

# Decolonial Potential in a Multilingual FYC

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Scholars in rhetoric and composition have questioned to what extent the field can be decolonial because of the gatekeeping role that writing plays in the university. This article examines the decolonial potential of implementing multilingual practices in first-year composition (fyc), enacting what Walter Mignolo calls “epistemic disobedience” by complicating the primacy of English as the language of knowledge-building. I describe a Spanish-English “bilingual” fyc course offered at a private university with a Jesuit Catholic heritage. The course is characterized by a translanguaging approach in which Spanish is presented as a valid language for academic writing. The students’ writing highlights the enduring influence of colonialism in the form of monolingual ideology within the linguistically diverse geographical context of Silicon Valley, where the potential of decolonial practices are tempered by the economic power of the tech industry and its hiring practices, which have resulted in a low number of employed women and minorities in comparison to both national employment levels and diversity within the region.

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Multilingual students experience monolingual ideology in their education, which undermines their abilities to communicate, make meaning, and be effective writers. A multilingual student, Selena<sup>1</sup>, describes in her literacy narrative the feeling of vulnerability she experienced in elementary school when she moved from Mexico City, Mexico, to Toronto, Canada:

I would rather be in a tank full of hungry sharks than once again be vulnerable to a language barrier that had barely been trespassed months before. I was determined to master the English language as to avoid another encounter where nobody could understand me and I couldn’t understand them. . . . After having lived my entire seven-year-old life in Mexico City, my father received a job offer in Toronto, Canada. This resulted in my small four-member family to move two countries north into an unknown culture, weather, people, and more importantly language (at least by me).

Selena communicates the vulnerability of starting a new school as a young student who is unable to speak English and is an emerging multilingual learner in an academic institution that imposes assimilation. This article examines the literacy narratives of multilingual speakers in a fyc course themed as “bi-

lingual,” the first course in a two-course sequence, which was taught in Spanish. After examining these literacy narratives, I recognized students had used translanguaging theories we discussed in class to conceptualize their multilingual struggles not as obstacles they had to overcome but as advantages they could use to create new meanings and discover new knowledge. The negative experiences that students related to assimilation, isolation, and insecurity reveal the need for decolonial practices that redress the damage of assimilation and monolingual ideology.

Before moving on, I want to clarify how I’m using key terms in this article. By multilingual, I refer to someone who speaks or writes in more than one language, with linguistic abilities ranging from emerging skills to more complex rhetorical awareness of linguistic practices in a language other than what was spoken at home. The term bilingual describes the specific Spanish fyc course that I co-taught with my colleague Juan Velasco, which was followed by a second course in English. The term bilingual falls under the larger umbrella of multilingual; however, the application of bilingual is limited because it reduces multilingualism to two languages, whereas many of the student writers in this piece speak or write in more than two languages. The term translanguaging refers to the dispositions, theories, and frameworks that propose inclusive approaches to the use of multiple languages, or translanguaging, for communication, in spite of monolingual efforts to invalidate non-Standard Academic English (SAE). By translanguaging, I refer to “both the complex language practices of multilingual individuals and communities, as well as the pedagogical approaches that draw on those complex practices to build those desired in formal school settings” (Garcia, Johnson, and Seltzer 2). The writing examined in this piece is by multilingual students in a bilingual fyc taught with a translanguaging approach that was incorporated through readings, discussions, and writing assignments.

Within rhetoric and composition, African American, American Indian, and Latinx scholars have questioned the extent to which the field can, across university contexts, operate within higher education and against colonial paradigms undergirded by racism, sexism, classism, and other systems of oppression that impact whose voices or English(es) are valued (Gilyard; Powell; Villanueva, “On the Rhetoric”). Indigenous scholar Angela Haas explains that decolonial theory informs practices, methodologies, and pedagogies that examine

- (1) how we have individually and collectively been affected by and complicit in the legacy of colonialism;
- (2) how these effects and complicities of historical and contemporary colonialism influence research and educational institutions, theories, methodologies, methods, and scholarship;
- and (3) how the effects and complicities of co-

lonialism play out in our everyday embodied practices. (“Decolonial Digital” 191)

Indigenous scholars such as Ellen Cushman focus on the coexistence of language and digital spaces in her call for decolonizing digital archives for the purpose of sharing the Cherokee language (“Wampum”), and Qwo-Li Driskill advocates for decolonial skillshares and exposure to indigenous language to counter colonial perceptions of indigenous knowledge and communities (“Decolonial Skillshares”). The issues of language and intellectual production that are central to the rhetorical sovereignty of Indigenous scholars in writing studies provide generative support for considering how translanguaging practices in fyc have the potential to disrupt colonial practices. By incorporating languages other than SAE into classrooms, students create knowledge and become familiar with translanguaging practices that frame their linguistic differences as resources and embodied practices and that disrupt colonial monolingual narratives.

