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Negotiating Linguistic Borderlands, Valuing Linguistic Diversity, and Incorporating Border Pedagogy in a College Composition Classroom

Introduction

American universities are experiencing a demographic shift that includes increasing numbers of cross-cultural and multilingual students, and faculty are recognizing the need to develop pedagogical practices that are more culturally and linguistically inclusive. Data compiled by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics on the enrollment demographics for the student population's ethnicity and race at my own institution, the Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York, hints at the linguistic and cultural diversity of the student body and reflects a trending majority enrollment of Hispanic/Latino/a students at the College. According to BMCC's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics, the "Minimum Number of Foreign Languages Spoken" by students at BMCC is "102," and the top ten languages listed are "Spanish, Chinese, Bengali, French, Creole, Arabic, Russian, Albanian, Cantonese, and Urdu" ("Factsheet Spring 2018"). Previous enrollment data compiled and posted to the College's website by BMCC's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics tracks the shifts in enrollment demographics and notes that from Fall 2010 to Fall 2016 Hispanic enrollments increased at the College from 37.0% in Fall of 2010 to 39.9% in Fall of 2016 ("BMCC Factbook Enrollment Dashboard"). The most recent official "Student Race/Ethnicity" data notes that this trend has continued: 44% of the students enrolled during Fall 2017 were Hispanic/Latino/a (BMCC, Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics, *National Center for Education Statistics*). Thus, this article focuses on the need for valuing linguistic diversity at institutions of American higher education by discussing what happened when I brought "border pedagogy" (Giroux 28) into a unit of my English 101 course to disrupt the traditional

monolingual approach to teaching English, which often “forces ... students to erase their language differences ... in order to enjoy an equal opportunity for success” (Lamsal and Paudel 762).

As an English professor who regularly teaches the first-year English composition courses at BMCC (English 100.5 and English 101), I am concerned with making sure that students do not feel marginalized during class activities or as if their linguistic differences are at odds with the courses.¹ While I assign informal, low-stakes activities and have discussions in the classroom, they are structured to prepare students for formal writing assignments that largely measure departmental and university Student Learning Outcomes and proficiency in Standard American English (SAE) in a required departmental final exam that constitutes thirty percent (30%) of the final course grade. The English 100.5/101 exam requires students to write an essay of 500 words or more that supports a thesis generated by a prompt while referencing two essays (taught across all sections) that are selected by the Composition Committee, and it is scored by a rubric.² Thus, the very standards and outcomes measured by the courses in some unavoidable respects

¹ BMCC, CUNY students are currently placed into composition courses according to their CUNY Assessment Test in Writing placement exam scores: current students are placed into non-credit bearing courses such as English 088 (score 43 or lower on the CATW) and English 095 (score 44-47 on the CATW) and must pass the developmental course before taking English 101. Or, they are placed in English 100.5 (score 48-55 on the CATW), which is a co-requisite course that combines 095 and 101 in a co-equivalent composition course for credit or 101 (score 56 or higher on the CATW). Students who take and pass English 100.5 or 101 continue to develop their research and writing skills in English 201, Introduction to Literature, to satisfy the General Education requirement for the Associate degree.

² While BMCC does not have a stated definition of SAE, the ENG 100.5/101 departmental exam has a “Grading Rubric” created by the BMCC, Department of English’s Composition Committee (2011) that includes a section on “Language, Syntax, and Grammar,” and ENG 100.5/101 faculty must follow it when grading the in-class exam essays. According to the rubric, “A” level writing requires students to meet the following criteria: “Controlled, precise use of language; Varied sentence structure and vocabulary; Grammar and spelling almost always correct.” In addition, the Departmental Student Learning Outcomes require students to “[d]emonstrate a command of edited American English, using vocabulary and syntax appropriate to college-level work” (BMCC, Department of English, “Required Outcomes for ENG 101 and 100.5”). Further, CUNY’s “Pathways Outcomes” expect students to “[w]rite clearly and coherently in varied, academic formats (such as formal essays, research papers, and reports) using standard English and appropriate technology to critique and improve one’s own and others’ texts” (BMCC, Department of English, “Required Outcomes for ENG 101 and 100.5”).

reify monolingualism at the institutional level along with the cultural and ideological dominance of SAE. Therefore, many linguistically diverse students who experience academic success may do so by sacrificing parts of their identities “at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being” (Ladson-Billings 475).

Given the high cost of academic success for students at a moment when the vast landscape along our national borders is being increasingly weaponized both literally and figuratively, it seemed necessary to consider how critical and pedagogical intervention might disrupt the ideological effects of monolingualism and quell fears of difference that often accompany nationalistic expectations for the use of English only in America. Political discourse about the national border affects how students interpret borders and situate themselves in relation to those borders as well as how they negotiate linguistic borderlands within and beyond classrooms. Border pedagogy offers faculty and students the opportunity to consider the intersections of language, identity, and culture in ways that decenter nationalistic views to promote inclusion and equity. This decentering is possible because the concepts of translanguaging and multilingualism (Creese and Blackledge 106) that inform border pedagogy conceive of all individuals as if they possess “a complex of specific semiotic resources” (Blommaert 102) that they use to communicate and fashion identities.

