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# Encouraging Language Negotiation in Institutional Spaces: A Qualitative Case Study in Pedagogies to Promote Translanguaging in Writing Courses

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing from a larger qualitative study that uses ethnographic research methods, I examine instructors' pedagogical practices that encouraged students to make use of their linguistic repertoires. The study was conducted in spring 2017 at a Hispanic-serving institution situated along the U.S.-Mexico border. In this piece, I highlight the experiences of two first-year composition professors and their students' responses to writing in a combination of languages. Within this context, I show how the instructors work to establish accessible writing pedagogies that promote linguistic diversity and acknowledge students' distinct communicative practices. By inviting bilingual students to compose writing assignments in Spanish or a combination of English and Spanish, instructors directly emphasize the dynamic and powerful contributions multilingual writers bring to the classroom. Students' literacy narrative examples presented in this article reveal that bilingual individuals specifically and rhetorically used translanguaging as placeholders by translating from one language to the other, and as a way to bring authenticity to an experience. This article aims to contribute to the efforts of writing studies' researchers and instructors working to dismantle the current dominant English Only movement and supporting the inclusion of students' varied languages into the classroom while pursuing a counter-hegemonic response that advocates for minority groups.

### Introduction

This article is an attempt to address the gap and add to the nascent scholarship focused on instructors' efforts to leverage multilingual students' linguistic repertoires. By inviting bilingual students to compose writing assignments in Spanish or a combination of English and Spanish, instructors directly provide access to students'

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linguistic background and emphasize the dynamic, and powerful contributions multilingual writers bring to the classroom. Students' literacy narrative examples presented in this article reveal that bilingual individuals specifically and rhetorically used transanguaging as placeholders by translating from one language to the other, and as a way to bring authenticity to an experience. Having access to multiple languages, students use transanguaging practices as tools for uncovering writing strategies. When I attended junior college in the early 1990s, I was a marginalized Mexican-American student, an economically disadvantaged, underprepared high school graduate. In retrospect, I feel the junior college, a Hispanic-serving institution, did not fully create a culturally and linguistically responsive learning environment. Phrases such as "Speak English," "This is an English class, no Spanish," and "No speaking Spanish" were commonly heard when students spoke in their home languages in class and around campus. At the time, I did not realize how this attitude was marginalizing other languages. I adopted a "that's the way it should be" attitude without questioning the ideologies driving these comments. Additionally, the recurring message about Standard Written English (SWE) being the only discourse in academia took root in my own thinking, and these policies and attitudes informed my own teaching style at the college level. Unfortunately, the idea of doing what institutional leaders claimed to be the best course of action for our students had been tacitly endorsed in my early college training. Therefore, it made sense for me to continue to support a system that privileged varieties of English.

Years later as an educator in the same college I attended and being cognizant of the English-only pedagogy adopted in higher education institutions, I was hesitant to speak Spanish in the classroom. After all, I was to be students' role model, teaching them to write in the dominant discourse of the academy. Oddly, I felt that I was doing them a disservice when I spoke Spanish by not showing them how to communicate effectively in the English language. Like some of my colleagues, I resisted the shifting and mixing of languages and held tight to an "English only" monolingual mindset; many instructors argued that, in order to learn a language well, students need sustained practice in the target language. While this is a true assertion, it does not preclude mixing languages. These experiences influenced the construction of my academic identity. Although I honestly believed that educators were doing students a service, increasing their linguistic capital, I soon realized that I was contributing to a culture that marginalizes students based on their language differences. By further participating in a monolingual approach in the teaching of reading and writing in composition classes, I, like other educators, promulgated an environment that marginalized students' linguistic varieties. Although we may not do this intentionally, we "play a role in

promulgating a standard language ideology” (Mangelsdorf, 2010, p. 113). This is especially true if writing instructors follow a curriculum that does not support other languages in the classrooms, besides English, or when they promote a “mythology that they may or may not fully understand” (Dance & Farmer, 2011, p. 794). When the field requires that instructors teach in the hegemonic language, it may be difficult to validate students’ languages. Thus, the nature of teaching composition in the dominant English discourse suggests a hierarchy positioning one language above others. This linguistic containment posits that there is only one correct and standard language. Mangelsdorf (2010) notes that that belief in SWE has been around for so long that writing instructors may feel compelled to support this notion based on the assumption that by adopting a standard language, students can successfully participate in the mainstream culture. It is important to note that moving away from a standard language ideology may not be easy, especially when this belief has become a part of our discipline and professional identities (Watson & Shapiro, 2018). As a result, instructors are faced with the conundrum of teaching what is expected of them or accommodating linguistic differences in a space that privileges English.

In this article, I would like to contribute to the efforts of writing studies researchers and instructors working to dismantle the current dominant English-only movement and supporting the inclusion of students’ varied languages into the classroom while pursuing a counter-hegemonic response that advocates for minority groups. I do this by showcasing two literacy narrative samples where students use translanguaging practices, including translation and place-holding in their writing. In one narrative sample, Daniela (pseudonym), uses translations as placeholders. As she composed her narrative, Daniela inserted Spanish words or phrases to hold her place as she continued the writing process in English. Translation allowed her ideas to flow without interrupting her train of thought. In the second narrative sample, Jacob (pseudonym) inserted Spanish words and phrases in his story. In his case, incorporating Spanish in his assignment made the message or story real. Despite being an English classroom, mixing languages allowed Jacob to relate his story with more accuracy. He expressed that as long as the teacher is okay with him mixing his languages, he would continue doing it.

Drawing from a larger qualitative study that used ethnographic methods, which was conducted in spring 2017 at a Hispanic-serving institution situated along the U.S.-Mexico border, I examine instructors’ pedagogical practices that encouraged students to access their linguistic repertoires. I highlight the experiences of two first-year composition professors and their students’ responses to writing in a combination of languages. Within this context, I will show how the instructors work to establish

accessible writing pedagogies that promote linguistic diversity and acknowledge students' distinct communicative practices. By using translanguaging practices, instructors provide access to and support for bilingual writers' voices, which are often neglected in English-only writing instruction. Focusing on students' language differences as assets rather than deficits, I argue that, as educators, we can become multilingual writers' allies and advocates by restructuring classroom content at several levels, including but not limited to language. First, I provide an overview of the theoretical perspectives that support this study, and then I introduce the study and highlight instructors' translanguaging pedagogies and challenges, and students' responses to this approach. I conclude with a call to conduct more studies focusing on pedagogies that validate students' linguistic and cultural identities in academic spaces.

