

Chapter 4

Translingual and Transcultural Engagement: Imagining, Maintaining, and Celebrating Collaboration, Agency, and Autonomy in a US University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses an epistemological framework rooted in feminism, post-colonialism, and deconstruction to situate discussions of how knowledge is created, and how collaborative knowledge creation extends our understanding of the shifting and inter-connected cultural, social, and language realities that we experience in our lives. The authors show that these collaborative efforts construct meaning, expand meaning, and change previously accepted meaning. They show how they interrogate the normalization of this discipline, how they address the need for continuously re-examining and re-thinking approaches to translingual and transcultural collaboration as a way to construct new meaning, and how collaborative work continues to address and redefine the norms and realities of the dominant academic culture so that our contributions can lead to much-needed change in how we understand our roles as participants and stakeholders in translingual and transcultural collaborations.

INTRODUCTION

In an article on “Cultivating a Rhetorical Sensibility in the Translingual Classroom,” Juan C. Guerra (2016) asks whether we should have explicit conversations about translingualism in our classrooms. He answers the question by arguing that we need to “engage in the process of explicitly demystifying

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the various approaches to language difference – including the translingual – by inviting our students to consider how each of them influences the choices they make in the writing classroom” (p. 232). Guerra’s (2016) comment reminded us of the many discussions we have had about the need for incorporating translingualism and transculturalism into the curriculum. It also reminded us of our own experiences as translingual and transcultural students and faculty, and the urgent need to expand current research and include attention to our own lived experiences in largely monolingual and monocultural academic environments where critical language awareness (Shapiro, 2022) was not part of any discussions on appropriate academic language use.

In this chapter, we focus on contextualizing our own experiences as translingual and transcultural individuals who have learned, through collaboration on curriculum development and research publications, that diverse cultural and language perspectives and practices can become a means to change current knowledge and create new and expanded knowledge. We use our experiences as an international faculty and a Latina faculty to address the benefits of transcultural and translingual collaboration. We use an epistemological framework rooted in feminism, post-colonialism, and deconstruction to situate our discussions of how knowledge is created, and how collaborative knowledge creation extends our understanding of the shifting and inter-connected cultural, social, and language realities that we experience in our lives. We show that our collaborative efforts as teachers and researchers – who grew up in different countries and whose backgrounds and experiences do not conform to dominant standards – construct meaning, expand meaning, and change previously accepted meaning. Such an understanding of collaboration in a dominant discourse system, we point out, has allowed us to work in an institutional setting that largely encourages heteronormative and hegemonic language and cultural discourses, and to redefine, realign, and reframe our roles as translingual and transcultural faculty who cannot and who do not want to claim participation in mainstream academic social realities devoid of our own realities. We address, overall, how we interrogate the normalization of our discipline, how we address the need for continuously re-examining and re-thinking our own approaches to translingual and transcultural collaboration as a way to construct new meaning and develop new agency, and how our collaborative work continues to address and redefine the norms and realities of the dominant academic culture so that our contributions can lead to much-needed change in how we understand our roles as participants and stakeholders in translingual and transcultural collaborations.

When we discussed the complex choices we would make when writing this article, we explored whether we would incorporate Spanish, Austrian German, Spanglish, or any of the dialects and vernaculars that we speak. We acknowledge the difficulty of our decision to focus on academic English. As translingual and transcultural professionals, we always make decisions based on purpose and intended audience. This affords us agency to determine which of our multiple and sometimes contradictory identities our audience can access. For this article, our intended audience is mostly English-speaking. We do not expect Spanish and Austrian German knowledge, nor do we expect in our audience a combination of the various dialects and vernaculars we speak. We are trained and find value in academic English when the communicative situation requires it. We also take seriously the need for critical reflections and continuous discussions of localized experiences. Our autoethnographic moments explore how we have continuously changed, adjusted, and reflected on our translingual and transcultural journeys, and how we have accepted that we need to take seriously our agency as individuals whose experiences are often outside or at the periphery of dominant educational, cultural, societal, and political systems.

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