To stage this intervention, I developed an in-class essay unit that was meant to model the exam and introduce border pedagogy to students in ways that would encourage critical engagement with expectations for accommodation along with the institutional and ideological structures of higher education and assessment in my Spring 2018 English 101 classroom. I assigned a unit on “Language, Identity, and Culture” and asked students to read David Foster Wallace’s “Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Wars over Usage,” which was originally published in *Harper’s Magazine* (2001), and Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” which is often anthologized and excerpted from her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). While the assigned texts do not necessarily constitute two opposed

positions within an ongoing debate over language usage, the authors provide two nuanced positions and different perspectives students must reference to support their own claims in an in-class essay. Both texts introduce and address linguistic differences as the authors discuss language usage, identity, and culture. Pairing them gave me an opportunity to assess whether or not elements of border pedagogy could engage my students and encourage them to develop their personal voices as they considered and took positions in discussions about language usage, language instruction, the intersections of language, identity, and culture. Further, the assigned texts for the in-class essay could be easily supplemented by more recent nonfiction selections to broaden the scope of the unit and discussion and add depth to revisions of the in-class essay. Additional texts considered for the unit included excerpts from Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2009 TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Zadie Smith's "Speaking in Tongues" (2009), Ta-Nahesi Coates's "Acting French" (2014), and Stephanie Elizondo Griest's *Mexican Enough: My Life Between the Borderlines* (2008).

Border Pedagogy

Henry Giroux contends that "border pedagogy" begins with an awareness of one's position in and between linguistic identities (28). In addition, Giroux argues that border pedagogy "speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power" (28). When placed within the context of English education at the college level, border pedagogy encompasses theories and practices that consider the intersections of politics, curriculum, course content, and the academic performance of students who are situated within a language-based learning environment. In particular, the addition of border pedagogy in my English 101 course allowed me to introduce Anzaldúa's text as a linguistic border that had to be negotiated and make the linguistic borderlands my students and I already negotiate beyond

the classroom part of the course content to challenge structuralist conceptualizations of language (as discrete and impermeable systems). Thus, the alteration of my usual course content encouraged reflection when it came to acknowledging cross-cultural and multilingual communications. Students learned new ways to express what they already knew, that the relationship between monolingualism and multilingualism cannot be viewed as simply opposed or in conflict because the terms are broad constructs. For, as Jacques Derrida explains in a “double postulation” that appears in *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1998):

We only ever speak one language . . .

(*yes, but*)

We never speak only one language . . . (10)

Derrida reveals a paradox that many of my BMCC students were keenly aware of as college students in a global metropolis brimming with the “metrolinguistics” (Pennycook’s term) of urban life: we always-already exist in a multilingual context that needs to be accounted for and contemplated because every language, including Standard American English (SAE), is not pure but in relation to or a mixture of other languages, dialects, accents, vernaculars, and so forth. Or, as Suresh Canagarajah explains in “Translanguaging in the Classroom: Emerging Issues for Research and Pedagogy,” “All of us have multilingual competence and adopt multilingual practices in our competence. Even the so-called ‘monolinguals’ shuttle between codes, registers and discourses. Therefore, multilingual competence involves a massive generalization of practices in many regions, times and communities” (4).

Many studies associated with border pedagogy have documented how Latino/a youth experience life as border crossers.³ In these particular studies, the concept of a borderland allows scholars to take a theoretical approach when explaining how linguistic boundaries impact the realities of individuals and

³ See Timothy G. Cashman’s “Border Pedagogy as a Conduit to Greater Understanding,” in *Multicultural Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, pp. 2-9.

groups whose identities are organized around language. Of particular interest to my course and this article is how Anzaldúa's concepts of the borderland and Nepantla offer faculty and students a theoretical framework for considering how students negotiate linguistic and discursive boundaries.⁴ Most readers who are familiar with Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" know that it is excerpted from her larger work, which contends that Chicano/as and Latino/as occupy a borderland, a middle place or space between linguistic groups or linguistic worlds. Another name Anzaldúa gives this place is "Nepantla," which is a Nahuatl word that locates linguistic border-crossers in a space between languages, identities, cultures, and regions. Anzaldúa explains her use of the term and concept in *Interviews/Entrevistas* (2000):

I found that people were using 'Borderlands' in a more limited sense than I had meant it. So to elaborate on the psychic and emotional borderlands I'm now using 'nepantla.' ... With the nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined." (176)

In "now let us shift ...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts," which is included in *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (2002), Anzaldúa further develops her concept of this location and says that Nepantla is a place where "transformation" occurs (548). Being in Nepantla leads to the development of a consciousness that comes from locating one's self in an in-between space where new identities and conceptions of self can emerge because the state of being in Nepantla allows one to nurture a double perspective that promotes awareness and the development of critical insight:

Living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders

⁴ See Cati V. de los Rios' "A Curriculum of the Borderland: High school Chicano/a Latino Studies as 'Sitios y Lengua,'" in *The Urban Review*, vol. 1, no. 45, 2013, pp. 58-73. See also Thomas West and Gary A. Olson's "Rethinking Negotiation in Composition Studies," in *JAC*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1999, pp. 241-251.

those cultures transparent. Removed from that culture's center you glimpse the sea in which you've been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it. From the in between place of nepantla you see through the fiction of the monoculture ... (Anzaldúa "now let us shift ..." 549)

Anzaldúa's conception of the insight that comes from being in Nepantla directs attention to this shift in perspective and the appearance of a consciousness of a double perception that develops when one inhabits a border space between cultures and languages and finds one's self in moments that demand social and linguistic negotiation.

