



An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English against the Order of Fast Capitalism

Author(s): Min-Zhan Lu

Source: *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Sep., 2004), pp. 16-50

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4140679>

Accessed: 01-03-2018 17:43 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

National Council of Teachers of English is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *College Composition and Communication*

Min-Zhan Lu

An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English against the Order of Fast Capitalism

This is an attempt to define what being a responsible and responsive user of English might mean in a world ordered by global capital, a world where all forms of intra- and international exchanges in all areas of life are increasingly under pressure to involve English. Turning to recent work in linguistics and education, I pose a set of alternative assumptions that might help us develop more responsible and responsive approaches to the relation between English and its users (both those labeled Native-Speaking, White or Middle Class, and those Othered by these labels), the language needs and purposes of individual users of English, and the relation between the work we do and the work done by users of English across the world. I argue that these assumptions can help us compose English against the grain of all systems and relations of injustice.

Jiao, a Chinese character used alone and in combination with other characters to mean: to converse, communicate, encounter, contact, interact, mate, befriend; to intersect, network, exchange, trade, traffic, confront, wage war, submit, hand in or over; and to negotiate, orchestrate, alternate, interweave, blend, border.

CCC 56:1 / SEPTEMBER 2004

This essay started as an attempt to wrestle with the voice of an Angel in My House of Composition, as Virginia Woolf might have put it.¹ This voice never fails to remind me of what I have repeatedly heard others in Composition say in reply to any account of the value to writers of grasping and making constructive use of the dissonance in their discursive resources: “Fascinating. Unfortunately, 99 percent of the students I teach are Native-Speaking, White, and Middle Class.”² One side of me hears the Angel say without saying: “Experiences of dissonance and struggle for responsive and responsible *jiaos* across competing languages, englishes, or discourses are relevant only to users of English with Special Needs: Minority, Ethnic, Foreign Users of English, Speakers of English as a Second Language, etc.”³ And I hear another side of me asking: “How and why have we become so certain about what socially or self-identified Native-Speaking, White, and Middle-Class users of English (don’t) need or want? What assumptions have we been using? What if we start with a different set of assumptions?”

In calling this an essay, I have in mind both *sanwen*, the Chinese term for “essay,” and the French verb *essayer* (attempt, try). The second character of *sanwen*, *wen*, connotes prose. The first character, *san*, can mean a series of actions: scatter, break up, or disperse. I am hoping that the spirit of *essayer-san* might embolden me to join literacy workers across the world in taking as many “necessary detours” (Hall 283) as it takes to *jiao* against several established assumptions about the language needs of users of English that have often been used to perpetuate intra- and international systems and relations of injustice in all areas of life.

Responsive and responsible users of language

In the process of selecting reading material for a rhetoric I am working on, I reread Toni Morrison’s 1993 Nobel Prize lecture. The library copy arrived at my desk bearing markings: yellow highlightings, dark blue ink underlining, two systems of page-folding, and handwritten marginal comments left by at least two different readers. These markings took me outside the purview of my previous reading, shifting my attention to what the “young people” have to say in reply to the old woman’s statement on the nature of language and the responsibility of all language users to keep it alive:

Why didn’t you reach out, touch us with your soft fingers, delay the sound bite, the lesson, until you knew who we were? . . . We are young. Unripe. We have heard

our entire short lives that we have to be responsible. What could that possibly mean in the catastrophe this world has become. . . .

Don't tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief's wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear's caul. . . .

Tell us about ships turned away from shorelines at Easter, placenta in a field. Tell us about a wagonload of slaves, how they sang so softly their breath was indistinguishable from the falling snow. How they knew from the hunch of the nearest shoulder that the next stop would be their last? How, with hands prayed in their sex, they thought of heat, then sun. Lifting their faces as though it was there for the taking. Turning as though there for the taking. They stop at an inn. The driver and his mate go in with the lamp, leaving them humming in the dark. . . .

The inn door opens: a girl and a boy step away from its light. They climb into the wagon bed. The boy will have a gun in three years, but now he carries a lamp and a jug of warm cider. They pass it from mouth to mouth. The girl offers bread, pieces of meat and something more: a glance into the eyes of the one she serves. One helping for each man, two for each woman. And a look. They look back. The next stop will be their last. But not this one. This one is warmed. (26–30)

The section caught my attention because it poses a set of questions for me to *jiao* with the Angel: In “the catastrophe the world has become,” what could being responsible possibly mean for each of us in Composition, students as well as teachers/scholars? How might we best go about getting to know who each of us are, had been, might be, and would like to become? What kind of word-work can help us stitch “belief's wide skirt” and unravel “fear's caul”?

A girl adds “a glance into the eyes” of the men and women she “serves”: One helping for each man, two for each woman. They look back. Together, they

I interpret their *jiao* as showing the necessity and possibility of responsive and responsible uses of language (gestural, visual, oral, verbal, or multimodal) in a world rife with and riven by systems and relations of injustice.

design a language (without words), possibilities for selfhood, social relations against the grain of slavery and patriarchy, new designs that point toward a world where *all* are warmed.⁴

I interpret their *jiao* as showing the necessity and possibility of responsive and responsible uses of language (gestural, visual, oral, verbal, or multimodal) in a world rife with and riven by systems and relations of injustice. I also read it as reminding us that, given the increasing infiltration of English into all forms of intra- and international *jiaos* in all areas of life, being responsible and responsive users of English might mean that we rework our relations to users worldwide.⁵ These include users whose englishes have been systematically pushed to the periphery by the english we have committed ourselves to study, users of English not only in countries like Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, or

the U.S. but also in countries like the Barbados, India, Malaysia, South Africa, or Nigeria and countries like Indonesia, China, Mexico, North Korea, Poland, Slovenia, or Vietnam where English is increasingly becoming the primary language of the market, the media, and the streets (see Canagarajah).

To use English responsively and responsibly, we need to unravel several residual fears hovering over the Angel in My House of Composition: the fear that “linguistic imperfection” will cause a “communication” breakdown; the fear that critical engagement with the language one needs to survive and thrive is incompatible with one’s effort to acquire it; a fear arising from the assumption that (socially or self-identified) Native-Speaking, White, and/or Middle-Class users of English are monolingual; the fear that issues of dissonance are irrelevant to their learning and discursive practices.

I pose two related directions aiming to *san* these fears. I argue for the need to depict Composition as boundary work: efforts to articulate responses (or take a stance towards) the dissonance between and across languages, englishes, and discourses with asymmetrical economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital in today’s world.⁶ And I foreground the need of all of us (Native-Speaking, White, and/or Middle Class and their Others) to grasp and make constructive uses of the dissonance in each of our (socially constructed) discursive resources and purposes for acquiring English.

Defining English as kept alive by the work of all its users

Using the voice of an old woman who is blind, wise, the daughter of slaves, black, American, and living alone in a small house outside town (9), Toni Morrison pronounces “dead” any language that is unyielding and content to admire its own paralysis (13). A dead language is static, “censored and censoring.” It is ruthless in its policing duties. It has no desire or purpose other than to maintain its own exclusivity and dominance (14). In contrast, “the vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers” (20).

I read the “old woman” as pointing to a struggle between peoples who use language as a tool of dominance and those who, as James Baldwin puts it, use language “to describe and thus control their circumstances” so as not to be submerged by the realities of their lives (87). An Associated Press report indicates that in a world ordered by fast capitalism, the struggle between users intent on deadening and enlivening English is intensifying intra- and internationally:

BEIJING (AP) - Fed-up with menus offering delicacies such as “fried pawns” and “bean eurd,” Beijing is declaring war against incomprehensible and misspelled English-language signs and notices, the state-run *China Daily* reported Friday.

“There are many `Chinglish` words on road signs, public notices, menus and signs describing scenic spots, which often puzzle foreigners,” Xiong Yumei, vice director of the Beijing Tourism Bureau, was quoted as saying. . . .

Students at prestigious Peking University have launched a six-month campaign to root out problem signs at 60 well-known tourist spots, relying in part on tips from foreign visitors, the newspaper said.

“Linguistic perfection is becoming increasingly important with the rise in the number of foreigners flowing into the city,” said Li Honghai, a top official with a municipal committee promoting the study of foreign languages among Beijing residents.

The newspaper said more than 3 million foreign tourists will likely have visited Beijing by the end of this year. (“Beijing Launches”)

The “war” against “Chinglish” points to the intricate grid of intra- and international *jiaos* taking place on the linguistic, economic, social, political, and cultural fronts as a result of the global extension of market modes of operation

The pressure to acquire and use English is increasingly becoming a lived reality for peoples stratified by labels such as Native-Speaking, Educated, Developed Countries, or Democracy and their Others.

and of the logic of flexible accumulation to all areas of life (Fairclough 163–64).⁷ The pressure to acquire and use English is increasingly becoming a lived reality for peoples stratified by labels such as Native-Speaking, Educated, Developed Countries, or Democracy and their Others.

