

Terms and Conditions: Working with (and in Spite of) Our Multilingual Student Frameworks

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the ways in which composition theory and pedagogy have traditionally conceptualized “ESL” students. While this term has already been contested for its limitations, and alternatives have been offered in its place, this article seeks to add to the conversation by demonstrating, through students’ and instructors’ first-hand accounts, the nuances that underlie a multilingual student’s identity. These perspectives aim to complement existing literature on how English instruction must consider all students’ language competencies and intersectional experiences, rather than merely the sequence in which their languages were learned. Drawing from English faculty and students’ perspectives on and experiences with the term, this work ultimately suggests pedagogical practices that more equitably address linguistically diverse students’ English language competencies, mobilize their existing assets as sites of meaning-making in the writing classroom, and foster confidence in their linguistic and cultural differences.

KEYWORDS: ESL, ELL, English language learning, multilingual students, community colleges, identity, translanguaging, writing pedagogy, intersectionality, race, cultural awareness, assessment, placement, writing support, first-year writing

The “ESL” term has been primarily used in writing studies in relation to international college students in the United States. In the 1990s, studying these students was convenient; they were easily identifiable through international student groups, data on degree status and countries of origin that is required by the federal government, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. Additionally, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper notes that many second language writing specialists were conducting research at large research universities, where international students were a steady presence (389).

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However, broader scholarship on multilingual identities beyond traditional approaches and efforts to develop more inclusive writing pedagogies have become increasingly exigent with the growing number of linguistically-diverse students on our college campuses. Linguistically diverse students possess an array of backgrounds, skills, perspectives, and experiences that are not accounted for in these narrow frameworks. This is especially the case at community colleges...where higher percentages of students comprise a rich blend of experiences, languages, cultures, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Community colleges enroll a higher percentage of minority students in the United States than four-year colleges (Miller-Cochran 20).

For one, domestic “ESL” students have been more difficult to pinpoint. We are left without critical information on the “high school experiences and post-secondary transitions of resident bilingual or immigrant youth” who have lived in areas surrounding our high school and college campuses, and have been a part of their present local communities during most, or all, of their lives (Ortmeier-Hooper and Ruecker 1-2). The “CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers” outlines the many variations that a “multilingual identity” can take:

Multilingual writers include international visa holders, refugees, permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants, as well as naturalized and native-born citizens of the United States and Canada. Many have grown up speaking languages other than English at home, in their communities, and in schools; others began to acquire English at a very young age and have used it alongside their native languages. Multilingual writers can have a wide range of literacies in their first languages, from being unable to read or write to having completed graduate degrees in that language. (CCCC)

Indeed, these students may or may not speak a language other than English at home; others toggle between multiple languages depending on the family member with whom they are conversing; some speak English more fluently than their first language. Living within the contact zone of their heritage language-speaking and English-speaking selves, they possess linguistic flexibility and cross-cultural knowledges. Their writing competencies vary widely, depending on a variety of other factors, including diasporas (international and domestic), socioeconomic class, dialects spoken within their second languages, ages at which they learned their languages, language and cultural attitudes, generationality, educational background,

and country of origin. Unfortunately, such nuanced considerations of a student's identity background are overlooked when their English proficiency is determined merely by the order in which they learned English, relative to their "home" languages.¹

This article doesn't claim to offer a term that would solve the aforementioned gaps once and for all. It doesn't assume that an entirely unproblematic term might even exist. Instead, it asks how linguistically-diverse students' identifications have functioned *because*, or *in spite of*, the circulation of these terms.² While international multilingual students have predominantly been studied in silos, this research looks at multilingual students through a translanguaging lens by examining how students who have been raised abroad, and residential multilinguals, perhaps share similar experiences and positionalities with limiting identifiers, or in practicing their linguistic identities. Drawing from community college students' and faculty's experiences and backgrounds, we can gain valuable insight on the varied approaches to teaching writing that can potentially have wide-ranging, positive implications on multilingual college students' writing success and confidence.

This article begins by looking at existing literature on terminology that has circulated in the research and teaching of multilingual students; in particular, I summarize the conversations surrounding their limitations and affordances in accounting for students' experiences. A methods section follows, detailing a qualitative study involving self-identified multilingual students in a first-year writing class, and English faculty. Then, from their respective standpoints, linguistically-diverse first-year writing students explain their positionality and experiences with terms such as "ESL." Along with English faculty, they propose changes they would like to see in the writing instruction of multilingual students, describe their favorite and ideal writing assignments, and reflect on the disadvantages and advantages of being multilingual in their broader, everyday lives. Informed by this data, the final section of this article proposes potential avenues for improvement, including the development of more nuanced pedagogies that challenge the constraints of traditional basic writing tenets.

Using one of the most diverse community colleges in the nation as the setting for this work, this article ultimately seeks to spur more equitable pedagogical practices in United States' college-level writing that not only address multilingual students' English language competencies, but also mobilize their existing assets as sites of meaning-making in the writing classroom, and foster confidence in their linguistic and cultural differences. Therein lies the power of translanguaging activism: the ability to dismantle "homogenous

discourses” surrounding language (Pennycook 114); to equip students with the tools to critique present-day “postmonolingual tensions” (Ayash); and to look to “multiple sources of cultural renewal” (Pennycook 114). It begins with us—the instructors, policy makers, administrators—seeing past troubling concepts that have long been operating in plain sight, and rethinking our profession for current times.

LITERATURE REVIEW: TERMS OF [DIS]AGREEMENT

To be sure, the contestation of “ESL” as a useful term is not new. Suresh Canagarajah notes that “English as a Second Language,” when ascribed to a student’s language proficiency, immediately places students in a contentious binary: they either learned English as their first language (see also: L1; NNES) or they did not (e.g. L2; NNES). This binary is reflected in the “mainstreamed and ‘segregated’” classes often found on college and university campuses (Miller-Cochran 21). Yet the order in which languages are learned is not a fair indicator of English proficiency or the type of English instruction needed; nor is it an apt measurer of one’s language skills, broadly: “It is difficult to enumerate one’s language repertoires based on proficiency or time of acquisition” (Canagarajah 417). Not only does the term “ESL” suggest that a student’s languages exist in hierarchical vacuums, it ignores the ways these languages can interact with and inform each other. The frequency of languages used and the ways in which they are prioritized shift over the course of a student’s life, given personal and institutional factors.

Furthermore, Ortmeier-Hooper argues that “ESL” and similar classifications have academic and emotional implications for a student. For an “ESL” student to work towards mastering standard English can feel like a compromise and erasure of the self; in associating a new meaning to a familiar word, for example, students may feel they are committing a “linguistic betrayal,” not just of the word but of the reality in which it is grounded. Mastering a new discourse can result in the eradication of their points of view as “outsiders,” thus breeding mistrust in academic writing instruction (Lu and Horner 904). The “ESL” term also centralizes English in a student’s target linguistic identity, privileges Standard English, and centers English as a linguistic identifier. Rather than viewing a student’s language differences as a potential asset, the label positions them as departing from a “correct” English that must be fixed. It is true that writing programs are moving toward a translanguaging approach by allowing students to use their home languages to mediate and make meaning in their English learning (see Canagarajah;

Hesford et al.; Matsuda and Silva; Jain). However, that is where the approach typically ends; when it comes to producing a finished written product, a student's English competence remains the goal.

