

## CHAPTER 17

# RECONSTRUCTING TEACHER ROLES THROUGH A TRANSNATIONAL LENS: LEARNING WITH/IN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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*Drawing on US theories and practices to rethink writing instruction in English at the richly multilingual American University of Beirut (AUB) challenged our assumptions about teaching writing both in Lebanon and in the US. We use this experience to reconsider how existing work in composition, WAC/WID, and L2/multilingual/translingual scholarship should shape the education of students and faculty in each of our universities; how we need to work reciprocally in language-rich sites such as AUB to further develop translingual pedagogies; and how we must rethink objectives and designs of all of our WAC/writing center/writing programs.*

Anchored in our own observations and beliefs about teaching English in multicultural settings and buttressed by the work of Canagarajah (2006), Horner et al. (2011), Pederson (2010), and others, this chapter charts Carol and Amy's process for rethinking writing instruction in English at the American

University of Beirut (AUB), both for students and for faculty. However, the process undertaken in the context of Lebanon demonstrates how those of us in other countries, particularly in Anglophone-based systems, might benefit from stretching our own assumptions about writing and writing instruction. This initial work in turn had immediate implications for Joan's ongoing research questions, several of which she and Carol had shared. Thus we began our collaborative work on this project, which has challenged all three of us to think differently about how we teach—and might better teach—writing courses in Lebanon, in the US, and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

As Joan and Carol collaborated on their current projects of studying knowledge construction across borders and the role of literacy brokers/gatekeepers in fostering or barring mutual collaboration, links became clear between their work and how writing was being conceptualized with students and faculty at AUB. Likewise, the rich experiences Amy and Carol used to recreate their WAC courses clearly exemplified how Joan and Carol encouraged writing center practices to shift. When Lillis and Curry (2010) published their work on how Anglo-centric expectations had infused international publication and academic performance expectations, all three of us saw the parallel expectations operating in writing programs and writing centers whose supporting theories are built on similar monolingual assumptions. Just as WAC, genre and cultural historic activity theories alerted compositionists to their singular vision of writing, causing a major shift in writing instruction at US universities from the 70s on, so too we saw how the use of multilingual, transnational perspectives must shift—indeed is already shifting—writing within disciplines. In our individual and collaborative work within multilingual settings, we had to consider not only how existing work in composition, WAC/WID, and L2/multilingual/translingual scholarship should shape the education of students and faculty in our own universities, but also how we need to work reciprocally in language rich sites such as AUB to further develop translingual approaches to language difference, to add to our understanding of pedagogies for multilingual writers, and to rethink objectives and designs of all of our WAC/writing programs.

## **LANGUAGES IN LEBANON AND AT AUB**

Due to its complex history, geographical location at the intersection of three continents, and travel-prone population, Lebanon has long been a deeply multicultural and multilingual society. Today, the number of Lebanese citizens who live in a very wide range of locations abroad is reputed to be three times larger than the number of those who live within the boundaries of this small

country; dual citizenships are quite common. Arabic is the official language of Lebanon, but family, social, and work connections often must often be maintained across geographic and linguistic boundaries, and Lebanese children may learn more than one language at a very early age. The two most prevalent non-Arabic languages are French and English—French as a legacy of the French mandate that ended in 1943, and English because of its global currency in business and scholarship. Armenian also figures as a strong minority language in the national language landscape, and it is used primarily within the Armenian community, which faithfully preserves the language at home and in school. While English is commonly heard in the capital city, Beirut, it is not spoken everywhere, and often it is used only in very specific places, in very specific ways. Only recently have scholars begun to research attitudes towards these various languages in Lebanon, and to observe how these languages interact and are used for different purposes (Diab, 2006; Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999, 2002).

Language policy in Lebanon reinforces the propensity towards multilingualism by structuring it into the school curriculum. Almost all children are required to learn Arabic, French, and English, although programs vary according to the weight accorded to each of these languages. Any one of the three can be the principal language of instruction, while the other two are relegated to ongoing foreign language courses. Similarly, in the many universities in Lebanon, instruction may take place in English, French, or Arabic. Furthermore, pedagogical approaches tend to gravitate, loosely speaking, towards ways of teaching that may be associated with the language of instruction: for example, a French-educated student not only learns in French, but also tends to write in genres and use textual conventions that are more commonly found in French schools. (For a description of a similarly linguistically rich writing and teaching environment in a graduate program at a Swedish-medium institution, see Lavelle & Shima [this volume].)

One additional twist, which is very relevant to writing instruction, is the fact that Arabic is a diglossic language. The formal written and spoken forms of Arabic that students learn in school are quite different from the spoken dialects that they learn at home in their families. Formal Arabic, which is shared across all Arabic speaking cultures, has a rich literary and linguistic tradition and high prestige; spoken Arabic dialects, however, vary considerably from one country to the next, and tend to be a much more oral phenomenon. The diglossic character of Arabic means that for Lebanese students, all writing may be experienced as somehow already “foreign,” even in Arabic. Because of new media, this phenomenon has changed recently: Lebanese Arabic is written using Latin characters and numerals (for text messaging) or Arabic characters, commonly seen, for example, on Facebook, in billboards, or in graffiti.

## LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AT AUB

The impetus for reviewing writing instruction at the American University of Beirut (AUB) has long been underway, first as part of the long rebuilding process that was undertaken after the fighting in the 1975-1990 civil war in Lebanon had stopped, and, later, in response to the urgings of accreditation reports (US accreditation for the university was awarded in 2004 by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools). Since its inception in 1866, the university has had a highly sensitive relationship to universities in the United States. Its institutional documents anchor it in American liberal arts models of education, and it is bound to address the requirements and concerns of accrediting bodies situated in the United States; at the same time a commitment to serving local needs and communities has been embedded in the institution's purpose from the outset. Thus, the institution has continually negotiated competing and overlapping objectives, values, cultures, and practices as it interprets structures and approaches often generated in the US and performs them in the context of Lebanon and the Middle East-North Africa region.

Unlike the US context, where the assumption of a monolingual English language culture must be countered with strong arguments, in Lebanon, the multilingual character of society is abundantly evident. Teachers at AUB expect students to have complex language identifications and a personal history with two or more written languages, in addition to one or more spoken Arabic dialects. In fact, it is very rare to encounter a student who speaks and writes only in English. The multilingual reality is reflected to some extent in the curriculum: To satisfy general education requirements, students are required to take communication skills courses both in Arabic and in English. (A "foreign" language is not required.) In all courses at AUB, however, except for Arabic and the few foreign language electives, English is the medium of instruction, a status it acquired in 1882. Until then, the primary language of instruction had been Arabic. In the last annual report of his long career, college founder and president Daniel Bliss (1902) reflected on the decision to shift to English, citing three important motivating factors: a desire among students to learn English; the difficulty of enrolling non-Arabic speaking students from other parts of the region, such as Persian or Turkish students; and a lack of Arabic textbooks in technical fields, such as chemistry or modern medicine—a lack that professors of the college had sought to remedy by writing and publishing Arabic textbooks themselves, but which they found too overwhelming to address successfully. According to Jeha (2004), when a debate over Darwinism led to the abrupt departure of several medical school faculty members in 1882, new professors

could not be found who were fluent enough to lecture on technical subjects in Arabic. As Jeha explains, the move to hire English-lecturing faculty—driven by practical necessity—sealed the shift to English as the principle language of instruction; however, the historical complexity of the language policy in the university has meant that debates around this issue have always been, and still remain, very alive.

This unique language environment of Lebanon has shaped instruction at AUB in several ways, at least from our perspective as American-educated compositionists. One salient effect is the fact that existing core required courses are framed primarily as instruction in language, rather than in writing or composition. For example, the required communication skills courses are named “Academic English” and “Advanced Academic English”; the courses in Arabic are called “Readings in Arabic Literature” or “Readings in Arabic Heritage.” While composition programs in US colleges and universities are broadly conceived as “writing” programs (in English), instruction in writing at AUB derives from English language teaching, and along with listening, speaking, and reading, it has historically been conceived as only one of the several skills important for learning the language. While requiring instruction in two languages acknowledges multilingualism, in one sense, the isolation of the two programs from each other does not reflect the actual language identities of the students, who in everyday practice move freely between the two, as well as French, several local Arabic dialects, and other languages, as the occasion demands.

A third important phenomenon we have noticed is that the tendency to relegate the teaching of writing to English instructors, a familiar attitude in US universities, is magnified at AUB, perhaps because approximately 75% of the faculty learned English as a foreign language. Despite extraordinary fluency and very high levels of proficiency, which allow faculty to teach and publish prolifically in their fields in English, a strong perception remains that commenting and assessing the language of a written document—“the English”—can only be the province of English instructors.

Horner and Trimbur (2004) note that “assumptions about language that were institutionalized around the turn of the century, at a high tide of imperialism, colonial adventure, and overseas missionary societies, have become sedimented in the way we think about writing pedagogy and curriculum” (p. 608), and the same is true at AUB. Here, students are eager to participate in world economies and scholarship, which entails using both spoken and written English, but instruction at AUB, as in most places in Lebanon, remains limited by traditions that focus on conveying rules and conventions for constructing academic texts. Students’ lived experience with languages, language acquisition,

and cultural rhetorics largely figures as an obstacle to their fluency, as a source of errors and deficiencies: thus students who are “weak in English” are positioned by teachers and policy makers as academic outsiders with problems, rather than as knowledge constructors. Although these practices conveniently maintain traditional and tidy hierarchies and allow status-quo gate keeping, they perpetuate a conservative rather than generative understanding of language, and they silence the contributions that multilingual students can make to language research and to knowledge in their own disciplines. Engaging with the traditional language policy in the AUB allowed us to see in high relief the failure of all of our writing courses to creatively address the needs and abilities of our students. Along with Canagarajah and Jerskey (2009), we wondered, “What kind of pedagogy would accommodate the emerging realizations of literacy, identity, and competence in the context of globalization and postmodern thinking?” (p. 482).

