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Enacting and Transforming Local Language Policies

Exploring language practices, beliefs, and management in a first-year writing program, this article considers the obstacles to and opportunities for transforming language policy and enacting a new multilingual norm in U.S. postsecondary writing instruction. It argues that the articulation of statements regarding language diversity, co-developed by teachers and program administrators, is a valuable step in viewing and constructing the classroom as a multilingual space.

Recent years have seen increasing interest in language and language diversity within composition studies. In 2006, for example, language diversity was the focus of two important special journal issues. The *College English* special issue on “Cross-Language Relations in Composition” brought together scholars who contested the monolingual assumptions that have dominated the field, arguing for the creation of new norms and assumptions that recognize the multilingual nature of today’s writing classrooms. Exploring how such assumptions or tacit language policies have arisen historically, are currently perpetuated, and can be resisted, the articles in the issue offer a new vision of writing studies and convincingly argue for the necessity of this vision. Just a few months later, the *WPA: Writing Program Administration’s* special issue on “Second Language Writers and Writing Program Administrators” examined the growing multilingual

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student population specifically from a WPA perspective, arguing that “second language writing is a *sine qua non* of writing program administration today” (Matsuda, Fruit, and Lamm 11). The articles in this issue together provide an overview of the changing and heterogeneous population that falls under the umbrella category of “multilingual students” and suggest specific strategies that administrators may implement in order to fully integrate multilingual perspectives into administrative structures and practices.¹

These journal issues, along with other articles, books, and conference papers appearing within the past decade, have successfully put multilingualism on the composition map, opening up spaces and opportunities for meaningful change. It is my goal in this article to consider how such change might be enacted at the program level; rather than starting from an administrator perspective, however, I turn to the perspectives of writing teachers and, to a lesser extent, students. These stakeholders generally do not hold the power or authority of administrators or publishing scholars (see Gallagher), and they are quite often isolated from the ideologies and discursive arguments that dominate journal pages and even professional conferences. However, it is my contention that classroom change is most likely to occur when program faculty are involved, when they work with administrators to articulate, reflect on, and, where appropriate, transform their local practices.

However, it is my contention that classroom change is most likely to occur when program faculty are involved, when they work with administrators to articulate, reflect on, and, where appropriate, transform their local practices.

This essay turns specifically to the local to consider the obstacles and, more importantly, the opportunities that already exist for enacting a new multilingual norm in the teaching of writing in U.S. postsecondary contexts. To do so, I incorporate insights from the field of language policy to aid in exploring the obstacles and opportunities in my own institutional setting. I begin by reviewing important insights on language diversity and policy in composition studies and then integrate these with scholarship from language policy studies to build a framework for studying policy (broadly conceived) within a single first-year writing (FYW) program. Next, I share a study of my own program, reflecting on the complexity of language practice, beliefs, and written documents that together enact a local language policy. Finally, I offer specific suggestions for transforming local policy, arguing that involving teachers in the articulation

of statements regarding language diversity is a valuable step in constructing a space that values and incorporates multilingualism.

Language Diversity and Language Policy in Composition Studies

The increasing language diversity of U.S. higher education is by now well acknowledged if not well documented.² In response both to changing demographics of writing classrooms and to national debates on language, the field of composition studies has generated formal documents taking stances on these issues as they impact the profession, including the Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) resolution, the "CCCC Guideline on the National Language Policy," and the "CCCC Statement of Second Language Writing and Writers." Despite these important attempts to raise awareness of language-related issues, many composition scholars have argued that there remains a lack of attention to language and language diversity, "indicative of a pervasive, tacit policy of 'English Only' in composition" (Horner 742). Horner and Trimbur assert that this tacit policy serves to reify an image of U.S. Americans as (monolingual) English speakers. In calling attention to monolingual assumptions, a number of scholars have asked compositionists to examine the ways in which English Only ideologies underlie and are perpetuated by the field's research, pedagogical approaches, and institutional structures (Bawarshi; Donahue; Lu; Okawa; Trimbur).

In his own rebuke of such assumptions, Matsuda points to a dominant discourse in composition studies that enables what he calls a myth of linguistic homogeneity. This discourse, he argues, is facilitated by a policy of linguistic containment that excludes language difference through program strategies such as filtering out language minority students in admissions, ignoring language difference in the classroom, referring language minority students to the writing center, or placing students into remedial writing courses or special sections for second language writers. Through such practices, language diversity is suppressed rather than recognized and valued. Other second language writing and composition scholars have outlined additional factors that may contribute to prevailing assumptions of monolingualism. At a disciplinary level, teachers (and students) will be best served when they have broad knowledge of the relationships between language and writing; therefore, a lack of coursework in teaching preparation programs or attention to such issues in teacher development publications can perpetuate monolingual assumptions (Preto-Bay and Hansen). Institutional structures may compartmentalize and disassociate

campus units such as English-language courses, writing courses, and modern or classical language courses, which could instead coordinate to offer valuable resources for multilingual students (Gentil; Horner and Trimbur). The common placement of first-year writing programs within English departments may pose additional challenges, privileging English department genres and ideologies (Leki). Further, the very labels used to discuss multilingual students have effects both on how programs and the profession view these students and also on how they view themselves (Ortmeier-Hooper).

