

Beyond Translingual Writing

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Following the publication of the 2011 *College English* manifesto “Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Turn,” authored by Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur, translingualism has emerged as a popular theoretical concept within composition studies. The manifesto, endorsed by fifty established scholars in the discipline, emphasized the need to view traditional language boundaries as dynamic and fluid, rather than static and impermeable, arguing that such a paradigm shift would enable writers to “engage the fluidity of language in pursuit of new knowledge, new ways of knowing, and more peaceful relations” (Horner et al. 307). Although scholars in cognate academic disciplines such as education, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology had attended to similar concerns regarding language diversity much earlier than the manifesto’s publication, as Paul Kei Matsuda reminds us (“Lure”), it was through the manifesto that the discourse of translingualism gained prominence within the discipline of composition studies in the United States, a fact evident in the growing number of publications in composition studies journals and conference presentations that have some variant of “translingual” in the title.

At first glance, a translingual orientation would appear to align with the principles of linguistic social justice in that it attempts to afford rights to all students in spite of their “proficiency” in English according to parochial, monolingual, monolithic norms. However, the very fact that most teachers and programs must use a standard or norm to evaluate and grade students and their writing, regardless of their pedagogical orientation, and that there has been little to no

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scholarly treatment of how translingual approaches might be assessed, begs the question of whether the translingual turn aligns with or contradicts the principles of social justice. In other words, do we work against social justice aims if we do not teach to and assess using a standardized English? Obviously, teaching standardized English is not solely an either/or proposition, but the assessment of student writing often puts us in a position where we must make such decisions.

If a social justice agenda for writing assessment is about creating opportunity structures and positive consequences for all students, then classroom grading is an obvious place to focus our efforts. Classroom grading practices have been closely connected to an unchallenged, dominant discursive standard in writing classrooms and programs. It has been argued that grading writing can be damaging and may not be helpful to a student's development in schools (Yancey and Huot; Kohn, "Case," *Punished*). Often those in writing studies offer descriptive or narrative solutions (Bleich; Huot) or ones around contract grading and the sharing of power (Danielewicz and Elbow; Inoue, "Grade-Less"; Shiffman; Shor), however, these reasonable solutions often do not explicitly address their consequences on marginalized student populations, especially multilingual students. Of course, there is a significant body of research that has questioned the accuracy of different types of formal assessment on multilingual students (Hamp-Lyons; Horowitz), the effectiveness of error correction (along with the very notion of what can be considered "good" writing across different cultural contexts (Currie). Alternatively, many have argued for teachers to learn the language practices of their linguistically diverse students (Ball; Kamusikiri), such as African American English. But these approaches, despite their concerns about judging instances of nondominant discourses as deficit, do not adequately address the problems with a single standard applied unilaterally in a classroom space. Brian Huot argues for "instructive evaluation," a "pedagogy for assessment with our students that focuses on their writing and the choices writers make, . . . involv[ing] the student in the process of evaluation" (69). Yet Huot's call still assumes a dominant discourse and standard by which to judge students, even if they may be more involved in those processes. His method is more democratic, but I wonder about the uneven ways many students, especially multilingual students, may engage in those democratic methods.

Educational researchers Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln argued for a social constructivist assessment model that resists one evaluator and one standard by incorporating a "hermeneutic dialectic circle" that collects the decisions of many judges who are involved in the consequences of the assessment (149–52). While not explicitly about classroom assessment practices, a few (Broad; Inoue "Grading Contracts") have applied these ideas to various writing assessment contexts, including the classroom. This model, "fourth generation evaluation,"

may come closer to what I'm calling for in this article, but Guba and Lincoln's model derives one evaluation, even if its methods include as many stakeholders as possible. More recently, Linda B. Nilson offers "specifications grading," a system that directly maps outcomes to the classroom activities and work graded (*Specifications*). While helpful and intriguing in many ways, specifications grading also assumes a dominant, static norm, and tends toward a "tough love" philosophy when treating multilingual writing. Ultimately, the research in writing assessment has tended to assume Standard Academic Edited English as *the* standard and has not articulated a way to transform writing assessment means to be more expansive in accounting for the construct of writing. This, I believe, is one way to read what White and his coauthors mean when they center the validity of program writing assessment on the consequences of the assessment's decisions (*Very*), and what Poe and her collaborators could mean when they discuss disparate impact as consequence ("Legal").

Scholarship on translanguaging has not evaded the question of assessment altogether (see Horner et al.; Dryer; Inoue, "Using"), but it has mainly focused on descriptive aspects of translanguaging pedagogy. This focus is because the translanguaging paradigm shift has manifested itself primarily in scholarship that encourages alternate discourse styles and multiple language resources in academic writing (Guerra). This application of translanguaging theory alone, without fuller attention to the question of assignment design, commenting practices, and assessment, will not enable us to attend to the central issue of *linguistic social justice*. Linguistic social justice entails *confronting the inequitable discursive economies that afford disproportionate amounts of social capital to certain language practices over others*. In the context of assessment, justice centers on a consideration of "fairness," which is defined by the American Educational Research Association as "the extent to which individuals have had exposure to instruction or knowledge that affords them the opportunity to learn" (*Standards* 56; see also Rawls). Linguistic social justice, as I argue, thus cannot be reduced to simply inviting alternate discourse styles in academic, even high-stakes, writing without attending to the technologies—placement testing, exit testing, common rubric scoring, among others—and stakeholders who decide when and where such discourse styles will be valued. If translanguaging is to be guided by the principles of linguistic social justice, then we may need to focus less on how to incorporate translanguaging writing into classroom spaces, less on questions of how to assess translanguaging writing both in the classroom and at the programmatic levels, and more on how to rethink the very assumptions surrounding assessment that exacerbate sociolinguistic inequalities. Put differently, the question we need to focus on is not how to assess translanguaging writing but how to go about *translanguaging assessment*. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to consider how a translanguaging orientation to

