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## Introduction

### RACING TRANSLINGUALISM IN COMPOSITION

#### *Toward a Race-Conscious Translingualism*

Tom Do and Karen Rowan

In 2020, the United States experienced unprecedented changes and sociopolitical upheavals. In the midst of a global pandemic, scores of protesters throughout the US marched to the streets to demand racial justice and an end to the perpetual racism, violence, and murder of Black bodies. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and countless others prompted the late John Lewis (2020) to note in a *New York Times* opinion essay that “Emmitt Till was my George Floyd. He was my Rayshard Brooks, Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor.” The parallels Lewis drew between Emmitt Till and George Floyd as unabashed displays of White racism underscore the underlying racism of these murders, which rocked the nation—albeit momentarily—of its colorblindness and revealed the systemic racism that continues to plague all levels of our institutions. The sociopolitical upheavals were also a response to a White House administration that not only failed dismally to address racial injustice but was in fact the purveyor and instigator that sowed racial division.

Amid upheaval and calls for racial justice, our field has looked inwardly to reflect on the ways our theories and practices continue to inflict linguistic racism by insisting upon, centering, and perpetuating Standard English as the universal norm. At the start of this decade, April Baker-Bell, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier, Davena Jackson, Lamar Johnson, Carmen Kynard, and Teaira McMurty (2020) issued a list of demands that call for Black linguistic justice. Broadly speaking, the list de-centers White linguistic supremacy and centers Black English. The list of demands for centering Black English, Black linguistic consciousness, and Black scholars is timely and necessary because many in the field continue to feel threatened by language diversity. For example, just two years earlier, Vershawn Ashanti Young’s (2018) use of Black English

in the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC's) 2019 Call for Proposal (CFP) was criticized on a widely read thread on the now-defunct writing program administrators' listserv (WPA-L) as an affected style, inappropriate, and ideologically driven. While some listserv members defended Young's CFP and language, the thread as a whole highlighted persistent tensions between official support for language diversity and linguistic justice and less visible but still prevalent resistance to language diversity in both professional and pedagogical contexts.

As our nation confronts systemic racism—reluctantly, in partial measures—there is an ever-growing need for anti-racist work and scholarship. This need is reflected in the spike in interest in books that address anti-racism, for both academic and non-academic audiences. *Racing Translingualism in Composition: Toward a Race-Conscious Translingualism* contributes to our national and scholarly conversations by confronting the ways racism continues to shape and inform our theories, pedagogical practices, and language policies and strives to develop anti-racist orientations to language and literacy pedagogies. Translingual theory and pedagogy have emerged as one of the most recent manifestations of composition's professed commitment to language diversity. We, too, believe that the translingual movement makes important contributions to our collective efforts to theorize, research, and teach in ways that support language diversity. And yet, for all the progress our field has made in challenging regressive language ideologies and advocating for progressive writing pedagogies, much work remains to effect widespread change in the field. In *Racing Translingualism in Composition*, we take up this work to help move the field forward by directly attending to the links among language, race, and racism and making the case for race-conscious, rather than colorblind,<sup>1</sup> theories and pedagogies.

To situate our work within a larger disciplinary conversation, we offer a brief historical review of the evolution of these conversations, from “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (1974) to translingualism. We then review key themes and movements in translingual scholarship, working to articulate both our orientation to translingualism in this project and the need for focused work on the role of race, racism, and anti-racism in translingual theory and practice. Finally, we offer an overview of contributions to *Racing Translingualism in Composition*.

# LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN COMPOSITION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT, CURRENT RELEVANCE

