

# TRANSLINGUAL APPROACHES TO READING AND WRITING

Centering students' languages and cultures  
within reflective practices of translation

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## Abstract

This collaborative project examines the challenges to reading and writing that surround international students who enroll in U.S. first-year-writing courses, with the goal to both query and enhance the students' ability to read and write in their target language, while drawing on their home languages and cultures as translingual and transcultural resources. Specifically, we discuss the reading and writing practices of multilingual students in the context of a translation assignment. This assignment is unique in its use of learner-centered pedagogy to place the students' translingual movement among languages as a site for inquiry and a subject of analysis in their development of L2 reading and writing skills.

Keywords: translation, translingual, reflective practice, first-year writing, English Language Learners

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A growing concern among teachers globally is how to engage English Language Learners (ELLs) in classrooms that are standardized around L2—most often lingua franca English—reading and writing development and practice. This concern is also present in U.S. first-year-writing classrooms, especially as these become increasingly populated by international students. Partly as a response to the rise in multilinguals in U.S. first-year-writing classrooms, translingualism has developed in the field of writing studies as both theoretical frame and pedagogical approach. A translingual framework allowed us to develop and implement a translation assignment that enabled and supported multilingual student practices of reading and

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writing. This assignment invites students to individually and collectively translate cultural texts from home languages into the shared English lingua franca of the U.S. writing classroom. Specifically, translation as both concept and practice is used to illustrate to students that comparison and reflection are at the center of reading and writing within and across languages. Taking a translingual approach directs students' attention to the "ways in which the social context of reading and writing can be used to construct meaning" (Morrow, 1997, p. 465).

Consequently, our research project aims to draw attention to the myriad approaches ELLs enact as they create meaning. Through inviting students to work within, between, and across languages—via not only the act of translation, but also through comparative analysis and reflective practice—this assignment pushes students to consider language and culture as important "social contexts" that are usable resources in their reading and writing practices. In positioning not simply translation, but also the acts of reading and writing, as a socialized meaning-making process, this study considers the following research questions:

- How can assignments based in translation, and specifically the translation process, help ELLs develop a better understanding of reading and writing as socially and culturally constructed?
- How can assignments based in translation be leveraged to support reading and writing development in ELLs, specifically in terms of meaning-making across languages and cultures as social contexts?
- How can the translation of cultural texts enable ELLs to reflect and explain their own reading and writing processes, via language negotiation, within their own lived realities?

These questions stress the importance of our study in terms of leveraging reading and writing skills as social and cultural resources in meaning-making; specifically, we designed the translation assignment as an exercise to enhance students' awareness of their own reading and writing practices. In turn, this move requires students to pay attention to the importance of audience, culture(s), and language(s) in both reading and writing practices, positioning them to consider reading and writing as a translingual process wherein students work within and across multiple languages to construct meaning.

## 2. A TRANSLINGUAL PERSPECTIVE FOR READING AND WRITING

Springer, Wilson, and Dole (2014) invite literacy teachers to recognize the great divide between the reading tasks expected of students in high school and those in post-secondary settings. In particular, they focus on students who are placed in developmental reading and writing courses, suggesting that such students often

have “fundamental literacy skills, but lack real reading proficiency” (p. 299)<sup>1</sup>. This lack of reading expertise manifests through behaviors such as skimming without considering the full meaning of the text, failing to make connections to other materials, not analyzing the context, and avoiding reading Western texts. When this research is extended to ELL populations, it is apparent that some of the challenges these students face are difficulties in recognizing the relationships between purpose, audience, and genre; this is particularly so when international students are required to read Standard Written English (SWE) texts that have a projected Western (often U.S.) audience (Yasuda 2011). We argue that part of the problem is that ELLs are often not taught the cultural conventions associated with SWE texts, and that once students are made aware of the social and cultural contexts of reading and writing across cultures, it becomes much easier for them to recognize specific strategies in their own reading and writing practices. In this way, our research responds to Yasuda in moving towards translingual reading, arguing that it is not simply language experiences that affect reading and writing skills, but also cultural. We suggest that ELL academic success is not based solely on proficiency, but also on the meaning-making and knowledge-building that are necessary in negotiating the complexities of how language and cultural differences affect SWE reading and writing practices.

