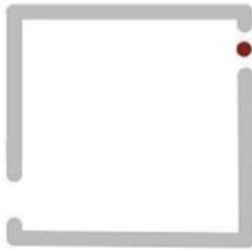
Fan's writing theory cartoons focus on unpacking and articulating culturally specific aesthetics, rhetorical styles, and ideological features of languages as operative within community, disciplinary, and national contexts (see figure 2). His reflection points to an increasing sensitivity to language as indexical of cultural ways of thinking and behaving. Both images follow a simple visual design, with a red dot placed on the upper right corner of a grey square to indicate the destination, or the "intention" of a communicative act. The first image, with intricate lines built into the grey square, mimics a maze and helps to deliver the insight that a person communicating in Chinese often masks her true intention, with subtle cues (visually signified by turns in the maze) given to facilitate the audience's navigation of the rhetorical situation. The second image, with a small gap on the lower left corner of the square and nothing in between the destination and the entrance, helps to deliver the insight that communication in English is often more straightforward. Through the first image, Fan comments on one dimension of Chinese rhetorical tradition--indirect expression of emotions. He elaborates:

When Americans love someone, they say 'I love you.' When an Asian man loves someone, he says 'The moon is beautiful tonight.' What does [the moon] have anything to do with love? That's because we are implicit. Even when we love someone deeply, we don't go crazy. We don't necessarily say what we are thinking. We just do what we should do to express our love, in a quiet way (Fan. Personal interview. 17 March 2014).

Figure 2. Fan's Writing Theory Cartoons and Explanations



Chinese language is mealy-mouthed and profound. Some Chinese people may not tell you something directly. Sometimes they are why to speak out, for example, they want to borrow money from you or they broke your plates. Sometimes they don't want the other people find that they tell you this secret, for example, the conversation between the politicians and entrepreneurs. In that case, you need to guess their thoughts. And the Chinese poet also like to say somethings profound. They always involved their emotion like ambition, sad, happiness and worry in their poems. Thus, Chinese language always be mealy-mouthed and profound, a short sentence may be contain with several different emotions and meanings.



English language is direct and specific. If you regard the Chinese language as they maze, you may think the English language is the road which has only one way to go. Admittedly, English language are also meaningful and philosophical. But related to American people's moral quality—straightforward and simple, you will feel easy to say with American. Furthermore, Americans are friendly and warm-heart. Thus if you ask them questions, they usually would like to explain these questions detailedly. Getting to know about Americans, you will easy to find these two characteristics.

Fan uses this example in his written explanation to explain how Chinese culture operates with rhetorical strategies to express emotions implicitly. For one thing, he describes how ancient poets drew on a rhetorical device called “combine emotion with scenery” (寓情于景) to articulate their emotions and aspirations. The moon is one such symbol that is frequently used to embody “family union.” In the example above, the man takes up this symbol to express his appreciation for a moment of solitude with his loved one. In Fan’s opinion, such rhetorical features make the language “mealy mouthed and profound,” which makes reading such texts a guessing game--a maze. In order to correctly decipher the author’s intention, Chinese audience relies heavily on acquired knowledge of cultural frames, tropes, and conventions. In comparison to his knowledge of his home culture, his emerging knowledge of American culture is reflected in a cartoon that provides a sweeping generalization of American people as polite, warm-hearted, and straightforward. In taking courses in ESL classes, Fan was impressed by the demeanors of his teachers, whose patient and personable approach to teaching contrasted with his previous experience with Chinese high school teachers he described as “harsh and demanding.”

Fan’s reflection sheds light on the complex ways in which rhetorical traditions inform his understanding and use of the language. The assignment facilitates the development of a meta-awareness of languages, cultures, and peoples as dialectically connected components that provide resources and impose constraints on language practices. Through sustained individual and collective exploration, Fan begins to recognize the importance of decoding the “hidden meanings” and unpacking the rhetorical traditions that inform his language use. For one thing, his peers provide comments on the different symbolic meanings of the moon (or the lack of such meanings) across cultures. These comments invite Fan to clarify and articulate his observations for a heterogeneous audience. Fan notes that he needs to unpack culturally specific expectations through giving examples, referencing canonical texts, and explaining people’s ways of behaving and valuing. In answering questions from his audience, Fan temporarily suspends established, familiar assumptions about his language and culture, while learning to consider his language/culture in the context of another.