The “war” against “Chinglish” also indicates that the english we use in Composition has the potential to directly and indirectly police how peoples the world over use English. To the vice director of the Beijing Tourism Bureau and the “students at the prestigious Peking university,” English is the english used by “foreign visitors.” Since a significant number of the current and future “visitors” from the U.S.—Tourists, Visiting Scholars, CEOs, Politicians, etc.—steadily “flowing in” to China would have been or might be required to take a course in Composition, the english we endorse shapes the “tips” U.S. Visitors pass along to those with the institutional power (of a tourism bureau, prestigious university, or municipal committee) to patrol how English is used on the streets of Beijing, China.

The reported involvement of students at “the prestigious Peking University” in the “war against Chinglish” also supports A. Suresh Canagarajah’s ar-

gument about Composition's role in standardizing the teaching of English internationally. Using Tamil as a case in point, Canagarajah details the ways in which U.S. expertise, research findings, and curricular assumptions "percolate" to ESL classrooms in Sri Lanka through organizations such as the Asia Foundation, which regularly sponsors visits by short- and long-term American Consultants, holds annual teacher-orientation seminars, and donates books and equipment (Canagarajah 83). On the one hand, increasing numbers of the "donated" textbooks come prepackaged with teachers' manuals, testing kits, and audiotapes (84). On the other hand, even when teachers are aware of the cultural inappropriateness of these materials, they are unable to print or photocopy alternative materials due to limitations in time, funds, stationery, and printing facilities. These practical difficulties often drive teachers to depend on U.S. publishers' prepackaged, ready-to-use, freely provided teaching materials (84–85). Because many of the dominant approaches to English as a Second Language are "borrowed" from literacy instruction in English as a First language, Composition scholarship, intellectual traditions, and philosophical movements directly and indirectly "undergird" or "moor" dominant forms of *jiao* conducted *in English* in places like Sri Lanka and, judging from the *China Daily* report, in cities like Beijing, China (Canagarajah 148–49).

Aside from illustrating our institutional designation to deaden English by imposing a "linguistic perfection" to maintain the intra- and international exclusivity and dominance of standardized U.S. english, the *China Daily* report also points to the fact that even as English is becoming a language of international commerce, media, and politics, it is breaking into multiple and increasingly differentiated englishes marked by accents, national origins, and cultural and professional or technical affiliations (Cope and Kalantzis, "Introduction" 5). Peripheralized, yes. But alive and vibrant, actively using English to limn the lives of people in situations designed to submerge them.

Even as English is becoming a language of international commerce, media, and politics, it is breaking into multiple and increasingly differentiated englishes marked by accents, national origins, and cultural and professional or technical affiliations. Peripheralized, yes. But alive and vibrant, actively using English to limn the lives of people in situations designed to submerge them.

For instance, the Associated Press quotes the *China Daily*, saying "The signs feature misspellings, obscure abbreviations, and jarring word-for-word translations of Chinese characters into English. Some examples: 'Collecting Money Toilet' for a public toilet." Read solely in terms of the grammar of standardized U.S. english, "Collecting Money Toilet" clearly signifies the kind of

linguistic imperfection to be “rooted out.” However, if we approach the sign as a discursive practice, an effort to resist the threat of being submerged by the realities of one’s life, then we would need to delay our sound bites and lessons until we have examined the social, cultural, economic, as well as linguistic realities (which might have been) depicted by the sign.

Let me pose one possible scenario: The standardized design “public toilet” assumes a very specific set of circumstances, including a clear distinction between private and public property carefully patrolled by centuries of legal, political, and linguistic structuring in English-Speaking Countries—Great Britain and some of its Developed former colonies: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. In contemporary China, the boundaries between “private” and “public” ownership are constantly being blurred and redrawn under the pressure of fast capitalism on all nation/states (Communist or Democratic, Developing or Underdeveloped) to function in ways that facilitate the workings of the Free Market (Kalantzis and Cope 136). This has resulted in what critics have called China’s Great Leap Westward. Even as more and more previously state-owned industries are being privatized, some facilities—factories or toilets—remain state owned. At the same time, employees in these state-owned facilities are often expected to be self-sufficient: they only get paid according to the profit they are able to generate. To the people working in such “self-sustained” but “public-owned” facilities, the key distinction may not be between “public” vs. “private” but between “collecting money” vs. “not collecting money.” If the vitality of English depends on its ability to limn the actual, imagined, and possible lives of all its users—toilet workers in Beijing as well as Foreign Visitors—then we might read the “war against Chinglish” as inadvertently acknowledging the meticulous work that people on the streets of Beijing are doing to keep English alive. In fact, the sign makes me wonder what a living English sign ought to be for some of the toilets I’ve used in tourist spots in Paris, where not having the right pocket change can have very unpleasant consequences for middle-aged women like myself with overactive bladders.

In making English serve a different reality—social relations, needs and purposes other than (and thus, Othered by) the ones presumed and thus, prescribed by standardized English—the designer of the “Chinglish” signs might be seen as a resistant user of English working in concert with Native Americans, African Americans, and peoples across the world to use English against the englishes of their oppressors. As Baldwin reminds us, black english evolved from moments like the “moment, in time, and in this place, when my brother, or my mother, or my father, or my sister, had to convey to me, for example, the

danger in which I was standing from the white man standing just behind me, and to convey this with a speed and in a language, that the white man could not possibly understand" (88–89). It came into being, as Morrison put it, because, even in the coldest and darkest moment of their enslavement, the shackled men and women "thought of heat, then sun. Lifting their faces as though it was there for the taking." As Scott Lyons reminds us, Native Americans have always used the English of colonizers against itself to refuse the submerging of their inherent right and ability "to determine their own communicative needs and desires" (450). For instance, in the 1992 Treaty by the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, the metaphor of a "new Ghost Dance" is carefully chosen to "cast into full relief the fault lines of Indian-white interaction in America": simultaneously "invoking the first Ghost Dance movement of a century ago, a prophetic religious movement praying for the return of Indian power (answered by whites with the brutal slaughter of Chief Big Foot's band of Lakota at the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890)" and calling on Native and non-Native people to join together and take action for social, historical change (Lyons 464). The range and vibrancy of Englishes African Americans and Native Americans have developed throughout U.S. history prove that English owes its life to the peoples' refusal to be submerged by situations designed to keep them down.

The range and vibrancy of Englishes African Americans and Native Americans have developed throughout U.S. history prove that English owes its life to the peoples' refusal to be submerged by situations designed to keep them down.

The collective efforts of resistant users of English across the world is captured by Canagarajah's argument that, even as Tamil is being Englishized, English is being continuously Tamilized by local users through a variety of tactics: code-switching, code-mixing, style shifting, and borrowing (76, 129). This work is being accomplished daily, not only by Tamil teachers and students in ESL classrooms but also by manual laborers, farmers, fishermen, and teenagers on the streets and for drastically different purposes (70). Meticulous work *in English* is also done by young people in China as they choose English names to stake their places in a world ordered by fast capitalism (Anthony). They look for names that serve multiple, often conflicting language affiliations and visions of self to help them gain access to all the countries of the world, to call attention to "a side of them that eats McDonald's and listens to George Michael," to increase their chances of being remembered and thus promoted by "foreign bosses," to give them "personality in a sometimes impersonal society," to continue the Chinese tradition of placing great stock in the meaning of names, or

to reject the tradition of name-picking left from China's earlier encounters with Western missionaries and colonizers. So, instead of picking standardized English names like Mary, Agnes, Peter, or John, Zhao Tianqi, an artist whose wood-block prints have been selling well to foreigners, has named herself Colour Zhao. Wang Lei, a video editor, has opted for a literal translation of his birth name, Lei, and goes around Beijing as Thunder Wang. Others have claimed Western brands, calling themselves Kodak or Levi.

The work of resistant users of English indicates that, like any other language—e.g., Chinese or Spanish—English is best defined as an unstable process kept alive by the intense intra- and international struggle between and across English and diverse languages (peripheralized by the power of English under fast capitalism),⁸ and between and across diverse standardized englishes and their Othered, peripheralized englishes (variously labeled Dialectal, Creole, Pidgin, Indigenized, etc.).

Whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, we take part in this struggle through every decision we make on which english to use and how to use it. Composition is boundary work. How we go about using English matters.

Whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, we take part in this struggle through every decision we make on which english to use and

how to use it. Composition is boundary work. How we go about using English matters.

