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Piloting a Language Autoethnography in a First-Year Writing Program: A Study of Five Multilingual Student Writers

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ABSTRACT

Texas Tech University's first-year writing (FYW) program initiated a pilot of a language autoethnography assignment to begin shifting toward a translingual theory of language. A translingual paradigm challenges how monolingual perspectives limit access for multilingual students by viewing their linguistic identities, skills, and experiences from a deficit lens. Based on interviews with five multilingual FYW students, analyses of their projects, and interviews with their teachers, this study shows that 1) students' language autoethnographies and interviews reveal rhetorical awareness and attunement toward language difference and practices, and 2) students' attunement to linguistic difference assisted them in transferring knowledge to the new situation of the academic essay, but their representations of language may have led to a reluctance to take risks in the essays. We conclude with implications for FYW programs and teachers, including the need to explicitly interrogate academic norms with students and to provide professional development for teachers. Ultimately, providing opportunities for students and teachers to engage in translingual practices alone does not create access. Approaches to translingual writing curriculum must also find ways to explicitly name and challenge monolingual language ideologies that limit access for multilingual students in writing classrooms.

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Introduction

Writing programs have recently grappled with how to meaningfully, effectively, and ethically respond to the translingual turn in rhetoric and writing studies (Horner et al., 2011). Those advocating for translingualism in rhetoric and writing studies argue that writing programs, classes, and teachers should value students' linguistic diversity and resourcefulness (e.g., Bou Ayash, 2019; Canagarajah, 2013; Guerra, 2016, 2022; Horner & Tetreault, 2017; Lorimer Leonard, 2014; Lu & Horner, 2016). Many have critiqued monolingual education for enacting a "metadiscursive regime" that reinforces a hierarchy of language practices and consequently supports material and cultural status quos (Corcoran & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 24). A translingual approach, on the other hand, "sees difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning" (Horner et al., 2011, p. 303). Consequently, a translingual approach requires "changes to writing programs in the design of writing curricula" (p. 309). While many scholars, teachers, and writing program administrators might agree with arguments for translingual approaches in theory, these approaches remain challenging to implement in practice for entire writing programs. Implementing a translingual approach for an entire program can be challenging in part because it requires professional development in translingual theories and practices, as well as collaboration across stakeholders (Canagarajah, 2016; Horner et al., 2011).

Driven by a desire to revise our first-year writing (FYW) program's curriculum and teacher preparation to encourage translingual approaches at Texas Tech, our research team developed and implemented a language autoethnography assignment. The assignment, adapted from Corcoran and Wilkinson's (2019), was piloted in 10 sections of our first-semester course in spring 2022. We hoped to learn from and with students and teachers to inform decisions and practices about potentially scaling up the assignment to the whole program and/or implementing other translingual practices and approaches in our two-course sequence.

This article reports on an aspect of that pilot study: the experiences and writing of five multilingual students enrolled in these sections, as well as interviews with their teachers. In this article, we focus on the following question: How might a translingual approach, such as the language autoethnography assignment, help to create space in higher education for multilingual speakers to draw on all their linguistic and cultural resources for rhetorical decision-making? While the findings we share here are based on early analyses of documents and interviews, we hope that these early findings are useful in understanding multilingual students' experiences with a translingual assignment in FYW and for other programs considering such an approach, particularly

for making writing programs more accessible for multilingual students and for encouraging translingual approaches by writing teachers.

We begin by overviewing the translingual turn in rhetoric and writing studies. Next, we provide our institutional context and gloss Corcoran and Wilkinson's (2019) language autoethnography assignment. We then turn to our research methods for this study, including a discussion of our positionalities as researchers and administrators. From there, we discuss our five student participants' projects and our interviews with student participants and their teachers. Based on our early analysis, we focus on three findings: 1) Students' language autoethnographies and interviews show rhetorical awareness and attunement toward language differences and practices—a finding that confirms much research and theory on translingualism (e.g., Bou Ayash, 2019; Corcoran & Wilkinson, 2019; Lorimer, 2013; Lorimer Leonard, 2014). 2) Students' attunement to linguistic differences assisted them in transferring knowledge to the new situation of the academic essay, but their representations of language (a term we define below) may have led to a reluctance to take risks in the essays. 3) Students' aversion to risk was confirmed by teachers in the pilot study, one of whom provided useful suggestions for reframing the assignment. We conclude with implications for writing teachers and programs hoping to develop and implement translingual approaches that might make their programs and classes more inviting and accessible to multilingual students.

