

Thinking Through Difference and Facts of Nonusage: A Dialogue Between Comparative Rhetoric and Translingualism

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Abstract: Difference or facts of nonusage present a challenge to teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric in WAC/WID and beyond. How can they appropriately engage different language and rhetorical practices in the classroom and relations of power asymmetry in discursive engagements? How can they effectively address issues of disciplinarity and challenge dominant paradigms and traditions in response to the needs and aspirations of linguistically and culturally diverse students? This article addresses these and other related questions by putting comparative rhetoric in dialogue with translingualism. Focusing on their objects of study and methods of inquiry, the article seeks to illustrate how comparative rhetoric and translingualism give voice and space to language and rhetorical practices that have been misrepresented, underrepresented, or not represented at all and how they together shed a new light on the imperative to teach, study, and speak with and for different rhetorical traditions and different language practices.

Lately the field of WAC/WID, as well as the broader field of rhetoric and composition, has been grappling with issues related to linguistic and rhetorical diversity and to how to teach and speak with and for different language and rhetorical practices without either denying their discursive interconnectivities or unnecessarily conflating their discipline-specific characteristics (e.g., Zawacki and Cox, 2014). Several key questions have since become the focus of attention. For example, how can the field address linguistic and rhetorical differences in ways that do not rely on Euro-American-centric ideology for adjudication or affirmation? What new terms of engagement should/can be developed to move beyond such ideology and to recognize and appreciate the significance of occasions and practices of language use in meaning-making and in identify formation? How can we as teachers of writing and rhetoric effectively challenge relations of power asymmetry in discursive engagements and respond to different languages and rhetorics in the classroom? What should we exactly do when confronted with difference in language and rhetorical practices? Should we sweep them under the rug by appealing to the purported utility and value of the Western Rhetorical Tradition or Standard English in the name of a generic “academic writing?” The flip side of this approach focuses on the forms difference takes and using the Western Rhetorical Tradition or Standard English to pit them against one another. Or should we direct our attention to such questions as: “What might this difference do? How might it function expressively, rhetorically, and communicatively? For whom, under what conditions, and how” (Horner et al., 2011, pp. 303-304)?

These and other related questions have so far energized the WAC/WID specifically as well as the broader field of rhetoric and composition, and generated a growing number of compelling responses to date. Comparative rhetoric and translingualism are two cases which illustrate the stakes for WAC/WID. Each has offered us a way forward in response to these questions, and each has further illustrated the importance of studying discursive practices on their own terms to the global making of languages and

Across the Disciplines

A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2018.15.3.15>

wac.colostate.edu/atd

ISSN 554-8244

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rhetorics. In what follows, I develop a dialogue between comparative rhetoric and translingualism to bring them into simultaneous view and to address issues of disciplinarity and the ways in which dominant paradigms or traditions are being challenged and contested.¹ My primary aim is to describe their shared stance on the objects of study and methods of inquiry and to illustrate their shared commitment to giving voice and space to those rhetorical traditions or language practices that have been misrepresented, underrepresented, or not represented at all. In the process, I want to highlight the major contributions each has made to ongoing conversations on these important issues and to show that they together can shed a further light on the imperative to teach, study, and speak with different rhetorical traditions, different language practices. I begin with comparative rhetoric.

Comparative Rhetoric: From Facts of Essence to Facts of Nonusage

Comparative rhetoric is both a practice and a methodology. As a practice, it studies discourses and composing traditions across time and space with a singular focus on historicity, multiplicity, and incongruity. Specifically, it aims to engage discourses and traditions that have been marginalized, underrepresented, or altogether forgotten and to intervene in and transform the relationship between dominant rhetorical paradigms, perspectives, and practices, on the one hand, and those rhetorical traditions and practices that have yet to be fully recognized or yet to become importantly present,² on the other. This kind of focus makes it possible for comparative rhetoricians not only to apply a comparative stance to all rhetorics but also to develop a more nuanced understanding or thick description of different rhetorics and their histories and traditions. In this sense, comparative rhetoric can also speak to the concerns in Writing across the Curriculum/Writing in the Discipline (WAC/WID) about disciplinary differences in writing. That is, its engagement with the other aims not to codify or abstract differences but to illuminate their interrelatedness or situated occasions of use that spawn those instances of interrelatedness or resonance.