To that end, I assigned a literacy narrative in the required fyc class that I taught in English, which students took after completing the first course in Spanish with my colleague Juan Velasco. When I examined the student narratives, I recognized students had used the translanguaging theories we discussed in class to reconceptualize their multilingual struggles not as obstacles they had to overcome but as advantages they could use to create new narratives about their linguistic differences. This analysis does not posit that literacy narrative assignments on translanguaging will be effective for teaching all English language learners across all institutional contexts; instead, this student writing reveals how reconceptualizing multilingual practices through the introduction of translanguaging in a fyc course highlights the potential for redressing perceptions of language, people, and communities based on the colonial influence of monolingual ideology. Additionally, both multilingual writing and writing in different forms of English provide a heuristic for recognizing how composing always requires a rhetorical awareness of translating a writer’s message and how competing ideologies affect audience reception, which highlights ideological factors.

### **The Bilingual Fyc Course**

From 2013-2017, my institution offered four sections of an fyc two-course sequence that enacted a translanguaging approach. Serving approximately 80 students over four years, each class of approximately twenty students began the fyc course titled Critical Thinking and Writing 1 Bilingual in Spanish (CTW1) with my colleague Juan Velasco, which focused on analytical skills, before continuing the sequence with me in CTW2 Bilingual in English,

which focused on argumentation, information literacy, and research. In this sequence, Spanish was presented as a valid linguistic mode of academic writing, and identities and experiences of multilingual students were validated through critical examination of monolingual ideology in course readings and discussion. The course theme of “bilingual” would have been better titled “multilingual” because multiple enrolled students grew up with languages other than English and Spanish.<sup>2</sup>

The bilingual fyc course was developed by English faculty<sup>3</sup> based on the understanding that multilingual students possessed linguistic resources that informed their rhetorical awareness and discursive skills, in part answering Ellen Cushman’s language-based decolonial question, “How can teachers and scholars move beyond the presumption that English is the only language of knowledge making and learning?” (“Translingual” 234). Students opted into the bilingual course based on questionnaires they completed during orientation<sup>4</sup>. The students’ levels of Spanish proficiency ranged from native speakers, those who have spoken Spanish as a first language, to native English speakers, who felt their Spanish speaking skills were still emerging, even though they passed Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish classes and tests in high school. Some AP students were the children of educators who spoke some Spanish with a care-giver growing up, while others learned English as a second language during their elementary education<sup>5</sup>. The students who learned Spanish in school tended to come from privileged backgrounds while the first-generation students spoke of immigrant parents, commuting to school and holding jobs<sup>6</sup>. With a student body of approximately 5,500 undergraduates, the twenty or so students who took part in the bilingual fyc courses each year were hardly a significant representation of the entire university; however, the percentage of Latinx students in each course exceeds 50% even though Latinx students make up only 15% of the overall student population.

In the first quarter of bilingual fyc (CTW1), my colleague Juan Velasco<sup>7</sup> conducted the course in Spanish, providing space for students to discuss the spectrum of their languaging abilities, including positive and negative experiences associated with their multilingual identities. Velasco introduced Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a central text to provide a model for thinking about writing as an expression of multiple linguistic identities and translanguaging with English, Spanish and Nahuatl. Steven Alvarez suggests that translingual literacy studies could undergird a decolonial definition of literacy that “contribute[s] to a necessary shift in literacy studies by treating heterogeneity in contact zones as the norm rather than the exception” (19). He continues, the “rhetorical dimension of translingual literacies allows it to consider communicative competence as not restricted to predefined meanings within individual languages” (19). The diverse population of students in the

bilingual fyc, which included white, Latinx, African American, Asian American, and Middle Eastern American students, understood linguistic heterogeneity because it was a part of their lived experiences as multilinguals. By addressing the negative impact of monolingual ideology on the linguistic abilities of multilinguals, the translanguing readings, discussion, and analysis contribute to the decolonial potential of this framework, which decentralizes a singular, authoritative version of language.

During the second fyc course in the two-course sequence (CTW2), which focused on argumentation and research, I assigned readings that theorized multilingual experiences within monolingual university writing classrooms, articulating important arguments about diversity within a single language. The students read Paul Kei Matsuda's "Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity," which problematizes teaching SAE as a primary goal of writing instruction and describes how the myth of linguistic homogeneity privileges monolingual English speakers. Students agreed with Matsuda's claim that "the dominant discourse of U.S. college composition not only has accepted English Only as an ideal but it already assumes the state of English-only, in which students are native English speakers by default" (637). Additionally, many agreed with Matsuda's explanation that "resident second-language writers" and "native speakers of unprivileged varieties of English" are harmed when educators assume English homogeneity (648). The class next read Bruce Horner et al.'s "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach" and discussed how translanguing speaks to the myth of a singular English and frames linguistic difference as a resource. Students appreciated learning that a translanguing approach "acknowledges that deviation from dominant expectations need not be errors; that conformity need not be automatically advisable; and that writers' purposes and readers' conventional expectations are neither fixed nor unified" (Horner et al. 304). These articles not only helped establish a shared vocabulary for discussing how audiences base responses to linguistic differences on monolingual ideology but also proposed a framework for advocating using languages other than English in the writing classroom.

