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The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued

Contesting the monolingualist assumptions in composition, this article identifies textual and pedagogical spaces for World Englishes in academic writing. It presents code meshing as a strategy for merging local varieties with Standard Written English in a move toward gradually pluralizing academic writing and developing multilingual competence for transnational relationships.

“The task, as we see it, is to develop an internationalist perspective capable of understanding the study and teaching of written English in relation to other languages and to the dynamics of globalization. At a point when many North Americans hold it self-evident that English is already or about to be the global lingua franca, we need to ask some serious questions about the underlying sense of inevitability in this belief—and about whose English and whose interests it serves”

—Horner and Trimbur 624.

In their award-winning essay “English Only and U.S. College Composition,” Bruce Horner and John Trimbur trace the pedagogical and cultural developments that have led to the conception of English writing in the United States as a unidirectional and monolingual acquisition of literate competence. While

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these assumptions have been motivated by the modernist ideology of “one language/one nation,” the authors envision that postmodern globalization may require us to develop in our students a multilingual and polyiterate orientation to writing. They outline the shifts in curriculum, policy, and research that will promote such a broadened pedagogical orientation in the future. However, as a teacher of writing for ESL and multilingual students, I am left with the question: what can I do to promote this pedagogical vision in my classroom now? I am concerned about the implications of this policy change for the texts produced by students in my current writing courses. Though the policy changes Horner and Trimbur advocate are admittedly “long term ideals” (623), teachers don’t have to wait till these policies trickle down to classrooms. They have some relative autonomy to develop textual practices that challenge dominant conventions and norms before policies are programmatically implemented from the macro-level by institutions (see Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*). The classroom is a powerful site of policy negotiation. The pedagogies practiced and texts produced in the classroom can reconstruct policies ground up. In fact, the classroom is already a policy site; every time teachers insist on a uniform variety of language or discourse, we are helping reproduce monolingualist ideologies and linguistic hierarchies.

This is an essay on pluralizing composition from the specific angle of emergent World Englishes. It explores the textual and pedagogical implications of the policy changes outlined by Horner and Trimbur. We may consider this article as taking off where Horner and Trimbur leave us. (The epigraph with which this essay begins is literally the final statement of their article.) Since their project is historical, Horner and Trimbur only account for the ways in which monolingual norms evolved in composition. It is not their intention to outline the pedagogies developing under the pressure of multilingual communicative practices or to fashion such pedagogies anew. Though I attempt to accomplish these objectives, I undertake a humbler task first: I outline some ways of accommodating in academic writing diverse varieties of English. This project can accompany, inspire, and even facilitate the more radical project (for which Horner and Trimbur call) of engaging with multiple languages in English composition.

The Implications of Globalizing English

Before I articulate the ways in which World Englishes¹ can find a place in academic writing, it is important to understand their new status in contempo-



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rary society. There are many developments that challenge the privileged place of what have been called “native” varieties—i.e., what I call the Metropolitan Englishes (ME), spoken by the communities that traditionally claimed ownership over the language in England, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Since the 1980s, Kachru has persistently argued that World Englishes (WE) are rule governed, with well-established norms and communica-

tive functions suitable for their new environment. Others have taken an ideological tack to this argument and demonstrated how these varieties evolve from ways in which local communities appropriate the language according to their social practices to resist the colonizing thrust of English (see Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*; Pennycook). A more recent argument is that appropriating English according to the preferred interests and identities of the speaker is both a condition for gaining voice and also the most effective way for developing proficiency in that language (Peirce). The nativization, resistance, and voice arguments notwithstanding, even in postcolonial communities like my own Sri Lanka, it is either “standard American” or “standard British” English that is treated as the target for conversational and literate purposes in educational institutions. Though the stigma attached to WE is changing, these varieties are still treated as unsuitable for classroom purposes. However, the intensified globalization of English in postmodern society further challenges this unequal and hierarchical relationship between English varieties. If earlier arguments haven’t radically changed the status of English varieties in literacy and education, recent social and communicative developments should.

To begin with raw statistics, the demography of English is changing. According to the British applied linguist David Graddol, the “native” speakers² “lost their majority in the 1970s” (58). Two different projections for year 2050, give the distribution of the speakers as follows:

	Graddol	Crystal
English as sole or first language:	433 million	433 million
English as additional/second language:	668 million	462 million

Even according to Crystal’s conservative estimate (see *English as a Global Language*), multilingual users of the language will be about 30 million more than





the “native” speakers. Graddol is stating the obvious when he proclaims, “[I]n future [English] will be a language used mainly in multilingual contexts as a second language and for communication between nonnative speakers” (57). This changing demography of English has profound implications for language norms. At its most shocking, this gives the audacity for multilingual speakers of English to challenge the traditional language norms and standards of the “native speaker” communities. My fellow villagers in Sri Lanka would say, “Who the hell is worrying about the rules-schools of Queen’s English, man?” After all, multilingual speakers have a much larger speech community with which to use their varieties. Their reference point is not British or American communities anymore. They know that there are millions of people around the world who use varieties like their own and are open to negotiating differences with sensitivity and skill. Therefore, they are now using their own varieties with greater confidence.

These changes are encouraging a reconsideration of the native/nonnative distinction between varieties. They compel us to think of English as a plural language that embodies multiple norms and standards. English should be treated as a multinational language, one that belongs to diverse communities and not owned only by the metropolitan communities. From this point of view, “standard” Indian English, Nigerian English, and Trinidadian English would enjoy the same status as British English or American English, all of them constituting a heterogeneous system of Global English (Brutt-Griffler; Crystal, *Language Revolution*; McArthur; Modiano). This perspective will also make us reexamine the distinction native/nonnative when it comes to speaker identities. Should we call a person who has been speaking Sri Lankan English since his birth a nonnative speaker of English? Granting even my multilingualism, the use of the term *nonnative* is difficult to apply to me in relation to English. To use the terminology developed by applied linguists (see Hamers and Blanc), I may be called a *balanced bilingual* who has acquired *simultaneous bilingualism* in a case of *childhood bilinguality*. That is, I have acquired Tamil and English in parallel, with equal facility, since my earliest days of linguistic development. Therefore, I am tempted to ask in Babu English,³ “Honored Sirs and Madams, I humbly beseech you, which language am I a native of?” Only the color of my skin would influence someone to call me a non-native speaker of English—not my level of competence, process of acquisition, or time of learn-

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ing. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use terms such as *expert* and *novice* that don't invoke considerations of blood, family, or race to describe proficiency (see Rampton). We should recognize that there are expert users of Sri Lankan English as there are of American English. If each of us can acknowledge that we are novice speakers of the other's variety, we will make efforts to develop competence in it (if necessary for our purposes) without expecting the other to defer to our own variety as the universal norm.