While all of the students in my English 101 class were multilingual to some degree, many had also crossed geographical borders prior to being in my course. They revealed this fact when they introduced themselves on the first day of class. The students lived in the Tri-state region, but a majority of them identified themselves as being from and having family in other countries, such as China, Israel, Bangladesh, Russia, Ecuador, Nigeria, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, or as being from and having ties to other territories and states, such as Puerto Rico, California, Texas, and New Jersey, or as being from particular boroughs within New York City, such as Queens and Brooklyn with sustained connections to family in other locations. In this sense, my classroom was fairly representative of the diversity of the student body at BMCC because it was populated with immigrants as well as international and domestic students who have complex identity formations and socio-economic backgrounds thanks to the processes of globalization and migration. For this reason, they were able to grasp Anzaldúa's concept of Nepantla when I introduced it in class with a handout that included the selected quotes above. In addition, including Anzaldúa's concept of Nepantla and discussing her emphasis on experience generated a sense of belonging for culturally and linguistically diverse students by creating a more inclusive classroom that invited students to draw from their full linguistic repertoires. When linguistic and life experiences are not discussed in classrooms, the personal perspectives of students and knowledge grounded in their own

experiences are devalued by default (Burke et al. 66). In contrast, border pedagogy values the perspectives of students along with the knowledge they already possess by acknowledging the fact that students traverse and negotiate geographic, cultural, and linguistic borders in their everyday lives while allowing them to incorporate those experiences.

As Stuart Hall explains in his well-known discussion of Caribbean identity and diaspora, for example, cultural identity construction “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation” (225). It is through play, through sharing and interpreting events and stories, that one assembles one’s sense of self within signification and representation. This process allows one to see and recognize the different parts and histories of one’s self and one’s connections to other people while also constructing and resisting simple binary oppositions (such as “‘past/present’, ‘them/us’”) as “‘boundaries are re-sited” (Hall 228). Similar to cultural studies, border pedagogy places an emphasis on identity and “begins with nurturing student voice” so that the classroom becomes a place where students can “engage in dialogue that makes it possible to be a part of a democratic social process” (Reyes 341). Sharing personal experiences and stories about the lived experiences of language usage and linguistic borderlands in class discussions and writing empowers students as they test and fashion identities, and this creative work prepares them to enter into participatory democratic discussions within the classroom and their own communities. Thus, border pedagogy engages all students from “multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages to help them construct their own narratives and histories, and revise democracy through sociocultural negotiation” (Romo and Chavez 143). And, it is in this sense that border pedagogy “prompts students to understand their own culture in new ways, appreciate cultural differences, become more aware of social inequities and power relations, and envision a more democratic society” (Hayes and Cuban 1).

Best Practices: Facilitating Active Reading, Discussion, and Student Voice

Students read Wallace's text first, and considered his notion that the language, dialect, or vernacular one uses is not static but determined by the group or community with which one wants to be affiliated (Wallace 51-52). They also had to contend with his position that Standard Written English is the language of elites within the United States and that it must be learned by those who want to gain access to groups with power and achieve success, even if it has been used to perpetuate discrimination and inequality in American society (Wallace 53-54). In this sense, students were asked to contemplate standard English as a marker of power within social hierarchies.

Since the formation of language policy after the 1960s in America, standard English has been perceived as a marker of power and prestige in American society. The policy was primarily influenced by two dominant language ideologies: monolingual ideology, which informs the English only movement, and the ideology of standard English (Terrence and Lukes 512). These pervasive ideologies "are tied to other ideological assumptions related to beliefs about the relationship between language and national unity and between language and social mobility" (Terrence and Lukes 512). Within them, the notion of a standard normalizes one form of language while all others are reduced. Further, when a standard language is identified, it gains prestige. And, fluency in that standard dialect or language becomes a means to opportunities and grants access to privileges such as education and employment. Thus, sociolinguists and scholars have described language as an instrument political, economic, and social power.⁵

Students readily comprehended Wallace's discussions of language because they already adopt the performative aspects of language in order to join a discourse community and are aware that they can drop

⁵ See Arnold H. Leibowitz's "Educational Policy and Political Acceptance: The Imposition of English as the Language of Instruction in American Schools," ERIC Clearinghouse for Linguistics, Document Reproduction Service No. ED C47 321, 1971. See also Robert Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University P, 1992.

them later. Perhaps, this is because “translanguaging” is an urban and postmodern practice (García 151). For instance, Alastair Pennycook’s conceptions of metrolingualism and metrolinguistics capture the linguistic fluidity of urban youth in *Language as a Local Practice* (2010), and the author develops his theories with Emi Otsuji on urban lingualism in *Metrolingualism: Language in the City* (2015). Pennycook’s texts and terms are worth introducing to students when explaining and discussing the types of performativity and examples of translanguaging in Wallace because they give students specialized language to discuss linguistic practices that they already understand and use to disrupt and destabilize monolingualism.

