Toward A Mestiza/o Consciousness: Translingualism and Working-Class Students

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Introduction/Background

Wazzup? Hi. Yo. Hello. Urbandictionary.com defines all of these "words" as a form of greeting. As a "veritable cornucopia of streetwise lingo, posted and defined by its readers," (*wazzup*) this site not only reflects the hybrid, multiple Englishes that characterize the multicultural, "mashup" demographic of the U.S. (a multiplicity that defies the category "American" or any other categorization) but it also reflects the way many of us language—drawing on a variety of home, social, popular culture and academic "codes" we have either learned or embodied from interacting with the local, situated cultures around us. Working-class students or those students less privy to the "high brow" cultural and academic affordances an affluent zip code often implies in our country, are those most likely to come to academia entrenched in these languaging "reals," or hybrid codes that often reflect communication in their social and work communities. In higher education, they are often met with a "linguistic prescriptivism" (Nero and Ahmad) or a push toward one "right" type of speaking and writing that denies their lived experiences. The academic "border" can be one of the most difficult and soul-crushing epistemological spaces these students attempt to traverse—ironically a crossing that is socially constructed as a route to empowerment. This article theorizes and illustrates ways that students might employ multilanguaging through multimodality to navigate the borders of their classrooms, disciplines, and assignments in the hybrid and online college classroom. To do so, the first section approaches translingualism[1] through Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of a mestiza consciousness. This perspective not only provides a way to valorize what Victor Villanueva calls "other cultural organization" ("Politics" 174) in the classroom, but also a move toward decolonizing the digital for working-class students through an affective pedagogy that connects to their material motives and experiences. Section two of this article turns to a personal example of the impostor syndrome I felt as a first-generation daughter and student in order to demonstrate the subtlety of linguistic violence and epistemic silencing in the often-Platonic context of institutional education. Section three exemplifies a mestiza/o

heuristic through classroom examples of multilingualism and multimodality in the classroom. Finally, this article offers a way to imagine how working-class students can work in, with, and against their writing environments and furthers the discourse of how digital environments can enable the act of critical composition for both academic and other contexts.

A Border Consciousness & Multi-Rhetorical Heuristic for Working-Class Students

In *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the makings of a multicultural consciousness as one that derives from "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization…a consciousness of the Borderlands" (76). The *mestiza* consciousness Anzaldúa describes is a useful way of understanding the "linguistic geographies" (Perryman-Clark, Kirkland, and Jackson 10) students and faculty may embody in our increasingly globalized culture, one that alters signifying and signification through "geo-migrations and other forms of postmodern sociocultural contact" (11). Though language has always been a fluid, evolving construct, increased transnational economic and social experiences proliferated by globalization and technology foreground a pluralistic orientation to languaging that is more visible than ever. Translingualism is a lens through which scholars are "currently re-envisioning writing and reading" (Canagarajah, *Literacy* 1) for a globalized geo-political, social, and economic landscape.

The concept of translingualism can be connected to the student-centered teaching movement that began over four decades ago with Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), followed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) 1974 resolution declaring "Student's Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL). The crux of the resolution asked administrators and faculty to shift English/writing education from an emphasis on uniformity to one on "precise, effective and appropriate communication in diverse ways, whatever the dialect," to encourage students to use their English varieties to communicate in the academy. The SRTOL movement has led to a more expressive, experiential writing-to-learn culture in many academic spaces, though national policies such as *The English Only Movement*, *No Child Left Behind*, and *The Standards and Accountability Movement* consistently deny the lived experiences of our multicultural citizenry. Translingualism can be viewed as an extension of the SRTOL discourse, though it takes into consideration multimodal rhetorics—visual, aural, gestural, etc.—and "glocal" or global and local (Perryman-Clark 10) contexts and practices.