Following the Matsuda and Horner et al. pieces, I assigned a literacy narrative assignment that asked students to discuss their experiences with reading and writing while reflecting specifically on language and identity. These narratives generated inquiry about language and multilingualism that often resulted in preliminary research topics. For the literacy narrative assignment, the purpose was to "write a literacy narrative that draws on your experiences with reading and writing, identifying how these experiences have contributed to how you see yourself negotiating the different ways that people think about language" (see appendix). Students were asked to treat their experiences with language, whether positive or negative, as generative sites of analysis that should be sup-

ported or complicated by quotations from the course readings. In the assignment, I emphasized “negotiating” the different ways that audiences think about language because a translanguaging approach benefits from the understanding “that English is always a language in translation” (Pennycook 34) and “recognize[es] all language use as acts of translation” (Horner, NeCamp and Donahue 287), thereby framing linguistic “difference as the norm of all utterances” (Lu and Horner, “Introduction” 208). Literacy narratives allowed students to focus on their diverse uses of language, creating a space where they could describe tangible instances of how audiences’ respond to language difference and what those responses reveal about their ideology. These moments of translation and negotiation provide generative experiences for writing literacy narratives because students are keenly aware of the moments when they have been made to feel inferior for their language use. Through writing, multilingual students express how they experience frustration, rejection, and feelings of not belonging that motivate the work of translanguaging scholars, providing more critical perspectives on monolingual ideology’s colonizing effect.

### **Isolation**

One of the reasons that introducing translanguaging theory into writing classes supports decolonial practices has to do with its ability to create more inclusive spaces for knowledge creation, counteracting the isolation that marks multilingual speakers as “others.” Below I return to the quote by Selena in which she describes her feeling of vulnerability after having moved from Mexico City to Toronto, Canada, without knowing English:

I would rather be in a tank full of hungry sharks than once again be vulnerable to a language barrier that had barely been trespassed months before. I was determined to master the English language as to avoid another encounter where nobody could understand me and I couldn’t understand them...After having lived my entire seven-year-old life in Mexico City, my father received a job offer in Toronto, Canada. This resulted in my small four-member family to move two countries north into an unknown culture, weather, people, and more importantly language (at least by me).

Because she would prefer to be in “a tank full of hungry sharks,” her experience as an English language learner arriving in an unfamiliar linguistic space is characterized as worse than living in constant fear due to her inability to communicate. Selena’s response underscores the fear associated with the experience of forced assimilation to dominant linguistic practices through the linguistic containment she faced in school. Assimilation remains a topic

of concern in literacy studies, because as Gregorio Hernandez-Zamora explains in *Decolonizing Literacy: Mexican Lives in the Era of Global Capitalism*, literacy learning is “not just a psycholinguistic process, but centrally... a cultural, political and ideological experience of *adopting and assimilating to the language, culture and ideologies of the dominant other*” (32). Fortunately, Selena describes her teacher in Canada as dedicating extra time to help her and another student who spoke only French, as well as “other classmates who not only tolerated us but also made a warm welcoming environment.” The multilingual context of Canada no doubt informed the teacher’s approach to language; however, Selena’s experience speaks to the necessity of professional development opportunities to prepare educators to work with multilingual student populations (Canagarajah, “Translingual Writing”; Ferris and Hedgcock; Matsuda).

Selena’s experience with the English language became further complicated when her family moved from Toronto to Corpus Christi, Texas, where she describes being exposed to Spanglish as a form of translanguaging that challenged her experiences with languages as being distinctly separate. She felt uncomfortable with the translingual practices of multilinguals in Corpus Christi because Selena’s educational experiences in both Mexico and Canada had reinforced monolingual beliefs about the homogeneity of languages. Moving again from Texas to a small town in Montana, Selena references Matsuda’s “Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity” to address the lack of diversity she faced when her English teachers focused primarily on grammar in her writing, a salient feature of her writing as a non-native English writer. Selena’s teacher imagined that she had had the same experiences as the other students, so her teacher paid less attention to the content of her writing:

[W]henver I was returned a red ink drenched homework assignment, I never connected that failure to the fact that English was indeed my second language but simply to the fact that I hadn’t worked hard enough or hadn’t invested enough time into it. I had fallen victim to the idea that “‘writing well’ is the ability to produce English that is unmarked in the eyes of teachers who are custodians of privileged varieties of English.” (Matsuda 640)

Although Selena makes no claims about discrimination because English was her second language, her experience demonstrates how the overemphasis of certain grammar rules enacts a form of linguistic discrimination that reinforces the exclusionary and punitive aspects of monolingual ideology. Even though Selena’s writing teachers may have intended to contribute to Selena’s transferable writing skills for future classes, the overemphasis of grammar and

syntax correction served to demoralize Selena. “Drenching” an assignment with red ink overwhelms students and detracts from higher-level writing goals; it serves only to reinforce the gatekeeping role of colonial institutions that mark non-white multilingual students as inferior.

