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Theorizing Code Brokering:

Bridging Monolingual and Multilingual Students through Literacy Skills

by

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A master's essay submitted to the faculty of the

Graduate Program in English in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

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ABSTRACT

The proportion of multilingual individuals in the United States is growing, and research suggests individuals who serve as language brokers/interpreters demonstrate advanced literacy and communication skills; specifically, language brokers quickly gain an understanding of institutional processes and accompanying vocabulary and also excel at comprehending and managing the expectations of their audience. This essay argues university instructors can encourage monolingual students to develop similar skills through "code brokering" instruction in first-year English courses. By focusing on "code," such as style shifting, nonverbal techniques, or other means, monolingual students recognize, appreciate, and enhance their own interpretation skills. This essay reviews and analyzes how students in a first-year English class responded to a unit introducing code-brokering concepts and discusses ideas to include code brokering in a first-year English course.

INTRODUCTION

Due to continually changing demographics in the United States, university English and composition instructors have increasing opportunities to leverage students' multifaceted language experiences in the classroom. For example, children of immigrants often participate in language brokering, defined as "interpretation and translation performed in everyday situations by bilinguals who have had no special training" (Tse 486), a practice that advantages individuals' ability to communicate and interpret for others. In this essay, I discuss engaging mono- and bilingual students together in the classroom to enhance learning of all students; while English learners should be encouraged to continue their progress, monolingual students would benefit by learning the skills of their language-brokering peers. Specifically, I argue that monolingual students do not necessarily need to know a second language to broker – or interpret – between two parties; therefore, I use a new term, *code brokering*, to describe how this learning can be introduced to monolingual students.

In this essay, I will discuss demographic changes in the United States and offer additional background to contextualize the situation. Next, I will review and compare relevant terms commonly used to describe how individuals use and move between languages. At that point, I will define code brokering and explain why I believe this term helps open the interpretation experience to all students, regardless of their language background. I will then describe a learning module prepared last spring for a first-year composition-literature course that was designed to introduce the concepts of code brokering. I will discuss students' reactions to the exercises and my general critique of the assignment, as well as theorize how such a module could be improved for the future. Finally, I will offer some thoughts about how such literacy exercises could help bridge gaps between mono- and multilingual students.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN AND LANGUAGE BACKGROUND IN THE UNITED STATES

In an article published in 1996, Lucy Tse reported 87 percent of 64 Chinese- and Vietnamese-American bilingual student research participants had provided some form of language brokering or interpretation service for their parents, friends, neighbors and teachers (489-90). Among her conclusions Tse notes, "Students who are called upon to convey information and concepts in a variety of situations gain linguistic, cultural, and world knowledge that teachers may be able to incorporate into learning experiences for all students" (494). Tse includes an example from Harris and Sherwood's study, in which BS, an Italian Canadian subject, interpreted for her father in business transactions.

Father to BS: "*Digli che è un imbecille*!" (Tell him he's a nitwit.)

BS to 3rd party: "My father won't accept your offer."

Father angrily in Italian: "Why didn't you tell him what I told you?" (in Tse 487)

This anecdote illustrates the importance of the interpreter's role. Though BS communicates her father has not agreed to terms of the transaction, she is careful to choose "the most culturally and linguistically appropriate interpretation of her father's words so as to increase the chances of a successful outcome" (486). These important skills continue to be critical, as demographic data recorded at learning institutions show the growing number of multilingual families in the United States. Just over a decade after Tse's article was published, the University of California (UC) began producing its *Annual Accountability Report*, which provides extensive demographic information for its student population. Arguably one of the most-diverse systems in the country, UC disclosed 19 percent of undergraduate students reported speaking a language other than English in their homes in fall 2008; 30 percent more reported speaking English and another language at home (104). Ten years later, 37 percent of first-generation students entering the UC

system reported their first language was not English. For other entering students, the number was 30 percent (25). Nationally, seven percent of first-time, full-time freshmen at four-year institutions reported English is not their primary language (Stolzenberg et al. 27). This data points to an increasing number of multilingual students, who likely participate in some level of language brokering.