Working-class students often encounter global and local situated forms of writing and composing through the Standard Written English expected in the academy and again through the various genres required of specific disciplinary discourses. Though the Oxford English Dictionary defines the working class as "A class of society or social grouping consisting of people who are employed for wages, esp. in unskilled

or semi-skilled manual or industrial work, and their families, and which is typically considered the lowest class in terms of economic level and social status; the members of such a class*" ("Working Class"), for Stuart Hall "There's no permanent, fixed class consciousness. You can't work out immediately what people think and what politics they have simply by looking at their socio-economic position" (Derbyshire). Similarly, Rubin et al. note "it is possible for a working-class person to have a relatively high [socio-economic status] while remaining in a stereo-typically "blue-collar" occupation" (196). Income can be, but is not always, an indicator of working-class students. This article assumes the intersectional identities of working-class students, identities that intertwine with other ubiquitous categories such as race, gender, and socio-economic status. Like the *mestiza*, the working-class student in academia negotiates "the ambivalence from the class of voices [which] results in mental and emotional states of perplexity" (Anzaldúa 78). First-year composition and core courses that advocate expressivist-centered assignments and SRTOL sometimes complicate the playing field when working-class students migrate to their disciplinary courses and must "start over" to negotiate and imitate rhetorical situations that appear completely disconnected from their languaging experiences. Furthermore, institutional policies and practices that valorize and reward what Geneva Smitherman calls "the Language of Wider Communication" (Perryman-Clark 5) are often at odds with working-class students' use of their own vernaculars in certain rhetorical contexts. A *mestiza/o* consciousness garnered through translingual practice might help working-class students acknowledge and name the multiplicity of their own rhetorical resources and how they might use these to navigate the "life between and across [the] languages" and spaces they encounter in academia and beyond.

Mike Rose, Donna LeCourt, Julie Lindquist, and others have written extensively about the under-explored position of working-class students in academia. Often these students are conflicted between a strong desire for economic capital (Bordieu and Thompson 14) and a desire to retain a foothold in their working-class communities. However, the inclusive/exclusive nature of academic discourse typically instills in these students a metaphoric ultimatum to choose between their working-class and academic identities, fostering the message that acculturation is the best and only way for one to achieve success—in and out of college, that the codes therein are the "key" or "secret" that will enable the desire for class mobility that brings these students to college—a secret one can only appropriate if he/she denies his/her Other identity and working-class rhetorical practices. These may include slang, dialect, and Other languages or Englishes that ironically enable some of these students to finance their college educations (through the discursive practices of their work communities) but disenable them from participating fully in academic culture. In this way, the working-class student's predicament is much like the *mestiza's*: "Cradled in one culture [that of her home and upbringing], sandwiched between two cultures [working-class community/academic], straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la*

mestiza undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war….only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically" (Anzaldúa 78-79). The message of acculturation that often accompanies academic discourse disenables expressive flexibility for the working-class student, creating an episteme of violence and "cultural silencing" that has material consequences for his/her identity. This "colonial encounter" tells the working-class student to deny his/her identity and linguistic resources, to scrub his/herself clean in favor of the discursive practices of the academy (Denny 72).

The problems with the academic message of acculturation are twofold. Acculturation assumes a fictitious perception of language as a static entity—that one kind or "correct" English exists when, in actuality, every "American" (a tenable discursive label/marker in itself) brings his/her own cultural, hybridized Englishes to the table, even native-born, monolingual students. Monolingualism or the particular kind of Standard Written English that trumps in most academic contexts is simultaneously a cultural myth and a *necessity* for the model of the university as we know it to exist. Without the myth of a unified, monolingual "commonality," the hierarchical stratosphere of our colleges becomes precarious, as does its divided disciplinary infrastructures. A pluralistic, fluid orientation to languaging presupposes that academic codes, like linguistic codes, *share* common ground with ways of communicating beyond their campuses and, further, that connections exist between disciplinary discourses and other communities *on* campus. The borders of academe reify monolingual orientations, colonizing students to adopt the discourses and epistemologies of those in power, denying their lived communicative practices.