In the years following the publication of CCCC's "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL) (1974), composition studies engaged in vigorous debate about the relationships among language diversity, writing, writing pedagogy, and racial and social justice. As Geneva Smitherman (2015, 69–71) recounts, some members of the field vocally supported the statement and worked actively to implement its pedagogical vision while others vociferously opposed it, rejecting the claim that students have a right to their own language and arguing that teaching anything other than Standard American English (SAE) is irresponsible. Following these initial responses, efforts to enact SRTOL were hampered in part by confusion about how the theory underwriting the statement might be translated to practice. Unfortunately, the conservative climate that emerged in the late 1970s undermined progressive initiatives like SRTOL, and continued direct attacks on the statement and on language diversity more broadly eroded commitment to the pedagogical project of language diversity (72). To be sure, some teachers in the field continued to develop and implement SRTOL-aligned pedagogies; but sustained, public, scholarly attention to SRTOL waned. This vacuum created a context in which many in the field supported SRTOL in theory but not in practice, taking the stance that non-SAE languages are good for family and social contexts but not for academic or professional contexts. This "enactment" of SRTOL was perhaps most explicitly articulated by Rebecca S. Wheeler and Rachel Swords (2006), whose conservative approach to code switching is rooted in the separation of languages and valorization of SAE as *the* language for academic writing (see Young 2013).

In recent years, composition studies has seen a (re)turn to language, driven in part by a revitalized interest in SRTOL as well as attention to second language writing (Matsuda 2013). That interest has come both in the form of scholarship that reexamines the history of SRTOL (e.g., Parks 2013; Kynard 2007; Lamos 2011; and others) and in scholarship that articulates the continued pedagogical relevance of SRTOL, particularly with respect to African American students and language (e.g., Perryman-Clark 2009; Kinloch 2006). Notably, recent historical research, such as the work of Parks and Kynard, highlights the relationship between the SRTOL movement and the activist and radical political movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, though Kynard is more explicit in her efforts to recover the ties among SRTOL, Black Power, and radical

Black politics. In so doing, she calls attention not only to the statement's activist roots but also to the ongoing relevance of radical responses to racism in writing pedagogies.

We call attention to the responses to SRTOL to contrast the statement's reception to the field's responses to translingualism. While many in the field rejected STROL, the emergence of translingual theory has been met with widespread enthusiasm. To be sure, some of the response to translingualism has manifested as critique, and rightly so; but the critiques of translingualism can, by and large, be characterized as generative critique that is meant to move the work of translingualism forward, not to dismiss it entirely. The differences in responses to SRTOL and translingualism are not coincidental. Rather, we believe translingualism's failure to center the intersections of race, language, and writing is consequential and has permitted its enthusiastic uptake. In short, language diversity is far more palatable when distanced from race because it appears safer to evaluate students' writing (Inoue 2015, 26). This absence, we contend, signals a need for critical intervention in translingual theory and practice, one that foregrounds issues of race and racism.

As *Racing Translingualism in Composition* argues, the different responses to SRTOL and translingualism are racialized, and these racialized responses are informed by the different racial projects of these two movements. Likewise, the consequences of those differing responses are significant, leading the field to take up distinctly different stances regarding the racial and social justice work of writing and writing pedagogy. To more fully explicate this argument, we now trace the trajectory of translingual theory and practice in composition studies.

#### TRANSLINGUAL THEORY AND PRACTICE AS A CHALLENGE TO ENGLISH MONOLINGUALISM

Translingualism, introduced to composition studies by Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur's (2011) manifesto "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach," is one of the most recent manifestations of the field's commitment to language diversity in writing pedagogy. Here, we offer a broad accounting of translingualism and, importantly, make the case for why we believe it is necessary for translingual theory and practice to engage deeply, explicitly, and consistently with race and racism. We do not aim to provide a comprehensive account of translingualism, either its theory or applications across global contexts; such a goal is beyond the scope of this project, and any attempt to offer a definitive account of translingualism would

arguably be antithetical to the central tenets of translingualism itself. Rather, our aim is to hone in on the elements of translingualism that speak to its anti-racist potential and therefore require sustained engagement with race and racism.

While many scholars have outlined the scope and nuances of translingual theory, we find Paul Kei Matsuda's (2014, 479) articulation of translingualism's key assumptions a useful starting point:

- English monolingualism is prevalent and problematic.
- The presence of language differences is normal and desirable.
- Languages are neither discrete nor stable; they are dynamic and negotiated.
- Practicing translingual writing involves the negotiation of language differences.