Selena’s negative experience with writing, based on a teacher’s overemphasis on a specific variety of English, highlights the need for translanguaging practices. These practices refer to the pedagogical “disposition of openness and inquiry the people take toward language and language differences” and the advocacy “to be more humble about what constitutes a mistake (and about what constitutes correctness) in writing” (Horner et al. 310-11). Enacting translanguaging practices reframes linguistic difference as a skill in the semiotic toolkit, following Suresh Canagarajah’s assertion that “[t]he term translanguaging conceives of language relationships in more dynamic terms” (*Literacy as Translanguaging Practice* 8). Translanguaging and translanguaging offer a dynamic paradigm for students to understand their multilingual identities and linguistic differences within monolingual universities where students like Selena have often been inculcated to think of multilingual abilities as a deficit.

In his literacy narrative, Julian describes the difficulty of growing up with parents who were emerging multilinguals, speaking primarily a non-privileged dialect of Spanish. After immigrating from Zacatecas, Mexico, to Aspen, Colorado, Julian describes the confusion that results from moving between two languages dominated by monolingual ideology:

Before starting school, my parents had taught me their imperfect versions of Spanish; dialects coming from a rural area of Zacatecas, México. Both of them had received very little education and thus had little experience with the more academic forms of Spanish. I was raised very monolingual, to the extent that I wasn’t even aware of all the other languages that existed in our surrounding community and around the world. Thus when I was taught to read and write in English at school in Colorado, my mind was blown away and I felt very confused and frustrated.

Julian’s experience highlights the clash of colonial influence. Spanish and English monolingual ideology negatively impacted his move between Mexico and the U.S. Julian’s frustration follows what Anzaldúa argues in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” about academic rules oppressing English and Spanish speakers: “Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca* [they want to put padlocks in our mouths]. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia* [academic rules]” (76; my translations). The student’s experience of moving between locations domi-

nated by monolingual ideology highlights how the enforcement of “*reglas de academia*,” in both English and Spanish, exert the worldview’s power through standardization.

Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* articulates many of the frustrations multilinguals experience because of the standardization that monolingual ideology imposes, which is part of the reason why my colleague Velasco taught the first quarter in Spanish using *Borderlands/La Frontera* as the primary text in the course. Anzaldúa’s translanguaging with English, Spanish, and Nahuatl provides students with arguments and experiences they can relate to about language and identity. For students like Julian, writing in a language other than English offers decolonial potential since their English abilities have been called into question due to their multilingual identity. The high percentage of Latinx students in the class provided an exigence for the incorporation of the Spanish language, which Anzaldúa describes as embodying a “tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity,” with the mestiza who learns “to be an Indian in Mexican culture” (101). Native scholar Driskill also introduces Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* into courses where the indigenous Cherokee language is incorporated because the book supports the claim that “[I]anguage revitalization and continuance is one of the central struggles of Native people in the United States and Canada” (Driskill 65). Language provides a generative heuristic for helping students to arrive at a nuanced understanding of the deeply rooted and intermingled cultures and people who live on colonized indigenous lands in the U.S.

Maria, a first-year Latina in my class who was actually a junior because of dual-enrollment credits, describes having felt, or having been made to feel, as though her first language of Spanish was inferior for creating knowledge. In her literacy narrative, she interprets her experience through the myth of linguistic homogeneity and translanguaging, revealing how monolingual ideology is internalized and used to subjugate speakers of non-dominant varieties of English. She advocates for translanguaging:

Throughout my education, I always viewed English as a superior language to my native Spanish language due to the constant separation of students into classrooms of different English levels. . . . Enacting a translanguaging approach to learning institutions is essential to break the borders that are built between several languages and their variations.

Maria’s advocacy for a translanguaging approach follows Cushman’s view, expressed in “Translingual and Decolonial Approaches to Meaning Making,” that translanguaging offers potential for decolonial practice because of its premise that knowledge can be made in languages other than English. Maria’s

literacy narrative also underscores Juan Guerra's reasons for using of translanguaging theory in writing classrooms. Guerra argues that translanguaging "introduces more of our students in the first-year and advanced writing courses to the competing ideologies that inform their current writing" ("Cultivating" 232). Using multiple languages in the writing classroom, Maria appreciates how a writing course creates a space where multilingual students can reclaim agency over their linguistic practices while addressing competing ideologies in those practices. For multilingual speakers like Maria, monolingual ideology manifests in a colonial rhetoric of assimilation urging students to should hide their abilities and identities as people who are able to speak more than standard U.S. English. When instructors teach languages other than English as contributing to knowledge in academic institutions, they create a space where decolonial practices serve to reveal how colonialism has benefited from erasing alternative epistemologies, cultures, and communities in order to justify expansion and "discovery" of occupied territories.

