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### Language difference in writing : toward a translingual approach.

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# OPINION: Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach

**Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur<sup>1</sup>**

**G**rowing numbers of U.S. teachers and scholars of writing recognize that traditional ways of understanding and responding to language differences are inadequate to the facts on the ground. Language use in our classrooms, our communities, the nation, and the world has always been multilingual rather than monolingual. Around the globe, most people speak more than one language. Indeed, they speak more than one variation of these languages. In addition, these languages and variations are constantly changing as they intermingle. The growing majority of English speakers worldwide—including substantial numbers within the United States—know other languages, and, through interaction, the Englishes they use vary and multiply.

Traditional approaches to writing in the United States are at odds with these facts. They take as the norm a linguistically homogeneous situation: one where writers, speakers, and readers are expected to use Standard English or Edited American English—imagined ideally as uniform—to the exclusion of other languages and language variations. These approaches assume that heterogeneity in language impedes communication and meaning. Hence, the long-standing aim of traditional writing instruction has been to reduce “interference,” excising what appears to show difference.

We call for a new paradigm: a translingual approach. This approach sees difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening. When faced with difference in language, this approach asks: What might this difference do? How might it function expressively, rhetorically, communicatively? For whom,

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under what conditions, and how? The possibility of writer error is reserved as an interpretation of last resort.

In calling for a translanguaging approach, we hope to forward efforts of a growing movement among teacher-scholars of composition and the language arts generally to develop alternatives to conventional treatments of language difference. With this text, we aim to articulate a research-based and generative conceptual approach to language difference in pedagogy, research, and politics. Our call builds on the work of many—only some of whom, given space limitations, we can acknowledge here.<sup>2</sup> Most obviously, our approach is aligned with the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) 1974 resolution declaring “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.”<sup>3</sup> That resolution defended the right of students (and all other writers) to use different varieties of English. It opposed the common, though inaccurate, view that varieties of English other than those recognized as “standard” are defective. It also opposed the view, just as inaccurate, that speakers of these varieties are themselves somehow substandard. It recognized the logicity of all varieties of English, the meanings to be gained by speakers and writers in using particular varieties of English, and the right of speakers and writers to produce such meanings. Subsequent resolutions, guidelines, and position statements by CCCC and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have extended and developed the implications of the “Students’ Right” document. So, too, have other professional organizations, as well as many teacher-scholars both individually and through groups. These efforts have addressed bilingual education, English as a Second Language (ESL), English Only policies, and related issues.

The translanguaging approach we call for extends the CCCC resolution to differences within and across all languages. And it adds recognition that the formation and definition of languages and language varieties are fluid. Further, this approach insists on viewing language differences and fluidities as resources to be preserved, developed, and utilized. Rather than respond to language differences only in terms of rights, it sees them as resources.

The translanguaging approach encourages reading with patience, respect for perceived differences within and across languages, and an attitude of deliberative inquiry. Likewise, a translanguaging approach questions language practices more generally, even those that appear to conform to dominant standards. It asks what produces the appearance of conformity, as well as what that appearance might and might not do, for whom, and how. This approach thus calls for *more*, not less, conscious and critical attention to how writers deploy diction, syntax, and style, as well as form, register, and media. It acknowledges that deviations from dominant expectations need not be errors; that conformity need not be automatically advisable; and that writers’ purposes and readers’ conventional expectations are neither fixed nor unified.

The translanguaging approach asks of writing not whether its language is standard,

but what the writers are doing with language and why. For in fact, notions of the “standard English speaker” and “Standard Written English” are bankrupt concepts. All speakers of English speak many variations of English, every one of them accented, and all of them subject to change as they intermingle with other varieties of English and other languages. Likewise, standards of written English are neither uniform nor fixed. What constitutes expected norms—for example, Edited American English—varies over time and from genre to genre. Indeed, these genres themselves change boundaries and intermingle.

