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# Advancing a Transnational, Transdisciplinary and Translingual Framework: A Professional Development Series for Teaching Assistants in Writing and Spanish Programs<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Considering the need for writing and language programs to develop translingual and transdisciplinary pedagogies for teacher development at the graduate level (Canagarajah, 2016; Williams & Rodrigue, 2016), the authors examine the design of a multilingual pedagogy professional development series for first-year Spanish and Writing teaching assistants (TAs). As designers of and participants in the series, the authors explore the benefits and challenges inherent in transdisciplinary and translingual conversations and discuss implications for teaching and research in language and writing instruction and teacher development. In order to advance transdisciplinary and translingual approaches as a new normal in composition studies (Tardy 2017; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue 2011), the authors hope to provide a professional development framework that adapts to the linguistic realities of different institutional contexts and students' lived language experiences.

Scholarship in writing studies and education has shown that colleges and universities across the nation have seen an increase in the multilingual student population. Multilingual writers and language learners possess rhetorical assets that can enhance not only their writing and language learning experiences but also their knowledge-making opportunities. Thus, writing and language programs in the United States are in a unique position to design professional development that may result in linguistically inclusive pedagogical approaches. Jonathan Hall (2009) argues that for scholars in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) to respond to their mission of being agents of change, they must transform their teaching practices to adequately meet the needs of multilingual learners. Additionally, Hall (2014) claims that WAC support services should ensure that the needs of multilingual learners are central and “not just as an add-on” (p. 7). Similarly, Shapiro, Cox, Shuck, and Simnitt (2016) call for writing and language programs to develop professional development opportunities and pedagogical approaches central not only to multilingual writers' needs as language learners and writers but also to their already sophisticated and diverse language and writing abilities. To do this, scholars in composition and WAC programs have advocated for creating transdisciplinary collaborations (Guerra 2008; Kells 2007; Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011; Tardy 2017), designing effective multilingual pedagogy faculty professional development (Cavazos, 2015; Cox, 2014; Geller, 2011; Worden et al., 2015), and reimagining teacher training at the graduate level (Williams & Rodrigue, 2016; Winzenried, 2016; Canagarajah 2016). In this article, we seek to respond to these three recommendations by exploring the

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design, implementation, and implications of a multilingual pedagogy professional development for TAs in our context.

## What Does It Mean to Teach Bilingually?: The Local Context

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) is a Hispanic Serving Institution located along the Mexico/U.S. border. When UTRGV was established in Fall 2015 as part of a consolidation between the University of Texas at Brownsville and the University of Texas-Pan American, a new departmental structure was also created. The co-authors who teach at UTRGV were formerly in the Department of English and the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. We are now all in the Department of Writing and Language Studies (WLS), comprised of the following units: modern languages, applied linguistics, and rhetoric and composition.

One of the visions of our university is to become a "highly engaged bilingual university." This vision has led faculty at all levels, from full professors to teaching assistants, to ask: "What does it mean to be a bilingual university?" "What does it mean to teach bilingually?" In our department, faculty began to ask critical questions that impact how we teach writing and language acquisition. For instance, colleagues teaching rhetoric and composition asked: "How should I adapt my pedagogy to help students develop bilingual writing abilities?" Faculty teaching Spanish as a Heritage Language inquired: "How can we respond to students' diverse levels of language fluency in Spanish heritage?" Faculty teaching modern languages asked: "If I am not bilingual in English and Spanish, how can I effectively contribute to fulfilling UTRGV's vision?" These questions illustrate the complexities associated with building linguistically inclusive educational environments in writing and language coursework.

In order to capitalize on our unique departmental configuration and respond to UTRGV's bilingual university vision, a grant from the Graduate College supported our project to develop a multilingual pedagogy professional development (MPPD) series for Teaching Assistants<sup>2</sup> in our department. The rationale behind this initiative is that an MPPD centered on teaching assistants can enhance quality writing and language undergraduate instruction as TAs build cross-linguistic awareness. As a result of this grant, our transdisciplinary, multilingual research team emerged, consisting of graduate students and instructors in rhetoric and composition, Spanish, English as a second language, and anthropology.

Our collaborative group exemplifies the linguistic richness of our border region. Four of us were born in Mexico and moved to the United States of America at different ages. All five of us speak and possess different levels of literacy competence in Spanish. Alyssa is Assistant Professor of Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies, and she is bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish. Her experiences as an English language learner and curiosity for the presence of language difference in the teaching of writing led her to develop research projects that explore how multilingual writers—faculty and students—across academic professions perceive and negotiate language difference in their teaching and learning. Due to Alyssa's pedagogical interests and research findings on the need to build professional development opportunities that respond to the linguistic assets of faculty and students (Cavazos, 2015), the department chair asked her to direct the grant project, which consisted of recruiting graduate research assistants and leading the research, design, and implementation of a professional development series. When Marcela, Lecturer in Rhetoric and Composition, learned about this project, she expressed interest in forming a part of the research team due to her language background, coordination of the Interdisciplinary Teaching Assistant Institute at our campus, and research interests in cross-cultural communication and English as a Second Language. Marcela was first introduced to conversations on language difference when she started her third MA in Writing Studies at UTRGV. As an emergent scholar, she saw her participation in this project as an opportunity to explore how interdisciplinary approaches to writing and language learning influence TAs' views toward language difference in their (and our) pedagogies.