writing provides an opportunity to reimagine assessment philosophies in ways that can work to promote linguistic social justice.

In this article, I theorize a philosophy of writing assessment that prioritizes not the product of translingual writing itself, but the application of the theoretical tenets of translanguaging toward methods and practices of assessment. Because the project of linguistic social justice is a large undertaking, in this article I focus our attention to how writing assessment can meaningfully contribute to linguistic social justice. I describe how translanguaging assessment entails reimagining assessment according to three interrelated principles: negotiating linguistic and institutional expertise, individualizing evaluative criteria, and attenuating the translingual-monolingual binary. To conclude, I address some remaining questions while considering directions for future research on translanguaging assessment.

Before proceeding, I should clarify that, although writing assessment is not a question of language alone, I focus on the question of language within this article for several reasons. First, in the latest version of the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* (2014), even though issues of language are emphasized in only one of the four major criteria and in only one of the total of twenty-two subcriteria, language tends to be the subject of a disproportionate amount of concern and debate among compositionists. It has been argued that the very notion of “error” is a highly subjective, negotiable, and contextual phenomenon (Williams; Anson; Dryer). Yet many assessment protocols continue to focus on “errors”—that is, a sliver of the construct of writing. Secondly, in the three versions of the *Outcomes Statement*, revisions to language criteria have been minimal, reflecting a general unwillingness to account for the reality that deviation is indeed what makes language (see Pennycook; Lu and Horner).¹ Lastly, even progressive raters can still hold intolerant attitudes to language difference (Lippi-Green; Greenfield; Johnson and VanBrackle).

WHY TRANSLINGUAL WRITING, AND WHY NOT?

The translingual orientation builds off work in sociolinguistics that challenges a monolingual orientation toward language by emphasizing how language boundaries are ideological constructs of European philology and the nation-state (See Canagarajah, *Translingual*; Bauman and Briggs; Makoni and Pennycook; Khubchandani; Reagan). In this regard, the monolingual orientation that is challenged by translanguaging is not the assumption that people should speak one and only one language. Rather, it is the ideology that contains languages from contact with each other, associating language mixing with contamination and lack of proficiency. The monolingual orientation privileges and idealizes

language in an ostensibly pure, hygienic form, as if by an educated monolingual native speaker within a homogeneous speech community, or what Mary Louise Pratt has termed the “linguistic utopia” (“Linguistic”). Insisting on the separateness of languages and discourse styles according to monolingual norms is not only theoretically uninformed and contradictory to everyday language practices, it is also a means of marginalizing linguistic minority students. In this sense, a translanguingual orientation is understood to be especially beneficial for allowing a more nuanced perspective on students who use English as a “second” or “foreign” language.

Of course, translanguingualism should not be regarded as a “replacement” to the discipline of second language writing, as noted in the recent open letter, “Clarifying the Relationship between L2 Writing and Translanguingual Writing” (Atkinson et al. 384). The authors of the open letter focus their critique on “translanguingual writing.” However, it should be clarified that “translanguingual writing” is merely one possible *product* of translanguingualism, which is, more broadly, an *orientation* to language (see Horner et al.). As I suggest throughout this article, even though a vast majority of scholarship on translanguingualism in the context of composition studies focuses on translanguingual writing, discourses of *translanguingualism* should not be reduced to *translanguingual writing* alone. Similarly, a translanguingual orientation should not be limited to advocating for the linguistic rights of second language writers alone. It is important to remember that certain “native speakers” of English, such as African American students, have historically been also marginalized because of their language differences. This is in spite of African American English having been demonstrated by sociolinguists to be highly structured, resourceful and systematic (see Smitherman). In fact, it was Vershawn Young’s argument of code-meshing, encouraging African American students to use “vernacular” discourse styles in academic contexts (“Average”), that was later developed by Canagarajah to consider how global varieties of English could be honored in classroom spaces (“Place”). Therefore, it is important that translanguingualism locates spaces for language practices that are generally pathologized in institutional contexts such as academic writing, including those of multilingual writers. This, of course, is not a call to view all marginalized students and their respective language practices as one and the same, or, as Keith Gilyard has recently put it, to assume the “sameness-of-difference” (286). As Gilyard argues, we must continue to remember the “historical and unresolved struggles of groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the academy and suffer disproportionately in relation to it” (286).