Translingualism in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

While “translingual writing is still in search of its own meaning,” as Matsuda (2014, p. 478) wrote nearly a decade ago, we understand translingualism in rhetoric and writing studies as an ideological approach that challenges the “metadiscursive regime” that values standardized Englishes in academia and suppresses, marginalizes, or ignores other languaging practices (Corcoran & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 24). Informed by research and theory from bilingual education and applied linguistics (Flores & Schissel, 2014; García, 2009; García et al., 2017; Otheguy et al., 2015), a translingual approach shifts teachers' focus from *forms* to *practices* (Canagarajah, 2013), thus understanding language as “not something we have but something we do” and conventions as continually formed, reformed, and transformed through these practices (Lu & Horner, 2016, p. 208; refer also to Pennycook, 2010).

It's helpful to contrast translingual approaches to other ideological approaches to language, particularly monolingualism (or eradicationism) and multilingualism (or accommodationism) (Bou Ayash, 2019; Guerra & Shivers-McNair, 2017; Horner,

2017; Horner et al., 2011). The monolingual or eradicationist ideology values “a traditional and singular linguistic identity unwilling to acknowledge a role for any other language in public discourse” (Guerra & Shivers-McNair, 2017, p. 20) and, by extension, in academic settings. This view, consequently, plays out in writing pedagogy through the valuation of Standard Written English (SWE), which is seen as “definable, systematic, neutral, and transparent,” and the exclusion or even eradication of “nonstandard” languaging practices or resources (Bou Ayosh, 2019, p. 27). A multilingual or accommodationist approach, on the other hand, sees value in (or at least tolerates) varieties of English and languages other than English (LOTE), but “assumes that each codified set of language practices is appropriate only to a specific, discrete, assigned social sphere,” meaning that language practices at home are valid and appropriate but are separate from academic language practices (Horner et al., 2011, p. 306). The problem with this approach is that it views language practices as codified and separate (e.g., a separate, discrete, and stable language for home, one for work, etc.) and fails to acknowledge how power works to define appropriateness—for instance, how certain Englishes are stigmatized and deemed “appropriate for a specific private sphere” while other Englishes are privileged as appropriate for public or academic spheres (Horner et al., 2011, p. 306; refer also to Bou Ayosh, 2019). Consequently, as Horner (2017) argued, accommodationist ideologies share eradicationism’s view of languages as existing without histories rather than as “the ongoing always-emerging product of practices” (p. 88). That is, both of these perspectives see languages as static and ahistorical rather than continually recreated (and thus evolving) through everyday practices.

Importantly, a translangual perspective is “not about fashioning a new kind of literacy. It is about understanding the practices and process that already characterize communicative activity in diverse communities to both affirm and develop them further through an informed pedagogy” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 2). While the recent turn toward translangualism in the field may be confusing to teachers, Canagarajah argued that “students don’t feel lost” because they are already engaged in translangual practices (as are all of us) (p. 8). The task at hand is “to make the classroom a safe house for such practices and facilitate such interactions for further development of these competencies” (p. 8).

While sociocultural theorists in second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics often refer to language users’ abilities to draw on their cultural knowledges to interpret and use language effectively in new contexts as *sociocultural competence* (e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2007; Moll & Arnott-Hopffer, 2005) or *multicompetence* (e.g., Cook, 1999; Hall et al., 2006), in this article we draw on Lorimer Leonard’s (formerly Lorimer)

discussion of *rhetorical attunement*, which she described as “a way of acting with language that assumes linguistic multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning to accomplish communicative ends” (Lorimer, 2013, p. 163). In her studies of multilingual writers, Lorimer Leonard argued that many studies of multilingual writers focus on their awareness and prior knowledge—which risks “suggest[ing] that multilingual writers’ resources are fixed and stable, traveling with them from one location or language to another as an unchanged repertoire of knowledge and skills”—rather than on their rhetorical and literate practices: “writers call on or create literate resources in the process of making do, asserting themselves, or communicating on the fly in specific rhetorical situations” (Lorimer Leonard, 2014, p. 228). Lorimer Leonard’s suggestion to attend to writers’ rhetorical attunement requires attending to “in-process and situationally specific” practices and “teaching for and assessing the relative success of language negotiation and play with specific audiences in certain situations” (Lorimer, 2013, p. 168).

We want to be careful as we discuss our translingual approach and multilingual students in our study. Second language (L2) writing teachers have warned that translingual approaches risk erasing the specific experiences and challenges of L2 student writers (Atkinson et al., 2015), and Matsuda (2014) argued that translingual approaches, if taken up uncritically, can turn into “linguistic tourism” (p. 483) by teachers who seek out “interesting examples—the more unusual, the better” from students (p. 482). Matsuda argued that students are unlikely to code-mesh when their teachers are monolingual and encouraged writing teachers and scholars to engage in research on linguistics and language differences.

Gilyard (2016) shared another concern, warning that translingualism can “flatten language differences” by ignoring issues of power and stigmatization (p. 286). As Gilyard observed, early movements in the field to value students’ own language use—epitomized in the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s 1974 resolution “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”—advocated for students’ language rights in response to collective oppression and stigmatization. Translingualism, however, risks individualizing differences and failing to recognize that “not all translingual writers are stigmatized in the same manner” (Gilyard, 2016, p. 286). Consequently, we must understand translingualism as not simply a matter of celebrating linguistic differences but also of investigating stigma and power.