Esteban, Professor of Hispanic linguistics and Graduate Coordinator for Spanish programs, joined the project through his role as advisor and mentor to Teaching Assistants in the Spanish program. He is bilingual in English and Spanish, and due to his research interests in sociolinguistics, language variation, and heritage language pedagogies, he was interested in engaging in cross-disciplinary conversations on the teaching of language. Crystal, who currently works as a writing instructor at a local college, joined this project as a graduate student while working on her thesis. Her graduate courses introduced her to language diversity and piqued her interest in examining the perceptions and attitudes of first-year writing students regarding language difference in academia. She undertook the research assistant position because she firmly believes all undergraduate students should be introduced to the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic connections tied to language use. Geoffrey is a public health researcher with the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. Working primarily with underserved communities in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Geoffrey joined this project to better serve the interests of these communities. In public health, researchers rely heavily on survey data; to this end, Geoffrey aims to implement this research to design surveys in a way that is culturally and linguistically relevant to participants.

## Research and Design of a Multilingual Pedagogy Professional Development

Due to our diverse disciplinary backgrounds, we knew as we began our collaboration that we faced challenges based on disciplinary and personal perceptions of English and Spanish and variations of these languages in the teaching of writing and language. Because those in charge of designing professional development opportunities often run the risk of advocating for a single perspective, our central objective was to create an integrated professional development series that took into consideration the Spanish and Writing TAs' respective pedagogical needs. Therefore, the disciplinary background of the graduate research assistants (GRAs) on the grant needed to be diverse and representative of the TAs' respective disciplines. For this reason, the call for applicants aimed to recruit GRAs interested in "language learning and teaching, multilingualism/language diversity, writing studies, feedback on student writing, professional development, curriculum design, and/or assessment." The objective of the grant project was not only to design and implement a multilingual pedagogy professional development series but also to provide graduate students with opportunities to engage in the research process, such as conducting research, presenting at conferences,<sup>3</sup> and writing for publication. To accomplish these goals, instructors and graduate students on the research team needed to engage in cross-disciplinary research and pedagogical conversations. We met biweekly during the Spring 2016 semester to discuss our disciplinary perspectives and assigned research areas that included multilingual pedagogy, curriculum design, professional development in writing and Spanish programs, and assessment of professional development effectiveness.

As we explored our respective scholarship on language issues, we learned first-hand that engaging in transdisciplinary collaboration is both challenging and essential as transnational approaches to composition require that we engage "in very deliberate and visible cross-language work and/or involve analysis of literacy practices" of writers in various global-local contexts (Kilfoil, 2016). As we engaged with different approaches to language based on our respective disciplines, our collaboration required what Guerra (2016b) calls rhetorical sensibility— the belief that individuals need "to develop a critical awareness about what language does, rather than what it is, in the context of very specific circumstances [...]" (p. 228). In our case, a translingual approach to transdisciplinary collaborations assisted us in cultivating new voices in the field by developing rhetorical sensitivity toward other disciplines to build relationships and student-centered alliances that foster writing and language agency.

For Geoffrey, thinking about translanguaging pedagogy branched into different lines of inquiry and raised questions about how power is embedded within and distributed in the classroom through language. More specifically, Geoffrey became interested in the function and perception of language in the Mexico/U.S. borderlands, how people negotiate the dynamic bilingualism and specific peculiarities of the language-identity relationship in transnational spaces. For Geoffrey, the transnational, transdisciplinary, and translanguaging are part of an emergent epistemological field that not only allows students to shuttle between languages, disciplines and nations but also to move beyond them. A trans- pedagogy, in this way, encourages students to challenge established norms and institutional boundaries. Geoffrey viewed our work as an opportunity to create connections between disciplinary perspectives and language backgrounds that would help us identify pedagogical approaches that encourage students to be creative while engaging their entire linguistic repertoires. As we discussed our respective research, we recognized that our goal for this project was not only to create space for language mixing in academia but also to facilitate conversations with TAs on how to encourage students to engage their existing language skills as they participate in academic discourse across linguistic, disciplinary, and national borders. In other words, we “lived” and “experienced” among us what we want TAs to do.

After we analyzed and discussed our personal views toward language and our research, we decided to conduct a pilot professional development workshop with graduate students in the Spanish and writing program. We intended to understand how cultural and linguistic differences as well as disciplinary differences influence our perceptions toward language diversity. Crystal was curious about understanding Spanish graduate students’ thoughts on language difference because she imagined many of them learned Spanish as a first language and suspected they would resist multilingual pedagogies. Her preconceptions of native Spanish speakers stemmed from interactions with people who mostly spoke standard Spanish and who often frowned upon the use of non-standard languages. Crystal learned both English and non-standard Spanish as a small child, but soon after she started school, speaking Spanish waned until it was required as a junior high language elective. Therefore, during the initial pilot session—in which most students spoke in Spanish—she sometimes refrained from speaking Spanish for fear of “messing up” questions or comments in front of native Spanish speakers.