We further find it valuable to extend these assumptions to begin to articulate how they intersect with issues of race and racism. To that end, we contend:

- English monolingualism is prevalent and problematic . . . largely because it is inextricably woven together with racism.
- The presence of language differences is normal and desirable . . . but some forms of language differences are more normal and desirable than others, and the variability in the ways language differences are valued is linked in large part to race and ethnicity.
- Languages are neither discrete nor stable; they are dynamic and negotiated . . . but some language negotiations are taken up more or less enthusiastically due to the racialization of languages.
- Practicing translingual writing involves the negotiation of language differences . . . but some writers must do more and different kinds of negotiating due to the ways they, as people and writers, are racialized.

Here, we are working to illustrate some of the ways we understand translingualism to be always already linked to issues of race and racism. While we endorse the fundamental tenets underlying translingual praxis, we also offer an important caveat that any theory of language must attend to race and racism to recognize the role language has in reproducing race and racialized language differences. *Racing Translingualism* seeks to highlight the roles race and racism play in how language differences are practiced, negotiated, and recognized.

While the growing body of translingual scholarship in composition has centered questions of language differences and negotiations, it has simultaneously de-centered race and racism in writing and writing instruction. On this point, Keith Gilyard (2016, 285) critiques translingual scholarship for eliding issues of race and racism in its construction

of the “linguistic everyperson”—a construct that flattens linguistic difference, overlooks the material and political consequences of linguistic differences, and ignores the struggles for linguistic legitimacy of racialized minorities. One consequence of this flattening is that when the linguistic diversity of monolingual and/or White, middle-class students is addressed (as it should be in translingual pedagogies), it is often attended to in ways that elide the differences in how majority/mainstream and minoritized students experience and negotiate language differences.

The translingual orientation is, indeed, an ideological position meant to challenge monolingual assumptions of standardness that many students (and teachers) entering composition classrooms hold. Much of translingual scholarship has articulated a paradigm that largely revolves around issues of linguistic inclusion, ideology, theory, and pedagogy that seek to challenge discriminatory policies and practices that are viewed as inherent in English monolingualism and SAE. However, as Asao Inoue (2015, 26) observes, translingual pedagogies “often assume racial structures that support and are associated with the linguistic and language competencies of all students” because “the people who most often form multilingual English students or linguistic difference from the dominant academic discourse are racialized in conventional ways.” In this and other ways, translingualism gestures toward linguistic inclusiveness and celebrates differences while ignoring the racialized structures that make linguistic difference visible in the first place. Thus, we contend, along with contributors to this collection, that translingualism must attend to institutional contexts, policies, and practices (and how race and racism shape those contexts, policies, and practices) if it is to effectively counter monolingualism.

Fundamentally, we contend that language differences are always already perceived, marked, judged, and racialized in communicative interactions. While “race” is widely understood as a social construct, racism and the racialization of people, their bodies, and their languages have real, material consequences and thus cannot be set aside. Despite its instability, contradictions, and slippages, race functions as a “master category” that structures all facets of our social lives that have real social consequences (Omi and Winant 2015, 106). That is, race functions as a master category precisely because of its resilience to defy absolutes and fixed notions of itself. Accordingly, *Racing Translingualism* aims to critically examine how race is always and already sewn into the fabric of our theories and practices of language, and this collection explicitly grounds the politics of race in dialogue with translingual approaches



while recognizing the fluid nature of both race and translingualism as negotiated terms.

*Racing Translingualism in Composition* is a racial project that signifies a shift in the scholarly conversations in translingualism by examining these intersections. In doing so, this edited collection moves beyond critique to rhetorically refine and thereby extend existing scholarship on translingual praxis by keeping the intersections of race, racism, anti-racism, and translingualism at its center. As we describe below, contributors to *Racing Translingualism in Composition* extend the larger project of interrogating intersections of race, racism, language, and translingualism; but they do so in ways that resist fixed or absolute definitions of these concepts. In this way, we hope this book, much like the concerns articulated in “This Ain’t Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice,” interrogates both the means of production and the various institutions that control the means of producing racialized language differences and inequality to create more linguistically and racially just writing theories and pedagogies.