For this reason, discussions of Wallace’s text centered around dialects and vernaculars versus the standard language and discourse deemed appropriate for formal situations. Students tended to compare public (school and work) interactions and communications with informal and private (home) communications when discussing Wallace. In particular, they discussed various forms of “you” singular and “you” plural in English vernacular and dialect. For example, one student said that “yo,” which is short for “you” (singular), and “ya,” which is short for “you all” (plural), are often used in urban or street vernacular to greet or address an other or others in New York City. Students in the class agreed. However, he also noted that he would not use “yo” or “ya” in a classroom or during a corporate job interview because it might make him appear to be uneducated or linguistically deficient. Students considered his comments and arrived at a conclusion that compliments Wallace’s notions about being fluent in diverse dialects, vernaculars, and languages. They argued that knowing when to use vernacular and standard languages and being able to code-switch or perform another language gives them linguistic versatility and the potential to access multiple groups. Thus, students embraced Wallace’s points that most people are fluent in multiple dialects of English (Wallace 51-52). Further, they agreed with Wallace that knowing and using standard English in formal situations could help them gain access to those with power and economic mobility.

After students read Wallace's text, they were required to read Anzaldúa's text and told that her work constituted a linguistic borderland that had to be negotiated in the class. Further, students were asked to reflect on how their responses and in some cases resistance to the text might reveal their own expectations about content for the course and the use of SAE. On the first day we discussed Anzaldúa, half of the students admitted to being challenged by Anzaldúa's text. Two native English speakers admitted that they stopped reading Anzaldúa's text as soon as they encountered Spanish within the text. Other students said they skipped over the Spanish. Three students said they tried to Google translate the Spanish sentences they could not understand.

One student said, "I couldn't understand Anzaldúa's text. Parts of it are in *Spanish*, and I'm not sure why we are reading Spanish in an *English* class!"

Everyone laughed, including me. The student was noting that her own resistance to the text came from the fact that Anzaldúa's text did not meet her expectations for a text assigned for an English class because the author used Spanish. She also said she could not understand portions of it because she is a native speaker of English who only speaks English. For this reason, she said she felt excluded from the author's audience, as if the text was not meant for her. However, a student with a different response raised her hand to comment. This student strongly identified with Anzaldúa's text and explained that reading the text "felt like going home to the border," between the U.S. and Mexico, where she lived with her family as a child. This student elaborated further on her reading experience and told her classmates that she was "moved" by the text and "surprised" by how much the text's language and content affected her. She said she thought her strong response was also generated by the fact that she also never expected to read a text like Anzaldúa's, a text that included her languages, in an English course because she had always been expected to use English only at school.

While some students were temporarily excluded by Anzaldúa's use of Spanish in her text, we all negotiated the linguistic turns along with the borderland the text created together. Further, our analysis of

Anzaldúa's text gave the entire class a new model for negotiating the linguistic borderlands that always-already exist in society as what had been repressed in our English course—the fact that the students are linguistically proficient in diverse and highly specialized ways—surfaced. They came to realize that SAE functions as a trope of neutrality and equal access. They also noted that SAE creates a formal equivalence through the use of a neutral language in the course that promotes sameness and communication. However, students also realized that the demand for proficiency in SAE ignores the linguistic diversity that comes with being in a global metropolis such as New York City.

In my classroom, students who had previously refused to volunteer to read aloud or refused to participate in discussion because they said they were self-conscious about their accents, or because they read or spoke more slowly in English, started participating more. When students realized that everyone in the class, including their professor, had to negotiate Anzaldúa's linguistic borderland and additional linguistic differences that emerged in our classroom as their peers started sharing their personal knowledge and experiences, they found their voices. It is in this sense that border pedagogy restores what monolingual instruction often prohibits: the ability to construct one's sense of self within signification and representation when allowed to reference linguistic repertoires as resources.

Introducing Anzaldúa's text as a textual linguistic borderland gave the class discussion a translingual orientation because it encouraged students to access the attitudes and skills that they already have when it comes to negotiating linguistic differences and brought them into the classroom. Further, it facilitated a discussion about the implications for reading and writing with an awareness that languages are always in contact and complement each other in everyday communications (Canagarajah *Literacy as translingual practice: Between communities and classrooms* 4). For instance, when we closely read Anzaldúa's text, many Spanish speaking students along with other linguistically diverse students who are bilingual or multilingual (and who have participated less throughout the term) began to speak voluntarily. Students who spoke Spanish offered to read passages aloud and translated passages for the rest of the class. Once