In his article "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued," A. Suresh Canagarajah has addressed the issue at the classroom level most directly. Despite some increase in awareness within composition studies of World English varieties and pedagogical practice, Canagarajah notes that students' language rights still seem to be limited to informal and nonprestige genres. For instance, while World Englishes may be considered acceptable for informal or personal writing, most teachers still insist on Standard English discourse and grammatical features for formal writing. Canagarajah challenges this norm and further argues that students' languages and cultures should be seen as resources rather than hindrances. He advocates pluralistic practices of writing instruction that integrate the meshing of students' linguistic codes, not just in personal writing but also in academic texts. Such an approach of code meshing not only promotes the active use of students' languages and discourses but is also natural for many students and can facilitate language development. Further, bringing students' multiple languages and varieties into the writing classroom can help them develop important discursive skills and strategies. In later work examining students' plurilingual practices, Canagarajah ("Multilingual") draws on the useful concept of *translanguaging* from bilingual education scholars. García describes translanguaging as the practice of switching between languages to carry out activities, often using different languages for different modes; it is a practice that multilinguals often engage in extensively, illustrating how languages operate on a continuum rather than as separate entities for multilinguals.

These arguments for the recognition of language diversity in the college writing classroom are theoretically persuasive, yet they tend to leave unexplored the perspectives of writing teachers and students. Current and future teachers with whom I have worked, for example, often find institutional structural issues to be out of their control but find the specific strategies offered by Canagarajah to be too challenging to implement in their own classrooms, which include

both monolingual and multilingual students. Examining teachers' perspectives is therefore important not only in exploring the extent to which scholarly arguments engage current practice but also in understanding potential obstacles to and opportunities for reimagining the postsecondary classroom as a multilingual space.

Examining Language Policy Locally

Though popular conceptions of language policy tend to focus on specific laws or formal statements issued by governing bodies (often nation-states), language policy is often described by scholars as a fluid, complex, and layered construct. Thomas K. Ricento and Nancy H. Hornberger, specialists in second language policy issues, describe at least four layers through which

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language policy is carried out: legislation and political processes, states and supranational agencies, institutions, and classroom practitioners. While classroom practitioners have certainly been acknowledged in recent composition scholarship on language policy, the focus of such scholarship has been primarily

on the first three layers. However, teacher and student perspectives have the potential to expand our understanding of this issue. As Vaidehi Ramanathan and Brian Morgan argue, "Research on individual beliefs, everyday contexts, and practices casts an instructive light on potential obstacles to policy initiatives and reforms" (449).

Certainly a turn to the local carries some limitations: a program administrator in Arizona, for example, faces a different set of local laws, institutional ideologies, and public discourses than does a writing teacher at an English-medium university in Turkey. But what such a perspective lacks in drawing broad-level conclusions it gains in affording a look at how policy statements, pedagogical practices, institutional structures, and individual beliefs are intertwined. A local view can also afford us a way to imagine possibilities for bottom-up change and to consider our individual and community agency. As writing scholars have noted, we write our local ecologies (Dobrin), and we construct our local spaces through the discourses we generate (Reynolds).

A rich and growing body of work by language policy researchers has examined language education policies, often taking a local perspective (e.g., Canagarajah, *Reclaiming*). One useful framework for studying policy, which

can easily be adapted to local explorations, is outlined by Bernard Spolsky, a language policy scholar. He distinguishes three components that make up language policy:

its language practices—the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology—the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management. (5)

As he notes, many institutions and countries do not have formal language policies, so their policy must be derived from an exploration of their practices and beliefs. To study one component of language policy without the other two would lead to an incomplete picture. Spolsky's definition of policy resonates with the ways in which the construct has been discussed in composition studies as well—not always referring to explicit documents or formal written statements, but encompassing underlying ideologies and practices, thereby often referred to as “tacit” or “de facto” policies (Horner and Trimbur; Matsuda). Drawing on this tripartite view of policy, then, I adapt Spolsky's suggestions for exploring the complexities of a given language situation, first identifying the language practices, then identifying relevant beliefs and potential community values regarding language practices, and finally searching for management decisions and interrogating the interplay of these components.

The FYW program at my own institution forms the site of my exploration. As I explain in more detail below, this program is a good site to study for many reasons: first, as a member of the community, I can more easily strive to gain an insider perspective; second, as a program that is currently undergoing changes in addressing multilingualism, it is a dynamic site in which I can readily examine the fluidity of policy; and third, by critically reflecting on my local setting (and my role within it, as the second language writing specialist), I hope that this research can affect future change and assist the program in moving toward the kinds of transformations it envisions. In sharing this research, I hope to provide strategies for others who may wish to examine their own local contexts with an eye toward self-reflection and potential change but also to demonstrate the opportunities for agency that practitioners and administrators have in language policy issues.

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Looking Local

My local context is one that shares traits with many mid-sized to large universities, particularly those in urban settings, while also having unique characteristics that impact our FYW program in specific ways. Set in a major metropolitan area with a long history of immigration, the institution is a private, Catholic-affiliated university with a strong mission of social justice and a large student population (nearly twenty-five thousand). Within the institution, required first-year writing courses are the purview of a FYW program, which has been situated within an independent writing department since 2007 (it included an undergraduate minor and a master's degree program at the time of my study but has since added an undergraduate major and a second, interdisciplinary master's program). The program offers three writing courses (Composition I, II, and III), into which new students are placed based on institutional placement exam scores, ACT test scores, or AP exam scores; the majority of students place out of Composition I and take only Composition II and III. While the FYW program is directed by a tenured faculty member, the vast majority of teachers in the program are part-time, in addition to six full-time non-tenure-track instructors. Unlike many writing programs, graduate assistants do not teach in this program; all instructors hold at least a master's degree in writing, English, or a related field. As is typical at many institutions, the FYW program is relatively autonomous but also lies within the institution's liberal studies program and therefore must conform to that program's expectations. Program learning outcomes and annual assessment reports, for example, must be approved by the liberal studies program, meaning that any explicit policy changes or new initiatives are subject to the eyes and ears of stakeholders outside of the writing department.

