

University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Faculty Scholarship

2-2018

Afterword.

Bruce Horner
University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/faculty>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Original Publication Information

Horner, Bruce. "Afterword." 2018. *Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies* 4(3): 766-771.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.



Afterword

Bruce Horner
Endowed Chair in Rhetoric and Composition
University of Louisville

I take the impetus for this special issue of the *Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies* to be that transnationalism of the kind that institutions of higher education (IHE's) around the world are confronting, and sometimes embracing (though for varied reasons) functions as a catalyst for writing pedagogies variously labeled "translingual, transcultural, translocal, transmodal, translanguaging, and/or global," as the editors of this special issue put it in their "Call for Papers." Indeed, in a slip, this journal's call for papers for this special issue on "transnationalism" is "<<http://joglep.com/index.php/special-issue-multimodality/special-issue-translingualism/>>" rather than <http://joglep.com/index.php/special-issue-multimodality/special-issue-transnationalism/> (emphases added). But despite Kilfoil's (2016) caution against conflating transnationalism and translingualism, it is understandable that the former might well precipitate the latter, particularly if we treat transnationalism as counter to "internationalism" of the kind many IHE's seek in order to boost, simultaneously, their status and their tuition coffers (see Dryer and Mitchell, 2017; Gallagher and Noonan, 2017). Just as *translingual* has been introduced to complicate received notions of *multilingual*, and *transcultural* to complicate received notions of *multicultural*, so *transnational* has the potential to complicate received notions of *international*.¹

But the critical stance I here attribute to invocations of the transnational/cultural/lingual/modal/etc. is easy to lose sight of, especially given the felt urgency of addressing the immediate challenges that differences in nationality, culture, language, mode, etc. appear to pose to what has heretofore been thought and felt to be not just the norm, but normal and right: a single, internally uniform language, culture and mode of expression identified with a nation-state, as in the (non sequitur) dictum "Speak English. This is America!" We are predisposed, as it were, to respond to the

¹ The same is roughly true of the introduction of *plurilingual* and *pluricultural* to counter conventional notions of *multilingual* and *multicultural* (Council, 1997) and of *diversalité* to counter notions of *diversité* (Bernabé et al., 1989/90).

appearance of such differences in only one of two ways: to entirely reject the different and insist on conformity to the singular familiar (as in, again, “Speak English, This is America!”) or to domesticate the different through a strategy of accommodation—the response of multiculturalism, multilinguality, multimodality, even, I suspect, multinationalism.

Despite their apparent opposition to one another, both responses work within, rather than against, an ideology of monolingualism. That ideology references not merely language but, instead, a set of beliefs about language and languages and their relationship to cultural and national identity. It aligns language, nation state, and social identity, and treats each such set as internally uniform, stable, and discrete from others, hence the common use of a single term to reference simultaneously a person’s language, civic and cultural identity (e.g., “Chinese,” “French”). That identity is imagined to precede the individual, who operates within the linguistic, civic, and cultural identity to which s/he has been assigned, usually by place of birth and which is imagined to have been imbibed from infancy through the mother—a mother tongue and identification with the mother land (Yildiz, 2012).

Against that ideology of monolingualism, notions of the translingual, transcultural, transmodal, and transnational pose not so much a plurality of discrete identities, languages, cultures, and nationalities to be tolerated—the strategy of accommodation through pluralization of monolingualism (see Pennycook, 2008)—but, instead, a rejection of the stability, internal uniformity, and discrete character of any such categories. Further, these notions of the “trans-“ highlight the role of individuals’ labor in sustaining and revising the substance of any of these. Thus, while those adopting a “trans” orientation acknowledge the presence of, say, Americanness or Frenchness or English (as a language), they treat all of these as the continually emergent outcomes of individuals’ ongoing practices rather than as entities individuals imbibe or even take up for use. It is in this way that one may be translingualist in writing what appears to be only one language, and, conversely, that one may be monolingualist while writing in what appear to be multiple languages (Horner et al., 2011; Yildiz 2012).