As these multilingual students and English learners enter post-secondary studies, they often enter an institution where English or composition is required during the first year of study. The changing student demographic means beliefs the instructors might have had in the past, perhaps that their incoming students are native speakers of English, may or may not be true. Much has been written about supporting English learners in the first-year composition classroom; however, instructors may find themselves wondering how to teach a class comprised of native English speakers and English learners – that is, monolingual students and multilingual students. Changes in pedagogy may be needed to better support such a class.

According to Steven Alvarez's research of bilingual students and their families in New York City, the "language brokering performed by youth language brokers has a community-based language function rewarded and cultivated only outside school" (10). Alvarez asserts there are ways to add activities into language arts classrooms and pedagogies that would tap into the unique traits of language brokering. One such activity would involve groups of students conducting ethnographic studies by learning from families of different backgrounds. In doing this work, students would be learning about others' lived experiences, gaining an understanding of – and an appreciation for – families using minority languages. By entering this type of work, students would have an opportunity to learn about the strengths of their diverse communities, "complicating a one-dimensional stereotype of low-income immigrants as dependent vessels of

deficits needing to be filled with the so-called 'official' language" (12). As students transition to college, such literacy-based activities will be increasingly valuable. Jason Schneider points out, changes in demographics also have "altered the demographics of first-year composition courses at all kinds of institutions, destabilizing long-standing beliefs that college writing classrooms are English-monolingual spaces" (345).

Schneider's point is well taken; these longstanding beliefs have been destabilized, and first-year composition educators have an opportunity to enhance learning through the diverse literacy of students in the classroom. A key barrier to incorporating such new learning opportunities is best summarized by Kaia Simon in her article, "Translating a Path to College: Literate Resonances of Migrant Child Language Brokering," in which she asserts, "because [immigrants] experience dominant monolingualist ideologies in the United States daily, multilingual migrants are all too aware that their multiple languages position them at a disadvantage" (80). It seems there remains a disconnect between the number of people speaking more than one language and a culture that believes English is the only language of value. Even in such a culture, numerous studies have been published regarding student literacies, English courses, and first-year composition. Educators can use research findings to develop new strategies in the classroom.

Though published two decades after Tse's, Simon's article parallels Tse's work and findings. Simon's research focuses on female children of Hmong immigrants from the Midwest; these girls served as language brokers for their families, teachers, and community members. Similar to Tse's findings, Simon's results demonstrate child language brokers develop skills that give them linguistic advantages over monolingual students. Some of the examples include child language brokers learning how to read their audiences and becoming conversant with how

institutions and businesses run, from which they learn specialized vocabulary and an insight into business acumen. Because of their early experiences and insight into commerce traditionally managed by adults, these girls used their temporary authority gained through literacy to their advantage, for themselves, their families, and members of their communities. As they grow older, language brokers have a more agile method of communicating and, Simon argues, they find these skills transferrable to other areas of their lives.

To illustrate the thought pattern of seasoned language brokers, scholar Laura Gonzales coined the term "translation moments," referring to "instances in time when individuals pause to make a rhetorical decision about how to translate a specific word or phrase for a specific audience in a specific context" (12). Gonzales describes the market in her hometown in Bolivia, where everyone's livelihood depends on their ability to communicate with customers. In a country of more than 40 languages, market workers rely on their command of languages, hand- and facial gestures, pictures, written words and symbols, and any other tools in their repertoire to transact on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the translation moments that are so crucial to survival in many parts of the world are, in the United States, seen as unnecessary, as long as everyone speaks and reads English. Multilingualism, as we learned above, is even a source of shame to some (Garcia and Kleifgen 12).