For instance, first-year-writing courses often stress the importance of reading in the context of developing students’ writing skills. Consequently, the pedagogical relationships between reading and writing that teachers strive towards in a first-year-writing classroom must center around not only meaning-making and knowledge-building, but also audience awareness. This study uses a translingual perspective that responds to Salvatori’s (1996, p. 445) argument that a constant struggle in the field of U.S. writing studies is to create reading theories that are more conducive to teaching “reading and writing as interconnected activities,” not simply within one language (SWE), but across L1 and L2 languages. We argue that a consideration of translingualism within these classrooms is especially important because it creates learning environments that embrace and foster ELL experiences, which also enable the development of culturally-sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012). Our pedagogical approach, which invites linguistic and cultural negotiation via translingualism, integrates students’ own understanding of writing to motivate their reading, and vice versa. This positions students to not only write more nuanced texts, but to also develop into more critical readers who are attune to the ways that genre, culture, and audience shape both the reading and writing of texts.

In addition to continuing efforts to prepare students to become independent, self-regulating readers with a set of cognitive and metacognitive strategies at their disposal, researchers have pointed to the importance of recognizing students’ di-

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<sup>1</sup> While we do not agree that ELLs should be placed in developmental classes, it is important to note many writing programs in the U.S. have specific—often, labeled remedial—sections that ELLs are placed into.

verse and ever-changing lived realities and identities (Jiménez, 2001), especially the informal literacies and the rich textual resources they bring to the table. Researchers also have recommended that teachers of ELLs provide explicit modeling and instruction on individual reading strategies (e.g. close reading, visualization, reading stamina) (Ivey, 1999; Springer, Wilson & Dole, 2014); opportunities to engage with texts of varying levels of difficulties, cultural themes, topics, genres, and modes, including student-generated texts (Alvermann, 2004); and integration of strategic code-switching (Jiménez, 2001; Jiménez & Gersten, 1999). While these theories are not seated in translanguaging, we argue that at the center of these moves must also be a recognition of students' languages and cultures as funds of knowledge (Jiménez, 2003; Rubinstein-Avila, 2003) and their linguistic and cultural "in-betweenness" (Sarroub, 2002). As such, the translation assignment is designed as a reading and writing exercise that recognizes the liminality of student experiences with languages and cultures, and the ways in which linguistic choice and cultural context cooperatively inform one another.

This liminality is at the heart of translanguaging theory, which stresses the important connects and disconnects between a writer's intention(s) and a reader's understanding. In U.S. writing studies, translanguaging positions SWE as a practice that is in constant negotiation with other languages. Translanguaging inquiry is especially important in discussions of translation due to its normalization and recognition of the fluidity of language(s), and its movement away from dominant ideologies of SWE (Canagarajah, 2012; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue, 2011). While Canagarajah (2013) has argued that translanguaging writing is most useful in its ability to produce texts that demonstrate successful language negotiation across diverse discourse communities, we suggest that translanguaging approaches also offer unique insight into the cooperative relationships between reading and writing. Ultimately, the translanguaging practices within the translation assignment enable students to make transparent the various "communicative repertoires they bring to the classroom while simultaneously acquiring new ones" (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p. 245). The translation assignment invites students to engage in social conversations that surface thoughts, and "give voice to [the student's] own readings of the [cultural] world through writing" (Morrow, 1997, p. 466). It also teaches reading and writing as connected, positioning students to recognize the ways in which "assigned course reading relates to and can help them with their writing tasks" (Bunn, 2013, p. 505); when students consider the living, translanguaging realities of cultural texts they are better positioned to understand how important the role of reading is to the task of composing.

Through the translation project, students come to understand and to articulate the complex lexical and syntactical processes involved in their ongoing translations among languages and cultures. They come to name for themselves what theorists in the field of translation studies see as the central problem in translation—that of finding an "equivalency" between the languages involved (Delisle, 1980). In the case of our students, resolving that problem is an imperfect but enlightening task