What makes Maria's experience further indicative of how colonial ideology discriminates against multilingual students is that she entered the university with junior-level status as a result of dual-enrollment courses, and yet she was still indoctrinated to believe her linguistic heritage made her academically inferior. Maria's heightened awareness about the impact of monolingual ideology demonstrates why students should be taught "communicative practices as not neutral or innocent but informed by and informing economic, geopolitical, social-historical, cultural relations of asymmetrical power" (Lu and Horner 208). Despite Maria's academic success, she was still left feeling that her linguistic heritage was framed as inferior by the pervasive monolingual ideology. Maria's experience is atypical for the many Latinx students who internalize myths of monolingual superiority because hers remains a relative success story. Many times, Latinx students with Spanish as their first language or heritage language are less academically successful because they are segregated in public and charter schools through implicit and explicit linguistic and socioeconomic containment (Blume; "Choice Without Equity").

### **Insecurity**

The feeling of insecurity that Maria describes demonstrates the impact of monolingual ideology, although the continued use of the term "broken English" by the multilingual students in their literacy narratives shows how these beliefs are internalized and then manifested, often to describe the linguistic differences of family members. One student, Kerry, defines the Korean English she spoke when she was young as a kind of "broken English." She writes, "As a child, I was raised by my grandparents who spoke broken English yet primarily spoke Korean. Thus, I spent most of my youth speaking to them in

what I called ‘Ko-english,’ a mixture of grammatically incorrect Korean and English.” Kerry’s description of her family’s English echoes Matsuda’s point about the implied connection between grammar and intelligence and his critique of educators “who judge the writer’s credibility or even intelligence on the basis of grammaticality” (640). That Kerry was made to feel shame or embarrassment about her family members’ way of communicating with the world demonstrates why decolonial and anti-racist scholars continue to critique the colonial imperative of assimilation (Baca, *Mestiz@*; Martinez; Villanueva, *Bootstraps*). When arguing for integration rather than assimilation, these scholars seek to recognize and increase the epistemological work recognized, as well as “the breadth of meanings available within a language,” such as variations across Chicax English, African American English, and Hawaiian English (Pennycook 43). In addition, the continued use of concepts such as “broken English” undermines the dynamic nature of language and of how language changes across genres, in different contexts, for different audiences.

However, Kerry also comments on how Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* re-conceptualizes effective writing by emphasizing the content of what is being communicated, rather than focusing primarily on grammar. Kerry writes,

Our [fyc in Spanish] professor showed us a variety of writing pieces with mixes of Spanish and English or grammatically incorrect Spanish, emphasizing that the message and content were more important than just the grammatical contents. He similarly encouraged us to not focus as much on the grammar in our Spanish, but more about our content as well as expressing our writing in creative manners. This was a complete change from all the previous standard language classes that I had taken . . . languages could intermingle, mix, and vary in an artistic manner, rather than be something that needed to be corrected.

Kerry’s appreciation of the “artistic” intermingling of languages and the attention to writing content demonstrates how translanguaging practices can create decolonial disruptions, positively impacting how students perceive their own language use. By drawing attention to how and what Anzaldúa writes, the course reveals “decolonial potential, [where] translanguaging approaches need to avoid simply changing the content of what is studied and taught and work toward dwelling in the borders to revise the paradigmatic tenets of thought structuring everyday practices” (Cushman, “Translingual” 236). When Kerry writes about Anzaldúa’s writing and the fyc’s approach to language, she alludes to how the course impacts the tenets of thought regarding her everyday practices with language and writing. As Cushman notes, the decolonial

potential of translingual practices is rooted in unsettling what students have been taught about the possibilities of writing. The “creative manners” that Kerry mentions also speak to a broadened definition of writing that includes multiple modes and semiotic resources for knowledge-making available to students.

While discussing the potential for constructing knowledge in the Cherokee language, Ellen Cushman calls for decolonizing digital spaces, a result of which might be multimodal composing. Both translingual and multimodal digital writing draw on a wide range of composing resources in non-alphabetic, multimodal, digital, and multiple linguistic modes of communication (Baca, *Mestiz@*; Banks; Canagarajah, *Translingual*; Cushman, “Wampum”; Haas; Palmeri; Selfe; Shipka). Cushman supports a translingual approach though remains critical of its application in much the same way she calls on composers to remain critical of the media they use. Cushman explains that “a translingual approach to meaning making evokes a decolonial lens with its focus on the ideologies implicit in any tool chosen for meaning making (be it mode, media, or genre), as these are always laden with cultural, historical, and instrumental import for the people who use them” (“Translingual” 236). I would add that the responses digital texts generate can reveal an audience’s ideology and conceptualization of writing. Like the additional affordances that digital, visual, and non-alphabetic modes offer students for communicating, translingualism offers another approach for understanding how linguistic diversity is regarded as a resource for intended audiences.