Given our certified power to directly and indirectly police how others use English, what could “being responsible” possibly mean? It could mean that we learn to see ourselves as working alongside users of English worldwide. I have in mind particularly those who use English when *jiaoing* on a daily basis with others across multifaceted language, social, and cultural borders and who bring to their work *in* English memories of how English has historically been used in religious, political, economic, and cultural subjugations in the past and present, intra- and internationally (see Harklau et al. 92–93; Kachru 2). Being responsible could mean that we treat standardized U.S. english as enlivened—enlightened—by the work of resistant users of English, compelling the certified border patrols of standardized U.S. english to work harder at repairing the structures protecting its exclusivity and dominance in inter- and intranational *jiaos*. Being responsible could also mean learning to acknowledge, interrogate, expose, reject, and alter the power of Our english to police how a majority of the world's population uses English in their daily existence. Being responsible could also mean learning to treat our decisions on how to use English as having real

consequences for the well-being of not only all the peripheralized languages, englishes, and discourses but also their users worldwide.

Designing English against the grain of fast capitalism

To be responsible users of English would mean that we face our potential entrapment in the “conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story,” which relies on a fantasy of a world dominated by a monolithic English—standardized U.S. English—and the fear of a world (ordered by U.S. interests) collapsing under the weight of Other languages and englishes (Morrison 18). It would also mean that we combat a commodity approach to the relationship between English and its users, one in which the acquisition of a language, whether a standardized or peripheralized English, is associated with the image of someone first buying or inheriting a ready-made, self-evident, discrete object—a tool (of communication) or a key (to success)—and then learning to use that object like an expert.

The commodity approach has locked our attention on identifying *what* english one needs (lacks) and *what* that english should (and should not) look like. As a result, we rank users of English into those qualified to design the Tools and those designated to merely use them. We then fear for those designated to be mere Users of the Tools, fearing that their inability or refusal to “resolve”—deny or suppress—the slightest hint of ambivalence towards the Tools will impede their efforts to Acquire and Use them “properly.” This fear has in turn precluded attention to *how* individual users of English are using it (working with and on its standardized blueprints) during a given instance: *how* this user is participating in the ongoing struggle between and across diverse standardized and peripheralized languages, englishes, or discourses. This fear has also made some of us hesitant to consider the possibility that efforts to acquire—learn and use—standardized U.S. english can be, have been, and, indeed, need to be enhanced by critical engagement with it.

One way to unravel these fears, I believe, might be to try out a different set of assumptions when depicting the relations of language and its users and when construing the language needs of individual learners or writers. Incorporating concepts from recent work in linguistics and education, I propose a method of reading that proceeds from two assumptions: (1) all users of English (self- or socially identified Native-Speaking, White, and/or Middle-Class users of English and users Othered by these labels) are actively structuring the english they are acquiring, its relation to other englishes, and the relations of

peoples invested in the competing englishes; (2) in every instance of discursive practice, all users of English are working with and on very specific, often complex and sometimes dissonant, discursive resources and for potentially complex and conflicting purposes. Working with these assumptions would compel us to take a dual approach to all texts (spoken or written): investigating not only whether certain features in a given text meet the standardized templates of the english with the most social, political, linguistic, and symbolic capital in fast capitalism's Free Market but also how and why individual users of English have designed such features on a given occasion.

In earlier calling the designer of the sign "Collecting Money Toilet" a potentially resistant user of English, I have approached the sign as a discursive practice "involving three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and the Re-designed" (New London Group 20; also, Kress, Kress and Van Leeuwen, Cope and Kalantzis, *Multiliteracies*). I have treated the expression "public toilet" as a standardized design—a blueprint or template—endorsed by the ascendant power of fast capitalism in social domains (such as the tourist industry, governmental institutions, higher education, or street-level commerce) in China as well as the U.S. And I have approached the sign as a redesigning of the standardized design, a redesign that is potentially motivated by a specific set of contexts and purposes (such as collecting money for the sustenance of toilet workers), contexts and purposes that are significantly different from the ones presumed (such as a set of divisions between "private" and "public") and prescribed by the standardized design. To put it another way, I have imagined the person who had composed the sign as a designer having options and making

decisions on what and what not to do when using English but also having to assert her agency in specific conditions (social, historical, cultural, linguistic, economic) that are not all and always of her own choosing.

If Composition begins to treat all discursive acts (spoken or written, "perfect" or "imperfect") as matters of design, we might slowly but significantly change the kind of tips Foreign Visitors would offer Students "from prestigious

Peking University" concerning "incomprehensible" textual features, features which "confuse" an Us. Instead of presenting Our confusion as resulting from Others' "linguistic imperfection," we might treat it as resulting from our lack

Instead of presenting Our confusion as resulting from Others' "linguistic imperfection," we might treat it as resulting from our lack of know-how or effort to make sense of how and why individual users of English might have come up with specific redesigning of standardized designs.

of know-how or effort to make sense of how and why individual users of English might have come up with specific redesigning of standardized designs. Instead of viewing the sign as causing us “inconvenience,” we might talk about the rewards of having to labor over its potential meaning: Seeing the redesigning (collecting money toilet) in light of the standardized design (public toilet) and vice versa, we might gain a firmer grip on the structuring and boundaries of standardized U.S. English—the constraints as well as opportunities posed by its standardized designs. Instead of treating the sign as something to be simply “rooted out,” we might present it as requiring the same close analysis we lavish on texts by Master Designers (Shakespeare, Gertrude Stein, or Gloria Anzaldúa) and with the same relish. Instead of treating standardized U.S. designs as the norm, we would present them as “limiting cases” (Fairclough 174–75). Thus, the repetitiveness and predictability of the designs created by a significant number of users of U.S. standardized English are acknowledged but depicted as resulting from conscious or inadvertent attempts to delimit the contexts and purposes of all discursive practices. They are depicted as made possible by subtle and unsubtle pressure to maintain the “purity”—exclusivity and dominance—of standardized U.S. English. Fluency *in* any English, standardized or peripheralized, is defined as resting on the presumed fixity of the contexts and purposes of all uses of that English, a presumption not always feasible for nor in the interest of all its users and certainly not on all occasions.

Fluency *in* any English, standardized or peripheralized, is defined as resting on the presumed fixity of the contexts and purposes of all uses of that English, a presumption not always feasible for nor in the interest of all its users and certainly not on all occasions.

Treating all texts as matters of design might also lead us to follow Morrison’s advice to “delay the sound bite, the lesson” (on what English the individual writer needs and what the correct forms of that English are) until we get to know who the writer is: to grasp the actual discursive resources each writer brings to his effort to acquire the English he feels he needs to survive and thrive in today’s world. By discursive resources, I have in mind a configuration of socially and historically structured patterns of discursive practice: intersecting as well as competing templates on how one should speak, read, write, think, feel, look (appear and view), act, viscerally respond to and interact with others and the world. And I envision the actual discursive resources of individual learners or users of English as continually spawned by their participation in, affiliation with, or bond to a broad but constantly changing range

How individual users of English make sense of and work with their discursive resources when reading, writing, and revising matters. The individual users shape and are reshaped by the texts they produce. They are shaped by and reshape the realities of their lives.

of social domains (societies, institutions, or life worlds).⁹ How individual users of English make sense of and work with their discursive resources when reading, writing, and revising matters. The individual users shape and are reshaped by the texts they produce. They are shaped by and reshape the realities of their lives.

I find two sets of concepts useful for mapping the discursive resources of individual writers: one's actual "language expertise, affiliation, and inheritance" (Leung et al. 543–55) and one's sense of one's actual, imagined, and possible self and life (Morrison; see also Ivanič).¹⁰ Let me use the sign "Collecting Money Toilet" as a point of departure to explore ways of reading, writing, and revising that are aimed at mapping the potential dissonances in individual writers' actual discursive resources, grasping why and how this writer might make constructive use of such dissonance, and helping us to become more responsive and responsible users of English.

The standard tags (Non) Native Speaker or Mother Tongue, which presume a one-to-one correspondence between one's racial and ethnic heritage and one's language resource and needs, would have us automatically assume that the person who has composed the sign "Collecting Money Toilet" is someone with expertise in Chinese but lacks exposure to and training in standardized Englishes, British or U.S. That assumption would also have us view her presumed expertise in Chinese as an impediment to her learning and writing *in* English, distracting her from seeking out the standardized English design "Public Toilet" and leading her to rely on a word-for-word translation from Chinese characters. However, if we approach the sign as a matter of design, we would have to delay such sound bites until we have studied the actual discursive resources (the often complex and sometimes conflicting templates of languages, Englishes, discourses, senses of self, visions of life, and notions of one's relations with others and the world) with and on which this designer might be working when composing the sign (see Barton and Hamilton; Barton et al.).