This is not to deny the ongoing, dominant political reality that posits and demands what is termed standard, “unaccented” English in speech and “standard” (aka “correct,” or “Edited American English”) writing.<sup>4</sup> An industry of textbooks and mass media-style pundits, along with their followers, maintains that reality. But a translingual approach directly addresses the gap between actual language practices and myths about language spread through that industry’s political work in order to combat the political realities those myths perpetrate. Though dominant ideology is always indifferent to the invalidity of its claims, we need not and should not accept its sway.

Myths of unchanging, universal standards for language have often been invoked to simplify the teaching and learning of language. But these have often resulted in denigrating the language practices of particular groups and their members as somehow “substandard” or “deviant.” By contrast, a translingual approach takes the variety, fluidity, intermingling, and changeability of languages as statistically demonstrable norms around the globe. It confronts, as well, the practice of invoking standards not to improve communication and assist language learners, but to exclude voices and perspectives at odds with those in power. It treats standardized rules as historical codifications of language that inevitably change through dynamic processes of use. A translingual approach proclaims that writers can, do, and must negotiate standardized rules in light of the contexts of specific instances of writing. Against the common argument that students must learn “the standards” to meet demands by the dominant, a translingual approach recognizes that, to survive and thrive as active writers, students must understand how such demands are contingent and negotiable.

In short, a translingual approach argues for (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 by researching and teaching how writers can work with and against, not simply within, those expectations. Viewing differences not as a problem but as a resource, the translingual approach promises to revitalize the teaching of writing and language. By addressing how language norms are actually heterogeneous, fluid, and negotiable, a translingual approach directly counters demands that writers must conform to fixed, uniform standards.

## RESPONSES TO DIFFERENCE IN LANGUAGE

We can advance the definition of a translingual approach to language difference by setting it against sketches of two types of responses to language difference that historically have prevailed in the teaching of writing in the United States. Although specific teaching practices have deviated from both, and inevitably nuanced them, we use these sketches to represent the terms and expectations for the teaching of writing within and against which teachers have inevitably had to struggle. One type of response, which we referred to earlier as the traditional approach, has sought to eradicate difference in the name of achieving correctness, defined as writers' conformity with a putatively uniform, universal set of notational and syntactic conventions that we name Standard Written English (or alternatively, Edited American English). This kind of response is problematic in at least four ways. First, it ignores significant differences between world Englishes and between writing practices with English in different genres, academic disciplines, work sites, and life worlds. Second, it ignores historically demonstrable fluctuations in notational and syntactic conventions. Third, it ignores how readers grant or withhold recognition of particular language practices as "correct" or "acceptable"—thereby often helping the powerful rig a game of demonstrating "mastery." And fourth, it ignores the value for ordinary language users and learners of challenging and transforming language conventions to revise knowledge, ways of knowing, and social relations between specific writers and readers. We take this response to be conservative in the root sense of attempting to preserve what is in fact a false ideal of a uniform language and language practice.

A second type of response has sought to distance itself from the eradicationist approach by acknowledging differences in language use; codifying these; and granting individuals a right to them. This response has thus appeared to be more tolerant and accommodating than the first. However, it assumes that each codified set of language practices is appropriate only to a specific, discrete, assigned social sphere: "home" language, "street" language, "academic" language, "business" language, "written" language (aka the "grapholect"), and so on. Despite the appearance of tolerance, this response is problematic on four counts. First, its codifications of language overlook the fluctuating character of each set of language practices. Second, it overlooks the ways in which each of these codified sets interacts with other sets within and beyond a given arena rather than being restricted to one discrete sphere. Third, like the more conservative response, it overlooks the role that readers' responses play in granting, or refusing to grant, recognition to particular language practices as appropriate to a particular sphere. Fourth, it fails to acknowledge the operation of power relations in defining what is appropriate, and often it resigns itself to these—for instance, designating certain English usages as appropriate only for a specific private sphere and thus inappropriate for public discourse. Masking the politics involved in hierarchically

ordering these spheres, this response establishes and ranks its own presumably immutable categories and the groups affiliated with them: African Americans speaking “AAVE,”<sup>5</sup> working-class people using “working-class” language, “educated” people speaking and writing “educated” English, and so on. While it is both accurate and useful to identify the language strategies by which specific collectivities have tried to resist domination, the aim should be to honor their linguistic ingenuity and to encourage other innovative strategies—not to reify a set of forms that supposedly have intrinsic power.