Contemporary social and economic developments in transnational life would force us to argue that English varieties shouldn't be treated as relevant and functional only within their respective communities of origination—i.e., Indian English for India, and Nigerian English for Nigeria. Just as composition was stultified by the monolingual norm of the nation-state framework, the

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nativization, resistance, and voice arguments for WE won't go far enough if they are made on behalf of self-contained local communities. Local Englishes are now traveling—just as American English—travels through CNN, Hollywood, and MTV. Often it is CNN that carries the diverse Englishes of reporters, politicians, and informants—not to mention musicians and film stars—into the houses of the most reclusive middle class families in the West. Furthermore, diaspora communities

have brought their Englishes physically to the neighborhoods and doorsteps of American families. If they are not working with multilingual people in their offices or studying with them in schools, Anglo Americans are exposed to WE in other ways. The new work order involves an international network of production, marketing, and business relationships. Personnel from the outsourced company who call us in Indian English from Bangalore or Madras are the least of the links in this network. As industrial, business, and marketing agencies across the world communicate with each other, they are compelled to conduct transactions in different varieties of English. At its most intense, the Internet presents a forum where varieties of English mingle freely. There are online journals, discussion circles, and websites that anyone in the world can go to for information. But without a willingness to negotiate Englishes, we get little from these resources. Scholars studying transnational interactions in English show the creative strategies multilingual speakers use to negotiate their differences and effectively accomplish their purposes, often with no deference to native





speaker norms (see Firth; Seidelhofer). ME/monolingual speakers come off as relatively lacking in these negotiation skills in comparison with WE speakers (Higgins), with dire implications for their ability to succeed in such transactions.

Developments like this show that in order to be functional postmodern global citizens, even students from the dominant community (i.e., Anglo American) now need to be proficient in negotiating a repertoire of World Englishes. In the case of second language teaching, we already have a body of research that reveals the limitations of curricula that favor only one variety of English—the North American, Australian, or British standard that has traditionally dominated education. In Toronto, Somali immigrant students learn “hip-hop English” more effectively outside the classroom, disregarding the established code of the school (Ibrahim). For these students, hip-hop English serves more functions in peer-group social interaction and self-presentation. In schools in London, Bengali students learn Jamaican English through interaction with their friends while absconding from classrooms that insist on standard British English (Harris et al). Since Jamaican English serves more functional purposes for networking in their immediate environment, students tap into their intuitive language competence and personal learning strategies to master a variety that is not formally taught to them.

A more ironic example comes from Eva Lam’s ethnographic study of a Chinese American student in California. Almon is frustrated by the negative identities provided for his “broken English” in school. Therefore, he is tongue-tied in the classroom. However, on the Internet, Almon is loquacious. He uses his own English with multilingual speakers of that language (who also come with diverse varieties of their English). Since he has a global speech community to relate to on the Internet (different from the “native English community” imposed by the teacher in the classroom), and a language that he owns collectively with this multilingual community of English speakers, his attitude and usage show significant changes. Being the founder of the fan group for Japanese pop singer Ryoko, and the host of an internationally popular home page, Almon engages in a range of discourses (i.e., pop culture, religion, therapy, and netspeak) and a variety of genres (i.e., biographical, expressive, and narrative writing in his homepage) all in English with his Internet buddies who display varying proficiency levels. The researcher has evidence of a visible improvement in Almon’s English as he engages quite effectively in these communicative interactions.



Lam brings out the many ironies in this situation when she concludes:

Whereas classroom English appeared to contribute to Almon's sense of exclusion or marginalization (his inability to speak like a native) which paradoxically contradicts the school's mandate to prepare students for the workplace and civic involvement, the English he controlled on the Internet enabled him to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness to a global English-speaking community (476).

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It is not surprising that classroom language based on "native" norms is irrelevant to what students regard as more socially significant needs in their everyday lives. This is confirmed by the choices made by Ibrahim's Somali students

and Harris et al's Bengali student. Furthermore, a classroom based on "standard" English and formal instruction limits the linguistic acquisition, creativity, and production among students. When Almon is engaged in purposive communication in socially valued encounters, he produces texts of a range of genres, uses the language actively, and learns collaboratively with

his peers. Thus it is outside the classroom that students seem to develop communicative competence and negotiation strategies for "real world" needs of multilingualism. Classes based on monolingual pedagogies disable students in contexts of linguistic pluralism. We also learn from this example that taking ownership of English, or appropriating the language by confidently using it to serve one's own interests according to one's own values, helps develop fluency in English. This observation confirms what many teachers have known all along: valuing students' own languages—in this case, nonprestige varieties of English—helps in the acquisition of other dialects, including the socially valued dominant varieties. As we recognize now, the vernacular is an asset in the learning of mainstream languages (see Cummins). Valuing the varieties that matter to students can lessen the inhibitions against dominant codes, reduce the exclusive status of those codes, and enable students to accommodate them in their repertoire of Englishes.

If it is important then to develop proficiency in the range of new Englishes gaining importance in contemporary society, how do we proceed with pedagogical practice? My colleagues in TESOL are busy these days redefining their teaching activity (see Canagarajah, "Introduction;" Holliday; Kumaravadivelu). We realize that rather than developing mastery in a single "target language," students should strive for competence in a repertoire of codes and discourses.





Rather than simply *joining* a speech community, students should learn to *shuttle* between communities in contextually relevant ways. To meet these objectives, rather than focusing on correctness, we should perceive “error” as the learner’s active negotiation and exploration of choices and possibilities. Rather than teaching grammatical *rules* in a normative and abstract way, we should teach communicative *strategies*—i.e., creative ways to negotiate the norms relevant in diverse contexts. In such a pedagogy, the home/first language may not be a hindrance (or “interference,” as labeled in traditional TESOL discourse), but a resource (as we find through Almon’s experience).

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Would such changes mean that speakers of English will soon lose the ability to communicate with each other as diverse varieties are legitimized for educational and social purposes? Would all this simply perpetuate the ancient curse of Babel—as some linguists fear (see Crystal, *Language Revolution* 60)? Here, some of the intuitive strategies that multilingual people use for communication come to our rescue. According to speech accommodation theory (see Giles), multilingual people always make adjustments to each other as they modify their accent or syntax to facilitate communication with those who are not proficient in their language. Furthermore, they come with psychological and attitudinal resources, such as patience, tolerance, and humility, to negotiate the differences of interlocutors (see Higgins). A refusal to deal with difference (or cooperate with an interlocutor) is not congenial for communication—even when the language of both speakers is the same! Other interpersonal strategies of repair, clarification, gestures, and back channeling are also wisely deployed to negotiate speech difference (see Firth; Gumperz). Indeed such cooperative values and strategies are intuitive to multilingual people who have had to always engage with diverse language groups in their environment since pre-colonial times (see Khubchandani). At any rate, the different varieties of English still belong to the same grammatical system. Some linguists are of the opinion that the underlying grammatical and syntactic structure (i.e., the deep structure, in Chomskian terms) is the same across the diverse varieties of English (Pullum). From this point of view, speakers don’t have to be experts in another variety of English in order to speak to other communities. They simply need the metalinguistic, sociolinguistic, and attitudinal preparedness to negotiate differences even as they use their own dialects. Ideally, this will ap-



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proximate the Biblical experience of Pentecost—the archetypal metaphor of unity in diversity—as speakers communicate with each other without suppressing (in fact, while celebrating) their differences. While proceeding toward this ideal, we must still acknowledge that such interactions take place in contexts marked by power differences (as I will illustrate below), with unequal roles and responsibilities for speakers, which those from minority communities have to negotiate with ideological clarity and linguistic creativity.