As a methodology, comparative rhetoric champions a way of meaning-making that is predicated on the language of presence-and-absence. By that I mean a meta-understanding that rhetorical practices within any given context are never complete and their meanings are always both present and absent. That is, their meanings are present because they are made possible and real by localized occasions of production, consumption, and circulation, and by speakers' and writers' own discourse communities. At the same time, they are absent, too, because there always is an excess of meaning in every communicative act, and there always are other meanings that fail to materialize or to become acceptable. Comparative rhetoric thus foregrounds the need to learn to recognize and value, rather than flatten or diminish, rhetorical practices' singularity, multiplicity, and fluidity. Corollary to this language of presence-and-absence is a profound respect for local histories and traditions as coevals with the dominant or the already-recognized, and for the development of terms of interdependence and interconnectivity to constitute and regulate representation of all discursive activities. Once again, the language of presence-and-absence as a meta-understanding can help to address concerns in WAC/WID about disciplinary differences in writing as it recognizes discursive differences (meanings both present and absent) and develops heuristics to engage them and to foreground their singularity (in the discipline) and fluidity (across disciplines).

Recent advances made by comparative rhetoric are centered on speaking with and for non-Euro-American rhetorics on their own terms; rethinking the field of rhetoric and composition in relation to these other rhetorics and composing practices; recognizing and further interrogating the influence of one's own cultural and linguistic make-up on speaking with and for the other; and valuing the importance of the historical and cultural contexts to rhetorical performances at all levels. Underpinning these advances is a commitment to moving beyond claiming proper or exclusive objects of study for comparative rhetoric and to promoting the development of "plural local terms and hybrid analytical frameworks" (Wang, 2015, p. 249) and methodologies that can deftly move between local and global or

emic and etic. To draw on Edward Schiappa (2003), such a commitment moves us away from “facts of essence” toward “facts of usage.”

According to Schiappa, inquiries into definitions typically seek two kinds of facts: facts of essence and facts of usage. By facts of essence, Schiappa means the definitional facts sought through the question, “What is X?” These are facts that describe the essence or the true nature of X and constitute “real” definitions (p. 6). By facts of usage, Schiappa refers to the definitional facts sought through the question, “How is X used?” These are facts that describe how language users use X in specific situations or environments. For Schiappa, the “natural attitude” toward definitions, which he aims to denaturalize, blurs the distinction between these two types of definitional facts. He advocates a pragmatic approach that treats facts of usage as “value (ought) propositions” distinct from “fact (is) propositions.” He argues that definitions are “rhetorically induced” and they embody or enact persuasive processes (pp. 9-10).

For comparative rhetoric, past efforts that relied on Greco-Roman or Euro-American rhetorical norms to represent the marginalized or the under-represented have either turned the latter into an inferior variation of the former or converted the latter into the former’s own other (Saussy, 2001, p. 12). Behind these efforts or any other efforts that aim to test the efficacies and universalities of Western conceptions of rhetoric against rhetorical practices in other parts of the world looms large this perennial yearning for rhetoric’s facts of essence—its own “origin” story and its own proper and essential objects of study (Kennedy, 1998, p. 217). These facts of essence turn out to be no more than mirror images of Greco-Roman and Euro-American rhetorical norms. Abstracted or so far removed from situated contexts and distributed agencies, they in turn become reified codes or another pile of our “useless lumber blocking our highways of thought” (John Dewey, as cited in Hall & Ames, 1995, p. xx).

The allure of facts of essence can also serve as a cautionary tale for WAC/WID. Namely, “tensions” or “factual” differences between disciplines should not be turned into facts of essence, into that which refuses to recognize what is actually transpiring on the ground or actual facts that are blurring or remapping the boundaries between disciplines. In other words, such “tensions” or “factual” differences between disciplines may very well be mirror images of one’s own disciplinary dispositions or attachments. To better appreciate the emergent and contingent nature of all disciplinary practices, it is much more appropriate to pivot toward treating these “tensions,” these “factual differences” as facts of usage mobilized by shifting and dynamic contexts of situation and jointly constituted by language users at local levels.