translations were offered, students worked together to rephrase them into SAE while paying careful attention to the original wording and meaning. Sometimes, they paused to discuss the best way to translate a particular word, and students looked up definitions in Spanish to English dictionaries I scattered around the room. In particular, discussion lingered over the translation of the following phrase “*El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua*” (Anzaldúa “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” 54). The student who volunteered to read the passage aloud translated the sentence as follows: “The Anglos, with their innocent faces, snatched out our tongues.” However, he noted that he was not sure how he should translate “arrancó,” and he asked other students how they translated the word. Another student who speaks Spanish suggested translating it as “snatched” made it sound less violent and suggested we use the word “ripped” or the word “yanked” instead. We paused to consider how Anzaldúa would want us to translate the word, and a student who admitted that he stopped reading the text pointed us to the passage where Anzaldúa quotes Smith to pose a rhetorical question that suggests that taking someone’s language is as violent as war (“How to Tame a Wild Tongue” 53). The student noted that since his peer had translated the text, he understood Anzaldúa’s decision to include this reference along with the anecdote about being at the dentist. He said we should use “ripped” or “tore out” because those words communicated the violence more than “snatched.” When students negotiated Anzaldúa’s linguistic borderland and translated the text, they became detectives; they mined the text for clues about meaning and engaged the perspective and intent of the author. Native English speakers, in particular, overcame their resistance to the text and opened up to it through their active reading practices and discussion.

We engaged Anzaldúa’s notion that being expected to learn and use SAE may prevent non-native English speakers and other individuals who prefer to use languages, dialects, or vernaculars that are connected with minority cultures or countercultures and identities from freely expressing themselves (“How to Tame a Wild Tongue” 54). Mainly, students focused on the author’s representations of her

educational experiences including descriptions of moments in which she was punished for speaking Spanish at school as a child:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess-that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for ‘talking back’ to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong.” (Anzaldúa “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” 53).

Many bilingual and multilingual students, especially those who immigrated to the United States with their families as children, identified with this moment because they too had encountered the English only ideology in the American public school system or had felt frustrated by the fact that their teachers could not or would not pronounce their names correctly. Sadly, many had been told to “speak English,” and several said they had been told “go back to Mexico” by white Americans who had heard them speaking Spanish in a public place. At this point, we considered what might have to repressed when attempting to appease or accommodate others to complicate our discussion of Wallace and performing for others. Native English speakers noted that Anzaldúa may have intended for them to feel frustrated by or even excluded from her text so they could identify with others who are forced to accommodate English speakers on a daily basis once we entered the text together. During discussion, one student went from feeling that she could not access Anzaldúa’s text and resisting it to having the following epiphany and sharing her critical insights with the entire class: “I understand why she chose to use Spanish, now. She feels violated, as if someone is trying to tear her language away from her, but she is refusing to be silenced. She is choosing to freely express herself and speak in her own language for a reason.” This same student noted that she had never really thought about her own linguistic privilege or expectation that others speak English until she read Anzaldúa’s text.

Another student responded to her by exclaiming, “*Gracias*, thank you for saying that!”

Consensus and Accommodation

In addition to being given a set of talking points that included vocabulary and concepts from both of the assigned readings, students were given reading and discussion questions to answer on their own. These questions structured class discussion as well as small group work and encouraged students to enter into the texts and engage them in informal, low stakes assignments that involved various types of speaking and writing. For example, when students read Wallace's text, they defined the following terms: "language," "dialect," and "vernacular." Later, students reviewed Anzaldúa's text and a particular passage in which she lists all of the languages, dialects, and vernaculars she speaks and uses with fluency (55). In group work and discussion, they considered why she might create such a list and include it in her text. Several students observed that the list was a way for her to document her language skills and fluency. One student noted that her list gives her credibility as an author who is speaking about her personal experiences. Students then created similar lists, individually. Afterwards, they formed groups and compiled their individual lists of languages, dialects, and vernaculars by answering the following questions:

1. How many languages are spoken by members of your group? List each language and the level of fluency for reading and speaking.
2. How many vernaculars are spoken by members of your group? List each vernacular spoken by members of your group and the level of fluency for reading and speaking.
3. How many dialects are spoken by members of your group? List each dialect along with the level of fluency for reading and speaking.

When asked to share their group findings with the class, they discovered that most of the students in the class spoke two or more languages, multiple dialects, and multiple vernaculars. This exercise surprised them. They did not realize how multilingual the class was. In many ways, this simple exercise reveals that

monolingual education policies deprive students of diverse linguistic resources that border pedagogy encourages them to celebrate and access.

Once each group had compiled a list reflecting the linguistic diversity of the group, they referred to the assigned texts and discussed when each language, dialect, and vernacular on their list might be used. They shared examples with the class after group discussion. This portion of the assignment required students to consider the contexts and settings for language usage along with the positions both Wallace and Anzaldúa take on language, dialect, and vernacular. All of the groups turned to Wallace's text to argue for letting the group one hopes to join determine the use of an appropriate language, dialect, or vernacular.