We close this section by stressing that translingualism is not a description of how L2 writers engage with language. Rather, translingualism is an ideological approach to understanding how all language users engage with language. Importantly, translingual approaches afford the opportunity to make higher education—and writing

education—more accessible for multilingual students, and, for all students. We take Guerra’s (2022) view that “writing teachers [are] not in a position to empower our students. The best we could do . . . was to create conditions in the classroom under which students could empower themselves—if they so choose” (p. 29). Our study of this pilot of the language autoethnography asks, in a way, questions about creating those conditions to help students empower themselves.

Institutional Context and Piloting the Language Autoethnography

The FYW program at Texas Tech is a two-course sequence with a standardized curriculum that introduces students to rhetoric, critical reading, and multimodality in ENGL 1301 and to inquiry, research, and public argumentation in ENGL 1302. The program serves roughly 3,500–4,000 students per semester. Texas Tech is also a Hispanic-Serving Institution: Roughly 29% of undergraduate students are Hispanic, though this classification does not necessarily designate students’ multilingualism. Additionally, roughly 2% of undergraduates are international students. The curriculum in the program is standardized, largely because graduate instructors teach the majority of FYW sections. Many teachers are novice teachers, and teacher turnover is high, with teachers averaging one-to-two years in the program. A standardized curriculum provides consistency and continuity across sections and the program.

Seeking a way to shift our FYW program from a monolingual or accommodationist approach to a translingual approach, we identified Corcoran and Wilkinson’s (2019) language autoethnography assignment as a potential way to introduce translingual approaches to the ENGL 1301 curriculum. Like Corcoran and Wilkinson, we believed our current curriculum did not honor “the rhetorical and linguistic expertise” of our student population (p. 19). Corcoran and Wilkinson designed a language autoethnography assignment that they hoped would “place language and rhetoric in a symbiotic relationship with one another, while, at the same time, positing students as language experts by having them draw on their own authentic linguistic experiences” (p. 29).

We shared similar hopes by adapting and piloting the language autoethnography assignment. Michelle first piloted this assignment in her summer 2021 section of ENGL 1301, and we expanded the pilot in spring 2022. As Corcoran and Wilkinson (2019) outlined, the assignment asked students to identify language episodes from their lives and reflect on those episodes as rhetorical languaging choices or practices. Further, the assignment prompt also invited students “to use any elements of [their] language repertoire to tell” their stories and encouraged students to think

about how they used and presented LOTE and “non-standard” Englishes (p. 28). We provide the prompt we used in spring 2022 as an appendix, which borrows heavily from Corcoran and Wilkinson’s prompt.

Methods and Researchers’ Positionalities

In fall 2021, we asked spring 2022 ENGL 1301 teachers if they would be interested in piloting this assignment to replace the first assignment in the course. Four teachers agreed, and we held a pre-semester workshop during which we overviewed translanguaging, explained the assignment, and walked through potential approaches and in-class activities. We also provided potential readings that teachers might pair with the assignment, such as Anzaldúa’s (1987) “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” excerpts from Cisneros’s (1984) *The House on Mango Street*, and Alvarez’s (2015) “Two-Minute Spanish con Mami” (linguaging practices were not addressed in our textbook at the time). Also, during this workshop, Michelle shared her experiences teaching the language autoethnography assignment the previous summer. The four teachers taught the language autoethnography assignment as the first unit in ENGL 1301 across 10 sections, with an approximate total enrollment of 180 students.

In order to study teachers’ and students’ experiences and perspectives on the assignment, we designed an IRB-approved study that 1) interviewed teachers about their experiences teaching the assignment and 2) recruited student participants who a) shared their rough drafts, final drafts, and feedback from their instructors and b) participated in an interview about their experiences with the assignment (Texas Tech #IRB2022-182 for teacher participants and #IRB2021-1086 for student participants). Our participants include the four teachers who piloted the assignment in spring 2022 and eight students who volunteered to participate in the study.

While our ENGL 1301 curriculum is standard across sections, there are notable differences in the classes that piloted the assignment. While the classes taught by two instructors were open enrollment classes, one instructor’s (John) section was limited to students in the Texas Success Initiative program with a focus on developmental literacy, which is now a co-requisite with ENGL 1301 in Texas. Another instructor (Brenda) had sections with a similar distinct focus: Advisors and the Director of First-Year Writing targeted struggling and/or repeat 1301 students for these smaller four sections in hope that the smaller class size and more focused instructor attention—with learning assistant support—would increase student retention and success.