Focusing On Composition

In the context of the sociolinguistic changes in the global use of English and the pedagogical changes to address them in applied linguistics/TESOL, we shall now turn to examine the place of English in composition. What is the place of WE in college writing? Relative to the developments in TESOL, its place is still unequal and pejorative. Though some of the positions we adopt in composition classrooms are not explicitly proposed or theorized, we do have an unwritten rule that stratifies the codes in the following way. If at all, we permit WE only in certain well-defined contexts:

WE for literary texts; ME for “serious” texts.

WE for discursal features; ME for grammar.

WE for informal classroom interactions; ME for formal production.

WE for speaking; ME for writing;

WE for home; ME for school.

WE for local communication; ME for international communication.

Let me elaborate. Teachers may prescribe an Achebe, Raja Rao, or Walcott, who uses local varieties, as a literary reader, but when students write an essay on these texts they have to use ME (see also Lu). At best, we may permit the use of WE for personal or creative writing. Even here, we’ll appreciate if the authorial voice is in ME, switching to WE only for the voices of characters in the text. This dichotomy, in fact, characterizes our use of readings in the classroom. While we may use postcolonial literary texts as supplementary reading, we use texts that use only ME for discipline-based or expository reading. (This practice is partly dictated by exigency: publishers have already “sanitized” aca-

demic texts written in WE. Therefore, texts that feature other varieties from non-Western communities rarely reach the educational institutions here.) To move to the second form of stratification, even the most progressive of compositionists (e.g., Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell) may permit WE preferences in style, tone, and discourse (at what we may call the extra-sentential or rhetorical level), while insisting on ME for the sentential level of grammar, syntax, and spelling conventions. [Note that some compositionists (see Elbow, “Vernacular Literacies”) consider the normative variety for writing as a neutral code, Standard Written English (SWE), which is not native to any community. However, I think that SWE is closer to the standard varieties of traditional “native speaker” communities and distant from WE varieties like my own Sri Lankan English. SWE is simply the textual realization of ME in composition. Hence my preference to label the normative variety for writing as ME.]

Outside the text, we have other ways of segregating the codes. We may accept WE for informal classroom activities (student text discussions whether in groups or as peer critiques; student-instructor conversations; and “low stakes” written assignments such as peer commentary, e-mail, and online discussions) but insist on traditional norms for graded formal assignments (essays and examinations). For some instructors, this arrangement translates as WE for speaking and ME for writing, motivated by the assumption that writing is formal and requires the established code.⁴ These forms of stratification, together with the other two discussed in the previous paragraph, resemble what many progressive practitioners have proposed as a pragmatic pedagogical strategy of using the local variants as a means for transitioning to the established code. Widely discussed as a pedagogical option for African American students (see Baugh; Heath; Delpit), this practice has been extended to the teaching of other language-minority communities in more recent times (see Heller and Martin-Jones; Lucas and Katz; Pease-Alvarez and Winsler).

The final two forms of stratification, at a more macrosocial level, are based on well-known arguments made by liberal linguists. Local variants for home and the dominant variety for school is behind the practice favored in Heath’s *Ways with Words* (see also Baugh; Labov; Wheeler). Others in TESOL (e.g., Widdowson) have argued for the use of local variants for intracommunity purposes, while metropolitan norms are used when communities interact at the institutional and/or international level. Scholars adopting this position would tolerate WE being taught in postcolonial communities for local usage; but they would insist on ME for formal, institutional, and international usage



(Widdowson). Needless to say, the message conveyed to students in even such presumably progressive positions is that local Englishes should have only a restricted place in one's repertoire.

The above approaches for accommodating local varieties in the classroom provide for many teachers the way to practice the CCCC resolution of Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL). The extent of the students' right here seems to be letting them use their English at home and in their local communities, and for informal purposes and low-stakes writing needs in the classroom. But shouldn't SRTOL also mean that students have the right to use their vernacular for formal purposes? It appears that SRTOL is interpreted as a policy of tolerance (i.e., permitting nonvalorized codes to survive in less-prestigious contexts), not promotion (i.e., making active use of these vernaculars or developing them for serious purposes). Another concern is that SRTOL doesn't seem to extend to the use of all varieties of English. Though the statement itself doesn't make the identity of variants covered clear, the supplementary document by the committee reveals that the authors are thinking primarily of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and what they call "Chicano English" (see *Students' Right*). There are understandable reasons why the SRTOL committee mentions only the English of the African American and Chicano communities. In traditional language rights discourse, *national minorities* (those with a history as long as the dominant groups and/or enjoying a sizeable demography and spread) have been given preferred treatment in language rights, while *ethnic minorities* and recent immigrant groups (with a more limited history, spread, and number) are treated as inconsequential (May). But this practice has been questioned lately, as the orientation to language rights based on the nation-state has become outmoded, just as the borders of countries have become porous under the influence of globalization. Now, as even Anglo American students are compelled to develop proficiency in multiple Englishes in order to shuttle between communities in the postmodern world, we must take a fresh look at the treatment of WE in SRTOL.

Toward Multilingual Writing Models

I am glad that some composition scholars are disturbed by the inconsistencies in the current practices and attitudes toward English in composition pedagogies. Peter Elbow would go further and call this state of affairs a "contradiction" ("Vernacular Literacies" 126). He is among the few who have started thinking and writing actively to resolve the dilemmas present in implementing SRTOL. Mindful of the concern that minority students shouldn't be fur-



ther disadvantaged by being excluded from attaining proficiency in established traditional varieties of English while being empowered to use their own (a criticism raised by minority scholars themselves), Elbow adopts a two-pronged approach: “A good strategy for handling contradiction is to introduce the dimension of time: to work for the long-range goal of changing the culture of literacy, and the short-range goal of helping students now” (“Vernacular Literacies” 126). He proposes to accomplish this by letting minority students use their own varieties for their early drafts but teaching them copy editing skills and/or getting them help from copy editors so that their final product conforms to the expectations in the academy.⁵ This way, he would help students to acquire SWE in order to prosper in the dominant culture of literacy and succeed in education and society. However, by keeping other varieties alive in the composition classroom and helping students develop written competence in them in low-stakes activities, he would be working toward the long-term goal of full acceptance for all dialects.

Though this is a pragmatic resolution that is sensitive to the competing claims in this debate—i.e., the importance of challenging the inequalities of languages and the need to master the dominant codes for social and educational success—I have experienced certain difficulties in implementing this approach. I have found that minority students are reluctant to hold back their Englishes even for temporary reasons. In my ethnography of both African American and ESOL students, I have discovered the strategies students covertly adopt to bring their Englishes into formal academic writing in a curriculum that encourages their varieties in everything other than formal/graded assignments (Canagarajah, “Safehouses”; *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism* chapter 7). The desire to use one’s vernacular even in formal texts is easy to understand. Everything from language socialization approaches and Bakhtinian theories of discourse to poststructuralist linguistics teaches us that to use a language meaningfully is to appropriate it and make it one’s own (see Peirce). Proficiency requires adapting the new language for one’s own values and interests. To use a language without any personal engagement, even for temporary utilitarian and pragmatic reasons, is to mimic not speak. It means “acting white” for my African American students and “putting a show” for Sri Lankan students.