It became clear that the students felt that Wallace's position was more pragmatic. Students achieved a self-directed consensus that being understood in formal settings and situations was more important than the relationship between one's identity and one's language, which could be embraced in less formal settings and situations. In this moment, even students who acknowledged that their identities and cultures could not be separated from their mother tongues agreed that switching codes and performing SAE when expected to do so would be advantageous. Their negotiations of the borderland side-stepped adversarial, antagonistic discourse and opted for the utilitarian and monolingual-schooled-solution also known as accommodation. To illustrate support for this agreement with Wallace's position, two groups decided to test Anzaldúa's position, on their own, and demonstrated what happened when they applied Anzaldúa's notions about exercising her right to free speech and using her preferred language to express herself to their group discussion for the class. Each student in one group had a different first language, and each addressed the other members of the group in that preferred native tongue. The first student spoke Russian, and the second student responded in English: "I cannot understand you. I do not speak Russian. Do you speak English?" The third student responded similarly in Urdu, and the fourth student responded in Spanish. They explained that English might not be their preferred language, but it was a

common language they could use to communicate. Another group explained that when seeking employment or at work, one might be expected to conform to SAE or the language used by a group to conduct business. Their discussion moved to contemplate what would happen if Anzaldúa were a customer service representative who responded to customer concerns over the telephone in the language or dialect she preferred. They decided she would be fired for not using the language or vernacular the customer preferred or her employer required. Thus, they also decided that they agreed with Wallace's notion that usage was determined by the group or person one wanted to engage with. Over and over, students embraced Wallace's claims; yet, they were sensitive to Anzaldúa's position and to peers who discussed the challenges of conforming to SAE or accommodating others.

Ultimately, most of my students concluded that some people may lose their linguistic and cultural identities when learning and adopting SAE, but they did not think that they would suffer the same losses Anzaldúa discusses because they had strong communal and familial ties that would keep their linguistic and cultural identities intact. Most of them noted that they were able to speak their home languages in face to face conversations with friends or family in the city and by using technology to stay in touch with friends and family that they were distanced from. However, some international students noted that as they became more fluent in English, they felt like they were forgetting words in their mother tongue or making substitutions by using the English equivalent because they were not using their first language as often. On the one hand, I was impressed with their strategies for testing the positions of the authors they had been reading. On the other hand, I realized that their conclusions insist on keeping private (home) and public (academic and work) cultures separate. This division in their conclusions revealed that my 101 students had in many ways already acquiesced to the expectations for the usage SAE and monolingualism in the dominant culture of American society. In this sense, Wallace's text seemed to reinforce the demand for accommodation by giving them explicit reasons for yielding to accommodation. One student, in particular, stated, "Wallace is right. Standard English unlocks the door to the American dream." With this

comment, the connections between language and power resurfaced. While one unit of border pedagogy may disrupt monolingual ideology, it is pervasive and will continue to be so as long as students are required to meet Standard Learning Outcomes regarding the mastery of standard English for the course to earn good grades and perceive standard English as a key to future success.

In light of this development, I asked myself, “Can community college composition instructors who teach in the borderlands between inner-city high schools and four-year university institutions as well as academic and home cultures really empower students by asking them to consider language usage and texts that discuss and critique the academic conventions being taught in the course?” I wondered if students would integrate anecdotes and personal stories about language usage into their essays. Would they use their voices to expose the privilege of those Americans who expect everyone to conform to and use SAE, or would those critiques be kept private and excluded from their academic writing? Or, had I succeeded merely in reifying monolingualism and mainstream composition pedagogy?

Mainstream pedagogical writing practices are generally complicit with policies for assimilation into a discourse community that expects proficient use of SAE. For this reason, they do not encourage faculty to recognize students’ marginal experiences. Yet, like Chandra Mohanty, I want to believe that the marginal experiences that are grounded in negotiating linguistic borderlands have the potential to become a “crucial form of empowerment for students—a way for them to enter the classroom as speaking subjects” (153). The low-stakes assignments I gave in my course were intended to elevate students’ awareness and critical understanding of linguistic diversity and promote their abilities to enter into public and academic debates about language usage in a range of contexts. While participation increased and students exhibited sensitivity to linguistic differences, the consensus achieved in group and class discussions left me wondering if my unit would fail to produce essays demonstrating strong voices, thesis statements taking positions in the ongoing debates over language usage, and references to personal experiences.

Self-Assessment of Outcomes

The in-class essay in this unit was meant to prepare students for a departmental final exam that also asks students to respond to a prompt, generate a thesis, and support it by referencing two assigned texts in an in-class essay of 500 words or more. I assessed the papers, including the thesis statements, use of supporting sources, critical thinking, organization, and grammar by using the same departmental rubric faculty use for grading the departmental final exam for English 101. This grading rubric was created by the Composition Committee and is distributed to faculty each term with the departmental exams.

Students were given ninety minutes to respond to the following in-class essay assignment:

Directions: Choose one question to answer. Then, you should create a brief outline for your essay. Draft an essay of 500 words (or more) that responds to the prompt you have chosen. Reference both of the assigned Essay 3 texts (by Wallace and Anzaldúa) to support your thesis. In addition to quoting and discussing Wallace and Anzaldúa's essays, you may also refer to personal knowledge or experience to support your thesis. Write the question and question number you have chosen to answer on your essay.