Despite their differences, both these kinds of responses are aligned with the ideology of monolingualism by treating languages and language practices as discrete, uniform, and stable. They differ mainly in that, whereas the first assumes the universal applicability of a single language, the second allows for use of a plurality of languages, though each in a discrete site in hierarchical relation to others. Both kinds of response ignore the inevitability and necessity of interaction among languages, within languages, and across language practices. Both also ignore writers’ and readers’ need to engage the fluidity of language in pursuit of new knowledge, new ways of knowing, and more peaceful relations.

#### REDEFINING LANGUAGE FLUENCY, PROFICIENCY, AND COMPETENCE

A translingual approach requires that common notions of fluency, proficiency, and even competence with language be redefined. Insofar as any language practice represents a resource, we applaud efforts to increase students’ fluency in as many languages and varieties of language as possible. Hence, we stand by the “English Plus” policy endorsed by CCCC, NCTE, and over forty other educational and civil rights organizations. However, in endorsing a translingual approach, we seek to move beyond an additive notion of multilingualism. We call for working to achieve fluency across language differences in our reading and writing, speaking and listening, so that we can become adept at processes of making and conveying meaning—processes that, particularly when they belong to less powerful communities, sometimes appear opaque to individual readers and listeners.

Because languages and language practices not only differ but fluctuate and interact, pursuit of mastery of any single identified set of such practices is inappropriate insofar as it leads language learners to a false sense of the stability of such practices and the finite character of language learning.<sup>6</sup> Instead, we recognize that we are all language learners, and that learning language is necessarily continuous precisely because language is subject to variation and change. Further, we recognize that language learners are also language users and creators. Thus, mastery must be redefined to include the ability of users to revise the language that they must also continuously be learning—to work with and on, not just within, what seem its conventions and confines.

Writers' proficiency in a language will thus be measured not by their ability to produce an abstracted set of conventional forms. Rather, it will be shown by the range of practices they can draw on; their ability to use these creatively; and their ability to produce meaning out of a wide range of practices in their reading. Translingual fluency in writing would be defined as deftness in deploying a broad and diverse repertoire of language resources, and responsiveness to the diverse range of readers' social positions and ideological perspectives. Translingual fluency in reading would be defined as openness to linguistic differences and the ability to construct useful meanings from perceptions of them.

### **ESL, BILINGUAL EDUCATION, AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION**

A translingual approach to language differences is aligned with multilingual education insofar as that education aims to develop and broaden the repertoire of students' linguistic resources and to honor the resources of all language users. Thus, it is aligned with those forms of bilingual education that aim not to replace knowledge of one language with another, but to build on students' existing language abilities, including the teaching of English as a second language. However, it rejects the view that so-called English language learners are the only ones in need of language development. In line with the English Plus policy, a translingual approach supports efforts to increase the number of languages and language varieties that students know, and to deepen their knowledge of these. It supports the granting of academic credit to those students adding knowledge of English to their linguistic repertoire. Similarly, it supports efforts to increase English monolingual students' repertoire of languages and to award academic credit for such learning.

We support the rights of all to use the languages of their nurture. We reject discrimination on the basis of language identity and use. We honor the efforts of all who seek to recover and maintain languages in danger of disappearing, for these are crucial to human linguistic diversity and thus to human survival, as well as to the survival of specific collectivities. We are wary, however, of the ease with which historical descriptions of languages can become prescriptions and rationales for social exclusion. We encourage renewed focus by students of writing on the problematics of translation to better understand and participate in negotiations of difference in and through language, including those leading to the position that no translation is possible.

### **LANGUAGE RIGHTS, IMMIGRATION, AND STATE LANGUAGE POLICY**

A translingual approach rejects as both unrealistic and discriminatory those language policies that reject the human right to speak the language of one's choice. The clear

impracticality of such policies is demonstrated by those advocating English Only legislation. These advocates fail to define English, and inevitably they have to include exceptions to their stated policies for purposes of public health and safety.