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In the light of such student resistance, we become alert to some ambiguities in Elbow’s model. Despite its attempts to accommodate diversity, the





model still falls under the dominant unidirectional monolingualist paradigm in writing. Other varieties of English are accepted only as tentative, dispensable, moves toward ME norms. The editing of the other Englishes in the final product may also lump these varieties into the category of “errors” to be avoided, in the eyes of students, and lead to the gradual loss of their home language. What I propose is a modification of Elbow’s proposal. In the place of his notion of time, I like to invoke the notion of space. I am interested in exploring

To use another metaphor to capture the difference, while Elbow and the other scholars propose a model of *code switching*, I propose a model of *code meshing*.⁶

how we can accommodate more than one code within the bounds of the same text. In an essay that is written in ME, I would also teach students to bring in their preferred varieties for relevant purposes. In textual terms, this strategy will result in a hybrid text that

contains divergent varieties of English. To use another metaphor to capture the difference, while Elbow and the other scholars (reviewed in the previous section) propose a model of *code switching*, I propose a model of *code meshing*.⁶ While they separate the codes and prioritize ME for formal purposes, I consider merging the codes. Code meshing is not new to academic writing. As I will illustrate with a close textual analysis in the next section, some African American scholars have already used AAVE in rhetorically compelling ways in academic texts that feature SWE (see Young for a recent discussion of this strategy). Note also that some radical scholars have used the term *code switching* broadly to signify the same practice that I call code meshing here—see Anzaldúa (in Lunsford) and my use (in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*). Various other metaphors have been used to describe this strategy—i.e., appropriation (Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*), third spaces (Kramsch and Lam; Belcher), and “talking back” (hooks). Though code meshing was used in classical rhetoric as a high-brow activity (i.e., inserting Greek or Latin without translation into English texts), I am presenting this notion as a popular communicative strategy in multilingual communities and developing it even for cases outside such elite bilingualism.

Code meshing calls for multidialectalism not monodialectalism. Holding that knowledge of the vernacular is solely sufficient for minority students would ignore the reality of multilingualism demanded by globalization. It would also segregate minority students into vernacular speech ghettos. My proposal demands more, not less, from minority students. They have to not only master the dominant varieties of English, but also know how to bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways. It is not even sufficient to learn





different English varieties and use them in appropriate contexts (as proposed by code switching models); now minority students have to learn to bring them together to serve their interests.

This discursive strategy of code meshing is also motivated by pragmatic sociolinguistic considerations. If all speech events are language games, the rules of the game that all the players currently share need to be acknowledged. This is important even if the current rules favor one group more than the other and may have come into force as a result of that group's dominant status. If we suddenly bring in new rules, we could be disqualified from that game. At the most charitable, this will be construed as a different game altogether, and we could be asked to play that game elsewhere. This is not necessarily a favorable outcome for minority scholars in academic communication. I don't want my text written in Sri Lankan English ruled nonacademic or treated as addressing only Sri Lankan scholars. I don't want my use of Sri Lankan English to make my text a different genre of communication for a different audience. Such a response will result in reducing the relevance and significance of my text. I want to still engage in the game of academic writing as it is played in the mainstream. By inserting the oppositional codes gradually into the existing conventions, I deal with the same audience and genre of communication but in my own terms. To be really effective, I need to work from within the existing rules to transform the game. Besides, I need to socialize the players into the revised rules of the game. The qualified use of alternate codes into the dominant discourse will serve to both play the same game and also change its rules.

It could be objected that this approach is yet another temporary strategy that defers the full pluralization of academic texts and legitimization of WE for a later time. I can hear my South Asian colleagues saying: "But your approach is looking like the very same one as Elbow's, no?" I agree. "However," I would reply, "there are small, small differences that make big, big significance." The advantage in my proposal is that minority students get to see their own variety of English written in academic texts. They don't have to edit out all vernacular expressions. Furthermore, we satisfy the desire of minority students to engage with the dominant codes when they write, and make a space for their own varieties of English in formal texts. Elbow's approach keeps these codes separate and unequal, and compels minority students to postpone critical literacy practices. Moreover, my approach enables students to personally engage in the process of textual change, not to wait for time to do the trick for them.



The reason why Elbow doesn't consider code meshing is probably because he believes that only one grapholect can be present in a text at any one time. He says: "Literacy as a culture or institution almost always implies just one dialect as the only proper one for writing: the 'grapholect'" ("Vernacular Literacies" 128). However, this assumption doesn't hold true for many non-Western communities. We have enjoyed a long tradition of constructing texts that are not only multilingual but also multimodal. According to Walter Mignolo, colonization attempted to suppress such dynamic local literacies and introduced univocal texts. In what he calls the "grapho-centric" literacy tradition, Western communities held that texts should use *words* (not images, symbols, icons, space, color or other representational systems), *written* words (not spoken words or other modalities of communication), and words from *one language* (not from multiple languages). As this tradition of literacy took hold, other literacy practices were treated as lacking precision and rigor and given pariah status. A consideration of multimodal and multilingual literacy traditions will show us that making a textual space for other Englishes may come easily for students from these communities.

The art of multimodal indigenous textuality has not died, despite its denigration since European colonization. Mario de Souza demonstrates how the *kene/ dami* textualities work for the Kashinawa in Brazil. In a multimodal text that involves paintings, alphabets, and drawing of figures and lines within the same "page," this Indian community produces texts that demand complex processes of interpretation. The alphabets and graphics relate to each other in dynamic combinations to produce meanings for insiders. De Souza presents fascinating recent examples of such texts from a teacher-development program in which local instructors produce these texts for their university professors. My own community of Tamils has practiced the well-known *manipralava* textuality from before colonization (see Viswanathan). When Sanskrit was considered the elite language for religious and philosophical purposes, local scholars mixed Sanskrit with Tamil in writing for their community. This way, we both elevated the respectability of the vernacular and democratized Sanskrit. Even now, local people adopt this strategy for in-group communication. However, now we mix mostly English, as this is the dominant colonial language in our context. For example, it is quite common for academic texts in Sri Lanka and India to involve a prominent mixing of English and Tamil (see, for example, Sivathamby). Sometimes, quotations from primary sources are in English, while the commentary is in Tamil. In other cases, foreign words are inserted into Tamil syntax as writers change the script midsentence to ac-



commodate English technical terms or phrases. It is rare for authors to translate or transliterate these marked codes. They expect the readers to perform a veritable bilingual reading. Nor is this a form of elite literacy. Even popular literature now involves English/Tamil mixing. Short stories written by Tamil refugees in the West (in journals like *kaalam* in Toronto and *eksil* in Paris) feature code meshing.

Though such local traditions of multivocal literacy have been practiced from precolonial times, they gained new ramifications during and after the colonial encounter. Despite the official policy in many colonial regimes to impose the grapho-centric and largely monolingual traditions of writing, hybrid literacies were developing subversively in the local communities out of this cultural contact. Mary Louise Pratt calls these the “literate arts of the contact zone.” Gloria Anzaldúa has also spoken recently about the ways she draws from the postcolonial tradition of mixing Native Indian, Spanish, and English languages (see Lunsford). While such texts exemplify typical processes of intercultural mediation, they are also ideologically powerful. Contact zone literacies resist from the inside without the outsiders understanding their full import; they appropriate the codes of the powerful for the purposes of the subaltern; and they demystify the power, secrecy, and monopoly of the dominant codes. More importantly, they display immense creativity as the subalterns negotiate competing literacies to construct new genres and codes that speak to their own interests. Code meshing in academic writing would be another example in the continuing tradition of contact zone textualities.