### **WORKING TOWARDS A MULTILINGUAL WRITING PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH 300: TRANSLINGUALISM AS DISCIPLINARY WRITING**

To explore these questions, Carol and Amy began their initial research within the language rich cultures of AUB in the spring of 2010 with MA/PhD students in two course sections of English 300: Writing in the Disciplines, an academic writing course for graduate students. These English 300 students were beginning graduate programs across the university, in nursing, engineering, computer science, public health, math, agriculture, and many other fields. Graduates primarily of Arabic- or French-language medium universities in Lebanon and the wider Middle East-North Africa region, they had been required to take the course, based on the scores they had received on an English language proficiency exam (88-96 on the internet-based TOEFL or equivalent scores on other tests). This placement at once flagged them as “low proficiency” users of English, yet inducted them into a high-stakes situation, as they would very shortly be expected to present their research, compose theses, and write for publication in English. Many students had very limited experience with academic writing in any language, much less in English. (Almost uniformly, they apologized, particularly to “American” faculty, for their “poor English,” in terms that reflected pride, frustration, and embarrassment.)

Before 2007, when English 300 was first added to the curriculum, entering graduate students who were required to take English courses had been placed into the core Communication Skills courses, where they studied side-by-

side with undergraduate students. Taking an undergraduate pre-requisite made students ineligible for Graduate Assistantships, however. Moreover, the undergraduate courses were neither tailored to graduate students' academic needs nor amenable to their more mature approaches to learning. The new, 3-credit course was designed to provide students with key academic writing and reading skills that they could situate within their disciplines. John Swales and Christine Feak's text, *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*, provided the guide for exercises and assignments. Students were asked to compose texts that followed common patterns in academic writing (in the language of Swales and Feak, these were identified as: defining; problem/process/solution; critiquing; summarizing; and reporting research). Sessions with information librarians provided an introduction to searching library sources, and the course also stressed learning to document sources appropriately. Informal writing was practiced in the form of journals and reflective essays. The course was offered through the Communication Skills Program, but differed from the other courses (which are almost all taught by Instructors), in that it could only be taught by a faculty member holding a doctoral degree.

As we began to implement the most current version of AUB's English 300 syllabus, we became aware of the mismatch between pedagogies that define students as deficient and that focus on what they can't do and our own observations of how much these English 300 students actually could do with language. As we watched them move across languages, sites, and mediums, we became convinced that we should begin by discovering more of what they did know about written and spoken languages, about cultural conventions, and about disciplinary rhetorics. And so we began to reconsider the traditional roles of these courses and of ourselves as literacy gatekeepers or promoters and instead worked toward Lillis and Curry's description of literacy brokers<sup>2</sup> with both students and faculty. However, as we observed our students' linguistic expertise as well as their "English deficits," we found the term "broker" challenged our own pedagogical inclinations. Although still a position of power, as is a broker, we chose to think of our role as reciprocal: facilitating knowledge construction required all participants to learn as well as teach. Instead of capitalizing on students' image of themselves as inadequate, as needing to be filled with grammatical and syntactic information, we began thinking about where we might shift the usual "professors export information; students import it" ratio; in short, we reversed this ratio and began importing their complex language histories into the work of the course, and into how we think about our own (new) identities as collaborative literacy brokers.

While most key assignments for writing remained essentially unchanged (a literacy narrative, summaries of reading, an annotated bibliography, and a



full research proposal), we added new ones; more importantly, we sought to change our role as instructors within the dynamics of the course. We asked students to write and reflect upon their language histories with a language use questionnaire (See Appendix A), which students completed online and then discussed in class. The introduction of the questionnaire and subsequent discussions provided students with a venue to acknowledge and share what they knew about language, explain usages derived from French or Arabic, or articulate the different ways political scientists, nurses, or engineers present data, as well as the perceived need for revised English instruction in this course and in the emerging writing initiative (WAC/WID). The small but significant shift in the course design fostered instruction that views English as an additional rather than replacement language, instruction that positions multilingual students as informants rather than as problems, instruction that changes faculty's gatekeeping function to that of collaborative literacy brokers. (For much the same reasons, a language use questionnaire is also an essential pedagogical element in the graduate writing support courses described by Craig and Lavelle & Shima [this volume]. The latter also describe the ways in which faculty work to foster a view of cultural and linguistic differences as resources not deficits.) Our seeking to be instructed by our students affirmed them as rhetorical agents who are "always doing things that make a difference. Unlike subjects, agents are defined neither by mastery, nor by determination, nor by fragmentation. They are unique embodied, and autonomous individuals in that they are self-organizing, but by virtue of that fact, they, as well as the surround with which they interact, are always changing" (Cooper, p. 425). As instructors, we acted as "observers" and "reflective practitioners," but not as observers of students as subjects who must be corrected. Listening to our students' conversations before and after class showed us the verbal flexibility that allowed them to fit elements of three or more languages into a single coherent conversation. Instead of subjects to be studied for ways in which we as instructors could intervene, students became the linguistic agents with whom we, as literacy brokers, would be working.