The same year that the FYW program moved from the English department to the newly established writing department, the program offered its first section of Composition II (the most common entry course) specifically for second language writers. This section was taught in the winter term and was presented as an option to students, who were generally advised by their Composition I instructor or an advisor to register for the course. The course enrollment grew from eight students in 2007 to sixteen students in 2009, eventually prompting the addition of a second multilingual section of Composition II and a new multilingual section of Composition III in 2010. During the year that this study took place, thirteen students (both international and U.S.-educated) enrolled in the single multilingual section of Composition II, making up about .005% of all

students enrolled in Composition II that year.³ This small enrollment, however, belies the linguistic diversity of the institution, as described later in the article.⁴

To examine the language practices, beliefs, and management within this context, I sought to understand the perspectives of FYW program faculty and, to a lesser extent, FYW students. I developed a student survey, which was distributed to a quarter of all FYW sections offered in the fall of an academic year (a total of 508 surveys), and carried out individual interviews with 9 survey respondents who self-identified as multilingual students and volunteered to be interviewed. These surveys and interviews allowed for greater insight into the language backgrounds of our FYW students (presumably representative of the student body at large), their perceptions of language practices carried out in their classes, and their attitudes toward a range of language practices. While student perspectives were helpful, they also proved to be somewhat limited. Survey responses indicated some confusion regarding students' interpretations of questions, and interviews often elicited minimal and predictable comments, no doubt influenced by their construction of my own identity as a university professor. Nevertheless, many responses to the survey did provide valuable insight into the local language situation as students may perceive it. Finally, it is important to note that the multilingual section of Composition II was not offered during the term that the survey was distributed; therefore, perspectives from students who had enrolled in a multilingual section are not included in this research.

Teachers' perspectives were gathered through a survey that was distributed to and completed by all 59 faculty members present at a year-opening orientation. These teachers averaged 10 years of postsecondary writing experience in general and 6.5 years of experience in the program; some instructors were brand new, while others had up to 30 years of teaching experience. Only 5 of the 59 instructors reported having taken a graduate course related to teaching ESL. To provide further insight beyond the survey responses, I carried out individual hour-long interviews, which were taped and transcribed, with 18 of these faculty members who volunteered. Teachers were forthcoming and often discussed their views at length, particularly in the individual interviews. While the views I collected cannot be considered representative of all faculty, they did include a fairly broad range of perspectives and included teachers with diverse educational backgrounds and experience in teaching. Again, my own subject position—as a colleague, as the local second language writing specialist, and as a researcher—is certain to have shaped these teachers' responses as well

as my interpretations of them. Nevertheless, it is my feeling that the research played a role in leading to the kind of programmatic reflection and policy transformation that I advocate in this article.⁵

Identifying Languages Practices

In his framework of language policy, Spolsky defines language practices as patterns of selecting among available language and language variety options.

Adapting these definitions of language practice to the local context of a FYW program, I hoped to identify not just the languages that circulate in this setting but also the language-related choices that students make in their writing and that teachers encourage or discourage in their writing classrooms.

Taking an ecological perspective to local language practices, Alastair Pennycook defines such practices as “what people are doing with languages in relation to other social and cultural practices” (105). Adapting these definitions of language practice to the local context of a FYW program, I hoped to identify not just the languages that circulate in this setting but also the

language-related choices that students make in their writing and that teachers encourage or discourage in their writing classrooms.

Reflective of the surrounding urban environment and institutional home, these students are not only ethnically diverse but also linguistically diverse. Students were asked, in separate questions, to identify their dominant language(s) and their home language(s) and to indicate the environments in which and purposes for which they used their different languages. In response, 17% of students indicated that their dominant language was either English and one or more additional languages or was one or more non-English languages. When asked to identify their home language(s), 21% identified a language (or languages) other than English or multiple languages including English. The most common environment in which students described using non-English languages was at home with family members. The survey responses suggest, then, that 17–21% of students in this writing program might be considered multilingual in that they are active users of multiple languages. In addition, a full quarter of the students reported using varieties other than Standard American English, most commonly hybridized varieties such as Spanglish, exemplifying the argument that languages do not operate as discrete or reified entities for language users (Horner and Trimbur). Seemingly in contrast to the rich language diversity among students, all of the instructors identified their only dominant language as English, though nearly half of them reported

having studied or occasionally using other languages at some point in their lives. Interviews with instructors revealed that several had lived abroad, spoke another language with their parents, or belonged to social communities that utilized their second languages. In other words, both students and teachers had multiple linguistic resources on which they at least occasionally drew, though linguistic diversity was more profound among students.

Knowing that these linguistic resources exist gives rise to the question of how they are drawn upon in the practice of writing and writing instruction. While an ethnographic account of classroom practices would help to identify actual patterns of use in the classroom (or, at least, some classrooms), surveys can highlight perceived language patterns—that is, while the surveys may not

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be accurate representations of practice, they hint at people's perceptions of their own practices, which, as Spolsky argues, may be even more relevant to language policy. Given a list of multilingual writing and instructional practices, students were asked to indicate whether or not they had engaged in the practice in their FYW class (see Table 1).⁶ Student responses suggest that the most common multilingual practices included discussing the use of multiple languages or language varieties in texts and reading texts that integrated multiple languages or language varieties; composing in languages or language varieties was relatively rare though still a practice used by some writers. All nine multilingual students who were interviewed described drawing on their multiple languages (or translanguaging) as part of their out-of-classroom writing practices, often discussing a paper or paper topic with a family member in another language while writing entirely in English.

