

# **Creating a Transnational Space in the First Year Writing Classroom**

Edited by

**W. Ordeman**

University of North Texas

**Series in Literary Studies**



**VERNON PRESS**

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*In the Americas:*  
Vernon Press  
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200  
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801  
United States

*In the rest of the world:*  
Vernon Press  
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,  
Malaga, 29006  
Spain

Series in Literary Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020949840

ISBN: 978-1-62273-952-3

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# Abstract

The chapters in this volume offer new ways of thinking about and applying theories of transnational rhetoric in first-year composition classrooms. Transnationalism is still a rather nascent field in rhetorical studies, and the growing body of literature has thus far focused on the critical necessity of laying theoretical groundwork. There remains a lack of applied pedagogical research teachers can use to help create and nurture transnational spaces in the classroom. While several works in this volume contribute to our understanding of the breadth and depth of transnational rhetoric, the goal of this work is to offer applicable pedagogy that helps create and nurture transnational spaces within a specific writing context.



# Introduction

## Theoretical Groundwork

What do we mean by “transnationalism”? In her article, *What’s the Difference Between “Translingual” and “Transnational” Composition?: Clarifying the Relationship between two Terms*, Carrie Kilfoil claims that these terms can often seem synonymous and that understanding their nuance requires intentional study. Still, it’s not uncommon to hear the terms interchangeably. After all, aren’t all translinguals also transnationals (and vice versa)? Don’t both denote the blending of culture ideologies? Part of this confusion, Kilfoil claims, stems from citizens of monolingual societies presuming all nations are monolingual entities. It is true that many nations represent monolingual societies - some even creating laws to enforce monolingualism (such as the English Only movement), and nation states have used linguistic colonization to subjugate translingual communities (see Anzaldúa). But as Yasemin Yildiz has argued, there is a false assumption that “individuals and social formations...possess one ‘true’ language (their ‘mother tongue’) and through this possession [are] organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation” (2). While translingual communities represent identities informed by language with multiple languages represented in a single community, a transnational perspective, as Yildiz puts it, “puts the emphasis on human agency: such groups are the result of cross-border activities which link individuals, families and local groups” (2). Using transnational and translingual interchangeably reinforces a limited definition of rhetoric - that it is a strictly linguistic act. It is important that students and faculty obtain a framework for understanding spaces where national interest and national identities are concurrent with but exist apart from language.

In 2008, Hesford and Schell argued “all national formations are constructed within and often solidified by transnational connectivities” (464) and called for research in composition studies that recognizes these transnational connectivities. The following year, Christiane Donahue reiterated this when she called more “deep intercultural awareness” to avoid “efforts [that] will remain stuck in a-historical, a-contextual, and highly partial modes of intellectual tourism.” (236) Since then, discourse in transnationalism composition has begun to address these relationships and lay theoretical groundwork for further study.

The introduction to the recent *Transnationalism: Theory, History, and Practice* edited by Xiaoye You argues the foundation of transnationalism

consists of translanguaging, transculturalism, and cosmopolitanism – each having a distinct role in our conception of transnationalism. This foundation has been partly constructed by research mentioned above and discourse on related areas including immigrant and migrant studies (Pandey; Simon; Vieira), digital literacy (Berry et al.; Lam and Rosario-Ramos), and globalization in higher education (Kang; Lorimer Leonard; McNamara) and transnational feminist studies (Dingo). The works of these individuals suggest transnational rhetoric create transnational space - begging the question, how do these created spaces influence agents therein?

Encouraging translanguaging practice in the classroom is crucial to empower students to influence and recognize influence within their environments. Language has no doubt affected the transnational composition classrooms, but as Xiaoye You has argued and the authors in this volume point out, translanguaging functions as the predicate of transnational pedagogy which deserves to be seen as an independent agent (*Transnationalism: Theory, History, and Practice*). Understanding the relationship of these two ideologies not only helps teachers develop pedagogy that creates space for developing and examining transnationalism and translanguaging independently, it will also reaffirm to our students the threshold concepts we believe about writing.