Ortmeier-Hooper asks us to interrogate the deeper implications of the term: "What exactly does it mean for a student to be 'ESL'? And when, if ever, does a student stop being an 'ESL' student?" (390). Canagarajah sees the term as deeply racialized. Canagarajah, a person of color himself, believes the answer to the latter question might be "never." "However long I learn English and develop advanced grammatical competence, English will never be considered native to me, given my racial and geographical background," he writes. "The color of my skin would influence someone to call me a non-native speaker of English—not my level of competence, process of acquisition, or time of learning" (417, 589).

Indeed, at the root of the question of who does or doesn't need interventional English support are racist English language ideologies. It is no coincidence that CUNY, after establishing itself as an open-admissions institution in 1970, garnered criticism for admitting uneducable "dunces," "misfits," and "hostile" "non-academics," many of whom were first-generation college students of color (Lu and Horner 892). While our basic writing pedagogies are moving away from racist epistemologies, it remains that many praxes for "ESL" students still measure their English proficiency in light of its "standardness," or its proximity to whiteness. Language education is rooted in histories of white supremacy and colonial expansion—and, as Kerry Soo Von Esch et al. write, "Who gets to define what counts as language ultimately shapes the potential of those learning it" (5).

Despite the criticisms already surrounding it, the "ESL" identity marker continues to be used in crucial and ever-shifting ways in our colleges, and the criteria by which "ESL" students are identified have a marked impact on how students are placed. Between the academic years of 2016 and 2019, the percentage of incoming first-year students at Queensborough Community College (QCC) who were designated "ESL" based on the standardized CAT-W (CUNY Assessment Test in Writing) placement exam stayed relatively consistent, ranging between six and 11 percent of all first-year students admitted each year. Notably, as of 2020, first-year students at CUNY are flagged as "ESL" if they have spent at least six months in an institution where English is not the primary language of instruction³, and the percentage of "ESL" students identified rose to 16%. When the college began administering a version of the CAT-W tailored for ESL placement in Spring 2023, the number of students placed as "ESL" dramatically decreased to 6%. These trends (see Appendix

for a full layout of student placement numbers) show a correlation between changing methods of identifying, assessing, and placing “ESL” students, and how many students end up receiving additional English support.

This “flagging” can be consequential: Those placed in “interventional” courses (many of which are non-credit-bearing) often end up dropping out of the course, or leaving college altogether. Across CUNY campuses, less than half of students assigned to developmental courses have finished them by the end of their first year (Che 191).

Unfortunately, alternatives that have emerged to describe linguistically diverse students have yielded their own set of concerns. “L2” and “NNES” (Non-native English Speakers) similarly identify language users based on a single scale of reference; their relative proficiency in English and time of English language acquisition. Based on their definitions, an “L2” or “NNES” can never cross the threshold into “L1” or “NES” (Native English Speaker), regardless of level of English proficiency possessed or gained.⁴ Given the narrow definition of “native speaker,” being “native” or “non-native” to English inevitably carries its own racialized implications. “Nativeness” has long associations with birthright, while non-white, monolingual English-speaking individuals are nonetheless treated as NNES given their racialized bodies (Canagarajah).

While a descriptive term, “English Language Learners” (ELL) is also an institutional marker of one in need of additional services and “someone still marked as a novice in the English language” (Ortmeier-Hooper 390). “Generation 1.5” refers to resident students who had completed at least some of their secondary schooling in the United States. Again, these are still static terms meant for a liminal institutional space that do not consider language and language learning as fluid and do not account for students’ affective and lived experiences. In fact, “ELL” and “Generation 1.5” can themselves pose concerns, as seen in Rod E. Case et al.’s study on how instructors assess student papers in mixed classrooms comprising basic writers, Generation 1.5 writers, and international students. Even though the instructors purported to grade their students as individuals separate from their linguistic identities, the authors found that students’ self-identifications impacted the content, form, and amount of feedback they received: the study revealed that instructors gave the least feedback overall to U.S. resident basic writers, and the most to Generation 1.5 and international students, with regards to ideas, grammar, and form. Coupled with transcribed interviews with instructors, these findings revealed ingrained beliefs about students’ abilities, needs, and prior education based on their linguistic self-identifications (Case et al.). While

they may seem benign, such student labeling can evidently lead to instructors' biased treatment of, and outcomes for, their multilingual students.

While the terms discussed in this section are by no means exhaustive, their common and disparate implications give us a glimpse into the social, racial, and intellectual assumptions that have been placed on multilinguals—and the trajectory of our efforts at unpacking and remedying the harmful effects of these assumptions.

A BLUEPRINT FOR SURVEYING “ESL” POSITIONALITIES AND MULTILINGUAL IDENTITIES

Part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, Queensborough Community College is one of the most diverse two-year campuses in the nation. As of Fall 2021, Asian students represent the largest group of students (28%), followed by Black (26%), Hispanic (25%), and White students (14%). “Non-resident aliens” and American Indian or Native Alaskan students comprise 6% and 1% of the student body, respectively (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment [OIRA] 20). While the majority of these students' country of birth is the United States, they hail from 111 different countries. Twenty-four percent are “non-native” English speakers, with Spanish, Chinese, Bengali, Creole, and Urdu being the most prevalent non-English native languages spoken (OIRA 1). QCC provides an ideal locus for this study given it is a “majority-minority” institution; its enrollees comprise 86% students of color and 14% white students. In any given semester, a first-year writing class (averaging 25 students) can be made up entirely of students of color who speak a language other than English as their first.

In order to tap into the implications of this student diversity and the pedagogical potential it holds, I conducted a qualitative analysis of survey responses from self-identified multilingual students and English faculty at QCC. This research reveals the prevailing yet variegated sentiments held about the “ESL” label. Students explain their perceived utility of the term, and how they have positioned themselves with it over time. Complementing these remarks are survey responses from QCC English Department faculty who share their opinions on existing “ESL” student definitions. They consider assets their multilingual students have that monolingual English-speaking students may lack, and writing challenges that their “ESL” students commonly face. Then, they describe key assignments that they have developed to account for these assets and challenges, and explain how and why they have proven efficacious. A survey method was chosen for data

collection as it would provide the most robust responses across participants, and would be accessible online for students and faculty unable to meet and complete the survey in person. On the whole, questions were open-ended (see Appendix) to allow for more openness in responses (Cresswell 149).

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are writing instructors' impressions of the "ESL" label, and how have they shaped their instruction of multilingual students?
- What are multilingual students' impressions of, and experiences and positionalities with, the "ESL" identifier, and how have these factors shaped their ideas of what makes an effective and inclusive writing assignment?

Participants

The student questionnaire was administered to 27 self-identified multilingual students enrolled in English 101 across the Spring and Fall 2022 semesters, and 28 English faculty members who teach writing courses at differing levels.

Students were either in their first or second year at QCC. Fourteen of them learned a non-English language as their first language; nine learned English as their first language; four identified English *and* a non-English language as their first languages (simultaneous bilinguals) (Canagarajah). While none of the nine English L1s were admitted as "ESL" students, six of the English L2s and two of the simultaneous bilinguals were, respectively. In addition to English, the languages and dialects these students were proficient in included Spanish, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Armenian, Tagalog, Puerto Rican Spanish, Trinidadian, Haitian Creole, Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Punjabi, and Dominican Spanish.

