

# Noticing the Way: Translingual Possibility and Basic Writers

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*ABSTRACT: This article presents a pedagogical practice for noticing and negotiating error in a multilingual classroom. Two examples from a classroom are compared to demonstrate the importance of “noticing” in the context of translingual pedagogy. The author’s first example offers an attempt to negotiate an error with a multilingual writer without such noticing, compared with a more successful negotiation where noticing plays a part in developing a writer’s rhetorical attunement. The concept of noticing derives from second language acquisition (SLA) scholarship in which to notice invites attention to a linguistic feature which may belie a writer’s expressed purpose. Without noticing error with their students, teachers dismiss errors’ relevance to the impact of writing, and also miss opportunities for an entire class to notice and negotiate sentence-level writing.*

*KEYWORDS: error; translingual; second language acquisition; noticing; grammar*

Error, like voice, is a deceptive topic.

—Tracy Santa

Ty<sup>1</sup>, a multilingual writer, shares his sentence for our last sentence workshop of the year. He writes this sentence on the classroom’s dry erase board:

I think that having so many “standard” English’s we sometimes lose ourselves in what “standard” English that we need to speak in.

On the digital recorder, there is a pause, then Sherlyn, another multilingual writer, asks him,

Why is there an apostrophe between the English and the ‘s’?

In a practical-process view of writing, Sherlyn’s question to Ty would seem insignificant—the presence of an apostrophe is not the point of Ty’s

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sentence. The ideas of Ty's sentence are provocative. Besides, the apostrophe is a matter of editing and so it will be fixed at a later stage. Alternatively, in a theoretical-translingual view, Sherlyn pointing out Ty's mistake may suggest what Anis Bawarshi refers to as "default reactions" to a *standardized* English (198). Bawarshi explains how a default response about *correct* or *wrong* language use are caught up in experiences of linguistic elitism, a set of beliefs surrounding ideas that one way of putting an idea is inherently better than another. David Foster Wallace in "Tense Present" cleverly names linguistic elites, those who may insist on upholding the distinction between *among* and *between* being upheld or who point out an errant use of an apostrophe, as "Snoots." In this perspective, Sherlyn's why evokes a Snoot pointing out a mistake—and the response, once the mistake has been noticed, is quite clear: the 's should not be there. The translingual perspective goes further than a critique of the Snoot, however, as it would highlight how Sherlyn's question and its intended response is problematic because it belies the possibility of Ty *working* English more pliantly. That is, her question ignores rather than invites playful readings of Ty's "mistake."

In the translingual turn, language authority is no longer understood as located "in" standardized language varieties published in grammar handbooks, and exercised through teachers' red pens; instead, authority belongs to language users and their texts as written. Aimee Krall-Lanoue refers to the departure as a "detraining of teaching practices" because a teacher "must focus on the text, not what a student 'meant to do'" (237). Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner similarly highlight a distinction in practice which should involve "asking students to explore not what to do and not do, but how they are doing English and why" (41). Agency, or languaging, emerges out of the negotiation that we, as language teachers, must encourage students to explore. In this stance, Ty's sentence needs to be read as already having authority, rather than quickly reading—assuming—that he has made a mistake in writing English's. Consider that Ty mentions the shifting nature of standards ("so many"), and the consequences of these multiple standards when he writes "we sometimes lose ourselves." Ty could be enacting the meaning by committing the mistake intentionally. Or, by writing "in what 'standard English,'" Ty could be presupposing that "English" itself is in fact multiple. When we take into account the three languages he speaks and writes on a daily basis (in which English is the only one that uses the apostrophe), the apostrophe could be read as an enactment of a proprietary identity. Despite the multiplicity here, because Ty is ignorant of the apostrophe as a linguistic feature, I read English's as an error. In fact, at this point in the transcript of

the recording documenting this sentence workshop, I'm aware that Sherlyn has created a space for our class to notice the error together.

It is certainly possible to enact a translingual reading without noticing error with multilingual students; yet, to do so *assumes* a writer may be *working* English to already realized purposes. In the case of Ty, he may need to fully explore these purposes; he may need some linguistic knowledge because currently he may not be understanding the critical meaning potential between the forms Englishes and English's. In this way, a translingual reading of Ty's sentence without stopping to notice the error may limit Ty's meaning potential. That is, just as we recognize the problematics of assuming basic writers have made "mistakes" in writing, we must similarly recognize that errors can be limit situations for all writers. Errors, we may say, seem to be "unnoticed" by error makers, until brought to attention and noticed—it is only then when errors can be critically negotiated. Noticing error, noticing ambiguity, in fact, can be made just as relevant to foster discursive agency as a content-based discussion concerning a given claim or warrant for a claim in a written argument. The aim of noticing error and translingual pedagogy is not error-free-once-and-for-all-correct and to-a-given-standard writing; instead, noticing can enable social negotiation leading to what Rebecca Lorimer Leonard refers to as "rhetorical attunement" (228). In other words, an agility with translingual possibility.