Insight from teachers provides a similar picture, with 53% of surveyed instructors saying that they had never invited their students to use non-English languages in conjunction with class work, 44% saying they had occasionally done so, and 4% saying they had frequently done so. In open-ended survey and interview questions, instructors described their most common multilingual practices as introducing and discussing readings that demonstrate or discuss multilingualism—readings by Richard Rodriguez and Gloria Anzaldúa, now somewhat ubiquitous in composition readers, were the most frequently cited.⁷ The second most common multilingual practice instructors reported using (again mirroring student perceptions) was encouraging students to integrate

Table 1. Use of Multilingual Classroom Practices, According to Students

	No. of Students Reporting This in FYW	% of Students Reporting This in FYW
Discussed the use of varieties in texts	125	25
Discussed the use of non-English languages in texts	109	21
Read a text that included an English dialect	106	21
Read a text that included a non-English language	82	16
Spoken with a classmate in a non-English language	73	14
Spoken with the instructor in a non-English language	54	11
Included English dialect in a final, graded paper	41	8
Spoken with the instructor in a variety of English	36	7
Included non-English language in a final, graded paper	22	4
Included non-English language in a draft	14	3
Pre-writing or planning partially in another language	14	3
Spoken with a classmate in a variety of English	12	2
Taken notes entirely in another language	10	2
Prewriting or planning entirely in another language	10	2
Draft entirely in another language	2	0

Source: Student survey responses.

terms or expressions from other languages into personal writing assignments, such as memoirs or autobiographies, particularly for rhetorical effect.

Relatively rare but still important to acknowledge were instructors' practices of encouraging students to use any language or variety when journaling or

prewriting or for carrying out research (including reading sources in multiple languages or carrying out field research, such as interviews, in additional languages). Some teachers specifically noted that they invited students to use any language for prewriting or journaling because they felt students should generate ideas in any language with which they were comfortable. As one teacher noted, "I wanted them to focus on 'getting it down on paper' and 'flow,' which for some students may necessitate non-standard English." Another teacher described an interesting recitation assignment in which she invited students to draw on any language:

[W]hen I was first teaching here I had a recitation assignment, a rhetorical delivery that each student would give of something that they memorized. Right? Memorization, it isn't something that we really teach anymore. But, it didn't have to be long, it could be even the length of a sonnet, and I would allow students to do that in other languages. Which they often would. So, I thought that was a great opportunity to kind of open up the classroom to multiple languages.

These teachers recognized that inviting students to draw on their multiple linguistic resources could facilitate their writing and literacy development. However, not all instructors were familiar with practices for supporting their second language writers. When asked in the survey what kinds of classroom or individual strategies they found to be most helpful in supporting these students, the most common responses were to provide additional help in office hours or to recommend that the student visit the writing center, falling into the "policies of linguistic containment" that Matsuda describes by limiting the visibility of language issues in the writing classroom. Several instructors also noted the use of peer review as a classroom strategy for supporting second language writers; interestingly, research suggests that at least some multilingual students may be disadvantaged in linguistically "mixed" peer review groups because of the oral turn-taking and sociolinguistic skills required (Zhu).

Bringing together the linguistic demographic information with the student and instructor perspectives suggests that classroom language practices in this particular FYW program are not exclusively monolingual. With at least one-fifth of the students comfortably using multiple languages or language varieties, it is unlikely that they are partitioning off their linguistic resources as writers and writing students. And while there are certain to be classrooms that operate primarily through a monolingual lens, there is also evidence that many teachers *are* taking language into account and encouraging students to do so

as well. Interviews and survey responses from teachers do suggest, nonetheless, that many (if not most) teachers have a limited set of strategies for supporting

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multilingual students, whether through practices that explicitly incorporate their multiple languages or through English-medium practices that support second language development. This may not be surprising given that only 8% of these instructors reported having had formal education or training in working with multilingual students.

Identifying Language Beliefs and Values

While examining local language practices can give us some insight into what people do with language (or what they *think* they do), it is also important to understand what people believe *should* be done—that is, the beliefs and values that they hold about language and language use. Pennycook refers to local language ideologies as “the ways in which the roles and functions and meanings of language are understood locally” (108). While Spolsky describes this aspect of language policy as “consensual ideology,” he does concede that communities may hold multiple, even contradictory, ideologies. U.S. society is certainly a case in point, as dominant language ideologies, or beliefs about language, range from English Only to Standard English to plurilingualism (Bianco; Wiley and Lukes). Identifying language ideologies within a FYW program can prove somewhat challenging, as it requires sorting out the personal beliefs of individual instructors and students as well as the dominant programmatic beliefs. That said, the ideologies that dominate U.S. society are echoed at the programmatic and individual levels as well.

To identify the beliefs about language and language practices held by instructors and students in the FYW program, I presented them with a set of practices that acknowledge or invite the use of multiple languages and asked them to indicate whether they felt each practice would be acceptable in a FYW course. As Table 2 shows, the general rankings of acceptability were quite similar between instructors and students⁸; in general, both groups were more accepting of code meshing in ungraded and personal writing than in formal, academic writing, supporting Canagarajah’s claim that Standard English (or Metropolitan English) remains the preferred norm in “prestige” forms of writing (“Place”).