Similar to Kerry’s experience with “broken English” and “Ko-english,” a student named Jennifer highlights how translingual practices can teach multilingual students to view their linguistic differences as something to leverage rather than hide. In the following, Jennifer presents her Filipino mother’s English as having a negative impact on Jennifer’s idiomatic phrasing and pronunciation. Jennifer relays the feeling related to the use of “broken English” when she describes her mother’s variations as grammatical errors:

Many of the grammatical and pronunciation errors that my Filipino family regularly make when speaking or writing in English have been passed down onto my own use of language. Although English is my first language, I have still managed to adopt the same nuances as my mom as a result of primarily learning how to speak and write from her. Sometimes I catch myself mistakenly saying to “open” and “close” the light instead of “turn the light on and off,” pronouncing the word “alumni” as “a-loom-ni”, and interchangeably using the pronouns she and he.

Contextualized language practices such as the use of “open” instead of “turn on” are misidentified as grammatical errors within the dominant monolingual ideology. In reality, the language use by Jennifer’s mother represents “the normal transactions of daily communicative practice of ordinary people” (Lu and Horner 212). These “normal transactions” of “ordinary people” like Jennifer and her mother demonstrate how overemphasizing privileged forms of English in the classroom can serve to uphold colonial standards that stigmatize linguistic variances, especially within the families of multilingual students.

Jennifer’s response to her mother’s English is an internalization of monolingual ideology, which manifests in the English Only movement, rebranded as “English Official.” Through a decolonial lens, English Official demonstrates an enduring colonial project that privileges nativism and excludes non-white multilinguals from institutional power due to linguistic difference that mark multilinguals as “other.” Here in California, monolingual ideology was concretized in the passage of Proposition 63 in 1982, making English the “official” language (Dyste). Opponents of English Official/English Only policy, Bruce Horner and John Trimbur explain that English Official policy “continues to exert a powerful influence on our teaching, our writing programs, and our impact on U.S. culture” (595). Students like Jennifer fear replicating the linguistic patterns of their parents because of the systematic remediation and poor assessment of multilingual students’ writing, supported by state policy authorizing discriminatory practices at the programmatic and classroom levels. Tensions over which language can be used for knowledge production continue to be an issue at the state level, where legislation such as West Virginia’s English official House Bill 3019 passed as recently as 2016 (“U.S. English”). These policies exert colonial power by delegitimizing the linguistic practices of anyone other than monolingual English speakers. With the majority of states having English as the official language, colonial paradigms operate through the establishment of a standard, against which the subjugated population always falls short (Bhaba).

### **Decolonial Implications for Multilingual Practices in Composition Studies**

The literacy narratives by students like Jennifer highlight the enduring influence that colonialism maintains through monolingual ideology, even in a geographical context as diverse as the Bay Area in northern California. The tech industry in Silicon Valley contributes to the colonial influence that flattens differences in the name of innovation and economic growth. The writing by the students in the bilingual fyc course brings to light how isolation and insecurity continue to impact multilingual speakers in composition classrooms. Even as my colleague Juan encouraged students to use both Spanish and Eng-

lish in their writing assignments to demonstrate how their multilingualism provided an additional semiotic resource, Juan noted how the students often self-censored their use of English when writing predominantly in Spanish. By adhering to monolingual practices in this multilingual writing class, students allude to how the prestige of SAE supersedes students' multilingual abilities. When students accommodate to the dominant language, they follow the logic of Western modernity that "is still at work assimilating and consuming" (Ruiz and Sánchez xvi). Students' desires to perform an educated version of English no doubt contributes to the discomfort that students described when speaking Spanish in a writing course. This is particularly poignant in Silicon Valley because diversity is often celebrated publicly as aligned with innovation (Massaro and Najera). The institutional context and its adherence to monolingualism support the belief that universities should be viewed as sites for job preparation exclusively, where learning rules translates into future employment.

My institution's geographical context of Silicon Valley also provides a useful metonymy for the juggernaut tech industry<sup>8</sup> to consider in the analysis of student literacy narratives because of the economic ethos of the area; that is, arguments for colonialism often use economic development as evidence of a positive net benefit. In "The Case for Colonialism," Bruce Gilley claims there is "evidence for significant social, economic, and political gain under colonialism: expanded education, improved public health, the abolition of slavery, widened employment opportunities, improved administration, the creation of basic infrastructure...access to capital, the generation of historical and cultural knowledge, and national identity formation" (4).<sup>9</sup> Gilley's claims that colonialism helped generate cultural knowledge contradicts accounts by native populations, such as the Nahua in what is now Mexico, where colonial forces destroyed literacy artifacts following contact with indigenous populations (León-Portilla). Similarly, Gilley's claims about abolishing slavery ring false given the forced conversion, labor and enslavement of native populations; colonial forces, ultimately, are those that benefit from inequitable economies and employment possibilities.