It is easy to imagine multilingual or immigrant students in an American classroom, working diligently to improve their English skills in order to fit in, to fulfill the hopes of their parents, and to make a life for themselves. In his autobiography Richard Rodriguez recalls growing up in a Spanish-speaking home and his early primary school days when he read books to become "educated" (65). In these first school years, he understood the incredible importance of his education and acknowledged "the classroom is responsible for remaking him. He relies on

his teacher, depends on all that he hears in the classroom and reads in his books" (72). The urgency of Rodriguez's voice is echoed in research indicating that young students who grow up speaking a different language at home can quickly "catch up" to their English-speaking peers (Halle et al. 14, Portes and Rumbaut 227, 231). Simon suggests multilingual students should be encouraged to use their skills in composing practices in order to help them perfect their English, which helps retain these students in higher education institutions. Almost as an afterthought, she continues, "instructors might also introduce these skills to monolingual students who haven't had similar life experiences in translation and interpretation" (81).

With this in mind, one might ask what types of linguistic instruction might be used to help fill the "translation moment" skills gap between multilingual and monolingual students. If monolingual students were trained to become more agile in their language and communication skills through learning from multilingual peers, the English-only culture still troubling to so many may be diminished as a result.

An initial problem might be obvious: language brokering requires at least rudimentary knowledge of more than one language. The first step, then, is to broaden the terms used. Since people do not always translate between languages to interpret ideas for one another, we need to think past the idea of "languages." People often use context, descriptions, pictures, body language, or a host of other ways to help someone understand something new. Therefore, I argue a new term, *code brokering*, may be a more inclusive concept that might allow instructors to engage monolingual students to begin thinking about the translation moments that their multilingual peers experience regularly. Speaking in terms of "code" shifts the conversation from language interpretation and translation to appropriate language use. For instance, students recognize they speak differently among friends than they do at school or work. The "code" used

when speaking with an instructor or supervisor is more formal than when speaking with friends or family. Students may gladly participate in creative code-interpreting exercises as an introduction to thinking about how to expand and improve communication skills. Initial discussions can focus less on personal experiences and backgrounds and more on interpreting concepts, technologies or ideologies. Doing so may make the subject of code brokering less daunting than learning an alphanumeric language and more relevant, especially in institutions in which the majority of students are from white, monolingual backgrounds.

While introducing and establishing the use of code brokering would be an excellent first step for students to appreciate developing new literacy skills, it would still be necessary to help students understand the importance of alphanumeric language brokering as a practice. It is possible some students may be unaware of the necessity of language brokering within minority communities to conduct day-to-day business, such as bank transactions, doctors' visits, or even buying groceries. Inviting discussion in the classroom may help prepare students for an unexpected situation – no one knows when a code-brokering opportunity will arise.

As an example, when I was researching this project, my husband, an officer in the local fire department, found himself in a language-brokering situation. After extinguishing a small house fire, he was attempting to record the details of the call, per the fire department's protocol. The homeowners spoke no English, so their daughter, who lived nearby, served as language broker. At first, she was hesitant to respond to the questions, and it eventually became evident she was concerned her parents would get a citation from the city or experience some legal difficulty. Once he explained his goal was to complete his report and ensure the home was safe for her parents, the remainder of the conversation went smoothly. In this case, both parties were committed to clear understanding, and the event concluded on a positive note and shared sense of

community. Though this is a local example, I would submit similar experiences take place everywhere, and how each is handled contributes to the culture of our nation and beyond.

Our current political and cultural situation is complex; global migration continues to increase, yet anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments are creating divisions within and between nations. Normalizing and celebrating multi-lingual skills in the classroom may help students appreciate each other's unique competencies, teach them how they all can use literacy skills to become better communicators, and even help ease cultural and political divisions over the long term (Canagarajah, *Translingual* 137, Horner et al. 311, Shapiro et al. 37). First-year composition educators are in a position to challenge divisive sentiments around migration and languages through mindful conversations and carefully designed coursework. Code brokering is a way toward this reality because the code-brokering exercises and discussions in the classroom are meant to encourage all students to appreciate their peers' interpretation skills, whatever they may be, and to build bridges through literacy. This work, then, would be accomplished not just by students improving their own communication style, but by building a community within the classroom setting to practice this important work.

DEFINING RELEVANT TERMS

As discourse evolves with the times and circumstances, so do terms describing various ways people work across languages. Here, I discuss a few of the terms used by scholars and how they relate to code brokering.