Table 2. Acceptability of Practices That Integrate Additional Languages

Practice	% of Instructors Who See This as Acceptable	% of Students Who See This as Acceptable
Prewriting or planning	85	30
Ungraded in-class writing	83	38
Informal/personal writing	83	30
Graded paper drafts	75	8
Peer review	75	20
Ungraded paper drafts	71	29
Graded in-class writing	42	8
Final papers	41	7
Formal/academic writing	41	7
Other	0	1

Source: Instructor and student survey responses.

These survey responses are interesting but should also be interpreted carefully. Student open-ended responses on the survey suggested that in at least some cases, students believed the survey to be asking about the whole-sale use of languages other than English (for instance, turning in a complete paper written in Polish), rather than the mixing of languages for a primarily English-language audience. Instructors' responses are interesting for other reasons. Their relatively strong support for such code-meshing practices indicated in Table 2, for example, contrasts somewhat with their apparent limited use of these strategies in the classroom, as described earlier. This seeming contradiction could be related to a disconnect between teachers' beliefs about what should be done and what is actually done in the classroom; alternatively, instructors' survey responses may be influenced by what they felt that I, as a researcher and second language writing teacher, may value. Digging a little deeper into language beliefs is necessary, and open-ended survey questions and individual interviews were valuable here.

As might be expected, students' and instructors' beliefs about language use mirrored the dominant ideologies that circulate at a national and institutional level. Explicit English Only values were evident among both instructors and students but were much more visible in student reactions. Two of the most

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common comments on the student survey, for example were variations of “This is not a foreign language class,” and “This is America; we speak English.” Such comments illustrate that dominant ideologies are reproduced at numerous levels and by many stakeholders; the challenges that writing programs and writing instructors face in acknowledging multilingualism are clearly not limited to our own disciplinary assumptions. For teachers, English Only values were evident primarily in the belief that an English-only environment is most conducive to language learning—a myth that has perpetuated among educators and the general public despite research evidence to the contrary (Auerbach; Cummins “Rethinking”; Shohamy).

Perhaps the belief that poses the most significant challenge for composition scholars wanting to move toward a multilingual paradigm of FYW is that Standard English is preferred in academic and professional writing and should therefore be the focus of FYW courses. Both students and instructors in my FYW program expressed the belief that these courses should focus predominantly, if not exclusively, on Standard English, echoing common public and institutional perceptions of writing and writing instruction (Bowden). As one instructor wrote: “The focus should be Academic English. I may be a hard liner on this, but so-called ‘standard’ English should be just that. ‘Non-standard’ English should have limited, if any, use in these contexts.” The power of Standard English and the symbolic capital that it carries looms large for writing instructors and represents a major source of tension for many teachers who believe that Standard English will provide their students access but who simultaneously value diversity of expression.

In the United States, the most common counter-ideologies to English Only and Standard English are linguistic pluralism and language rights. Locally, these values circulate around discourses of diversity, freedom of expression, and human rights. Importantly, these are also strong values of my local institution, conveyed to students and faculty through the university mission statement, website, convocation and commencement speeches, and even statues and paintings that adorn the walkways and hallways of campus. Motivated by the mission of the university’s patron saint, institutional discourse highlights respect for “the God-given dignity of each person” and diverse values, and a dedication to serving underrepresented student populations and to addressing issues of social justice. A prominent statue by the student center depicts

a modern-day priest asking, “What are you doing for justice?” While students and faculty are influenced by more than just their institutional environment, these discourses do resurface in expressed values related to writing. Several students, for example, reflected that students should be “allowed” to use multiple languages because it is a right. One student wrote, “I don’t want to perpetuate forms of imperialism and the like,” while another wrote, “it should be their choice, nothing forced upon them.” A significant number of instructors and students expressed a strong value in diversity, including respect for cultures, languages, varieties, and discourses. In many cases, they noted the benefits of exposing all students to diverse forms of expression. One student, for instance, wrote that “Proper English is not the only thing that is spoken amongst people of this country. To disassociate the world of English spoken is to alienate a new realm of new people and new creativity.”

National and institutional language ideologies, however, are not the only influence on local language beliefs. Both instructors and students are also influenced by values that dominate the discipline and study of writing—most particularly, the values placed on self-expression and on writing as a dynamic, multiple, and hybrid form of communication. Students and instructors wrote and spoke of the importance of allowing student writers to express themselves through whatever linguistic means. There was also significant support for teaching writing as rhetorical, complex, multiple, and hybridized, and both instructors and students connected these beliefs to language. One instructor wrote, for example, “If we’re teaching writing, then it should include multiple discourses, which in turn should include multiple dialects.” Several students echoed this belief, with one writing:

Considering the fact that we are in a rhetoric class, if a student is able to use different dialects of English in order to serve a purpose then they should be encouraged to do so. It makes writing more interesting and can enhance an argument.

Contradicting the numerous students who wrote that use of other languages would be inappropriate because “this is an English class” (which is in fact inaccurate), one student wrote simply, “It is a writing course, not an English course.” These beliefs that writing is not tied to a single language and that learning to write is fundamentally about learning multiple discourses are clearly reflected in the program’s dominant ideology, expressed through the program goals that emphasize rhetoric and multiplicity. For instance, the program explicitly states that it aims to help students develop multiple discourses used within and beyond the university.