That insistence on the role of concrete labor in producing language and national and cultural identity is, for me, what distinguishes work adopting a “trans” orientation to matters of language, modality, and nationality from the far more prevalent “multi” orientation encouraged by fast capitalist neoliberalism. That “multi” orientation, in apparent contradiction to the fordist insistence on uniformity of product and rigid hierarchy in workforce, revels in a proliferation of product difference as a marketing ploy and “flattened” organizational structures to claim the loyalty and dedication all parts of every worker—from head to toe—at all times to the effort of the whole “team”—at least for the duration of a given project. The “multi” orientation has rightly been criticized for its complicity with neoliberalism (Kubota, 2015; Flores, 2013). But critiques of that orientation have also falsely conflated it with a “trans” orientation by neglecting the latter’s insistence on labor and, instead, accepting commodified notions of language, culture, nationality, modality, etc. as the stock-in-trade of all those concerned with difference. Such commodified notions occlude, by definition, the contribution of concrete labor to the production of any of these by attributing agency instead to the commodified

entity itself, imagined as having the power by itself, absent human effort, to produce particular effects (cf. Canagarajah, 2017).

The contributors to this special issue on translingualism/transnationalism can be seen as wrestling with the challenges of resisting what the ideology of monolingualism has predisposed all of us to imagine as the only alternative to itself—a pluralized, “multi” accommodation of what that ideology has also presented to us as the different, understood as stable, spatial entities of language, culture, nationality, modality, etc. Mysti Rudd, in her article, is perhaps most forthright in addressing this struggle. Working for what seems to be an unequivocally and unapologetically import model of education aimed at turning Qatar students into Texas A&M University “Aggie” students, Rudd and her colleagues, predisposed to see the Qatar students as irrevocably different (and hence, from the institution’s perspective, in need of conversion), come to recognize that this difference, one marked as national culture, is at odds with the transnational character of the students, who are simultaneously “Aggie” students and not (and, of course, the same would be true of all students enrolled at any TAMU campus). It is the students’ labor that contributes to the continually emergent character of “Aggie” culture as much as it is the efforts of the institution to instill a monolithic notion of that culture (efforts that themselves betray the institution’s recognition of the unstable character of that culture and its dependence on continual efforts to be sustained).

At times, inevitably, Rudd’s account suggests sharp divides between and clear identities of two cultures: U.S. “Aggie” culture and “Qatar” culture (tagged as Islamic [as if this were uniform, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding] and collectivist). So, for example, Rudd reports that a “cheating incident involving nearly a dozen TAMUQ students called into question the effectiveness of importing notions of academic integrity from the home campus to an IBC half a world away.” The problem, as couched, would seem to be the failure of the institution to recognize irreconcilable differences in culture and its insistence, instead, on a conversion to its own “Aggie” culture through efforts at “enculturation,” leading to the culture clash represented by the cheating. As Rudd herself puts it, “As a new member of the TAMUQ community myself, I wanted to discover how students negotiated this tricky balance between being a good ‘Aggie’ and being a good friend and upstanding member of their religious or social communities.”

But Rudd’s account also indicates that, however vulnerable the status of the TAMUQ students, their identities were more complex than the culture clash model would suggest. Initially, as she notes regarding the questions she originally posed to students, “the wording of the first question implies that students *should* indeed have a problem with an honor code imported from the West, and the second question assumes that there will necessarily be conflict between a student’s own codes and the AHC, jumping ahead to ask for a description of this conflict. . . . [W]e wanted to disrupt the one-way traffic of exporting a Western curriculum into a transnational space without any adaptation.” The assumption was that the only alternative to one-way traffic would be a cl/rash. But while, as she confesses, she and her colleagues had initially seen the students as “victims,” she came to recognize that they had “developed ways to work in and around the system, calling upon all of their experiences with a variety of languages and communities and institutions to help them progress in their journeys towards earning

prestigious engineering degrees from an R1 American IBC located in the Middle East.” In other words, the students were through their efforts redefining both what it meant to be a Qatari and what it meant to be an “Aggie” (cf. De la Garza & Ono, 2015).