Code Switching: Linguist Suresh Canagarajah defines code switching as "treat[ing] language alternation as involving bilingual competence and switches between two different systems" ("Codemeshing" 403). Canagarajah's definition is rather straightforward and deftly void of political implication. However, code switching often is viewed as relinquishing an

undervalued dialect for a superior or “correct” language code. For example, when traveling in Germany the first time, I was told I had learned “high German,” the language individuals are expected to use at school, work, or other formal situations. I was told I would not even understand the dialects Germans used at home and with friends in casual conversation. Though I did not find the dialects as challenging as originally advertised, there certainly was a difference.

Vershawn Young has spoken against the use of code switching because, instead of “accommodating two language varieties in one speech act,” it “advocates language substitution, the linguistic translation of Spanglish or [African American English] into standard English” (50). For this reason, Young coined the phrase “code meshing.”

Code meshing: According to Young, code meshing is “the blending and concurrent use of American English dialects in formal, discursive products, such as political speeches, student papers, and media interviews” (“Nah” 51). Further, Young et al. suggest “code-meshing presents an alternative vision of language to teachers, one that offers the ‘disempowered’ a more-egalitarian path into Standard English, a route that integrates academic English with their own dialects and that simultaneously seeks to end discrimination” (*Other People’s English* 56).

Canagarajah advocates for code meshing instead of code switching in his courses. One of his graduate students, originally from Saudi Arabia, wrote primarily in English, but she incorporated Arabic and French into her narratives to express herself more clearly. (“Codemeshing” 403). For her, using Arabic was critical when expressing her religion and the proverbs she grew up with. In a similar example, Margaret Willard-Traub’s Iraqi American student felt writing assignments were pointless until he incorporated Arabic into his English narratives. When he recognized himself in his work, he became more “engaged and confident” in

his writing (332). In these examples, students are encouraged to mesh their own languages and ways of speaking with a more "standard" English.

Translanguaging: Canagarajah defines translanguaging as the "ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages" ("Codemeshing" 401), and the "general communicative competence of multilinguals" (403). This straightforward definition is reminiscent of *German I*: I learned how to say, "Wo ist der Hauptbahnhof?" Per this first definition, translanguaging simply refers to using the language most appropriate for a certain situation; when in Germany, I can use the above sentence to ask where the main train station is located. Stewart and Hansen-Thomas have a much more specific use for this term, as it defines the "transformative practice teachers should understand and utilize with emergent bilinguals in an official manner within the classroom" (451). Finally, Otheguy et al. opt for a much broader use, referring to it as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages" (Abstract).

Style shifting and Register variation: Style shifting refers to the natural variation in speech of individual speakers. For instance, a woman speaks with her supervisor a certain way, then may talk in a more simplified manner with her toddler; when she converses with her mother, she may find herself speaking in her hometown dialect or using phrases only used within her childhood home. Wolfram and Schilling point out, "There is no clear dividing line between style shifting and code switching, since … it is very difficult to determine what counts as a 'dialect' of a language vs. a 'language' in its own right" (388).

In *Dimensions of Register Variation*, Douglas Biber explains "variability is inherent in human language: a single speaker will use different linguistic forms on different occasions, and

different speakers of a language will say the same thing in different ways" (1). He continues to explain, "Analysis of the systematic patterns of variation associated with these factors has led to the recognition of two main kinds of language varieties: registers, referring to situationally defined varieties, and dialects, referring to varieties associated with different groups of speakers" (1). Wolfram and Schilling categorize register variation as a form of style shifting (387). Individuals who feel they only speak English may feel empowered to know they engage in style shifting and register variation on a daily basis; though not shifting between languages, they already change their style of speaking as appropriate for various situations.

Code brokering: While the above-mentioned terms describe how individuals substitute one language or dialect for another to expand or personalize their communication, they do not express a description of the interpretative process that anyone can use. The word *code* was chosen because it explicitly encourages a broad definition of an individual's communication repertoire. Coding may mean interpreting from one language to another, but it could also mean communicating via any type of symbol, body language, context-building or any other mode that needs to be traversed to convey meaning.