Crystal’s preconceptions were also fueled by the fact that even after decades of advocating for change in how we view writing, scholarly work produced in composition studies continues to reflect beliefs that privilege English-only monolingualism (Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011). This monolithic view of language is also present in some Spanish programs, where privilege of a standard, academic Spanish continues to exist (Parra, 2016). Writing and Spanish graduate students from the pilot sessions questioned the pragmatics of language difference in writing and language learning courses, which helped us realize there is a continued need to discuss language issues openly to not only gain awareness but also identify ways we can recognize language difference in the teaching of writing and languages. Both pilot sessions resulted in organic and engaging conversations on translanguaging, and through our unique experiences, we all grappled with how a translanguaging approach might allow us to not only draw on different disciplines and approaches to language but also see “difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 303). However, there was still an air of reluctance regarding its placement in academia, mostly because graduate students were not sure how it would “look” or work. This observation informed the need for future sessions to provide TA’s with the opportunity to brainstorm and create linguistically inclusive writing and language learning assignments.

## Multilingual Pedagogy Professional Development Series

We saw our task in the design of the professional development as an opportunity to engage in conversations on how the transdisciplinary realities of not only our team, but also our region, influence the teaching of writing and languages. Michelle Hall Kells (2012) argues that writing programs should



work toward sustaining the “linguistic and rhetorical ecologies within which twenty-first century student writers are exercising agency” (p. 1). According to Kells (2012), in order for writing programs to be sustainable, they must respond to the “emerging exigencies of diversity [by] building relationships across disciplinary boundaries” (p. 3). We draw on Kells’ research to argue that a translingual approach provides us with a framework to build “relationships across disciplinary boundaries” especially between Writing Studies and Spanish. A translingual approach not only responds to the “emerging exigencies of diversity” in the classroom but also provides the framework for offering teacher training across disciplines. Informed by our research, we designed a four-session series where the meaning of translingual practices emerged from our lived personal and pedagogical experiences (Lu and Horner, 2013; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). In each session, we explored how to develop writing projects that enable students to become aware of how knowledge is represented in different languages and how they negotiate these languages based on rhetorical expectations. One of the goals in all of the sessions was to ensure that TAs shared their personal and theoretical values in the teaching of language and writing. While TAs might be new to teaching, they possess knowledge we want to recognize (Reid, 2004; Canagarajah, 2016), especially their experiences with language difference pertinent to their developing identity as educators. When we value others’ teaching and language approaches, we create room for reflection, rethinking, and redesign of pedagogical practices that can lead to linguistic inclusivity.

### **First Session: Self-reflection**

The first session focused on providing background knowledge of the series and participants’ self-reflection on their linguistic background as learners, writers, and teachers as Geller (2011) recommended. Because the unique circumstances surrounding our language learning and writing experiences ultimately influence what we value and how we teach writing and language, we started the first session with a reflective activity on our personal language experiences and how the presence of different languages functions in our respective courses. Through our pilot session, we found that understanding our “language experiences and language biases” (Geller, 2011) is crucial to developing transdisciplinary conversations in the teaching of writing and language. Therefore, we invited TAs and instructors to reflect on the following questions:

1. What languages/dialects do you know/use? In what contexts do you use them?
2. To what extent have you used all your language resources in your education/academic work?

Some of the TAs and instructors who participated in the professional development series had learned English as a second language, others had learned Spanish as second language, and yet others had learned English and Spanish simultaneously. Subsequently, we asked participants to engage in an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas by reflecting on and discussing the following questions in small cross-disciplinary groups:

1. What do you think is the role of language diversity in the classes you teach and why?
2. What languages/dialects do your students know/use? To what extent do your students use or draw on their language resources in the work they do in your class?
3. Identify 2-3 questions you have about the presence of language diversity in the classes you teach.

Our intention with these questions was for TAs and instructors to explore language difference from their disciplinary perspective, and we discovered that many of their questions or concerns about teaching writing and language were similar.

During the first session, Esteban recalls questioning how this collaboration would help his teaching as he believed that, as a sociolinguist, he was familiar with the ideas discussed. To make sense of the experience, he identified terminology used during the workshop and connected them to concepts he knew within his own field of expertise. Specifically, he remembers being surprised to see instructors of English writing

courses accepting translingual approaches; in his mind and personal experience, English writing courses are sites where standard English exerted full hegemony. When asked to think about the extent to which he uses his language resources in the classroom, Esteban is sensitive about promoting language variation present in the local community, often missing in textbooks, because students often resort to their whole linguistic repertoires in real linguistic encounters, including their first or second language or a mixture of the two. For this reason, it is critical to introduce students to different registers, styles, and varieties in heritage language courses, alongside more academic registers. Because students often bring to class forms and varieties that are highly stigmatized at the social level, a standard language ideology serves to reinforce insecurities students have about ways of talking in their community, and standard language ideologies have negative effects on students, such as the invalidation of home varieties and other linguistic modalities and potentially erodes pride in their heritage language and bilingual repertoires.