Studying the designer's actual discursive resources would first involve considering this designer's actual language expertise. In the most general sense, we would have to consider her expertise in at least four systems: (1) the English "from above" (the heavily British accented English disseminated through schools, phrase books, and dictionaries¹¹); (2) the Englishes "from below" (the Englishes used by people on the streets of Beijing, China, when *jiaojiao* with

Foreign Visitors or the englishes used in life worlds she may regularly and actively participate in or have exposure to, such as life worlds organized around entertainment, morning exercises, religion, or the reading and trading of books or underground political news); (3) the standardized written Chinese of the People's Republic of China (taught at school and used in such media venues as the *China Daily* both prior to and after China's Great Leap Westward); (4) the spoken and/or written Chinese used in other social domains which are relevant to this writer's existence. Given the dominance of standardized British English in Chinese education both before and after the 1949 communist revolution and given the prevalence of standardized U.S. English in other areas of life since China's Great Leap Westward (making it possible for global corporations like Nike to exploit the practically free labor market and for McDonald's and Marlboro to break into the "vast" but "virgin" consumer market), it is highly possible that this designer might have had certain exposure to if not high or equal levels of expertise in both of these Englishes.

Let's suppose, for the sake of this discussion, that we have enough textual evidence and direct or indirect access to her literacy autobiography to conclude that her actual expertise in standardized U.S. or British English is limited and that, when composing the sign, she had not been aware of the expression "public toilet." We cannot simply rely on this information to predict how she would revise the sign after she has been "tipped" on the "correct" form. How she makes sense of and works with the standardized template when redesigning the sign would be mediated by other factors in her discursive resources, including the potential dissonance between the standardized English template and the templates endorsed by the other languages and Englishes that she has encountered and in which she has expertise. Let me pose just one of the possible scenarios. The template in standardized written and spoken Chinese is *gong gong* (public or communal) *ce suo* (toilet). This expression is also the standardized dictionary translation for "public toilet." Although both the first and second characters share the same phonetic symbols (*gong*), they bear different written forms and connotations when used separately or in combination with other characters. The second character, *gong*, is combined with other characters to signify "communism" or "communist." Given China's Great Leap Westward, it is possible (although never predictable) that this designer might feel ambivalent about the echo of "communism" embedded in the expression *gong gong* and thus feel ambivalent about its standardized (dictionary) translation, "public."

Secondly, our efforts to study the designer's actual discursive resources would involve considering (1) her language affiliation—the attachment and identification she feels towards diverse englishes and chineses in which she may not have expertise (Leung et al. 555), and (2) her language inheritance—“emotional bond” to the discourses she was “born into” (because they are used by members of her immediate or extended family and by peers or elders in the neighborhood) but in which she has no expertise nor necessarily feels attached to (Leung et al. 555). Here are some possible scenarios. *Scenario One:* Because of China's recent Great Leap Westward, she might be becoming increasingly attached to (or detached from) various discourses in English and Chinese used in TV programs, billboard ads, popular song lyrics, discussion of business prospects at the dinner table with family or with neighbors and co-workers, discourses in which the term *gong* (communist party, ideology, or government policy) functions as a code word for corruption or conservatism. *Scenario Two:* As a result of political philosophy, religious affiliation, fascination with historical movies and novels set in northern, rural parts of China, etc.), she might feel attached to the Northern chinese discourse in which the common term for “toilet” is not *ce suo* but *mao keng* (a pit in the ground, under a thatched roof) or *maofang* (outhouse). Since the dictionary translation for both of these colloquial expressions is “latrine,” she might experience ambivalence towards

Our efforts to study the designer's actual discursive resources would involve considering her sense of the “order” between and across the languages, englishes, and discourses among those resources—that is, how they order (shape and are shaped by) one another historically and socially as well as their ranking order (their unequal social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital) at a given time and place.

the term “toilet.” *Scenario Three:* She could have language inheritance—hold emotional bonds—to the expression *maokeng* and/or *maofang* because they are the standardized templates in the discourse her parents use when around members of the extended family or their childhood friends, most of whom had grown up or were still living in houses without indoor plumbing. The interplay between and across her language expertise, affiliation, and inheritance might cause ambivalence towards the template of stan-

dardized chinese *gong gong ce suo* and, by extension, its dictionary translation, public toilet. This might mediate her decision on whether and how to use the “tip” (from Foreign Visitors and passed along through the Students from Peking University) when redesigning the sign.

Thirdly, our efforts to study the designer's actual discursive resources would involve considering her sense of the "order" between and across the languages, englishes, and discourses among those resources¹²—that is, how they order (shape and are shaped by) one another historically and socially as well as their ranking order (their unequal social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital) at a given time and place. For instance, the report on how young people in China choose their names suggests that people like Colour Zhao and Thunder Wang are aware of the interplay between and across various discourses in English and Chinese: the Chinese investment in the meaning of one's name, the Christian investment in the names of Biblical figures, the Communist investment in "impersonal" names vowing one's devotion to the collective, the Fast Capitalist investment in turning the young people of China into eager Consumers and below-minimum-wage Labor for global corporations. The choice of names such as Colour Zhao also indicates a level of awareness of the ranking order of diverse englishes and chineses. We can interpret her decision to spell her name the British way as an indication of Colour Zhao's recognition of the residual power of standardized British english among the Foreigners interested in her artwork. The choice of name for the Levi's of China, on the other hand, can be read as indicating the young people's awareness of the emerging power of the english of global conglomerates, the english of TV commercials and billboard ads aimed at niche marketing the younger generation into devotees of McDonald's, Marlboro, designer clothes, Hollywood movies, popular music, or Nintendo games. The broad range of names chosen by these young users of English can also be interpreted as indicating that their choices are mediated by their sense of the order of diverse forms of name-choosing practices within a specific social domain, paid work involving Foreigners and Foreign Bosses. Decisions to distinguish oneself from the Mary's and Henry's at work suggest that they don't see Foreign naming practices (of Missionaries, Colonizers, or Bosses) as necessarily enjoying that high a ranking order among the diverse ways of naming practiced at individual job sites in contemporary China.

Fourthly, our efforts to study this designer's actual discursive resources would involve considering her sense of self—her vision of her actual, imagined, or possible life. For the purpose of discussion, let's again assume that this writer might have some expertise in the (heavily British accented) english disseminated in textbooks and dictionaries (both of which were required mate-

rial during her schooling), and, therefore, she was indeed aware that the dictionary translation of *ce suo* is “latrine,” “lavatory,” or “toilet.” How she makes use of that expertise when designing the sign would also be affected by her

How she makes use of that expertise when designing the sign would also be affected by her senses of self: an understanding emerging from her interpretation of her past and present lived experience in all areas of life (school, paid work, family, and other life worlds); of her prospects and desires for her future; of the kind of learner of language and writer she has been, is, or would like to become; and of the kind of person she is expected to come across as on a given occasion.

senses of self: an understanding emerging from her interpretation of her past and present lived experience in all areas of life (school, paid work, family, and other life worlds); of her prospects and desires for her future; of the kind of learner of language and writer she has been, is, or would like to become; and of the kind of person she is expected to come across as on a given occasion. Each aspect of her sense of self would pose a set of discursive perspectives: blueprints of interests (what she is interested in and what is in her interest to be doing), ideas, opinions, commitments, voices (ways with words, grammatical, lexical, and broader textual choices, preferences for genres, accents, etc.), sense of self worth, practices (ways of doing things, including reading, writing, and

interacting with others), or visceral responses (see Ivanič 24–25, 182–83). Different aspects of her sense of self might pose contradictory as well as intersecting templates for her to work with and on.

Let me pose some hypothetical scenarios to elaborate on the concept of a designer’s sense of self. *Scenario One*: Her lived experience of education in general or the particular English courses she was required to take had left her feeling alienated from the (British accented) English of school while seeing herself as good at other subjects and at writing in Chinese. This reading of her self in relation to writing and learning might motivate her to critically engage with the English of school when designing the sign. The following possible factors could also move her in the same direction: (1) she has a general disdain towards school knowledge (and by extension, her knowledge of school English) because she has been and takes pride in seeing herself as an active member of a family, neighborhood, peer group, or workplace where scholars and intellectuals are regularly referred to as *qiong* (impoverished) *du* (study) *shu* (book) *ren* (person); (2) she no longer feels affiliated with the British English of school because her work experience and her local connections make her feel that she has good prospects to secure a job under a boss from the United States or

because she feels such a job is desirable, even though she does not see herself as having any chance of getting one; (3) she wants to call attention to the side of her that is familiar with U.S. popular music, brand names, and cultural trends; (4) she wants to call attention to the side of her that is committed to the well-being of the toilet workers whose livelihood depends on the money collected, a commitment that could result from her lived work experience and/or her interaction with toilet workers at home or in other life worlds (neighborhood, place of worship, morning Tai-Chi or ballroom-dancing groups on the sidewalks of the city); (5) she could be a fan of local theatres and take pride in being praised by other fans for having a way with words, a knack for picking up different dialects and a wit in coining expressions and puns. All these potential aspects of her sense of self might motivate her to tinker with the (British accented) school/dictionary English when designing and revising her sign.