The word *brokering* describes the purpose of the communication, implying negotiating or interpreting to advance communication between two parties. Instead of changing one word for another, such as translating, meshing, switching or shifting, *brokering* is not done for oneself. It is done as a way of communicating with others, negotiating as needed, and improving clarity among at least two people. The goal may be bridge-building or relationship building; however, that need not be the case. Similar to language brokering, the goal is to act as a conduit between people or institutions, or to promote inclusivity between parties or concepts, attempting to form a positive resolution using literacy.

Code brokering is the activity that best describes the literacy activities used not only by multilinguals but by all people who are attempting to improve communication between parties. Thinking back to our monolingual students, practicing code brokering over time allows participants the opportunity to improve their own communication skills. They will be more attuned to others' needs or ready to manage expectations. They will need to learn more about the background of each (for instance, helping someone open a bank account will improve their knowledge of and vocabulary of such an exchange). They will need to make many split-second decisions around words and actions they choose, all the while reading peoples' reactions to ensure the communication is progressing in an acceptable way.

Monolinguals may not immediately understand the relevancy to themselves. However, sometimes code brokering involves explaining a concept foreign to another. For instance, the first time my daughter sent a text to my mother, my daughter found she needed to explain what a text was, where mother could find and open the text on her phone, how to respond to a text, and finally, she explained circumstances in which it might make more sense to text instead of calling or emailing. After the tutorial was finished, my daughter felt supremely satisfied that she was able to teach her grandmother something new. Meanwhile, my mother was thrilled to have a new way to communicate with her granddaughter.

In the next section, I will describe a learning unit used to highlight the relevance of code brokering to a class of first-year college English literature and writing students.

My Code Brokering Module

During the spring semester, 2020, I participated in a teaching mentorship, allowing me to serve as a teacher's assistant in a composition-literature course for primarily first-year students. As part of my mentorship, I was responsible for leading a course unit on any text; since I wanted to

introduce students to cultures, world views, and language use about which they may have little awareness, I chose Haitian immigrant Edwidge Danticat's autobiography, *Brother, I'm Dying*. Perhaps unfairly, I assumed many of our students are monolingual, as many live within 100 miles of our midwestern campus. However, I was confident this text would help students grasp the richness of multilingualism that is embedded within Danticat's text, as in this example:

> "Sa blan an di?" asked my mother. What did the blan say?
>
> This was the way my mother always let my brothers and me know she hadn't heard or understood something we'd said. The equivalent of a gringo, a blan was not just a white man but any foreigner, especially one who spoke the type of halting and hesitant Creole that my brothers and I sometimes spoke with our parents. (46-7)

Danticat frequently incorporates her native language in the text, deftly interpreting and contextualizing for her readers. In the above example, she explains *"Sa blan an di?"* is an often-used phrase within their family. In this way, Danticat is offering a bridge to her readers; even if they do not understand French, they probably can think of "shorthand" phrases or codes used within their own families.

The Danticat unit was comprised of four lessons. Here I will focus on the one that addresses code brokering, titled "Developing Awareness Around 'Translation Moments.'"[1] The assignment introduction was necessarily lengthy. As I have discussed several of these points throughout the essay already, here is a brief summary of the information given to the students:

a. A reminder of Danticat's role as language- and code-broker for her parents, aunt and uncle, and others.

b. A summary of the premise of Simon's assertion that people who serve as language brokers and interpreters have highly developed rhetorical and literary skills, which are generally not as developed in monolingual people.

c. An introduction to Laura Gonzales's term, "translation moments," along with an explanation of what this means. Similar to Simon, Gonzales also stresses that people adept at translation moments have a highly developed sense of audience, mode of communication and language.

d. To illustrate these skills in action, I offered a few examples of real-life translation moments and interpreting scenarios.

After reading the introduction, students were asked to answer two of four questions via a discussion, and each was required to respond to at least one classmate's post.[2] In the next section, I will include each assignment question, explain how it relates to code brokering, discuss how students responded, and comment on how effective each was in terms of conveying the learning objectives.