Doing justice to individual and community ideologies, even in a relatively small, local setting, is not easy. What I hope I have illustrated here is that a wide range of beliefs regarding language in the classroom are held by both students and instructors, with individuals often holding beliefs that are seemingly at odds. Individual and community values are influenced by public, institutional, and programmatic discourses, as well as values related to individuals' numerous cultural, religious, and social affiliations. As Judith Rodby so aptly expresses: "Many writers and educators seem to struggle with antonymous impulses—to promote both linguistic diversity and uniformity, monolingualism and multilingualism, univocality and polyphony. For many this double vision of ethnicity and universalism creates a discourse that appears ridden with contradictory, competing claims" (39).

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Interrogating Language Management

With these competing practices and beliefs in mind, we turn to language management. Again, I use the term *language management* to refer to explicit plans or policies about language use, usually written in formal documents. For the purposes of understanding language policy on the local FYW program level, it became necessary to consider various layers of language management that may have an influence on the writing classroom.

As described earlier in this essay, explicit statements regarding language use do exist within the discipline's professional organization; CCCC's "Guideline on the National Language Policy" and SRTOL are both relevant documents, as is the organization's "Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers." In my survey I asked instructors whether they were familiar with CCCC's National Language Policy. While 5 of 59 instructors indicated that they were, no one answered the survey question that asked for a summary of the statement. A survey of NCTE and CCCC members carried out in the late 1990s similarly found that only one-third of these members were aware of the NLP or SRTOL (Richardson). Broken down by demographic categories, the survey found that the members most likely to be familiar with the policies included people of color (over white members), those who held doctorates (over those who held bachelor's degrees), males (over females), those who had taught fifteen years or more (over those who had taught six years or less), and those who were older.

Given these figures, it is perhaps not surprising that a mere 8% of instructors surveyed in my program, few of whom are CCCC members or regular conference attendees, were aware of the organization's statement on language. While these instructors can be characterized as a very dedicated group with, in some cases, lengthy experience in teaching FYW, the majority work part-time (often at multiple institutions), and many hold master's degrees in literature or creative writing rather than writing studies. Disciplinary leanings and financial and time constraints are all factors that limit these teachers' involvement in CCCC.

Institutionally, my university is typical in its lack of explicit statements regarding language and language use.⁹ The few policies include a TOEFL requirement for international students and a foreign language requirement (which students can place out of) for students in some colleges and programs. The university does not collect information on students' language backgrounds. In surveys and interviews, instructors were asked to describe any program policies related to language or working with linguistically diverse students. In most cases, instructors were unaware of any policies, though several did refer to the relatively new optional section of Composition II for multilingual writers. At the time of the study, this placement option was not described in the program's official materials, as it was still considered a pilot; explicit statements regarding language use in general were also not part of official program materials. It is notable, however, that these materials also do not contain any explicit reference to *English-language* writing, nor is there a directive to focus exclusively on Standard American English, as some instructors and students assumed there to be. In contrast, the faculty handbook, like the course and program goals, emphasizes the need for students to develop rhetorical skills of writing for different audiences and modifying their style, tone, and structures accordingly. It is, of course, possible that the omission of any reference to *English* is merely due to an assumption that the course and program goals are about English.

In interviews, several instructors also commented that required program meetings had not included sessions or workshops specifically devoted to working with multilingual students, though some did refer to this survey and a yearly announcement regarding the multilingual section as raising some awareness of the issues. When asked in interviews whether they felt there was any kind of unstated but generally agreed-upon policy or consensus, the majority of instructors felt there was no common approach. One instructor labeled the issue of multilingualism as "a white elephant in a lot of ways, that people are not sure

how to proceed,” while another stated, “right now, it’s like we’re pretending it doesn’t exist to a certain extent.”

What these instructors are noting is that the absence of explicit language management may add to an invisibility of language (and language minority students), inadvertently contributing to the kind of “tacit English Only policy” or myth of linguistic homogeneity to which composition scholars have called our attention. Writing in regard to the lack of language policy within the professional organization of TESOL, Jim Cummins, a researcher of bilingual education, has noted:

Failure to articulate a position on the issue of the use of monolingual versus bilingual instructional strategies risks linking TESOL with the normalized assumption that monolingual instructional strategies are self-evidently desirable when teaching English to children and adults. (“Multilingualism” 318)

Although Cummins is focusing here on organizational language management, his cautionary statement is, I would argue, quite applicable to writing programs. Indeed, it is at the program level that such statements are likely to directly influence instructional practices, as we already have some evidence that broader-level policy statements may fail to reach classroom teachers. When asked whether our own FYW program should develop some kind of policy or set of guidelines related to working with linguistically diverse students, 54% of the instructors I surveyed said yes, 44% said they were not sure, while only 2% said no. The only concern voiced was that a policy might be too rigid or constraining. Instructors who were interviewed were nearly unanimous in expressing an interest in bottom-up approaches to language management, including program statements developed by program faculty and discussion groups that resulted in written summaries, workshops, and required or optional meetings focusing on strategies for working with multilingual students.