My article's opening focus on Sherlyn noticing Ty's error draws from a classroom practice I designed which is a sentence workshop. In sentence workshops, students are able to engage in what Second Language Acquisition (SLA) scholarship refers to as *self-initiated focus on form* (see Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen; Williams). Having students select a sentence from their own writing, inviting them to share their purpose in that writing, and then expecting them to field questions from the class audience were ways I set up my Basic Writing classroom, which eventually prompted multilingual students to notice error, and then negotiate it. The role noticing played in helping basic writers see linguistic possibilities of their errors was an emergent feature; I did not start the Basic Writing semester with a disposition toward noticing before negotiating error. Discovering the role noticing played in negotiating error, I shifted how I worked with students, leading here to an argument for deeper consideration of formal matters in translingual practice.

To demonstrate the emergence, I draw on two contrasting cases of student writing and transcripts from two sentence workshops from the same Basic Writing class. The first case is a missed opportunity while the latter one is a full example of noticing "caught on camera!" In short, successful

negotiation necessitates noticing the difference between error and mistake. In the current discussion surrounding error and mistake in U.S. translingual scholarship, the distinction between an error and a mistake needs to be made clearer in our theorizing, so that we can create interactive spaces in our classrooms where the difference between a mistake, which is readily noticed and resolved when pointed out, and error, which is a miss-communication between writer and reader, is able to be noticed, explored, and negotiated.

### **The Need for Noticing Errors and Mistakes in Current Translingual Discussion**

Outlining the translingual approach to language difference and writing in *College English*, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur address the role of error in a question and answer section titled “Implications for Writing Programs” (310). Their response to the second question—“Does translingualism mean there’s no such thing as error in writing?”—is revealing, regarding the state of error in a translingual approach:

No. All writers make mistakes, and all writers are usually eager to remove mistakes from their writing. Taking a translingual approach, however, means that teachers (and students) need to be more humble about what constitutes a mistake (and what constitutes correctness) in writing, rather than assume that whatever fails to meet their expectations, even in matters of spelling, punctuation, and syntax, must be an error. (310)

In this approach, correcting or editing any feature, even a feature that seems to us outside a linguistic boundary, without discussion of the consequences or stances in the writing, would be problematic, especially from the standpoint of critical pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> A translingual pedagogy would also necessitate discussion, or negotiation, of features that can be read as *different*. For Basic Writing teachers, translingual pedagogy necessitates slowing down our response and reading differently. However, I also note that in their answer, Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur take up the question about error and use the term “mistake.” The terms in use here reflect an orientation that errors are what teachers notice and mistakes are what writers do. That is, errors are the spaces where “[failed] expectations” are encountered. Mistakes, however, are simply miss-takes, and are readily resolved once pointed to, usually by way of the teacher’s authority which is certainly noticeable, since “[a]ll

writers make mistakes, and all writers are usually eager to remove mistakes from their writing.” Given this difference in orientation, Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur argue that teachers should read differently, and through this reading create a space for negotiation with the writer about error.

Yet, exactly how and when this negotiation occurs must be addressed in Basic Writing classrooms. We, as teachers, struggle within and among ambiguities because of how mistakes, errors, and choices get muddled in our work with students. Tracy Santa’s historical taxonomy of error points out that “the dilemma of where, when, and how to exercise an inevitable authority is not easily resolved” (111). In fact, Santa makes this point in her review of 1990s-era U.S. scholarship on error. In this particular period of error studies, the understanding of error was tied to the assumption that “error in large part reflects choice on the part of the student writer” (111). Or tied to another assumption, as Lu demonstrated, error as a contact zone can lead to “self conscious and innovative experimentation” (“Professing” 444). Santa questions in these cases if forced negotiation, particularly when students may seek knowledge of conventions that an “expert,” the teacher, might be perceived by the student as withholding, is itself a problematic power relationship which simply displaces the alternative. In other words, before we attempt to create a space for negotiation, we need to first notice errors and mistakes alongside our students. Such noticing reflects the tensions Lu recognizes within the contact zones of style in our classrooms.

Some evidence of the practical struggle is also in recent translanguaging scholarship by Suresh Canagarajah, as he highlights the close association between errors and mistakes (“Translanguaging” 9). Canagarajah observes that for the translanguaging movement “[a]n important consideration is if there is a place for error or mistake” (9). One recent article demonstrates the practical need for mistakes based on his own teacher research of his students’ work in translanguaging. In a detailed discussion of a graduate student writer enrolled in his translanguaging strategy class referred to as Buthainah, Canagarajah presents how the student mistakenly uses three different forms to refer to “Ma Sha Allah” (An Arabic phrase that literally translates “as God has willed”) in her writing (“Translanguaging” 22). The student refers to this “mistake” as an error (22). Replying to his inquiry (“Did you think the readers will easily understand your meaning and therefore you don’t have to worry too much about editing problems?” (22)), she is “quite embarrassed about this error (and another mistake below)” (22). Definitions follow. Canagarajah writes that

Mistakes appear to be unintentional and unsystematic choices . . . [h]owever, when choices that are intentional fail to gain uptake, we can consider them *errors*. They can fail for many reasons. They may not have much rhetorical purchase. They may not also achieve success in encouraging readers to co-construct meaning. . . . Errors occur when certain translanguaging choices are not effectively negotiated for meaning. Thus we can arrive at a practice-based or performative orientation to error, different from a norm- or form-based definition. (22)

Canagarajah's theorizing here highlights errors through time, as moments "when choices which are intentional fail to gain uptake"; however, a spatial dimension to *written* errors also applies. Errors can also be distinct from translanguaging choices when a writer is unaware of semantic difficulty on the part of the reader. Or when an error is found to be a semantic misunderstanding between the writer and the reader because of the writer's limited knowledge about a specific linguistic feature in the text, which has a formal meaning to the reader.