To speak with and for the marginalized or the under-recognized responsibly, comparative rhetoricians have parted ways with rhetoric’s facts of essence and embraced facts of usage. With facts of usage as their primary objects of study, they investigate how different rhetorical practices have been used or experienced in their own temporal-spatial contexts within and across traditions, and they develop new methods of analysis for transforming traditional narratives of rhetoric in general and for the making of global rhetoric in particular (Baca, 2008; Baca & Villanueva, 2010; Kells, Balester, & Villanueva, 2004; Lipson & Binkley, 2004, 2009; Lloyd, 2011; Mao, 2007, 2013; Powell, 2004, 2008; Romano, 2010; Stromberg, 2006; Sun-Gi, 2010; Wang, 2012, 2013).

The central question then to be asked is neither “What is rhetoric in/for other cultures?” nor “What are the dominant rhetorical traditions and who are the prominent participants in/for other cultures?” Rather, the central question becomes “What do these other cultures do in/with rhetoric and how do they do it?” As comparative rhetoricians cross discursive borders to develop answers and to enrich understanding of rhetorical practices across language, culture, and time, they outright reject what Robert Soloman dubs the “transcendental pretense” (cited in Hall & Ames, 1995, p. xiv), a pernicious form of Western ethnocentrism that treats its own (provincial) principles or precepts as constituting universal norms or standards and the rest as in want of “normalization” or “standardization.” They further investigate, for example, the questions other cultures and communities are centrally concerned with that have led to the

answers that they are; the reasons for both why they do what they do and why they do not when they do not; and the cultural matrixes under which rhetorical knowledge or what passes for it is produced, circulated, and/or reconstituted.³ Equally important, as comparative rhetoricians engage with facts of usage, they also perform reflective encounters by making every effort to close the gap between what they think they know about and how they can speak with the other and what has to happen in order for them to begin to know about and speak with the other, and by asking questions such as “How do other rhetorical practices challenge their own (parochial) conceptions of rhetoric?” and “How does history bear on the present, and vice versa?”⁴

Reflective encounters as a rhetoric trope could also be applied to answer the challenges confronting WAC/WID. For starters, how can instructors in writing-intensive courses engage linguistically diverse students in ways that appropriately recognize and further utilize the latter’s cultural and rhetorical background? And how can those working in WAC/WID interact with writing programs that are situated in different cultures and communities in ways that reject the “transcendental pretense” and move to make the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar? Similarly, in what ways can they use self-reflexivity to acknowledge and address the gap between what they think they know about and how they can speak with these students or these programs, on the one hand, and what actually has to happen in order for them to begin to know about and speak with them, on the other? In addition, reflective encounters can also emerge when WAC/WID researchers situate linguistically diverse students’ discursive behaviors or their “errors” in their own discursive environments and assess their effectiveness not in terms of some (decontextualized) “academic writing” but in terms of their own appropriateness conditions, of how their discursive choices affect their voices, their identities, their agencies.

However, there are more facts, as it were, to be recalled and recovered. That is, meanings and usages can never be complete nor remain constant, and they are always in the process of being completed or realized. They have to be repeatedly negotiated, reconstituted, circulated, and experienced. In the process, other meanings and usages become marginalized, silenced, delegitimated, or forgotten. These meanings and usages can be called “facts of nonusage.” Facts of nonusage can be sought by asking, for example, what are these other cultures and communities not doing, and why? Could what they are doing be examples of the merely present rather than the importantly present? Could what they are not doing be attributed to our not seeing or not hearing due to the blind spots we have developed or “the useless lumber” we have accumulated?

For comparative rhetoricians, to recover or recall facts of nonusage is to address instances of erasure or elision and to resurrect rhetorical knowledge that has been buried, disqualified, or ruled out of order. Answers to these questions will go a long way toward re-membling, re-covering, and re-contextualizing those rhetorical practices and their effects/affects that have been concealed, excluded, and/or forgotten. Out of these answers will also emerge reflective encounters that further interrogate one’s own “useless lumber” and help develop a creative and more capacious understanding of different rhetorical traditions.