Faculty surveyed were adjuncts and full-time instructors, and specialize in a variety of English subdisciplines. Participants were recruited through critical case sampling; given the students' diverse backgrounds and faculty's varied disciplines, this approach uses "logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases" to create synthesis across responses (Cresswell 158). Having my own students as participants enabled me to become more acquainted with the students' linguistic and cultural identities through our class discussions and their personal writing over the course of the Spring and Fall semesters, which informed and contextualized their responses. In the same vein, given that my faculty participants were in

the English department, they were accessible and shared general knowledge about the course policies and outcomes expected from teaching their courses.

Method of Analysis

The study took a grounded theory approach, given that both the students and faculty have “participated in a process about a central phenomenon.” In this case, the “central phenomenon” pertains to participants’ experiences with and knowledge of the “ESL” term: multilingual students who have come in contact with the “ESL” label and are taking a college writing class, and English instructors who have taught multilingual students and have some level of familiarity with “ESL” (Cresswell 148). While all students surveyed self-identified as multilingual, they varied in the order in which they learned their heritage languages relative to English, their heritage languages, and whether they were U.S. immigrants, born abroad and emigrated to the U.S., or born domestically. From these variations, the analysis ultimately sought to find commonalities and divergences in areas, such as positionalities with the “ESL” term, and overall experiences as multilingual students in writing classrooms, before and during college. Similarly, analysis of faculty responses sought similar and dissimilar understandings of the “ESL” identifier alongside their instruction and perception of their multilingual students. While all surveyed faculty taught English, their disciplinary backgrounds varied and the classes they taught spanned the gamut of first-year writing, upper-level writing, and developmental English.

The student survey questions (see Appendix) are broken down into three main categories: background (i.e. What is/are your first language/s?); linguistic identity/their positionality toward the “ESL” identifier (i.e. How do you feel about the “ESL” student” label? Does it have a positive and/or negative connotation to you, and why?); and writing support (i.e. Generally speaking, what kinds of writing assignments do you find the most valuable?). Student background questions were asked to gauge their linguistic competencies, and the ways that they have been treated in academic spaces, up until the point of college writing placement. In the second category, students consider the connotations they believed the term held, and their positionality with it, institutionally and personally. In the third category, students apply their previous and current experiences in writing classes in suggesting improvements to first-year writing classes and support systems offered on campus, particularly for multilingual students.

The faculty survey seeks to first understand their level of familiarity with “ESL” pedagogy and terminology via their teaching experiences. Questions (see Appendix) were broken down into the following categories: teaching and disciplinary background/“ESL” positionality (i.e. What is your discipline? How does your discipline define “ESL” students (if at all)? What would YOU consider to be the criteria for an “ESL” student? What informs your definition?); classroom context (i.e. What are some writing *challenges* and *strengths* that your “ESL” students have faced?); and writing support and praxis (i.e. Describe an assignment that you have found to be particularly effective in your teaching of “ESL” students).

By understanding factors such as English instructors’ varied disciplinary backgrounds, we may also understand their positionalities with the “ESL” term, translanguaging, and multilingual writing, both within the discipline and at the college level. From this background information, we may draw a connection with how they situate the “ESL” identifier within their writing instruction, as well as their perceived limitations and affordances of the term. In the second category, I ask faculty to share their first-hand experiences of teaching multilingual students and evaluate the writing competencies of their current and previous multilingual students, including the linguistic and cultural assets they bring to the classroom. Then, I ask faculty for examples of writing assignments that have proven effective in engaging and teaching writing to multilingual students, and explain the reasons behind their efficacy. They also provide suggestions for reformed and/or new on-campus writing support systems for multilingual students.

Given the goals of this research, after learning the students’ and faculty’s backgrounds, themes and subsequent sub-themes were derived from the student categories of *Linguistic Identity* and *Writing Instruction & Support*, as well as the faculty responses within *Classroom Context* and *Writing Support and Praxis*. A table of these themes and sub-themes can be found in the Appendix.

Any deviations from Standard English in students’ responses will be maintained for the sake of accurately representing and honoring their voices in this piece.

“ESL” RELATIONALITIES: STUDENT RESPONSES

Linguistic Identity and “ESL” Positionality

Of these 27 multilingual students, 19 did not consider themselves “ESL.” These 19 comprised all nine English L1s, eight out of the 14 English L2 students, and two out of the four simultaneous bilinguals. As noted in the table below, while some respondents answered “Yes” or “No” based on which language they learned first, eight L2 respondents did not consider themselves “ESL” based on other considerations.

Table 1. Student self-identifications

Question: Would you consider yourself “ESL”?		
	Yes	No
English L1s	0	9
English L2s	6	8
Simultaneous bilinguals	2	2
Total	8	19

In explaining their responses, four predominant sub-themes emerged among respondents within the theme of Linguistic Identity and “ESL” Positionality: age of English language acquisition; ease of heritage versus English language use; ability to navigate everyday spaces in English; negative associations with “ESL” label.

Age of English acquisition. Whether some students self-identified as “ESL” was influenced by their age of English acquisition. For one English L2 student who answered “No,” English acquisition came with her introduction to U.S. schooling: “My first language was Spanish and that comes from my family, but *once I got into school English was my first language*, and I would only speak Spanish at home when needed to” (emphasis added). Her L1 linguistic self-identity was not determined by the order in which she learned her languages, but rather, the shifting demands of when and where she was expected to speak each of her languages, namely, in school and at home. Meanwhile, another English L2 student who emigrated to the United

States as a child identified as “ESL” “because I didn’t know English when I came to USA.” For him, linguistic identity was tied to place; in particular, English was associated with America. “I spoke Armenian up until six years old, then from that point on I learned how to speak fluent English,” answered another English L2 student who did not see himself as “ESL.” “I am much stronger in speaking English than Armenian.” This student associated his age of English acquisition with his level of fluency in English over Armenian.

Ease of languaging. Indeed, the ease with which some multilingual students spoke English versus their heritage language determined whether or not they identified as “ESL.” While the above Armenian L1 student correlated his ease with English with acquisitional age, others cited the *frequency* of their heritage language usage as the reason English was easier to use. One English L2 student explained that he did not self-identify as “ESL” because “I speak a lot more English than Spanish and sometimes struggle more with my Spanish than my English.” Meanwhile, another English L2 student believed she was “ESL” because she associated her “ESL” identity with the idea of “correct” *English pronunciation*.

Navigating everyday contexts. Yet other responses indicated a correlation between being “ESL” and an ability to navigate everyday spaces, such as work, school, and community, effectively and practically in English. A Spanish L2 student said she “currently” would not say she is “ESL”; “I have gotten used to speaking English everywhere all the time.” A Haitian Creole L2 speaker similarly believed he was not “ESL” because his ability to communicate in multiple languages “doesn’t affect my involvement in society, ex: when speaking at school or work, places that I speak English predominantly at.”