In this way, a translingual error is bound not only by interactive time, but also by linguistic space. Recognizing this relationship between writer and reader suggests to me that a spatial definition of error is still relevant, especially for BW. Moreover, the difference between an error and a mistake is an interactive difference, where the error, unintentional and unrecognized by its maker, needs to be noticed before negotiated in writing. When erring, a writer does not know an error has been made; whereas, a mistake, when pointed out, is simple enough to fix because the mistaken writer knows the answer—understands where the *corrector* is coming from. The difference between an error and a mistake rests in the error-maker's relationship to forms and a meta-knowledge of a given form's meaning-making possibility, knowledge of which makes a difference. Wouldn't a writer, serious about the impact of his or her ideas, appreciate the chance to learn more about error so that the ideas themselves are clearer and have a chance for wider impact?

As teachers, we cannot ignore an error and then engage the error-maker in a negotiation of it. In stating this claim, we are not the only audience that notices errors because our students also notice them, and "noticing" is where "dynamic learning processes" occur (Hanaoka and Izumi 344). Enabling noticing is not simply a matter of pointing out error to a basic writer because "in planned focus-on-form conditions, teachers' intended pedagogical focus does not always match the actual attentional focus of

the students” (Hanaoka 460). And so, possibilities for meaning are lost. The concept of “noticing” and its relationship to learning is a much-discussed pedagogical concept in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) scholarship. SLA pedagogies thus advocate that teachers notice developmental patterns of error and bring them to a learner’s attention in an interactive manner. In this research perspective, an error often represents learning as errors are *unnoticeable* to the error maker. Empirical studies have referred to this as the Noticing Hypothesis, an “important cognitive process” (Qi and Lapkin 278), in which noticing is an “awareness of a stimulus via short-term memory” where a stimulus is “anything that rouses one’s attention . . . with respect to language” (279).

Error, then, is an especially rich opportunity both for language development and for knowledge about a given language’s limits, in BW, specifically. When the expected or conventional use of language in a context is violated and creates semantic confusion, we must not assume “mistake” and likewise we cannot immediately engage in correcting or *reading* error as language authorities. Simply put, given that conscious access to neither systematic English rules and grammars nor rhetorical traditions and cross-cultural understanding is equitable in our classrooms, we need to reorient ourselves and our students toward noticing and talking about error as enabling further possibility for basic writers. We must encourage exploration of the semantic potential by working toward conditions and practices where noticing error can occur, followed by enough time to navigate with our students what is possible. While the teacher should work to enable a noticing which is grounded in meaning realized through some formal translingual options, the teacher is not simply “notice-r”—the role of noticing happens as writers interact.

In this direction, I offer a critical-functional approach to error and basic writers, when three conditions are met: First, there is functional error in the descriptive grammar of the course context—since grammar is fundamental to how we make meaning with language and communicate to others. Second, the violation corresponds to a semantic misunderstanding which muddles the writer’s expressed purpose. Third, there exists a knowledge gap between the language users. Once these conditions are met, in a social learning environment, such as Basic Writing, another reader must notice the gap and enable the writer to negotiate. In what follows, I offer how this approach to error developed over a semester of Basic Writing, taught in Fall 2009.

**Teaching Sentences: Teacher-Research Design in Basic Writing  
Fall 2009**

Familiar with multiple experimental research designs on the relationship between explicit grammar instruction and writing, I recognize how our “intended pedagogical focus” does not always “match the actual attentional focus of students” (Hanaoka 460). Acknowledging this mismatch, I designed a sentence workshop practice so that Basic writers could have interactive experiences with sentence-level choices for their own writing in process. Through the whole class workshop, my primary pedagogical goal was to disrupt some of the determinism that a basic writer can experience about choices, mistakes, or errors in sentence writing. Provided their sentences were “still in process,” the entire class would have an opportunity to shape decisions about sentence level writing. In this vein, I sought to enable writers to take more risks in their sentence writing, and through such risks, to learn from the multiple resources writers with diverse language backgrounds always bring to a writing situation.

My experience with student sentence workshops in previous semesters encouraged me to learn more about the reasons behind the decisions that basic writers made in their texts. I was also eager to learn more about the relationships between my teaching and the experience of the workshops from the perspective of the basic writers’ revisions post-workshop. As a researcher, I wondered what came up in workshops—what about sentences were students noticing and what reasons were given about what they noticed? I was teaching a shared Basic Writing curriculum in a public research University in the North East, where the Basic Writing course, its teachers, and its students had substantial institutional and programmatic support, including four hours of instructional time per week in computer classrooms, publication opportunities for students, incentives for teachers to research their practices, and graduation credit for the course because it qualified as a “diversity” credit. Students were placed into the class based on their performance on a timed essay exam which was developed by our program director, and then read and scored by teachers of our program in the summer. I was an involved, experienced graduate student who had helped design the curriculum and scored placement exams in the summer. I was also persuaded by current scholarship at the time surrounding World Englishes, multilingualism, and cross-language relations.