The focus on translation in Margaret Willard-Traub’s and Massimo Verzella’s articles has the potential to bring a comparable kind of labor to the fore. Verzella’s account of the collaborations instituted through the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP) suggest both the necessity of such labor and students’ growing recognition of the role of such labor in the production of meaning through their collaborative efforts at producing “effective” documents. Verzella himself argues for these projects as constituting a “cosmopolitan” approach to the teaching of writing, an approach marked by “multiple opportunities for exchange and collaboration between groups of students from diverse cultural backgrounds” that “incite[s] students to compare ways of life, reflect on rhetorical traditions, negotiate communication, and mediate meaning as key steps toward an effort to think and live in terms of inclusive oppositions.” Verzella highlights the value of such an approach in helping NNSE’s “find new possibilities to make their voices heard to redress power asymmetries in English language use” and helping “native speakers [...]to step out of their linguistic and cultural comfort zone to establish a more egalitarian dialogue and more participatory forms of writing.”

Without discounting these possibilities, here I highlight the role of writers’—and readers’—concrete labor in producing meaning, and the ways such projects can render such labor visible. For what may have seemed to somehow magically “carry” meaning, it turns out, is contingent on particular reading practices for its yield. Verzella ascribes the effectiveness of communication to the appropriateness of its form, arguing that “different rhetorical situations call for different ways of using language,” and suggesting that, accordingly, “[s]ometimes it might be wise to break the rules of formal style to enhance the clarity of a message for a specific audience.” But this puts him perilously close to a fast capitalist model of communication, whereby marketers deploy whatever language works for the particular niche market being targeted. More promising is his acknowledgement both that the cosmopolitan approach he advocates “will not deny that cultural differences might complicate the communication process” and that it will lead students to “study what makes us *do* culture,” understood as an action rather than essence, and as the product of our labor rather than merely a barrier or means to communication.

Willard-Traub points to this role of labor in her account of the transnational collaborations her students participated in. On the one hand, she notes that “transnational pedagogies help students reflect on and articulate new understandings of writing and the ‘work’ writing can accomplish, both within and beyond the university.” This, then, would seem to highlight what writing itself—understood as tool—might accomplish. But as Willard-Traub notes further, “As significantly, students in transnational classrooms come to articulate a sense of change in their own identities as users of language, as writers, and as learners.” If, as Raymond Williams observes, “the most important thing a worker ever produces is himself [sic], himself in the fact of that kind of labour” (1980, 35), perhaps the most important accomplishment Willard-Traub’s students produce is a different sense of themselves as not mere users but producers of

language through their collaborative work in writing. Much of that accomplishment arises from students' newfound sense of the sheer labor of transnational classroom writing—I'm thinking here of Willard-Traub's observation that the "threshold potential for learning" she attributes to the transnational classroom arises because the "collaborations with overseas peers are almost always as much about struggle as they are about dialogue." But to go by her accounts of the students, in at least several cases, that struggle results in striking changes in students' sense of the contributions they themselves can and have made to the collaborative work of the course—recall here Willard-Traub's description of the growing sense of confidence students Chris and Huda experienced in what they could contribute to that work.