While there was some concern that an explicit program statement may be too directive or may not actually be followed, many instructors felt that the process of crafting such a statement would be beneficial in its raising of awareness. Others noted that once a statement is crafted, it may have unanticipated uses in the future. Finally, one instructor felt that such a statement could be a valuable opportunity for demonstrating the program’s commitment to diversity in a way that reflects the mission of the larger institution:

You know, I grew up in Atlanta . . . and moved to Chicago, and the thing that I am always still to this day stunned by is just the diversity here. So the linguistic

diversity and the writing diversity, I think somehow or another should almost be reflected in [a program statement]. I think also it dovetails into [the institution's] overall mission as a university. So I think there's a benefit on two levels. One, I think it might actually help someone to learn something, which would be a plus. And two . . . part of FYW is that we understand our position here in [the institution's] overall structure, as a diversified university, in a diversified city, and that that is not only where we are at this moment in time, but also where we want to help be, or what we want to be in 10, 15 years, 20 years time.

Reflections

As I worked through this framework of identifying language practices, beliefs, and management, I was struck by the tensions among these components. My goal overall was to understand the forces that may serve to perpetuate monolingual assumptions and practices and to identify instances where opportunities to move forward toward a multilingual lens might exist. Societal ideologies and institutional structures pose obvious barriers to all FYW programs, but looking more locally, the tensions between practices and beliefs may be a more pragmatic place to begin.

Societal ideologies and institutional structures pose obvious barriers to all FYW programs, but looking more locally, the tensions between practices and beliefs may be a more pragmatic place to begin.

Common concerns that both teachers and students had regarding the use of multilingual instructional practices demonstrated prominent myths regarding language, literacy, and language learning. For instance, both teachers and students expressed concerns about how writing that drew on multiple languages might be graded (assuming that it would have to be graded), questions about how writing in forms other than Standard English would be appropriate to a writing class, and beliefs that an English Only environment is most beneficial to second language development. Research in writing and language studies, however, problematizes or counters all of these views.¹⁰ What is more important than the views themselves may be what they indicate: a need to equip teachers with broader knowledge of and strategies for addressing language in general and working with multilingual writers in particular, a need that clearly resonates with recent arguments within *CCC* (MacDonald; Matsuda). It is not my goal here to add to these arguments—others have already put them forth quite convincingly—but instead to reiterate that they pose significant barriers and, given these barriers, to outline the opportunities that might exist locally for developing teachers' repertoires and programs' language management

approaches in ways that might help to reenvision (or, more aptly, recognize) the FYW as the multilingual space that it is.

Opportunities for Transforming Local Policy

When scholars such as Matsuda or Horner and Trimbur call for a shift to reimagining writing classrooms as multilingual spaces, they are primarily calling for a change in underlying assumptions, a recognition that the classroom is already multilingual and that practices that imagine the existence of only a single code are limiting at best and ill-serving at worst. As Horner et al. argue,

As a professional organization, CCCC should continue to engage actively in discussions that help to erase monolingual assumptions through resolutions, modifications to teacher development programs, and increased attention to language-related issues in journals and conference sessions. These broad-level approaches to policy play a valuable role in articulating our professional identity and stance on national issues; at the same time, these approaches are likely insufficient for affecting change in the classroom. Local language policies, on the other hand, can be constructed by and for local practitioners and practices.

language heterogeneity should be viewed by teachers and students as a valuable resource for meaning making. As a professional organization, CCCC should continue to engage actively in discussions that help to erase monolingual assumptions through resolutions, modifications to teacher development programs, and increased attention to language-related issues in journals and conference sessions. These broad-level approaches to policy play a valuable role in articulating our professional identity and stance on national issues; at the same time, these approaches are likely insufficient for affecting change in the classroom. Local language policies, on the other hand, can be constructed by and for local practitioners

and practices. Working together, program administrators and faculty can examine the local barriers and opportunities that prohibit and afford the kind of multilingual assumptions that compositionists have advocated. The input of both program administrators and faculty is crucial, as administrative changes made without input and support of those teaching in the program may be overlooked or even resisted.

One of the first steps programs can take toward changing such assumptions is to identify the nature of linguistic diversity within the institution. This process may take place through an institutional initiative, through an FYW-wide survey, or simply by instructors collecting information about their students' language backgrounds along with other information gathered in the first

week of a new term. As Barbara Kroll argues, identifying linguistically diverse students is crucial, as an unidentified population will easily go unnoticed and unserved. With heightened awareness of the student population, programs are more likely to take on new initiatives; for instance, findings from my local study have played a valuable role in the inclusion of language issues in our move toward the development of a directed self-placement tool.

Further, by reflecting on what they do and why they do it in relation to language, FYW programs can better represent their language practices and beliefs through active language management. In my local study, I found that many opportunities already exist within the institution. The dominant conception of writing within my FYW program, for example, already foregrounds rhetoric rather than a view of written language as a static or pure system of grammar. This ideology is reflected in the program's goals, handbook, meetings, assessment rubrics, and common assignments. Course goals like the following clearly outline a view of writing as multiple and rhetorical: "Students should develop the ability to shape the language of written discourse to their audiences and purposes." As illustrated earlier, many teachers and students share these views and often already draw connections among writing, rhetoric, diverse discourses, and language diversity. Making such connections more explicit, perhaps in handbooks or other official statements, can be an important step toward recognition of language practices and beliefs.