*Explicit Teaching Yields Mini-Lessons.* For these reasons, I felt I was positioned to engage in classroom research about sentence workshops. Before



teaching the course, I worked with the pedagogical idea of scaffolding, both in terms of my sentence instruction as well as my research inquiry. I taught sentences as critical thinking; and such teaching was embedded in or synced with the existing Basic Writing curriculum. I weaved my research inquiry about sentence level choices alongside the existing course's focus on various literacies, contexts, and power relationships involved with linguistic identities. In order for sentence workshops to elicit the kind of attention I believed would be the most valuable to basic writers, I had to scaffold my teaching of sentences, which I decided would involve explicit teaching of specific sentence techniques or principles, or, mini-lessons occurring each unit. My goal was to help students recognize how the "wording" of ideas positions a writer in unconscious ways. In this teaching, I would select sentences from our program-designed course reader (*Multiple Literacies*) to teach sentences as constructed, manipulated utterances. I began with our curricular goals and framework and then imagined what aspects of the sentence I sought students to *notice*. I created framing questions for each unit about which aspect of the sentence I wanted writers to engage with, which worked alongside the assignment sequence. Encouraged by Laura Micciche's "Case for Rhetorical Grammar," I drew on additional rhetorical, functional, and critical theories of language to frame choices in sentence writing as "positioning tools" (see Appendix A as a scaffolding table of these ideas). This explicit teaching amounted to approximately ten minutes of mini-lessons ten times over the semester.

During the explicit instruction, I shared my reasons for selecting a sentence, and I articulated how I understood the sentence's connection to our curricular interest in the unit. I also highlighted a rhetorical principle. For each unit, I selected strategies about sentence level meaning-making that I believed would complement the cognitive processes we as a program believed supported critical thinking (again see Appendix A). In the case of the observation unit, for example, I would choose sentences which I believed would enable noticing a writer's arrangement of words and how arrangement reflects a valuing and positioning of certain ideas over others. One explicit teaching moment drew on Martha Kolln's concept of "end focus," pairing it with a sentence from Perri Klass's "Learning the Language": "And I am afraid as with any new language, to use it properly you must absorb not only the vocabulary but also the structure, the logic, the attitudes" (10). For my teaching, I asked students to consider the four items Klass highlights regarding language in the sentence—then, I asked "Why do you think Klass arranges the four items in the series the way that she does?" I wanted students to use observation as a technique for sentence revision and possibility.

*Student-Directed Learning: The Sentence Workshops.* In addition to this explicit sentence instruction which merged form and content, students went through a recurring writing process each unit, where they would do a week of exploratory writing, followed by drafting and peer review activities. In the process pedagogy, the sentence workshops took place an entire week before the final paper due date to encourage more conceptual revision beyond substituting one word for another. In this way, the practice of asking students to select a sentence from their own writing in progress, rather than my selecting a sentence from their work or finding an example in a published work, offers a chance for noticing to occur for negotiation. I required students to have a reason, but did not require a specific type of sentence to be chosen; in fact, some students chose sentences of which they were proud. Before each of the four workshops, I asked them to reflect in writing on what they hoped would happen in the workshop as well as what sentence they had chosen.

By analyzing the transcripts which showed peer-to-peer as well as my interaction in sentence workshops, I started to pay more attention to what my students noticed, and through my noticing, I noticed an assumption in my pedagogical design about the difference between mistakes and errors.<sup>3</sup> I realized I was working through a deep anxiety about my sentence-level instruction being perceived by my students as “snooty.” This disposition toward error and mistakes was affecting how I interacted in the workshops, and because of it, *noticing* could not flourish. I saw how in earlier sentence workshops my students were attempting to notice error, even as I thwarted this possibility by leaping too quickly into negotiation.

In the next section, I introduce Pik, a multilingual, U.S. immigrant student from China, who helped me notice noticing. In the example, Pik shares a sentence with an error, but it goes unnoticed. What's more is that without noticing the error, Pik attempts to re-work the sentence and ends up creating a statement which I argue belies her purpose. At this point in the semester, I had not yet theorized the importance of noticing with my sentence pedagogy, and so consequently, neither could Pik or her peers. Instead, I tried to help her negotiate meaning as if she, like myself, recognized her initial mistake.

### **Not Noticing Error as a Teacher: Pik's Tradition Rule**

By the midterm of Fall 2009, I had not yet recognized the distinction between error and mistake and the role of noticing before negotiating. So, during the second unit of the semester, as students were working on applying what they were learning about language and literacy use in context, a mul-

ilingual student named Pik shared a sentence with a lexical-grammatical error that went unnoticed before it was negotiated. Pik had been participating in these discussions, and the transcript below is from her first sentence workshop in front of her peers. The workshop is brief, and this too is part of my discovery; it is brief because noticing was not present. She chose the following sentence:

I never thought silence would be a problem since I got used to it when I was little. It turned out to be a tradition rule in our family.

The first question after Pik shared this sentence was from Sonya, a second-generation immigrant, who identified as knowing only English:

What do you mean by tradition rule?

Here, Sonya notices the error. Before Pik can answer, someone else asks her about the “rule”:

Is the rule “in your family,” or is it a “rule where you are from”?