- 1. To what extent might one benefit from conforming to and using Standard American English when speaking and writing?*
- 2. How might being required to use and conform to Standard American English impact a person's identity?*
- 3. Should all people living in the United States be expected to learn and use Standard American English? Why or why not?*

The above assignment and questions ask students to take positions within ongoing debates about SAE that are relative to its usage and the positions of the authors of the assigned texts. My hope was that adding elements of border pedagogy to the unit would create opportunities for students to apply life experiences and examples of language usage to their analyses of assigned texts as they considered the concepts and ideas introduced in their readings. Thus, I created prompts that would allow students to reference their

lived experiences of language usage to encourage them to create original claims and nurture their voices as writers.

Seventeen students attempted the in-class essay, and my self-assessment generated the following data regarding thesis statements and use of sources.

- Two students chose to answer question 1; seven students chose to answer question 2; eight students chose to answer question 3.
- Twelve thesis statements met the requirements for A and B level thesis statements according to the rubric's standard of being "Clearly articulated and Thought-provoking" or "Clearly articulated"; four thesis statements met the criteria for C level thesis statements for meeting the standard of being "Identifiable"; and, one paper had no identifiable thesis claim.
- Fourteen students shared personal anecdotes and examples from personal knowledge to illustrate a point or reflect on language usage while three students did not use any personal anecdotes or examples from personal knowledge.
- Sixteen students referred to and discussed both of the assigned texts for the unit in their essays; however, twelve students actually quoted both texts, four students quoted one text, and one student quoted zero texts.

The spread for prompt selection is interesting given the fact that in our public class discussions, students arrived at a consensus, and groups agreed with Wallace's pragmatic position that Americans should learn and use Standard American English. The positions students took in their papers on language usage are more nuanced and do not reflect that consensus. Overall, their essays demonstrated a sensitivity to multilingual individuals and groups while noting that conforming to SAE to accommodate others can have negative effects.

In addition, the assessment suggests that the informal assignments and discussions in the unit nurtured the development of student voices. In fact, a majority of the students generated identifiable

thesis statements and used personal anecdotes to offer support for their own positions and claims or to illustrate a concept from the assigned texts. Others, empowered by Anzaldúa, decided to include sentences in other languages, such as Urdu, in their essays to discuss Anzaldúa's multilingual text and identify with her choice to express herself freely. They often pointed to instances where a specific word used in their native tongue lacked an English equivalent. Some students discussed their own hybrid languages such as 'Ruglish,' a mix of Russian and English used by Russian immigrants in New York City. Overall, the anecdotes and examples in my students' essays are engaged, compelling, and personal. The following paragraphs discuss three examples from student essays that are representative of the ways students used sources (assigned texts and/or personal knowledge) in the in-class essays to support their thesis claims in the English 101 section being assessed for this article.⁶

Student 1 opens her essay by connecting her lived experience to her position and claim: "Coming from Ecuador at an early age was difficult, learning and being required to speak Standard English was the hard part. And in the transition of that, who I was got lost. My identity changed. I believe requiring someone to use and conform to Standard English will badly impact a person's identity because how you wish to speak is part of who you are." In particular, the student uses her personal experience to disagree with Wallace's notion that the language one chooses to use depends upon who is being addressed:

... Wallace believed that the way we chose to speak depended on the group we want to address.
... I don't agree because forcing someone to accommodate to the way a group is or talks just to try to fit in is taking away the value of a person. ... Identity is lost, it's badly impacted when someone feels they have to change ... to fit in the group they are addressing. When growing up I was bullied because of the way I pronounced words ... I didn't want to get bothered anymore so I changed who I was (my identity). I changed the way I spoke. The summer before going

⁶ I asked three students if I could anonymously reference their essays for this article, and they agreed. I chose to refer to the authors as Student 1, Student 2, and Student 3.

into middle school I was going to libraries and grabbing every English movie so I can take them home to learn to speak English without an accent. School time came and I started having more friends more chances to have fun, but I wasn't myself. I didn't realize until a few years later that I was doing wrong.

In this sense, her essay testifies to the double vision and awareness that comes from crossing a border and being located between languages and cultures that Anzaldúa describes as the space of *Nepantla*. In addition, she discusses her experience of the expectation for monolingualism in America. Most importantly, her anecdote is connected to and supports her claim, which demonstrates comprehension and critical thinking.

Student 2 referred to the source of her cultural identity, Bangladesh, and the history of The Language Movement, which is not separate from the Bangladesh Liberation War in her example. She represents The Language Movement in East Pakistan and the War for Independence from Pakistan as a fight for linguistic freedom to support her claims that “language and identity are intricately related,” and that “[w]e should not be required to speak a certain language if we don't choose to”:

Personally, I am multilingual and I speak three languages. My mother tongue is Bangla. Bangladesh is the only nation in this world who went to war for language. When Bangladesh was captured by Pakistan, the Bengalis were prohibited from speaking Bangla and forced to speak Urdu, for which reason the nations went to war. After losing many lives, Bangla was officially our mother tongue. Due to its rich history, I have a special weakness for my mother tongue, Bangla. ...