#### **RACING TRANSLINGUALISM IN COMPOSITION: AN OVERVIEW**

As the response to Young’s (2018) CCCC CFP illustrates, while many in the field accept that there are important intersections among race and racism, language ideologies, and writing and writing pedagogy, there is not widespread agreement on or acceptance of these intersections for either our scholarship and research or our pedagogical practices. Therefore, the chapters in part I collectively bridge the gap between theory and practice by articulating the nuances of those intersections—moving from theoretical analyses to empirical studies of instructors and students—and argue that the field must attend to them in substantive and sustained ways.

The first two chapters focus on the relationships between colorblind racism and language ideologies. Karen Rowan views translingualism as an anti-racist racial project that challenges monolingualist assumptions and ideologies about language difference. Rowan argues that translingualism’s focus on difference in *all* languages for *all* translingual subjects runs the risk of being rearticulated in ways that reflect colorblind racist ideologies. Rachael Shapiro and Missy Watson similarly problematize translingualism for its exclusive focus on language fluidity and argue for an approach that actively resists standard language ideology and its concomitant role in colorblind racism. They advance an overtly racialized translingualism as both a theoretical and a pedagogical approach that

not only calls attention to the myth of standard language ideologies but also counters the new racism inherent in such ideologies.

Guarding against colorblind racism in translingual praxis begins by looking closely at language and identity in context, a project taken up in the next two chapters. Aja Martinez speaks to the risks of colorblind translingualism by bringing into focus her experience of linguistic marginalization. Martinez narrativizes her experiences of heritage language loss and identity within the historical context of US colonization, recounts the verbal and physical abuse her parents' generation endured for speaking Spanish, and lays bare the fallout of this abuse on successive generations of Mexican Americans and Chicanx—many of whom are, like Martinez, unable to “pass” as either proficient Spanish or English speakers. In so doing, Martinez extends Sara Alvarez and colleagues' (2017) efforts to explore and trouble the ways ethnic identities, heritage languages, and language and writing practices are simultaneously linked and contested. Tom Do further complicates translingualism's understanding of the relationships between language resources and ethnic identity in his examination of how communities of practice both afford and constrain heritage speakers' participation in communal practices that impact their in-group membership and ethnic identity. In three case studies of Vietnamese heritage language speakers, he focuses on social practices—embodied in material artifacts, ritualized processes, and intra-cultural interactions—and argues that a race-conscious translingual paradigm forefronts race and ethnicity by examining the role communities of practice play in the construction and maintenance of heritage speakers' ethnic identity.

The final chapter in part I turns to examine how racialized attitudes about language play out in instructors' responses to student writing. Bethany Davila's empirical research examines instructors' responses to a student paper, responses that illustrated the ways their perceptions of students' race and ethnicity shaped their perceptions of students' languages and accents. These racialized attitudes exemplify the negative stereotypes that students of color are perpetually foreign and deficient while privileging White students as fully capable of Standard English.

Employing a wide range of methodological approaches—from historical to qualitative research methods—and drawing our attention to students, instructors, and institutional contexts, the chapters in part II collectively conceptualize and articulate a race-conscious translingual praxis.

Responding directly to Gilyard's (2016, 288) call for scholars “to write histories of the translanguagers who organized at City College and other places,” Lindsey Albracht rereads the five demands from the Black

and Puerto Rican student activists in light of race-conscious translingual praxis. Albracht argues that the activists' transformative blueprint provides a guide for "racing" translingual praxis so as to move beyond granting students' rights to their own languages and toward a more fundamental rethinking of the structures, practices, and unexamined ideologies that stigmatize and racialize language in the first place.

Shifting more explicitly to pedagogy, the following chapters draw on case studies of student experiences to inform calls for race-conscious translingual pedagogies. Using stories of three African students and her own experiences, Esther Milu argues that African immigrant students' unique and diverse language repertoires need to be understood in the context of Africa's complex racialized histories and raciolinguistic experiences. Examining the racialized histories and raciolinguistic experiences of students from Rwanda, Angola, and Kenya, as well as students' experiences of double linguistic marginalization from mainstream White America and Black America, Milu demonstrates how each context shapes students' translingual repertoires and language ideologies. Next, Yasmine Romero centers the experiences of Emma, a student in her intermediate course for multilingual language learners. Two relationships emerge among language, race, and racism in Emma's experiences: how accents shape perceptions of multilingual learners and how racial identity shapes multilingual learners' linguistic and rhetorical choices. Romero's project complements both Davila's analysis of the "perpetually foreign" stereotype and Martinez's narrative of exclusion and identity. Like Milu, Romero underscores the need to develop a race-conscious translingualism that emphasizes students' lived experiences.