We recruited student participants by visiting each class, talking about the study, and asking students to consider participating. We followed up with an email that restated the study's purpose and the process for participation. Eight students participated in the study: seven students provided materials and an interview, and one student provided materials but not an interview. In recognition of their time and labor, student participants received a \$50 scholarship for sharing their projects and a \$50 scholarship for participating in the interview. We similarly offered \$100 to the teacher participants following their interviews. Out of the eight student participants, five are multilingual speakers.

Following the conclusion of data collection, the team transcribed the interviews, provided pseudonyms for participants, and removed all identification signifiers from materials before analyzing the content. For our initial analysis, we focus on the five multilingual student participants:

- Tara, a first-year student from India majoring in computer science. She grew up speaking Marathi and Hindi (and primarily Marathi at home) and learned English in primary school.
- Joshua, a first-year student from Nigeria majoring in business. He grew up speaking English, Pidgin English, and Yoruba.
- Antonin, a first-year student–athlete from Poland majoring in kinesiology. He grew up speaking Polish and learned English through formal education.
- Björn, a first-year student–athlete from Sweden majoring in economics. He grew up speaking Swedish and learned English through formal education.
- Darshan, a first-year student from India majoring in computer science. He grew up speaking Telugu and now speaks Telugu, Hindi, and English. (Darshan shared his language autoethnography but did not participate in an interview.)

Situating ourselves as the research team is necessary because our positionalities affect how we approach this study. Michael is a tenured associate professor and served as WPA (2018–2021). As a White, English-only speaker and writer, Michael became committed to linguistic justice and translingual approaches in FYW after conversations with multilingual, BIPOC, and international graduate students who expressed frustration and disappointment in how the FYW curriculum privileged SWE. Michelle, a PhD candidate and technical writing instructor, is Chicana from South Texas and

speaks Spanish as a heritage language. She earned an MA in Teaching English as a Second Language, and she previously taught ESL and researched and implemented bilingual STEM curriculum in K–5 after-school programs. As part of her graduate appointment, she has served as an FYW instructor (2018–2021) and assistant director of FYW (2019–2021). Michelle’s own experiences as a Latina at a predominantly White institution and mentoring multilingual undergraduate and graduate students motivated her to seek approaches for incorporating linguistic justice into curricula that tend to default to and privilege White, monolingual ideologies of writing and being. Elizabeth is a White woman who grew up speaking English and began learning Spanish as a teenager. She taught emergent bilingual students in Texas public schools, becoming interested in translingual ideologies as a more accurate representation of her students’ languaging practices than what was represented by educational policies. At Texas Tech, she researches and writes in English and Spanish as a linguistics PhD student and is a 2022–2023 assistant director for the FYW program. Finally, Callie taught in the program as an assistant professor of practice for FYW (2018–2022), and when she became an assistant professor in fall 2022, she also began serving as the WPA. Callie is a White, English-only speaker and writer and is committed to translingual approaches as a component of inclusive, antiracist practices in FYW curriculum and teacher preparation.

As teachers, administrators, and researchers, we recognize that our own languaging practices are necessarily different from those of the students in this study, which means we are outsiders describing particular languaging practices from limited evidence (student projects and interviews). We have attempted to take care to describe, interpret, and honor these student participants’ languaging practices and perspectives.

Multilingual Students’ Rhetorical Expertise with Translingualism: Joshua’s Language Autoethnography

As previously discussed, a central premise of the translingual turn in rhetoric and writing studies is that students—whether multilingual or monolingual—already have “rhetorical expertise and linguistic creativity” when it comes to their own languaging practices (Corcoran & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 27). One goal of rhetoric and writing classes, then, is to help students develop awareness of and reflect on their practices in order to promote transfer and intentional rhetorical decision-making to new rhetorical situations.

Our research participants’ language autoethnographies and interviews show this rhetorical expertise and students’ rhetorical attunement, which should come as no

surprise to readers familiar with multilingual students or research in the field (Bou Ayash, 2019; Corcoran & Wilkinson, 2019; Lorimer, 2013; Lorimer Leonard, 2014). Teachers in our study also acknowledged that the assignment was meant to recognize students as rhetorical experts regarding their own languaging practices. For example, Brenda, an instructor in the program, observed that students developed some comfort with the assignment once they realized, “Oh, I know language. I know this rhetoric stuff. It’s not that difficult, not as difficult as I thought it would be.”

Joshua’s language autoethnography provides one example of multilingual students exhibiting rhetorical attunement toward difference. Joshua wrote about the norms of talking to elders, particularly to parents, in Yoruba culture:

All these are practices I carry out with my language usually used to show respect to older ones, they have a sense of formality and shows (sic) a sign of respect from whoever says it to whoever it is being said to. Growing up with all these practices has made me cultivate the habit of always addressing elders with sir or ma, speaking to them with respect, in return I get their respect.