The second problem is that linguistic and rhetorical practices as recognized/valorized in the academy are increasingly intersecting and overlapping with rhetorical practices in digital spaces. These contexts reflect a multiplicity of communicative practices that overturn monolingualism at every corner. In short, it is disadvantageous and could actually be materially disadvantageous to teaching students a monolinguistic, SWE orientation when technology has become such an inherent part of our communicative cultural landscape. Excluding working-class students from the pluralistic rhetorical mindset they require to analyze and understand the multiple-semiotic/multimodal practices that digital communication, particularly awareness of the socially constructed digital genres that have currency in our geo-political economic climate—blogs, websites, social media, and other interfaces—would be reifying the socio-economic stratification these students already struggle with daily in their personal lives outside of the academy. Acculturation just doesn't work. Enter translingualism.

Translanguaging involves using linguistic and non-linguistic means to communicate. Suresh Canagarajah defines a translingual orientation as "[considering] all acts of communication and literacy as involving a shuttling between languages and a negotiation of diverse linguistic resources for situated construction of meaning"

(*Literacy* 1). The object of translingualism is to foster a particular kind of rhetorical attunement—an ear for or turning toward difference or multiplicity (Lorimer 228) that enables "uptake" or successful communication in any context, "real" or virtual. Here the student brings his/her multiple languages, Other Englishes, and ways of communicating that exceed the grapholect (Elbow 130) or written variants of language—and determines how to combine these to achieve the rhetorical purpose for the specific time and place he/she is in, whether it is through an assignment for a first-year composition course or a Skype presentation for a cohort of colleagues in Europe. In each case, the student (citizen) draws on his/her multiple semiotic resources to achieve his/her purpose in communicating. Translingual students combine linguistic, auditory, spatial, gestural, and visual methods (Arola et al. 5-12) to achieve a rhetorical purpose that may include a real and/or "virtual" audience. Translingualism also takes into consideration that many working-class students may be addressing a new social class of individuals that may share a lot of commonalities in their propensity toward communicative exclusivity, with the literati of academia—their virtual (arguably wealthier) counterparts—the digerati (Nakamura *Cybertypes* 24). In fact, faculty and students can view the many interfaces and digital spaces of cyber-culture as a parallel to academia and its many disciplinary genres and sub-genres. Working-class students require a translingual orientation for communication and writing across discourses in the academy but also in critically considering their rhetorical positions vis-á-vis the digital "borders" they negotiate daily. Translingualism can also be viewed as the application of a skill that is tacitly being fostered through working-class students' daily rhetorical practices in digital spaces such as email, texting, or social media, and therefore a somewhat relevant and familiar resource for them to draw on in the composition classroom.

Like the *mestiza*, who is straddling spaces of epistemology, the working-class student can use a translingual lens to "[develop] a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity…She has a plural personality, she operates in pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldúa 79). Offering the working-class student a translingual orientation to communication, where he/she can draw on all of her/his linguistic resources, may enable him/her to analyze and identify genre and discourse conventions more readily and to re-contextualize language for the personal, professional, academic and virtual spaces he/she performs in. Translingualism makes hybridity, multiplicity and variety in communication permissive, even favorable: "Existing terms like multilingual or plurilingual keep languages somewhat separated even as they address the co-existence of multiple languages…[T]he term translingual enables a consideration of communicative competence as not restricted to predefined meanings of individual languages, but the ability to merge different language resources in situated interactions for new meaning" (Canagarajah *Literacy* 1). The working-class

student's ability to identify and name what may be institutionally perceived as the rhetorical "good, the bad, and the ugly" is what enables him/her to talk back to "tropes of oppression…maintained through nomenclature" (Perryman-Clark 14). A *mestiza/o* consciousness and translingual orientation disrupt the spaces and lines of orientation that attempt to scrub students "clean" of linguistic working-class markers.