As translingual theorists have argued (Horner et al.), students need to learn to recognize rules and conventions of language use as historical codifications that inevitably change through dynamic processes of use. In this instance, the writing theory cartoon invites Fan to consider how he might negotiate rules embedded in the context of his home language in light of the

new exigencies of communication--how to explain the symbolic meaning of the moon to a diverse audience. While his analysis seems to essentialize the two languages as operating with distinct rhetorical conventions, such analysis points to how rhetorical demands are contingent and negotiable when one crosses genre, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Fan's analysis goes a step further than Ru, whose concern with words focuses on linguistic structures and stays at a local level. For Fan, translating the poem and using the writing theory cartoon to consider his challenges in carrying meanings across cultures foreground his rhetorical repertoire and cultural knowledge not only as resources for learning, but also as differences to be negotiated. When I asked him to elaborate on the implicit rhetorical tradition, he discussed the challenge of operating with an established social norm to solve a strife with his American roommate, who accidentally used his decorative heirloom dish to eat cereal.

When I discovered that he used my grandfather's dish to eat cereal, I felt a burning anger. But he didn't know; he was just sitting there not knowing what he'd done. Knowing that I needed to be polite, I didn't say anything and pretended nothing was wrong. The more I tried to hold my anger, the worse it got. Finally one day I yelled at him for some other thing. We then fought over all the little things that had been bothering me. When I finally told him about the dish, he looked shocked and said he was so sorry. He said 'Dude why didn't you say anything?' Yes, why didn't I tell him? We Chinese fake our feelings just to be polite, but they just tell you how they feel (Fan. Personal interview. 17 March 2014).

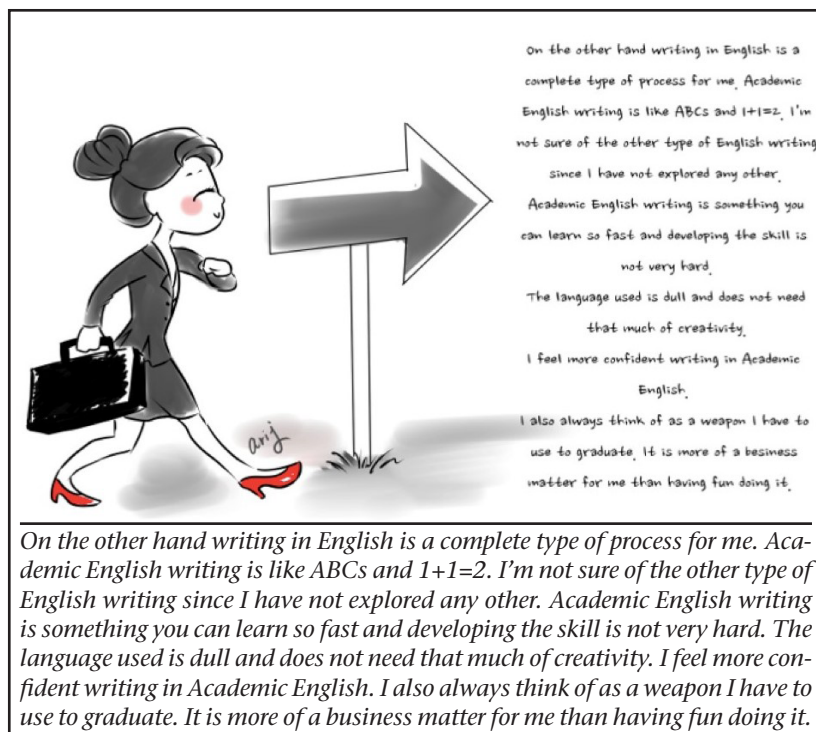
The assignment values students' experiences and languages from their home communities and cultures. It allows Fan to identify a focal point of negotiation through the lens of a personal experience and an academic exercise. It leads to an understanding that language practice involves the negotiation of rhetorical conventions and cultural frames. The assignment also creates an opportunity for Fan to develop a meta-vocabulary for describing and theorizing his struggles as grounded in "strifes" between two rhetorical traditions. Such a recognition of his rhetorical and cultural repertoire as fluid and negotiable resources provides a space to devise concrete strategies useful in resolving similar problems.