Our education began with students' responses to the language questionnaires in which they disclosed how much they knew about language. They detailed rich and complexly layered processes of both simultaneously and sequentially acquiring two, three, four, or five languages. Their descriptions of their current languaging practices showed them selecting and combining from these languages to engage with different audiences and settings. For example, a political science student reported that she and her husband, both Syrian, speak chiefly in English because although they both learned Arabic as their home language, he had had most of his schooling in English and is more comfortable



speaking and writing it. She speaks English also with domestic help, but with her parents she speaks Arabic if it is personal—but English for everything else. Several students described home-related differentiations, speaking Arabic with grandparents, French with parents, and English with domestic help (who are usually migrant workers from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, or Ethiopia), as well as campus differentiations, depending upon whether school was conducted in Arabic, French, or English. Several also noted that, in their workplaces, they most often spoke a mix of Arabic and English but wrote most often in English. Their texting practices were a mix of Arabic and English, most often a mystery to both their English and Arabic speaking professors! As observer-teachers in reflective practice, we provided the ground on which we mirrored to students what they already knew about negotiating context-specific expectations, but they in turn continually challenged our own tendency to “teach to” them as “students.” They enacted multilingual theories with their linguistic acuity, and in turn they contributed to our own understandings of the ways disciplines and languages interacted.

In class, we watched two electrical and computer engineering students, one Armenian/Syrian and the other Lebanese, both contribute to class discussions and write sophisticated papers in English. They also ably contrasted the ways their ECE journals in different subfields review literature with the ways their Lebanese nursing student counterparts described the same moves in nursing journals. As they described these journal articles, they also observed significant differences in Arabic, French, and English rhetorics. For example, they cited many instances in which Arabic or French logic simply didn’t translate into English, and they offered word counts to illustrate what they called the “parsimony” of English and the “elaboration” of Arabic and French. Finally, they noted an important pedagogical implication of these differences as they reflected that assignments written in English seem to invite very open exploration while those in French stipulate both what data mattered and how it should be displayed. These articulations became for us a language of instruction within the class, taken up by us as teachers rather than substituted with a pre-formed rhetorical frame; the more we refrained from naming student reflections, the more our own opportunities as brokers and agents grew—and were exchanged.

Even our seemingly simple responses to interrogate rather than correct produced generative interchanges that more fruitfully pointed to the laminations and subtle meanings that are carried in the grammar and the structure of language/thinking. As a Lebanese public health student described writing a grant proposal for a daycare center for elderly Alzheimer’s patients, she showed a thoughtful sensitivity to the Lebanese family constructs. As she watched middle-aged parents struggle to accommodate the shift from women being

mostly at home and available to care for aging parents, to men and women working outside of their homes, leaving no one at home to provide that care, she was mindful then that her proposal would need to be sensitive to this cultural shift if elder daycare were to be acceptable. She was equally mindful of her English instruction when she was editing, often carefully telescoping her many elaborated Arabic phrases into more succinct English constructions. Thus, to limit the number of times she repeated “caring for patients who have dementia,” she began writing “caring for demented patients.” As the writer read her text to the class, Carol was unsure whether this was accurate in Lebanon so asked how they would react if someone said that their grandmother had dementia: the students said “sad.” “How about if someone said that she is demented,” she asked: they said “mad”—and everyone laughed as the student commented that knowing the English rules doesn’t always produce correct usages.

In return, our students’ descriptions of how languages “feel” helped us understand and explain some of the ways language embeds cultural habits and shapes assertions. When asked which languages they liked best, many students said that they like Arabic because it “feels good in their ears,” because they “don’t have to think to use it,” and because it is richly elaborated. They like French because it is “elegant and classy,” and they like English because “it gets straight to the goal,” is compact, easy, and very useful in many workplaces.

Asking about language histories, habits, and feelings allowed the conversations in class and the written comments on papers to focus on understanding how language and texts work and feel and sound, in particular contexts, and to avoid reinforcing teaching that simply conveys rules, conventions and norms that the students must learn to emulate. Talk in the classroom could draw on the knowledge that students brought with them about their languages and previous writing experiences, as well as on the differences among their various disciplines. Just as important, that instructors’ acts of asking positioned them as agents/learners along with their students: repositioning ourselves in the classroom, repositions students in as mutually interactive knowledge-builders engaged in a process of mutual negotiated literacy brokerage.