## Literature Review

### *Translingual Inclinations*

Much research has focused on addressing students' linguistic resources in the classroom. With the goal of recognizing students' varied languages, in 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) passed a resolution on language which affirms "the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" (CCCC). This resolution supports students' rights to use their languages as a means to become competent in rhetorical practices, and, thus, establish their own style and identity. This resolution would create a space for varied communicative practices to be considered as a way for students to bring their languages into the classrooms, but also as a way to value their home dialects. Their home dialects are important to recognize because this is a border community where language is used to connect with others both in and outside of the classroom. Since the resolution, there has been a growing body of scholarship that advocates for adopting a translingual approach in the teaching of writing. In doing so, educators, teachers and scholars have developed models which not only value linguistic practices, but also study how students enact such practices (Ayash, 2019; Alvarez et al., 2017; Canagarajah, 2012; García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Horner, 2018; Horner et al., 2011; Lu & Horner, 2016; and Mazak & Carol, 2017).

*Diverse Multilingual Practices*

There are numerous terms and conceptualizations used to describe diverse multilingual practices such as code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2011b; Young et al., 2014); code switching (Young & Martinez, 2011); translanguaging (García 2009; Wei, 2018b); transcultural literacy (Lu, 2009); translanguing writing (Horner et al., 2011; and transliteracy (You, 2016). In the following sections, I will use the term translanguaging to refer to bilingual students' and instructors' dynamic and fluid communicative practices in first-year composition courses. I specifically incorporate García's (2009) definition of translanguaging as the "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds" (p. 45). García's conceptualization of how bilinguals communicate is one that most resonates with my own experiences both in and outside of the classroom. Because language clearly flows across borders, my language background and that of students living in border communities is influenced by the constant interaction of the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking culture. Given the large number of bilingual students attending the university where the study was conducted, most students fall within the bilingual continuum, and Spanglish—a so-called non-standard language variety and a popular form of the language of many Hispanics in the U.S.—is frequently used in and outside of the classroom.

*Heritage Language and Spanglish*

There are several definitions describing heritage language learners. One of the most popular and widely used definitions in scholarship is a person who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken (Valdés, 2000 p. 1). Students who attend this university may have acquired their heritage language, Spanish, from birth as they grew up with family members and relatives who spoke Spanish. Few participating students welcomed the idea of mixing and combining languages, while others expressed hesitation. Study participants were familiar with the term Spanglish and often used the term to describe their language practices. Similar to English standard language ideology, there is also a Spanish standard language ideology. These ideologies influence the way bilingual speakers respond to combining and mixing their English and Spanish languages.

This language ideology stems from the "ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language" (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). Subscribing to the belief and the legacy

of pure Spanish or Castilian Spanish, this language is positioned as having a higher status and is deemed as the “purest” and most “correct” form of the language compared to other Spanish-language varieties (Pennycook, 2001). As a result, bilingual speakers are likely to be marginalized based on their language choices. In this study, attitudes towards Spanglish have been mixed; while some participants describe this language variety with pride (indicating that the mixing of languages supports their identity as someone who is bilingual and knows two languages), other participants express criticism towards those who mix and combine languages. The latter perceive Spanglish as “ugly”, “wrong”, and “incorrect.” Otheguy and Stern (2011) contend that the term Spanglish “is often used to disparage Latinos in the USA and to cast aspersions on their ways of speaking” (p. 86). Not only is Spanglish stigmatized in the U.S., but also in Mexico (Mangelsdorf, 2010). Students participating in this study indicated that when they traveled to Mexico, many of their family members made fun of the way that they mixed their languages, often calling them *pochos*—this term implies that they are “Chicanos who have lost their connection to Mexico and who cannot speak so-called Standard Spanish” (Mangelsdorf, 2010). Instead of being viewed as individuals who can negotiate multiple interactions, bilinguals are seemingly stigmatized for their language practices. Unfortunately, to echo García’s (2014a) views, bilinguals are “caught between the imperial designs of the United States and Spain” (p. 75).

### *Translanguaging*

The term translanguaging has been studied and defined by scholars in both applied linguistics and in Rhetoric and Composition. Scholars have described translanguaging as “shuttling between languages” (Canagarajah, 2011a); “using different languages together” (García, 2009); and “a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include ALL the language practices of ALL students in a class in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones” (García & Kano, 2014, p. 261). Other scholars use similar terms such as “using both languages together” (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012); “mobilizing linguistic resources” (Li & Zhu, 2013); and “using one’s idiolect, that is one’s linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language names and labels” (Wei, 2018b, p. 19). Translanguaging then refers to “the constant, active invention of new realities” as the process of languaging both shapes and is shaped by interaction in specific contexts (Mazak & Carroll, 2017). A key feature to underscore is that in a translanguaging act, there is one “integrated repertoire of linguistic and semiotic practices from where

bilingual speakers draw” (Mazak & Carroll, 2017, p. 2). This integrated repertoire is one system that contains features from all of students’ languages.

For the purpose of this piece, and as I examine two students’ literacy narrative samples, I define translanguaging as combining or mixing English and Spanish words, phrases, and sentences in written assignments. The terms combining, and/or mixing languages will be used in place of “translanguaging.” The reason for doing this is that during the study, I felt that participating students may have not been familiar with this term and its various definitions. As a result, the terms combine/combining, or mix/mixing of languages were used in place of the term translanguaging. This approach was purposely taken so participants could clearly understand the practice of using different languages in their communicative practices.

### *Translanguaging Theory*

The theoretical foundation for the study was informed by translanguaging theory (Canagarajah 2011a, 2012; García, 2009; García et al. 2017; García & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2018b) since this theory is primarily concerned with the language use of bilingual individuals and their communicative practices in specific learning contexts. I use a translanguaging lens to examine the communicative practices of bilingual college students to illustrate the concept of dynamic bilingualism, and to demonstrate that this communicative practice allows for the disruption of constructed language hierarchies, which place one language over other non-standard languages. García (2009) defines translanguaging as “the complex languaging practices of actual bilinguals in communicative settings” (p. 45). This definition positions bilingual communicative practices as complex, but also privileges bilinguals’ languages by placing all languages as equally important. It is important to highlight that translanguaging is not using two separate languages to make meaning, but rather using two languages simultaneously in a dynamic and integrated manner (Baker, 2011). In a translanguaging act, languages occur at the same time and help bilinguals organize and mediate mental processes (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Ongoing research in translanguaging has added to these theoretical propositions, as García and Wei (2014) emphasize, “Translanguaging refers to the use of languages as a dynamic repertoire and not as a system with socially and politically defined boundaries” (p. 1). By participating in translanguaging practices, speakers freely combine languages in a way that may not necessarily align with the social or political expectations of Standard Language ideologies. In other words, bilingual individuals may access their languages organically as needed to negotiate meaning.