The war, in her example, is a victorious history of resistance against a colonizing force and the resilience of a people who refused to give up their mother tongue. It is clear that the student author takes great pride in her linguistic heritage although she identifies as multilingual. For this reason, her example speaks to Anzaldúa's text in a profound way. Yet, she moves from aligning herself with a position that is compatible

with Anzaldúa's resistance to accommodating others and the position of The Language Movement to conclude her essay by declaring that "language is only the medium of communication, and we should be linguistically flexible to gain access to different kinds of people and socialize with them." While some readers would simply point out the contradiction in her conclusion, I think it reveals the double vision that comes from her relationship to the history of a culture that faced the erasure of a native language under law and an awareness of the need to negotiate linguistic borderlands today. When the student speaks and identifies as multi-lingual, she values the flexibility that comes with code-switching. When the student is considering her cultural identity, she speaks more forcefully about the connections between language, identity, and culture to note that no one should be stripped of the freedom to speak a given language. In this sense, what might be perceived as a contradiction or weakness in her essay actually points to her unique perspectives and experiences as a multilingual border-crosser.

Student 3, who is not a native English speaker, took a different approach to the assignment by assuming the discourse of an authority on the topic. David Bartholomae discusses the dilemma students face when they adopt this convention of academic writing: Students "have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing . . . and before, at least in the terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say" (156). While there are no personal anecdotes or references to lived experience in the in-class essay, the student supports her thesis with references to the assigned texts that demonstrate comprehension while conforming to the expectation that she adopt "codes of power" and master SAE while pursuing her academic studies. The student argues: "I think one will significantly benefit from conforming to and using Standard English when speaking and writing because it aligns with the realistic expectations in society as it exists. Conforming to and using Standard English can allow one to be successful and competitive—allowing social and economic mobility." The student goes on to support the claim by referencing Wallace's text:

... [U]sing a common language like Standard English allows for understanding, uniformity, and fosters formality and professionalism. He [Wallace] views Standard English as a vehicle to social and class mobility because language allows for group inclusion. By speaking and using Standard English, one can connect to or gain access to people with a high status in society. The fluidity of language allows that happen. If one uses Standard English, then he/she can identify with the elites in society since Standard English is considered the language of the elites by Wallace. In Wallace's text, he says one uses a particular language or dialect because it "is a naked desire to fit in and not get rejected." He is simply implying that to gain inclusion to a group, you should speak the language of group.

In this passage, the student's focused engagement with Wallace's position is connected to the rationale of her thesis claim. There is a strong alignment with Wallace's position; however, the student does not dismiss Anzaldúa's claim that identity and language cannot be separated:

... [S]he [Anzaldúa] argues that having to conform to Standard English causes one to lose his/her identity. ... In her text, she argues that "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language." She means that [a] person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group is expressed through their language. ... By that she is claiming that one shouldn't be expected to conform to Standard English, especially to gain inclusion in groups. Having to conform to Standard English will rob one of who he/she really is, Anzaldúa claims.

While the student is sensitive to Anzaldúa's argument, and goes on to concede that conforming to SAE can "take away" one's "human personality," she rearticulates her own stance by stating, "While I agree with Anzaldúa, I believe that there are more advantages of conforming to Standard English. Like Wallace, I strongly agree that conforming to and using Standard English gives one social and economic mobility." She then moves to connect her position to academic pursuits and employment opportunities in the "real world." This student's ability to note the loss one might endure when required to conform to a

monolingual culture within her argument demonstrates sensitivity and respect for cultural and linguistic differences even as she pragmatically argues for conforming to SAE.

Conclusion

The linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the student body at Borough of Manhattan Community College make it an ideal institution to implement border pedagogy in a first-year English composition course. However, I do not think that border pedagogy should only be implemented at institutions with similar demographics. This is because border pedagogy stages an encounter with linguistic difference in which students become linguistic border crossers and glimpse the monoculture from a new perspective that has the potential to disrupt "existing configurations of power" within America's socio-linguistic hierarchy (Giroux 28). Carefully selected multilingual or bilingual texts can be assigned to create a linguistic borderland or borderlands that must be negotiated in the classroom. This variation in content invites students to traverse the assigned texts by utilizing their existing multilingual and translingual skills to make meaning. For this reason, border pedagogy is a tool that can be used in any classroom for promoting more ethical relations with others. This is because binaries that are used to construct identities and categorize languages in difference are questioned, deconstructed, and refashioned in ways that allow student writers to develop voice and articulate a sense of self. Further, students may draw from lived experiences and linguistic phenomena such as code-switching and translation in their discussions and essays.

In my course, embracing elements of border pedagogy gave students the opportunity to discuss their lived, concrete experiences in ways that facilitated the emergence of voice in their textual representations of cultural and linguistic self-awareness. Also, border pedagogy affords students an opportunity to view monolingualism with a critical glance in a course that usually reifies the dominance and institutional privileging of SAE. In light of this outcome, border pedagogy proves valuable because it

prioritizes students' unique, concrete, and often conflicted experiences with language while making them central to the work of the composition classroom. Ultimately, what had been repressed in our English course—the fact that students are linguistically proficient in diverse and highly specialized ways—surfaced. Thus, it is a valuable pedagogical intervention that requires students and faculty to collectively and individually negotiate linguistic borderlands and create spaces for new forms of belonging in ways that celebrate the plurality of voices that populate America.

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