Such literate arts of the contact zone are still alive (albeit hidden) in postcolonial classrooms. Students and teachers who are expected to adopt English only (or monolingual) pedagogies practice bilingual discourse strategies that enable them to develop more relevant classroom interactions, curricular objectives, and learning styles. Ethnographies in contexts as diverse as Hong Kong, Kenya, Tanzaniya, Malta, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, and even England and North America point to the strategic role of code mixing in language learning (see the collection of articles in Heller and Martin-Jones). In some of these classrooms, the mixing involves two varieties of English (see Lin and Martin, for examples from Singapore, South Africa, India and Hong Kong). Literacy practices of codes meshing are also not unusual—students mix codes to negotiate the meaning of English texts and to compose stories or journals in expressive, creative, or reflective writing (Hornberger). Much of this research literature demonstrates that rather than hampering the acquisition of English, the negotiation of codes can indeed facilitate it. Some applied lin-



guists do argue that code switching is detrimental to language learning and literacy as it would lead to a fossilization of mixed forms and, eventually, create a deficient *interlanguage* (see Bhatt for a critique). But such scholars are influenced by the notion that language acquisition ideally involves a unilateral movement within a single language, treating the context of acquisition as an idealized homogeneous language environment. Sridhar points out that language acquisition in real life often takes place in multilingual contexts with an engagement with many codes. In such engagement, Cummins argues that one language can play a positive role in the development of another.

While such pedagogical realities have previously not been acknowledged by educational policy makers—as it has been an embarrassment to the dominant pedagogies which prefer the purity of the instructional code and validity of monolingual approaches—it is becoming difficult to hide in scholarly literature or suppress in classrooms a practice that is so pervasive. It is not surprising that some local scholars have started arguing for consciously developing strategies from traditional multilingual approaches (like the *manipravalava*

tradition⁷) for local literacy education (Rajan; Viswanathan). They propose that reading and talking about Shakespeare or Wordsworth in Tamil can enable students to adopt a critical detachment from the original texts. What would amount to a translation strategy can also provide different perspectives on the texts, as students perceive them from the spectacles of competing languages.⁸ While these scholars recommend this approach only for text reception, my proposal for code meshing sees a place for it in text construction as well with similar benefits.

Though code meshing is a complex discursive act for our students (one that involves a polydialectal competence—i.e., familiarity with standard varieties, expert use of local variants, and the rhetorical strategies of switching), multilingual communities have a long tradition of using such communicative practices.

Though code meshing is a complex discursive act for our students (one that involves a polydialectal competence—i.e., familiarity with standard varieties, expert use of local variants, and the rhetorical strategies of switching), the examples above suggest that multilingual communities have a long tradition of using such communicative practices. Therefore, students from these communities can draw from their textual histories and literacy cultures to make a space for WE in academic texts.



Textual Possibilities: An Example

How do we proceed in implementing the above literacy orientation in composition classrooms? In my classes, I like to provide models from the writing of minority scholars to show what multilingual students can achieve in their writing.⁹ It is interesting that African American scholars like bell hooks and Geneva Smitherman have made considerable headway in infusing their own dialects into academic writing. It is a reflection of an understandable bias in composition circles that the black vernacular is permitted, even glorified in certain composition circles, but WE is not tolerated in academic writing. As noted earlier, perhaps AAVE and certain North American class and regional dialects are validated because they come from “native English speaking” communities; WE varieties are not given the same treatment because they come from multilingual speech communities. However, it is a blessing to be able to cite as precedent the advances made by African American writers and to create further spaces for new Englishes in academic writing.

Smitherman’s “The Historical Struggle for Language Rights in CCC” is a good example of a minority scholar employing a range of dialects to represent her voice and identity in formal academic writing. Interestingly enough, the article takes stock of the pedagogical advances made since SRTOL.¹⁰ For the most part of the paper, Smitherman uses the established code and the conventions of scholarly publication—i.e., citations, footnotes, and scholarly evidence. The essay is also very balanced in representing the alternate positions to the ones she herself holds on SRTOL. Her writing thus wins academic credibility among readers. The instances of AAVE use are few, but carefully deployed to construct her desired voice for this article.

Curiously, most of the cases of AAVE begin to appear in the middle section of the article where Smitherman narrates the dialogue and debate that accompanied the formulation of the resolution. AAVE is not used much in the opening of the paper where she provides the background and reviews the scholarly developments leading to SRTOL. This structure serves to build Smitherman’s status as a proficient academic writer and earn the reader’s respect before introducing the atypical codes later in the writing.¹¹ Such a strategy is different from her earlier practice in 1974 (see “Soul n’ Style”) when she used AAVE more prominently, starting from the very beginning of the article (including the title) and sustaining its use throughout the text. Furthermore, it is significant that in most occasions of AAVE in the SRTOL article,



Smitherman doesn't use quotation marks to flag them as distinct or strange. Using quotation marks would have distanced the author from the language, invoking the traditional biases. Consequently, most readers would now process these switches without pausing to consider them unusual. This ambiguity also results from the fact that some elements of AAVE have become mainstreamed. We are losing the ability to classify certain items as categorically "nonstandard." The deft mixing of codes in this article confronts readers with their own biases—i.e., what do we consider as unsuitable for academic writing, and why?

Consider the first occasion of AAVE use when Smitherman writes: "In his scathing critique, with its signifyin title, 'Darkness is King,' Lloyd took Knickerbocker to task . . ." (8). (Knickerbocker's paper, which derides ungrammatical expressions in student writing, is entitled "The Freshman is King.") An in-group motif from folklore (see Abrahams), "signifyin" has now received near global currency. After Henry Louise Gates' *Signifying Monkey* and other publications like Smitherman's own book, *Talkin and Testifyin*, this reference to instigating has become familiar for even speakers of WE like me. Though this is a mere lexical switch, what might be considered a single cultural borrowing, it indexes a whole vernacular speech event. This is an example of the way gradual but bold uses of the vernacular lead to their becoming naturalized and widely shared over time, losing their stigmatized status.

Note also the lexical items underlined in the following statements:

At the time, my Womanist consciousness was just developing, and so I was not very vocal in this hours-long debate, for which I was soundly blessed out by one of the women when we took a bathroom break . . . The debate was finally resolved when Elisabeth McPherson, genius that my girl was, proposed that we cast the wording in the third person plural (Smitherman, 22-23; emphasis mine).

Or

As I listened to their arguments, all I could think about was the dissin and doggin I had endured during the "Students' Right" years, and I kept saying "no way" (30; emphasis mine).

These too are in-group expressions that have gained wider currency now. They especially belong to the urban vernacular, distinct from the more marked rural (Southern) speech that we will see later. These lexical items also evoke special attitudes and feelings. That the author refers to being "blessed out" suggests that she is taking this as an in-group chastisement that should be accepted





and treated as unoffensive. The next usage, “my girl,” indicates the close relationship between the interlocutors. The other two nouns “dissin and doggin” reflect the tone and attitude toward the insulting speech of the out-group members. The context invoked in all these uses provides rhetorical justification for these switches. The switches index the type of relationships and feelings referred to.