Further, in spite of the translanguingual orientation’s affordances for linguistically marginalized student populations, scholars have raised concerns that translanguingual pedagogies deprive students the ability to learn ostensibly privileged varieties of English such as standardized English.² As Todd Ruecker argues,

translingual pedagogies “may do students a disservice . . . by possibly delaying students’ attempts to learn standardized language varieties” (116, n12). Of course, this sentiment, which reifies the assumed social capital of “standardized language varieties,” is scarcely new and reminds one of John Honey’s 1983 book *The Language Trap*, which argues for the need to teach standardized English to students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and marginalized ethnic groups. Honey’s arguments, like those of many similar ones that have followed, are a reflection of the old question of how to reconcile socioeconomic realities shaped by dominant language ideologies with the desire to promote alternative historically marginalized language practices. As Lisa Delpit similarly argued just a few years later: “To imply to children or adults (but of course the adults won’t believe you anyway) that it doesn’t matter how you talk or how you write is to ensure their ultimate failure” (292). In other words, encouraging or even reluctantly accepting diversity within classrooms does not necessarily mean that “diversity will automatically be accepted at gatekeeping points” (292). Scott Lyons more recently made a similar point, insisting on the importance of teaching privileged usage to marginalized student populations such as American Indian students. As Lyons writes: “[G]o ahead and teach them what they need to survive: Standard English. Doing so does not make you like General Richard Henry Pratt, killing Indians to save men and all that. It would mean you are doing your job, and your job is definitely worth doing. It helps Indians to live” (138–9).

While the translingual orientation might be characterized as an “idealist” position to some, Canagarajah describes the kinds of arguments made by Ruecker, Honey, Delpit, and Lyons as representative of the “pragmatist position,” whereby teachers view “the norms of academic written English as a fact of social life” and “focus their efforts on providing access to this language of power to minority students” (*Translingual* 110). Both the idealist and pragmatist positions represent well-intentioned desires to promote student learning, and it would thus seem that both can be considered inherently invested in the promotion of their own means to linguistic social justice. Yet neither position sufficiently addresses how to assess writing, whether “translingual” or “standardized,” in ways that promote social justice. As I will demonstrate in the following section, once we more actively consider the question of assessment for translingual writing and writing more broadly, the issue of whether to invite or discourage alternate discourse styles in academic writing is but a fraction of the problem.

TRANSLANGUAGING ASSESSMENT

At one of the universities where I formerly taught, a student submitted an essay for the annual undergraduate essay contest, a compelling literacy narrative written for a first-year writing course. In that essay, the student described the

challenges of being a Chinese American and having to navigate two different cultural and linguistic identities. The essay was lauded by the judges and was poised to win an award for best essay in the literacy narrative category. What especially fascinated the contest judges, composed of composition instructors in the department, was the author's method of interweaving Chinese expressions within the essay. However, the essay was disqualified during the final stage of judging when it was determined that the student author had used automated translation, perhaps a translation program such as Google Translate, and simply embedded, perhaps just copied and pasted, incoherent expressions within the essay. Even though the essay was overall strong, it was ultimately disqualified because the Chinese characters made the essay "translingual" but only in a superficial manner.

Perhaps the most interesting question is how this pseudo-Chinese essay was able to be held in such high regard by so many instructors. The obvious reason, of course, is that the other instructors did not read Chinese and did not consider the possibility that the Chinese in the essay was incomprehensible. Such cases illustrate our collective susceptibility to what Matsuda has called "linguistic tourism" (482). Linguistic tourism, as Matsuda argues, refers both to a fascination with unfamiliar language practices and the tendency of scholars to select conspicuously unique examples of writing to focus their analysis on, which is akin to a tour guide focusing on particular attractions that are appealing to tourists but not necessarily representative of the day-to-day lives of the local people. In the essay example, ideologies of linguistic tourism impacted the assessment of the student writing in so far as the student's teacher, who nominated the essay for the prize, along with the other contest judges, evaluated the essay favorably in part because of the Chinese characters within it. Linguistic tourism is problematic, argues Matsuda, "because the focus on visible and interesting examples" leads to a "characterization of language users or uses based on differences alone [, which can] mask similarities and might lead to stereotyping ("Lure" 482). Additionally, the nature of the differences judged in this example (Chinese characters in an otherwise English essay) have relations to the historical exoticizing of Asia (and Asians) in U.S. popular culture (Klein; Marchetti; Lee; Prashad). The powerful urge to linguistically tour and see Chinese characters as exotic in an English essay can lead to assessment consequences that may, at face value, seem to be socially just.

