



OPEN WORDS: ACCESS AND ENGLISH STUDIES

Vol. 15, No. 1 (December 2023): 1–11.

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2023.15.1.01

ISSN: 2690-3911 (Print) 2690-392X (Online)

<https://wac.colostate.edu/openwords/>

Guest Editor's Introduction: Access Necessarily Precedes Success: Multilingual Student Writers in Higher Education

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I have crossed a myriad of borders and barriers in my life—geographical, economic, cultural, and linguistic, among others. While I currently teach and study at a university on the border between the United States of America (USA) and Mexico, it was not until recently that I became fully aware of the nature and importance of these borders and barriers and their indelible impact on providing access to learning and academic success in a student's life. Pursuing a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition Studies in the US after coming from Nepal prompted me to reflect on these borders and barriers, realizing how they can limit access to learning and impede students' success. I now understand that *access necessarily precedes success*.

At various points in my life, I have encountered significant barriers that restricted my access to educational materials. One such impediment involved is a geographical barrier. During my school years, we did not have access to transportation and nearby markets for purchasing essential reading materials. This lack of access resulted in delays in obtaining course books and supplementary resources, hindering our timely reading and academic progress. Similarly, after obtaining my master's degree in Nepal, I taught in a remote area where Internet and personal phone services were scarce, further limiting my access to online resources and communication. In contrast to urban teachers, I faced geographically limited access to resources and exposure to professional development programs and academically current scholars in my field.

Another barrier that limited my access to education was my economic status. I was born into a sharecropper family. As the son of a sharecropper and a first-generation student, I hail from a humble background and struggled financially. I vividly recall the days when I couldn't even afford basic supplies, like pens,

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notebooks, and textbooks. Similarly, I had constraints for my study time. Sometimes, I had to plow the field with oxen before going to school in the morning, and even in the evening after returning from school. Consequently, I was constrained by both my financial situation and my household responsibilities.

Next, growing up in a multilingual society, studying with multilingual classmates, and teaching multilingual students, I realized how language plays a vital role in students' success when it provides them access to their ways of knowing and being. In my case, seeing my school and college education in Nepal from a language and cultural perspective, I was indeed part of the dominant majority group—that of the Nepali-speaking community in my country. But I also recall how my classmates from nondominant linguistic and cultural backgrounds—such as Gurung, Newar, Tamang, etc.—often encountered language and cultural barriers due to institutions' policies of favoring the dominant group of students' knowledge and ways of learning. I also remember instances when my classmates were subjected to ridicule because of their different, minority accents in dominant Nepali.

Ironically, it was when I later came to the US to pursue a Ph.D. as a multilingual student, that I understood how limited I am in communicating, studying, teaching, and writing due to my own linguistic and cultural borders. For example, in the early days, when I would speak, sometimes my peers would not understand due to my accented English. I further understood the complexities of multilingual students' lives while teaching undergraduate-level writing courses at my current university in the US, presenting papers at various national and international conferences, and hosting some speaker series events representing the Writing Program Administration Graduate Organization (WPA-GO), on the issue of multilingual writers, race, and accessibility. Through my study and professional service, I identified the vast difference that access to language and literacy practices makes in students' success and in providing access to them.

I share these examples from my own “felt experience,” an experiential knowledge acquired through my personal learning journeys, to illustrate how *access necessarily precedes success*. I came to fully realize that assessing students' achievements without considering the access they have is deeply incorrect. Success alone does not reveal the intricate processes involved in achieving that success through access. Analogically speaking, it is like gauging a piece of writing solely by its final version, the final product, without understanding the extensive writing journey involved and all the labor that writing entails.

As U.S. higher education institutions are increasingly becoming more multilingual, how to give access to multilingual students is ever more important.

Over the last few decades, the number of international multilingual students attending U.S. colleges and universities is increasing exponentially, reaching a total of more than one million annually in higher education institutions in the United States between 2014/15 and 2019/20 (The Professionals in International Education, or PIE). PIE News also reports a 68 % rise in new first-time international enrollments in US higher education institutions for 2021/2022 (Nott).