A translingual approach demands that composition "instructors" also adopt the *mestiza/o* consciousness we hope to foster in our working-class students. "The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended" (Anzaldúa 80). Self-awareness of our own socio-cultural imbrication and interpellation in the institutional web that our working-class students struggle to negotiate is necessary for instructors to be able to name and help students identify the genres, sub-genres, and rhetorical constraints that emerge in this context. Like our students, we too traverse epistemological spaces daily in our lives and professions. A translingual *mestiza/o* orientation demands that we expose the social materiality of communication, particularly writing in academia, as a host of discursive practices connected to a particular institutional location with ideologies and epistemologies that are localized and often inscribe students' bodies as Other (LeCourt 202-203).

Institutional initiatives that support and model translingualism are already in place in most colleges and universities. Writing across the Curriculum programs where students and faculty communicate, write to learn, and learn to write across disciplinary and digital divides have become robust pillars and in some cases models of inter- and intra-institutional pedagogy. Writing centers and emerging online writing labs or OWLs are other institutional hubs where one-on-one consultations, either face-to-face or online, often require effective translanguaging across rhetorical and generic divides for "uptake" or a successful session to occur. Each of these programs/spaces has evolved locally on many secondary and post-secondary academic landscapes in response to the pluralism of students, faculty, and the increasingly interdisciplinary academic and social ecologies they negotiate. Composition instructors can draw on these translingual models or resources in constructing syllabi and practices that encompass collaboration, multiplicity: we just have to channel our *mestiza/o* consciousness reach across the "borders" of campus communities to do so.

Working-class and all non-traditional students should imagine the college context as a contact zone (Pratt) where they might learn to "become…the officiating priestess [versus the sacrificial goat] at the crossroads" (Anzaldúa 80) of epistemological spaces. Once students understand academic writing as an authoritative discourse "[or] the central colonial encounter" (LeCourt 203) they can work to "address…[or] challenge the material conditions of that institutional location" through "fertile mimesis" (Horner et al. 56) or a hybridization of their own discourses with those of the particular assignment or genre they are performing. A translingual

approach to language instruction coupled with a collaborative orientation to pedagogy, one in which the composition classroom becomes a kind of composing lab—working with librarians, instructional technologists and perhaps, faculty from other disciplines—facilitates the *mestiza/o* consciousness (Anzaldúa) and translingual orientation faculty and working-class students—or those students most privy to cultural silencing—need to decolonize their communicative contexts.

A local, situated consideration of the socio-political and economic culture and "borders" our students negotiate in and outside of the classroom fosters successful understanding of and orientation toward translingualism. Awareness of what kinds of "uptake" or communicative epistemologies working-class students privilege and how their identity informs and is informed by writing to learn, learning to write, and writing in the discipline activities can bolster translingual pedagogy. Making writing and processes of meaning-making "central object[s] of study…connected to culture, the social real and power relations at the points of production and circulation" (LeCourt 204) paves the way toward a fluid, agentive *mestiza/o* consciousness for working-class students in the composition classroom—a borderland consciousness they can use to shift gears not only between rhetorical contexts and genres but also between modes of communicating. Creating assignments tied to translation, deconstruction, and talking back to the "social production…of culture" (LeCourt 204) enables relational awareness and critical inquiry of systemic obstacles that often complicate learning. Assignments such as literacy narratives or autobiographies and self-directed projects that give working-class students room to wrap themselves around particular discourses or topics they experience or want to investigate in and beyond the composition classroom offers a step in this direction. What "social real" informs these students' identities outside of their academic experience? How can they channel that reality to perform or negotiate assignments and expectations of the academic discourses in which they may be trying to gain foothold? Offering students an alternative "social gaze…[one willing to be] disrupted" (LeCourt 202) as an instructor or classroom audience presents a genuine opportunity for translingual orientations and a "*mestiza/o* consciousness." Localizing pedagogy and assessment practices offers an alternative gaze while foregrounding students' identities.