Beyond “interesting,” these students’ responses helped us think more seriously about that “elaborateness” that Western English conventions undercut, ones that might better be interrogated to avoid losing what might be otherwise lost in the bargain; about the rhythms and music with which different languages and rhetorical styles are infused—the tones that color and convey concepts as well as word choice; about exporting Western notions of argument and conflict, and questioning the act of negatively tagging the “non-linear,” or “lack of transitions.” A linear, generally deductive, and thesis-

driven argument pattern, based on Aristotelian logic, carries with it forms of thinking, ways of questioning and producing knowledge, practices of debate and contestation, expectations of transitions that are not the only ways to build or present knowledge. Yet the very assumptions inherent in how an argument must be made and must proceed, the ones driving this article, may not be the best for approaching issues, raising questions, building knowledge upon which non-western cultural practices are built (Lipson & Binkley, 2009). Challenging the monological mode of constructing communication reframes teaching, learning and communicating as a simultaneously interlingual and interlogical series of inventions that emerge from meshed interactions.

It can be argued that framing the work of this course primarily in terms of collaborative language study and of constructing knowledge in chemistry, nursing, or political science, rather than as “learning English,” also afforded the means to alter how students were perceived by others, how they viewed themselves as users of language, and how the work of the literacy classroom could be represented in a different way—focusing on participation in a social discourse, rather than as a display of discrete skills. Drawing on the work of James Gee and Brian Street, Canagarajah and Jersky point out:

We do not write only to construct a rule-governed text... Multilingual writers benefit from a pedagogy that allows writing to go beyond narrowly defined processes of text construction. Writing becomes instead a rhetorical negotiation for achieving social meanings and functions. In other words, writing is not just constitutive; it is also performative. .... We write to achieve specific interests, represent our preferred values and identities, and fulfill diverse needs. (pp. 482-483)

A performative model of writing, and the agency it assumes or allows in the writer, also emerges in the work of Gunther Kress and other members of the New London Group. According to Kress and Jeff Bezemer (2009), “Text making is a semiotic act in which meaning is the issue in every aspect, because it is also a social act with social consequences”(p. 171). The implications of this assertion for writing and writing instruction is that “[c]omposition seen as competent performance is replaced by design, seen as the attempt to make constantly varying rhetorical purposes effective” (p. 171). This definition counters approaches that confine writing to a narrow performance of skills, approaches that inevitably categorize writers according to the skills they lack,

while excluding the evident capabilities that they do possess as irrelevant, a consequence that is especially searing for writers like the English 300 students, who have been officially marked as “weak” in English.

A few aspects of the English 300 course worked to undermine the assumption that texts are static, objective, containers of information, and to represent them instead as performative acts of a particular sort. Adding a second required textbook was valuable in this respect because dissonances between the two texts used allowed new perceptions of meaning-making to emerge. We paired *Rewriting: How to do Things with Words*, by Joseph Harris with the Swales and Feak text. At the start of the semester, students analyzed how authors of each of the books represented “academic writing” and compared their two extended definitions.

A model of academic writing that draws on the concept of performativity is at the core of Harris’s text. In his “Introduction,” Harris describes how his understanding of academic writing, and his desire to provide new terminology for the things writers do when they are composing, is indebted to his powerful encounter with John Austin’s book *Doing Things with Words*:

In this book [Harris writes] ... Austin argues that in thinking about language his fellow philosophers have long been overconcerned with decoding the precise meaning or truth value of various statements—a fixation that has blinded them from considering the routine yet complex ways in which people use words to get things done: to marry, to promise, to bet, to apologize, to persuade, to contract, and the like. Austin calls such uses of language performatives and suggests that it is often more useful to ask what a speaker is trying to do in saying something than what he or she means by it. While I don’t try to apply Austin’s thinking here in any exact way, I do think of myself as working in his mode. (p. 3)

Harris is intent on describing academic writing in terms of what writers are doing to affect a particular project that interests them. By contrast, Swales and Feak base their representation of academic writing, as well as the textbook’s information, tasks, and instructions to student writers, on extensive knowledge of, description, and analysis of, the features of published academic texts. The textbook reveals patterns of organization and language use pertinent to academic writing in any field, and it focuses on supporting writers as they construct similar texts themselves. While Swales and Feak’s representation of academic writing tapped into familiar assumptions students brought with them about writing, Harris’s discussion challenged these assumptions, and it introduced

new ways to think about how texts respond to and shape contexts. Founding our work in the class on an animated analysis of these two approaches helped shift expectations about the course and about writing for all of us.

For example, previous assignments had followed a traditional trajectory of writing summaries, analyses, reports, and critiques, with only tacitly assumed ties to students' majors or professions. One of the new writing projects, an interview with a faculty member in the student's field, contributed significantly to students' understanding of writing as a social act, rather than as a set of discrete skills. Students read an article published by one of their professors and then met with the professor to discuss his or her work as an author. Asking the faculty member about the research itself as well as the process of doing and reporting the research invited students and faculty to think about how writing constructs their fields or professions, about how forms prescribe what may and may not be said, about the implications of having most research activity based in English-only sources. The interview showed students how texts were often composed as an integral part of a broader discourse, and could be viewed not as a "product" but as a medium, often produced collaboratively, for participating in ongoing cycles of research and discussion in their fields. As one student wrote in her end-of-semester reflection, "Research and looking for new inventions and new technologies to help our community is my aim and these projects can't be proven to be true unless they are documented in papers accompanied with experiments and results that show their efficiency and applicability." Her realization echoes the observation made by Canagarajah and Jersky: "Texts are not just context-bound or context-sensitive. They are context transforming" (p. 483). Viewing her work as a writer as integral to her work as a designer of green energy technology allowed this student to perceive the texts she composes as ways to participate in her field, and to weigh the effectiveness of the language and other features of the text according to this purpose.