A challenge for assessing translingual writing, then, results from the practice of providing languages other than English with only minimal and tokenistic representation in academic writing contexts. In other words, inviting minority language usages in academic venues potentially provides the semblance of tolerance and permissiveness to nonstandardized forms but ultimately contributes

to maintaining the subordinate status of those languages. Such an invitation of marginalized discourse styles in official spaces such as academic writing enables dominant language ideologies to “eat their cake and have it too.”³ For one, it perpetuates the assumption that minority writers must be, to use Matsuda’s words, “characterize[ed] . . . based on differences alone” (482). Further, it points to a larger structural problem in which particular cultural identifications and language practices and issues are marginalized by the very process of being put on display as objects of analysis, ultimately assessed as having some unique characteristics from their ostensibly normative counterparts. Linguistic tourism is additionally detrimental to linguistic minority students because it involves a superficial fetishization of ostensibly exotic language features. Further, such an approach potentially renders alternate discourse styles open to appropriation in mainstream contexts by users who can freely use these language choices without having to be weighed down by the social, political, and economic challenges facing many individuals within the communities from which the languages originate. Therefore, it may be argued, pedagogies that invite translingual writing by buying into the culture of linguistic tourism may ultimately do more harm than good for students.⁴ This can serve as a reminder that the linguistic tourism promoted or used to validate “other” language practices is a question of assessment. An urgent question, then, is whether the assessment of difference can be done in a socially just manner in which surface-level evaluations of difference, even if these evaluations are positive, do not function as a means to overcompensate for the inability to read and thus evaluate a text.

But if it can be agreed that the promotion of linguistic social justice is the telos of translingual pedagogies, the question of how to invite and then assess “translingual writing” is not the most pressing question. We need to focus instead on how to go about translanguaging assessment. By translanguaging assessment, I refer to the application of the premises of translingualism toward a reimagination of traditional practices of assessment more broadly conceived. By “translanguaging,” I draw inspiration from the work of Ofelia García who uses the word to refer to a “linguaging continuum that is accessed” (47), challenging traditional approaches to bilingualism that assume particular individuals use two (or more) languages in isolation from each other. The decision to use *linguaging* is additionally significant. While the common expression “language use” suggests an ontological stability of language as a system that is used by a community of people, *linguaging* represents an emergent process of social interaction that does not merely draw from “language” but constitutes the “language” through ways in which it is practiced by individuals. In J. Normann Jørgensen’s formulation, *linguaging* refers to a highly deliberate and controlled communication based on cues from and assumptions about various interlocutors (“Polylingual”). It

is highly systematic but not in the sense that it draws solely from language as a system—it is systematic in the sense that it relies on an acute meta-awareness of a particular scenario and the language abilities of the interlocutors within that context. *Langauging*, referring to the process of communicating in spite of dominant conventions and rules of language, and *translanguaging*, referring more specifically to such communicative practice that resists traditional categories of language, are crucial in order to understand communication not as a way to bide by linguistic norms, but as an ongoing practice across conventional categories of language (Canagarajah, *Translingual*).

“Translanguaging assessment,” therefore, refers not to the assessment of translanguaging, but rather to the ways in which assessment philosophies can be continually reconstituted in accordance with the principles of translanguaging. Translanguaging assessment means we apply lessons evolving out of translanguaging approaches about language to the assessment of language. It is not a consideration that is reserved for translanguaging writing alone but applicable to all writing. In what follows, I attempt to outline some principles of translanguaging assessment. I draw from other scholars who have previously theorized innovative approaches to writing assessment who may not have used the label *translingual* (such as Huot, Anson). Yet the approach to writing assessment described within this article draws from the theoretical tenets of translanguaging as its starting point. The three facets of translanguaging assessment that I focus on are negotiating linguistic and institutional expertise, individualizing evaluative criteria, and attenuating the translanguaging-monolingual binary.

Negotiating Linguistic and Institutional Expertise

Any exploration of the interrelationship between writing assessment and linguistic social justice needs to attend to the reality that assessment practices in institutionalized educational contexts are, in large part, responsible for the reification of standardized English and its assumed privilege. For instance, student work that uses grammatically and mechanically sound language and adheres to the conventions of a particular genre tends to be awarded with a higher grade or placement than the student work that does not. Many well-intentioned teachers follow the pattern on the basis that they did not create the norms but they have a sense of responsibility to abide by them, following the “pragmatist” position, and help students develop proficiency according to these norms. However, assessment practices, beyond merely working within established standards and conventions, indeed create and perpetuate the standards and conventions themselves. As Hanson has noted, “[T]ests create that which they purport to measure” (294). Yancey makes the important point that the criteria we assess and thus value are largely shaped by the larger historical shifts in assessment

approaches, from multiple-choice examinations to portfolios, which each value certain skills over others (such as knowledge of grammar and mechanics vs. genre knowledge, respectively) (“Looking”). Lester Faigley similarly makes the argument that what is valued by teachers is shaped by socially informed tastes as readers (*Fragments*).

By translanguaging assessment, we approach assessment according to the assumption that the teacher’s linguistic and institutional authority is negotiable—that assessment itself is a negotiation. We work toward undermining the dominant assumption that those on the peripheries must use English in accordance with the semiotic and conventional restrictions set forth by dominant interlocutors. Brian Ray demonstrates how translingual writing can be refined using the progymnasmata of the classical rhetorical tradition as a “developmental framework” for students (193). But the pedagogy outlined essentially demands that the translingual writing accommodate the reader’s—in other words, the instructor’s—limited proficiency in the student’s language resources. Even in Min-Zhan Lu’s famous example of a student’s usage of “can able to,” which has emerged as a classic instance of uptake in translanguaging, while compelling in its resourcefulness, is not validated until the student is able to explain why the existing choices in English “can” and “to be able to” are inadequate for her personal experiences and stylistic goals (“Professing”). The “success” or even “innovativeness” of a particular “translingual” usage appears to always be contingent on the teacher’s judgment.