As these comments demonstrate, the question of what defines an “ESL” individual isn’t always clear-cut or based on a singular criterion, especially when left up to a multilingual student’s own determination. Perhaps this is most evident in the response of one Spanish L1 student, who, while having replied that she would self-identify as “ESL,” also noted several factors that would indicate otherwise:

Literally, I would [say I am “ESL”] because I only learned and picked up English from going to school and from my older brother. I grew up in a Spanish speaking household, it was always Spanish before my family (including cousins) grew. However, no, considering the purpose [of this survey], I never had trouble learning or speaking English. Throughout my whole elementary school years (K-5th) I

was placed in a dual language (English/Spanish) class because I was proficient in both languages.

From this response, we see a multilingual student's awareness of the ways in which she may be "ESL" and not "ESL" at once. She remains proficient in both Spanish and English, speaking Spanish at home, in her community, in church, at family reunions, and with "any Hispanic really that understands Spanish," and English in school, with friends, and while shopping. She is able to deftly utilize her languages according to her various social contexts, and has had formal education in both in primary school. In these senses, she considers herself not "ESL." Yet she also acknowledges that she may still be considered "ESL" given she acquired English proficiency at a young age, and in school.

Compared to the question of whether they would deem themselves "ESL," respondents were noticeably more affective in their responses when asked how they *felt* about the term itself. For instance, one Spanish L1 student describes an "ESL" student as "a student who grew up most of their lives speaking another language other than English, but [was] *forced* to learn English due to the schools and community" (emphasis added). "ESL" in this context represents a lack of agency in self-identification, a reluctant label taken on by someone in the face of institutional and societal expectations.

"ESL" as a negative term. Students who believed "ESL" carried a negative connotation generally cited a correlation with one's level of intelligence, a de facto association with being a racial minority, and overall inferiority. The majority of respondents who associated "ESL" with a negative connotation believed the term is used to describe someone who is unintelligent, or less intelligent than those who learned English as their first language: "Growing up I hated that label because it made me feel like I was stupid just because English isn't my first language," a Spanish L1 student wrote. While not having experienced this prejudice first-hand, one Spanish L2 student was still aware of the stigma attached to the term. "I have not experienced any negative connotation due to my language because most schools I've been to were diverse," she said, adding that nonetheless, "I feel that 'ESL' students are viewed as less intellectual when that's NOT the case." Several students believed "ESL" should exist simply to signal a student's English learning needs, but that negative associations with their intelligence can overshadow this purpose. "I personally don't feel that 'ESL' has a positive or negative connotation to me because if English is your second language you should receive some help and there's nothing wrong with that," said

one student, for example. She adds, however, “I do feel like the label ‘ESL’ has negative stereotypes around it, people seem to think that if you’re ‘ESL’ then you’re not that smart.”

Other students believed the term unfairly suggested a fixed otherness of the speaker based on their race, regardless of English proficiency acquired: “Personally if I had the label I would take a bit of offense to it cause that insinuates that all the English classes that I took my whole life was for nothing or that my racial identity makes people think that I don’t know English,” said one student. “It represents inequality and not belonging to the majority race. Some ‘ESL’ students may feel excluded from the rest of their peers,” another student wrote. For her, this linguistic othering paves the way for racial othering that may in turn present an impediment to someone’s social well-being.

Further, students correlated “ESL” with a general sense of inferiority. One English L2 student reported being “looked down upon.” A simultaneous bilingual student who learned Chinese and English at the same time nonetheless cited being a Chinese speaker as having caused him to feel “out of the norm.” However, he expresses pride that he is able to bring linguistic and cultural knowledge to the table that his monolingual English-speaking peers cannot: “[My languages are] also a strength because I am different yet the same as them.”

Writing Instruction and Support

On the types of writing instruction and support they have found helpful, or would like to see more of on campus, students responded with the following emergent sub-themes: the ability to choose their own writing topics; the freedom to write from a personal standpoint; more practical and personalized writing support; on-campus student community.

Choosing your own topics. Among the types of writing assignments respondents found most valuable were either narratives, freewriting, or argumentative papers based on a topic of their own choosing. Words and phrases most commonly used to describe their preferred assignments were “relatable,” “opinion,” “feelings,” “my experiences,” “express myself,” and “personal.”

“Maybe the ones where you’re given a topic/assignment that you can choose or relate to/free writing, not only because it might be easier but because it won’t feel like a burden,” wrote one student. Interestingly, she adds, “I would probably remember what I wrote about, it won’t feel like I wrote it in vain even if I got a low score.” Beyond getting a good grade on the assign-

ment, this student believes that assignments that are relatable and not too rigid are intrinsically rewarding and help with the retention of knowledge.

Personal writing. Similarly, another student emphasizes the value of loose constraints in writing assignments, believing that the genre of personal writing allows for the greatest flexibility in form. “I find the most valuable would have to be a personal paper about me or something that has impacted my life in some way,” she writes. “Something that is personal, I think is the most valuable because you have no limits to what you can write, you can write it in your own way. and speak about it well, with no format.” Collaborative assignments such as in-class group work and discussion board posts were also preferred among respondents, along with the traditional academic essay.

Outside of the classroom, however, students who have not sought writing support on campus vastly outnumbered those who have. Four students have consulted the college’s Tutoring Center for help on writing assignments; one has gone to the CUNY Start program (which allows students who need to take one or more skills development courses before beginning credit-bearing courses) for assistance. Meanwhile, nine respondents explicitly noted that they have either not sought support or were not aware of existing writing support at QCC, and the remaining students did not answer the question at all.

Practical and personalized writing support. Students’ suggestions for added writing support on campus range from formal programs that tended to their writing competencies, to student communities that would boost their confidence as writers. On the formal side, one student who has not reached out for writing support suggested the addition of “a department where students could go to get help in writing and feedback on papers.” This perhaps gestures to his lack of awareness of a tutoring center at the college, and/or the function of one. An L1 Cantonese-Chinese speaker who was not admitted as an “ESL” student, nor self-identified as “ESL” nonetheless wanted to see “more support for writing in multiple different languages.” Yet others wanted more practical writing support for essay and research paper writing.

On-campus community. Students also sought writing support for more personal reasons. One recommended “maybe like a club or something like that,” as it “might be helpful for students who might be struggling writing essays, or papers.” A few students suggested a “creative writing club” would help in fostering their enjoyment of writing, while another student recommended “a journal entry class, so students can feel comfortable talking about personal dilemmas while improving their writing.” This particular student saw a connection between one’s personal life and lived experiences

with their writing outcomes, and wanted support that addressed this gap in what the college values in its writing instruction

“ESL” RELATIONALITIES: FACULTY RESPONSES

Teaching and Disciplinary Background / “ESL” Positionality

Twenty-eight English faculty members responded to the faculty survey. Several of them taught multiple sections of the same class while others taught multiple sections across different English classes. At the time of the survey, 19 faculty members taught English 101: English Composition I; five taught ALP (Accelerated Learning Program): a dual enrollment program, comprising English 99 and English 101, that provides students with supplemental support to advance to English 102; five taught English 102: English Composition II: Introduction to Literature; three taught English 90: Integrated Reading and Writing for Advanced “ESL” Students; and two taught the upper-level English 201: Introduction to Literary Studies. Other outlying respondents taught English 220: Introduction to Creative Writing, and CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program), a special program that helps “ESL” students improve their language skills before they begin taking credit-bearing courses. Of these faculty, the majority have backgrounds in literature (i.e. Comparative, 18th century, 17th century British). Four broadly identified their disciplines as English; four have disciplinary backgrounds in “ESL” or TESOL (Teachers of English as a Second Language); three, in composition/rhetoric; two in Applied Linguistics.