Finally, course assessment also worked to support a shift from perceiving texts in static ways to seeing them as performative, and to frame conventions, rules and standards as constructions that can be useful or contested. Unlike undergraduate communication skills courses, English 300 was graded on a pass/fail basis. For instructors, assessment meant determining whether work presented and participation could be "Passed"—accorded the equivalent in US terms of a 2.2 grade point average. In one respect, the relatively undemanding requirement made room for the circumstances of this student population, who are often full-time employees, graduate assistants or parents, as well as being students. We found that the pass/fail assessment allowed all of us to focus on commenting and discussion, by removing the effect of this grade on the general grade average. Ironically, by allowing us to encourage more risk-taking, and

to keep attention from fixating on texts as objects to be graded, this form of assessment actually supported more sophisticated student writing. Recently, we have also instituted a grading contract, based on the work of Danielewicz and Elbow (2009), to further reinforce the goals for the course. The contract recognizes the agency of students by defining key aspects of the course, such as revising, responding to others, and being present, not as teacher expectations, but as student responsibilities; a passing grade is guaranteed to the student from the outset, as long as the clearly articulated responsibilities are fulfilled.

## **GOING FORWARD, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: AUB'S CAMPUS-WIDE WRITING INITIATIVE**

The lessons learned in the process of rethinking English 300 have continued to inform teaching and program design at AUB, and they have been carried by Joan and Carol to their US institutions. We believe that—from the inception of the program for faculty to the new relationship between student agent-brokers and instructor broker-students—they also provide useful models for us all, and we invite our readers to imagine their own contexts operating similarly and to equally imagine the subtle shifts that might occur as a result.

At AUB, in 2010 and 2011, Carol and Amy began the larger project of designing the university's approach to language instruction across the disciplines, a project that the provost and General Education Committee were enthusiastic about because of recommendations in a recent accreditation report, and because they had been awarded a three-year Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant to establish a campus-wide writing program. Indeed, the strong endorsement of increased emphasis on writing, mandated in new General Education requirements and widely advocated by the faculty, presented an opportunity for constructive engagement with policies and attitudes represented by "English" and "writing." This approach to constructing a local WAC/WID/CAC program drew on well-established programs in the US. However, it was particularly important to help administrators and faculty assume roles that foster reciprocal knowledge construction and underscore student contributions to learning, to stress social views of literacy that represent writing in performative terms, and to assert the value of situating English not in isolation but in relation with the several other languages that are present in the AUB context and that are used by multilingual writers. (See also Lavelle & Shima [this volume] for a discussion of how faculty conveyed to international graduate students their value as intellectual contributors to

knowledge construction, including setting priorities for reading and taking a “let-it-pass” approach to *lingua franca* surface errors.)

While administrators and faculty initially looked to us as importers of knowledge about WAC/WID programs to AUB, we believed that accepting this role unambiguously would belie all that we claimed to have learned from our work with English 300 students. Thus, in the process of establishing the new writing program, key moments have arisen when this theoretical stance—to construct knowledge about writers collaboratively, to conceive of multilingualism as an asset, and to think transnationally—shaped decisions in critical ways. One important decision arose in relation to how additional General Education writing courses were conceived. Just as English 300 students had been seen as deficient and needing language repair via an “English” course, undergraduate students across the disciplines were seen as deficient writers, particularly in English, and the initial guidelines proposed they take two more “English” courses, delivered in ways that did not participate in or “detract” from the work of their majors. We came to these discussions with the scholarship of our own fields, and we also thought about the commitments to being good brokers we had made to our English 300 students. Thus, we listened carefully to deans’ and chairs’ descriptions of their students’ linguistic failings, but we also urged them to consider the language expertise AUB students and faculty possess and to consider alternate instructional models that might engage students as biologists, nurses, nutritionists, computer engineers, and public health workers. Again, as we took seriously our roles as brokers rather than importers, we were able to learn alongside administrators and faculty as they thought about the writerly moves they made as professionals and then the ways they might create parallel moves for students—with support from the writing center and the teaching-learning center. In this process, they and we discovered ways that intentional and visible work with writing might be part of already existing courses. By the end of this process, the General Education guidelines had been revised to require that each student take two courses within the major that embed explicit disciplinary writing instruction.