This relationship reflects a one-way power dynamic in which the ability to negotiate flows from the teacher alone. A particular usage, in other words, is never inherently successful but only constructed as such at the moment the instructor can be persuaded accordingly. Expertise cannot be reduced to the whims of the instructor, and the burden of accommodation cannot continue to lie primarily within the student. Of course, on the other hand, relying solely on the student’s determination of what constitutes appropriate usage can result in undesirable assessment outcomes as well. In the above example of the pseudo-Chinese essay, the readers’ willingness to provide excessive liberties to the student resulted in a validation of a touristic usage of Chinese.

Therefore, a translingual orientation to writing, in the same way that it goes beyond the assumption that one must follow and be subservient to predetermined norms, is not merely about finding ways to incorporate a predetermined number of different language resources as possible in a particular utterance. It also needs to be about confronting the ways in which the criterion of “effectiveness,” including “effective writing,” themselves help to establish inequitable social hierarchies through language. Indeed, teachers, as enforcers of these criteria, invariably benefit from, often unjustly, the social capital afforded by the ability

to abide by certain norms. By treating the criterion of effectiveness as negotiable, translanguaging assessment thus also sees the institutional capital of the teacher and the cultural-linguistic capital of the student as negotiable. However, no matter what, students and teachers cannot make a situation in which the balance of power is even. The teacher always has the advantage because the teacher is the one who decides to use a translingual approach, not the student. Therefore, if linguistic social justice is a priority of translanguaging assessment, we need to continue to discover ways to negotiate the power imbalances inherent within any classroom context and avoid the assumption that the invitation of multiple discourse styles alone is a satisfactory resolution.

Individualizing Evaluative Criteria

One of the appeals of the translingual paradigm shift is its apparent relevance to all language users in a globalized era. Catherine Prendergast's critical ethnography of Slovaks suggests that the acquisition of English can have varied outcomes, including disillusionment toward the promises of free-market capitalism (*Buying*). Yet the translingual orientation challenges the commonsense assumption that one must acquire English, especially a traditionally privileged variety of English. Translingualism promotes an understanding that it is not so much English that is needed; rather, it is the ability to negotiate language differences in order to communicate in a wide range of linguistically diverse spaces (Canagarajah, *Translingual*). It is no doubt important that pedagogies be designed for the communicative demands of today's increasingly global era. However, by translanguaging assessment, we recognize the necessary limitations to any universal assessment criterion.

Such a consideration is urgent in part because scholarship on translingualism draws generalizations from particular sociolinguistic ecologies and language practices. For instance, Pennycook and Otsuji's recent work looks at examples of what they term *metrolinguism*, or multimodal translanguaging drawing on spatial repertoires in urban contexts, specifically in Tokyo and Sydney. Of course, one main reason for drawing such generalizations is that publishers prefer scholarship that will appeal to a broader audience; the title *Metrolinguism: Language in the City* no doubt has a wider appeal than *Metrolinguism: Language in Tokyo and Sydney*. This being noted, we also need to be mindful that translanguaging is not a universal practice. As Vivette Milson-Whyte importantly argues, in terms of teaching, we must respect the fact that some students who "live/operate in situations where languages are still treated as discrete systems" might be resistant to "translingual" pedagogies (121). We can make more critically informed decisions about assessment practices by continuing to consider the universality

of translingualism: actively questioning the generalizability of the cases from which translingualism has been theorized.

One challenge of translanguaging assessment is, therefore, trying to determine the usefulness of generalizations about particular communities. In the same way that we can reasonably question the extent to which a book on metrolingualism in Tokyo and Sydney can legitimately live up to the subtitle that suggests it is more broadly about “the City,” we need to actively consider the extent to which community categories and labels can adequately represent the needs of individuals who identify with, or may not even self-identify with, the respective communities. Ruecker, for instance, insists that Latinx students should not be taught translingual writing because “students like those in [his] study typically enter college classrooms with a clear purpose: to learn a privileged standardized variety of English” (116, n12). Ruecker’s work is well-intentioned and clearly is invested in promoting linguistic social justice, and I commend him for attempting to actually listen to his students, which is something we can all do a little better. But working toward linguistic social justice means that, as a discipline, we also need to go beyond drawing conclusions on the basis of what a particular group of students ostensibly wants or needs. For one, aspirations to assimilate to a dominant linguistic community are not always the result of critically informed, self-reflexive understandings of language; often they are the result of an internalization of discriminatory discourses, reflective of a phenomenon referred to by Villanueva as “internal colonialism” (“Maybe”). I was sent by my teacher to a speech pathologist at a young age because of my accent, so it makes perfect sense that I internalized the standardized English ideology for so many years of my life. But I also need to emphasize that the alternative, insisting that all students need translingual writing, is not a better solution.