It must be stated that reclaiming facts of nonusage should not be taken to mean that we can now flip the hierarchy so that yesterday’s facts of nonusage become today’s facts of usage, or vice versa. For such a reversal of fortune, however well-intentioned or amply justified, still preserves the underlying binary and thus fails to acknowledge and harness their mutual entailment. Rather, what should be pursued is to investigate the conditions under which both facts of nonusage and facts of usage become what they are and to collapse the binary that pits one (the undesirable or unacceptable) against the other (the desirable or acceptable). Further, if facts of nonusage and facts of usage are both historically emergent and historically contingent, facts of nonusage should not be relegated into the role of an antithesis or the mere shady side of facts of usage. As a matter of fact, facts of nonusage conceal or embody conditions and relations that led to their own exile and to the sanctioning of facts of usage. In short, facts of nonusage and facts of usage are mutually entailing of each other, and they represent the making of total rhetorical reality.

By rejecting facts of essence, and by turning to both facts of usage and facts of nonusage, comparative rhetoric has redefined the objects of study, challenging writing and rhetoric scholars to free themselves from being fixated on claiming for rhetoric subject matters that are finite and free of social, cultural, and linguistic contingencies, contradictions, or conflicts. Moreover, it has provided a different method of inquiry through reflective encounters, through constantly interrogating one's own "useless lumber" and carefully cultivating a meaning-making disposition that is predicated on dialogism, thick description, and the language of presence-and-absence. Such a disposition becomes central to breaking through the importantly present, to contesting and transforming the underlying conditions and relations that formed and sustained the divide between facts of nonusage and facts of usage, and to constructing difference not as exception to the norm but as the necessary condition to the making of global rhetorics.

Translingualism: Toward a New Understanding of Difference

The rise of comparative rhetoric coincides not only with the increasingly blurred, shifting, or disappearing boundaries between, for example, indigenous and exogenous, past and present, and local and global, but also with the rise of translingualism, with the realization that languages are local practices and that they are products of the social, cultural, and political activities in which people engage (Pennycook, 2010). Not surprisingly, comparative rhetoric's critical stance on facts of essence and its dialectical tacking between facts of usage and facts of nonusage share an unmistakable affinity with translingualism—with its rejection of monolingualist ideology, its redefinition of language, and its reconceptualization of difference. As a countermodel to monolingualism, translingualism has greatly advanced our understanding of the nature and function of language and the process of meaning-making and becoming.

For example, translingualism represents a direct response to monolingualism.⁵ Monolingualism or monolinguist ideology sees languages as "stable, internally uniform, and discrete entities" (Horner, 2016, p. 57). This view of languages turns language practices into no more than reproductions of the language and robs them of their material and social characteristics or their historicity, specificity, and temporality. Corollary to this view of language is monolingualism's characterization of Standard English, which stands as "the assumed stable, discrete norm that itself neither requires nor merits investigation" (Horner, 2016, p. 58). Standard English thus becomes the norm against which all individual language practices must be measured and to which students and teachers alike must aspire in their language practices.

On the one hand, by ascribing to languages such essentialist attributes as stability, uniformity and atemporality, monolingualism denies languages their singular, multiple, fluid characteristics. In so doing, it thus appeals to facts of essence, to questions such as "What is language?" and "What are language practices?" as opposed to "How is language used" and "How are language practices being produced, and under what conditions?" With facts of essence being the objects of study, monolingualism turns a blind eye to the fact that "languages are mobile, heterogeneous, and hybrid resources that combine with other semiotic resources to make meaning in context" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 23) and that language productions are constituted temporal-spatially, materially, and relationally. In short, monolingualism chooses essence over practice, certitude over contingency, and being over becoming. It perpetuates binary logic and reinforces the myth that language is a self-contained system of symbols sustained by an essentialist set of attributes and impervious to production, negotiation, and transformation in the meaning-making process.