that focuses on the communicative task and purpose at hand—a solution that aligns with advocates of Skopos theory, which emphasizes the purpose of any given translation rather than its “equivalent” value (Reiss, 1989), or with Delise’s (1980) notion of how “*theorie du sens*,” or meaning that resides outside the text, impacts the translator’s task, or with Hurtado’s concept of the functional aspect of translation (2001). That being said, in its rhetorical and pedagogical focus, our study draws more on the work of translanguaging scholars (Canagarajah, 2013; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Creese & Blackledge, 2010), and is closely allied to the study of Jiménez et al. (2015), who incorporated translation activities into middle school bilingual classrooms in order to forward the children’s metacognitive understanding of their own reading processes. Yet because of institutional differences and the sheer variety of home languages in our poly-lingual classrooms, we also veer from these scholars, too, in that our project does not require that our teachers be necessarily proficient in the home languages of her students. Our focus instead is on what the students themselves say and come to understand about their own reading and writing practices.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 *Context of study*

This research collaboration was housed in the writing department of a large, public Midwestern U.S. university. In recent years, the population of international students in this institution has increased dramatically. The first-year-writing course in which the study was focused is populated by primarily freshman, international students, with the majority being Chinese, and others from such countries as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Thailand. In response to this shifting demographic, a number of instructors experimented with new approaches that paid heed to the recent call for translanguaging pedagogies (Horner et al., 2011). This experimentation brought about curricular redesign, which worked to position the students’ own language(s) and culture(s) as assets and resources in the practices of reading and writing. These initiatives highlighted students’ negotiations of languages, cultures, and genres (Canagarajah, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013).

#### 3.2 *Data collection and analysis*

In this pilot study, we developed grounded theory that systematically described students’ evolving understandings of language differences as indicative of transnational genres, discourses, and cultures. Data gathered from five sections of the course, where different versions of the translation assignment were used, illustrates students’ practices of reading and writing in terms of a dynamic negotiation, or “shuttling between languages” (Canagarajah, 2012). To that end, we analyzed a focal set of nine students’ reflective memos to inductively generate primary cate-

gories (i.e. word equivalency, idioms, theories of translation and language, history and previous educational experiences). Focal texts were coded at the sentence level. We then drew on socio-linguistic theories (Gee, 2005) to group them into secondary analytical constructs (i.e. language as object, cultural perspectives and value systems, and translation as inquiry). Emergent categories and constructs were further triangulated with translation texts, invention artifacts, and pre- and post-surveys to allow us to uncover “invisible” translation strategies and students’ emergent theories that attend to the complex, dialogic relationship between languages and cultures, as well as reading and writing.

### 3.3 *The assignment*

Through a sequence of activities, students engage in individual and collective translation as well as reflection on their translation processes and strategies. Figure 1 highlights the shared steps all three instructors implemented.

*Figure 1: Translation narrative assignment stages<sup>2</sup>*

1. Individual translation
  - Students individually read and translate cultural texts into English
2. Group comparison and reflection
  - Students read each other’s translation text and identify differences and strategies
  - Students collaboratively develop theories of translation, language, and cultural differences
  - Students share and discuss theories and themes of translation
3. Individual reflection
  - Students write reflection essays
  - Student essays compare translation differences at the individual and group levels
  - Students develop conceptual understanding of language/culture differences
  - Students collectively develop theories of metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness

Students experience purposeful, translingual reading activities in all stages of the process: the early pre-activity reading assignments that we use to introduce the project; the students’ reading and then translating a cultural story to English from

<sup>2</sup> *These stages are adapted by individual instructors in response to particular needs of the students.*

their home languages; the comparative reading and analysis of their respective translations, which acts much like a peer review; and their final reflective analysis, which has them looking back on and interpreting the various translation choices they had made, especially when compared to those of their peers. For the purposes of this paper, we especially highlight the pedagogical affordances of steps two, three, and four as they are central to ELLs' growth as both readers and writers. We describe how these steps of the assignment cultivate critical rhetorical analysis through foregrounding students' cultures and languages, positioning student writing as reading material for linguistic and cultural analysis, and situating peer comparison as a reflective and integrated practice of reading and writing. Finally, we discuss how we were able to leverage the translanguaging framework of the translation assignment to forward the multilingual students' reading of other class assignments.

However, before we move to our discussion, we will spend some time foregrounding and scaffolding the inner workings of the assignment, with the goal of offering pedagogical strategies for others to take up. On the one hand, given the preliminary activities outlined below, the students follow a similar pattern in their selection of a "cultural story" to translate: that is, they typically choose folk tales, poems, or songs from their home countries for this assignment. On the other hand, though, these preliminary activities are purposefully designed to complicate our students' understanding of their own reading processes across languages and cultures.