Impostor Syndrome

Anzaldúa's borderland consciousness is one that resonates for me as a working-class, immigrant daughter. In my childhood, I had to negotiate the borders of the Southern Italian culture of my household—a culture and dialect that is still not considered the "right" kind of Italian today—with the American world outside of it, while negotiating the inscriptions of the working-class daughter alongside these two cultural identities—a third identity in sharp contrast with the white, Anglo-dominant preppy school community of the all-girls Catholic high school I attended.

While the other girls played soccer and attended student council meetings after school, I came home to a limited window for homework knowing I had chores that awaited me such as folding laundry

and helping my mother prepare the evening meal. School and the time to ruminate over assignments and books were considered a luxury to my parents, whose education was abruptly aborted when each of them was in seventh grade. My mother's apprenticeship with the local seamstress of her town and my dad's early career as a painter in Naples are the adolescent experiences that inscribe their lives and ideology still, their inability to understand why a job is not enough to make my sister and me "happy"—why we want more than that.

Sleeping in on Saturdays was inconceivable in our house. There was dusting, bathroom scrubbing, and ironing to do that would give my mother a jump ahead on the upcoming week. Though I struggled with algebra and physics, I knew precisely how to wrap the dust cloth around my forefinger so that I would reach every crevice. There was no room for adolescent roamings or imaginings in a home where there was always more work to do, where there never seemed to be enough money to for anything recreational except meals—a ritual that is central to the Italian culture but one that I still associate with oppression having watched the women of my family slave tirelessly in the kitchen through illnesses, depression, and other life struggles without ever receiving a helping hand or even a thank you from the men at our tables—the "breadwinners" who were too tired and concerned with the more "important" work of paying the bills.

A mestiza consciousness evolved instinctively in this working class, gendered context. The oppressors were my parents and I resented them, but I also loved and understood them despite "the angers of that house" (Hayden ln 12) and part of me became them in some respects, albeit a hybrid version that enabled me to "cross" other borders, and cultivate other identities, among them, that of the "American" student. I could not name this consciousness at the time, nor see myself reflected in any parts of my high school context except, perhaps, in the reoccurring theme of the biblical sacrificial lamb, espoused in my theology classes (ironically taught by a zealous male layman). Julia Alvarez poignantly epitomizes the impostor syndrome that characterized my emotions at that time:

> So, mirror in hand,
> I practiced foreign faces, Anglo grins,
> repressing a native Latin fluency
> for the cooler mask of English ironies.
> I wanted the world and words to match again
> as when I had lived solely in Spanish. (Alvarez 15-20)

This feeling stayed with me as I tried to cultivate a culture of recognition and valorization in my teaching experiences later.

Translanguaging in the Classroom

A translingual approach "treats textual practices as hybridizing and emergent, facilitating creative tensions between languages" (Canagarajah, *Literacy* 2). In my efforts to differentiate instruction and scaffold assignments in composition for the diverse local cultures in my first-year composition courses at a community college, a four-year state college, and a four-year private university, each with distinctively different demographics, translingual practices emerged before I could identify or theorize them. At one institution where most of my class was comprised of working-class students

(some who made it clear early on they could not attend every class because they had conflicts with the jobs that were paying their college tuition), offering composition assignments that enabled "alignment of words with many other semiotic resources" throughout the semester yielded dynamic results (Canagarajah, *Literacy* 1). Each of these assignments was designed under the theme translation.

The first assignment was a literacy narrative asking students to "contextualize and translate their multiple identities." The second assignment was a research paper asking students to translate a web-based text or "tool" of their choosing, and the third assignment was a collaborative collage where students worked together to translate a concept or theme connected to their discipline. The first three assignments were designed as scaffolding steps toward a collaborative group final project *of their own choosing* at the end of the semester versus the research paper that often culminates a first-year writing course (a terminal assignment that typically does not intersect with student interests or work beyond the FYC classroom). Additionally, each of the assignments was scaffolded through a brainstorm, draft, peer-review and revision process so that students could reflect upon and revisit their own epistemological development, tasks that require consistent "translation." I did try to group students by major for the final project, which, in some cases, facilitated deciding on a topic and mode of presentation.