The interdisciplinary exchange of ideas during the first session provided us with opportunities to learn and better understand our disciplinary background and perceptions of language. As a result, we collectively identified the following questions:

1. What is the role of language difference or extent of language difference within different academic units (e.g., writing program, writing center, language learning programs, institution)?
2. How does a grammar focused and/or a prescriptive approach to teaching writing and language influence/impact native/non-native speakers/writers?
3. How do we reconcile different expectations (e.g., course, program, department, institution) while valuing different languages while adhering to expectations?
4. How does the presence of language diversity impact assessment practices?

Our goal was to not only understand our own linguistic background, but also establish cross-disciplinary conversations between Spanish and Writing Studies. We learned that we have similar concerns and questions, from different perspectives, about language and writing in both First-Year Writing and Spanish language learning courses. The first session helped us build a sense of community as we prepared to explore these questions in subsequent sessions.

## **Second Session: Translingual Assignments**

The second session focused on brainstorming potential translingual assignments from a Spanish and writing instruction perspective. For this session, we asked TAs to read “Cultivating a Rhetorical Sensibility in the Translingual Writing Classroom,” by Juan Guerra (2016b). We worked in small groups to respond to questions on the meaning of “rhetorical sensibility” from a language learning and writing course perspective (see Appendix).

Michelle Cox (2014) argues that one way to begin a conversation on responding to multilingual writers’ strengths is by posing the following question: “Where, in your discipline, does pedagogy that builds on the strengths of linguistically and culturally diverse students already exist?” (p. 316). This was a critical question that guided the second session, especially because we asked TAs to think about how we might already be enacting “rhetorical sensibility” in specific writing or language assignments in our courses. The guiding questions over the Guerra reading helped us discuss our respective goals for the classes we teach to identify ways we could collaborate across academic disciplines. TAs and instructors explored what is often valued in writing and language learning courses; particularly, they explored the differences between applying a translingual approach in Spanish for heritage language learners and Spanish for non-native speakers. Spanish TAs explored how a translingual pedagogy might work best in a heritage language class or an upper level Spanish course rather than in an introductory non-native Spanish language learning course. The Modern Language Association seems to indicate there is a need in foreign and second language courses to relate to other languages, implement writing, and build rhetorical awareness through translingual and transcultural competence (MLA Ad Hoc Committee, 2017). This conversation led us to

consider a potential disconnect between professional development or pedagogy courses and assignment designs that encourage cross-language and cross-cultural learning objectives.

In order to attempt to respond to this disconnect, we designed an activity that would convey to all TAs that they possess knowledge based on their personal, scholarly, and teaching experiences, which creates an environment centered on their meaning-making rather than on a prescribed set of pedagogical tips to implement. For this reason, we asked a former Teaching Assistant to develop a handout describing linguistically inclusive writing assignments informed by her thesis work. Afterwards, TAs reflected on how they could use or revise the examples provided. As a result of our conversations, TAs and instructors discussed potential linguistically inclusive writing assignments in partners or small collaborative groups. This type of activity aligns with the goals of a translingual approach, which include, among others, encouraging instructors to develop their translingual pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2016) and ensure graduate students facilitate the conversations (Worden et al., 2015). Some of the assignments we discussed as a group that might apply both to language learning and writing courses included literacy or language autobiographies, language ethnographies within different discourse communities, and reflective writing activities on language and grammatical choices.

Out of the four sessions, Marcela found this one to be the most challenging and transformative as we engaged in conversations not only across different languages and disciplines but also pedagogical values. For most of us participating in the sessions, it was the first time that we were learning about translingualism, and for those outside the discipline of composition, it was the first time they were exposed to conversations about language difference and writing. The epistemological disciplinary differences became visible when questions about what it would take to design linguistically inclusive assignments that acknowledged students' language differences while equipping them with disciplinary specific knowledge were voiced.