Scenario Two: It is equally possible that in spite of her multiple levels of ambivalence towards the English of school, she would still try to use the “tip” on “correct” design in predictable ways either because of her sense of the expectations of Foreign Visitors—the possibilities for selfhood available to *jiaos* with Foreign Visitors at Beijing’s tourist spots—or because of her sense of the historical lack of power for peoples in her situation to impose a listening in intra- and international *jiaos* on the social, cultural, economic, and linguistic levels (Bourdieu 55).

Finally, our efforts to study the designer’s actual discursive resources would involve considering her view of the kinds of world and success she and others have had, could have, and should have. We might treat the sign “Collecting Money Toilet” as indicating in both its content and choice of language a concern to articulate a specific reality: China’s leap towards the Developed Market has exposed her and others to the threat of being submerged in a world where material necessities of life must be purchased on the market. Along with a majority of the world’s population, people like her are compelled to undertake paid work that barely keeps them and their families afloat. In this so-called Free Market for labor, acquisition of English has increasingly become a prerequisite to one’s ability to survive, if not thrive. However, the designer’s expressed concern to acquire English alone should not lead us to presume that this designer holds no ambivalence towards the template of “life” or “success” endorsed by the standardized Englishes of Developed Countries such as the United States. As many cultural critics have argued, life in “modern societies” is truncated into three discrete areas—Work, Civic, Personal (Kalantzis and

Cope 140). In the standardized English of Developed Countries, “the personal occurs in its own spaces (the home, the family, grassroots communities) and in its own times (after work, the weekend, holidays)” (140). And “success” is defined solely in terms of one’s access to paid work promising the fastest accumulation of social, economic, and/or symbolic capital.¹³ The Great Leap Westward has clearly opened China to the hegemony of Developed designs for “life” and “success.” However, our designer’s actual response to these Developed blueprints for “life” and “success” would be mediated by the diverse visions of what life and success have meant and could and should mean for her and others, notions fostered by her actual discursive resources.

Let me pose another possible scenario to probe the function of this aspect of any writer’s discursive resources. The designer of the “Collecting Money Toilet” sign might have been and remains involved in one of the morning Tai Chi exercise groups in the park or along the sidewalks of Beijing, which are regularly participated in by people who have “retired” from their government-assigned jobs since China’s Leap Westward: not just those who have *tui* (returned to) *xiu* (rest) after reaching the standard retirement age but also those in their mid thirties or forties who are *xia* (let down from) *gang* (posts) when their places of work were closed down or joined the venture Westward. During conversations before and after their exercise routine, different members of the group might evoke different templates of life and success. Some “retired” members might air their nostalgia for their life under Mao, when they had job security and when “success” was defined by one’s ability to turn life in all three areas—work, civic, personal—into a concerted effort to serve the collective. Other “retired” fellow exercisers might have made smooth transitions Westward (such as setting up lucrative food or souvenir stands in Beijing’s many tourist attractions or doing consulting work for “joint venture” facilities) and thus have become vocal disciples of Developed ways of life and success. Some fellow exercisers might boast of the ingenuity and exploits of their offspring in the Developed Market, offspring like Thunder Wang, Colour Zhao, and the Kodak’s or Levi’s who are actively redesigning the blueprints of Developed Englishes to make them limn their actual, possible, and imagined lives. Others might be devoted practitioners of traditional philosophies who see Tai Chi as essential to the well-being of not only one’s health but also one’s mental and moral conduct in all areas of life: not as a means to boost but as integral to how one acts at paid work. How this designer makes use of these conflicting templates of life and success would, of course, be mediated by her sense of

their social historical “order” within and outside that particular life world and her actual discursive resources. Her decision would also be mediated by her sense of the status of the different fellow exercisers proffering the competing notions, their rank (in terms of education, earning power, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc.) both within the group and on the Market. One way or another, the vision of life and success she construes from these templates would affect her position towards the Developed template of “life” and “success” and thus how she makes use of the “tip” (public toilet) promising to collect the most money from Foreign Visitors.

At the same time, even if her vision of life and success along with her sense of herself as a competent learner and creative user of Chinese dialects and discourses might motivate her to redesign the Developed templates, it is equally possible that she would use the “tip” in predictable ways because of her sense of the material circumstances of her existence. For instance, she might feel compelled to compromise her interest in foregrounding the connections between paid work and her life in other social domains because the money collected from Foreign Visitors is the only source of income for her and her family in the present and (foreseeable) future. We simply cannot presume that because this designer and Colour Zhao are both Chinese and living in China, they are using English to limn the same actual, possible, and imagined life. The report on the naming practices of young people of China suggests that some of them indeed see their paid work (prospect of a promotion by a Foreign Boss) as intimately connected to rather than separate from and primary to their lives in other social domains as nonspecialized persons: where they eat or shop, what they listen to, and their interaction with people who put great stock in the meaning of names, hold ambivalence towards “impersonal” society, and/or disdain the impositions of missionaries and colonizers on Chinese naming practices. But their choices also indicate that they perceive themselves as not only having the know-how to redesign the naming traditions of various Chinese or English discourses but also possessing the necessary economic, cultural, and symbolic capital to impose a listening from the Foreign Boss they hope to impress. (But we can and should never assume that our designer shares a similar sense of her actual resources.)

In summary, to be a responsible and responsive user of English, we need to delay our sound bites on what English this designer needs and how she needs to use it until we have studied her *understanding* of her discursive resources: the options opened up and closed down by her actual language expertise, af-

filiation, and/or inheritance as well as by her sense of her actual, imagined, and possible self and life. I put a stress on the word *understanding* to call attention to the interpretive process involved in one's efforts to map the actual

I put a stress on the word *understanding* to call attention to the interpretive process involved in one's efforts to map the actual discursive resources of individual writers (one's own resources or those of the writer whose texts we are reading).

discursive resources of individual writers (one's own resources or those of the writer whose texts we are reading). As many in Composition have long argued, notions of "expertise" are socially constructed, depending on the criteria and assumptions historically used to assess the discursive practices of people categorized along lines of class,

gender, sex, race, occupation, ethnicity, religion, education, national origin, etc. Such assumptions have profoundly influenced how individuals talk about their language resources, including whether they identify themselves as persons "with (or without) good ideas" or as being "good (or not good) at expressing themselves" and what they believe they should or should not do when learning and writing.

The distinction between language expertise and language affiliation is useful for mapping one's felt relations with diverse languages, englishes, and discourses: relations that often remain unarticulated but may indirectly mediate one's sense of options and, thus, the textual decisions one makes when using the english one feels one needs for a specific occasion. The distinction between language inheritance and language affiliation is useful for taking into account dispositions residual from one's early childhood, propensities that are "transposable" to a variety of social domains, often without one's having any conscious or felt sense of their being operative (Bourdieu 83). Attention to the interplay between and across one's language expertise, affiliation, and inheritance, along with attention to individual writers' understandings of different aspects of their selves and lives, can help us interpret and depict one another's discursive resources (and by extension, language needs) in terms of not only the "actual" (lived experiences) but also the "possible" (possibilities and prospects) and the "imagined" (desire, hope, aspiration), so that we may represent one another's actions as grounded in the realities of our lives but never predetermined by them.

By approaching writing as a matter of designing mediated by individual writers' actual discursive resources, I have depicted users of English as needing to, having been trying to, and having indeed benefited from efforts to probe the potentially dissonant options generated by their actual discursive re-

sources.¹⁴ Furthermore, I have presented them as potentially having social and personal reasons to be interested in and concerned with ways of using English that rework or blur the borders protecting the division and hierarchy of competing languages, englishes, and discourses, borders that are carefully patrolled by labels such as Foreign v. Native, Public v. Personal, School v Home v. (paid) Work, Expert v. Novice, or Developed v. Developing v. Underdeveloped. At the same time, I have presented these English users as not always feeling they could make constructive use of the dissonance emerging from their actual discursive resources. On the one hand, they are acutely aware that it is not always in and to their interest to use English in the repetitive and predictable ways they feel they are expected to by those in positions to make and break their life opportunities in school or at paid work. On the other hand, they often feel compelled to take the either/or approach: either strictly abide by or totally reject the approved templates of the english promising (the seldom delivered) access to the best-paid work. The fear of assimilation or exclusion has debilitating consequences, often resulting in a profound cynicism and alienation towards both learning and writing (Ivanič 228; Canagarajah). Finally, I've argued that how they make sense and use of such dissonance matters. It can have long-term effects on the life of English, of individuals and peoples worldwide, and of the world we share.