But we also recognize that, in practice, vagueness in defining English can and does get used to justify discrimination against individuals and groups, who may be designated as failing to produce what those in power deign to recognize as “English,” or “true English,” or “Standard English,” or “Edited American English,” or “English without an accent.” Such policies operate as faux-linguistic covers for discrimination against immigrants and minorities: in place of discrimination on the basis of presumed national, ethnic, racial, or class identity, discrimination is leveled on the basis of language use. In the specific case of English Only policies, the fact that these are advocated in a situation in which English is anything but threatened shows that language is being used as a proxy to discriminate on the basis of race, citizenship status, and ethnicity. This effort is the precise inverse of efforts to preserve those language practices that are, in fact, in danger of disappearing—for example, Native American languages—as a consequence of oppression and decimation of native peoples.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING PROGRAMS

Advancing a translingual approach requires changes to writing programs in the design of writing curricula and in the hiring, training, and professional development of writing teachers.<sup>7</sup> At the very least, it requires making good on long-standing calls for giving all teachers of writing professional development in better understanding and addressing issues of language difference in their teaching. More ambitiously, it may well involve greater collaboration with departments of so-called foreign languages and greater attention to the problematics of translation in teaching writing. Graduate programs in rhetoric and composition need to take more seriously, and be more ambitious in making use of, what is now all too often treated as a token second language requirement of its graduates. The challenge is to incorporate more multi- and cross-language work into graduate curricula. In short, new work, in which many faculty cannot yet claim expertise, will be demanded of both faculty and their students. That is the challenge of embracing a translingual approach, and its promise: the necessity of working on writing collaboratively with our students, our current colleagues, and those who can become our colleagues amid the realities of a translingual nation and world.

As a means toward advancing our collective efforts to articulate and enact translingual approaches to writing, we include here a selected bibliography of just some of the scholarship we have found helpful in our thinking about translingual work, and a website for a more extended working bibliography to which we invite readers to contribute suggestions. As will be immediately obvious, this work crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries separating composition studies from ESL, applied linguistics,



literacy studies, “foreign” language instruction, and translation studies. And as will also be apparent from our bibliography, we are still at the beginning stages of our learning efforts in this project, which by definition will require the ideas and energy of many—including literacy workers using diverse languages, from outside as well as within the Anglo-American sphere.

We preface this set of resources with several questions we anticipate about the challenge we present for U.S. teachers of writing, with our answers, necessarily tentative.

*How do monolingual teachers of writing teach a translingual approach? Wouldn't teachers of this approach have to be multilingual themselves?*

Knowing more than one language can only benefit teachers of writing who aim to teach a translingual approach (and others). Yet it's also the case that teachers of writing self-identified as monolingual regularly use a mix of varieties of any one language, and that even ostensibly monolingual texts may be found to be more linguistically heterogeneous than is ordinarily recognized. Teachers can use the actual heterogeneity in genre, register, and language of ostensibly homogeneous texts to explore, with their students, the translingual activity that they and other writers are already engaging in, even when that is not ordinarily acknowledged. And although we recognize the benefit to all of expanding one's linguistic resources, the issue here is approach to language difference. Those identified as “monolingual” might nonetheless take a translingual approach to language difference, while some identified as “multilingual” might nonetheless take a monolingualist approach to language difference.

*Does translingualism mean there's no such thing as error in writing?*

No. All writers make mistakes, and all writers are usually eager to remove mistakes from their writing. Taking a translingual approach, however, means that teachers (and students) need to be more humble about what constitutes a mistake (and about what constitutes correctness) in writing, rather than assume that whatever fails to meet their expectations, even in matters of spelling, punctuation, and syntax, must be an error. For example, we can't assume that a student who writes “spills out” or “stepping stool” where some readers might expect to read “spells out” or “stepping stone” is making mistakes. However, a student (or any other) writer who following the date of this text's publication writes “2009” to identify the year of a letter he or she has just composed is either making a mistake, engaging in subterfuge, or needing to cue readers about the dating system he or she is employing. That the acceptability of notational practices is negotiable demands more responsibility, not less, from both writers and readers.