For this reason, we intended to engage in transdisciplinary dialogue to understand how different disciplines, particularly Writing Studies and Spanish, not only create knowledge but also how they perceive different languages in the teaching of writing and language learning contexts. We aspired to develop a transdisciplinary collaboration that "treat[s] disciplinary perspectives as valid and distinct but in dialogue with one another in order to address real-world issues" (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 20). Therefore, a goal in this session was to foster a professional environment where participants explore how different disciplines perceive multiple languages and how our respective cultural and linguistic backgrounds impact views toward approaches to language. Justin Rademaekers (2015) explores the challenges in transdisciplinary collaboration, and recommends engaging in a rhetorical dialogue about disciplinary conventions that leads to understanding how each discipline constructs knowledge and uses specific concepts. He claims that understanding disciplinary knowledge and conventions can result in the creation of new, integrated methodologies for research and the design of transdisciplinary collaborative projects. Inspired by this work, Marcela and an instructor of Spanish-as-a-Heritage Language (SHL) engaged in meaningful dialogue that culminated in the design of a collaborative transdisciplinary and translingual writing activity to help develop students' linguistic agency. They had to negotiate how to build an assignment that fostered students' collaboration and language resources and that fit their different course delivery formats (SHL class was offered fully online whereas FYW was a fact-to-face course). Their collaborative assignment consisted of students in both classes reading the same text, writing a response in English or Spanish, respectively, and engaging in a cross-course and cross-linguistic response. Through engaging in rhetorical dialogues across disciplines and languages as students responded to the reading in both English and Spanish, Marcela and the SHL instructor responded to the needs and linguistic assets of a multilingual student population (Canagarajah, 2016; Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi 2013) while encouraging them to think about issues of language and identity through their disciplinary perspectives.



In order to accomplish this activity, it was necessary for the SHL instructor and Marcela to transcend disciplinary “fronteras” and became “transfronterizo collaborators,” a notion that requires that participants actively construct a transnational identity by engaging in “deliberate and visible cross-language work” (Kilfoil, 2016). Drawing from bilingual education studies, the term *transfronterizo* “emphasizes the continuous linguistic and cultural contact that border youth maintain as part of the multiple daily transactions across both sides” of the Mexico-U.S. border (Relaño Pastor, 2007, p. 264). Residents of border communities are perceived to be from *acá y allá* as they participate across worlds (Relaño Pastor, 2007; Blommaert, 2008; Zentella, 2009; Smith & Murillo, 2012). Transcending *fronteras* requires *transfronterizos* to engage in recontextualization which is “concerned with understanding the movement of discourse across different contexts, including the ideologies and power relations that come with this process” (de la Piedra & Araujo, 2012, p. 708). As *transfronterizo* collaborators, the SHL instructor and Marcela responded to Guerra’s (2016a) call for educators to open up spaces for students to “first develop the critical language and cultural awareness that comes from knowing that discourse operates in very different ways across the varied communities to which they [and us] belong” (p. 108). One of the questions that emerged from this session among the writing and language instructors was on how we should assess students’ writing and language learning, which paved the way to the third session.

### Third Session: Linguistically Inclusive Assessment Practices

The third session addressed how we might design assessment practices that are fair and equal using a linguistically inclusive approach. We read Paul Kei Matsuda’s (2012), “Let’s Face It: Language Issues and the Writing Program Administrator.” The session was designed in two parts:

1. exploring Matsuda’s article and
2. brainstorming the design of linguistically inclusive writing assignments (Appendix).

The purpose of the discussion questions about Matsuda’s article was to learn about the participants’ existing assessment approaches and their values toward responding to and assessing student writing. We discussed the following questions as a group:

1. What assessment tools do you use in your writing and language class, respectively, to assess student learning?
2. What specific tools/methods do you use to assess specific student learning outcomes for the course, program, department, and/or university?
3. How does Matsuda’s discussion of instructional alignment, formative assessment practices, and metalinguistic commentary/awareness align with and/or offer a new perspective on your assessment methods in your language and writing classes? And
4. How do we respond to the “growing linguistic diversity” in our classrooms through assessment tools and the design of writing and language assignments?

These questions helped us understand assessment practices from a language learning and writing studies perspective as well as how instructors who teach writing and language responded to Matsuda’s arguments about writing assessment.

For Alyssa, this session revealed the challenges inherent in advocating for translingual approaches to language and writing instruction, especially within transdisciplinary conversations. As early as the first session, instructors were already voicing concern on how we should assess writing and language learning within a pedagogy that welcomes and accepts language differences. Particularly, instructors were concerned about language and writing standards and the message our pedagogy would send students about language “correctness.” Through our conversations, we learned that language teaching and assessment in Spanish as a second language and as a heritage language value two approaches to language. One approach accentuates grammar instruction in language learning, and another approach places

emphasis on reading and writing programs to raise the learner's Critical Language Awareness (Leeman & Serafini 2016; Parra 2016; Guerra, 2016a). Scholarship in second language writing in English addresses similar concerns regarding language and grammar instruction and assessment, particularly recognizing the need for second language learning while also honoring multilingual students' linguistic resources (Shapiro, Cox, Shuck, & Simmitt, 2016). As Lee (2016) reminds us, when we engage in "translanguaging assessment [we] de-universaliz[e] assessment criteria so we remember that different kinds of writing have different values for different students" (p. 185). Students' different values toward writing are rooted in their lived language experiences. For this reason, we cannot ignore students' linguistic abilities for the sake of teaching "academic" English or Spanish.