Research Techniques

My research involved analyzing the students' responses to Danticat's *Brother, I'm Dying* discussion prompts. The prompts were written with the intention of helping students 1) become mindful of where and how Danticat uses instances of interpretation within the text, 2) identify for themselves any communication benefits obtained from extensive language interpreting (if any), 3) consider Danticat's intention in her own use of language and what it meant, and 4) remember interpretation moments in their own lives and think about how the interpreter needed to consider audience, language, or mode of communication in that moment. The purpose of analyzing

students' responses was to determine what the students learned and inform the development of classroom techniques to advance the concept of code brokering.

Question 1: There are many places in *Brother, I'm Dying* where someone needs to translate or interpret for someone else. Please identify some of these instances in the text. What is the significance of that moment in Danticat's story?

The purpose of the first question was help students recognize and look for examples of interpreting in the text. I reasoned, once they look for examples, they will become concerned with who needs to understand, who is giving information, and how an individual serves as go-between for this communication to happen. Two students offered insightful answers to this question. Emma[3] pointed to an excellent example of code brokering in which Danticat, at the airport with her father to greet her uncle, interprets between her father and Uncle Joseph, whose laryngectomy silenced him:

> "How's Denise?" my father asked.
>
> My uncle mouthed, "on ti jan malad."
>
> I was amazed that I could still read his lips more easily than my father could.
>
> "What did he say?" asked my father.
>
> "Tante Denise is a bit sick," I said. (128)

Emma reflects Danticat needed to translate for her father, and she also noted "immigrating to the United States was hard at times for the Danticat family because they were separated." The student thus appreciates the importance of code brokering when connecting with others.

A second student, Bennett, referenced a different passage in which Danticat interprets between her uncle and a banker. In this case Bennett focuses on Danticat's interpreting as a way of reducing anxiety for her uncle.

In both cases, the students were able to identify instances of code brokering and the benefits of these skills. They described feelings of empathy with Uncle Joseph and Danticat. Based on their answers, the question served its purpose.

Question 2: Do you think it's accurate that people adept at translation moments have a highly developed sense of Audience, Mode of Communication, and Language, as Dr. Gonzales asserts? Why or why not? Please include examples from the text that would support your answer.

The intent was for students to ponder what each of these skills means and then weigh in on whether they agreed with the scholars (Are these skills important? Why would someone argue these skills are highly developed?). If they agree, students might be more interested in honing these skills. If they choose to disagree, they would have thought through their reasoning.

However, since only one person responded, I conclude the question is flawed. My initial assumptions are students either did not understand the question or they felt they did not understand the concepts well enough to render a clear response. A possible revision of the unit might include supplementary readings around language brokering and translation moments.

Finally, an in-person format could include in-class writing in small groups and oral discussion in which students could ask questions and be empowered to agree or disagree. Since there was no evidence of students pondering these skills, my conclusion is this question, as presented, was ineffective in conveying learning objectives.

Question 3: I felt like Danticat interprets for her reader, providing language translations and cultural context. Why do you think she includes the original language, which (for many) then needs to be translated?

In terms of code brokering, this question probed students' opinions regarding the importance of Danticat's languages growing up. For code brokering to be effective, monolingual

students will need to have an appreciation of their peers' backgrounds, cultures, and languages. This was a popular question, answered by 13 of the 14 students participating in this project. I attribute this to the students feeling more comfortable writing their opinion without being asked to provide supporting examples in the text.

Many responses spoke of the authenticity the original language brought. Others pointed out there are words and idioms that do not translate, so the original language was more accurate. Caleb thought, "Danticat still puts in the original language to remind readers of her culture and to let the reader think about how this story isn't taking place in English and to show the reader that not everything is in English and that it is important to learn about other languages and cultures." Candace asserted, "I believe Danticat keeps the original language to show the power of her language…. Language is a powerful thing. She also may have left it to keep her roots, immigrating is hard and many immigrants lose their part if not all of their language and culture. Keeping the language in her book is a power move." Noah, possibly tapping into Danticat's profession as a teacher, wrote Danticat "wants it to relate to the audience because most of the people probably have not ever translated a language before." Finally, Olivia empathized with immigrants who "are often forced to learn English and drop many traditions and customs that make these people them."