*Does this mean there aren't any standards?*

If by “standards” is meant a desire for quality writing, then no: readers expect, even demand, that writers try to do their best to communicate to their readers, just as writers expect, and sometimes demand, that readers work hard to make the best, most generous sense they can of writers’ texts. It does mean that we need to recognize the historicity and variability of standards, which change over time, vary across genres, disciplines, and cultures, and are always subject to negotiation (and hence, change). We can and should teach standards, but precisely as historical, variable, and negotiable. This will help to demystify (and lessen confusion among students about) what these standards are, and will make students feel a greater sense of responsibility, as writers, for the writing practices they engage in.<sup>8</sup>

*My students are all English monolinguals. Why would they need to learn a translingual approach to writing?*

First, it’s often difficult to assess students’ actual language abilities—students who by some definitions might be English monolinguals might not be by other criteria. Second, virtually all students who are monolingual in the sense that they speak only English are nonetheless multilingual in the varieties of English they use and in their ability to adapt English to their needs and desires. And even if we overlook this resource, it’s worth recalling that what we think of as English is itself linguistically heterogeneous in its origins and ongoing formations, as demonstrated by neologisms, the development of world Englishes, and shifting conventions.

Further, even if we were to accept that our students are English monolinguals, they are unlikely to be restricted in their writing, or their speech, to audiences of only other English monolinguals. Others to whom they write, and whose writing they read—including faculty, employers, fellow employees, fellow citizens, and members of their communities—are increasingly likely to know English as a second, third, or fourth language, and to know varieties of English that differ from what some recognize as Standard English or Edited American English. A translingual approach to differences can facilitate writers’ interactions with the full range of users of English and other languages.

Finally, while increasing one’s linguistic resources is always beneficial, taking a translingual approach is not about the number of languages, or language varieties, one can claim to know. Rather, it is about the disposition of openness and inquiry that people take toward language and language differences. For example, although we take a translingual disposition toward language difference in this text, it is still primarily monolingual by conventional definitions of multilingualism. Students who are identified by conventional standards as monolingual might take a translingual approach to language difference, as demonstrated by their response to unfamiliar

ways of using language, while individuals identifiable by conventional standards as multilingual with regard to their own linguistic resources might well approach language differences in ways at odds with a translingual approach.

*Don't students first need to learn the basics of writing in one language before taking on the challenges of writing in another language?*

No. The problem here resides in assumptions about the basics and fluency. Scholars of basic writing have long since exploded the notion that adult writing students improve their writing by first attempting to master the so-called mechanics of writing before working on what are deemed to be higher-order features of writing. Instead, like all writers, student writers' command of various features of writing fluctuates: they may have more difficulty with issues addressed through copyediting as they attempt to write in different genres or about new topics or to unfamiliar audiences. Likewise, language users' spoken fluency with a particular language—even their “home” language—will fluctuate in relation to the genre and topic and circumstances of the speech situation.

Rather than put off translingual work, students can investigate, in order to make more conscious use of, differences in all features of written language, including syntax, punctuation, formatting, media, organization, and genre, addressing these in terms of their interrelations. They will gain fluency in working across language differences in all these areas, instead of attempting to achieve a chimerical fluency in one language alone.

*How will taking a translingual approach to language differences help my students do well academically and in the job market?*

The linguistic heterogeneity we speak of applies to all spheres of life, including the academic realm as well as public and private spheres. Except perhaps for professional actors, few walks of life require attaining native-like spoken fluency in a particular variety of a particular language (and even with professional actors, what is achieved is more likely to be simply what it is believed that particular audiences have learned to recognize as representative of a specific language variety). Instead, what is increasingly needed, and even demanded, is the ability to work across differences, not just of language but of disciplines and cultures. This requires changing our predispositions from those of monolingualism to translingualism. Monolingualism teaches language users to assume and demand that others accept as correct and conform to a single set of practices with language and, in multilingual situations, to assume and demand that others accept as correct and conform to multiple discrete sets of practices with language. By contrast, translingualism teaches language users to assume and expect that each new instance of language use brings the need and opportunity to develop new ways of using language, and to draw on a range of language resources. The ability

to negotiate differences and to improvise ways to produce meaning across language differences with whatever language resources are available is becoming increasingly necessary, not only to careers and commerce, but to the chances for peace and justice.