One example is when students participate in a version of the childhood "telephone" game—where a student initiates a sentence (in English), whispers it to a peer, and that peer in turn whispers the phrase to someone else. By the time the sentence makes its way through ten students, it is significantly warped from its original version—a revelation that in hindsight had the students speculating on how much a message could change in the processes of transmission and communication, depending on who spoke and how the message was heard. We also discuss how such entangled transmissions are a form of translation that occurs in many socially constructed contexts. As instructors, we also incorporate reading activities involving different versions of the same "cultural story" (for example, John Henry as a folk song and then as a recent Disney video), so that students could see how much stories changed depending on their location in time and space. We should also note here that throughout these exercises, we work to complicate the notion of "culture"—given different contexts, audiences, and purposes (for example, how depending on context, John Henry can represent the strength of a Disney hero designed for a young audience, or indicate African American resistance against inequitable labor practices). Throughout this project and the course, we also complicate the notion of "culture" beyond national boundaries: again, consistently emphasizing the rhetorical purposes to which any given text might be put, given its audience, setting, and form.

In another exercise, students (in small groups) are asked to compare their initial interpretation of poems written by U.S. or Canadian authors (such as Langston Hughes's "Dream Variations" or Margaret Atwood's "Siren Song"), with a subsequent reading once the professor "filled in" with relevant background or historical information (in the case of Hughes, the history of lynching; in the case of Atwood, her feminist writings). Such class exercises in "cultural reading" lead students to realize how greatly understanding of texts can be linked to knowledge that is often shared by the members of a given culture, but is not always visible to "outsiders."

Another discussion was built upon analyses of poetry, where a student provides the class with a poem written in their home language with a word-by-word translation in English alongside. This exercise helps the students see the inadequacy of word-by-word translations, which do not account for the complexities of shared cultural and linguistic knowledge embedded in texts—something that the instructor was to leverage later, when the students began to read more challenging assignments.

In making these moves, our goal was not to teach our multilingual students to become full-fledged translators, but rather to draw inductively on what they themselves could learn about the translation processes and the complex translingual relationships among languages, cultures, and interpretive acts; and to leverage that knowledge in the interest of their future reading and writing development. That is, while we recognize the value of translation studies theory, our main interest here is pedagogical, in the sense of building on students' enhanced awareness of the fact that equivalence in difference is the key problem of translation (Delisle, 1980) in order to help them develop strategies for reading unfamiliar, culturally imbedded texts.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

##### *4.1 Comparing translations as a form of peer review*

Part two of the translation assignment is a brainstorming activity where the students compare the shared cultural stories that they have individually translated from their home languages into English. Such comparisons evoke rich classroom discussion and note-taking, as in small groups the students explain their specific translation choices to others, and note how such differences create individualized interpretations of the same text. As such, this activity positions students to problematize the intersections of language and culture, as they consider how cultural ways of thinking are constructed through translingual language use, and how differently these might be expressed, depending on the translator's sense of their audience. For example, in analyzing the differences between his own and his peers' translations, one writer reflects that:



I just translated them from Chinese directly with most written words. In contrast, my partner used some oral words. For example, the word “你” in sentence ‘Did you agree with me?’ I translated as ‘you’ where in my partner’s translation, he used the word ‘guys,’ as in ‘you guys.’ It was a little bit different from mine...I chose to use the word “you” to connect with the reader. “You” kind of says that the reader is my friend. In contrast, my friend had a more casual tone, like almost slang. My partner used more oral words to emphasize the emotion in the story. It seemed that he thought the slang in the story showed the person in the story are much closer in English.

Due to our teaching philosophy, which honors the legitimacy of students’ writing, despite what might be seen as linguistic departure from SWE, we choose not to focus on error or error correction, and instead strive to emphasize the authenticity of students voices. As such, our translations and transcription methodology adhere to the actual student writing, without editing or modification. As this comparative analysis indicates, both students had discussed the implications of their respective word choice—“you” vs. “you guys”—in terms that took into account their sense of their reader: constructed here as a cultural “outsider” whose language was English. Clearly, part of this comparative discussion, as observed by the teacher and then described later in the students’ reflections, circulates around which student has done this task of translation by way of cultural explanation and communication better, and how. Consequently, students discuss their differing word choice, syntax, and added cultural background in terms of how each of these elements might affect their readers, as they anticipate and weigh the possible effects. In these ways, the comparative peer analysis leads students to consider who has expressed their ideas better to an “outsider” audience—one not familiar with the cultural and linguistic mores and understandings that the peers within the group shared.