*Translanguaging Pedagogies*

In recent years, the emergent body of research on translanguaging, particularly in higher education where the language of instruction is English, has brought translanguaging pedagogies to the forefront (Andrei et al., 2020; Panezai, 2023; Rivera & Mazak 2019; Rodríguez et al. 2021; Van Viegen & Zappa-Hollman, 2020). The growing scholarship broadens our concept of translanguaging both in theory and practice. Explaining how translanguaging pedagogy operates in the classroom, García and Kano (2014) describe the process “by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of all students in a class in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones” (p. 261). This joint exploration occurs when instructors facilitate linguistic interactions where students learn from each other and their peers.

An approach to including students’ heritage languages in academia is an important step for language diversity advocates, as well as a significant move toward shifting the way we teach writing. In a 2021 study, Rodríguez et al. examined instructors from different disciplines and their translanguaging stances by reviewing instructors’ syllabi and course design. The authors discovered that when instructor participants intentionally and purposefully used translanguaging pedagogies, student learning was maximized (Rodríguez et al, 2021). Most importantly, the study revealed the vital role that instructors in Hispanic-serving institutions play “in the development of a linguistically inclusive approach to instruction in higher education” (Rodríguez et al., 2021, p. 353). It is important to lead by example; if students see us valuing their languages and cultural experiences in classroom discussions, lessons, and assignments, this practice may help reduce the “tacit feeling of exclusion, as it is often the standard that you expect in a university classroom” (Perez, interview, May 1, 2017). Consequently, as instructors, we are social actors and can embrace translanguaging despite monolingual constraints.

It is understandable that educators cannot make huge departures from what the institutions request such as teaching in English only, but enacting translanguaging pedagogies represents a significant start in valuing students’ linguistic backgrounds. Purposely making space to enact translanguaging practices in the classroom can be either a welcoming proposition, or this approach may be rejected by students. Wei (2011) proposed the concept of incorporating a translanguaging space in the classroom. A translanguaging space may not necessarily be a physical space; it can also be a space that bilinguals create in their minds as they engage in the translanguaging process. During their thought processes, bilingual speakers are free to combine and



mix their linguistic tools, acquired from lived experiences, and create meaningful acts. On the other hand, in the classroom, a translanguaging space can represent a physical social space that allows bilingual students to bring “together different dimensions of their personal history, experience, and environment; their attitude, belief, and ideology; their cognitive and physical capacity, into one coordinated and meaningful performance” (Wei 2011, p. 1223). In this manner, all these aspects provide students opportunities for creativity as they generate new ideas.

### *Teaching on the Border*

As the literature advocating for linguistic diversity in the classroom continues to grow, it should be noted that there is limited research dedicated to studying educators who explicitly encourage language-negotiating practices to create an inclusive learning environment for multilingual students in higher education. More specifically, there are scant studies focused on border institutions where there is a large student population of bilingual and multilingual students. Identifying ways to include languages other than English in writing courses not only supports multilinguals by offering them agency to make rhetorical language choices that can facilitate the writing process, but also invites them to incorporate their voices and lived experiences in institutional spaces. García (2017) argues, we must open “espacios for different people to act equitably in their worlds through their own languaging” (p. 256). However, while existing scholarship focused on border institutions, specifically on the US-Mexico border is limited, research opportunities abound.

At a border institution, writing program directors understand the importance of becoming linguistically and culturally inclusive to address the population it serves. For example, Rosenberg & Mangelsdorf (2021) advocate for a writing program that “draws on and enhances the many communicative strengths that students living on the border bring to the classroom” (p. 174). In their respective roles (past and present) as directors of FYC and RWS at a border university, the authors describe long-term and current initiatives, both curricular and programmatic, that center students’ multiple languages in writing classrooms. These initiatives range from offering community literacy programs, all of which are nonprofits that serve the bicultural, bilingual area communities, piloting a bilingual Spanish-English first-year composition course, as well as supporting student and faculty research that position students’ languages as assets (Rosenberg & Mangelsdorf, 2021). Making spaces for diverse students in the writing classroom is the focus of Cavazos’ (2019) study. In this study, she identifies students’ experiences from linguistically diverse writings noting the

importance of listening to students' translingual writing experiences to “develop effective writing pedagogies and partnerships that focus on learning with rhetorically aware translingual writers, professionals, and citizens” (p. 53). Border universities, where most of the student population is of Hispanic descent, represent unique research sites to examine how students negotiate their language repertoires to achieve effective communication in the academic environment.

My goal in this article is to provide two case studies that illustrate instructors purposefully creating spaces for bilingual students to leverage their linguistic repertoires. This approach not only supports multilinguals by offering them agency to make rhetorical language choices that can facilitate the writing process, but also invites them to incorporate their voices and lived experiences in institutional spaces. Before continuing, it is important to clarify that participating instructors did not create assignments requiring translanguaging practices, but they did incorporate translanguaging practices by inviting students to use all available means to be clear and persuasive in their writing, including using diverse languages. Initially, the study was to focus only on students' organic translanguaging communicative practices. However, one instructor mentioned his language experiences and encouraged students to embrace their linguistic repertoires. While this was not an initial goal of the study, it certainly added another component.

### **Language of Instruction in Writing Courses**

While there is an increasing number of multilingual students entering higher education, universities in the United States are perceived to be English-only institutions where the language of instruction is in English. However, at border institutions, bilingualism is common and expected both inside and outside of the classroom. As a result, diverse communicative practices or mixing and combining of languages often occur. At the university where the study was conducted, instructors teaching first-year composition courses received a sample syllabus template created by the First-Year Composition (FYC) program in the English department. The syllabus included institutional and department policies, and suggested readings and assignments. Nowhere in the syllabus does it mention that all assignments should be written in English, or that communication, written or oral, should be conducted in English. Although the course syllabus for composition courses may not explicitly support an English-only approach, a tacit English monolingual policy exists. One of the participating instructors indicated that while he does not have a language policy in the classroom, there is an expectation from the department and an expectation by society because “of the nature of the class”

(Barcena, interview, April 11, 2017). In short, the English language is traditionally used in an English writing course. Unfortunately, an English monolingual policy works to dismiss students' heritage languages by focusing solely on the target English language.