Another category of fairly unshocking AAVE use is in the stylistic choice of emotive, repetitive, and rhythmic expressions valued in oral communication. This lexical choice violates the established register in academic prose. Such language may be considered too informal for academic writing, but it certainly serves to evoke the desired voice of the author. Consider the satirical humor in the following:

Not content with knocking Knickerbocker upside the head, Lloyd also slammed the journal and the organization . . . (8).

or

As an organizational position, the “Students’ Right” resolution represented a critical mechanism for CCCC to address its own internal contradictions at the same time as marching, fist-raising, loud-talking protesters, spearheaded by the Black Liberation Movement, marred the social landscape of “America the beautiful” (18).

The rhyme (“knocking Knickerbocker”) and rhythm (“marching, fist-raising, loud-talking”) evoke a voice that is more oral and nonacademic. There is also the hyperbole of some word choices here that may be considered very unacademic (i.e., *slammed*, *marred*). All of these lexical choices represent a speaker from a high-involvement culture and jar against the conventions of a low-involvement communicative genre (Tannen). Furthermore, the language certainly suggests the author’s identification with the acts described here. In fact, the language is rhetorically appropriate for acts and attitudes that are oppositional to the dominant values of the academy.

In some cases, the author doesn’t have to use her own words, but she makes her cited authorities evoke a divergent discourse to accomplish her purposes. She does this by carefully choosing the quotations from her sources. She writes, “Lloyd even goes so far as to say that linguistics ‘is a promised land for the English teacher’” (10). The phrase “promised land” has special resonance for the African American community. Apart from the importance of the Bible in vernacular culture, we know that the metaphor of a promised land has

enjoyed currency in black consciousness ever since Claude Brown's book. Through this allusion, Smitherman is also appropriating the field of linguistics for the oppositional causes of enlightened instructors who wish to challenge the popular biases of the dominant community. The same rhetorical strategy is used again when Smitherman cites a verse from the Bible: "But we also knew that without 'vision, the people perish'" (18).

However, in the second part of the above quotation, Smitherman quickly shifts to the most direct grammatical display of vernacular English in this article: "Besides, as I commented to a fellow comrade (a psychologist, who was one of the founders of the Association of Black Psychologists), what else was we gon do while we was waitin for the Revolution to come?" (18). In the more striking uses of AAVE (as here), Smitherman embeds them in a clear dramatic context that provides a different frame for deviations from SWE. In the case above, it is clear that the usage reflects the language of the persona who uttered that statement and the in-group solidarity enjoyed with the interlocutor in that speech event. In using AAVE grammar, the author is being true to the context and the interlocutors. Thus, the rhetorical context disarms criticism. We find a similar narrative context in the examples that follow. Discussing the divergent responses to the resolution, she writes "A few simply said that CCCC had done lost they cotton-pickin mind. . . . [Then, after discussing more favorable responses, she continues:] A few simply asked CCCC why it took yall so long. . . . Such ideas elicited strong reactions among CCCC professionals (irrespective of whether they supported the resolution or not) and moved the intellectual production of knowledge in the field to a whole nother level" (24; emphasis mine). Indeed the language gives evidence of the "strong reactions" elicited by the proposal. The mention of "cotton-pickin" makes the stupidity one notch worse. "A whole nother level" indicates that the production of knowledge was not just moved to the next level but to a totally different dimension. These statements alternate with more scholarly views from others, presented in very staid prose, showing that the author is switching codes with remarkable control over a repertoire of Englishes. In addition to the switches between SWE and AAVE, we must note that there are different dialects of AAVE orchestrated here. While the examples in the previous paragraph are largely from the urban vernacular, the ones in the latest example are largely rural and southern.

If the above switches are motivated by the changing rhetorical and speech situations, we find a similar *situational switch* in the acknowledgments section. Smitherman gives "a shout out" to one of her graduate student assistants



(36). This language is motivated by the youthful persona addressed. A more senior scholar will not appreciate this manner of acknowledgment. For the only other person thanked in this section, the author writes “I would like to express my gratitude and special thanks to Dr. _____, for his most capable assistance and archival work” (36). The more formal language suits the senior scholar addressed in this statement (indicated by the title, “Dr.”). Apart from the situational motivation, there is additional reason why the switch to vernacular is rhetorically permissible here. In certain low-stakes environments in the text, the vernacular is generally treated as unobjectionable. There is considerable latitude in using nonstandard elements in such peripheral sections of the academic essay. Other low-stakes sections are dedications, titles, and conclusions (see Thaiss and Zawacki).¹² Such textual spaces can therefore be exploited to bring in the alternate codes and discourses desired by the author—and students should be taught to discern these spaces.

Ironically, in the only case where Smitherman flags an expression, she does so not to mark the unusual usage behind the peculiar item but to evoke the widely shared usage of a well-known expression. She says, “(I report with pride that I was the first to introduce ‘cussing’ into committee discourse, to the relief of one of my male comrades.)” (23). She uses quotation marks probably to neutralize what appears to be a shocking *metaphorical switch* here. (Metaphorical switches—unlike the previous situational switches—violate the established code for the situation to evoke alternate values and meanings.) Similarly, the only case where she provides a gloss is to introduce an item that is recent and probably an in-group expression among a subcultural group—black teenagers: “In the 1998 celebration of African American History Month, a television commercial for Mickey D’s (Ebonics for McDonald’s) featured a White father and his young son browsing through a gallery with paintings of African American heroes and she-roes” (29). Smitherman’s gloss for “Mickey D’s” indicates that the nickname is perhaps new to the older generation of AAVE speakers. (“She-roes” doesn’t warrant a gloss, as its meaning is clear from the context.) At any rate, the example shows that Smitherman is varying the AAVE used—not only between regions, i.e., urban and rural, but also between age groups, i.e., adult and teen talk.

It must be noted that all these instances of AAVE don’t amount to much in an article running to about thirty pages. But they are sufficient to change the ethos of the text. More importantly, they demonstrate what Smitherman argues for in this article: “It has been said that politics is the art of compromise. And compromise we did. After the lengthy debates and verbal duels, we

finally produced a document that we all felt we could live with” (23). This text is again a compromise—something we can all live with—until more spaces are available for other Englishes when academic literacy gets further pluralized. This position registers a shift in strategy for Smitherman herself. She has apparently moved away from the strategy of using AAVE for the whole essay (as in her two-page 1974 article “Soul N’ Style.”). To give further insight into this new strategy, she later says (before concluding): “The documented spirit of resistance in the ‘Students’ Right’ and National Language Policy is an important symbol that change is possible—even *within the system*” (36; emphasis added). The careful deployment of vernacular items within an SWE text is an example of this strategy of resistance from within. Even if it takes more time for AAVE to gain a legitimate place of its own in academic writing, one doesn’t have to wait indefinitely as Elbow’s approach would make us assume. The change is already underway in Smitherman’s text. The few instances of meshed codes have moved this text to a whole nother level.