None of those with literature backgrounds cited a definition of “ESL” within their disciplines. Among those with “ESL” and TESOL backgrounds, Professor RR (all names are pseudonyms) wrote that “ESL” was a term used to refer to “students whose native language is not English *and* who struggle with speaking, reading, understanding or writing in English” (emphasis added). In this context, the mere need for improved English skills is not enough to qualify an “ESL” student; the student also needs to be a “native” user of a non-English language. Coming from the same disciplinary background, Professor W believed “ESL” refers to “anyone who speaks a language other than English at home.” However, she disagrees with this criterion, having observed her “ESL”-designated students’ English proficiency in her classes; “I have had students listed as ‘ESL’ who spoke fluent English,” she states. This recalls the nuanced linguistic identities of our multilingual students,

who can be simultaneously proficient in multiple languages and possess a translingual orientation across home and school contexts. Trained in TESOL and Linguistics, Professor R believes “ELL” is a “more accurate term” to refer to those we have traditionally considered “ESL,” given the breadth of linguistic knowledge these students may already possess: it is not always a heritage language versus English language binary. “Many non-native speakers studying the English language already have a second or third language in their repertoire,” he writes.

It is important to understand how (if at all) different English subdisciplines understand the “ESL” term if we want to spur department-wide English collaboration and writing instruction that equitably accounts for our multilingual students’ backgrounds and language proficiencies. Professor M, who holds a background in Composition, delineates between “multilingual students” in her field and “English Language Learners” in TESOL. Having worked in developmental education for over 10 years, she notes, “I have seen how these distinct definitions by these two fields can make cross-disciplinary conversations about ‘ESL’ students difficult. My discipline focuses more on linguistically diverse students, some of whom might be identified as ‘ESL’ in a formal way through an ‘ESL’ program’s criteria,” she says, referring to the “ESL” flagging criteria outlined in the Introduction. Professor M makes a disciplinary distinction: while Composition considers “ESL” students in light of their language repertoires, TESOL considers “ESL” students in terms of their English language learning needs.

On the college level, Professor M notes that this formalization of the “ESL” definition in writing placement has led many students who would benefit from additional English support to fall through the cracks. “CUNY is currently using a pretty narrow definition to identify students as ‘ESL’ through the admissions process,” she writes. “It used to be that students were identified as ‘ESL’ through an examination of their placement essay (and perhaps their answers to questions about linguistic background and language use). ‘ESL’ functioned more as a marker of linguistically diverse writers in need of additional Academic English support when scorers of placement exams were looking at writing samples. Now the ‘ESL’ definition is more formalized, which means fewer students are identified as ‘ESL’ and therefore offered ELL support.” This narrow institutional framework for writing placement, coupled with cross-disciplinary disagreements on what constitutes an “ESL” student, further complicates how colleges place, instruct, and evaluate multilingual students.

In terms of what faculty understand the college's definition of "ESL" student to be, responses varied widely, from some believing that "ESL" students are simply those placed in ALP classes (which is not necessarily the case), to others outright admitting that they were unaware of the college's official definition, either because it was "constantly changing" or "unclear." Professor E, who has worked at CUNY for 20 years, writes bluntly, "I try to avoid any definition they provide. I prefer the term 'English Language Learners' because it puts the students in the same space as those who would study French, Spanish, Latin, Chinese, etc." Similar to Professor R, Professor E's preference of "ELL" to guide her instruction of multilingual students serves as a way to relativize a student's multiple languages, with English proficiency being just one of a student's (rather than *the*) potential language learning goals.

Professor A agrees with Professor M on the limitations of a formal means to identify an "ESL" student, believing that students should have agency in their linguistic self-identification. "I think labeling a student as 'ESL' in some official way should come only from interaction with the student: from asking them about their language(s) and their own level of comfort and fluency with English," she says. Citing "students who I have seen labeled 'ESL' in CUNYFirst (an online platform through which faculty can review their students' records) but whose English skills are very strong," Professor A doesn't see the usefulness of the "ESL" label. Like Professor W, she has noticed a discrepancy between some students who have been designated "ESL" through placement criteria—and thus deemed in need of supplemental English instruction—and their actual English competencies, which can exceed those of their English L1 peers.

Classroom Context

Key sub-themes found in faculty responses included "ESL" students' preoccupation with notions of "correctness," rhetorical dexterity, practical barriers to learning writing, and negative impact of the "ESL" label on writing performance.

"Correctness" over intent. The most common challenges faculty noted their multilingual students faced related to mechanics: trouble translating vocabulary words from a heritage language to English; adapting to the linear Aristotelian structure that is typical of Western argumentation; incorrectly mirroring English sentences after the grammatical structure of their heritage language. Faculty noted students' preoccupation with "cor-

rectness,” namely, with grammar. While some feel this concern is justified, others worry that it can impact a student’s sense of confidence as a writer.

Granted, grammar is not a priority for all instructors—after all, some like Professor D, have observed grammatical struggles in student papers and online discussion board posts, yet note that because these students dedicate time to comprehending class texts, they can still produce strong writing. A preoccupation with “correct” grammar, Professor E believes, can stop a student from even beginning to write. She argues that more emphasis needs to be placed on an assignment’s “content or intent.” In response to the pressures her English L2 students might feel to produce “correct” grammar, Professor T has lowered the stakes on this criterion, and has observed a shift in her students’ performance and attitude towards writing. She describes a student who “is really an enthusiastic writer, and since now grammar and punctuation is 0% of the grade, the students’ enthusiasm seems to grow.”

Conversely, a preoccupation with “getting it right” has fostered in many “ESL” students a determination to proactively seek supplemental instruction. Professor L has seen her “ESL” students “show determination in crafting their writing, including coming to the professor for extra help, working with a writing center tutor, and making sure they understand what the assignment is asking.” These efforts have yielded tangible results. “Students who possess this perseverance tend to have more positive outcomes in the class,” she says. Professor D adds, “‘ESL’ students often excel in their study habits, their effort, and insights. I have often been impressed by how much many ‘ESL’ students care and are invested in their learning.”

Rhetorical dexterity. In being extremely focused on their grammar usage, students have also demonstrated a keen rhetorical awareness of the choices that go into their sentence construction. Said Professor A, “I’ve noted in particular that some ‘ESL’ students have a strong willingness to share and discuss the norms of their first or second written language(s) in comparison to English. So these students are strong in their ability to reflect on written language and rhetoric generally.” Other faculty similarly noticed a meta-awareness in their “ESL” students, using phrases like “deep and analytical thinking” and “critical” to describe their writing processes.