Within writing studies, decolonial theory continues to gain attention because it reveals and resists enduring colonial legacies that subjugate those marked by linguistic or racial difference. In *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies*, Raúl Sánchez points to Walter D. Mignolo's influence on decolonial theory in writing studies: "Mignolo's decoloniality is of interest to scholars in our field who wish to continue expanding the concept of writing, especially as we continue to consider the rich varieties of Latin American and Latinx written experience past, present, and future" (87). Mignolo's influence in writing studies can be traced back to his work on breaking from colonial knowledge that

standardizes and enforces beliefs about language (“Delinking”), his advocacy for epistemic disobedience (“Epistemic”), and his arguments for recognizing parallel sites of knowledge making (*Darker*). Mignolo’s work is important for writing theory, methodology, and pedagogy seeking to break from colonial narratives about what is authorized as writing for knowledge-making and what knowledge is valued. Decolonial theory enriches the analysis of multilingual student writing because colonial ideology imposes itself through the control of indigenous knowledge and knowledge by people of color. In previous work, I drew on decolonial theory in the examination of texts by predominantly Latinx students in Tucson responding to culturally relevant assignments in the context of anti-ethnic studies legislation that targeted a program scaffolded around indigenous and Latinx ways of knowing. In the context of Arizona HB 2281, which sought to outlaw a program that increased graduation rates and state test scores for a predominantly Latinx student population, I argued for the application of “decolonial theory, writing, and practices [such] as those which work against hegemonic institutions and policies that support colonial assumptions of white supremacy” (Medina 61) because district administrators sought to discredit the work of the ethnic studies program. Through the analysis of student writing in these contexts, we can observe the decolonial potential through the benefits students describe from having experienced a de-centering of colonial knowledge and monolingual practices in the classroom. A decolonial framework provides a critical method for analyzing student texts because experiences with language cannot be separated from the social and cultural ecologies of student knowledge.

### **Decolonizing “Good Writing”**

For decolonial practices to be effective, they need to be iterative and reconstituted by taking local institutional contexts into account. Indigenous scholars such as Driskill incorporate decolonial practices through Native American language usage in the classroom relating to the demographics of a particular geographic location (“Decolonial Skillshares”). By standardizing the use of language other than English, Driskill argues that “Indigenous languages not only carry cultural memory, because language is so central to rhetoric, they also change the way we think about rhetoric and how rhetoric works” (67). Unfortunately, my students’ literacy narratives suggest that writing instruction and assessment continue to overly emphasize grammar and syntax. Decolonial scholars might argue that over-enforcing syntax and grammar is rooted in colonial belief systems dating to at least 1492, when “one writing system was so brutally and quickly imposed upon others” (Baca, “Rethinking” 232).

Multilingual students have been discouraged from using their linguistic resources because of how their language practices have been policed by assessment practices based on colonial standards that emphasize mimicry (cf. Bhabha) through assimilation. In both the students' literacy narratives and class discussions, their perceptions of themselves as writers reveal the negative impact grammar rules have had on them and their writing. In writing studies, the discussion of grammar can be traced back to the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar, where scholars in composition and writing studies fought for the recognition of writing as entailing more than grammar and syntax. However, recent critiques of Vershawn Young's use of African American English (AAE) in the 2019 College Composition and Communication Conference call for papers demonstrate the need for more inclusive understandings of linguistic diversity within the U.S. Responding to Young's language use, such as his assertion that "We gon show up, show out, practice, and theorize performance-rhetoric and performance-composition," contributors on the Writing Program Administration listserv (WPA-L) echoed colonial appeals to standards, arguing that Young's writing should reflect the English taught in first-year classes (Young). These national conversations about the centrality of SAE reflect what students described in their literacy narratives regarding the enforcement of monolingual ideology. Nationally and locally, the reduction of writing to little more than grammar stands in for monolingual ideology because of how English and writing become narrowly defined as homogeneous. Canagarajah points out that these responses demonstrate how "[m]onolingual ideologies have relied on form, grammar, and system for meaning-making, motivating teachers and scholars to either ignore strategies and practices or give them secondary importance" (*Literacy as Translingual Practice* 4). Students' focus on writing for content, not simply for correctness, supports advocacy for translingual practices. These practices can help make writing more relevant and can "push composition from its parochial status as a U.S.-centric, English monolingual enterprise to a discipline directly confronting, investigating, and experimenting with, rather than simply correcting, language practices on the ground" (Horner, NeCamp and Donahue 291). Presenting translingualism in the classroom increases student awareness of the evolving nature of language and disrupts monolingual arguments that negatively impact how multilingual students view the validity of their writing.

Translingual theories and practices contribute to decolonial practice when curricular materials and assignments call attention to monolingual ideology and provoke students' critical reflection on the discriminatory institutional practices that affect how multilingual speakers negotiate language use. This work—beyond making writing about more than error correction—counters deficit-model terminology embedded in phrases like "broken English" and proactively responds to naming the enduring legacies of colonialism and hav-

ing *la facultad* to see beneath the surface of these structures (Anzaldúa 60). At this moment when xenophobia functions as a strategy in mainstream political campaigns<sup>10</sup>, language remains a tangible curricular avenue through which to discuss the unequal distribution of power and the importance of critical communication for civil discourse. Instead of continually fortifying walls that separate and authorize language use, educators have the opportunity to engage students in critical discussion about language difference and multiple literacies and to continue the work of decolonizing the borders of what writing is and how it can be composed. The literacy narratives discussed here reveal the decolonial potential of providing students with an alternative paradigm through which to understand language differences. Translingual practices provide a pedagogical intervention for reframing discussion of linguistic difference within the classroom and for redressing how colonial legacies affect multilingual students' perceptions of themselves as writers.