Increased global movement and migration of translinguals have augmented the significance of multilingual education across the world, demanding that higher education institutions address multilingualism more consciously (Catalano, Shende, and Suh, 2018). In such situations, acknowledging and providing access to multilingual students' linguistic repertoire and experiences seems vitally important for promoting social justice in college education. When it comes to fostering writing skills in higher education classrooms, it is vital that instructors embrace a pedagogy that provides access to multilingual students; indeed, it is our ethical responsibility to do so.

Historically speaking, writing studies have long attempted to recognize and address the specific concerns of multilingual students. For instance, since 1975, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) has affirmed the importance of "students' right to their own language" within the university classroom. CCCC has been consistently issuing its statements on second language writing and multilingual writers (e.g., 2001, 2009, 2020). Over the past five decades, numerous scholars (e.g., Suresh Canagarajah, Paul Kei Matsuda, among others) continue to articulate various perspectives and to offer different strategies, practices, and approaches that enhance access for multilingual student writers.

Having crossed several borders, and living the multilingual context of the contemporary U.S. university, I now also understand that providing access to multilingual student writers is in fact a key aspect of university education in the US. So, this special issue, **Access Necessarily Precedes Success: Multilingual Student Writers in Higher Education** in *Open Words* spotlights access for and fostering of multilingual students and their writing, enriched by their own experiences, within the learning process. This special issue contributes to opening, maintaining, promoting, and defending access for multilingual writers, offering various strategies for teaching multilingual student writers.

Providing Access to Multilingual Writers

Teaching undergraduate writing courses at a Texas System University and at Tribhuvan University in Nepal, attending my disciplinary conferences, and being exposed to Ph.D. courses in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, I recognize how some pedagogical practices and pedagogies that directly give access to multilingual writers, such as translanguaging practices, multimodality, decolonizing pedagogy, among others.

Research shows that translanguaging tends to create inclusive pedagogical practices, thus giving equal access to educational opportunities and allowing an increased degree of student participation in classroom settings (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011) advocate for a broader shift from an outdated “English-only” approach to a translanguaging norm. A translanguaging approach provides better access for multilingual writers in various ways, such as, (1) “honoring the power of all language users to shape language to specific ends; (2) recognizing the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within the United States and globally; and (3) directly confronting English monolingualist expectations” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 305). It empowers language users to freely mix and change languages, without perceiving such mixing as a sign of linguistic failure, cognitive incompetence, or cultural threat (Horner & Tetreault, 2017).

Scholars argue that embracing multimodality (e.g., audio, video, color, image, etc.) in teaching writing facilitates access to multilingual student writers. During the writing process, multilingual writers often struggle with the English-only linguistic mode, while embracing other modes that can empower them (Pandey et al., 2021). Gonzales and Butler (2020) argue that multimodal activities and assignments can establish effective composition spaces for students using Spanish, American Sign Language, and/or other modes. Canagarajah (2013) has long asserted that real-world language users typically leverage all available semiotic resources for meaning-making, making it necessary for translanguaging theory to go “beyond words and accommodat[e] other semiotic systems” (p. 450).

Resisting dominant language practices and contents and welcoming multilingual students’ knowledge and practices can give better access to multilingual student writers. Drawing ideas from Walter Mignolo’s “epistemic disobedience,” Medina (2019) contends that translanguaging has the potential for “implementing multilingual practices in [First-year Composition] classes by enacting ‘epistemic disobedience,’ by complicating the primacy of English as the language of knowledge-

building” (p.73). Writing about decolonizing methodology, Haas (2012) argues for the need to (1) redress colonial influences on perceptions of people, literacy, language, culture, and community and the relationships therein, and (2) support the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, histories, places, and spaces—and encourage respectful and reciprocal dialogue between and across them (p. 297).

Additionally, in order to provide more access for multilingual students, instructors can develop assignments relating to students’ own culture and previous language experiences, thus providing students with preferential options in their writing assignments. “Writing from Experience,” for instance, is an assignment that encourages students to write an essay from their personal experiences (e.g., home literacy experiences, school literacy experiences, or broader social literacy experiences), which in turn enables them to make meaning which can be inspirational for their own and others’ future. With the aim of connecting language and rhetoric while empowering students to draw from their authentic linguistic experiences, Corcoran and Wilkinson (2019) created a language autoethnography assignment to engage students through personal narrative writing and their linguistic abilities. Regarding assignments, the CCCC statement (2020) on second-language writing and multilingual writers states, “We encourage instructors to provide students with multiple options for successfully completing an assignment, such as by providing multiple prompts or allowing students to write in a variety of genres for completing the assignment.” Indeed, offering multiple options while assigning assignments and allowing learners to articulate their work via multiple genres gives better access to multilingual student writers.