One group of pre-med students in first-year composition at a four-year private university determined to understand the conventions of publication in their science courses, joined forces to create a Tumblr "how to" blog/project in this vein. Another group of students from healthcare, accounting and sports management fields decided to explore what communication—particularly technology-driven communication— looks like in their respective professional workplaces through interviews and outreach. A group of business majors wrote a children's book through storyjumper.com to historicize the concept of tax inversion. Students employed a *mestiza/o* consciousness and translingual approach through all of these projects not only in their efforts to traverse the "borders" between Standard Written English and their own vernaculars but also those borders between SWE and their disciplinary languages. Finally, students employed a *mestiza/o* consciousness and a translingual orientation as they navigated digital genres such as Prezi, MindMeister, and Blogger versus traditional essay genres to determine which would best help them analyze and communicate their project topic to the class.

Each of these projects reflected a negotiation of students' "social reals" and "rhetorical reals." Interestingly, almost every group of students in this particular institution chose projects connected to their desire for "capital" in their respective professional fields, even though my assignment sheet invited an array of topics from social justice to academic to professional themes (where I did not provide a list to choose from). For these students, acquiring the capital of their disciplinary or professional discourse equates to the capital necessary for the social mobility they came

to college for. Many of the students told me they were grateful to be given the choice to construct a "pragmatic" project.

Collaborative projects where students had to negotiate their rhetorical purpose and audience, decide on a genre, and choose which conventions of the genre would help achieve that purpose facilitated a pluralistic or *mestiza/o* consciousness, a translingual heuristic and some tension in this course. In students' reflection papers on the final project—which was assigned as a "digital remix project"—complaints about certain group members not "carrying their workload" and other issues coordinating and decision-making as a group were rampant. However, having to work toward the common goal of completion/grade and the impetus of a meaningful project enabled compromise and ultimately a unified final project (Russell). Scaffolding the project "pieces"—planning, research, drafting, final copy—and asking for individual student contributions to each piece of the project countered the propensity for one person to take over for the benefit of the group. Through these individual submissions, I was able to see each student's process and how he/she contributed or compromised his/her stance for the end goal of the group. The parceling or consistent inclusion of the individual piece also ensured that no one student's identity was suppressed in the project experience.

Some students drew on the digital spaces and genres they were writing in daily (Tumblr, Twitter, etc.) while others considered new digital tools they wanted to learn how to use to construct their projects. If the platform was new, students worked together to learn and navigate the genre to determine whether it was a fit for their rhetorical purpose, which was articulated early on in their project proposals. Students also had to consider how the context would inform content and vice versa since the two were inseparable in this case. All of this involved a translingual orientation—a strategic assemblage of multiple semiotic resources—that was specific to the project topic in many instances but also derived from many of the students' lived experiences using blogging, Twitter and YouTube as consumers and producers. In an end-of-semester questionnaire, students revealed that their initial reluctance toward group work was ultimately trumped by their ability to create in a genre they felt comfortable with versus a more traditional "academic" genre they may have struggled with earlier in the semester. One student's feedback reflected that of many in this course: "I think that composing a multimodal project helped me understand the topic more because it opened my eyes to things that I did not see or notice before and related to the topic better." Another student added: "[composing multimodally] helped me understand my topic because I got to see it through more angles."[2]

Multilanguaging and multimodality emerged here as a product of the assignment but also as part of the multiplicity in the classroom. Each student had to intersect linguistic, disciplinary, digital genre savvy to conceive of and compose the group's digital remixes. The last step was to traverse the border of creating a composition and presenting that composition orally to the class. There were three

projects I felt had particular "uptake" or persuasion. The first was a group of business majors' digital storybook about tax inversion, *Fairy Tales and Taxes:*

> These students used fairytale vernacular to explain the history and effects of tax inversion in a way that made it easy enough for young child to understand. The "characters" in the text represented the government, corporations, and people affected by tax inversion. Students successfully negotiated both the language of their discipline and the literary conventions of a fairytale to simplify and communicate an otherwise complicated subject.