### **Institutional Context**

The university where the study took place is considered a commuter institution, drawing students from the U.S.-Mexico border communities. It is a large public research institution with a population of 23,922 students registered in the fall 2016 semester (University Communications, n.d.). The 2014-2015 fact book stats, which were available when the study was conducted, indicate that nearly 80% of the students are Hispanic; 5% are Mexican International; 8% are white non-Hispanic; 3% are African American; and the remaining 4% are of other races (University Communications, n.d.). According to a New Student Survey administered in Fall 2016 by the Center for Institutional Evaluation Research and Planning (personal communication, July 7, 2017), approximately 39.9% of students identify themselves as bilingual in English and Spanish, 48.6% of students are most comfortable speaking English, and 10.6% of students are most comfortable speaking Spanish. The statistics mentioned above reflect the numbers when the study was conducted. Based on current data, In the fall of 2022, there were 20,141 students enrolled with approximately 84.3% identifying as Hispanic according to the university fact book (University Communications, n.d.). Because the university is situated on the border, the university attracts students living across the border in Mexico. These students can be classified as international students (with a non-immigrant student visa), or they can also be U.S. citizens with dual citizenship. It is quite common for transnational students to travel back and forth to attend school in this border region.

### **Research Site: First-Year Writing**

The study was conducted in two separate first-year writing sections offered in the spring of 2017. For the purpose of this article, I will refer to the writing course as first-year composition (FYC). FYC is an introductory core curriculum-writing course required for undergraduate students attending the university. There are two classes, taught during two separate semesters, which make up first-year composition—RWS 1301: Rhetoric and Composition I and RWS 1302: Rhetoric and Composition II (RWS stands for Rhetoric and Writing Studies). Each section of RWS 1301 has a maximum of 25 students per class. According to the course description, the goal of RWS 1301 is

to develop students' critical thinking skills in order to facilitate effective communication in different contexts. Students in this class are exposed to concepts including discourse communities, audience awareness, genre, rhetorical strategy, and the writing process. I chose to conduct research in the first section of the FYC course, as opposed to an upper-level division course, because of the diversity of the students enrolled in this class. Regardless of students' career goals, most students will have to sign up for the first section of FYC, providing me with a wide sample population. Since the focus of this article is about instructors' pedagogical approaches to teaching first-year composition advocating for linguistic diversity, I will primarily concentrate on data collected on the instructors in the study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The ethnographic methods used in this qualitative study included surveys for recruitment, participant observation as well as informal participation observation and interviews before and after class, semi-structured interviews, and artifact/document analysis. Artifact or document analysis was conducted by accessing instructors' assignment sheets and syllabi as well as reviewing students' drafts and final projects.

#### *Survey Data Collection*

I surveyed two first-year composition sections, each with a cap of 25 students per course. Since the goal of the study was to examine the communicative practices of bilingual students in college-level contexts, specifically in writing courses, the student survey was the main instrument for the recruitment of participants. The survey became the first step in getting to know my participants and a way for me to gauge their linguistic background, their feelings about academic writing, and their areas of study. There were two versions of the survey, one for students and one for instructors. The instructors' survey consisted of 10 questions and the student survey consisted of 14. The instructors' survey was used to gather descriptive information on their educational and language background as well as their teaching experience. Overall, I received 45 completed surveys from both sections and one survey from each instructor. Based on these completed surveys, I determined that 23 of the students were eligible to participate in the study, based on their descriptions of their language practices.

*Participant Observation or Fieldwork*

I attended class sessions throughout the semester, taking field notes and observing students' verbal and nonverbal expressions as they interacted with their peers and instructors. One class met twice weekly while the other met three times. Combined, I observed a total of 51.5 hours in the classroom environment. Communication practices were also captured using visual and audio equipment for cross references.

*Interview Data Collection - Instructors' Semi-structured Interviews*

The most significant source of data gathering was the semi-structured interviews. I conducted three separate face-to-face semi-structured interviews with both instructor participants and participating students. I conducted 80 student interviews for a total of 13.5 hours and 3 instructor interviews for a total of 2.5 hours. Instructor conversations were a bit lengthier compared to the students' interview sessions.

**Participating Instructors**

First-year writing courses are taught by professors, full-time and part-time lecturers, doctoral assistant instructors, and by graduate teaching assistants. Based on potential candidates' enthusiasm about the study, their availability, vast teaching experience, and their genuine desire to help bilingual students succeed, I chose Professor Barcena and Professor Perez (pseudo names); both instructors were English-Spanish speakers. Having two bilingual instructors, which was also another criterion for participating, was important since I felt that students would be more willing to use their linguistic repertoires in the classroom when their instructors, who were bilingual themselves, invited them to combine their languages. Both participating instructors also had years of teaching experience at Hispanic-serving institutions. Bilingual instructors bring a wealth of experiences and knowledge from their own backgrounds, which could possibly encourage them to create opportunities for communication in different languages. Following is a brief discussion on instructors' practices and challenges teaching on the border.

*Professor Barcena*

Although Spanish does not have a significant role in his course, Professor Barcena sincerely believes it should have a major role based on the diversity of students

enrolled. Given the opportunity, he would like to structure his classes so that the students can draw upon their multilingual backgrounds (Barcena, interview, March 9, 2017). One of the challenges that surface in his students' work is how Spanish may mistakenly influence their writing. He addresses this by commenting on students' papers or speaking with them in person and explaining how students can structurally change a sentence and place it in a different order when writing in English. He commends students when they express themselves freely, especially if their native tongue is Spanish, "I think that [providing feedback] motivates them to also work a lot harder with their English. I think it helps them; it reminds them that they are intelligent beings" (Barcena, interview, April 11, 2017). In one of our conversations, Professor Barcena stated that since his participation in the study, he is more aware of students' linguistic practices in the classroom. He added that he had several bilingual students in his class, and that as a teacher, he felt that he needed to explore different ways of structuring the class so that the students could draw upon their multilingual backgrounds:

I am inviting students to use multiple languages or a combination of languages in their reflection blogs, and I would like to put more thought into how to do that, in other assignments and in future classes because I am a big proponent of bilingual education from early on (Barcena, interview, April 11, 2017).