Joshua actively navigated the sociolinguistic expectations of Yoruba culture so frequently that he developed a habit of identifying different sociocultural situations and shifting formality to meet appropriateness expectations of each situation, as evidenced by his awareness of how his language practices show levels of respect and formality based on audience. Joshua contrasted the formal register expected for talking with elders to the use of Pidgin English when talking with siblings and friends:

I tell [my brothers] things like “Abeg commot here jare” basically means “Please leave here” but most of the time it is used sarcastically like the phrase “get out” while other times it means just what it means, for the person being talked to (sic) leave their current location, the meaning behind the phrase all depends on the intonation used and the facial expression given.

Joshua’s discussion shows his rhetorical attunement to difference, including how language is multimodal, involving intonation, body language, and gestures (Shipka, 2016). The same phrase spoken to his brothers can be taken literally—“Please leave”—but by changing the kinesics of the delivery, Joshua can imbue frustration and command into the phrase’s meaning.

In his essay, Joshua explained how Yoruba fosters this multimodality of language:

Yoruba is naturally a high-toned language which heightens the emotions in whatever you say, your body language and facial expression is what would help the receiver of the message know how you are trying to pass the message across.

Joshua's metalinguistic awareness of audience as he shifted the kinesics of delivery shows the complexity of his linguistic repertoire. Because Joshua is aware of how he combines the linguistic forms of his languages with the multimodal elements of communication to match each specific environment, he overtly tunes his entire linguistic repertoire to each rhetorical situation.

Joshua's purposeful negotiation shows a point of access for multilingual students to apply their dynamic expertise to rhetoric and writing classes. Translingual assignments like the language autoethnography can make rhetoric and writing classes more accessible for multilingual writers by providing the space and opportunity to exhibit their own sophisticated rhetorical expertise.

Students' Representations of Linguistic Difference

By using Joshua's language autoethnography as an example, we have shown that multilingual students in our study exhibited rhetorical attunement and expertise in their language autoethnographies. In this section, we turn to students' representations of language practices in their interviews and essays. Bou Ayash (2016) has pointed out the importance of studying students' representations, or the "constructed ideas [they] entertain about their own languages and language practices . . . the value they grant to particular language practices and not others, and their appraisals of what they should do with their language resources in specific literate situations" (pp. 556–557). She argued that students' negotiation of language difference and new rhetorical contexts are mediated by "mixed and often contradictory representations" (p. 559), which can assist students in new linguistic situations or, alternatively, impede their ability to take risks in new situations.

Before turning to our students' representations of language practices, we want to interrogate our own representations. In our initial proposal for this special issue, we expressed disappointment that students in the study didn't explicitly code-mesh in their language autoethnographies. They provided explanations of their languaging practices across difference, but LOTE and nonstandard Englishes were only used when quoting oneself or others, never in the exposition of the essay itself. We were, at the time, the uncritical teachers Matsuda (2014) warned about who seek out exotic

uses of diverse language practices. After reading more of the literature in translanguaging and returning to our participants' essays and interviews, we came to realize, as Guerra (2016) observed,

we falter in our efforts to help our students understand what a translanguaging approach is because we have been leading them to think that we expect them to produce a particular kind of writing that mimics what we call code-meshing rather than getting them to understand that what we want instead is for them to call on the rhetorical sensibilities many of them already possess but put aside because of what they see as a jarring shift in context. (p. 232)

Indeed, we saw students in our study negotiate this “jarring shift in context” to academic writing by transferring their rhetorical attunement toward linguistic difference to a new rhetorical situation: writing an academic essay (on relationships between translanguaging and transfer, refer to Lorimer Leonard & Nowacek, 2016). These students pointed to their previous knowledge and experiences with shifting register, tone, syntax, and vocabulary to meet their audiences' needs, particularly for their English-only teachers and classmates. For instance, in the following passage, Joshua translated for his audience:

“ko n se gbo gbo igba le ma ma so oyinbo” my parents would say, telling us we don't have to speak English all the time, but it's not something my brothers and I would speak to each other, because speaking in English seems to be more comfortable.

This passage is emblematic of the writing we saw from our five multilingual research participants: They chose to quote LOTE rather than use home languages in exposition in their essays. Nowhere in Joshua's essay does he use Yoruba or Pidgin English in language directed toward his readers. When he was asked about why he didn't use Yoruba or Pidgin English in the exposition of the essay itself, Joshua explained, “It would be tough to translate, for the reader to understand.” Joshua is attuned to his teacher and his classmates' linguistic repertoires: they didn't know Yoruba or Pidgin English. This type of rhetorical attunement—the awareness that using LOTE or nonstandard English in the exposition of the essay itself would be a challenge for this audience—was a theme in student participant interviews.

Similarly, Tara discussed her experience thinking through what she wanted to say in her essay and how she should best translate her ideas to her U.S. audience:

The most challenging thing was [...] just having some information that most of the people would know. Like we had this feedback and review from our classmates. Uh, so I just wanted to make sure that they understood my reference. But writing wasn't the most hard part. It was just a referencing to what I know and what other people know, and just making them feel like they know this.