Scholars in both Spanish and English as a second language and/or heritage language instruction argue for writer's linguistic agency where students become aware of linguistic differences and language choices as they use their language resources to write and learn in a new or heritage language (Parra, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2016). While Matsuda (2014) has questioned a translingual approach to writing, we must recognize and expose TAs to a variety of approaches to language in writing and language learning contexts, which will assist instructors in making informed pedagogical and assessment choices. Matsuda (2012) argues that when assessing student writing, "the key is to focus on the development of linguistic resources rather than [...] on deficits [because] [m]any second language writers also bring various linguistic and rhetorical resources from their previous literacy experience in other languages" (pp.156-157). Like Canagarajah (2011), Guerra (2016b), Leeman and Serafini (2016), Lu and Horner (2013), and Parra (2016), Matsuda (2012) also views students' language abilities and their linguistic agency as resources that can assist in language learning and rhetorical awareness.

A translingual approach to writing assessment accounts for how language is used and negotiated in different contexts, and as Lee (2016) claims, we should engage in "individualizing the criteria by which student writing is evaluated, working beyond a homogeneous set of standards" (p. 186). Therefore, in the third session, we explored how we "individualize" assessment to meet our students where they reside linguistically while valuing their goals as writers and language learners.

The third session was critical because we discussed assignment design and assessment, but some of the TAs missed the session, which impacted what they were able to create in the end. We gathered that other TAs were reluctant to share with the whole group, and that they preferred to share ideas with Alyssa during individual conferences. Through one-on-one conversations, we determined that the underlying reluctance was a result of concerns regarding how to reconcile traditional, standardized approaches to writing assessment and a translingual perspective on writing assessment.

This suggests the need to create a more cohesive program with all TAs in the department to build a sense of community within and across disciplines as well as the need to continue conversations on the need to shift traditional writing assessment practices in writing and language coursework. Inspired by Matsuda's (2012) article, instructors at this session shared how asking students to engage in metalinguistic reflections can serve as a critical component in assessing student writing and language learning. Conversations on metalinguistic awareness helped us contextualize how such an approach can assist students in developing "specific dispositions toward languages, language users, contexts and consequences of languages use, and the relations between all these" (Lu and Horner, 2013, p. 29). These dispositions toward language facilitate multilingual writers' abilities to engage in translanguaging practices, develop translingual rhetorical sensibility, and enact linguistic agency (Guerra 2016b; Shapiro et al., 2016). Conversations on metalinguistic awareness also helped us understand Tatyana Kleyn's (2016) claim that "[t]ranslanguaging is for all language learning [...] translanguaging has a place in bilingual education [...] and English as a second (or new or additional) language programs just as it is equally powerful in world and foreign language programs and general education classes [...]" (p. 203). Our conversations and our research revealed the potential in engaging in metalinguistic awareness as a way to not only respond to

assessment concerns in both writing and language learning coursework but also as a way to develop translingual fluency.

### Session 4: Reflection and Next Steps

The final session was a reflection session intended for participants to share their writing assignments and offer suggestions for the future of the series. Reflection is critical to professional growth and development of innovative pedagogies, as Manel Lacorte (2016) argues: "Reflective practices should be an essential component of language teacher courses and programs in L2 or general education units for [sic] TAs [...] reflective practices may be the foundation for a research component in teacher preparation programs" [...] (p. 111). When we are open and willing to engage in rhetorical dialogue with colleagues from diverse linguistic backgrounds and disciplinary expertise, we create the necessary "contact zone [conditions] valuable for reflection and negotiations of translinguality" (Canagarajah, 2016, p. 268). For this reason, the final session was intended to engage in a reflective and collaborative experience, which enriched our respective pedagogical approaches and enhanced collaborative opportunities within our department. As an example, it was during this final reflection session that Marcela and the Spanish Heritage Language instructor finalized the collaboration objectives they had started during the second session. We reflected on and discussed the following questions:

- A writing assignment/activity/project idea (linguistically inclusive) that is tied to student learning outcomes. We all shared potential ideas during our group work in [the second session] when we discussed the Guerra article and even during our discussion of the Matsuda piece [in the third session]. Please share with us why you are committed to that assignment and what questions you have about drafting it.
- A short description and/or sample of how you respond to student writing/projects. What do you value in student work when you give feedback? How is this reflected in your commenting style? How does your feedback align with student learning outcomes and the assignment? What questions do you have about providing effective feedback?
- What ideas/thoughts do you have for how we can continue developing this multilingual professional development series in the [next semester]? What would be valuable, useful, and beneficial to you?

These reflection questions triggered discussions on how we can design writing assignments that communicate to students how they can draw on their language resources to make meaning, learn a language, analyze, and write for different audiences. Most importantly, our discussion focused on how our assignments can encourage students to become aware of their language choices and language resources as they make sense of their language learning and writing processes. While we believe that TAs were committed to translingual approaches to teaching writing and language, we also recognize this commitment may not result in direct implementation without follow-up sessions and conversations. Additionally, as mentioned previously, some of the TAs were not present during the final session or expressed reluctance to share their ideas with the whole group. For us, this indicated the need to create more opportunities for all TAs across academic disciplines to engage in sustainable and consistent cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic collaborations. As we worked collaboratively to research and design a multilingual professional development series and as we worked with Spanish and writing TAs and instructors, we recognized that our student and faculty population do not fit one linguistic background. Because students and faculty at our institution are multilingual and bilingual in a variety of forms, we must engage diverse approaches to language in writing and language learning contexts in professional development situations.