Numerous other theories, approaches, and practices exist to serve multilingual student writers. The articles included in this issue add to the current scholarship on multilingualism, specifically with reference to multilingual student writers, by programmatic interventions and efforts to support multilingual student writers, pedagogical practices, and writing centers’ services.

Overview of the Issue

This special issue explores how teaching writing to multilingual student writers can provide them with access to various opportunities and resources. It includes topics such as translanguaging, multimodality, asset-based pedagogy, programmatic efforts and writing centers’ services, and storytelling rooted in diverse cultures. These

articles showcase how effective access is granted to multilingual student writers, empowering them to enhance their rhetorical skills.

The issue opens with **Joyce Meier, Xiqiao Wang, and Cheryl Caesar's** article, "Re-Addressing the 'Problem of PCW': Rethinking A Bridge-Writing Course in the Interest of Supporting Multilingual Students," which discusses the programmatic efforts for providing access to multilingual student writers of the Writing Program at Michigan State University. To be specific, the authors offer how their university's Preparation for College Writing (WRA 101) and first-year writing program evolved to give better access for its multilingual students through translanguaging, multimodal, and asset-based pedagogical practices.

Xiao Tan's work, "How Can I Sound Politician?: A Case Study of Multilingual Writer Transferring Prior Knowledge in Multimodal Composing," is the case study that examines the process by which a multilingual student leveraged his prior knowledge to create a video proposal and how this multimodal project enhances opportunities for learning and reflection, thereby facilitating greater accessibility. Collecting data from screen recordings with a think-aloud protocol, a semi-structured interview, writing assignments submitted by the student participant, and class observation notes, Tan explores the participant-mobilized procedural, genre, and rhetorical knowledge at different stages of the project by integrating the multimodal composing experience.

Maria Isela Maier, in "Encouraging Language Negotiation in Institutional Spaces: A Qualitative Case Study in Pedagogies to Promote Translanguaging in Writing courses," focuses on the pedagogical practices employed by undergraduate instructors to encourage students to use their linguistic repertoires at a Hispanic-serving institution situated along the U.S.-Mexico border. Maier reports on how participant instructors establish inclusive writing pedagogies that embrace linguistic diversity and acknowledge students' unique communication practices, allowing students to translanguange in their writing.

In "Storytelling in First-Year Writing: Empowering Multilingual Learners with the Hakawati Tradition," **Anthony DeGenaro and Lena Hakim** advocate for access by inviting multilingual writers to embrace Hakawati storytelling, a traditional Arabic storytelling tradition, in first-year writing classes. The authors present their own practices of storytelling that have been implemented in their first-year classroom through their two assignments, the oral research narrative and the "I-Search" essay.

In their article, "Piloting a Language Autoethnography in a First-Year Writing Program: A Study of Five Multilingual Student Writers," **Michael J. Faris, Michelle E. Flahive, Elizabeth Hughes Karnes, and Callie F. Kostelich**

demonstrate the complexity of a project like an autoethnography, which aims to provide valuable learning opportunities for multilingual student writers. The authors offer implications for first-year writing programs and teachers that they need to explicitly interrogate academic norms with students and to provide professional development for teachers.

Marco F. Navarro, Sara P. Alvarez, and Eunjeong Lee, in “Multilingual Epicenters: First-Year Writing and the Writing Center as Critical Sites of Multilingual Sustainability for Language-minoritized Students in Higher Education” argue that both writing centers and first-year writing classrooms are places where justice and injustice get entwined for language-minoritized students. They correctly observe that mere access to sites of institutionalized writing instruction and policies is not enough to counter deep-rooted structures of oppression that target and pathologize racialized communities. Through their conscientious practices, including providing tailored feedback, designing assignments that prioritize language-minoritized students’ needs, and ensuring holistic support before and after writing center services, the authors propose sustainable approaches for fostering multilingual meaning-making practices and thus to better enact justice in first-year composition classes and writing centers.