Professor Barcena takes a sincere interest in creating opportunities for students to draw on their linguistic backgrounds in their writing assignments. Recognizing the benefits of knowing multiple languages, Professor Barcena shared that "There are some situations where students will use Spanish, where they will draw on their Spanish to use a little bit more advanced vocabulary words in English" (Barcena, interview, April 11, 2017). For example, there are many words in Spanish that have an equivalent or cognate in English. He explained that some of these Spanish words are "sophisticated". The word "apellido" (last name) in Spanish; in English it is appellation. He stated that he truly believes that being able to speak another language influences students' ability to speak English. "I can see that students who have integrated Spanish, I think that has helped them with their English as well" (Barcena, interview, April 11, 2017).

*Professor Perez*

Approaches promoting translanguaging in Professor Perez's class vary. Before the study began, he had already crafted assignments and activities that gave students opportunities to use their diverse language skills. For example, early in the semester, students were assigned an activity where they analyzed the article "El correcto empleo del español" (2017) which is written in Spanish. The activity aimed to bridge the concepts of multilingualism, rhetoric, and information literacy. Perez wrote instructions bilingually and students responded by mixing their languages as they addressed the prompts. In their responses, students wrote that the activity was "challenging," "interesting," "fun," "frustrating," and "entertaining". Generally, most students appreciated the activity but realized that maybe they did not understand academic Spanish that well. Other students were surprised they knew more than they thought, referencing some of the terms presented. One student noted that she felt comfortable since Spanish is a "huge part of her life anyway," and another stated, "I thought it was refreshing since my first language is Spanish and it was fairly simple for me" (Ruby, [discussion post] March 22, 2017). Professor Perez actively encouraged students to think about their relationship with language and to consider whether that is a theme that they want to explore in their own assignments. Interestingly, he emphasized that "if it's rhetorically effective and appropriate, students can bring in Spanish terms or dialogue or analysis to their work" (Perez, interview, March 22, 2017). Connecting this idea with Aristotle's definition of rhetoric and the concept of using all the available means of persuasion, and that if language, or having Spanish language skills, helps students gain access to certain communities that they otherwise wouldn't be able to access, "that can be a way of drawing on those available means or resources into doing something practical and learning something that otherwise you would not have been able to learn" (Perez, interview, March 22, 2017). Perez is aware of the challenges that are present in FYC courses with a diverse student population. He noted that there is a variety of linguistic experiences, competencies, and skills sets, adding that students' linguistic challenges run the gamut "from having a very tenuous hold on English, to students who are skilled, very skilled in many cases, writers in English and presumably in Spanish too, but who are still dealing with issues of grammar and conventional phrasing" (Perez, Interview, March 22, 2017). He was challenged to create an environment where students at all different levels, "all different points on the spectrum can find a point of engagement and find something that they can productively do to improve in their writing and learn about writing and leave the course as more confident writers" (Perez, Interview, March 22, 2017).

When I approached Professor Perez about the study, he indicated that he currently incorporates students' linguistic backgrounds into his classes and was looking "forward to reflecting more deeply on how to facilitate opportunities for students to draw on their linguistic resources in my classes" (Perez, interview, March 22, 2017). Drawing upon his own language resources is something that Professor Perez often does. He noted that there was one student who met with him, "we'd speak primarily in Spanish, but we reached for shared English words when that was the only way to make ourselves understood" (Perez, interview, March 22, 2017). It is clear that Professor Perez acknowledges the benefits of mixing languages especially when this negotiation affords students a clearer understanding of important class material. In short, the instructors' eagerness to assist, the students' willingness to participate, my presence as a researcher and the open invitation for students to translanguage in the classroom, influenced participants' performances. Before focusing on the participating instructors' translanguaging approaches related to the study, I would like to share my own practices and challenges stemming from experiences teaching at several higher-level institutions situated along the US-Mexico border.

### **My Own Practices and Challenges**

In addition to including readings from scholars that focus on blended languages such as "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" by Gloria Anzaldúa and "Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan, I also share my lived experiences with language. On the first day of class, I talk about learning English and the struggles and obstacles that I encountered in academia. I share my research efforts in identifying methods that can help non-native speakers communicate. I talk about my accent and how people sometimes laugh at it (still) and even mention words that I cannot say in English that more than likely embarrass me every time I attempt to pronounce them. An example would be *Twin Peaks* (the popular 90's television show) which sounds like *Twin Picks* among others. I reinforce the fact that bilinguals' languages matter and are valued in my classroom. At the end of the class, several students will approach and thank me for my revelation; they speak to me in Spanish with a sense of freedom and comfort evident in their words, smiles, and handshakes as they exit the room. While this approach is simple, it has made a huge difference in my writing courses. Students' demeanors change and I become more relatable and approachable, which helps as they embark on their journey in academia.

The challenges that I encounter are seeing students struggle with writing, especially those whose first language is not English. I encourage them to draw on their



languages and mix or combine languages if it helps with the writing process. Sometimes I feel, as bilingual individuals, we need to be reminded that all of our languages play a role in our learning. Additionally, in reviewing my students' work, I try to understand their writing by focusing more on the communication effort instead of form. By this I mean, that as a Spanish speaker, I can see how Spanish may have influenced their writing, and I clearly understand what they are trying to say. We work from the message and aim to communicate it clearly to both the writer and the reader. I can't help but see myself in a lot of these students. For that reason, I keep reminding them that being bilingual is an asset and not a deficit, being bilingual offers writing opportunities that monolinguals may not have.

## Findings

### *Instructors' Pedagogical Practices in the Study*

At the beginning of the study, instructors purposefully invited participating students to compose assignments where they could mix/combine their languages or write entirely in Spanish. In creating actual translanguaging spaces, bilingual language users are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful participation as they use their linguistic abilities to strategically communicate and thus achieve academic meaning. In this study, mixing languages or translanguaging was not required and students had agency to exercise this option. While there were many students who saw translanguaging practices as a way of assigning value to their languages, an aid for comprehension as well as a tool for negotiation to make new meaning, there were students who resisted practicing translanguaging.