Pik: I think it is like a rule in my family.

I interrupt. I attempt to get Pik to negotiate the “error”:

Me: Tradition, I think, suggests larger than just a family, a tradition. So I think you might need another adjective in there, like: it turned out to be a family tradition. Period. Because when you say traditional rule, we are sort of thinking, “oh it’s even bigger.” But you’re really talking about your family tradition.

At the time, I felt good about the conceptual distinction I provided between the forms “tradition rule” and “family tradition.” I felt I was being explicit and helpful. From this perspective, I had applied a descriptive rule of English grammar, order of nouns, to the meaning of Pik’s sentence. I had listened to her peers’ questions, and offered her a choice. However, I hadn’t listened to Pik talk about her understanding of her forms—there was no space for interaction. Instead, as the authority, I had interrupted, quickly and implicitly, inviting her to negotiate, but without providing the time and space for Pik to notice and work with the limits of her error. I came to these

conclusions when I read how Pik revised her sentence—after the workshop, she edited the sentence as follows:

Original: It turned out to be a tradition rule in our family.

Edited: It turned out to be a tradition rule in my family.

The edit evidences two insights—one, Pik understood the semantic distinction between “our” and “my” in her writing, and two, the syntactical error had gone unnoticed. Pik’s sentences are also examples of a writer interpreting implicit feedback to linguistic features in an incorrect manner, a kind of implicit instructional feedback that John Truscott has demonstrated results in *problematic* negotiation by English Language Learners (see also Ferris on “error” and Second Language Writing). Since my suggestion reflected an implicit understanding of syntax which I had and Pik was still acquiring, my authority squashed the potential discussion of Pik’s translingual potential; the difference between “in your family” and a “rule where you are from” was not pursued by her peers in her workshop. Consequently, I did not recognize that Pik needed to field some questions from her peers: Did she mean such and such? Could it be that? Was she offering something like this? Instead of interactive dialogue, I had decided to say back the “right” wording, a form of implicit feedback in this context. This feedback, which did not notice the error as error, was then negotiated by Pik in a manner that may have belied her purpose.

I also have concerns that the “our” to “my” individualizes Pik in a kind of Western-individual discourse, a discourse that Pik may or may not resist. The *new* sentence takes its cue from a common convention that “my” is a Western particularization of experience, and is more idiomatic than “our.” Yet, it is an ideological revision that I cannot claim is *hers* because I do not know her intention, and yet again, my authority in shifting her sentence is clear to me. I’m imagining, for instance, Pik being encouraged to experiment with the wording of “tradition rule,” and perhaps getting at semantic possibilities that I, as a monolingual speaker of English, could not have anticipated. In this case, I care that our communication—that is, between what I asked her to consider and how she took up that consideration—resulted in her meaning remaining not just wrong but unclear. Others might claim that the continued iteration of “tradition rule” in the sentence is an example of agency. I’m still wondering, however, *what does she mean by tradition rule? What’s different, to her, about the meaning of tradition and rule?*

In Pik's workshop, we did not notice the error, and because we did not notice it, we also could not discuss the meaning which needed to be negotiated. The consequence: Pik could not continue developing deeper understandings of how form and content of *English* work for *her* purposes. If I had worked to help Pik and the other students *notice* the error, I could have then encouraged more interaction surrounding Pik's intention in the sentence. This sort of play is only possible, however, with more explicit awareness of the rules of a language system in which one is operating, and of that system's nature as a lexical-grammar.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, in the classroom scene below, Ty experiences a revision which I can claim as *his*. Ty, like Pik, did not, at the beginning of his workshop, understand his options well enough to make a choice for how to represent his intention. Yet, unlike Pik, he was able to *notice* his error during the workshop and before he was asked to draw on the experience in his writing post-workshop. Another difference was my orientation to error and mistake. At this point in the semester, I had come to problematize my pedagogy toward granting students the space to notice error.

### **Noticing Error as a Workshop: Ty's English's**

For the fourth and last workshop of the semester, Ty stood at the front, and waited. He wrote his sentence on the dry erase board, read it aloud, and listened for our response. His sentence, "I think that having so many "standard" English's we sometimes lose ourselves in what "standard" English that we need to speak in," received no suggested revisions at first. Instead, it was met with Sherlyn asking him, perplexed,

Why is there an apostrophe between the English and the 's'?

Her question prompts Ty's reasoning:

Ty: Well, English is. . . well, that's what it did, the autocorrect when I was writing, cuz without the apostrophe it put a red line on it so I right clicked and it said put the apostrophe, possessive or something. Is that correct to use? I don't. . .

Ty's response brings a context into our classroom that had before this point been "invisible"—the role of MS Word's grammar checker. His response is motivated by a simplistic notion of correctness and trust in spell-check as

a determiner of correctness. His question to the workshop about whether the apostrophe is “correct to use” is answered by the effect of Ty’s use of the apostrophe, since, as Sherlyn says to him,

I just don’t know what it means.

The confusion about what the convention means takes up a considerable amount of Ty’s workshop. In the discussion, Ty shares some of his linguistic background, which includes use of the German language, in which apostrophes are not used, as well as the awareness that apostrophes are important because they reveal relationships between nouns:

Ty: I’ve never used apostrophes before, so. . . because in Germany you don’t need the apostrophes, you don’t have. . . my mom was telling me the use of them, the possessive or something like. . . when you say “someone’s dogs” or whatever you put the apostrophe because that’s their dog or whatever. . . . So, is it like that? I don’t know.