None of the students seemed surprised that Danticat wrote in Creole and French, and no one seemed to be inconvenienced by working a bit harder to make sense of the untranslated passages. I was pleased with the students' responses and thought my objectives in asking the question were met.

Question 4: Have you interpreted for someone in the past? Have you had someone interpret for you? If you don't have a personal example of this, can you think of a time you saw a

scene in a movie when someone needed to interpret? Or perhaps you witnessed someone interpreting for someone else? Please write about a "translation moment," either real or fictional. Please include context that would explain how the interpreter needed to consider audience, language, or mode of communication.

This last question gave students the chance to insert themselves in a code-brokering situation. They could think back to a time when they saw a need to explain something in service to another person for a needed outcome. Since the students were expected to read each other's comments and respond to at least one post, I reasoned students would not only think about themselves in this role but also learn from others. This question also had a large response, with 13 commenting. I was impressed by the number of students who have served as language broker or code broker. Those who did not interpret for others seemed appreciative of the help they received or related a story of someone they knew who serves as an interpreter. None of the students needed to invent a fictional situation; they all had a memory to report. Because the responses are varied, I will summarize a few here.

Candace wrote, "I have interpreted things for my family my entire life." Candace's grandmother didn't speak English and lived in a nursing home. Candace served as a language broker and noted, "I noticed that, along with my Grandma, nurses would get excited … to understand things quicker and have someone to really communicate with. I never considered doing this a big deal because it is something I have done my whole life having immigrant parents."

Caleb wrote about explaining to his 90-year-old grandmother what a text is. He "explained it as writing a letter or note but then sending it electronically. This she was able to

understand, and it was a ‘translation moment’ for [him].” In Caleb’s case, his explanation helped his grandmother feel included in a conversation she otherwise might not have followed.

Another student, Devon, was visiting the CN Tower in Toronto and witnessed an increasingly difficult exchange between an employee and a couple who only spoke Spanish. The visitors needed directions and were becoming frustrated. Fluent in Spanish, Devon joined the conversation, acted as interpreter, and quickly resolved the situation.

Olivia related an experience she had when working in a clothing store. A mother came in with her daughter who had special needs. The daughter was nonverbal and used a wheelchair. Olivia recognized she was unable to communicate as she normally would, saying, “I would watch the daughter’s face light up when she found something she really liked. I am very grateful for this interaction because I had to change my form of communication in order to be more attentive and engaged with people, which is a lesson that has stuck with me.”

After reading responses to the fourth question, I was impressed by the number of students who are fluent in at least one other language besides English. In the midwestern part of the United States, many people believe there is little need to learn a second language and less opportunity to practice one; I wondered how many students might be content to use English and expect everyone else to speak it as well. Based on the responses, students appreciate the skills of their multilingual peers and understand the benefit of using their full repertoires to mindfully engage with others to work toward understanding each other.

Overall, I believe the students were engaged in the text and connected it and the literacy concepts presented in the lesson. Based on their responses, students seemed to become aware of learning more about managing to their audience’s needs, choosing an appropriate mode of communication, and identifying the language or style of language for their situations.

The class successfully learned these concepts via the text and web-based assignment without the benefit of a synchronous discussion. I am optimistic that bringing more activities into the classroom to support this learning would only make the unit stronger. Through organic discussions, I hope we can freely discuss the English-centric culture in which we live (or let students disagree with this assertion) and discuss how their literacy may benefit from new ways of viewing audience, exploring different modes of communication, and conscious use of language.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In considering the text, I think Danticat's *Brother, I'm Dying* worked well because the story is very relatable. Danticat weaves a family history of love, dreams, support, and trust familiar to people everywhere; simultaneously this text encourages students to learn about the culture and political history of Haiti, the Danticat family's experiences with immigration, and Danticat's multiple language-brokering and code-brokering moments.