We further need to reject the notion that any particular criterion can be set for all students of a particular racial, ethnic, national, gender, or sexual identification and do our best to understand students’ individual aspirations and the means to achieve those aspirations. For advocates of translingualism, this does mean accepting the possibility that translingualism may not be what every student wants. Translanguaging assessment means continuing to reimagine assessment as attending to student aspirations on an individual level rather than merely reacting to disciplinary trends (for instance, encouraging students to produce translingual writing). Historically, “standardized” writing has been held in higher regard, and thus assessed as higher quality, than “translingual” writing. But translanguaging assessment is not simply a call to adapt assessment criteria to value “translingual” writing more; it is about de-universalizing assessment criteria so we remember that different kinds of writing have different values for different students.⁵

Scholars have noted the limitations of privileging criteria that are ostensibly universal, generalizable, or uniform for the purposes of writing assessment. Brian Huot argues for the need to view assessment that prioritizes “the context of the texts being read, the position of the readers and the local, practical standards that teachers and other stakeholders hold for written communication” (104). Taking Huot’s argument one step further, translanguaging assessment could mean, by viewing a teacher’s institutionally afforded expertise as negotiable, encouraging student input to help make determinations of what constitutes the “local, practical standards” of writing. Translanguaging assessment also means continuously individualizing the criteria by which student writing is evaluated, working beyond a homogeneous set of standards, even for one particular classroom.

Attenuating the Translingual-Monolingual Binary

The third point is in many ways the most crucial. By translanguaging assessment, we work toward complicating the very discursive binary of translingual and monolingual. This is not to say that the “translingual” and the “monolingual” need to be viewed as one and the same. As I suggested earlier, language contact is a common fact. This is especially observable in the linguistic ecology of precolonial communities, as noted in the work of scholars such as Lachman Khubchandani (*Revisualizing*). It has been noted not only that the boundaries between languages are ideological constructs, but also that determining the boundaries between one language and another is highly contingent on how language resources develop meaning within local contexts (Pennycook). Indeed, we need simply look to the history of “English” to note it is, in essence, a creolized language (Canagarajah, *Translingual*). Although language contact is a common fact, as Canagarajah notes, it is a common fact that is selectively ignored by conservative language ideologues. Common facts about language, or what Lippi-Green terms “linguistic facts of life,” such as the fact that all spoken languages change over time or that all languages are equal in terms of linguistic potential, are often ignored in the name of standard language ideology (*Accent*). If standardized English can be recognized as an ideological fiction, one would think that deviations from that fiction would become inconsequential if not nonexistent. Ideally, one would be able to see the English language practice of those we deem “different,” whether in terms of racial, ethnic, national, or cultural background, to still be different from our own, but not necessarily defective or deficient. Yet that is not the case.

Perhaps a first step is to promote an understanding that assumes the ordinariness of translingual writing because continuing to view translingual writing as “different” runs the risk of it being further marginalized or exoticized. I noted earlier the dangers of promoting translingual writing for the sake of translingual

writing. Here, I wish to add that assessment practices that treat translingual writing as inherently superior potentially promotes social stratification by creating a culture of polyglot exceptionalism. Matsuda has argued that scholars of translingualism promote a false dichotomy in which translingual is seen as good while everything else, monolingualism, and even scholarship associated with “second language writing” are seen as outdated, uninformed, uncritical, or quite simply, bad (“Lure”). To take Matsuda’s argument one step further, I use the expression *polyglot exceptionalism* to refer to the practice of treating language practices that draw from multiple language resources as inherently superior to their ostensibly monolingual alternatives, as was perhaps the case in the pseudo-Chinese essay being held to such high regard. Of course, the monolingualist expectations that privilege certain registers and dialects (such as academic writing and standardized English) have historically marginalized the voices of ethnic minorities and of students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds more generally. It is possible that many teachers will feel the impulse to privilege translingual writing as a reaction to the historical injustices of assessment practices driven by a monolithic standard of English. While such a reaction is undoubtedly well-intentioned, by continuing to privilege writing that is conspicuously translingual, assessment practices can inadvertently reify a false translingual-monolingual binary and also promote a view of translingual writing that potentially subordinates *all* students, including “monolingual” students, many of whom often represent underserved demographics.

By translanguaging assessment, we challenge the culture of polyglot exceptionalism not just because it relies on the very linguistic categories that the translingual orientation challenges. Insisting on the novelty of translingual writing assumes not only the neat categorizability of monolingual writing but potentially creates new sociolinguistic hierarchies based on a demarcated difference between the translingual and the monolingual. While we certainly should continue to legitimize language practices that have historically been marginalized, including elements of translingual writing that historically have been neglected in academic contexts, there is a fine line between what constitutes “translingual” and “monolingual” and assessment practices driven by a desire to promote linguistic social justice must avoid reifying a false translingual-monolingual dichotomy as a means of uncritically valorizing the translingual over the monolingual.