Faculty have also noticed that their “ESL” students have often in fact demonstrated dexterity in using *stylistic language*, given their multilingualism and cross-cultural knowledges. They have described their “ESL” students’ writing as “poetic,” “rhythmic,” and having “flavor”—strengths that can be overlooked if these students are referred to only in a loaded term that otherwise merely denotes having learned English secondarily. Professor KA,

an instructor of the upper-level English 201: Introduction to Literary Studies, has observed “poetic translations of home phrases,” while Professor D writes, “Many bring... a sound, rhythm, and texture to their writing that offer innovative as well as critically responsive ways to put forth their thoughts, their experiences, their assessments of an event or text.”

Of course, faculty note that these strengths are often dependent on the kind of prior formal education students have received, which, contrary to “ESL” placement criteria, may depend less on whether the primary language spoken at an institution, or a standardized high school exit exam was conducted in English, and more on cultural differences that influence rhetorical styles of argumentation, skills prioritized (i.e. rote learning; critical thinking/reading/writing), and beliefs of what the ultimate goal(s) of being able to write well should be (i.e. self-expression; acing an exam; applying to college, or a job).

Practical barriers. Other challenges that instructors observed in their students included unrealistic deadlines (English L2 students often needed more time than their English L1 peers to read texts and complete assignments), unfamiliar cultural references and idiomatic expressions in texts, and quite simply, “general life challenges” such as employment, long work hours, and family obligations—considerations that aren’t as present among four-year college students.

Several professors believed that the move to online learning and events of the past few years have exacerbated existing issues faced by their English L2 students: “In the past year or two, more students have had trouble with understanding, reading, and writing in general,” says Professor D. “In meeting with them, they are not always sure what to do—many don’t have the time or foundation they can draw on as their own.” Foundational reading and writing skills are absent from many of their English L2 students’ repertoires, leading them to rely on familiar habits to read and write about English language texts. “They struggle to understand literature, books and articles,” notes Professor RR. “Some read in their first language whereas others make up or contrive information about a piece of literature.”

Impact of “ESL” on writing performance. And then, there is the obstacle presented by the term “ESL” itself, and all that it can connote for a student. “More than any particular syntax/grammar issue their sense of self and confidence is greatly impacted by their ‘ESL’ status,” writes Professor ND. “They feel insecure about their academic proficiency because of their language fluency, or their perceived language fluency, even if they are academically stronger than other native speakers in the class.” Professor D

likewise has noticed, “Many ‘ESL’ students have a better understanding of grammar than native speakers of English.” Indeed, students deemed “ESL” by the college can very well be proficient in English, mechanically and stylistically—even more so than their English L1 classmates. However, these students may feel held back by the assumptions of a “fixed” deficiency that is tied to, as Professor ND phrased it, their ‘ESL’ status.”

Writing Support and Praxis

Predominant themes that emerged from faculty’s responses include: the need for more positive reinforcement of multilingual students’ assets; more non-academic writing assignments; more institutional support prior to or during their matriculated writing classes; placement reform.

Positive reinforcement. Faculty insist on making their students’ strengths known to them. “I think in teaching, it’s important to acknowledge these strengths—students like to hear they add to an assignment, that their work and effort is recognized,” says Professor D. Professor C recognizes that often, “ESL” students are doing double duty—learning a new language while learning how to use it in the college context, in Standard Academic English. “I believe this fact should be greater acknowledged and praised by the faculty,” she writes. Amid the persisting stereotypes that are attached to the “ESL” label and students’ tendency to internalize them, it is critical that their instructors remind them that they are valuable contributors, both practically and creatively, to their classrooms.

Non-academic writing assignments. In terms of praxis, faculty recognize that students are generally more comfortable writing about personal topics. Professor KA assigns a “poetry explication assignment” that asks students to close-read their own poem, its devices and uses of figurative language: “They seem more comfortable to talk about something familiar, than when they write about texts/histories that are unfamiliar,” she says. Similarly, Professor D has seen her students “write eloquently about ‘place,’ their neighborhood, memories of childhood in their native country.” This genre of personal narrative writing has fostered a comfort level that has allowed for more inventive use of language. Writes Professor D, “These writings have been especially rich in imagery, in sensory details, that bring forth the presence of these places. These assignments are especially effective after they’ve responded to particular readings and considered how different writers present their own descriptions of place—of childhood memories.” She cleverly weaves in these personal writing assignments with writings

about class texts, allowing students to synthesize their understanding of shared human experiences in a broader conversation. Other personal topics instructors ask their students to write about have included role models, foods, and “memories of a place in nature.” “Non-academic” writing assignments, Professor AA says, motivate students to write. “I find assignments outside the standard essay model give students a greater sense of the exigency of writing practice and can be incentivizing to ‘ESL’ and native English speakers.”

Several instructors name poetry as a genre that gets their students especially engaged and invested in writing. “Many of my ‘ESL’ students have enjoyed working with poetry, particularly because of its focus on imagery and emotional impact. This transcends language and gives students a useful tool for expression,” Professor A says. An instructor of first-year writing and the director of QCC’s Creative Writing Club, Professor C writes, “Many ‘ESL’ students have great strengths in writing poetry and writing creatively, as there are less rules to follow in creative writing, especially poetry, and they can use the vocabulary and syntax that works for them to communicate.” Her students’ creative writing, as enabled by fewer “rules,” is reminiscent of Professor T’s student who became more “enthusiastic” about writing once grammar and punctuation became worth 0% of her grade. Professors A and C’s observations about their students’ writing of, and responses to, poetry, demonstrate the genre’s efficacy not just in creating more comfortable, flexible spaces for students to experiment with voice; they also in bringing out their aforementioned stylistic dexterity in “sound, rhythm, texture,” and “translations,” as noted by Professors KA and D.

In addition to personal writing, Professor R has found low-stakes reading responses to be effective in engaging and encouraging “ESL” students to write more freely. During the time of this research, he assigned his class *The Alchemist*, “which is not too challenging of a read, but is a novel full of big ideas about life.” In their response journals, students answer a weekly thought-provoking question related to the novel. Professor R believes the assignment has worked well in building writing fluency given it is not graded; students can “relax a bit and to express themselves in English.” Professor L has similarly observed more expressive writing in her “ESL” students’ writing in low stakes writing assignments such as discussion boards: “Even when there is error, their responses are more robust and developed.” Professor CL assigns “lots of in-class informal writing,” then, from these low-stakes assignments, asks his students to choose one or two of those informal pieces “to be upcycled into carefully crafted versions.” Like Professor D, Professor

CL uses scaffolding as a means to ease his “ESL” students into writing more comfortably, confidently, and creatively.

Other professors weave in socialization with scaffolding. In her English 102 classes, Professor R assigns “group presentations/videos on specific sections of a book we’re reading. The groups are of mixed backgrounds so they must work in English. They must also listen, read, write, comprehend in order to complete the task.” Professor R writes that the socialization aspect of the task forces her “ESL” students to practice, in real time, their English-speaking skills. Professor P aims to make his assignments more relevant to his students through their medium. He recalls a particularly effective “writing/speaking assignment that asked the students to write a summary of a chapter of the novel, *Siddhartha*, and then make a TikTok based on that summary” that they would publish on the app and share with the class. Because of students’ familiarity with TikTok’s generic conventions, this assignment led to improved grammar and summary writing. In addition to improving writing, Professor R and P’s assignments foster community and support in the classroom among students from different linguistic backgrounds.