Professor Barcena encouraged students to use their languages in low-stakes assignments including journal entries, reading posts, and discussion questions. Similarly, Professor Perez invited students to combine their languages or write in Spanish in any low-stakes assignments as well as their final assignment, which was a high-stake project. Most of the students who chose to combine their languages did so in their journal entries, discussion posts, outlines, and writing drafts for major assignments. Some major assignments were completed using translanguaging practices; for example, one student completed a research project combining languages, with most of the Spanish being used in dialogue. Surprisingly, one participant wrote a five-page research argument paper completely in Spanish. This piece will focus on the

literacy narrative essay where students seized the opportunity to leverage their languages by mixing/combining them as they related their experiences with language.

### **Literacy Narrative Assignment**

The literacy narrative represents a common genre in FYC. Young (2004) documents the rise of literacy narratives in the field of composition dating back to the 1990s in his book “Minor Re/Visions.” His book focuses on the rhetorics of Asian American citizenship in reference to literacy narratives. He describes literacy narratives as distinct genres of text stating, “While there are variations in the stories we tell about literacy, we usually rely upon (both in writing and reading literacy narratives) recognizable characters, themes, and actions” (p. 37). I assign literacy narrative essays often to learn more about my students’ literacy experiences. The genre also presents an opportunity to highlight students’ language and cultural backgrounds, broadening their concepts of writing. Composing a literacy narrative may involve the use of a variety of languages; this is a choice that students make. However, by encouraging or inviting students to mix or combine their languages, this genre creates a space for them “to practice and negotiate their language goals” and “to examine dominant discourses through witnessing how their peers’ literacies have developed in relation to those discourses” (Wilson, 2020, p. 20). Canagarajah’s (2011b) study on code meshing in literacy narratives posits that accessing the practices of translanguaging offers multilingual students “diverse options and resources” particularly because students can draw on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds as they compose their literacy narratives. Rodríguez et al. (2021) illustrate how one instructor leveraged students’ bilingualism through literacy narratives. In their literacy narratives, students were asked to reflect on their experiences as writers and readers in multiple language contexts. In this case, students were encouraged to use their linguistic resources “strategically and purposefully” (p. 362).

One theme that resonated in these students’ samples was how they focused on their lived experiences with language, adopting a positive and nostalgic approach. Both students highlighted examples where language played a prominent role in their lives. Alexander (2011) notes that literacy narratives encourage students “to negotiate and grasp various identities. They claim one identity and then move on to another” (p. 625). Daniela’s literacy example illustrated her love for reading books in Spanish when she was a child attending elementary school. She focused on happy memories about her love for reading Spanish books at home. Jacob also was nostalgic and remembered with much fondness and excitement the time when he was first exposed to a different

language. He talked about a time that he spent with his “homeboys” listening to the radio. In each case, both students shared notable examples allowing the readers to see them in a different light.

In defining what translanguaging means, García states that “Translanguaging refers to the language practices of bilingual people” (García, 2012, p. 1). Based on my understanding and experience, these practices can include mixing/combining languages in a sentence, in conversation, and in writing. These practices can be evident in what individuals do or say, or they can also occur as individuals negotiate or create meaning in their thoughts. What these practices highlight though is the participants’ flexible use of their complex linguistic resources to make meaning in their lives and their complex communications (García, 2014b). Additionally, having different languages at your disposal makes it easy to translate from one language to the other for specific purposes. While conducting the larger study, I witnessed bilingual students’ communicative practices as they communicated with their peers, the instructor, and myself, as well as in the assignments they completed. One theme that surfaced in students’ work was their use of translation. Translating words or phrases from one language to the other is not something new to translanguaging. I use translation and have seen my students use translation to understand words, phrases and concepts that are unclear. However, what was surprising about the larger study was the continuous use of translation and the multiple purposes that translation afforded students. The word “translation” and other words associated with this term occurred in a little under 100 instances in the data.

Another noteworthy observation is that by using translation, as a form of translanguaging, bilingual students can be seen as actively participating in the writing process. Translation provided a visual representation of the writing process for bilingual students, especially when students created written drafts. Some of the participants indicated that they translated in their head, and as such, we cannot see the process; however, one student’s writing sample provided a visual representation of her translanguaging practices. The data revealed that bilingual students utilized their linguistic repertoires spontaneously yet strategically in an effort to make meaning and to communicate.

For the literacy narrative assignment, both professors asked students to examine their literacy history, habits, and processes. Professor Perez invited students to “bring in Spanish terms or dialogue or analysis in their literacy essay” (Perez, interview, March 22, 2017). He invited students to translanguage especially if rhetorically effective and appropriate. Professor Perez emphasized that he raises opportunities for language negotiation by encouraging students to, “bring multilingual

skills, largely Spanish skills into class projects” (Perez, interview, March 22, 2017). There were numerous samples where students combined or mixed English and Spanish languages; for the purpose of this article, I provide two examples that exemplify the most common practices of mixing languages. One example, authored by Daniela, combined languages using translation to serve as a placeholder. Using translations, the participant translated words or phrases written in one language to the equivalent or similar word or phrase in another language. The second example, composed by Jacob, combined/mixed languages in an essay to authenticate an experience where Spanish (or varieties of the language) was apparent.

#### *Daniela’s Literacy Narrative*

The following example shows how participant Daniela used translation as a placeholder in the writing and thinking process when she combined or mixed her languages. Daniela, who was enrolled in Professor Perez’s class, mentioned that translation took place in her head after she revisited her rough draft and used translation as a placeholder. The process of translating internally implies that the translation act occurs in the person’s mind, which was the case with Daniela. However, before the translation act, Daniela inserted Spanish words or phrases in her writing as placeholders. In other words, while she was in the writing process, and she could not think of a word or phrase in English, Daniela strategically placed the Spanish equivalent to hold the place of the English term or phrase. She explained, “I know at times when I am typing I can’t find a word in English, but I find it in Spanish. So, then I use that word and then when I come back to it, I am like, I got to replace you” (Daniela, interview, March 1, 2017). The last words, “I got to replace you” are notes, or a reminder that she had to come back to this section and address what she could not retrieve at that moment. Translation allowed her ideas to flow without interrupting her train of thought. Unlike other student participants, who used translation to generate ideas, Daniela already had her ideas formulated; therefore, translation served as a postponing strategy, something she had to return to, revisit, and revise. Daniela elaborated on the process:


...because I had the idea down and like in Spanish and I just had to translate it into English, and then yeah, because the idea was down, it wasn’t so hard to come up with an idea, as it was to translate it. The idea just being jotted down and then translate it, it was easier then like trying to figure how to put it in

English and then like...get that to work the way that I wanted it to. (Daniela, interview, April 4, 2017)

This means that Daniela expressed her ideas in Spanish as she was thinking about them and transferring them to her paper. The issue that she encountered when combining her languages was translating her ideas into English and making sure that it all made sense. It appeared that Daniela was keenly aware of how to use her Spanish as a holding place to continue writing without interrupting the flow. Early on as we discussed combining and mixing languages, Daniela made it clear that while she combined languages, she did not feel right about combining them in academic writing, especially for a grade. For Daniela, writing for academia had to be uniform or cohesive, in one language or the other. However, this thinking did not keep her from combining her languages when composing a draft. She explained her translation process: “I write words in Spanish, like when it is the first thing that comes to my mind, and then I translate it later to keep it, like, cohesive...” (Daniela, interview, March 1, 2017). As mentioned earlier, using Spanish as a placeholder allowed her to continue writing; however, she revisited her draft and made sure that everything was in one language to make it sound “cohesive.” By this, she meant that since the assignment was in English, everything should be written in English. Furthermore, this translating process allowed Daniela to use translanguaging methods, combining English and Spanish, in her written assignments. This approach helped Daniela complete the writing task. Figure 1 illustrates Daniela’s use of Spanish words and ideas that she later translated into English.

Narrative outline:

Intro/peek/~~read~~ story

- Reading when younger
  - Los osos Bonestai'n
  - Little critter
  - Sapo y Sapo
  - Esos libros con el dinosaurio amarillo y con manchas rojas y carita feliz →  - ~~pero~~ no recuerdo como se llama
  - Cuando Ms. Donn me dejó sacar como <sup>diez</sup> ~~seis~~ libros de la biblioteca y casi leía todos porque no podía con ellos y me tuvo que ~~ayudar~~ ayudar

Reading experiences / language

- siempre habla en español y leía en ~~es~~ español hasta que tenía seis o siete años
- Series of unfortunate events w/ word definitions
- bilingual classes until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade
- Take test was hard because of how used to ~~write~~ writing & reading in Spanish I was
- Learning to read was frustrating in both languages but it was harder in English because it wasn't my first language and it was hard ~~to~~ to learn new phonetic rules - gh making noise - lion double o etc.

Writing:

- Spanish it was easy to read and write because everything was as it sounded
- Odiaba escribir porque nunca me salían las palabras como quería - no hacían sentido - a veces escribía cosas

*Handwritten note in margin:* now satisfying to be able to read alone as well in 2 languages

Figure 1: Daniela's notes for narrative essay

### Jacob's Literacy Narrative

The invitation to combine languages in assignments sparked great interest in Jacob, who was in Professor Barcena's class. Being able to combine/mix languages is something that Jacob looked forward to when his instructor encouraged him. When I

asked him if he would like to combine languages his response was a direct “Oh yeah, hell yeah” (Jacob, interview, March 3, 2017). Jacob is a non-traditional student, having graduated from high school some 20 years prior. As an English language native, he began speaking Spanish as a freshman in college. He related that he and his “homeboys” would listen to oldies on the radio and play cards, and it was then that he learned to speak like his friends who “speak real like they are high” (Jacob, interview, April 18, 2017). Jacob brings a distinct variety of Spanish, a language that he has embraced with his friends and now with his professor. He expressed that he took advantage of the invitation to combine languages, especially in his research paper. He said that inserting Spanish phrases when you write about life experiences makes the message more “authentic, this is what actually happened.” Once he knew his instructor was bilingual, he felt more comfortable mixing since his audience would be able to understand what he was saying. He emphasized that one should consider the audience but maintained that the purpose of the writing plays a role in mixing languages. In his case, incorporating Spanish in his assignment made the message real: “this paper has more effect...by using whatever Spanish I know because it is authentic” (Jacob, interview, April 18, 2017). Figure 2 on the next page shows an excerpt of Jacob’s essay.

As shown in Figure 2, by mixing in some Spanish Jacob is maximizing his rhetorical potential. He did apologize for using curse words, but he maintained that the selection of language was done deliberately to make a point: “I think it adds more authenticity to some of my stories some of my...you know, I don’t want to like to cuss but, you know, what I mean, it just sounds more [accurate]” (Jacob, interview, March 3, 2017). I asked him if his story would have the same impact if he omitted the cuss words. He replied, “No, it doesn’t. I am not doing this to be like a bad boy... this is just the real deal; this is the way it is” (Jacob, April 18, 2017). Despite being an English classroom, mixing languages allowed Jacob to relate his story with more accuracy. He expressed that if the teacher is okay with him mixing his languages, he would continue doing it.

These excerpts also show two professors’ attempts at creating inclusive environments. Being invited to access their linguistic repertoires in the classroom allowed students to communicate a message clearly and precisely. Used rhetorically, translanguaging practices allow for different levels of rhetorical and communicative effectiveness, and this approach helps create a strong case for the legitimacy of non-standardized languages.

**Me:** Ese mi Kiki wacha homeboy, you like my saco ese?

**Kiki:** Awwww man Jacob, aww man chignon brotha! Check out these pants I got off one.

of those French vatos for a beer, for a beer pinche puto!

**Me:** Yeah yeah yeah ok ok. Hey wait homes those are pretty nice carnal, hey put this on, aver how they look together.

**Kiki:** Jacob, I'm chingon!

**Me:** Y este pinche cadena??? Here put it on the belt, make it look like you got a lot of feria to spend and got gold chains.

*(Me: Hey there Kiki, look homeboy, you like my coat?)*

**Kiki:** Awwww man Jacob, aww man s\*\*t brother! Check out these pants I got off one of those French dudes for a beer, for a beer f\*\*cking as\*\*hole.

**Me:** Yeah, yeah ok ok. Hey wait homes those are pretty nice bro, hey put this on, let's see how they look together.

**Kiki:** Jacob, I'm f\*\*cking great!

**Me:** And this damn chain??? Here put it on the belt, make it look like you got a lot of dough to spend and got gold chains).