## Implications for Teaching

As a result of the multilingual pedagogy professional development series, we learned that engaging in transdisciplinary conversations with our colleagues is critical in responding to the linguistic needs and assets of our students. In order for such collaboration to be meaningful for all, a professional development series like this needs to be institutionalized at the program, departmental, and university levels. Although there are concerns to address regarding the implications of a "bilingual" institution, we have University support to develop linguistically inclusive pedagogies. We also have departmental support, as our department chair recognizes the need for this type of work; however, there are issues we can address at the program level to fully engage our TAs in a cross-disciplinary, cross-linguistic professional development. TAs were not required to attend the series but were highly encouraged to participate by our department chair and their practicum faculty mentors. While the majority of TAs attended, there might have been a sense of resistance because the ideas discussed were often new to many of them, especially because a sense of privilege of "standard" languages or "correctness" continues to exist in both disciplines. In order to challenge monolingualism as the norm in higher education, Geller (2011) argues for the "need to know about multilingual faculty members' experiences as learners, writers and teachers." Furthermore, Robert P. Yagelski (1999) argues, resistance or doubt "can be an opportunity for careful, critical self-reflection about one's teaching and the nature of the relationship one is building with students" (p. 48). A translingual approach to writing may be seen as a "distraction" from, perhaps, the "real work" that students need to focus on, which discounts the importance of translingual approaches to teaching writing. The aim of the TA multilingual pedagogy workshop and the aim for faculty teaching writing across the disciplines are to converge on how to use all available language resources to guide students in conveying meaning effectively in diverse linguistic contexts. If the practicum course TAs take also addresses the presence of language difference in the teaching of writing and language, TAs might be more receptive to exploring translanguaging as a writing and language learning pedagogy and they might see the series as a continuation of their teacher preparation. Additionally, TAs in the Spanish program do not take a graduate practicum course; however, they attend a pre-semester training and monthly meetings. If a practicum course existed for Spanish TAs like the graduate course for Writing TAs, there would be opportunities for faculty teaching practicum to engage in cross-disciplinary collaboration, particularly with a focus on how writing can also be used in language learning contexts. This collaboration among the TAs can enhance linguistically inclusive practices in their respective courses and build long-lasting cross-disciplinary, cross-linguistic relationships.

In future professional development sessions, we plan to facilitate conversation surrounding many of the questions, concerns, and issues raised by the TAs and other instructors during the series. For instance, TAs expressed concern regarding how to design translingual assignments. Although some scholars in rhetoric and composition have discussed implementing pedagogies that embrace translingualism (Guerra, 2016b), they tend to focus on assignments that mostly involve reading about translingualism. Therefore, instructors are left wondering about what a translingual approach might look like in practice. Because a translingual approach involves more of an awareness that students use and draw on all of their language resources while reading, drafting, and researching, course activities should facilitate this awareness of language use for both educators and students. Through our transdisciplinary professional development workshop, TA's had the opportunity to collaboratively brainstorm potential assignments that implemented a translingual approach. Through this collaborative work, they not only identified challenges that come from creating such assignments, but they also recognized how these assignments can enhance writing instruction and language learning. As Suresh Canagarajah (2016) explains, "Teacher preparation for translingual writing would focus on encouraging teachers to construct their pedagogies with sensitivity to student, writing, and course diversity, thus continuing to develop their pedagogical knowledge and practice for changing contexts of writing" (p. 266). The multidisciplinary workshop introduces participants to these sensitivities by first creating an awareness of the rhetorical abilities

multilingual writers already possess, and by encouraging participants to reflect on their personal attitudes towards translanguaging in order to better understand their own views toward a progressive approach to writing and language instruction.

In order to sustain a multidisciplinary translanguaging approach, the practice of reflection for both educators and students is essential. Wholly embracing language diversity continues to challenge the deeply held language beliefs of even longtime advocates because as language users, we are constantly reminded of linguistic hegemony, especially in academia. Therefore, through reflection, we can focus on why translanguaging is important for current and future language instruction, since its aim is not just to include the languages and dialects of others, but to change the way we think about language and language use—a constant struggle for many. Bruce Horner (2016) argues that “...[W]e can recognize, and help our students learn to recognize and engage in, writing as the occasion for just such action-reflection, posing anew the ongoing challenge of what kind of difference to attempt to make through writing, how, and why” (p. 120). Through the practice of action-reflection, a translanguaging approach to writing and language instruction will likely be sustainable because the focus remains on awareness of language negotiations for both educators and students.