Translanguaging Assessment in the Classroom

Translanguaging assessment should not, of course, be reduced to a formulaic or systematic process. When considering how to translanguaging assessment practices in the classroom, we can begin by taking seriously the work of other scholars who have already presented alternative approaches to writing assessment. In-

oue’s approach to contract grading solely on labor is one way of ensuring that predetermined criterion of language proficiency is not a factor in assessment, another would be to assign grades in a manner that “decouples grades from the assessment of writing” (“Grade-Less” 84). But to build off Inoue’s approach, for students who prefer to be assessed individually rather than on contract-based criteria for the whole class, it is possible to invite students to dictate to the instructor, on an individual basis, what percentage of their grade on major essays should be distributed to specific criteria, including to their proficiency in standardized academic English norms. In my experience, some students wish for as much as 25 percent of their essay grade to be determined by this criterion, while others request that it has no impact on their grade, and this is a request I willingly honor.

Inoue provides the following elaboration to his approach to assessment:

I’m not suggesting that I do not teach a white, middle-class academic discourse, or that our rubrics and expectations do not resemble that dominant discourse. They often do. I am saying that I try to teach that dominant discourse without using it as a cudgel to bludgeon students of color or other students because they are not white, middle-class academics. (86)

In my approach, I also aim to avoid the practice of “punish[ing] students for not being white-middle-class academics” (Inoue, “Grade-Less” 85), but I additionally attempt to avoid denying students the right to standardized English. Put differently, I am suggesting that we let students decide whether they want standardized English to be a “cudgel to bludgeon” them, along with how severely they wish to be “bludgeoned,” if at all. We need to find ways to guide our students to make decisions that make the most sense for them and, through our assessment practices, evaluate their work on the basis of what the student believes is in the best interest for short-term and long-term goals. Translanguaging assessment thus includes confronting the saviorist expectation that assumes we have a responsibility to enforce some set of norms, such as those of standardized English, on our students.

The value of this minor gesture in translanguaging assessment is, in addition to treating grammatical quality as negotiable, it also ranks the instructor’s linguistic and institutional expertise as negotiable in that it lets students decide, individually, what they want from writing instruction. By doing so, it is just one way of individualizing evaluative criteria. There will be students who wish to focus on developing their proficiency in a standardized variety of English. But it is these same students who will often be penalized for not having this set of skills upon arriving to the classroom. Perhaps we can imagine ways for students such as these to document their development in acquiring mastery of this particular

discourse and relying more on the documentation of their labor in *approaching* this goal rather than merely on their demonstration of their having *achieved* the goal in the written product itself. For instance, relying more on reflective essays, which give students the opportunity to develop discursive and linguistic knowledge through metacognitive analysis, can be used to translanguage assessment insofar as we can avoid having students assessed on their ability to demonstrate having achieved this particular form of proficiency.

By inviting students to individually negotiate how specific features of their writing will be evaluated, we are also working to attenuate the translingual-monolingual binary. Historically, this has meant students who come from backgrounds by which they have come to closely embody the skills that assessment criteria are based on have an unfair advantage over other students. So assessment cannot depend on evaluative criteria that privileges translingual writing over “monolingual” writing because that would therefore potentially privilege students of a cultural habitus in which translanguaging is the norm. We must keep in mind that there is a difference between a writing classroom that *allows* translingual writing and a writing classroom that *encourages* or even *requires* translingual writing. Encouraging and requiring translingual writing can result in an assessment ecology in which it becomes a baseline standard that disadvantages students who are unable to or otherwise choose not to produce such writing. Translanguaging assessment means we need to resist the urge to evaluate conspicuously translingual writing more favorably simply on the basis of its visible or even exaggerated use of multiple language resources. So while I do not believe we need to discourage such instances of translingual writing, when it comes to assessing it, we need to avoid treating it as inherently exceptional.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While translanguaging assessment will necessarily entail a radical reconsideration of common approaches to evaluating writing, I concede to the reality that I cannot provide a portrait of an entirely translanguaged assessment ecology. In fact, I believe there is somewhat of a risk in providing too many suggestions for what to do in the classroom in order to translanguage assessment because these assessment practices can in turn become routinized and applied while losing sight of why we implemented them in the first place. Translanguaging assessment demands that particular principles, such as the three I have described here, become the starting point for assessment strategies that are contingent on classrooms and students involved. This agrees with contemporary writing assessment theory that says good writing assessment is “context-sensitive” and

“locally controlled” (Huot 105). In the same way that translanguaging views language as emergent, continually reimagined by the languaging of everyday users, rather than continually recodified according to putative grammatical rules, the translanguaging of assessment needs to also be continually reimagined from within the local ecology in which it functions.

I also wish to repeat the point that the practice of translanguaging assessment is not merely about figuring out ways to assess translanguaging writing. Guided by a desire to promote linguistic social justice, translanguaging assessment emphasizes the negotiability of linguistic and institutional expertise and considers the inadequacy of universal evaluative criteria, while problematizing the translanguaging-monolingual binary. Translanguaging assessment decentralizes the instructor by not limiting students’ language resources to those the instructor has prior competency in and does not position the instructor as the dominant interlocutor who solely determines what constitutes “effective” writing. Rather than reducing assessment to a determination of “how well a student writes,” translanguaging assessment confronts the inequitable power relations specifically in the classroom by understanding that different students have different objectives for writing instruction, and being taught how to produce a predetermined type of writing, whether monolingual or translanguaging, may or may not meet the varied needs of all students.