On the other hand, for translingualism, languages are historically emergent and historically contingent, and language practices take myriad forms and invoke multiple contexts. What is central to the understanding of how language works is not about constructing language's (imagined) essentialist attributes or making facts of essence the objects of study, but about representing how it is being socially and culturally produced and circulated at a given moment in time (Pennycook, 2010, p. 28). Joining hands

with comparative rhetoric, translanguaging also makes an unmistakable pivot for facts of usage, for facts that are linked to language participants, histories, cultures, places/environments, ideologies, and relationships. Therefore, instead of asking “What is language?” translanguaging is asking “What does language do, and how does it do it?” Central to translanguaging are how language practices are being enacted, what meanings are being produced, and for whom and why, and how they actually shape and inhabit the world around language users here and now.

Questions like these evidently do not aim to describe language practices in any finite way, nor do they seek to catalog facts or principles about them. Rather, they intend to generate answers aimed to capture the dynamics and affordances of language practices, and to cultivate “an orientation to language and language relations rather than a set of practices or a marker of some language users as opposed to others” (Horner, 2016, p. 73). The importance of cultivating this orientation cannot be emphasized enough. For it calls for an openness to embracing new objects of study and new forms of inquiry, one that in turn helps us as teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric reassess our received knowledge about language and close the gap between what we know and experience and what it takes to represent what we know and experience, and why (also see Horner, 2016, pp. 71-73).

More importantly, this new orientation to language and language relations brings to the forefront an implicit but intractable tension between the unrelenting processual nature of language practices and the equally unrelenting need to use language to represent such practices in ways—such as separation, isolation, or fragmentation—that would arrest or detract from this very process of change and becoming. Meanwhile, such an orientation bears a strong family resemblance to the meaning-making disposition advocated by comparative rhetoric, and more specifically, to the language of presence-and-absence or the meta-understanding that there always is a surplus of meaning in every communicative act language users initiate or encounter.

Translanguaging’s openness to new objects of study and new forms of inquiry is most clearly evidenced in its reconceptualization of difference. That is, for translanguaging, difference is “the norm of language practice rather than an exception to the norm” (Horner, 2016, p. 69). It is being seen not “as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 303). With difference being the norm rather than exception, we can move away from measuring this or that difference against Standard English or Standard Language X, either of which, truth be told, is a variation on the “transcendental pretense.” We can ask what forms this or that difference takes, what functions it performs, what discursive conditions it reflects and responds to, and what material consequences it renders. We can focus on both the conditions that have produced this or that difference and the conditions that have led to this or that difference’s own “exile.”

Just as comparative rhetoric turns to facts of nonusage to recover rhetorical practices that have been under-represented, under-recognized, or dismissed altogether as anything but rhetoric (Mao and Wang, 2015, p. 240), so translanguaging draws on difference to redefine language and language practices and to challenge the tyranny of unchanging, universal standards or norms. And just as facts of nonusage entail facts of usage and call on us to respect their interdependence and the yin and yang of rhetorical reality,⁶ so difference as the norm of all language practices challenges us to cultivate a sensitivity toward, and develop a productive approach to, differences within and across languages and cultures. They together make us more able to engage different rhetorics and languages and more grounded in communities of practices that we travel to and speak with, be our particular objects of engagement non-Euro-American rhetorical practices or first-year student compositions.

In making difference the norm or basis for understanding language practices, translanguaging not only rejects the monolingual paradigm but also shifts the grounds for knowing and speaking with the particular, with the other. In a world structured in dominance and hierarchy, our engagements with the

particular, with the other, can very well be shaped and influenced by values and standards that are dominant and Euro-centric. Now, with difference being the basis for knowing, we as teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric can begin to learn to recognize and, better still, put to work, those values and standards that are merely present or not present at all; we can investigate the ongoing history and the interpenetration of various language practices and their susceptibility to change and internal variations; and we can call for “more, not less, conscious and critical attention to how writers deploy diction, syntax, and style, as well as form, register, and media” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 304).