Understanding Language as Ideological Structure: Airuwa

In addition to theorizing language as linguistic and cultural structures, students often become aware of the power relations that render certain languages visible, appropriate and dominant. In the following, I draw on Airuwa's writing theory cartoons to discuss how the assignment encourages basic writers to consider their multiple languages as ideological structures. Airuwa, a young woman and a mechanical engineering major from Saudi Arabia, is among 60 recipients of a prestigious corporate scholarship that funds her studies in the U. S. This scholarship comes with an obligation to work for the oil company upon graduation. In her writing theory cartoons, Airuwa explores the complex ways in which her language capacity is tied to social, cultural, political and economic circumstances of her transnational past and present.

Airuwa's cartoon on English portrays her as a young professional (wearing professional attires and carrying a suitcase), for whom English is

Figure 3. Airuwa's Writing Theory Cartoon on English

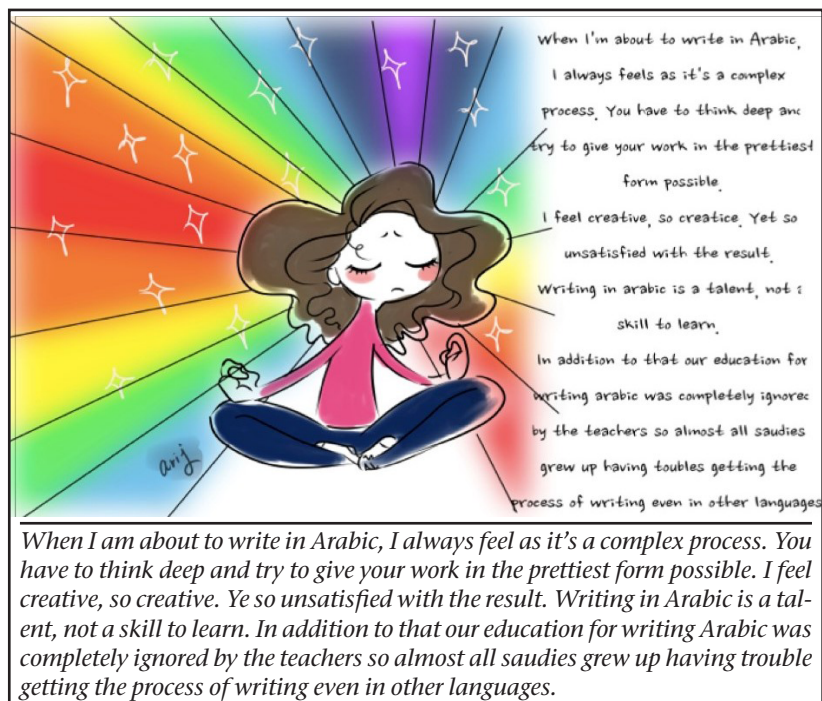


a tool for achieving success in her discipline and globalized marketplaces (with an arrow denoting a clearly defined professional goal). In her reflection, she celebrates English as her “armor and sword against ignorance [and] her weapon to be good at science and to know the world because it is the channel through which 98% of scientific knowledge is disseminated.” Simultaneously, she problematizes the status of English as a global lingua franca-- “just like Greek and Arabic were once the languages of science long ago, there might be another global power and another language of science fifty years from now. I will be ready to learn that language.” While the assignment does not specifically address ideological issues surrounding language diversity or the dominance of English, various invention activities provide opportunities to bring these issues into focus. For example, during the public sharing of multilingual texts, Airuwa brought an excerpt from the Koran. When introducing her text to and answering questions from the class, she engaged a Chinese student in a rather heated debate about the status of ancient civilizations, as each student drew evidence from history textbooks to showcase significant contributions one’s home culture made to humanity. Such a conversation eventually informed Airuwa’s view of language as an ideological structure, whose status is entangled in changing social circumstances, geopolitical power structures, and socio-economic forces of globalization. She recognizes that historically demonstrable fluctuations in world languages are tied to social mechanisms that produce and sanction certain types of literacy practices, ways of knowing, and knowledge. Such an understanding creates opportunities for Airuwa to imagine and strategize her language learning as a continuous process and her multilingual repertoire as social capital. While she sees the lingua franca English as an essential tool for professional growth, she also recognizes the inherent variations and changes of languages, a view that helps her place value upon her linguistic dexterities.