Pedagogical Possibilities: An Example

If Smitherman’s practice hints at some textual strategies for using other Englishes in academic writing, Min-Zhan Lu suggests pedagogical strategies for encouraging multilingual students to bring in their variants of English into the composition classroom. Her 1994 article in *CCC* still remains a rare documentation of teaching strategies for validating alternate codes at the microtextual and grammatical (as distinct from rhetorical) level. Lu explores the peculiar usage “can able to” in the essays of a Chinese student from Malaysia (e.g., “As a Hawaiian native historian, Trask can able to argue for her people”; “If a student can able to approach each situation with different perspectives than the one he brought from high school, I may conclude that this student has climbed his first step to become a ‘critical thinker.’”). Since the modals *can* and *may* are used according to their conventional meaning in other places of the student’s writing, it is clear that “can able to” is used with a unique meaning of its own. In fact, Lu finds later that “can” and “be able to” have interchangeable meanings in the student’s first language. More importantly, the student points out to the teacher (with the help of her English dictionary!) that “be able to” has an additional meaning of “have permission to” that is not connoted by “can” in English. Therefore she puts together both structures to coin “can able to.”

What motivates this student to use this structure? Since the student has personally experienced a lot of pressure from her family against undertaking



higher education (because of her status as a woman and her community's norms), she is cognizant of the struggles one has to go through to think critically and act independently. To express this need to achieve independence despite community constraints, she uses "can able to"—a structure that connotes for her "ability from the perspective of the external circumstances" (Lu 452). She is also inspired by her understanding of Trask's ability to still speak for her people despite the constraints of being a minority historian. The student therefore tries to communicate the possibility for action by struggling against external limiting constraints. When the instructor makes this grammatical usage a point of discussion for the whole class, the other students state that it is the dominant American ideology of individual transcendence and personal power that makes speakers treat "can" and "able to" with similar connotations. The Malaysian student wants to convey a different orientation to ability, and is thus forced to fashion a new usage for her purposes.

An important lesson here for teachers is that not every instance of nonstandard usage by a student is an unwitting error; sometimes it is an active choice motivated by important cultural and ideological considerations. The assumption that multilingual students are always bound to err in a second language denies them agency. The Malaysian student is not blind to the differences between Chinese and English. She insists on using the peculiar structure because she is struggling to bring out certain ideas that are important to her. This example further shows the dangers of jumping to the conclusion that any peculiarity in English is to be explained by the influences from the student's first language. In being thus judgmental, teachers sometimes ignore the creativity of the students who negotiate unique meanings. Teachers may suppress other explanations for why a structure may sound unusual—i.e., explanations that testify to students' rhetorical independence and critical thinking.

Many pedagogical benefits derive from discussing this grammatical deviation without prejudice or preconception. To begin with, the writer and the rest of the class now understand grammar as ideological. The choices we make hide or emphasize the values we want to convey to our readers. In trying to find out from our students the reasons why they use a peculiar structure, teachers will acknowledge the serious considerations motivating their language use.

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age. Such discussions enable students to use grammar meaningfully, rather than opting for stereotypical choices. In the process, students also develop a

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metalinguistic awareness of the values and interests motivating grammar. These skills are far more significant for developing writing competence, compared to enforcing a blind conformism to the dominant grammatical conventions.

Understanding student motivation for using unusual grammar structures doesn't exhaust our responsibilities in writing instruction. Can such

a structure that is peculiar to SWE be promoted in the essay? How far should students go in deviating from the dominant dialects? Lu provides a multifaceted answer, opening up different possibilities. She narrates that at a later point of the course she got the whole class to explore alternative grammatical structures to convey the Malaysian student's meaning while being mindful of the dominant grammatical conventions of academic writing. After more thought, the writer resorted to using "may be able to" in deference to SWE usage. This strategy ensured that she was within the bounds of established conventions, while also conveying her unique perspective. Other students considered possibilities such as adding an "if" clause to "be able to," or even using "can able to" with a parenthetical explanation or a footnote about the need for this unusual usage. The latter strategy—footnoting—is a form of compromise as it acknowledges that the writer is aware of using the structure in a peculiar way for a unique rhetorical purpose. (Besides, the footnote is a valued convention of academic writing.) On the other hand, another multilingual writer, a student from Vietnam, argued that he would use "can" and "be able to" interchangeably because their connotations of agency inspired modes of resistance and individual empowerment against the fatalism of his own community. The "standard" grammar structure thus became an ideologically favored option for a minority student—a structure he uses not mechanically but with critical thinking. Lu concludes this grammar instruction by noting that the structure "can able to" took on a life of its own in her class. After being playfully used in class discussions, "it became a newly coined phrase we shared throughout the term" (454). The exercise thus dramatizes the process by which English is nativized—and, in fact, how certain cases of peculiar usage become "standardized"—once their meanings and purposes are socially shared.

There are many pedagogical benefits from teaching students to negotiate grammar for their rhetorical purposes. Students must be trained to make





grammatical choices based on many discursive concerns: their intentions, the context, and the assumptions of readers and writers. Students must understand that in certain special cases they may have to try out a peculiar structure for unique purposes (making sure that they subtly indicate to the audience that they are using this with the full awareness of the established conventions). This doesn't mean students are free to use the vernacular for all contexts of communication. Negotiating grammar means being sensitive to the relativity of style and usage in different communicative situations. Overzealous teachers who impose correctness according to SWE norms may stifle the development of a repertoire that will help students style shift according to differing communicative contexts. Furthermore, when the standard dialect is inadequate or inappropriate for our purposes—which is not surprising as its grammar does index dominant ideologies and interests—we may negotiate meaningful usage and, in the process, reshape the rules. This is certainly not an instantaneous or individual process. It is important to engage with the linguistic system, with the understanding that there is always the tension between stability and change, dominant usage and emergent conventions, and sociolect and idiolect in any language. Rather than being treated as a sign of a lack of proficiency, such negotiation should be treated as a mark of independent and critical writing.¹³

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Conclusion

It is time now to take a step back from these microtextual and micropedagogical forms of intervention to ask what difference these activities will make in pluralizing composition. As the theorization of Anzaldúa and Pratt, and the practice of hooks and Smitherman show, code meshing in English writing has a politics of its own. Though not directly confrontational as to reject the dominant codes or to flaunt the vernacular codes in established contexts, multilingual students will resist ME from the inside by inserting their codes within the existing conventions. This activity serves to infuse not only new codes, but also new knowledge and values, into dominant texts. Such subtle Gramscian “wars of position” are important in order gain spaces for a more direct “war of maneuver.” There is value in making gradual cultural and ideological changes in the notions of textuality and language among educationists and policy makers, building a coalition of disparate social groups and disciplinary circles, and





There is value in making gradual cultural and ideological changes in the notions of textuality and language among educationists and policy makers, building a coalition of disparate social groups and disciplinary circles, and winning small battles in diverse institutions toward an acceptance of hybrid texts, before we mount a frontal assault by using nonlegitimized codes in high-stakes writing.

winning small battles in diverse institutions toward an acceptance of hybrid texts, before we mount a frontal assault by using nonlegitimized codes in high-stakes writing. In making this sobering concession, we have to keep in mind that textual resistance cannot by itself sustain the larger institutional changes needed to legitimize WE. Even the ability to initiate textual changes is often dependent on the extratextual power authors bring with them. We have to admit that Smitherman is able to use AAVE so confidently in her writing because of her standing as a distinguished scholar in academic circles and her achieved status as a spokesperson for language rights in professional associations. Many other black scholars and students cannot succeed in using AAVE if they don't enjoy the relative status in their contexts of communication. Despite the authority she brings to writing, Smitherman herself is strategic in making

qualified uses of AAVE in her texts and in taking measured steps of meshing in her writing career.