Promoting such translingual meta-linguistic analyses engendered through comparison with the work of their classmates, the translation comparisons constitute a form of more traditional peer review, where writers review one another’s drafts in progress. For all writers, the composing process involves a complex juggling of multiple factors, as studies such as Almagot, Caporossi, Chesnut & Ros (2011) underscore; therefore, it is essential that instructors find ways to scaffold or unpack the writing process for ELLs. The comparative aspect of the translation project does this kind of unpacking, as it helps students become more aware of their reading audience, and to see and conjecture, comparatively, how their own translations might be interpreted by others. Berg (1999) argues that inexperienced writers sometimes need to be taught to consider incongruity between their intended meaning and the actual meaning perceived by their readers (Berg in Min, 2006; p. 134); the translation comparisons foreground this process. During peer review, writers experience “negotiation episodes” when they receive information and suggestions “from each other to make their writing clearer from their partners’ perspectives” (Suzuki, 2008, p. 223); Suzuki claims that through such negotiations, students come to acknowledge the “gap between what they wanted to write, and what they actually wrote” (p. 223). The comparative analysis part of the translation project has this kind of effect on students. For instance, a common student realization during these

comparative reflections is that, “we need to consider from our readers side ensuring that they understand what we are talking about” and, that “comparing my ideas to others can help me get new ideas.” In addition to providing an opportunity for writers to find out how writing communicates to readers, comparative analysis engenders an opportunity for writers to learn by reading and evaluating the writing of their peers; writers see other ways of how it is done—that is, what solving the translating “problem” might look like in the hands of other writers. Another student explains:

For writing, the biggest change in my article is to read my article as a reader. When I read my article as a reader, I could see the problems in my article, this can made me know where should I revised my project. In the past, I just wrote down what I want to talk about, and never thought about what should I do that can make my readers think my article is easier to follow.

In this way, comparative reading and discussion of one another’s translations help the students think more consciously and purposefully of their audience. This example shows how ELLs are invited into a dialogical space of translingual negotiation, where they consider one another’s rhetorical practices and choices from a cultural perspective.

#### *4.2 Developing metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness through individual reflection*

The analysis of comparative and individual reflection comes together in stage three, a final reflection when students write an essay that explains—both to those in their own translation group and the other “outsiders” who are either unfamiliar with the text at hand and/or the language from which the text was translated—how and why they came to make their translating choices, and what they thus learned from this project. This individual reflective writing is key, as students are invited to articulate how they handled the challenge of translating the “invisible” aspects of the text that are only visible to those who have familiarity with and understanding of this culture. As they reflect both on their original translations and those of their peers, the students ask themselves a number of questions: As you translate a text from your own culture, how do you make the invisible visible? How does your ability to “make visible” compare to that of your peers? What kind of cultural information or context do you or others have to provide in order to make the meaning of this work clear and transparent to others?

Sometimes the reflections focus on linguistic and cultural differences between the student’s home language and English. For example, one Chinese student reflects upon the need to provide the necessary cultural context for her U.S. reader; she wrote in her reflection about the importance of considering meaning when translating texts across languages and cultures:

Because the ancient Chinese word contains more extensive meaning than the word on its own because sometime when people in the old time, they write with a lot of stuff

omitted assuming others can figure it out. If I translate 以椎毀之 directly into English it'd be 'use hammer break it'; which is not fully indicated what is going on. But the meaning of the paragraph is actually: the thief cannot carry the heavy bell, so 'he tried (以) to break (毀) it (之) apart with his hammer (椎) and carry the debris back home.' So in this case, we need to...add the missing pieces of information in order for the English readers to make sense of the story.