In contrast to English, which she characterizes as “ABCs and 1+1s,” Airuwa describes her experience with Arabic writing as a “hunt for phoenix”—a journey filled with mystery and unfulfilled aspirations. In this image, Airuwa casts herself in a private setting, with her eyes closed and her body relaxed in the act of meditation, with rainbow-colored stripes surrounding her to depict sources of inspiration her religion provides.

I love Arabic so much, but I am not capable enough to handle writing in formal Arabic. In other languages, the more you read, the better you write. But in Arabic, it doesn’t matter. Like the Koran, it has the most beautiful Arabic in the world, but no one can write

Figure 4. Airuwa's Writing Theory Cartoon on Arabic



anything like it. Just to read to understand the meaning of the Koran is like solving a really hard puzzle. No matter how much you read it, you still don't get enough from it (Airuwa. Personal interview. 24 March 2014).

To Airuwa, the ability to write in formal Arabic is tied to her religious identity. Having tried and failed to write poetry in formal Arabic, she concludes that formal writing in Arabic is a rare talent that one does not acquire through effort. In the cartoon image, she portrays herself performing a daily ritual-meditation. An awareness of her spirituality was heightened by an ongoing dispute with her American roommate, who found it hard to accommodate her morning prayers. Amidst their arguments, Airuwa felt increasingly attached to Arabic, which embodied her religious identity and her creative aspirations. This cartoon sheds light on her literacy, professional, and religious identities as entangled in complex processes of negotiating translingual and transcultural relationships.

While her theorization of her languages seems to treat languages and language practices as discrete structures tied to distinct social spheres

(professional, private, creative, religious), it is important to recognize how such juxtaposition creates opportunities to unmask politics involved in hierarchically ordering such languages and social spheres. As we see, Airuwa honors formal Arabic as embodying wisdom and creativity that she desires and works hard to achieve. In so doing, she demonstrates an increasingly clarified understanding of how her rhetorical repertoire, consisted of multiple languages, could be deftly deployed in response to the exigencies embedded in different social situations. Her Arabic provides a space to release creative energies and connect to spirituality, as her English enables academic achievement, professional growth and global mobility. Each language has its own value and plays an important role in her social and academic lives.

Similar to Fan, Airuwa also uses the assignment to explore tensions embedded in her transition into the university. When her religious and language practices in Arabic come in contact with dominant monolingual and monocultural ideology (represented by her roommate's protest against her morning prayers), the assignment creates a space for her to process such struggles. In creating a space to share multilingual texts and multicultural knowledge, the assignment helps Airuwa recognize the ideological struggles inherent to global and local efforts in managing the fluidity and multiplicity of languages. In particular, her theorization of such ideological struggles as historically situated and fluctuating demystifies the lingua franca status of standard English and instead positions her multilingual repertoire and linguistic dexterity as valuable assets in pursuing new knowledge, new ways of knowing, and reconciliation. As such, the assignment supports Airuwa's development of a translingual disposition toward language, semiotic, and cultural differences as laden with ideological values and entangled in social political parameters.

Toward Translingual Dispositions

Students' development of translingual dispositions is grounded in collaborative creation of a meta-vocabulary to name translingual practices they already perform. For many, the difficulty of finding the right word in English mirrors the frustration they encounter in negotiating small mundane details, including ordering food from the cafeteria, seeking help from a professor, or having a conversation with an American roommate. Analyzing these daily struggles creates an occasion to sharpen strategies that facilitate students' transition into the social, cultural, academic and language practices of the university. For students such as Ru, Fan and Airuwa, reflections on their

translingual practices help them articulate and sharpen strategies that guide their choices and actions in academic and social situations. The validity of such theories aside, such meta-awareness and meta-vocabulary allow for the transfer of writing knowledge and strategy into unfamiliar situations.