With difference being the norm or basis for knowing, the dominant means of discourse and familiar models of representation can now be called into question, and other ways of knowing and doing can be introduced and promoted. Similarly, the binary between the dominant and the dominated, between the familiar and the unfamiliar, or between the acceptable and the unacceptable can also be contested through the lens of difference as the very condition of existence for all discursive practices. Once again, translingualism’s reconceptualization of difference resonates with comparative rhetoric’s turn to facts of nonusage. Namely, by recuperating facts of nonusage, and by making them the basis for comparison, comparative rhetoric makes it an imperative to reject binaries or terms of opposition for description or for explanation and to develop what Bo Wang calls a “geopolitical approach” that not only “links cultural specificities with larger geopolitical forces and networks” but also “brings into view those concepts and categories under construction across languages, cultures, and locations” (Wang, 2013, pp. 233-234).

There is more. Translingualism or what it espouses also brings to the fore this oft-unstated, if not ignored, tension between the processual, as well as messy, nature of language practices, on the one hand, and the ongoing need to use language to represent such practices and to discipline them into a coherent, predictable order, on the other. The same tension has also been by and large left unstated, if not ignored, when claims are being made in WID about the need to advocate respect for and observance of the standard language and its rhetorical practices within a particular discipline. It is one thing to make such claims, but it is altogether another to develop an argument for them without acknowledging this underlying tension, without calling attention to the constructed nature of the standard or the emergent and contingent characteristics of rhetorical practices within any discipline.

By reconceptualizing difference as the norm for all language practices, translingualism respects the fluid and porous boundaries between languages and between language practices. What this respect calls for is an understanding that is based on, and accountable to, their own historicities, specificities, and incongruities, rather than some external norms or standards sanctioned by dominant language ideologies and their representations. Under this kind of understanding, language practices become activities that are “socially and culturally produced and regulated” and that “bridge the gap between individual behaviour and social and cultural structure” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 28).

Turning to comparative rhetoric again. The focus on facts of nonusage aims to shine a bright light on the importance of speaking with the other, of understanding what questions they are asking, what answers they are seeking, and what discursive conditions they are addressing. Otherwise stated, the underrepresented, the marginalized, or the altogether forgotten must be included to participate in and contribute to this process of recovering, representing, and recontextualizing their rhetorical practices. Moreover, this co-constitutive process, often unfolding in an uneven relation of power asymmetry, must always be understood as open-ended and incomplete, a process in which meaning continuously manifests itself in both its own presences and its own absences.

With translingualism’s focus on difference and on language relations, it is perhaps instructive to think of language practices as events in this context. As events, they are being enacted through distributed agency (over individual agency) and fruitful correlations (over strict causation), and they are being shaped by sociopolitical matrixes, situated interpretive frameworks, and a complex web of power relations. And as events, they reject a linear temporality and Euro-centric teleology characterized by “a proper beginning,

middle, and end—all of which follow, chronologically, in a logic of time” (Ballif, 2014, p. 243). Seeing language practices as events promotes a relational or interdependent focus. As teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric, we stop focusing on how language practices are in themselves, and we begin to ask how they stand in relation to other language practices at particular times, and how they stand in relation to still other language practices that have either transpired or would have or could have transpired. In the process, both facts of usage and facts of nonusage are being rolled into one. Further, because communicative contexts and conditions are ever-changing, these relations are ever-changing, too, and they cannot help but mean *more* or *less* or *different* than what they are.

Ultimately, what translingualism has brought us is an awareness and a perspective. That is, it has made us aware that there will always be a tension and a gap unfolding simultaneously—also known as the language of presence-and-absence—between the dynamic nature of language practices and the terms or paradigms available to us, be they (reconceptualized) difference, or facts of nonusage, or events, to represent them. Further, it has given us a perspective, one that sees language as “the always-emerging outcomes of those practices rather than the stable realm within which practices occur” (Horner, 2016, p. 74) and that regards meaning as both the property and outcome of a co-constitutive, intensely social process marked by approximation, contestation, and contradiction. They together have brought us, as a result, a step closer to answering the questions I raised at the beginning of this essay.