A third opportunity lies in teachers' current teaching strategies. As some instructors in my program already incorporate multilingual practices occasionally, their strategies can be shared broadly and expanded where appropriate or desired. For instance, many actively discuss language diversity and the use of multiple discourses, and several encourage the incorporation of multiple codes into writing where rhetorically appropriate. Program-wide discussions might consider how language diversity in formal, academic texts might also be incorporated, perhaps developing a list of shared resources and examples by students as well as published authors. Similarly, teachers may share assignments they have used that invite students to draw on multiple codes where appropriate. Many teachers in this program, for example, already teach rhetorical analysis, though the assignment may often assume analysis of English-language texts; teachers can consider how to modify their assignments to invite students to analyze texts in any language. Some teachers in my program also encourage students to use home languages for stages of their writing processes, such as planning, freewriting, library research, and field research. These practices

don't require additional classroom time or specialized skills for teachers, but they make clear to students that their multiple languages *are* resources that can contribute to their writing development, including their development of academic English. Many teachers I surveyed and interviewed told me that they had never thought of practices like these before but that participating in the research had encouraged them to consider such strategies in the future. Faculty discussions, perhaps co-facilitated by second language writing specialists, can also explore how teachers might assess student work carried out in multiple languages or how they might teach students to work with translation in their writing, issues that posed concerns for several teachers in my research. Pooling resources among faculty can serve both as a way to expand teachers' repertoires and as more general consciousness raising.

While program discussions like these are vital, the regular turnover among instructors in many FYW programs, whether they be graduate teaching assistants or part-time instructors, necessitates written documents that can record and transmit prior discussions for future faculty. In the same vein, programs may revisit written statements that already exist and consider opportunities for modifying them in ways that raise awareness of language diversity. For instance, one section of our FYW handbook outlines a checklist for designing writing assignments and includes the following item:

[Is the] Task Accessible to All Students? Can the assignment be completed with some success by students at different levels of ability?

This statement already brings instructors' attention to the fact that not all students come with the same ability—language (or even cultural background) could easily be added to this item, serving as a reminder to instructors. As program committees, which ideally include both instructors and administrators, undertake annual reviews of such documents, language-related issues should be considered.

Moving a step beyond revisions of current written statements, administrators can also consider the value of preparing—with program faculty—new explicit statements regarding language that reflect current program practices and beliefs or visions of where the program would like to move. Such statements could include formal guidelines for teachers, additions to program mission statements, or separate resolutions—local versions of the types of statements that CCCC has created. The creation of an explicit language management document can involve program faculty and administrators in a valuable dialogue

while guiding program visions and constructing local spaces. When appropriate, these statements can also link language diversity to institutional missions and values, making arguments that can potentially resonate with administrators throughout the institution.

Ramanathan and Morgan argue that it is time for scholars and practitioners to move beyond describing language policies and the inequities they create and move toward discussions of how we can enact change in our local contexts. While the strategies offered here may not be appropriate in all programs, they illustrate possibilities for internal program reflection and agency. The basic principles of sparking conversations, sharing resources, and taking a proactive approach to language management is applicable across contexts. As we engage in these activities and articulate current or desired approaches to language diversity, we help to construct our own local spaces.

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Notes

1. A broad range of students fall under the term *multilingual students*, including international students and late-arriving and early-arriving U.S. residents, terms used by Dana Ferris in her recent book *Teaching College Writing to Diverse Student Populations*. In this article, I generally use the term *multilingual students* when referring to this population broadly; at times, I use the term *second language writers* to refer to students who may struggle more with certain elements of English language proficiency (often, but not always, international students or late-arriving resident students).
2. Because many institutions do not collect information about students' language backgrounds, attempts to gather such data generally rely on inferences drawn from related statistics, such as numbers of international students or triangulations of figures on immigrant youth, college-going minority youth, and language minority student enrollment and retention in higher education (Harklau and Siegal).
3. Hired specifically as a second language writing specialist, I advocated for and taught this designated section in its first few years of existence. While I received strong support from the program director and associate director, we experienced difficulties early on in institutionalizing this section. Questions such as how to

label the course, how to ensure monolingual English speakers did not enroll, and how best to present multilingual students with their course options have all posed challenges, though we have made significant progress.

4. At the time that this research was carried out, the university reported that 27% of all students, and 30% of undergraduates were “minority students,” a label that includes the categories of Hispanic/Latino, African American, Asian, Multiracial/Non-Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and Native American; an additional 4% of the student population were classified as “international.” Because the university does not collect information about students’ language backgrounds, these figures on ethnicity and national origin only hint at the institution’s linguistic diversity, as ethnicity does not directly correlate with language background; the large population of first- and second-generation Polish Americans, for example, is unaccounted for in the university’s figures but makes up one of the largest groups of multilingual speakers at the university.

5. I understand my researcher subjectivity to be intertwined with my research goals.

6. I use the terms *multilingual writing* or *instructional practices* to refer to the use of two or more languages or language varieties. Language varieties (e.g., World Englishes or code-meshed varieties like Spanglish) are included as part of this definition to acknowledge the fluidity of language.

7. While Jordan has illuminated the problematic ways in which readers that include readings such as those by Rodriguez and Anzaldúa may situate multilingual writers, these texts also offer instructors a valuable entryway for discussing language as a rhetorical element of writing.

8. Because monolingual and multilingual student responses were nearly identical, I have not separated them here.

9. As Dadak notes, citing Rawley, it is indeed common for institutions to lack explicit policies in relation to supporting international students’ language skills; anecdotally, the situation appears to be similar for U.S. resident multilingual students.

10. Readers interested in following up on these issues may turn to Spack and Sadow on the value of including ungraded writing, Casanave on the role that non-academic writing (such as journal writing) can play in the development of language skills (70–75), and Cummins (“Rethinking”) on the role that students’ native languages play in development of second language academic proficiency. Bean et al. also address these and related issues at length, exploring the many variables that might influence when inviting students to write in their home languages might be most appropriate.

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