The inclusion of translingual themes, through purposeful centering of students' languages and cultures as objects of inquiry, invites students to recognize and negotiate the vast range of literate experiences they mobilize from one place in the world to another. Basic writers learn to configure and reconfigure rhetorical resources and strategies at their disposal in response to rhetorical situations that demand informed explanation of one's social and cultural experiences for a diverse audience. Placing multiple languages in juxtaposition to each other, basic writers learn to challenge binaries that separate languages as sealed and isolated entities, while developing meta-linguistic understandings of language as linguistic, cultural, and ideological structures that can be negotiated and recasted. In the case of Ru, recognizing language differences as derived from linguistic features enables her to develop meta-awareness of language differences, name her successes and challenges, and strategize her negotiative moves. For Fan, thinking about English compels him to examine his home language, which often leads to recognition of languages as historically fluctuating and language differences as a norm. For Airuwa, problematizing the status of English as a *lingua franca* from a historical perspective helps her to see herself as an agentive user of an integrated linguistic repertoire. As such, writing theory cartoons not only render visible some of the linguistic and cultural struggles that often remain invisible or peripheral in writing classrooms, but also encourages students' negotiation of such struggles.

While the cases presented here illustrate broad patterns of how students navigate the assignment, they have not captured the full range of student learning. For instance, students draw on a far broader range of metaphors informed by different facets of their cultural lives to discuss language differences (religion, food culture, politics) than what this study has the space to discuss. It is in this access to a range of experiences that we find the pedagogical appeal of the assignment— it encourages basic writers to draw on familiar rhetorical and cultural resources to make sense of unfamiliar aspects of their social and linguistic reality.

Evidenced in these images are also complex ways in which multimodality enables rhetorical sovereignty as students derive meaning from personal experiences, engage in creative work, and forge agentive identities. Multimodality gives shape to experiences and emotions that are hard

to describe in linguistic terms. Meaning arises from the emergent process where ideas are tested, translated, and represented. The recursive process of drafting, reviewing, and revising the drawings creates many opportunities for developing and translating ideas across languages and modes. For each of the three students, access to a fuller range of semiotic resources and writing systems provides multiple pathways toward meaning making.

The assignment also creates an exigency for teachers to reconsider the role of their own language repertoire and pedagogy. It not only encourages me to draw on my multiple languages to model and analyze my approach to negotiating language differences, but also invites me into the unfamiliar dimensions of students' linguistic and cultural realities. Every student in the classroom serves as a teacher for someone else. I learned, for example, to hear the subtle variance across Arabic dialects that was critical to Airuwa's accurate identification of the place of origin of an Arabic speaker; I listened to an explication of the Korean writing system by a student, Grace, as she taught me to write the character for "rice" stroke by stroke; I listened to stories of lost languages and cultures from Andala, a student from Zimbabwe, whose home language disappeared in the manner of a decade; I ventured into the game world of League of Legends through Yu's laptop just to get a sense of the aesthetic style he sought to emulate. It is in these moments of learning to see the world from the perspective of another, celebrating the "aha" moments, and revisiting our own biases, that multilingual and monolingual writers alike recognize the value of composing across differences.

Notes

1. All student participants were invited to construct pseudonyms while some preferred to use their first names. I defer to students' choices for how they want to be addressed.
2. In my transcript, I have replicated students' written explanation of their writing theory cartoons, including all grammatical and spelling irregularities.

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Appendix: Stages of Implementation

Frontloading: Develop conceptual understanding

- Read, translate and analyze short texts from multiple languages (e.g. idioms, poems, Children's books)
- Develop conceptual understanding of languages (e.g. words, sentences, storytelling, styles)

Freewriting: Generate theories of languages

- Students use free-write prompt to develop individual keywords and elaborate
 - Prompt 1: When I think of English/home language, I feel . . . because . . .
 - Prompt 2: English/home language is like a . . . because . . .
 - Prompt 3: Living with multiple languages is like . . . because . . .
- Instructor uses wordle.net to generate word maps displaying class themes
- Discuss common reactions and themes
- Students choose a key theme of personal relevance

Drafting: Develop visual representation

- Use flockdraw.com to complete first draft of writing theory cartoon
- Export and upload drafts to class repository for public viewing and peer review

Multimodal workshop: Develop conceptual understanding of multimodal composition

- Students provide peer review to each other's drawing
- Instructor leads class discussion around exemplary student work, with the focus on multimodal design principles (e.g. components, color, shapes, spatial relationships, textual and visual symbols)

Revision: Further develop conceptual understanding of languages and multimodal design

- Students revise and finalize a set of cartoons, each representing a language
- Students provide bilingual explanation on theory and design

Reflection: Develop metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness

- Students develop a written reflection
- Use insights from assignment to focus on issues of translingual practices and transnational experiences