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### Notes

1. Student names have been changed.
2. This diversity of language is similarly reflected in U.S. Census data cited in a 2014 *Silicon Valley Index* report that the percentage of Spanish speakers is smaller in Silicon Valley compared to California and the rest of the U.S., with Chinese, Vietnamese, other Indo-European, and Tagalog spoken at higher rates by those who are five years and older (*Silicon Valley Index* 13).
3. Juan Velasco and Sharon Merritt worked together to develop the course in 2011. Velasco and I piloted it in its second year when I began at Santa Clara University in 2013.
4. The mechanism for identifying students for this class has been an issue since the inception of the bilingual fyc. Students are often uncertain about why they were placed in the course.
5. At this small liberal arts private institution, a student commuting can be indicative of a working class background, especially in the context of the visibly privileged student population.
6. Anecdotally, the division in cultural and economic capital between students who could have benefited from bilingual education and those students whose parents exposed them to immersion education highlights how outlawing bilingual education disproportionately negatively impacts students of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
7. Juan Velasco earned a PhD in his home country of Spain and an additional PhD in Chicano Studies from UCLA.

8. When most students were asked why they chose to attend this institution, proximity to the Silicon Valley tech industry ranked highest.

9. Since the publication of this article, the journal has withdrawn this essay after it “received serious and credible threats of personal violence,” according to the Taylor & Francis webpage.

10. The xenophobia evidenced in Donald Trump’s remarks about Mexico as a country sending drug dealers and rapists to the U.S. is echoed by lesser-known political candidates such as Mike Pape (see Pape’s campaign ad on YouTube).

## Appendix

First Year Writing |

Session Year | **Literacy Narrative**

A literacy narrative tells the story of a particular incident or a series of vignettes that contributed to the awareness of becoming literate. It is a meaningful narrative constructed with scenes, events, dialogue and detail that communicate experiences.



During this unit, we’re engaging with writers whose writing addresses issues related to language, a writer’s identity, and myths of a singular English. Some of these issues are described by Gloria Anzaldúa as literacy moments, and we will think of literacy “as a set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it” and “apply this knowledge for a specific purpose in specific contexts of use” (Scribner and Cole 236). Because the theme of this class is education and identity, this writing assignment will ask you to reflect on aspects of literacy as they relate to your identity and your use of knowledge about language in specific situations.

**Assignment:** Write a literacy narrative that draws on your experiences with reading and writing, identifying how these experiences have contributed to how you see yourself negotiating the different ways that people think about language. For example, you might consider specific instances when you made conscious decisions about language that either achieved a desired outcome or perhaps when your choice of language led to an unexpected response from someone who thought differently about language than you. You will incorpo-

rate quotes from the course readings that support, refute or complicate your point and experience with language and literacy.

**Required Texts:** Paul Kei Matsuda, “Myth of Monolingualism” and Bruce Horner et al., “Toward a Translingual Approach”

**Audience:** For this assignment, you will be writing for an academic discourse community in a non-fictional style of writing that uses Standard Academic English as well as non-English to demonstrate your claim about language.

Should Include:

- A central claim/thesis about yourself as a reader/writer and how it reveals an aspect of your educated identity
- Clear scenes with description and explanation of significance of this scene
- Evidence in the form of quotes from Matsuda or Horner et al.
- Analytical explanation about how and why this experience impacted your identity as a reader, writer and educated person
- Paragraphs organized by content rather than focused on length

Remember that you are working to:

- Demonstrate how experiences from your life contributed to how you are critically aware of language
- Demonstrate critical thinking, which includes the whole process of selecting complex enough claims, appropriate evidence (and the appropriate amount of analysis)
- Demonstrate insights about experiences through analytical explanations
- Demonstrate the strategic use of details to communicate the tone and emotion of the experience

**Format:** MLA format, 12 pt font, Times New Roman, double spaced, 1-inch margins, page numbers (see MLA example on OWL Purdue on d2l), 3-4 pages, works cited page

*Grading Rubric Criteria*

**Analysis:** How effectively are experiences explained and their impact on literacy/education communicated?

**Clarity:** Did the scenes/experiences provide details, description or dialogue that communicated the feeling of the experience?

**Organization:** Did the sequence of events or the choice of included events contribute to an effective communication of experiences with education?

**Academic Convention and Style:** Did the style match the content of the scenes and analysis? Did the quotes effectively contribute to analysis of the experiences?

**Process:** Did you engage in the drafting activities with your group? Work across drafts to make the best summary possible?

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