Increased institutional support. On the institutional level, Professor R argues that often, “ESL” students need more training on reading and writing skills prior to enrolling in credit-bearing writing classes. Professor A warns that without this preliminary support, some students will inevitably fail their English classes. “This is a change CUNY needs to initiate, especially with the influx of immigrants into NYC,” she says. “Throwing these people in [matriculated English classes] may set them up for failure.” She notes that this is a particular risk for “ESL” students who are not literate in their heritage languages. Other forms of institutional support suggested by faculty include student workshops, reinstated, required visits to a “writing lab.” Currently, an optional “Conversation Hour” workshop for ELL students allows students to practice their oral fluency in English with peers in an informal, out-of-classroom environment. In terms of credit-bearing English classes, Professor R also calls for more course offerings targeted towards English language learners. “As it stands, we only have English 90, and students are expected to be prepared for a co-req with English 101 after just one semester. As research clearly shows, language acquisition takes more time than that.”

Placement reform. Placement and assessment practices also need to change in order to be more equitable. “Many of us are wondering what happened to our ‘ESL’ population,” Professor R says, of the dwindling number of students placed as “ESL.” “This semester we had only 43 students place into our one ‘ESL’ level.” He cites the Spring 2020 introduction of the CUNY

Proficiency Index—which employs multiple measures to “more accurately assess the developmental needs of our students than placement tests”—as a potential reason for this sudden discrepancy (OAA 1). “Before CUNY instituted their mysterious placement index, which waives many ELLs from taking a standardized CUNY writing exam, we had many more students in our ‘ESL’ classes,” he says. Ongoing advancements in AI technology have caused faculty to feel concern that the individual needs of students are overlooked during placement. “CUNY should implement an English assessment that is graded by a human being, not a computer, which is the case for the new Accuplacer—the prospective students’ writing will be scored by AI (!!!),” Professor P writes, adding that in addition to non-machine assessment, we could gain a fuller sense of a student’s language competence through an oral assessment, “via a brief interview of all students.”

Professor L suggests that the college “switch terminology to ‘multilingual’ across the board. And DEFINITELY allow [the] Foreign Languages department [to] offer WI (Writing Intensive) classes. It is a real shame that this hasn’t happened yet.” He also suggests closer collaboration between the English department and the Foreign Languages department by merging the two: “Call it Language and Writing or something like that.” As indicated by Professor L’s response, lasting and meaningful writing support for our multilingual students comes with a change and reorganization in institutional structures and a change in mindset. That is where rethinking terminology comes in.

TOWARD A MULTILINGUAL FUTURE

To echo David Bartholomae’s sentiments about basic writing reform, “The first thing we would need to do to change the curriculum would be to *change the way the profession talked about the students who didn’t fit*” (Bartholomae 21, emphasis added). Change begins with mindset, which is then followed by practice. While terms can seem benign, we as writing instructors and compositionists undoubtedly know that what terms we use, and how, matter.

A Change in Mindset

The hope is that this article can encourage us to be more cognizant of the potentially damaging effects and implications of the terms we use to describe our linguistically diverse students—particularly, terms that essentialize a student and rob them of linguistic self-determination. Validation

goes hand in hand with supplemental support and instruction. As Professor J states, “I think students find tutoring helpful, but also I think it’s just important not to make ‘ESL’ students feel as if they are behind or as if they are a problem. They come in with rich language skills (that I envy) and adaptation into any language is a process. I don’t like hearing conversations where it feels as if ‘ESL’ students are being viewed clinically or critically. I think any extra language help is something they find helpful, but I don’t like the idea of constant testing to categorize people.” The assumptions of deficiency that come with the “ESL” identifier can be internalized by students and instructors alike.

Language identities will be layered and complex, leading to new classifications—and this is what a translingual disposition toward multilingualism acknowledges. Student identities may need to be continually re-imagined for pedagogical purposes (Canagarajah 430). It may be some time before this and other disciplines (see Professor M’s earlier note about Composition/TE-SOL divisions) can agree on a singular term to describe linguistically diverse students—and perhaps there is no term that isn’t entirely unproblematic, or accounts for every nuance in a student’s background.

In the meantime, in the midst of these terms’ continual institutional usages and presence, instructors should actively seek to understand their students’ linguistic self-identifications, through a translingual framework. While terms like “ESL” and “ELL” and binaries like “L1/L2,” and “native/non-native” can be guiding heuristics that orient us to where a student might stand on their English learning needs, they should be merely that—guides—for our instruction, program development, and conception of writing support systems. Our efforts at getting to know our multilingual students’ linguistic capabilities, preferred modes of learning, and personal roadblocks should be ongoing, personalized, and individualized. “Such knowledge is particularly relevant in order to support late arrival resident L2 students who may not appear to be multilingual, i.e., depending on their oral fluency levels, they may be mistaken for monolingual L1 students, but their writing may nonetheless exhibit patterns that do not adhere to the norms of the ‘standard’ language that may be expected in the classroom,” argue Crista de Kleine et al. (7). Indeed, instructors and their institutions need to take greater initiative in learning their students’ background linguistic knowledges to make up for what simple L1 and L2 classifications cannot account for.

A Shift in Praxis

With this shift in mindset, instructor initiatives may take the form of embedding curricula that help instructors identify multilingual students' writing competencies and needs, in faculty programs, first-year composition programming for instructors, or programming offered through Writing Across the Curriculum programs, writing centers, ESL support services. Teachers—especially at community colleges, where faculty are often over-worked and undercompensated—should be given opportunities to attend workshops on teaching second language writers at professional conferences. Instructors may be trained to understand the ways cultural differences can influence writing patterns, and writing programs can familiarize themselves with the multilingual populations surrounding their institutions (CCCC). Being able to locate and interpret the varied “second language effects” of students given their language background could, importantly, broaden our understanding of multilingual students' language competencies, and inform fairer, more student-centered teaching and assessment practices.

QCC faculty member and former English Department Chair Jennifer Maloy sees linguistic difference as a site for pedagogical opportunity rather than constraints. “We. . . should consider possibilities for thoughtfully integrating linguistically diverse students into basic writing and composition courses,” she argues in “Binary Structures in a Translingual Age” (32). Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner and QCC faculty Jed Shahar put Paul Kei Matsuda and Tony Silva’s proposal of a cross-cultural composition class into practice in advanced-level developmental writing courses by mixing English language learners (ELLs) and native English speakers (NES) (Matsuda and Silva; Comeau-Kirschner and Shahar). In contrast, a growing number of universities are offering “ESL” track FYC courses, comprising self-identifying “ESL” students, as an equal alternative to “mainstream” FYC courses, rather than a prerequisite for first-year composition. Students are placed into these FYC-equivalent courses through directed self-placement (DSP), a model in which students receive guidance on how to place themselves, and then make their own placement decisions. Given its matriculated status, the availability of these classes can boost retention while fostering a safe space for cultural and linguistic exchange in the classroom (Mesina 24, 27). The potential downside of such a course may come from students' further feelings of marginalization, given their negative responses to the “ESL” label. These “segregated” classes may also perpetuate the myth of “linguistic homogeneity” (Matsuda 638).