The development of ongoing courses to satisfy the General Education guidelines is work that progresses slowly. In individual and small group meetings, Amy and Carol (as well as Joan and Carol in the US and other sites) have thought alongside colleagues in other disciplines about how writing constructs and is constructed by their fields. Only then were they—and we—able to see how, even though it might be untidy and time-consuming, embedding writing in existing courses—using writing for those courses’ purposes—was more likely to be “real” for students and sustainable for faculty. To do this work required



redefining efficiency, for us, for our colleagues, and for our students. It meant lots of “front-loading”: selecting in each major at first just one course that all students would take and that embodied many of the habits and concepts of the major. It meant rethinking that course in terms of language functions, of why, how, and with whom writing typically is done in the field as well as the implications of those habits and features for the discipline and its participants—and then how these moves might be incorporated in students’ projects. It meant facing the uncomfortable recognition that sometimes disciplines’ traditions conserve unwarranted power or simply no-longer-existing technologies and need to be challenged. It meant trying—and both succeeding and failing. Mutual high points occurred when faculty experienced the “aha” moments of realizing how much writing they already were teaching and saw how making their writerly moves more visible might move students toward more expert roles as biologists or geologists. They then also began to incorporate elements of the base course into their other courses and to watch for the effects of these courses in students’ senior projects.

The writing initiative, which reports directly to the provost, has been positioned within the already-existing WAC/WID-oriented Writing Center, a choice that Amy and Carol recommended, for it provides a hospitable and ongoing physical and intellectual location for both students and faculty. To date, 35 faculty members have been directly involved with the development of the courses they teach. In the first three semesters of implementation, 19 pilot courses have been taught at least once, in Agriculture and Food Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, Nursing, and Arts and Sciences, even as more continue to be developed. The courses have enrolled approximately 1,550 students, and have been supported by 2,800 hours of writing center meetings. At the end of three years, we project that faculty will have designed and taught at least one course in each major in which students look seriously at the ways multiple kinds of texts and authors, including themselves, construct both schooling and professional work in their disciplines.

Preserving the important lessons learned in English 300 as this large program continues to unfold calls for strategic approaches that can ensure that pedagogical values remain central to its work. Faculty development is at the heart of the new writing initiative, and thus as writing center staff meet with course instructors, they not only function as literacy “brokers,” but they also introduce current scholarship on multilingual/translingual writing into readings and discussions. Also, inspired by the broker role of learning from or with students and faculty, the writing center and English department are collaborating to conduct a four-year longitudinal research project to study writing, writing practices, and representations of writing of students and faculty members.

The education of writing center tutors represents another important area for strategic engagement with writing instruction across the university, an area in which to forward social theories of literacy and multilingual writers and practices that support them. In addition to the formal, intentional discussions of shared readings and tutoring observations in the writing center, meaningful encounters often occur without planning. Recently, for example, a group of electrical engineering students came to the writing center to discuss a report on their project to design a control system for a hard drive. They questioned the value of discussing the report with a writing center tutor, since, “it has hardly any English—it is mostly formulas and figures.” When tutors explained that the visit was an occasion to discuss the effectiveness of their whole report, including language and the social context in which it circulates, students engaged in a very lively discussion (in English and Arabic) about revisions.

As we work in AUB’s consortium of writing program faculty, writing initiative faculty and administrators, writing center staff, and students (both as tutors and authors), this transnational view of language anchors a pedagogy that asks what students and faculty know about languages and disciplinary structures. As we have studied the answers to these questions, both we and our colleagues have found them to generate thoughtful ways to build on multilingual knowledges. For example, aware that although AUB’s language of instruction is English and much professional work takes place in English, neither faculty nor students function in an English-only world. Like the English 300 public health student, most faculty and students work across multiple languages. They interview clients, talk to patients, write grants, read local and global rules of governance, negotiate contracts, and design agricultural reforms in these several languages but also as translinguals or transnationals, using a mix of English, Arabic(s), French, and other languages. With a more nuanced consideration of their own translingualism, they notice how Lebanon’s linguistic practices reveal age and class positions as they hear the public performances of the Lebanese Symphony announced in English and the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored performances announced in French—all in the same Catholic church on a French-speaking university campus. They think amid linguistic and cultural conventions and patterns, transforming both local sites and global practices.

Embedding writing within existing courses rather than “adding English courses,” is shifting the focus away from English and onto a social, performative view of writing that allows faculty to invest in the project in ways that did not appear to be possible before. Already some faculty teaching the writing-embedded courses have taken the opportunity—and the challenge—of engaging with and arguing about the shift away from “English” and towards constructing meaningful texts. And, in fact, these conversations are occurring

with students in classes and with faculty in Teaching and Learning seminars as well as informally in the faculty dining room. Further, to support faculty and students with these projects, administrators have also seen the value of investing in a more broadly conceived writing center that can provide an ongoing home for this richer work with writing.

## GOING FORWARD: BEYOND AUB

The three of us are optimistic about these projects and look forward to expanding them at AUB and with other colleagues in other sites. As the AUB program develops the second round of writing-embedded courses, we will continue to study the ways that multilinguals move from using their several languages, yet compartmentalizing each language's words, idioms, and rhetorical patterns, to more cross-fertilized languages, each bearing traces of the other and ultimately being changed by these exchanges. We will look to the work of Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe (2012) to reshape the ways the academy reads


**Eh, We2fet 3layk!**  
Making change is up to you

Let's make an impact together. Join us for a preview of the film, "The Lebanon I Dream of," and learn about how we can stop dreaming and start impacting change in Lebanon.