Attention to the interplay between and across one's language expertise, affiliation, and inheritance, along with attention to individual writers' understandings of different aspects of their selves and lives, can help us interpret and depict one another's discursive resources (and by extension, language needs) in terms of not only the "actual" (lived experiences) but also the "possible" (possibilities and prospects) and the "imagined" (desire, hope, aspiration) so that we may represent one another's actions as grounded in the realities of our lives but never predetermined by them.

Working with dissonances in one's discursive resources

In making the call that Composition needs to delay our sound bites about what the so-called Native-Speaking, White, Middle-Class, Educated and their Othered users of English need (or don't need) until we learn to know the actual discursive resources of each user, I am working with a number of suppositions. First, users of English seldom work with identical discursive resources, in identical contexts, and for identical purposes. Second, each configuration of discursive resources opens up as well as closes down a broad range of options for how one might work with and on the standardized blueprints of the english (promising the fastest accumulation of economic, cultural, and symbolic capi-

tal). Third, whether one is aware of it or not, whether one is interested in acknowledging it or not, all users of English have experienced some level of dissonance in their actual discursive resources and, thus, some ambivalence towards the particular value(loaded) english they are interested in acquiring. Fourth, it is not always in and to the interest of all users of English to use the approved designs of the value(loaded) english in repetitive and predictable

Attention to the potential dissonance in one's discursive resources can help individual writers grasp contexts and purposes peripheralized by the value(loaded) blueprints that are nevertheless crucial to their day-to-day existence. This can, in turn, help the writer locate personal and social reasons to critically engage with the very english one feels one needs to acquire.

ways. Fifth, attention to the potential dissonance in one's discursive resources can help individual writers grasp contexts and purposes peripheralized by the value(loaded) blueprints that are nevertheless crucial to their day-to-day existence. This can, in turn, help the writer locate personal and social reasons to critically engage with the very

english one feels one needs to acquire. Sixth, critical engagement with the english one feels one needs to acquire is conducive to one's learning and writing: it can help us to gain a firmer grasp of the structure and function of that English—what it can do or cannot do *to* and *for* individual writers with diverse contexts and purposes. Finally, it is the work of resistant users (or active redesigning) of value(loaded) englishes that keeps English alive.

One way Composition might link its work with the language practices of resistant users of English within the United States and across the world is learning to perform “closer” readings of texts that “confuse” those of us with “fluency” in the standardized englishes of Developed Countries. We might begin by performing “closer” readings of texts students have designed prior to college and in areas of their lives generally peripheralized by the kind of work they feel they are expected to do in those college classrooms or fields of study they have stakes in. Let me elaborate on how this kind of work might proceed by using two New Year's resolutions printed in the Monday “Jump” section of *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* linked to *Jump Online*, which markets itself as “written by and for teens”:

I'm a Christmas junkie. I look forward to Christmas all year long—the lights, crowded malls, finding the perfect gift, Christmas cookies and definitely the music. . . . I am truly happy.

My new year's resolution is a bit different than in most years. My resolution is to stay in the Christmas spirit all year long. I want to stay as happy as I was at Christmas for 12 months, not just 12 days.

I want to be excited about giving over receiving. I want to whistle songs while walking through the mall and say "hi" to people I don't know. I want to bake cookies with my family in June and July, not just December. I want to have enthusiastic church celebrations about the coming and birth of Jesus more often. —Molly Anderson, senior, Pius XI High School

Formulating a resolution this year was easy—I need to stop procrastinating. In the past I would leave my homework until 9 or 10 p.m. and then stay awake until the early morning hours trying to finish.

In an effort to maintain that elusive New Year's resolution that so often becomes dissolution, I have created several easily attainable short-term goals for myself. . . . By 10 each night, my goal is to have every item on the list crossed off.

Also, I plan to interpose brief periods of exercise into my work schedule. This exercise helps me focus more clearly, keeps me healthy and alert, and will give me a break from the monotonous tirade of homework papers and essays. —Libby Allard, junior, New Berlin Eisenhower High School ("Digging Deep")

To approach each text as a matter of design, we might begin by performing a close analysis of the content and style of each text to identify changes in aspects of one part of the text and another, such as word choice, sentence patterns, values, points of view, etc. Instead of treating each of the shifts as an "imperfection" (lack of consistency or coherence) to be "rooted out," we might use the shifts as a point of departure for engaging the writer in mapping the actual, often complex and sometime dissonant discursive resources she was working with and on when composing it and could be working with and on when revising it. And we might use that mapping to engage the writer in considering reasons for and ways of critically engaging with the Englishes she is interested in acquiring.

For instance, we might use as points of departure a shift in Molly's choice of words ("Christmas junkie," "Christmas spirit," and "enthusiastic church celebrations about the coming and birth of Jesus") or Libby's choice of words concerning "work" ("prioritize my work," "interpose brief periods of exercise into my work schedule," "exercise helps me focus more clearly, keeps me healthy and alert, and will give me a break from the monotonous tirade of homework"). Through journaling, conference, group, or class discussion, one focus might involve asking each writer to map her actual and potentially dissonant discursive resources. For instance, we might ask each to consider (1) the social do-

mains in which she has encountered or used each of the terms she uses here in relation to “Christmas” (or “work”-“exercise”); (2) some of the diverse discursive patterns—“saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” concerning “Christmas” (or “work”-“exercise”) practiced by differently ranked participants in each of these social domains (see Gee et al. 142); (3) the discursive combinations she feels she is expected to show fluency in when working as a “writer” of *Jump Online*; (4) the discursive combinations approved by the fields of study or classrooms she is most invested in; (5) any other social domains she feels attached to, participates in regularly, would like to someday be affiliated with and her sense of the approved discursive combinations concerning “Christmas” (or “work”-“exercise”) in these domains.

A related focus might involve each writer in treating her actual discursive resources as directly or indirectly mediating her discursive acts (both her lived experience when composing the resolution when in high school and when reading this resolution in a college Composition classroom). For instance, we might ask Molly or Libby to consider if any part(s) of the content and/or style of the resolution “rings true” to her or makes her feel “compromised” when composing the resolution in high school and when reading it now (Ivanič). Which part(s) would she claim or disclaim responsibility for and to which group(s) of people central to her life? The writer might also reflect on whether there might be other resolutions she had wanted to include (or thinks she should have included) but did not. She might also explore possible links between her decisions on what to include and exclude when composing the resolution and her complex and conflicting sense of self. For instance, she might probe her sense of the possibilities for selfhood open to the “Jump” section of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* or *Jump Online* and her sense of herself as “student” and “writer”: whether she feels she has the know-how or is in a position to be “creative” when using the expected discursive combinations, her sense of which aspects of her actual, possible, imagined self she is willing to or not willing to “compromise” when writing for “Jump,” and her sense of the ranking order of diverse discursive combinations commonly practiced in *Jump Online* and in other social domains generating her discursive resources.

Another focus might involve complicating the writer’s existing discursive resources by researching texts on the same topic but written by and for participants from diverse social domains, not only in domains such as the classroom or one’s field of study (or interest) but also life worlds peripheralized by such a field of interest on all levels of intra- and international *jiaos*. For instance, we might look for texts that examine the interest of fast capitalism in

niche marketing, the encroachment of market discourse on life worlds (such as recreation or entertainment, hobbies, fashion as well as “lifestyle”—REI or health food co-ops) and fast capitalism’s success in “customizing” the dispositions of adolescents in all aspects of their lives. Or, we might look for texts concerning “Christmas” employing alternative discourses within the denomination of the “church” one is affiliated with or written by participants of different denominations and religious faiths. To link our use of English with users the world over, we might research texts that examine the “realities” of those working in Developing and Underdeveloped pockets of the United States and the world and producing most of the Christmas paraphernalia and “gifts” we consume. We might look for texts that examine fast capitalism’s interest in prioritizing areas of our life, turning our life outside paid work and school work (in preparation for paid work)—exercises or other activities we are involved in—into “distractions” from or “provisional” to the “work” we are assigned to do by school and paid work. We might also look for texts that analyze the kinds of material resources—money, time, energy, etc.—required to carry out our exercise plans, the working conditions facing workers filling the manufacturing and service jobs to “perfect” the equipment demanded by U.S. Exercisers, the conditions of life of peoples within and outside the United States deemed by fast capitalism to be not worthy of its effort to be so “niched,” or the lives of people whose paid work leaves them neither the time nor the energy to “exercise.”¹⁵

At the same time, we might design revision assignments allowing students to consider reasons for work on as well as with the englishes/discourses individual students feel they need to succeed in the kind of paid work that interests them. One such assignment might ask each writer to compose another resolution for *Jump Online* that tries to revise those parts of her resolution which leave her feeling compromised while simultaneously weaving in discursive combinations she had felt compelled to leave out in the first version. Another assignment might ask individual students to compose a New Year’s resolution for a different social domain, one that is critical to the student’s day-to-day life but which she feels she is expected to set aside or dismiss when writing in college or in the field of study she hopes will increase her access to the paid work she wants. Another assignment might ask individual students to revise an earlier New Year’s resolution for a Reader who identifies fully with the standardized templates of “success” and “selfhood” in her field of interest while simultaneously drawing on elements of her revised resolutions. After finishing writing each of these assignments, we might ask each writer to identify one feature in the revision that she is most proud to “own” and one that

makes her feel most “compromised” and then discuss not only how and why she has arrived at such a designing but also what her action might do for and to her, given her sense of the kind of actual, possible, and imagined life opportunities (in all areas of life) that everyone ought to have in the United States and across the world.