From Binary to Dialogism: Some Concluding Remarks

In *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (1995), Hall and Ames characterize the challenges facing comparative scholars in representing China, or any other culture or language for that matter, in terms of the following binary:

Some scholars are persuaded that the conversation is richest where there is the greatest degree of commensurability; others believe that behind the more obvious and uninteresting psychological and other apparently acultural similarities—one head, two ears, and so on—there may be profound differences that derive from culture-specific ways of thinking and living. Some believe that failing to regard the commonality as most important is to deny the Chinese their humanity; others believe that to assert an essential commonality is to hobble the inquiry and, in so doing, to deny the Chinese their uniqueness. (p. 123)

Using their characterization as a point of departure, I want to suggest that comparative rhetoric and translingualism constitute a viable alternative in the representation of the other. By turning to meanings that have been “exiled” or made “illegitimate,” comparative rhetoric promotes a meaning-making process that is constituted by the language of presence-and-absence. By cultivating an orientation toward openness for difference, translingualism sees every language practice to be marked by fluidity, multiplicity, and continuity in a sea of language practices. Therefore, uniqueness and commensurability do not have to be placed in direct opposition to each other as both humanity and individuality can emerge from each meaning-making process or out of each language practice. To the extent that engaging comparative rhetoric and translingualism together can help us teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric transcend this binary and reconstitute the basis for knowing and for comparison, a dialogue between them cannot be happening soon enough. Developing such a dialogue advances comparative rhetoric and translingualism in general and the ongoing conversation on issues related to linguistic and rhetorical diversity in particular. Consequently, we can begin to view difference and facts of nonusage through the lens of interdependence and interconnectivity so that we can challenge and complicate the Western Rhetorical Tradition or Standard English in terms or ways that are no longer anchored in or beholden to the “transcendental pretense.” Better still, through situated questions on the terms of the other or language participants, and through a dialogic engagement with their practices of all forms, we can begin

to demonstrate more effectively that difference and facts of nonusage are not only products of our rhetorically motivated activities but also the very condition of our living, being, and knowing in the twenty-first century.

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Notes

1. In her recent PMLA essay (2014), Patricia Bizzell asked, “How should we deal with different languages in the classroom?” “How can we understand the diverse rhetorical resources of our students, especially those from non-Western cultures?” “How should we use the electronic resources being developed in the digital humanities to expand our understanding of students’ cultural and historical backgrounds?” (p. 443). She brought together comparative rhetoric and translanguaging, as well as rhetoric-related digital humanities, in her attempt to review how each responded to these questions. What I am doing here is, in a way, a continuation of this effort.
2. By “importantly present,” I am drawing on David Hall and Roger Ames’s work (1995). To determine whether a concept, theory, or doctrine plays a significant role in a culture, we must ask: Is it importantly present—that is, “present in such a way that it significantly qualifies, defines, or otherwise shapes the culture?” (p. xv).
3. Here in posing these questions, I am channeling G.E.R. Lloyd’s comparative work (1996), where he develops a methodology that examines not the results of ancient Greek and Chinese science but the conditions that helped make certain questions become the focus of attention for ancient Greeks and Chinese and certain answers the knowledge or accepted principles of their times (pp. 15-16, p. 47, pp. 118-119).
4. See Mao (2003) for more on the importance and complexity of enacting reflective encounters for advancing comparative rhetorical work.
5. It is perhaps worth noting that while multilingualism also opposes monolingualism, it fails to acknowledge the dynamic interactions between languages and language communities, or between facts of usage and facts of nonusage. Similarly, while contrastive rhetoric rightly recognizes that language and writing are products of culture (Connor, 1996), it fails to come to terms with the fact that rhetorical paradigms or traditions within a particular culture are never constant and they are historically emergent and historically contingent.
6. I pair facts of nonusage and facts of usage with yin and yang, two major concepts in Daoism and in the history of Chinese science, philosophy, and rhetoric, to accentuate their interdependence and interpenetration.

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Complete APA Citation

Mao, LuMing. (2018, November 3). Thinking through difference and facts of nonusage: A dialogue between comparative rhetoric and translingualism. [Special issue on transdisciplinary and translingual challenges for WAC/WID.] *Across the Disciplines*, 15(3), 104-113. Retrieved from http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/trans_wac/mao2018.pdf