Here, we see a window into Tara's strategies for negotiating meaning with her audience. She reflected on her audience's needs and background knowledge. This audience awareness showed up in her essay in multiple ways, like when she contextualized Hindi by explaining, "You might have heard of Hindi if you are fond of Bollywood movies." Because our student participants exhibited sophistication in transferring their rhetorical knowledge with linguistic diversity to academic audiences, they were overtly attuned toward writing in a university context.

Like some of Bou Ayash's (2016) student participants, some students in our study wrote about linguistic representations that were "discrete, reified, and fixed entities appropriate for distinct academic spheres and/or social domains" (p. 570). All five of our student participants' language autoethnographies exhibited this representation in some fashion, as the student writers often wrote about rather fixed dichotomies of formal/informal contexts. Joshua, for example, contrasted his respectful and formal language toward elders with his more casual linguistic practices with his siblings and friends. Björn contrasted his more formal language toward his coaches with his more casual, jovial, and code-meshing practices with his teammates and roommates. Similarly, Antonin contrasted the formality of his communication with professors with his more informal communication with peers. Tara briefly contrasted how her pitch changes when talking to her cousins compared to her elders. While the students were hesitant to write in ways that disrupted their language representations of academic writing, in the interviews they spoke about concrete examples that moved beyond fixed dichotomies.

While we didn't have the opportunity to interview Darshan, his language autoethnography provided two points of difference from the other students in this study. First, his essay provided more specific language *episodes* rather than contrasting languaging *trends*. He provided a specific scene from school in India in which he and a friend were punished by a teacher for disrespectful behavior and for speaking Telugu instead of English, and he discussed how he is both formal and intimate with his mother, while mostly only formal with his father. These two examples are a second

point of departure from other students in our study: Darshan represented languaging practices in writing that are not entirely distinct or bound by prefigured rules of formality and informality.

Darshan wrote using a translingual understanding of his linguistic practices, as he explained shifting between formal and informal registers with his parents. For example, he explained how, when his mother is present, he and his father can be more playful with language:

I can't say the same [that Darshan is more informal] with my father since he is not so friendly like my mom. Even me and my mom laugh in front of my father and my sister to just tease them and my father and sister are say "meeru aapara meeku em pani ledha" in telugu which means don't you guys have any work, won't you stop now in a very cordial and comical way.

Darshan wrote about adjusting for audiences by using different discourses that bled into each other, showing that it's not only audience that matters, but also situation and context. However, while Darshan seemed to exhibit translingual representations in his language autoethnography, normative representations of academic writing seemed to loom large for participants. Like some of Bou Ayash's (2016) participants, several of our participants understood academic language as "standardized usages and conventions" that necessitate mastery (p. 571). These representations seemed to carry over into written academic discourse, which most participants seemed to see as a discrete and separate discursive realm from other linguistic practices.

Our pilot of the language autoethnography provided mixed results regarding spaces for multilingual students to draw on all their cultural and linguistic resources to engage rhetorically with academic discourse. On the one hand, these students exhibited rhetorical attunement toward language differences that led to transfer of their rhetorical expertise about language to their understanding of their teachers and classmates as audiences of their essays. On the other hand, for some of them, their rhetorical attunement led to language representations that stifled their abilities to take risks, as students were hesitant to write in detail about the complexities of language episodes. In the next section, we turn to our interview with Brenda, who had important insights into students' reluctance to take risks in their language autoethnographies.

A Teacher's Perspective: Risks and Possibilities

While all four of our teacher research participants provided useful insights for our study, we focus here on Brenda, who, during her interview, explored how students were reluctant to take risks and latched on to language mostly in terms of word choice. Early in her interview, Brenda observed that once the assignment had been introduced and they had explored languaging practices together, students quickly latched on to distinguishing their languaging practices with friends from their languaging practices with authority figures, like parents and teachers. While this distinction is an important rhetorical distinction to make, Brenda observed that it didn't involve many risks and that students largely focused on word choice:

Everyone wanted to write about this is how I talk to my parents and this is how I talked to my friends, and getting them to think beyond that, like what are some incidents that have happened, what are some episodes that you might just want to press on? To start getting them to take that risk and think outside of the box.

In this passage, Brenda expressed three frustrations. First, that students immediately clung to rather commonplace dichotomies: how they talked with friends compared to how they talked to authority figures, like parents or teachers. Second, that students typically wrote in generalities, making large sweeping claims about this distinction rather than focusing on and interrogating specific languaging episodes. This second frustration is related to Brenda's third frustration: that students were reluctant to take risks in their writing. Savvily, Brenda attributes students' reluctance to take risks with the specter of her authority:

I learned that if there is still an authority figure somewhere back there looming behind them that they're not going to try [to take risks]. They put it as [needing] "to speak professional language." They call it "professional language," that even with me pushing that "this is, this is your story. How would you tell this story to your friend or someone you know?", they still kind of have that authority figure looming behind them in their ear, like, "You can't write that. You can't say that." I feel like they all made a whole bunch of safe choices.