The article, “Increasing Support for Multilingual Student Writers in a Writing Center Context,” by **Allie Johnston**, discusses incorporating responses from undergraduate and graduate tutors and the voices of multilingual student writers, and reports on the initiatives taken by a new Writing Center Director for developing support, training, and resources to support his multilingual student writers in tutoring sessions within his campus Writing Center. Johnston provides examples and ideas, particularly on three main aspects, as addressed by Blazer and Fallon (2020): understanding students’ experiences with language; developing an open mind towards difference; and making and applying meaning to tutoring sessions for designing more inclusive tutoring practices for our multilingual student writers.

Conclusion

In U.S. universities, twenty-first century classrooms very often include a significant population of international and domestic multilingual students, who bring their unique linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. When these students arrive at US universities, they often face various barriers, including linguistic issues, economic, cultural, and time constraints, etc. Given this situation, it becomes crucial to ensure equitable access for multilingual students and support their academic

success. When it comes to writing, scholars argue that some pedagogical practices give better access to multilingual student writers, such as translanguaging practices, multimodality, decolonizing pedagogy, etc. For example, translanguaging pedagogy proves beneficial for student writers as it accepts differing and diverse practices of student writing; decolonial pedagogy helps enact equitable pedagogy in the writing classes as it honors students' own epistemological roots, including varying educational and cultural norms. Additionally, multimodality enables students to better complete assignments by allowing them to employ multiple modes of composition (i.e., audio, video, pictures, graphs, etc.). I wholeheartedly recommend the articles in this collection as highly valuable resources for facilitating access to multilingual student writers in higher education. These articles provide instructors with tangible programmatic strategies, encompassing pedagogical practices like translanguaging, decolonization, asset-based pedagogy, multimodality, storytelling, and establishing welcoming writing centers. Through sharing their distinct experiences and viewpoints, these authors concretely contribute to fostering social justice within the multilingual landscape of contemporary American universities.

Now I invite you as a reader/scholar to explore two future steps: a call to action, and reflection. After reading the articles included in this special issue, I urge you to go into action by embracing strategies, practices, and approaches that provide access for multilingual student writers. Furthermore, I invite you to reflect on how the articles included in this special issue can inform and inspire your own teaching and learning of multilingual writing. I also encourage you to share your experiences and insights with other multilingual writers and instructors through various platforms and networks. How do you view multilingualism as a resource and a challenge for academic writing? With what kinds of strengths do they come? What are some of the strategies and tools that you use or recommend for enhancing multilingual writing skills and performance? How do you balance the expectations and conventions of different academic genres and disciplines?

I further encourage you to reflect on the strategies that you are practicing to ensure access to multilingual student writers. If you are in a program director or department chair position, then please think seriously about whether your programmatic policies provide access to multilingual student writers or not, what effort you would like to make to offer access to these students, what professional development activities you offer on the programmatic level to equip instructors to teach multilingual student writers, and what resources you have on hand for promoting multilingual student writers. Similarly, if you are a writing instructor, please examine yourself: How are you consciously providing full access to the

multilingual student writers in your classes? What pedagogical approach you embrace, what kinds of assignments you assign, how you assess students' work, what effort you would like to make to provide more access to the students, etc.

Furthermore, if you are a writing center director or tutor, I urge you to make a critical reflection on your own practices of providing access for multilingual student writers and the implementation of necessary reforms for offering more inclusive and supportive writing center services.

I conclude this editorial note by repeating the mantra that *access necessarily precedes success*! So, first, let us provide access to our multilingual student writers through programmatic efforts, pedagogical practices, and writing center services, and then can follow success in multilingual student writers' academic lives.

Happy reading this issue!

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Jagadish Paudel is a doctoral candidate in Rhetoric and Writing Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. His areas of interest include social justice in rhetoric and writing studies, policies in rhetoric and writing programs, multilingualism, translanguaging, decolonizing composition studies, critical pedagogy, and non-Western rhetoric. His scholarship has been published in the *RSA Quarterly*, *Rhetoric and Communications-E Journal* (co-authored), *Journal of NELTA*, among others. He is also associated with the Writing Program Administrators-Graduate Organization (WPA-GO) Leadership Council. Currently, he serves as its Chair for the year 2023-2024 and holds monthly meetings, plan for events and activities, oversee its committees, and advocate social justice issues.

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Vol. 15, no. 1 (December 2023): 1–11.

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2023.15.1.01

ISSN: 2690-3911 (Print) 2690-392X (Online)

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