Figure 2: Excerpt from Jacob's narrative essay

## Discussion

As educators, we influence our students. We represent our language ideologies through our linguistic interactions and pedagogical practices in the classroom. Those teachers who taught me have informed my educational and pedagogical experiences. I embodied their behaviors, and for a long time, I carried with me their language ideologies as well. Today, I embrace my identity and heritage and continue to advocate for linguistic diversity in higher education by purposefully including readings featuring diverse voices, and by teaching bilingual courses or courses with a bilingual component. I employ translanguaging pedagogies in my classes validating students' lived experiences, emphasizing that language difference can be a resource for learning.



With that goal in mind, FYC directors can encourage their faculty to adopt a multilingual approach, including translanguaging, to teaching writing. But first, faculty should be educated on language-teaching practices through training or during professional development focusing on incorporating translanguaging and other translingual pedagogies that draw upon students' complete linguistic repertoires. At Hispanic Serving Institutions, I echo Rosenberg and Mangelsdorf's (2021) call for writing program administrators to "attend to their unique circumstances" and look at language differences as "qualities they [administrators] use to identify and influence initiatives they choose."

As researchers, it is important to take advantage of the changing educational landscape and explore methods, such as translanguaging as tools, for providing access to multilingual writers, especially in regions with diverse populations. Identifying approaches to leverage students' rich linguistic resources and experiences is important for student learning. These efforts can yield ongoing explorations on translingual practices offering differing perspectives for scholarship and pedagogy. This work is also an attempt to contribute to conversations about translanguaging approaches in the classroom more explicitly, so we can engage in practices that work to blur the lines between language hierarchies found in English centric spaces.

### **Limitations**

The study where the data was derived for this article examined the translanguaging practices of bilingual students in first-year composition in a border institution. This was a qualitative study using ethnographic methods, and although an ethnographic approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of bilingual students' translanguaging practices, the length of the study was limited. Typically, ethnographic studies are conducted over a prolonged period. This present study was conducted during three months in the spring semester which limited data collection. Other limitations include delayed IRB approval as well as not being able to speak to previous instructors in the university who could offer insight on the language practices displayed by the participants in this particular study.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

There has been research conducted on translanguaging and other translingual practices (Cenoz, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Canagarajah 2011a, 2011b; García, 2009; García & Otheguy, 2020; García & Wei, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis et al.,

2012; Sayer, 2013; Wei, 2018a). However, there is limited research that focuses on translanguaging in higher education and specifically in border institutions. Most of the literature explores translanguaging in primary and occasionally secondary education contexts in the U.S. and UK (Mazak & Carroll, 2017). In considering a shift in policies and pedagogies, it is important to know how students' linguistic repertoires contribute to effective communication among multilingual students. Therefore, the challenge is in learning more on how bilingual students use language difference as a way to negotiate academic contexts.

My research was aimed at studying bilingual Spanish-English speaking students at a border institution. A similar qualitative research approach can also be used at other kinds of universities with bilingual and multilingual students. Educational sites with a diverse student population deserve to be studied in order to better serve the needs of all students. For example, places like San Francisco, California, where students might be bilingual in a variety of languages (Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese, and so on) are excellent sites to learn how students make sense of their multilingual worlds and how we can capitalize on their cultural knowledge and background. In addition, with the growing number of multilinguals entering colleges and universities all over the United States, regions far from the border such as the Midwest can also benefit from qualitative and ethnographic research methods. Areas such as the Midwest have experienced an increasing number of migrants who are or will be enrolling in higher education. These marginalized populations bring with them a wealth of cultural practices that can be highlighted in classrooms where their language and cultural background are valued.

## **Conclusion**

Given the growing number of multilingual populations present in universities, it is vital to identify multilinguals' negotiating practices in the classroom and begin mapping or remapping pedagogical practices to include translanguaging. It is evident that multilingual speakers use their language abilities or rhetorical practices and cultural backgrounds. In this piece, I illustrated pedagogical practices instructors engaged in to provide access to multilingual writers. Literacy narrative writing samples clearly showed students' responses to the opportunities to use their full linguistic repertoires. Integrating similar translanguaging practices can be beneficial for bilingual students as they incorporate their various languages in their writings. Additionally, instructors are not only providing insights to translanguaging purposes, but also carving a space for students' heritage languages within the writing context in higher education. Making

space in academia is an important step for language diversity advocates, as well as a significant move toward shifting the way we teach writing.

However, creating opportunities for translanguaging practices can be challenging, especially for educators who unintentionally continue to uphold English-only policies in higher education; or when educators may not fully understand what translanguaging is and how it works. For example, some educators may still see bilingual students as equivalent to two monolinguals despite the research showing that they are different. García (2017) contends that all teachers, bilingual or not, can take a translanguaging stance, and can design translanguaging instruction. She describes this approach as something that needs to be “continuously adjusted...to keep in response to students’ learning needs” (García, 2017, p. 262). For this reason, it is important that educators in higher education understand how bilingual students learn when they can leverage their linguistic repertoires. This may be possible by examining real classroom examples of translanguaging or by moving theory into practice. Therefore, this article is also a call to continue research studies focusing on pedagogical practices that foster flexible and dynamic spaces for multilingual students to thrive. In addition, educational sites with a diverse student population deserve to be studied to better serve the needs of all students. In considering a shift in policies and pedagogies, it is important to know how students’ linguistic repertoires contribute to effective communication among multilingual students. I hope that this chapter encourages educators, scholars, and researchers to recognize writing classrooms as spaces where multilingual students can access and draw on their robust and diverse linguistic proficiencies.

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**Maria Isela Maier**, Ph.D., teaches Rhetoric and Writing Studies courses in the English Department at The University of Texas at El Paso. Her dissertation focused on the communicative practices of bilingual students in higher education. Her teaching philosophy stems from her own lived experiences in learning to write in a new language. As a non-native English speaker, she clearly understands the challenges and demands most students in a bicultural and bilingual community encounter when it comes to writing. These experiences prompted her to research strategies that facilitate the writing process for those whose first language is not the dominant language of instruction. In addition, her community scholarship examines multilingual practices and the importance of bilingual content and material for the large Spanish-speaking population in the El Paso border community. Dr. Maier received the Nuestra Gente Award from the University of Texas at El Paso in 2017. The award assists minority students conduct research that impacts Latinx communities.

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