However, Danticat's text is only one of many such texts. An instructor fluent in a second language would be able to enrich the lessons even further by selecting a text in their language. Another excellent opportunity would be to choose a text based on the demographics of their school. For instance, if a school has many Spanish speakers, the instructor might choose a text that would encourage students' participation in sharing translations and even cultural insights.

Similarly, Steven Alvarez encourages interpreting, if not language brokering, as an everyday literacy practice in the classroom. An instructor can request translations from different languages into English during lectures both to enhance the discussion and to empower emergent multilingual students to speak with the authority of another language (12). For example, if the class is reading T.S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the instructor can ask if anyone

can interpret the epigraph, in Italian, from Dante's "Inferno." If so, the class could discuss how the epigraph relates to the meaning of the poem. In this way, one individual's skills would initiate a new discussion, benefiting everyone and perhaps enhancing the sense of community within the classroom.

Though advantageous to share individuals' various language abilities in the classroom, it is also important to address the anxiety some students may feel if their literacy skills differ from those of others. Stephanie Kerschbaum offers insights in how instructors can lead the process of normalizing difference. In reviewing the research she performed in first-year composition courses, she argues everyone naturally marks differences between themselves and others, and this information is used to determine how people interact with one another. Students naturally gravitate to people with whom they find similarities, sometimes alienating others in classroom activities. Kerschbaum maintains

> We should all benefit from honing our skills of noticing and from adopting an ethic of answerable engagement with our students. Such practices insist on an attentiveness to the here-and-now, and they put the onus on us all to perform the best possible responses we can offer in once-occurrent moments that will never recur and that have consequences for unfolding dialogue, interactions, and learning. (135)

Modeling curiosity and respect is necessary, especially when difficult situations arise. Though Kerschbaum is not writing directly about language literacy, encouraging this culture within the classroom is highly beneficial for multilingual students to engage in open discussions around language, and it is equally beneficial for monolingual students who may be hesitant at first to engage in language literacy discussions.

As we further consider how to prepare the classroom for discussions around code brokering, it is helpful to consider linguist Rosina Lippi-Green's term *communication burden*. Lippi-Green explains, "'the social space between two speakers is not neutral,' due to the myriad sociopolitical and interpersonal factors that shape communication; thus, speakers always decide 'whether or not they are going to accept their responsibility in the act of communication'" (Schneider 354). Schneider explains

> According to Lippi-Green, native speakers of a language are typically willing to share the communicative burden with other native speakers, even if communication seems unclear at first. However, in interacting with nonnative speakers, many native speakers will reject their share of the communicative burden by deciding that communication is too difficult or impossible, even though in most cases 'breakdown of communication is not due so much to accent as it is to negative social evaluation of the accent in question.' (354).

A broad dialogue around code brokering could include the potential of successful communication with diverse audiences, if students are willing to practice curiosity and trust their own abilities.

First-year composition courses and the composition-literature courses taught at my university provide an excellent opportunity for students to examine their language and languages around them, whether the languages are other Englishes or different languages altogether. As the percentage of multilingual higher-education learners continues to rise, I believe educators can help improve students' success by preparing monolingual English speakers to appreciate the benefits and skills associated with multilingualism and code-brokering. Not only will their own language skills improve; their ability to communicate over a broad range of techniques will be

valuable. Finally, students in the first-year classroom will be better equipped to connect with students from different backgrounds using this juggling of codes.

Notes

1. Though the term *code brokering* was not referenced in the title or assignment, the instructions, questions, and learning outcomes were developed around the principles that led to what was subsequently called code brokering.

2. This assignment was planned as a full-class discussion, including time for writing reflections, small-group discussions, and opportunities to discuss code brokering scenarios. The discussion and activities were curtailed by moving the course online due to COVID; however, as I noted, students' discussion responses indicate an understanding of and openness to the concepts of code brokering.

3. I received retroactive IRB approval to review and use students' assignment responses. Of the 17 students who completed the assignment, 14 consented to my incorporating their responses in this essay. To protect their privacy, students' names and identifying characteristics have been changed.

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