Certain forms of struggle are indeed waged better when they are conducted over time, in response to the changing contexts and discourses in the field. On this point, Elbow and I are in agreement: we both rely on time to make a difference. There is already evidence of the beneficial effects of time. To argue for a postcolonial spatial orientation to written texts, we now have evidence from an unexpected quarter. In the context of the Internet and digital media, we see the mixing of not only different varieties of English but also of totally different languages. To be literate on the Internet, for example, requires competence in multiple registers, discourses, and languages, in addition to different modalities of communication (sound, speech, video, photographs) and different symbol systems (icons, images, and spatial organization). To capture these changes for textual processing and production, scholars have now started using the term *multiliteracies* (see Cope and Kalantzis) and are explicating the new acts of reading and writing involved (Warschauer). In fact, many composition scholars prefer the term *designing* over *composing* in recognition of the spatial and multimodal nature of writing (see Faigley). These changes in text construction make it easy to envision that different varieties of English may find a "natural" place in the evolving shape of the text.





Talking of time, this is the moment for me to come clean about my own evolving positions on WE in writing. Having criticized the field of composition and other progressive scholars for their limitations in accepting WE in academic writing, I must confess that I have myself held such positions in the past. The extent to which my radicalism extended previously was to argue for alternative tone, styles, organization, and genre conventions in formal academic writing.¹⁴ I have steered clear of validating nativized varieties at the intrasentential level. In retrospect, it occurs to me that I was playing it safe in my argument. I didn't want to jeopardize my case for pluralizing academic writing by extending it to the controversial terrain of grammar. But a combination of developments in theoretical discourses, social changes, communicative advances, and pedagogical rethinking (reviewed in this article) tell me that now is the time to take my position to its logical conclusion. The moment is ripe to extend my argument of pluralizing English and academic writing into the "deep structure" of grammar. Still, I must confess that I am myself unsure how to practice what I preach (other than the few instances where I shamelessly copy Smitherman's strategies above). Throughout my life, I have been so disciplined about censoring even the slightest traces of Sri Lankan English in my own academic writing that it is difficult to bring them into the text now. Therefore, this article is only a statement of intent, not a celebration of accomplishment. It only aims to make some space for pedagogical rethinking and textual experimentation on the place of WE in composition. As for practice, I am hereby humbly announcing that I'll be joining my esteemed students in the classroom for learning how to accommodate local Englishes in academic writing.

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I wish to thank Geneva Smitherman for encouraging me to undertake a close reading of her writing strategies. My colleagues Bridgette Davis and Shondel Nero commented on my interpretation of the AAVE items in Smitherman's texts. John Trimbur and an anonymous reviewer raised useful points to make my argument more complex.

Notes

1. Since I question the distinction native and nonnative varieties, I am using World Englishes to encapsulate the emergent varieties that differ from the traditional



“native” varieties I refer to as Metropolitan English (ME). I go on to argue that we have to develop a nonhierarchical model of plural English where all the varieties (including minority dialects such as AAVE and Chicano English) enjoy equal status. To capture the latter notion, I use the label Global English to connote “a family of languages” in the sense of Crystal (*Language Revolution*). Standard Written English (SWE) is, for me, the realization of ME in composition. I will use the label SWE when I refer to the work of composition scholars who prefer to use it, especially in Anglo-American pedagogical contexts.

2. Though I go on to argue that we have to adopt more proficiency-based categories like expert/novice to distinguish speakers, and abandon categories based on birth or blood, I retain the use of “native” and “nonnative” when I discuss the work of scholars who use that framework.

3. This is a highly formal and inflected variety of English originally used by locals to talk to colonial administrators but still used in South Asia to address someone deferentially.

4. After making a case for accepting diverse varieties of English in European academic communication, Stephen Barbour still ends up arguing that multilingual authors have to use the established varieties for writing. He argues that since the rich paralinguistic clues of speaking are not available for interpreting writing, multilingual authors have to get the help of editors and translators to eliminate the localisms in their English.

5. Though he discusses primarily the case of AAVE in this article, Elbow is thinking of applying the same position to other varieties of WE. In a recent conference presentation, he illustrates his approach with examples from students of Hawaiian English (see, “Should Students Write”).

6. We must distinguish *code meshing* from *code mixing*, which refers to the inclusion of single lexical items (“borrowings”) that have become naturalized in the borrowing language. Code meshing, however, can include mixtures of larger structural and rhetorical units and may still symbolize something “marked” in the dominant language of the text.

7. Manipravalava refers to mixed-code writing. This term originally referred to the mixing of Tamil and Sanskrit in written texts by Tamil scholars at a time when Tamil didn’t enjoy the prestige for being used in learned discourse. Sanskrit was the medium for such purposes then. By mixing, Tamil scholars raised the status of their vernacular and subtly resisted the power of Sanskrit.”

8. Such scholars attempt to give complexity to translation approaches in composition, although translation was discredited in ESOL after the days of grammar translation method (Richards and Rodgers) and in Composition after the days of using classical texts in teaching (Horner and Trimbur).



9. Curiously, the two best examples for this purpose come from L1 contexts of composition studies. This ironic state of affairs is probably because TESOL still defers to L1 composition for norms in writing pedagogy (see Matsuda). Also, TESOL has traditionally treated academic writing as a pure and sanitized domain of linguistic correctness, under the influence of positivistic applied linguistics. TESOL has not been too daring in working out new textual or pedagogical options.

10. Although this essay is a version of a publication in a refereed journal, CCC (“CCCC’s Role”), it is probably a solicited essay for a commemorative issue. As a historical review essay and a contribution to a collection of essays in an edited book, the version I analyze has some latitude in style compared to empirical essays in refereed journals. However, the strategies Smitherman employs are transferable to other “refereed” publishing contexts.

11. Elbow (“Vernacular Literacies”) would agree with this strategy. He advises his minority students that using “nonstandard” varieties in the beginning of the article would alienate the readers. He trains them to open with established codes before using their preferred varieties.

12. In the more conservative pages of the *TESOL Quarterly*, Smitherman uses AAVE prominently in the safe space of the title (see “Dat Teacher Be Hollin at Us”). Except for glossed uses of “homiez” and “capping,” this is the only place where she flaunts AAVE authorially in this article—clearly a strategic choice.

13. While Lu’s essay is an example at the micro-level of negotiating a single grammatical item in the writing of a single student, Elbow (“Vernacular Literacies,” “Inviting the Mother Tongue”) suggests more protracted strategies for the writing process that can help students negotiate divergent grammars.

14. For examples on developing alternate literacy pedagogies, see Canagarajah (“Safe Houses”) for African American students and *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism* for Sri Lankan Tamil students; my attempts to culturalize my own academic discourse are narrated in “The Fortunate Traveler”.

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