During her interview, Brenda observed that no matter how much she stressed that she wasn't looking for "professional language" in the essays, students still felt the need to write in formal (English and academic) language, which in part led them to take fewer risks regarding their language choices, genre choices, and formatting choices.

To attempt to counter this resistance to risk and reliance on professionalism—the perceptions about formality and appropriateness that students brought with them into the class—Brenda suggested revising the language in the assignment guidelines and/or clarifying in introducing the assignment that the audience for this project does not need to be the instructor. For example, Brenda shared, “I was thinking about maybe just telling them, like, ‘Don’t write it to me. I’m invisible. Write it to your classmates.’” In this statement, Brenda clearly reflected on how to approach this assignment in the future in ways that may counter risk aversion, and she articulated the need to decrease the presence of the authority figure—the teacher—as the central audience in the project.

As we unpack this suggestion, we see multiple possibilities emerge from shifting the audience in the project toward peers and/or other external, non-authoritative, figures. First, it provides a framework for introducing audience as a rhetorical concept from the initial assignment and could provide a more solid foundation, in our curriculum, for teaching audience, purpose, and genre throughout the semester. While Brenda provided the suggestion to de-center the teacher in this assignment, other teachers in the study similarly noted the possibility of overtly teaching audience, purpose, and so forth within this unit. Second, by focusing on a non-teacher audience in this assignment, we can encourage students to consider their own positionality within the classroom, a space potentially very different from their K–12 experiences. This works to disrupt the sage-on-the-stage model of education and contributes to antiracist pedagogical practices that value and encourage the unique contributions of students. Finally, as Brenda suggested, it has the potential to empower students to take risks in investigating their languaging practices and to do so with specificity, to think about episodes they “might just want to press on.” While Brenda observed that students were hesitant to take risks in the pilot spring 2022 semester, her reflection on risk aversion has led to our potential and productive re-envisioning of the assignment for future semesters.

Admittedly, while shifting the audience for the assignment from teachers to students alleviates some concerns around power and may encourage student risk-taking in their writing, this shift does little to address the concerns raised by Matsuda (2014) and Gilyard (2016) that we discussed above. Multilingual students still carry with them representations of language that frame academic writing as formal SWE. And if their classmates are White or speak standard English, multilingual students may see it as necessary or savvy to take fewer risks and use SWE to appear smart and like they belong. Like the student participants in Zhang-Wu’s (2023) study, multilingual students in our study were reluctant to use home languages in their academic writing—

a result of powerful discourses and representations of language that stigmatize home languages, not simply the teacher's presence as an authority audience. While encouraging less formal audiences for writing is helpful, teachers need to de-center not only their authority but also the authority of SWE. If the "safe houses" that Canagarajah (2013, p. 8) imagined are possible, teachers need to, as Zhang-Wu (2023) suggested, "reposition themselves as co-learners together with their multilingual students" (p. 170).

Conclusion: Implications for Writing Teachers and Programs

While our study is limited in scope and not generalizable, we believe there are important implications for FYW teachers and programs attempting to integrate a translingual approach into their curriculum, particularly in order to make courses and programs more accessible for multilingual writers. We have argued that students in our study were rhetorically sophisticated in how they drew upon and understood their languaging resources and practices for the language autoethnography. However, representations of norms of academic writing may have discouraged risk-taking in multilingual students' writing. Students want and need access to the privileged norms of academic writing—and our job as writing teachers is to help them gain entry into these discourses. However, we also understand how writing and rhetoric teachers can help students investigate and interrogate these norms and how they are created through power, as they explore how academic writing is always recreated through (re)negotiation of these norms.

Based on how representations of academic writing shapes students' and teachers' understanding of genre and linguistic expectations, we suggest that teachers incorporating a translingual approach engage in the following practices and that these practices be made transparent through program-supported pedagogical training: First, teachers should share a variety of examples with students, in a variety of modes and genres, and translingual practices. Second, teachers should interrogate with students the norms of academic writing, explicitly (re)negotiate the norms of the assignment through explicit genre talk—including "not-talk" (Nowacek, 2011)—with students; the assignment prompt should support this renegotiation by encouraging students to utilize their rhetorical attunement as they consider genre and audience. Third, students need plenty of drafting and brainstorming time for the language autoethnography assignment, or similar assignments. Teachers in our pilot devoted approximately 2–3 weeks to the language autoethnography, with several noting that they could have used

additional time to, as Brenda said, “start getting them to take that risk and think outside of the box.”