The MBA students at the Olayan School of Business, under the patronage of the Mikati Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative, invite you to the launch of the **Graduate Net Impact Chapter**

***A chance for business students to use their skills to make a difference***

**DATE:** Thursday, February 23, 2012  
**PLACE:** Maamari Auditorium - OSB  
**TIME:** 7:00PM

 **AUB**  
American University of Beirut  
الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت


 **NET IMPACT**  
[www.netimpact.org](http://www.netimpact.org)

Figure 16.1 Poster produced by graduate business students

multilingual students' writing and likewise the ways that those students' writing enriches the writing of monolingual academics, both faculty and students. We will watch for shifts in the ways instructors' assessments differentiate between errors in meaning and those errors that native speakers might notice but that don't interfere with meaning. We will look to outsider "errors" that indicate different ways of expressing ideas and that make visible the point that language offers many ways of making sense. For example, the three of us adopted one of Carol's English 300 student's "errors" that expanded our use of "discipline" and "field" into "meadow" and began referring to the "meadow" of composition and rhetoric; in doing so, we meant to suggest that we should see our field as capacious, open to different seedlings, participants, and languages.

We conclude with a poster produced by AUB's graduate business students (see Figure 16.1, previous page). Just as they are challenging themselves in the text of the poster to move beyond dreams to reconstruct Lebanon's business practices, we are eager to act more visibly and emphatically upon the implications of transnational language work.

Finally, we want to add to the position statements asserting students' rights to their own languages, the recognition that multilingual students in particular have much to offer monolinguals and monolingual-based writing programs. It is our responsibility to seek out opportunities for dialogue and collaborative inquiry, such as ours, as we construct a richer understanding of translanguaging's possibilities for our students and for our programs.

## NOTES

1. At AUB, Amy has been a faculty member in the English Department since 2004. Carol, a professor of English at California State University, San Bernardino, received a spring 2010 appointment as AUB Visiting Professor of English and an additional appointment in spring 2011. Her assignment, to embed writing in the majors as part of a revised General Education program, included co-teaching a graduate writing course with Amy. Joan, professor of English at Illinois State University, has been engaged in transnational scholarship through her work with writers and writing instruction in multiple institutions in and outside the US. The authorial "we," thus represents Amy and Carol when they report on AUB, but all three speaking collaboratively out of their engagement with multi/translingual issues.
2. For further use of the term "literacy broker", see Lillis and Curry, 2010; see also Mullin, Haviland, and Zenger, 2012.

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## APPENDIX A

### AUB Language Questionnaire (reformatted for space reasons)

We are interested in learning more about your language experiences as we adapt this and other courses to build on AUB students' multilingual strengths. We will aggregate responses anonymously. Thank you for participating.

#### I. Your languages

First language:

Age \_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_ Speak? \_\_\_\_ Read? \_\_\_\_ Write? \_\_\_\_

Second language:

Age \_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_ Speak? \_\_\_\_ Read? \_\_\_\_ Write? \_\_\_\_

Third language:

Age \_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_ Speak? \_\_\_\_ Read? \_\_\_\_ Write? \_\_\_\_

Fourth language:

Age \_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_ Speak? \_\_\_\_ Read? \_\_\_\_ Write? \_\_\_\_

Others?

## II. Speaking

- What language(s) do you speak at home and with whom? Siblings? Parents? Grandparents? Domestic help?
- What language(s) do you speak with your friends?
- What language(s) do you speak at school and with whom? Classmates? Professors?
- What language(s) do you speak in any work situations and with whom? Peers? Managers?

## III. Reading

- In which languages do you read for which specific school purposes? For example, you might read engineering reports in English and political science analyses in Arabic?
- In which languages do you read for work or professional purposes?
- In which languages do you read for “everyday” purposes, such as ordering from a menu, installing a printer, learning about the day’s news (either online or in print)?
- In which languages do you read for pleasure?

## IV. Writing

- Do you think that your writing practices are different when you write in the different languages you use?
- For example, when you do exploratory writing (drafting, listing, free-writing), what languages do you use?
- When you talk about your writing with classmates, writing tutors, or professors, what languages do you use?
- When you write in English, do you think in Arabic or French and then translate words or ideas?
- Think about writing specific academic papers in English (summaries, literature reviews, critiques, or proposals): What organizational or rhetorical forms seem “correct” to you? Where did you learn those forms? Does anything surprise/frustrate you when professors ask you to use other forms?
- How does the kind of text you are producing (email, texting, twitter) change your writing?

## V. Thinking:

- What language(s) do you “think” in?



## VI. Language Attitudes

- What language(s) do you like best and why?
- How do you think that your language background shapes your language preferences?
- When you say, “We do it this way because we were educated in French” (or Arabic, or any other language), what does that mean to you? How does that experience make you think or speak or write or read differently?
- What else about language practices do you think that your English 300 faculty should know?