Yet another focus might involve reading and writing in response to texts by Master Designers in each writer’s field of interest and in ways that make constructive uses of the writer’s actual, complex, and dissonant discursive resources. That is, we might ask the writer to construe the discursive combinations endorsed by the Master Designs and try to use these combinations in contexts and purposes that are different from—ranked lower than—the ones presumed in the Master Designs but that are, nevertheless, central to the writer’s daily existence or to social groups with which she has been, is, or would like to be aligning herself.

Or, we might use texts such as the “incomprehensible” signs on the streets of Beijing and the New Year’s resolutions by high school students for the news media to initiate a series of reading, writing, and revising assignments that highlight the connections across our work in English in College or at (paid) Work, our work outside these domains, and the work in English by other users around the world. Doing so might help us center attention on the options opened up and closed down by specific configurations of discursive resources while presenting one’s discursive resources as continually shaped (and reshaped) by one’s own (changing) discursive practices as well as one’s (changing) relations with a wide range of social domains. It might help us treat repetitive and predictable ways of using English as contingent on the (often presumed) continuity of a particular configuration of contexts and purposes, a continuity requiring heavy-duty policing designed to maintain the exclusivity and domination of the predictable (prescribed) way of using English. Finally, it might help us see the texts we design in English as having material consequences. All efforts to redesign the existing structure and order of competing languages, englishes, and discourses can potentially bring about long-term change, if and when the specific circumstances motivating the redesigned become relevant to the existence of a collective.

All efforts to redesign the existing structure and order of competing languages, englishes, and discourses can potentially bring about long-term change, if and when the specific circumstances motivating the redesigned become relevant to the existence of a collective.

relevant to the existence of a collective. At the microlevel, we might probe what one’s discursive acts can do to and for one’s actual, possible, imagined life. On

the macrolevel, we might begin to recognize that how each of us uses English in all areas of life, at all levels of *jiao*, matters. It can directly and indirectly affect the life opportunities of all users of English, the future of English, and the world we share.

Redesigning the responsibility of composition

My hope is that attention to the actual, complex discursive resources of individual writers might help us redesign some of the standardized assumptions in Composition's discourse on the language needs of College Students, assumptions that have locked us in the fear that having expertise, affiliations, interests, and aspirations that are Othered by the value(load)ed standardized U.S. english is detrimental to, will interfere with, or distract Students from their effort to acquire it. This fear is fed by and feeds a series of sound bites urging and promising to help Students resolve—deny or suppress—the slightest hint of ambivalence they might experience towards the english/discourse they feel they are expected to use in predictable ways at a given social domain; sound bites assuring us that we can simply “ease in and out” of disparate social domains, languages, englishes, discourses, prototypical selfhoods, relations with others and the world in the same way one picks up and puts down a tool (or slips into and out of a dress), without any “real” effect on one's Authentic Self; sound bites promoting a fluency that requires a willingness to presume (and therefore, prescribe) a set (fixed and specific) context and purpose for all users of English, one serving the interests of those with the most say in the designing of English, the realities of the Othered, and the world order.

Efforts to search for the stitches to unravel the caul of such fear are particularly urgent at this historical juncture. In the discourse of fast capitalism, the standardized template of selfhood is someone willing to (1) see the world in terms of either a pre-existing market to be passively registered and adjusted to or something waiting to be aggressively customized; (2) see one's self as a “portfolio”—as embodying itemized discursive skills that can be flexibly arranged and rearranged as one moves from “project” to “project”; (3) relate to co-workers as just another flexible portfolio and to others' outside paid work as a Market (Consumers or Providers of raw material, labor, or services) (Gee; Gee et al.). Such a template requires users of English hoping to “succeed” in the “global free market” to accumulate a sizable portfolio—including fluency in diverse languages, englishes, or discourses—but precludes the possibilities of them making connections or attending to their sense of dissonance between and across different aspects of their individual discursive resources. Fast

capitalism's standardized template of selfhood would encourage users of English to leave its life in the hands of the Market and envelope ourselves in the caul of standardized fear-myths. To intervene with the order of Fast Capitalism, it is the responsibility of Composition to work with the belief that English is enlivened—enlightened—by the work of users intent on using it to limn the

It is our responsibility to call attention to the potential desires, capabilities, and needs of all users of English to actively participate in the redesigning of standardized englishes with the highest Market value and to do so in intra- and international *jiaos* on all levels of life.

actual, imagined, and possible lives of all its speakers, readers, and writers, the work of users intent on using English to describe and, thus, control those circumstances of their life designed by all systems and relations of injustice to submerge them. It is our responsibility to call attention to the potential desires, capabilities, and needs of all users of English to actively participate in the redesigning of standardized

englishes with the highest Market value and to do so in intra- and international *jiaos* on all levels of life.

Composition can and should take up such a responsibility. A course in composition is one of the few courses required of a majority of college students, a social domain through which future Working Persons, Tourists, Consumers, Teachers, CEOs, Portfolio Men, Consultants, Politicians, Leaders of institutions or life worlds, and the parents and teachers of the next generations of these certified U.S. patrols of the boundaries of English will pass through. Composition might very well be the only institutional space where a majority of college students might use their tuition dollars to buy some legitimate time to think, reflect on, and revise the tacit goals, values, and understandings prescribed by the discourse of flexible accumulation. How we use English in Composition matters. Trying to critically engage with the standardized designs of a discourse of flexible accumulation when reading and writing in English can have long-term effects on the future of all languages, all users of English, and the order of the world we share.

The prospect of involving all students of Composition in this line of work is, ironically, enhanced by the fact that our work has been institutionally defined as “preparatory” and, therefore, necessary only for entry-level college students. Aside from the fact that Higher Education has always been marketed under the promise of change and improvement, Undergraduate Studies, especially First-Year Student Life, represents one of the times when people are bombarded with a wider range of Possibilities for Selfhood, to the point of making them feel like they are continually “trying identities on for size” (Ivanič 237).

Furthermore, the transition from the familiar environment of home to the new place called the academy often involves changes in one's country, city, or neighborhood of residence. This can also bring about a "crisis" in one's sense of self and relations with competing languages, englishes, and discourses vital to one's life before and outside college and to one's new life in college. This heightened state of flux might make one more alert to the need for and interest in the possibilities of redesigning one's familiar language practices and the new language practices one has explicitly come to college to acquire. The fact that many of our students have not yet "declared" their "major" also opens up some possibilities for their being interested in this line of work.

It is my conviction that our work can help to build a world warmed by responsive and responsible uses of language. By all. For all. It is also my conviction that we have no alternative but to cling onto this conviction. As Cornel West reminds us, we are at a "crucial crossroad in the history of this nation: we either hang together by combating these forces that divide and degrade us or we hang separately" (159). Since the 9/11 event, no single person in the United States is exempt any longer from the rest of the world's concern to figure out what being responsible could possibly mean in "the catastrophe this world has become" (Morrison 26). We are at a crossroad in the history of the world: we either hang together by combating all forces that divide and degrade, or we hang separately, whether by the rope or through large-scale (technologically Developed) destruction. More than ever before, we need designing in English that is motivated by the belief that all intra- and international *jiaos* in all areas of life are intricately connected. We need ways of using English which unravel the fear that attention to dissonances between and across standardized and peripheralized languages, englishes, and discourses and attention to the interrelations between and across our Paid Work and our work in other areas of life will interfere with rather than enhance our expertise as users of English. We need designing that helps those directly or indirectly benefiting from the logic of Fast Capitalism to add "a glance into the eyes of" those we claim to "serve" with our "technology" and "aids" while having the least say in the design of the realities of their lives (Morrison 26). Designing that enables us to acknowledge not only that those Othered by us do "look back" but also that we have much to learn from their labor to keep English alive—making it limn lives and serve purposes peripheralized by the englishes and discourses in which we are invested.

It is my conviction that our work can help to build a world warmed by responsive and responsible uses of language. By all. For all.