Throughout the workshop, Ty is often looking for confirmation or security in his discussion of his reasoning, which develops into a rhetorical reasoning about this choice. I notice his anxiety throughout our exchange. I purposefully withhold answers, as I wish to investigate the reasoning behind his decision to write English’s, and because the opportunity to discuss in-depth how grammatical coding functions is an important aim in critical reasoning about form.

Me: Ok, so you are understanding the rule of the apostrophe. . . .

Ty: Yea.

Me: And, Microsoft Word’s grammar checker told you to put it there, but is there a possession, I mean, what did. . . your application of it, Ty?

Ty: Is wrong?

Me: What’s wrong?

Ty: The apostrophe where I put it?

Me: How do you understand what the rule is supposed to mean. . . and. . .

Ty: Well English belongs to the Standard, doesn’t it? No?

Ty, however, doesn't seem convinced. He's applying the rule of the possessive to his sentence. He does so through his reasoning involving MS Word's grammar checker and his mother's teaching of the general rule, and these contexts taken together likely construct his paradoxical, and philosophical, statement: "English belongs to the Standard, doesn't it?" At this point, while I sense his frustration, I still don't want to provide him with critical thinking about this form—that's his job.

Me: I mean, I think, you are making Standard English plural, right?

Ty: Yea.

Me: And do you think that Microsoft Word understands the radical nature of making Standard English plural?

Ty: I don't think so. . .

Me: . . . the . . . pluralization of English isn't going to be understood by MS Word. But what MS Word is able to do, oh, you put an "s" on a word that I don't think ever has an "s" it must be a possessive use and so it gave you the red squiggle and you looked at it, and thought, get this off my screen. Accept change.

Ty: Yea, that's pretty accurate. . . . So, no apostrophe?

Me: I don't know.

I said "I don't know" because I hesitated to "answer" Ty's question about what to do. If I had offered him an answer, I would not help him with *noticing* his choice. I saw such a (lack of) response was productive for his workshop, in fact, as it created a more interactive space.

Ty: I don't know either, that's why. . . it looks cool but. . .

Taquana: You should take it out.

Someone: Hmmm. . .

Taquana: You aren't saying English is. . .

Tejada: It's not possessive.

This interactive exchange, prompted by Sherlyn's confusion about the apostrophe-s, essentially tells Ty what he should do based on what his intention is and what he means, which is distinct from a prescriptive correction-based reasoning about this same choice *and* his language background about the lack of apostrophes. In this way—given my prompting that MS Word is based on standardized English and therefore would not understand Ty's meaning-making—the reasoning behind Taquana and Tejada's suggestion

to “take out” the apostrophe is an example of noticing. While I initiated the critical reasoning for Ty’s choice, these other students realized and made clear to Ty that his use of “English’s” is wrong.

Based on this analysis, it’s revealing that, had this happened quickly in the workshop—by a simple editing suggestion from a peer, perhaps—Ty wouldn’t have had the same experience. In fact, by slowing down the writing classroom, we were able to support his meaning-making by allowing him space to develop his misunderstanding, something that brought a kind of clarity to the discussion.

Sherlyn was engaged here, and after Tejada stated for Ty that he should not be using the apostrophe, she brings up a related issue. How should he spell it?

Sherlyn: e-s or just s.

Me: So, if you are trying to make a word that the dictionary in Microsoft Word is not getting, right? In some ways, this is maybe bringing our context, your purposes of English into this sentence, right? How are you going to write Standard Englishes so that we know what that is? And. . . Sherlyn just said you could write “s” or “e-s.” So how do you know which one you should spell?

Ty: But I. . .

Me: you are going to have to think and apply. . .

Ty: Spell it myself?

Me: How would you spell it?

Ty: Like that, without the apostrophe.

Taquana helps him out again by bringing up the stylistic nature of spelling in his case. He gets to choose how he wants to spell it.

Taquana: But if you write it -es, isn’t that a style factor or whatever. Like, when you are making up a word, not, kind of making up a word, you have as a writer you can choose how you want to spell it or not, so it’s not necessarily wrong.

Here, Ty perhaps starts to apply his own rhetorical reasoning, as he remembers that there are conventions to spelling that relate to the place of English.



Ty: Well, I know like, when, here, in America you spell color c-o-l-o-r, but in Europe you spell it c-o-l-o-u-r.

Taquana: Really?

AJ: Yea.

Me: Yep that's British English versus American English [sic]. . . . So, I think that using your multilingual background, Ty, think about the spelling. I will say "s-h" as an ending of a word that gets an "s" the rule is?

Sherlyn: -es.

Me: So, think about that. Or, Google it and see if other people are using "Englishes" and how they are referring to it and choose it that way. Just because you can't find it in Microsoft Word telling you what to do, doesn't mean that you can't have a principle for what you are choosing.