A second group of pre-med students in the same first-year composition course designed a Tumblr blog with a Twitter feed as a resource attempting to unpack writing genres and conventions in their field. This project, which included interviews with advice and "how-to tips" from medical professionals and scholars, can be used as a reference tool in perpetuity. Students even listed themselves as contacts for future pre-med students who may have questions about the processes of writing in medicine. In this case, a border-consciousness evidenced in their inter-disciplinary translanguaging, fostered students' subjectivity, reflected in their mastery of medical writing discourse conventions:

Finally, three students with majors related to either healthcare and medicine exposed how the media is complicit in maintaining a white supremacist, cultural hegemony in its emphasizing of certain "epidemics" over others. The premise of this group's multi-media PowerPoint presentation was that if affluent countries with more white citizens are affected by an illness, the illness becomes newsworthy and oftentimes "cure-worthy." This was probably the most controversial of the projects as the students juxtaposed media clips that dramatized the Swine Flu and Ebola—illnesses that have been around for decades but did not become a glocal (global and local) media concern until the "right people" started getting sick—versus ground-breaking medical innovations that receive little to no media attention because the demographic of the people who have that illness are considered "dispensable."

This PowerPoint slide shows a spoon invented to help Alzheimer's patients eat independently. The students pointed out how, despite the thousands of victims who succumb to this illness annually (typically elderly people who would, in this case, be viewed as "dispensable"), this groundbreaking invention received no media coverage whatsoever:

> Perhaps the most attention-grabbing part was this group's use of the hip-hop song "The 3rd World" at the end of this presentation. Before closing with this song (one group member emailed back and forth with me for weeks to obtain permission to use this, as it contains explicit lyrics), the students explained that it talks back to the intersectional politics of capitalism, media, and medicine. The African American Vernacular and Spanish lyrics illustrate what Vershwan Young calls code-meshing: a strategic combining of languages and vernaculars to

affect a rhetorical purpose. The angry code-meshing of vernacular and profanity coupled with the loud, insistent lyrics and militant musical rhythm communicated the emotional injustice and call to action behind the informative slides and video clips of the earlier PowerPoint. Below are some of the ending lyrics of the song: f*** your charity medicine, try to murder me / the immunizations you gave us were full of mercury / so now I see the Third World like the rap game soldier / nationalize the industry and take it over! (Immortal Technique).

In all of these projects students negotiated their own English varieties with disciplinary and digital genres in a process that Horner and Lu describe as "sedimentation": taking pre-existing language (and in this case, genres) and re-contextualizing them to make "new" or hybridized meaning. These projects illustrate that a *mestiza/o* consciousness and translingualism are not particular to bilingual or multilingual students. They illustrate that we all—"native speakers" or not—already translanguage to "rhetorically listen" (Ratcliffe 203) and communicate in the situational contexts of our daily lives.

I was troubled by dubbing the project a "digital remix," in the way this might create the systemic silencing students often feel when confronted with academic assignments designed around very specific disciplinary or sub-disciplinary genres. However, I found that those students more reticent to embrace a digital project used a more traditional digital genre such as Google Docs or PowerPoint to convey their work. Allowing lots of time in class for students to collaborate and share one another's digital skills or sometimes directing students to the resources on campus that might help them achieve their rhetorical purposes more seamlessly—the librarian, the writing center, the office of instructional technology—but also reminding students to think critically about the relationship between their genre and purpose was key to this process. Again, many students' choices emerged as almost instinctual and connected to their "social reals" (LeCourt 6)—issues or ideologies they struggled with or wanted to learn more about.