To redesign standardized U.S. english against the grain of fast capitalism means to combat several dispositions we've accrued through our designation as the residents of the world's most Developed Country and our credentials as the most Literate of the most Developed. We've been disciplined to compartmentalize diverse forms of *jiao*: Communicating, Trafficking, Trading, Warring, etc., and Mating; Befriending (in Private Life) versus Contacting, Networking, Negotiating (at Work) versus Intersecting, Confronting (in Public Affairs). We have been trained to demarcate the world into Developed, Developing, Underdeveloped, Undeveloped pockets, cultures, and peoples and to see *jiaos* between Us and Them strictly in terms of the Aid We grant to the Development (of Knowledge, Technology, the Market Economy, Democracy) of Others rather than also how Our Aid helps stunt Their life opportunities in the name of Development. We have also been trained to valorize quick fixes for serious and complicated social, political, cultural issues. We are not in the habit of taking long views, attending to incremental changes built up through long periods of history and through seemingly banal, minute *san-essayer* on a day-to-day basis. When faced with the realization that we will not live to see any of the injustices "fixed" in spite of what often feels like a lifetime of strenuous efforts, we get so depressed and disillusioned that we forget that we have

Working alongside resistant users of English across the world, in the past, present, or future, is a critical lifeline for Composition to sustain our hope and conviction that how we use English can make a difference.

no real alternative but to keep on trying. To stop trying would be to let hegemonic forces off the hook of having to do the heavy-duty patrolling and mending of the borders they've erected in their own interests, saving them energy to do more harm to a world under their order. Working alongside resistant users of English across the world, in the past, present, or future, is a

critical lifeline for Composition to sustain our hope and conviction that how we use English can make a difference. Our word-work can help to design a better world. By all. For all.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank Roz Ivanič, Peter Mortensen, Diana George, David Clark, Graham Smart, Dylan Dryer, Lisa Riecks, Aimee Krall-Lanoue, Katie Malcolm, Marilyn Cooper, and Tom Fox for their comments on various versions of this paper, and Bruce Horner for his sustained support and critiques throughout the process.

Notes

1. On “wrestling with angels,” see also Stuart Hall (280).
2. I am using “Composition” to stand for college-level study and teaching of writing in the U.S. and all the fields of study and interest groups listed on the 4Cs program, whether its members view and treat the 4Cs as their main, secondary, or tangential affiliation. I spell the word “composition” with an upper-case *C* and strip it of the qualifier “U.S.” to highlight its institutional and disciplinary role within U.S. higher education and its power to influence literacy work across the world.
3. My use of the character *jiao* is informed by the multiple connotations listed under it and its combination with other characters in *A Chinese-English Dictionary* and the *Far East Chinese English Dictionary*.
4. I find useful the concept of “possibilities for selfhood” (Ivanič 27) for identifying the prototypical subject positions available at a given time and place, and the concept of “sense of self” to refer to one’s understanding of diverse aspects of one’s actual, imagined, and possible life, including one’s past, present, prospective, or desired self and one’s sense of self as a writer or learner.
5. Unless otherwise specified, I use the first person plural to refer to all of us participating in the work of Composition, students as well as teachers and researchers.
6. Following Pierre Bourdieu, I am using the term “capital” to highlight the links across diverse forms of resources and the links between issues of resources and social relations of power.
7. For discussions of post-fordism, fast capitalism, or global capital, see James Gee, Gee et al., and Norman Fairclough. Most broadly, these terms refer to the tendency for economic, social, political, and cultural processes to take place on a global scale and the extension of market modes of operation and a regime of flexible accumulation to new areas of social life (Fairclough 165, 163).
8. For discussions of the ways in which fast capitalism has resulted in the increasing power of English at the expense of the great majority of languages and englishes vital to the day-to-day existence of peoples worldwide, see Norman Fairclough 165.
9. Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis define “life world” as the world of everyday lived experience, richly organized, laden with linguistic and cultural traditions but serving immediate and practical ends. It is what we unreflexively expect to be there and on which our everyday understanding and actions have some purchase. For all their pregiven, everyday, intuitive, self-evident character, life worlds are not less a site of subjectivity and agency than any other (Cope and Kalantzis, “Designs” 206). On “lifeworlds,” see also Jürgen Habermas.
10. Roz Ivanič offers two related sets of terms for examining how individual writers make sense of their identities and life histories: autobiographical self (retrospec-

tive, present, prospective, and desired), discursive self, self as author, and the possibilities for selfhood (16–23). My reading of the individual writer's sense of self and life is indebted to her succinct definition of these concepts and her application of this frame in her case-study work with eight mature students in Britain.

11. Throughout this section, I've used the revised edition (1995) of the *Chinese-English Dictionary* published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of Beijing, China. It is the authoritative dictionary for Foreign Language Institutes throughout China, and its abridged version is regularly recommended to Chinese high school students.

12. For analysis of the "order of discourse," see also the New London Group (20–21) and Norman Fairclough (170).

13. New management theory is quick to appropriate the terminology of critical discourse (New London Group 11; Gee et al.). For instance, Bill Gates stresses the importance of one's well-being in areas of life outside the "campus." But I interpret Gates's attention to Other areas of life to be primarily motivated by how these interests might boost one's performance at paid work. Living a "rounded" life has become a form of exercise—luxury—reserved for the select: those with the kind of purchasing power and accumulated capital to qualify as Value Adders of the Free Market by the discourse of Fast Capitalism.

14. A. Suresh Canagarajah and Roz Ivanič make the same argument, using bottom-up ethnographic research in, respectively, ESL classrooms in Sri Lanka and case-study work with eight mature students in Britain.

15. For a discussion of the material effects of the proliferation of niche markets on a broadening band of working poor and welfare recipients and a "wide zone" of communicatively dead, see Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope (143).

Works Cited

- Anthony, Ted. "Chinese Pick Names with Pizzazz: Young Looking for English Names Find Inspiration in Food, Soccer Players, History." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* 27 Oct. 2002, final ed.:24A.
- Baldwin, James. "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" *In Depth: Essayists for Our Time*, 2nd ed. Ed. Carl Klaus, Chris Anderson, and Rebecca Faery. New York: Harcourt, 1993. 87–89.
- Barton, David, and Mary Hamilton. *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Barton, David, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanič, eds. *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- "Beijing Launches Campaign against Bad English-Language Signs." CBS News.Com, 6 Dec. 2002 <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/12/09/nationa/main532348>> 4 Apr. 2004.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Ed. John B. Thompson. Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991.

- Canagarajah, A. Suresh. *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford UP, 1999.
- . *A Chinese-English Dictionary*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research P, 1995.
- Cope, Bill, and Mary Kalantzis. "Designs for Social Futures." Cope and Kalantzis 203–34.
- . "Introduction: Multiliteracies: The Beginnings of an Idea." Cope and Kalantzis 3–8.
- , ed. *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- "Digging Deep, Shifting Gears in New Year." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* 6 Jan. 2003: 4E.
- Fairclough, Norman. "Multiliteracies and Language: Orders of Discourse and Intertextuality." Cope and Kalantzis 162–81.
- Far East Chinese English Dictionary*. Taibie, Taiwan: Far East, 1995.
- Gates, Bill. *The Road Ahead*. New York: Viking, 1995.
- Gee, James Paul. "New People in New Worlds: Networks, the New Capitalism and Schools." Cope and Kalantzis 43–68.
- Gee, James, Glynda Hull, and Colin Lankshear. *The New Work Order: Behind the Language of the New Capitalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1. Trans. T. McCarthy. Boston: Beacon, 1984.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacy." *Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Harklau, Linda, Kay M. Losey, and Meryl Siegal, eds. *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition: Issues in the Teaching of Writing to U.S.-Educated Learners of ESL*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999.
- Ivanič, Roz. *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins, 1998.
- Kachru, Braj B. "Introduction: The Other Side of English and the 1990s." *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*, 2nd ed. Ed. Braj B. Kachru. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992. 1–18.
- Kalantzis, Mary, and Bill Cope. "Changing the Role of Schools." Cope and Kalantzis 121–48.
- Kress, Gunther. *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold, 2001.
- Leung, Constant, Roxy Harris, and Ben Rampton. "The Idealised Native Speaker, Reified Ethnicities, and Classroom Realities." *TESOL Quarterly* 31 (1997): 543–75.
- Lyons, Scott Richard. "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" *College Composition and Communication* 51.3 (2000): 447–68.
- Morrison, Toni. *Lecture and Speech of Acceptance, upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Delivered in Stockholm on the Seventh of December, Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Three*. New York: Knopf, 1994.
- New London Group. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." Cope and Kalantzis 9–38.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Professions for Women." *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1942. 235–42.

Min-Zhan Lu

Min-Zhan Lu is professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and coordinator of its graduate program in Rhetoric and Composition. She teaches composition theory and pedagogy, life-writing, and critical and cultural studies. Her recent publications include *Shanghai Quartet: The Crossings of Four Women of China* (Duquesne UP, 2001) and “Composition’s Word Work: Deliberating How to Do Language,” appearing in *Composition Studies in the New Millennium* (Southern Illinois UP, 2004).