## Implications for Research

Through our collaboration, we realized that the heterogeneous linguistic nature of multilingual students is a valuable resource that we should integrate into the writing and language studies curriculum. Through the promotion of linguistically inclusive pedagogical practices, students can use all linguistic resources at their disposition to produce knowledge through writing and orality. Multilingual students’ differences in their linguistic repertoires can be used to “increase students’ fluency” in written and oral communication in their first, second, and heritage language (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur 2011, p. 307). The transdisciplinary aspect of the project helped us identify our different linguistic needs and approaches to achieve more inclusive pedagogical practices grounded on a translanguaging view of writing and language teaching. Geller (2011) calls for research to “push against the institutionalized and standardized English monolingual norms” by designing WAC programs and support services that “encourage faculty to learn about and reflect deeply on language experiences and language biases.” Future research should focus on collecting data on the impact of a multilingual pedagogy professional development by collecting evaluations, conducting interviews and class observations, and analyzing primary documents, such as syllabi and course assignments. Data collection will help us apply a systematic approach to evaluating how our pedagogy is enriched by professional development focused on a translanguaging view to teaching writing in our disciplines. Empirical data would also allow comparisons within our disciplines to see whether our focus on a translanguaging approach to teaching writing and language studies has the same or a different impact on our pedagogies and students’ language practices, and it could show the particular language practices that influence writing and language acquisition in each discipline, informing future studies and pedagogical practices. We also suggest research that investigates how writing-to-learn or learning-to-write approaches (Manchón, 2011) and service learning (Parra, 2016) can be implemented alongside translanguaging writing in writing and language learning contexts. Finally, we are interested in engaging in cross-institutional collaboration to explore how different factors, such as institutional context and faculty and student populations, impact how translanguaging approaches to teaching writing and languages are explored through professional development.

In order to advance transdisciplinary and translanguaging approaches as a new normal in composition studies (Tardy 2017; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue 2011), we hope to provide a professional development framework that adapts to the linguistic realities of different institutional contexts and students’ lived language experiences. Our respective language backgrounds, language perceptions, and linguistically inclusive pedagogies can impact our students’ linguistic agency, academic success, and sense of belonging in higher education; therefore, it is critical to explore how multilingual students perceive the presence of

language difference in the classroom and create opportunities where they can use all their language resources as they navigate through changing academic and community contexts.

## Appendix

### Session Two: Discussion Points

#### Activity T-Chart: Language Learning Class and Writing Class

- What does Guerra mean by developing "rhetorical sensibility that reflects critical awareness of language as a contingent and emergent" (228)? What does this look like in language learning class and in a writing class? How might we already be doing this with our students?
- Guerra provides several examples of the type of writing activities he asks his students to work on in class and he also acknowledges the mistakes he made (231). To what extent do you find those examples useful and/or valuable in building rhetorical sensibility? How would those assignments (or revised versions of them) look like in your own courses (Spanish/Writing)? What changes would you make and why?
- How does the former TA's document help us think about language difference in language learning and writing courses? What are your thoughts? What kind of assignments can facilitate critical awareness and rhetorical sensibility that accomplish course, department, and university learning outcomes? What are the student learning outcomes for your course?
- Discussion question: Guerra claims that each one of the approaches to language (monolingual, multilingual, translingual) is informed by specific beliefs, values, and practices and he also provides an example of a teacher who asks students to respond to these approaches based on their lived experiences. What are the beliefs, values, practices of each of the approaches based on your own experiences as scholars and teachers but also as you interact in non-academic contexts?

### Session Three: Writing Assignment Design Brainstorming (Part 2)

- What is an ideal writing assignment you would like to assign students in your language/writing class?
- Why would you like to teach this writing assignment?
- How do you think this writing assignment can be linguistically inclusive by considering all our students' language resources and abilities?
- How does the writing assignment fit with the objectives of the course, program, department, and/or university?
- What is the objective and purpose of the writing assignment? How does the writing assignment connect with course readings and beyond the classroom?
- What do you want the students to learn or experience from this writing assignment?
- Should this assignment be an individual or a collaborative effort? Why?
- What do you want students to show you in this assignment? To demonstrate mastery of concepts or texts? To demonstrate logical and critical thinking? To develop an original idea? To learn and demonstrate the procedures, practices, and tools of your field of study? Explain in detail.
- How will you assess student learning? What makes the assignment effective? How will you evaluate it?

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2. The following is, in part, the original grant proposal Dr. Colin Charlton submitted to the Graduate College: “[The Department of Writing and Language Studies should] explore transdisciplinary TA training with the idea that language acquisition (technical, cultural, or professional) is a concern of all learning situations. WLS is primed to begin integrating a multilingual group of graduate students and leveraging their backgrounds for the development of multilingual lessons and community literacy interventions. For the spring and possibly summer, a small group of graduate faculty and advanced graduate students could study existing graduate training programs, design a multilingual one within the existing UTRGV channels and degrees, and prepare it for launch in fall 2016.”
3. We presented our work in March 2017 at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Portland, Oregon under the title, “A Translingual Approach to Professional Development for First-Year Spanish and Writing Instructors.”

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