The pedagogy Liao describes would seem likewise intended to bring out an alternative sense among students of their own contributions to language through writing, though, given prevailing mass cultural understandings of poetry as a medium for self expression, the focus on poetry autoethnography would seem to risk encouraging a fixed self to be expressed rather than an emergent self produced through language. That same risk is clearly present in the conference project described by Meier et al. In both projects, the linguistic, literary, and other materials come to be understood as a means, if "successful," of closing any gap of difference between artist and audience. We can see this in Meier's claim that "[i]ncorporating multimodal projects and cultural artifacts into the conference allows students, both U.S. and non-U.S., to *see* and *hear* one another's perspectives, experiences, cultures, and even languages" (emphasis in original). Such claims render the medium the agent of communication, occluding the contribution of the concrete labor of writers and readers, speakers and listeners, to the realization of any meaning, and, hence, the inescapable contingency of any meaning produced and of what is ostensibly "communicated," be it culture, the self, or even the language (or medium) involved in the act of communication. Just as we cannot expect conformity to the "same" language or even the "appropriate" language to result in "effective" communication, so we cannot expect that meaning can be communicated immediately through deployment of any particular medium or combination of media, standard or not, appropriate or not, old or new. Rather, as Bernabé et al. have observed of *créolité*, we need to bring back to our models of communication, transnational and otherwise, "l'opacité que nous restituons aux processus de la communication entre les hommes" (1989/90, p. 52).

I'm suggesting more broadly, here, that the opacity in meaning accompanying the difference that transnational pedagogies of the kind described in this special issue bring into sharp relief is not something to be overcome or denied but, rather, expected, even at times embraced, as/and a feature of writerly efforts that we can encourage students, too, to learn both to expect and accept. It is the logical consequence of the contingency of meaning that is itself the consequence of the dependence of meaning on readers' and writers' concrete labor.

This means, too, that the "transnational/lingual" approach advanced in this special issue, and elsewhere, is not and cannot be a settled matter. Rather, admittedly to the discomfiture and even frustration of many, it remains, as argued elsewhere of translanguality specifically, at best, and no more than, an occasion for labor (Lu &

Horner, 2016, pp. 215-16): the labor of renewal, redefinition, revision. The contributions of this special issue show what this labor can and might entail. More importantly, they show how others might, should, and need to take up such labor as well.

References

- Bernabé, J., Chamoiseau, P., & Confiant, R. *Éloge de la créolité*. (1989/90). Paris: Gallimard. Rpt. as *Éloge de la créolité/In praise of creoleness*. Trans. M. B. Taleb-Khyar. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
- Canagarajah, S. (2017). *Translingual practices and neoliberal policies: Attitudes and strategies of African skilled migrants in anglophone workplaces*. Springer.
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>
- De La Garza, A., & Ono, K. (2015). Retheorizing adaptation: Differential adaptation and critical intercultural communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 8(4), 269-89.
- Dryer, D., & Mitchell, P. (2017). Seizing an opportunity for translingual FYC at the University of Maine: Provocative complexities, unexpected consequences. In B. Horner & L. Tetrault (Eds.), *Crossing divides: Exploring translingual writing pedagogies and programs* (pp. 135-60). Logan: Utah State Univ. Press.
- Flores, N. (2013). The unexamined relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism: A cautionary tale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 500-20.
- Gallagher, C., & Noonan, M. (2017). Becoming global: Learning to “do” translingualism. In B. Horner & L. Tetrault (eds.), *Crossing divides: Exploring translingual writing pedagogies and programs* (pp. 161-77). Logan: Utah State Univ. Press.
- Horner, B., Lu, M.-Z., Royster, J. J., & Trimbur, J. (2011). Language difference in writing: Toward a translingual approach. *College English*, 73(3), 303-21.
- Kilfoil, C. (2016, September 9). What's the difference between “Translingual” and “Transnational” Composition? Clarifying the relationship between the two terms. [Web log comment]. Retrieved from <https://transnationalwriting.wordpress.com/2016/09/09/whats-the-difference-between-translingual-and-transnational-composition-clarifying-the-relationship-between-two-terms/>
- Kubota, R. (2016). The multi/plural turn, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal multiculturalism: Complicities and implications for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 474-94.
- Lu, M.-Z., & Horner, B. (2016). Translingual work. *College English*, 78(3), 207-18.
- Pennycook, A. (2008). English as a language always in translation. *European Journal of English Studies*, 12, 33-47.
- Williams, R. (1980). *Problems in materialism and culture*. London: Verso.
- Yildiz, Y. (2012). *Beyond the mother tongue: The post-monolingual condition*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press.