This example captures how students begin to treat language as objects through their analysis of lexical, semantic, and syntactical choices. A common observation students make points to emergent understanding of languages as rule-governed linguistic systems and the need to make sense of semantic and syntactical changes when reading and writing across languages. As this student points out, her translation needs to account for a rhetorical style that emphasizes brevity, and assumes reader responsibility. Her translation involves unpacking a brief narrative written in ancient Chinese as she reworks key pieces of information into a syntactic structure that follows SWE grammar. In so doing, she supplies proper transition words that indicates the logical flow of the story, adds pronouns (he), prepositions (apart, with), and infinitives (to break) to make the sentence work. Such reflective work lends to metalinguistic awareness that subsequently informs revised goals and strategies for reading and writing. For one thing, the student comes to theorize reading and writing in SWE as more author-responsible—that is, authors rely on specific and accurate words to help readers. She then revises her immediate learning goal to use reading materials to acquire precise and accurate vocabulary, to keep a writing journal that records well-written sentences, and to use dictionaries for nuanced meanings.

A comparative juxtaposition of texts presented and represented across languages and translations prompts students to not only theorize languages as informed by linguistic, cultural and rhetorical contexts, but also to consider each in relation to other languages. In addition to managing languages as objects of analysis and performance, students also engage with broader transcultural concerns, most tellingly illustrated through their attempts to unpack and articulate language choices as informed by culturally specific knowledge about people and histories. Another student reflects upon how she had explained the meaning of the “autumn” and “spring” periods of Chinese history in her translation, because otherwise, she argues, a U.S. reader might “think that this story happened between spring and fall, whereas a Chinese reader of this term would think that ‘Spring and Autumn Period’ meant a particular Chinese historical period.” In this instance, the student recognizes the complexity of cultural contexts that need to be explained more fully in translation, in order for a Western reader to understand the original story. This in turn enhances the students’ understanding of the extent to which linguistic and cultural traditions can inform their (and others’) reading and interpretation of texts.

Thus, throughout the reflective process students actively engage in discussions about the “translatable” and “untranslatable” aspects of their cultures, languages,

and experiences. By observing and questioning the many differences that arise across translations, students become cognizant of the multiple possibilities of translingual and metalinguistic negotiation inherent to the act of translating texts across languages and cultures. Because emphasis in this final essay is on the many possibilities, or choices, available within any translation, rather than on the translation itself, students may also reflect on what they learned from their group partners—and in fact, may choose to argue that in some cases, their partners' translation may be the better one, and why. Moreover, students often note that their original interpretation of the cultural story had changed through the act of comparing their translation to those of their peers. From our perspective as teachers, it was not whether or not a student's translation ended up being more "correct," or closer to the ideas expressed in the original, but what kinds of evidence the student mustered in support of their claims, as they analyzed the choices they and their peers had made.

Thus, this final stage of the assignment makes most transparent the writer's meaning as negotiated with the meanings developed by his peers. Here is Rinnert's (2015) dynamic transfer, or Canagarajah's (2006) "shuttling between languages," as the writer attempts to clarify his choices for his reader. One student describes how much the translation reading and writing activities had informed his understanding of the importance of communicating his ideas fully to others:

I understand how to make my language understandable in the translation—consider from the audience side, that translate the article based on the meaning, not merely words. To really make a perfect translation we should not translate the story word by word. If you do not do this, your reader will get lost. Since they are not Chinese, the other students in our class known nothing about the languages and the language habit (ellipses, orders, interchangeable words) in Chinese.

Another assertion that writers often make is to argue for the inevitable impossibility of this writing challenge; you can give a flavor of the original in his home language; you can dance around it with images, stories, and examples from your home tongue, but you cannot fully replicate the original. One student considers how lived experiences with language affect translation choices:

every individual translation is extremely hard to be same from different people and people always emphasize different parts of same sentence. Anyway, it is normal for us to see many differences between our translations because of different understanding that depends on how familiar people are on both languages...there are different organizations of sentence due to different English education. According to two examples, the differences about translations are from our different language level that decides on what vocabulary we choose and what type of sentence we use. Therefore, the significant factor causing different translation is how familiar people are on both languages.

In this way, students use analysis of their own written materials, as well as lived experiences with language and culture, as resources for reflective reading and writing.