As we observed in the introduction, teacher preparation and development can make programmatic adoption of translingual approaches a challenge (Horner et al., 2011). Canagarajah (2016) has argued that teacher preparation for translingual approaches can't be a simple matter of giving teachers “predefined norms, materials, and knowledge,” and instead needs to prepare them to “construct their pedagogies with sensitivity to student, writing, and course diversity” (p. 266). Given that teachers must negotiate the overlaps and differences between their own “conceptions of literacy” and a writing program's (Brewer, 2020), any teacher preparation and development must reinforce the importance of translingual integration in FYW curriculum while also providing pedagogical support for assignment creation and implementation.

Rather than provide suggestions for *all* writing programs seeking to incorporate translingual approaches (because all writing programs have different contingencies), allow us to share how we're taking what we've learned from this pilot study to scale up a translingual approach in our programmatic context. Instead of implementing the language autoethnography for all ENGL 1301 sections in fall 2022, we are only requiring it with incoming first-year MA and PhD graduate student instructors. We chose our first-year MA and PhD cohort because they take a required practicum in their inaugural year teaching in the FYW program. This provides graduate student teachers with guided support and instruction on languaging practices and teaching strategies alongside their first time teaching the assignment. We take Canagarajah's (2016) point on teacher preparation seriously: With a program of our large scale, if we included the language autoethnography assignment in our standard 1301 curriculum for all teachers, we risk simplifying translingual approaches—reducing this important shift in curriculum to materials that lack context and for teachers who may lack the necessary theoretical and pedagogical grounding. We will start with this cohort and expand our number of teachers teaching the assignment with each subsequent cohort. We also encourage teachers from the pilot in spring 2022 to continue teaching the assignment, as well as our full-time lecturers who attend a workshop on the assignment in advance of the fall semester.

We opened this article by asking, how might a translingual approach, such as the language autoethnography assignment, help to create space in higher education for multilingual speakers to draw on all their linguistic and cultural resources for rhetorical decision-making? As we've shown, translingual assignments like the language autoethnography can make rhetoric and writing classes more accessible for

multilingual writers by providing the space and opportunity to exhibit their own sophisticated rhetorical expertise. However, language ideologies are powerful, and simply providing these opportunities will not necessarily lead to students taking risks and challenging their own conceptions of what “counts” as academic writing. While our program is following Brenda’s suggestion and revising the language autoethnography assignment prompt to ask students to write to an audience of their classmates, we also understand that this one revision doesn’t fully change the dynamics of power, stigma, and access. Additional steps are needed: Our writing program is incorporating translingual theories into the practicum course for first-year teachers and encouraging teachers to explore with students and learn along with them how language practices become stigmatized or valorized.

We conclude with an encouragement for teachers to embrace the possibilities of translingual approaches in the curriculum, for WPAs to prioritize the creation, implementation, and facilitation of languaging assignments in their programs, and ultimately, for teachers and program administrators to study the assignments and contribute scholarship to this evolving and crucial component of writing studies. Importantly, a translingual approach, implemented reflexively with teacher support and development in translingual approaches, can help to create conditions for accessible writing pedagogy for multilingual students entering academic discourse.

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Appendix: Language Autoethnography Assignment Prompt

Note: This assignment prompt draws heavily from language provided by Corcoran and Wilkinson (2019, pp. 28–29).

Prompt

Construct an essay that 1) identifies two concrete uses or practices of your everyday language and 2) analyzes those uses or practices as contextualized rhetorical situations. Your goal in this essay is to demonstrate your critical awareness of how your language choices are rhetorical: adapted for and shaped by audience, purpose, genre, stance, and medium.

Further Explanation

In your everyday life, you likely use rhetoric (without even thinking about it as rhetoric) to make choices about your language practices and uses, adapting them for different audiences, purposes, genres, stances, and media.

For this essay, select two concrete examples of your everyday language usage or practices and **reflect in detail** about how **audience, purpose, genre, stance, and medium** shape your language use and choices in these concrete episodes. While you are welcome to use these rhetorical terms, you are also free not to use them. Whether you use these terms explicitly or not, your essay should still illustrate to your reader how audience, purpose, genre, stance, and medium influence your language use and choices.

This is your language story. So please feel welcome to use any elements of your language repertoire to tell it. This means that you have every right to include languages other than English and “non-standard” varieties of English. This assignment gives a chance to showcase your language talent and your language expertise, even if people don’t usually consider this talent and expertise as “school” English, or even if this talent and expertise is in languages other than English. When you include languages other than English or a “non-standard” variety of English, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- How can I incorporate these elements into my writing so that they are rhetorically effective?
- Should I “translate,” or will context help my readers understand meanings?
- Should I italicize words from languages other than English or “non-standard” varieties of English?

These questions are yours to answer as a writer. The decisions that you make in response to these questions will show both your creativity and your understanding of the assignment's particular rhetorical situation. Ultimately, you are being asked to tell a story—your language autoethnography should explore your personal experiences with language in a way that connects to your audience's wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

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