Throughout this exchange, there is evidence of prescriptive and descriptive reasoning concerning Ty's choices whether to remove the apostrophe or keep it and how to spell "Englishes." Ty's peers push him to consider his options before he simply chooses to focus on the spelling of the word. This occurs when he answers my question regarding how he would spell it, using his initial spelling prior to the auto-correction in Word. Taquana pushes him to consider the stylistics behind spelling, just as AJ and Ty himself remember that spelling can also identify an English speaker as a specific type. In this way, our rhetorical consideration opens Ty up to not only consider correctness and communication, but now also the contexts of the English language, as well as its audience. In this way, the collaborative atmosphere of the workshop keep Ty's purposes in mind, and yet also work to extend those purposes, by considering the effects his choices of spelling and punctuation have on his audience. As I join the discussion, I deliberately ask him to consider context and to better own his intention to make "English" plural.

Ty, who was still drafting at the time of the workshop, did not elect to change his original use of English's in his draft. He did, however, in post-workshop writing, use the more appropriate for his purpose term "Englishes." Clearly other aspects of Ty's practice need to be noticed by him and encouraged by me: namely, revision as re-seeing; because, yes, in a pedagogical reading, his choice to write "Englishes" is reduced in effect by the continued presence of "English's" in his final draft. And so, yes, as his teacher, I was disappointed that Ty did not revise his paper with the experience of the workshop in mind. Yet, from the standpoint of a noticing

pedagogy, the contrast between both English's and Englishes in the paper does help one recognize the impact of the workshop on Ty's writing. For me, his final essay demonstrates that, from the moment of the workshop on, Ty was making a choice to write Englishes, despite the red squiggle. Even now as I write *Englishes*, the red line appears. I can imagine now how one might notice the red squiggle but still not *notice* the reasons for it appearing. Whether or not Ty right-clicked on Englishes to "add" it to his dictionary in order that the red squiggle did not appear again cannot be known because I never asked him about his process post-workshop. Despite not knowing, however, I like thinking in divergent ways of whether or not Englishes still appears in red in his word processing program. Put another way, the sentence workshop helped Ty acquire and develop some intuition with standardized language. He now may take a second look at the red squiggle appearing in future instances. In his working of English, he may decide that he can turn nouns into pluralized forms for his own rhetorical effects.

### **Noticing Englishes**

At the time I taught this class, the term "translingual" was not yet circulating; instead, as referenced, I was working with ideas surrounding the politics of linguistic diversity in its forms in ways similar to current treatments in translingual discussion. As I aligned my classroom with such pedagogical goals, I also ignored features in student texts that were wrong. I failed to recognize how my linguistic authority read *through* language for intentional meaning—a reading which did not enable the kind of learning and working with Englishes we seek. Pik and Ty as examples should now pose questions to our role as language authorities in BW: Are we there to help students *negotiate mistakes*? Or, are we there to help students notice and negotiate error? Through noticing such questions, we uncover power relationships both inside and outside BW.

My concern about power and its relationship to error matters especially in a time when zeal for translingualism poses definitional questions for the field of Second Language Writing. In a provocative dialogue in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, Canagarajah writes that "second language writing" as a concept is "misleading" and should be questioned given current calls for all writing to be understood as translingual ("The End" 441). Unfortunately, discussions of translingualism often reduce SLA to being focused *primarily* on "target" proficiency. Horner, for example, in pointing to an intersection between SLA scholarship and past BW understanding of error, equates the

concept of “interlanguage” to BW’s discourse of error, an equating which Horner reads as evidence of BW’s risk of directing students away from “interlanguage” and toward monolingual norms (“Relocating” 11). Horner goes on to reference scholarship specific to BW, such as David Bartholomae, Glynda Hull, and Elaine Lees as part of the SLA tradition, putting forth the argument that “interlanguage” was then and *still* is a fraught concept. “Interlanguage” in SLA theory, discussed in the recently edited collection *Interlanguage: Forty Years Later*, however, is similarly shifting its goals and ends. According to Diane Larsen-Freeman’s contribution, “interlanguage” is a good example of shared premises between translanguaging and SLA. Larsen-Freeman understands language as “an open system, always changing, never fixed,” and asserts that its speakers reflect “a dynamic network of language-using patterns: emergent, mutable, and self-organizing” (213). Further, this articulation is not new. Larsen-Freeman’s work, in fact, has resonance with Horner’s recent arguments in *Journal of Basic Writing* about the need for incorporating time and timing within our approach to working English. “In other words,” as Larsen-Freeman puts it, “we need a camcorder, not a camera” (159).

The SLA model, in previous scholarship by Horner, is discussed as associated with the eradicationist and assimilationist models, and as such is thought to maintain a “tacit politics of English Only” in the teaching of writing (Horner and Lu “Rethinking” 144). Horner seems to encourage us to turn away from SLA empirical research findings about the treatment of error and interlanguage. In earlier scholarship, Horner and co-author Lu critique this treatment as the “Second-language-interlanguage” model (“Rethinking” 144). Basing this claim on such a description of SLA error analysis involves, according to Lu and Horner, “proofreading skills to identify deviant marks,” as the goal is the “production of writing in conformity with the conventions of EAE/SWE” (145-146). Clearly, Horner and Lu’s interpretation of this model rests in a prescriptive notion of usage, which they read as wired into SLA theory. Even at face value their critique raises a problem, as some readers would argue that the practice of teaching conventions does not translate to “conformity,” because teaching is additive and students always exercise choice. On a deeper level, though, we need to recognize that our students’ power to choose is dependent and relative to the number of options possible. Limits to these options occur when errors go un-noticed, and thus limit the range of semantic potential to be negotiated. In my view, there is a power in both linguistic and rhetorical knowledge, including knowledge of error, which can, if noticed, be used to bring about translanguaging possibility. Moreover, we must not allow the critique—that SLA is snooty—to dismiss the productive

aspects of SLA pedagogical theory in our increasingly linguistically diverse Basic Writing classrooms.