## 5. CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

### 5.1 *Benefits*

From the students' perspective, the translation project's benefits far outweigh its limitations. The ability of this assignment to create an exigency for students to interrogate and analyze the broad range of linguistic and cultural experiences that inform their many collective and individual experiences as readers and writers is something that is striven for across first-year-writing courses. Through inviting students to work within, between, and across languages this assignment pushes ELLs to consider language and culture as important "social contexts" that are usable resources in *both* their reading and writing practices. Specifically, reflection helps students recognize reading and writing as socially and culturally constructed acts wherein linguistic choices can be leveraged to support diverse reading and writing tasks, both within and beyond the first-year-writing classroom. Moreover, perhaps most importantly, this assignment, and the dialogue surrounding it, emphasizes to ELLs the importance of their own lived realities, and consequently their own agency and power as readers and writers of L1 and L2 texts.

In asking students to negotiate multiple approaches to translation this assignment positions reading as a way of learning writing, and vice versa. Reflecting on one's own reading and writing practices as interconnected processes encourages a better understanding of rhetorical situations. When student writers reflect on their processes of translation, particularly the social contexts of language and the construction of meaning across languages, it makes visible the ways in which linguistic and cultural conventions allow for specific translating choices. Students' discussion of how translations differ across group members, and decisions of which translation choices make most sense and why provide insight into the ways that social and cultural contexts enable students to incorporate and analyze discussions of language, culture, and genre. This process leads to deep thinking about the nature of texts, and how tied they are to specific communities and cultures both inside and outside the academy.

In this way, the translation assignment benefits students because it invites them to engage with translanguaging concerns, most tellingly illustrated through the negotiation of cultural sensitivities. In other words, students learn to unpack and articulate culturally specific aesthetics, rhetorical styles, and literary devices embodied in their texts. Most students' discussion reflects the dilemma embedded in their "bifocal" lens (Sarroub, Todd, & Sweeney, 2007). The challenge to not only incorporate reading and writing, but also to emphasize both as interconnected lies in bridging the meaning and style of the original text and that of the audience's expectations and interpretations.

As we have previously reported (Kiernan, Meier & Wang, 2016), in making such moves, students often find themselves wondering whether it is even possible for a reader from another cultural background to understand the tropes, tales, and met-

aphors that inform much of the original meaning of the story. Because a reader's knowledge of these literary devices is often assumed in their home culture, translating them means decoding their "hidden meanings" and unpacking the corresponding rhetorical traditions. It is through these juxtapositions of and reflections on texts across languages and cultures that students develop a translanguaging stance. To make texts from their home cultures comprehensible to cultural outsiders, students learn to recognize the affordances of genres and rhetorical styles across linguistic and cultural contexts, to articulate such culturally specific expectations, and to name and strategize moves that they already make in everyday conversations and communications. In particular, many reflect on the importance of supplying missing background information and inferential details, unpacking established assumptions and tropes (and citing them), and using reflective practice to explore differences among people's ways of thinking and behaving.

From the teacher's perspective, the translation project provides a translanguaging asset-based learning experience for ELLs that in turn can be leveraged for other reading and writing challenges. For example, the project provides a lesson for the instructors to lean into the inadequacy of word-by-word translations when multilingual students face their next reading assignment in SWE. Other challenging readings, such as scholarly articles, can be introduced by reflecting on lessons garnered from the translation assignment; students can be encouraged to look at scholarly and other texts as cultural products, reflecting specific community goals and "insider knowledge." Unpacking and understanding the "cultural work" that scholarly articles do, in terms of situating a current study in terms of both past research and new findings, can help students see these "cultural texts" as serving specific purposes—just as the "cultural stories" they had translated and read. In turn, students can be encouraged to rely on other tools (besides just translating word-by-word) to unpack this cultural context: such as inferring and gathering meaning from context and illustrations; identifying key areas of readings (such as abstracts) that may require especially careful reading; and doing preliminary research (i.e., into the author or the issue at hand) before engaging a given text.

## 5.2 Limitations

Our position is that the many benefits of this assignment far outweigh any limitations; however, it is important to pause and consider what adjustments can be made to this assignment sequence, and posit directions for future research. We will do this through offering a brief description of student difficulties, assignment redirections, and future research possibilities.