*I'm intrigued by the notion of taking a translingual approach, but I don't know how to do it. Where can I go for help?*

Taking a translingual approach goes against the grain of many of the assumptions of our field and, indeed, of dominant culture. At the same time, it is in close alignment with people's everyday language practices. While we've found the works listed in the selected bibliography that follows to be helpful in thinking through why it is important to take a translingual approach, and what it might mean to do so, we don't claim expertise, nor do we believe it necessary to first acquire such expertise before taking up the important work that is called for. Instead, we believe we can all, teachers and students alike and together, develop ways of taking up such an approach by changing the kind of attention we pay to our language practices, questioning the assumptions underlying our learned dispositions toward difference in language, and engaging in critical inquiry on alternative dispositions to take toward such differences in our writing and reading.

Increasingly, our professional organizations are recognizing the need to take up these alternative dispositions and to cross disciplinary divides. We see this in moves to enable teachers to attend annual conferences of both Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and CCCC (instead of having to choose one or the other). We see it in the work of individual scholars and groups of scholars to address cross-language work, the devotion of special issues of *College English* and *WPA* to scholarship addressing such work, and the ongoing efforts of such venues as the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, the Symposium on Second Language Writing, and the CCCC Language Policy Committee. But we also see this in the efforts of individual teachers and programs to confront the realities of language difference in writing in ways that honor and build on, rather than attempt to eradicate, those realities of difference in their work with their students.

The following teacher-scholars have seconded the project outlined in this text:

Lisa Arnold, University of Louisville

Resa Crane Bizzaro, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Patricia Bizzell, College of the Holy Cross

Deborah Brandt, University of Wisconsin–Madison

A. Suresh Canagarajah, Pennsylvania State University

Ralph Cintron, University of Illinois at Chicago

Marilyn M. Cooper, Michigan Technological University

Laura Detmering, University of Louisville  
Christiane Donahue, Dartmouth College  
Matthew Dowell, University of Louisville  
Tom Fox, California State University–Chico  
Steven Fraiberg, Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, Michigan State University  
Diana George, Virginia Polytechnic and State University  
Keith Gilyard, Pennsylvania State University  
Susan M. Griffin, University of Louisville  
Jeanne Gunner, Chapman University  
Joseph Harris, Duke University  
Gail E. Hawisher, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Suzette A. Henke, University of Louisville  
Wendy Hesford, The Ohio State University  
David Jolliffe, University of Arkansas  
Debra Jounet, University of Louisville  
Julia Kiernan, University of Louisville  
Karen Kopelson, University of Louisville  
Tika Lamsal, University of Louisville  
Shirley Wilson Logan, University of Maryland  
LuMing Mao, Miami University  
Paul Kei Matsuda, Arizona State University  
Carol Mattingly, University of Louisville  
Peter Leslie Mortensen, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Samantha NeCamp, University of Louisville  
Dhruba Jyoti Neupane, University of Louisville  
Brice Nordquist, University of Louisville  
Malea Powell, Michigan State University  
Catherine Prendergast, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Scott L. Rogers, University of Louisville  
Stephen Ruffus, Salt Lake Community College  
Eileen E. Schell, Syracuse University  
John Schilb, Indiana University–Bloomington  
Cynthia L. Selfe, The Ohio State University  
Ghanashyam Sharma, University of Louisville

Vanessa Kraemer Sohan, University of Louisville

Christine Tardy, DePaul University

Ryan Trauman, University of Louisville

Victor Villanueva, Washington State University

Bronwyn T. Williams, University of Louisville

Joanna Wolfe, University of Louisville

Xiaoye You, Pennsylvania State University

Morris Young, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Vershawn Ashanti Young, University of Kentucky

## NOTES

1. This essay grew out of discussions the four of us had following, and inspired by, an October 2009 symposium at the University of Louisville, sponsored by the Thomas R. Watson Endowment and the Endowed Chair in Rhetoric and Composition. We thank all of those who participated in the symposium, whatever their views toward the ideas presented here, for their insights. We don't intend this essay to represent either the specific views, or the culmination, of the October symposium, at which different perspectives on a variety of issues were aired.