Furthermore, Hope Parisi asks that we seize on the generative nature of writing in teacher-student collaborations. When teachers consider students' literate lives alongside their own, a network of subjectivities forms, providing a repertoire of diverse yet intersectional literacies and identities—a translingual disposition rooted in social justice (139). Additionally, among Maloy's proposed reforms for writing placement are designing Directed Self-Placement (DSP) protocols for multilingual students that consider their local contexts and demographics, and gives credit to the self-awareness they may hold on their own English language competencies. "Translingual approaches to writing placement for linguistically diverse students. . . must be built on the belief that, as experienced language users, students will have valuable views on the types of courses that would best serve them," writes Maloy (50). Echoing her advocacy for DSP for linguistically diverse students, the CCCC 2020 statement adds that the advantages and disadvantages of each placement option should be made transparent to international and residential multilingual students alike so they can make informed decisions (CCCC). A translingual approach to how we place, instruct, and refer to our linguistically diverse students is the means by which we can fairly and fully honor their agency: agency to linguistically self-identify, to flout conventional academic structures, and to mobilize their diverse language repertoires in their meaning-making.

Ultimately, a translingual approach to teaching composition benefits *all* of our students, regardless of linguistic background. The term "translingual," Lu and Horner note, has commonly been associated with "those deemed linguistically 'other'," such as writers designated "ESL." It is therefore a sort of "prescription" given just to these students for support; "Conversely, those identified as English monolinguals are seen as beyond the purview or concern of teachers and scholars taking a translingual approach" (585). In fact, when language difference is seen as the norm, we recognize that it permeates all language users' everyday contexts. "A translingual approach is best understood as a disposition of openness and inquiry toward language and language differences, not as a matter of the number and variety of languages and language varieties one can claim to know," write Lu and Horner (585). Meaning negotiation, translation, and invention are inherent processes in languaging, including "standard" varieties that claim to be static.

Navigating the composition classroom through this lens frames writing as an emergent act, not as something to master. This can take pressure off of multilingual and monolingual students who in their educational experience have been trained to produce texts that are "correct," and pave the way

for writing that is more confident, engaging, and expressive. And even more than this, it can reinforce to students that they have *a right to choose*—*whom* they write as, what they write *about*, and *how* they write.

NOTES

1. Students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds are unaccounted for in CUNY writing placement, which determines incoming students' English proficiency by the languages primarily used in their previous schooling and standardized exams. First-year students are flagged as "ESL" if they have spent at least six months in an institution where English is not the primary language. The consequences for placement are severe; at QCC, those placed in "interventional" coursework (many of which are non-credit-bearing) often end up dropping out of the course, or college altogether. Across CUNY campuses, less than half of students assigned to developmental courses have finished them by the end of their first year (Che).
2. Given the research conducted in this work draws from contributions from students and faculty at QCC, and writing placement at the college flags "ESL" students, this term in particular will be used to anchor this discussion. Separate from the discussion of terms, "multilingual" will be used to refer to students to more holistically account for those who learned English as their first, second, third, etc. languages.
3. The criteria has since been expanded to include students who have graduated from a secondary school where the language of instruction is English, and completed at least one semester in a non-English secondary school environment, or completed their High School Equivalency Examination (GED, TASC, HiSet) in a language other than English (Office of Academic Affairs [OAA]).
4. In the context of this article, "L1" and "L2" will be used to delineate between students who learned English as their first language and those who learned it as their second language. They will be discussed alongside simultaneous bilinguals, who learned two or more languages in congruence as their first languages.

APPENDIX

QCC First-Year Placement by Academic Year

Student Survey Questions

Student Background Questions

- What year are you in at QCC?
- What is/are your first language/s?
- What languages and/or dialects can you communicate in?
- For each of the languages you mentioned above, specify where you use them in everyday life (i.e. home, school, friends).
- Were you admitted as an “ESL” (English as a Second Language) student?

Linguistic Identity and “ESL” Positionality

- How do you define someone who is “ESL”?
- How do you feel about the “ESL” student” label? Does it have a positive and/or negative connotation to you, and why?
- Would YOU consider yourself “ESL”? Why or why not?

Writing Instruction and Support

- Generally speaking, what kinds of writing assignments do you find the most valuable?
- What writing support, if any, have you found helpful at QCC? In what ways was this support helpful?
- What writing support, if any, would you like to see at QCC?

Faculty Survey Questions

Teaching and Disciplinary Background / “ESL” Positionality

- What English class(es) are you teaching this semester?
- What is your discipline? How does your discipline define “ESL” students (if at all)?
- What is your understanding of how the College/CUNY defines “ESL” students?
- What would YOU consider to be the criteria for an “ESL” student”? What informs your definition?

Classroom Context

- What are some writing *challenges* that your “ESL” students have faced?
- Similarly, what are some writing *strengths* that your “ESL” students have possessed?

Writing Support and Praxis

- Describe an assignment that you have found to be particularly effective in your teaching of “ESL” students. What elements of the assignment were particularly efficacious, and why? What learning outcomes did you observe?
- What suggestions, if any, do you have on how we can improve pedagogy/support services for “ESL” students?

Student Themes and Codes

Category #1: Linguistic Identity and Positionality				
Themes				
	Age of language acquisition	Ease of heritage vs. English language use	Ability to navigate everyday spaces in English	Negative impression of “ESL” term
Codes	Introduction to U.S. schooling	Correct pronunciation and grammar	Use in school/work/other predominantly-English-speaking spaces	Correlation with one’s level of intelligence
	Arriving to the U.S.	Frequency of language use	Heritage language does not interfere with English use	A de facto association with being a racial minority
	Relationship of language with place (i.e. English = America)	Level of “struggle” with a language		Overall inferiority
				Lack of agency; predetermined identity

Category #2: Writing Instruction and Support			
Themes			
	Ability to choose their own writing topics and expectations	Practical and personalized writing support and assignments	On-campus student community
Codes	More motivation to write	Tutoring for multi-lingual writing	Creative writing club
	Better knowledge retention	Journal writing to express writing insecurities and concerns	Collaborative assignments, in-person and virtually
	Likelier to write better		Writing support club
	More investment in assignment itself; less preoccupied with grade		
	No formatting requirements		

Faculty Themes and Codes

Category #1: Classroom Context			
Themes			
	“ESL” students’ metacognitive abilities	Cultural differences	Negative impact of “ESL” on performance
Codes	Can explain grammatical norms of different languages	Unfamiliar with idiomatic expressions; U.S. cultural references	Feelings of deficiency
	Literary translations from heritage to English language	Different writing/argumentation styles	Lack of confidence as writers
		Emphasis on different writing abilities and skills in heritage country	

Category #2: Writing Support and Praxis				
Themes				
	Need for more positive reinforcement of multilingual students' assets	More non-academic writing assignments	More institutional support prior to, or during their matriculated writing classes	Placement Reform
Codes	Recognition of translation work in writing	Poetry responses	Student workshop/writing lab	Support before placement in matriculated writing class
	Acknowledgement of their contributions to an assignment	Writing about childhood memories	Conversation hour	Placement exams graded by humans rather than computers
		Writing about food	Collaboration between English and Foreign Languages department	
		Low-stakes assignments		
		Use of multimodalities (i.e. social media)		

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