ELL students, for the most part, embraced this assignment, and were comfortable working translingually between their L1 and L2 languages. However, a limitation that often arose in our classrooms was the diverse, and often weighted, population demographics of our students. Specifically, most students (~80%) were coming to our classrooms from China. As outlined in our methodology, this is not to say that

students from other countries were not present in these classrooms, but due to the large population of Chinese, their voices and experiences may have been marginalized; however, we feel that the translation assignment did attempt to combat this through its focus on all students' experiences and compositions.

In terms of future iterations of this assignment, it would be useful for students to engage in other types of translation activities. For instance, while cultural stories are particularly accessible to students, because many of them have grown up with versions of these tales, it would also be useful for students to move outside this comfort zone and translate unfamiliar texts. Possibilities for these texts include scholarly texts, popular media, and digital texts. We envision, however, that in order for students to move to these more advanced texts the initial attention to culture stories would need to remain embedded in the course, as translation is very much dependent upon cultural interpretation, not just linguistic interpretation. Consequently, we argue that in order to engage fully in other forms of translation, students must have a foundational understanding of the importance of culture in terms of audience—and as tied to specific genres. That way, the translation of cultural stories could be leveraged for other reading/translating challenges that students face in other contexts: for example, scholarly articles, case studies, and annotated bibliographies within their disciplines, and how these do the “cultural work” of specific academic and professional communities.

While we position ourselves as teacher-researchers situated in writing studies, we do acknowledge the necessity to bridge scholarship across disciplines to build a robust theoretical framework informed by cross-disciplinary insights. For one thing, research on translation as a pedagogical and theoretical construct might benefit from the work of scholars in translation studies such as Hurtado and Delisle, cited above. For example, researchers might explore the different translation practices of professional translators and language learners, as these two groups comprise different populations in different contexts and with different goals. Translation scholars, who are more concerned with the complex range of competencies demonstrated by professional translators, might benefit from a socially situated view of translation, especially with regards to how metalingual awareness and cultural understandings might co-emerge through the productive interrogation and examination of multilinguals' lived experiences with translation and border-crossing. Conversely, writing teachers might benefit from a holistic understanding of translation competencies, including grammatical competence in target and source languages, access to vocabulary in professional and cultural domains, explicit metalinguistic knowledge of grammatical overlaps, pragmatic routines through which communicative intentions overlap, knowledge of styles, genres, and dialects, and so on (Hall, Smith & Wicaksono, 2011). Similarly, future work might also benefit from transdisciplinary conversations with theorists in the field of cultural rhetorics, which views cultures as rhetorical and rhetorics as cultural, as well as research on rhetorical ecologies and circulation: in other words, on the movements of representations of culture through time and space.

Similarly, writing teachers at post-secondary levels can benefit from empirical and pedagogical research conducted at the secondary level, such as studies of students' translanguaging practices in out-of-school contexts (Orellana & Reynolds, 2008) and pedagogical models that make similar use of translation exercises as a window and scaffold to students' growing understandings about language (Jiménez, David, Fagan, Risko, Pacheco, Pray & Gonzales, 2015). Such an attention might help literacy teachers across all levels recognize the gaps in curricular and pedagogical moves taken in supporting multilingual students' linguistic and social development and explore ways to bridge such gaps through pedagogical innovations such as the one presented here.

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To conclude, the major take-away from this research is that inviting students to enact translingual reading and writing processes of translating, comparing, and reflecting engages them in metalinguistic analysis that heightens their explicit awareness of the communicative tools they need in order to make their writing clear to readers who do not share the same cultural or linguistic context. In terms of translingualism, this focus on metalinguistic analysis and awareness better enables students to recognize relationships between reading, writing, and audience. We suggest that when translingual approaches are not adopted, these moves can remain invisible to students; however, foregrounding these strategies through reflective reading and writing aids their academic and cognitive development by positioning the students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as resources and assets. Enabling such visibility is especially important when designing first-year writing courses populated by multilingual internationals because, as Yasuda (2011) asserts, it is often difficult for ELLs to recognize the relationship between purpose, audience, and genre. In particular, we suggest that reflective peer review performed from a translingual pedagogical perspective provides opportunities to develop reading and writing skills that are important in the development of metalinguistic knowledge and a negotiative stance toward multiple languages and cultures. In such moments, reflective peer review can provide the exigency for these translingual discussions, as the students' awareness of the cultural and linguistic differences help fuel and inform their understandings of the different ways to make their writing—in this case translation—accessible to others.

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