At the same time that we question the political motives of BW, we need to notice that variance in writers' intentionality is not the same as differing levels of conscious knowledge about how a particular example of language use *could* work in a given context, by diverse audiences. Recognizing how power operates in the distinction between error and mistake is what leads me to insist on a theory of error which differs from mistakes and failed negotiations, and to imagine how we might teach translanguaging, given the differences in conscious linguistic knowledge present in our classrooms. We must continue to question entrenched language attitudes about Basic writers. We should not question our feelings that prescriptive takes on language can be disastrous for fostering critical awareness about words and wording. Yet, at the same time that these beliefs contribute to a disciplinary understanding of error as less a "feature of text" than a feature of "context" (see Santa; Lunsford and Lunsford), this understanding also reflects the privilege of a standardized reader, who can *choose* to read *through* language. Our classes, our students, our languages are changing, and so, we need to also *pay attention* to what may seem to our students and ourselves as a contradiction—analyze the features of language as meaningful for constructing social context; yet ignore error to find meaning in a student text. We need to create spaces in our classrooms for students to notice the linguistic features of their working English so that they can also become moments for noticing the way toward translingual possibility. And, we must continue to reclaim the sentence from notions of "rules" and "violations," emphasizing its translingual potential in much the same way we approach the teaching of writing. Noticing those moments in our work with Basic writers where the distinction between an error and mistake can be muddled, we can in those same moments allow noticing to unfold—offering our guidance to help Basic writers find themselves in a productive space for translingual possibility.

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## Notes

1. The IRB-approved protocol for this project included a question about whether and how students wanted to be named. All students chose how to be named and to use their actual names.
2. In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Paulo Freire writes that “[a]cquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables—lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe—but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one’s context” (45). A language policy that enforces one standard rather than also engaging the multiple standards of its participants’ literacies violates this premise.
3. Through a systematic analysis, a process in which I refined categories and coded student reasoning, I had also learned how my students developed more nuanced understanding about the relationship between form and content in their own writing. For instance, I was able to notice how many of these students arrived in Basic Writing with an arhetorical orientation about their own sentence writing. Students would report how they did not believe there was really a difference between one word and another (privilege v. luck, for example) but through the semester, I learned how the sentence scaffolding with the existing critical Basic Writing curriculum was contributing to students arriving at more conscious understanding about linguistic forms and how they relate to their own purposes in writing. This discovery was tempered by the discovery of noticing which I believe has implications for all writing classrooms.
4. Pik’s placement challenged my grammatical sense that in U.S. edited English, nouns modify other nouns when the relationship of modification has meaning in the system of language that speakers use. That is, while it is permissible to say “family tradition” since family, a noun, modifies tradition by semantically specifying tradition as a “type,” it is nevertheless not permissible to modify “rule” with tradition in the same way, as these two nouns are not conventionally used to modify one another. Semantically, tradition and rule violate a poetic syntax of order. Knowledge of this syntax is often implicit unless it becomes explicit.

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**Appendix: Table A**  
**Scaffolding Sentence Instruction in the**  
**Basic Writing Curriculum**

<i>Type of Essay</i>	<i>Theoretical Approach and Pedagogical Strategies</i>	<i>Pedagogical Questions and Theoretical Concepts</i>
Mapping Literacies through Experience (a short essay exploring one way they make meaning with others)	Positioning parts of the sentence (such as phrases and words) to make different meanings.  *Rhetorical Grammar (Bakhtin; Kolln).	How does where a word is placed matter to the sentence's meaning? How else could you arrange this sentence?  (parataxis, hypotaxis; end focus)
Bringing Literacies Home through Close Reading (essay that brings at least one course perspective to bear on a choice of being silent or speaking)	Analyzing the choice(s) of a sentence in terms of its lexical, conventional and grammatical aspects, then mapping that choice onto other options for it.  *Functional Grammar (Halliday).	What is the difference between the writer's choice and another option the writer could have chosen? Why does the choice make sense based on the writer's context?  (given new contract; modality)
Examining Literacies of Power through Privilege (essay that brings in at least three perspectives that relate to a generative theme)	Examining the relationship(s) that choice(s) of sentence structure has to wider ideological contexts and discourses. Critical Grammar (Gee).	In this use, what about the concept is being highlighted and what is not being highlighted? What are the consequences and effects of this choice?  (backgrounding and foregrounding; discourse).
Unschooling Literacy through a Writerly Sense of Purpose (a reflective essay applying our curricular reading to a theoretical concept)	Reflecting on a sentence as a whole, encoded by its choices and considering how a change to one part necessitates other changes	Why do you think the writer chose to form this idea in this way? What does it reveal and how might you change it?