Translanguaging assessment can also potentially help us to reconsider the necessity of other assessment criteria beyond language issues. For instance, the most recent *Outcomes Statement* notes that students should be able to “Locate and evaluate (for credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, bias and so on) primary and secondary research materials, including journal articles and essays, books, scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and internet sources” (3.0). The first obvious consideration is that factors such as “credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, bias and so on” are never consistent across different discourse communities and disciplinary contexts. An article published five years earlier might be considered timely in some disciplines but dated in others, and some academics continue to regard print publications as more credible than online publications. But a translanguaging orientation helps us to see traditional criteria such as “credibility” are also negotiable. For instance, one should take note of how the aforementioned criterion lists “informal electronic networks and internet sources.” First, the placement of these types of sources at the end of the list suggests they are the least urgent for students to develop familiarity with. Second, the ambiguous placement of “informal” may lead some to assume that both “electronic networks” and “internet sources” are *necessarily* “informal,” which is not the case. Third, even if the “informal” is meant to refer only to “electronic networks,”

the very use of “informal” here reifies such network discourses as “informal” and thus assuming a false binary of formal and informal. Such a description is highly problematic because English teaching has historically relied on imagined criteria of “formality” to subjugate purportedly “informal” Englishes. In short, a translingual orientation to assessment does reveal some of the politics in the way certain language resources are judged in various places, but it also gives us new ways to think about issues beyond just “language.”

Although I have largely advocated on behalf of social justice for students, it is important to acknowledge that the request to relinquish authority may be an uncomfortable gesture for some instructors. I will acknowledge that, when I am teaching linguistically or socially privileged students, I have difficulties imagining an urgent need to “liberate” them from social inequalities. Put differently, linguistic social justice needs to be acknowledged as a right for everyone, but it is possible that language advocacy is in many ways more urgent for some student populations than others. Further, while it might be argued that the translingual orientation has implications for all students, it is not about making uncritical generalized assumptions about specific types of students. The challenge, then, is avoiding a multiclass, stratified system of writing assessment in the name of translanguaging assessment.

I encourage readers to imagine and theorize other ways of translanguaging assessment. In addition, further empirical research needs to be conducted in order to understand the impact and benefits, and perhaps even drawbacks, of translanguaging assessment on our students. There is a great body of growing work on how users navigate language boundaries and on how students can do so in their writing, but there is little work that goes beyond analyzing student writing to understand the social and material implications on students’ lives in relation to translingualism. Such research will help us to understand the best ways we can continue to redesign our assessment ecologies in a manner that continues to challenge, rather than merely perpetuate, social inequalities that derive from language difference.

ENDNOTES

1. Dryer argues that the latest *Outcomes Statement*, which prioritizes “knowledge of linguistic structures” rather than insisting that students “control surface features,” reflects a more nuanced treatment of error (279). Nonetheless, the *Outcomes Statement* is based on a monolingual paradigm of “linguistic structures” in which deviations from such “structures” can be fixed “through practice in composing and revising.”

2. Of course, translingualism does acknowledge the ontological instability of languages and varieties, including standard English. This orientation to language argues that varieties such as standardized English are not stable and fixed varieties in and of themselves but constitutive of what Pennycook has called “sedimented repetition,” a series of language practices that, through

continuous usage, become stabilized and codified (47). Lu and Horner draw on Pennycook's work to argue that a translingual orientation to language allows us to recognize that deviation is indeed the norm in all language practice, but in composition, we paradoxically valorize writing that abides by norms rather than viewing students as having agency in transforming the very conventions that are imposed on them ("Transcultural"). Yet this does not necessarily dissuade stakeholders outside the pages of scholarship and the walls of the classroom from continuing to regard varieties as fixed categories, such as standardized English, along with assuming the cultural capital associated with the so-called varieties. There is, in other words, a vast disconnect between theoretical claims about language and public assumptions regarding how language should be used. Unsurprisingly, public perceptions of language difference are at the forefront of many instructors' pedagogical practice.

3. "Eat your cake and have it" is the Singaporean English alternative to "have your cake and eat it too," which although unconventional, is arguably more logical than the original (see Jenkins).

4. I am aware of the numerous arguments made that languages are always in a process of becoming and influenced and shaped by contact with other languages (see Blommaert; Canagarajah, *Translingual*; Lippi-Green; Pennycook; Voloshinov). Indeed, even those who resist the appropriation of their heritage languages from outsiders will openly acknowledge the realities of linguistic contact (see Lyons). If language contact is a commonplace phenomenon, what is the point in advocating against it? As Chow argues, discourses of language purism, even if guided by a counterhegemonic or decolonial agenda, are not only simplistic but also potentially ethnocentric (*Native*). However, to paraphrase Lyons, communities should at least be given the right to resist language contact if they believe that is what is best for their cultural heritage, even if they understand that the purity of the language they aim to preserve is more symbolic than literal ("Fencing").

5. In fact, following the important work of Stephanie Kerschbaum, we need to also remember how the very notion of "difference" as a category cannot account for how students position themselves within and against these categories through dynamic social interactions. As Kerschbaum argues, "reciprocity," or the simultaneity of the "unfolding interactional environment" and the "cooperation of each group member" in that environment shapes individuals' identities (93).

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