Conclusion

The postmodern orientation of translingualism, a languaging ideology so broad that it seems to defy categorization, can be challenging from a pedagogical and learning standpoint. In a culture where "social sorting" (Nakamura 11) often determines the materiality of our students' lives, it is tricky to make transparent the fluidity that translingualism advocates. Unlike the rules of Standard English, it is difficult to find a textbook definition of what types of rhetorical multiplicity garner uptake and which do not, which types of translingualism are A-worthy and which are subpar. "Monolingual ideologies have relied on form, grammar, and a system for meaning-making….A translingual orientation requires an important shift to treating practices as primary and emergent, as form is so diverse, fluid, and changing that it cannot guarantee meaning by

itself" (Canagarajah, *Literacy* 4). My students were quick to insist on definitions and reminders of what concepts such as "multimodal" and "genre" meant as we worked on their projects. Analysis and discussions throughout the semester about vernaculars and the parallels between these and the assorted disciplinary and digital genres students negotiate and appropriate daily, reinforced the idea that literacy practices are situated—that what is deemed as an "effective form" of communication is often contingent on a particular time and space.

Translingualism is a nuanced pedagogy whose methods and materials are still evolving. However, this post-colonial pedagogy is one that most connects working-class students material realities with the discursive forums of their academic lives. The *mestiza/o* subject positions that working-class students employ in their translingual practices are most similar to the orientations they are already accustomed to in their social media entrenched languaging reals. These practices also defy the "colonial encounter" in the academy by channeling "pre-print," "pre-colonial" literacies rooted in orality and visuality (LeCourt 38). Encouraging discursive *and* non-discursive rhetorical practices can be particularly useful for working-class students. Faculty should enable spaces and assignments for the types of linguistic, visual, and auditory meaning-making students experience daily, particularly through use of their cell phones, in the classroom. "Rhetors have always known about the power of a particular orator's tone of voice, the use of gesture at key points in a speech, appeals to patriotism and to the emotions, the use of vivid imagery and storytelling, and even the value of grooming and general appearance: manipulation of any one of these elements has a direct affect on the audience" (Murray 11). Offering working-class students opportunities to use languaging beyond "discursive, print-oriented rhetoric" (1) may offer self-recognition and more occasion for "uptake" in the composition classroom.

Donna LeCourt says that working-class students' awareness of difference—"even of how difference is implicated in social relations and language use—does not in itself foster agency nor alter the technologies of subject production that seek to reproduce academic subjectivities within students." She suggests that the students "see writing as offering not only a space of reproduction, but also one in which new meanings might be created that offer alternative ways of 'caring for self'" (197). A translingual approach to composition that encourages multiple semiotic resources and a *mestiza/o* consciousness offers resistance to the acculturation working-class students often feel in academia and encourages working-class students to become "subject[s] of hybridization…deeply implicated in the production of language," which can name and traverse identity rhetorics and materiality versus being "subject[s] of the politics of recognition" (LeCourt 198).

In *Facing the Center*, Harry Denny reminds readers "the distance between the margin and the center, in economic terms, is wider and more fluid than ever. At colleges and universities nationwide, the middle class is quickly dissipating, receding back into the ranks of the working class" (82). Doing the cultural work of exposing

how genres are derived from spatial-temporal contexts and authorized within disciplines is our ethical responsibility as composition instructors who are often faced with working-class students who cannot name why or how they feel displaced in a college environment. U.S. Census and National Center for Education statistics consistently show that these are the students who either drop out of college or graduate significantly later than their middle- or upper-class peers, often because of material constraints in their personal lives. The gaze from faculty and students alike that insists one cannot "be" a certain way or share/illustrate an experience that counters the "right" communicative theory and discourse fosters an episteme of violence that has material consequences for already vulnerable working class students (Spivak). A translingual approach in our composition classrooms offers our students a gaze that hails a *mestizo/o* consciousness, encourages them "politicize the personal" (Villanueva, "Politics"173) and take back the agency of communication that typically resides in academic discourse.

Notes

[1] For the purposes of this paper, I focus on two notions that characterize translingual orientations according to Suresh Canagrajah in *Translingual Practice*: The first is that communication transcends individual languages, dialects and registers such as Standard English; the second is that communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources (6).

[2] I obtained students' permission through the Institutional Review Board at this institution in order to publish their work.

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