The next two chapters explore the professional and institutional contexts that inform translingual possibilities. First, Stephanie Mosher explores the challenges and possibilities of inculcating instructor engagement with race consciousness and translingualism. In her interview-based study, Mosher analyzes how each participant uses narrative-in-conversation to put new translingual discourses into productive dialogue with their preexisting beliefs about language correctness and appropriateness; and she identifies several types of narratives of engagement, including resistance, anger, confusion, and conscious efforts to incorporate the new ideas into participants' pedagogies and theories. Shifting the focus to the spaces of teaching and learning, Jaclyn Hilberg argues that translingual pedagogies can avoid flattening racial difference by explicitly framing composition classrooms as racially segregated spaces. Hilberg situates translingualism within a broad disciplinary trend of imagining classrooms as spaces for linguistic contact and suggests that

composition instructors complicate contact-oriented notions of classroom space by considering the ways racial and socioeconomic segregation structures literacy education. As an intervention, she proposes that composition instructors frame their classrooms as complex spaces of both contact and de facto segregation and offers multiple framings of classroom space to illustrate how translingual pedagogies might more explicitly account for linguistic exclusion alongside the typical focus on inclusion.

The final two chapters in part II explore research methods as pedagogical interventions for cultivating translingual insight and practice. Drawing on a raciolinguistic framework, Steven Alvarez argues for critical translingual pedagogies that demystify raciolinguistic structures and openly examine and name students' lived experiences with English-only ideologies grounded in White supremacy. Alvarez is particularly interested in reading the ways the practice of policing languages masks the linguistic racism that underlies standard language norms. He proposes ethnographic methodologies as a pedagogical tool for cultivating critical translingual literacies, using his reading of an instance in which both the language practices and people from minoritized groups are publicly policed and shamed as an illustrative example. Shawanda Stewart and Brian Stone likewise propose a research-based approach to developing a race-conscious translingual pedagogy, this time taking up the traditions of participatory action research and Hip-Hop pedagogy as starting points. They attend to the close links between racial identity and language identity and draw on critical race theory to make a case for participatory action research as one way to enact a race-conscious translingualism in the composition classroom.

In part III, Bruce Horner's chapter complicates efforts to race translingualism, pointing to the emergent character of both translinguality and race. In response, he foregrounds translingualism's insistence on opacity as a means for resisting monolingualism's impulse to make people and languages transparent and for highlighting labor as an essential element in all communicative interactions. In his chapter, Victor Villanueva maintains that the coloniality of power, and the racism that follows from it, is manifested in our cultural systems, including rhetoric and composition studies. Racism thus pervades all facets of our lives, and we are all complicit in it. To fully engage in translingualism and its beliefs in linguistic diversity, he argues, we must be "translingual first" by de-linking ourselves from the colonial matrix of power. Taken together, these two response chapters speak to the tensions that both gave rise to this collection and help to frame the continued inquiry that follows from it.

The chapters in this edited collection advance current iterations of translingualism by centering race and racism in reconceptualizing and theorizing a race-conscious translingual praxis. Foregrounding race explicitly this way moves translingualism toward a sustained interrogation of the ways racialized language ideologies and practices continue to disenfranchise our most vulnerable students and confronts both the challenge and the necessity of cultivating a race-conscious and anti-racist translingualism.

## NOTE

1. Since the inception of this book, the term *colorblind* has been called into question. We use the term *colorblind* figuratively to indicate how the intentional or unintentional refusal to acknowledge racial differences ignores the consequences of racism. Some of our contributors have opted to use different terms, such as *color evasive*, to arrive at a similar concept or idea.

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