Our essay is neither all-inclusive on the issues it does address, nor the final word. We have developed this piece because we believe it is far past time for the issues it addresses to be engaged more aggressively in our field, and we hope to open a much-needed conversation that will be continued in many places, in many genres and forums, from many different points of view—with an eye toward change in the conceptual, analytical, and pedagogical frameworks that we use here.

At the end of this text, we include a list of colleagues who “second” the idea that we need to have these issues more fully on the table, and who believe, like us, that teaching, discussion, research, and scholarship (past, present, and future) in this area are important and deserve our direct attention. (Time constraints have so far restricted us to approaching only the symposium participants and invited speakers of the 2010 Thomas R. Watson Conference.) We invite those wishing to add their names to this list to contact Bruce Horner.

2. See the selected bibliography for more information on works cited and additional resources on which we've drawn.

3. Reaffirmed in 2003, with an annotated bibliography added in 2006 (CCCC Language Policy Committee).

4. The term Edited American English encapsulates the gap between linguistic practices and political realities. As a purely descriptive phrase, “Edited American English” applies to an enormous corpus of writing of incredible diversity: produced by Americans attempting to “write English” which has been subjected to editing. Our essay serves as one tiny contribution to that corpus. And yet, as the anticipated opacity of our text for some readers illustrates, at least some readers will fail to recognize in this text the features that would justify calling it Edited American English, because all of the three terms in the phrase are subject to dispute insofar as they represent not just descriptions but valuations ascribed to which writing should, and shouldn't, have legitimacy conferred upon it by identifying it as edited, American, or English.

5. There is a long and ongoing debate on whether to name the language practices of African Americans “African American Vernacular English” (AAVE), “African American Language” (AAL), “African American English” (AAE), “Black English Vernacular” (BEV), “Black English” (BE), or “Ebonics” (see DeBose; Mufwene; Smitherman; Young).

6. As the contemporary Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant observes, notions of the stability of the language to be “mastered” often interfere with language learning:

[A]près cinq ou dix années de scolarité plus ou moins chaotique, l’Haïtien moyen parvient à peine à articuler une phrase correcte en français alors que lorsqu’il émigré aux USA, au bout de six mois, il parle déjà anglais relativement couramment! [. . .] La raison est la suivante: en français, il est paralysé par l’épée de Damoclès d’une norme rigide, il crève de peur de commettre des fautes alors qu’en anglais, rien de tout cela ne pèse sur lui. Personne ne lui fera de remarque désobligeante sur son accent ou sur telle ou telle faute qu’il pourra inévitablement commettre au cours de son apprentissage.

7. Though we focus on the implications of a translingual approach for writing programs, clearly such an approach has implications for all programs of language study, within and outside “English.”

8. Some readers will see our own decision to follow conventional notational practices as evidence that we are failing to practice what we appear to be preaching—shouldn’t we be somehow more “translingual” in our spelling, diction, punctuation, syntax? To this, we observe that to include in one’s writing recognizable deviations from what is expected in these matters (inserting the occasional “ain’t” or “dissin” or “je ne sais quois”) does not in itself necessarily demonstrate a translingual disposition toward language difference; for example, in certain instances it might serve only to advertise the breadth of the writer’s linguistic repertoire. Conversely, our decision to use “&” instead of either “and” or “et” in our citation of the collection by Zarate, Lévy, & Kramsch (see selected bibliography) represents our effort to negotiate between readers’ expectations for and familiarity with each of these options and our responsibility to the three authors. In other words, some readers’ sense that we are in fact writing “standard” Edited American English is a product and effect of their reading practices, which we are at pains to persuade them to revise.

9. We plan to post this selected bibliography plus information about additional works online. We invite readers to send us their suggestions for adding to this online bibliography (contact Bruce Horner).

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