### **Answering the Call**

Teaching writing within these transnational spaces helps foster what Rebecca Lorimer Leonard calls *rhetorical attunement*: “an understanding that assumes multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning across difference” (“Multilingual Writing as Rhetorical Attunement”288). Sara Alvarez claims transnational writers can “sustain and foster transnational literacies and networks via various forms of writing that are of value to the academy” (344). This volume responds to this assertion. Each chapter addresses one of the following questions: “How can we use the resources at our disposal to incorporate transnational ecologies in homogeneous classrooms?” and/or “What can be done to foster transnational literacies and networks as a direct response to transnational spaces outside the classroom?” All authors see transnational space in the classroom as an opportunity to help students see rhetoric as highly contextual and subject to the agents involved. David S. Martin’s recent work, *Transnational Writing Program Administration*, has helped illuminate long-standing assumptions about program curriculum and pedagogy within writing programs. This volume continues in research that understands “transnational activities are thoroughly shifting the questions we ask about writing curricula, the space and place in which writing happens, and the cultural and linguistic issues at the heart of the relationships forged in literacy work” (Martins 1).

This volume also addresses Leonard's call in her short essay "Moving Beyond Methodological Nationalism" when she calls for research that is "more precise and less restricted." (129) Readers will find precision for the term transnationalism through the specific pedagogical projects each author has introduced in their classes. Restrictions in terms of correct/appropriate/right and incorrect/inappropriate/wrong are guided by each author's specific pedagogical goal.

Several authors in this volume were afforded the opportunity to teach rhetoric to students who live in *transnational spaces* where the rhetoric is reflective of an altogether unique phenomenon happening outside the classroom. The authors share their analysis and results in an effort to find effective teaching methods that satisfy student learning outcomes while creating ecologies that reflect the values and perspectives of the students in the room. Other authors in this volume teach in homogeneous classrooms (classrooms where one cultural group accounts for the majority of the students) where they themselves bring a representation of transnationalism by teaching English writing courses as a non-native speaker of English. Their purpose is not so much to reflect the ecologies of the students' transnationalism, but rather to reveal the transnational spaces they as instructors create. Translingualism is a common theme throughout the work as translingual pedagogies are commonly used to help construct/reflect transnational ecologies. As both are still relatively novel pedagogical approaches, there are a number of new ways of analyzing, implementing, and evaluating their pedagogy.

Where previous work on transnational pedagogy has focused on theory, the goal of this volume is to offer examples of transnational pedagogy *in action* followed by discussions of what these applications imply to our understanding of the field. By building a larger database of transnational pedagogy, teachers will better be able to develop writing curricula that create transnational space - a space many students and teachers are already living and operating in.

### Chapter Sections

All the authors in this volume are connected by their shared vision of cultivating transnational spaces in the first-year writing classrooms. They write to cross the border between scholarship on transnationalism as rhetorical theory and applying this theory to first-year writing curriculum and pedagogy. *Creating a Transnational Space in the First Year Writing Classroom* is structured along the border of pedagogical research methods and classroom application and thus divided into three sections based on the author's implementation and research methodology. The chapters are divided into these sections to help align the reader's goals with correlating goals of the authors. Researchers who are most interested in understanding their

students' relationship with transnationalism might find the chapters in Part 1 most beneficial as they incorporate ethnographic research. Readers who are in a position to create transnational courses study might find chapters in Part 2 most helpful. Educators who are interested in applying a piece-meal approach might find the chapters in Part 3 helpful as they are concerned with specific assignments. By dividing the work thus, readers can guide themselves toward sections most pertinent to their objectives.

### **Creating Transnational Spaces through Ethnographic Reflection**

The authors of this section use ethnographic reflections as a means of both evaluating and then inventing new pedagogical models. Their qualitative approach to research begins without a materialized hypothesis and is facilitated by inductive reasoning allowing them to discover insights specific to where they teach. These teachers explore first-year writing pedagogies via collecting qualitative data through the ethnographies of the students. Norma Dibrell begins her inquiry without asking specific questions, but rather from a position of understanding the students' experience outside the classroom. She uses their reflections as a means of challenging constructs of linguistic homogeneity. Abu Saleh Mohammad Rafi and Anne-Marie Morgan, on the other hand, begin by asking three open-ended questions specific to the efficacy of Rafi's classroom – one that is a transnational ecology. He uses several methods of gathering qualitative data to assess the efficacy of his teaching methods. Naoko Akai-Dennis' research begins by questioning assumptions about agency in transnational spaces. Akai-Dennis has her students collect data of language-use outside the classroom and uses the students' ethnographies to highlight the shortcomings of current theoretical constructs of translingual contact zones. All three authors undertake their research in the understanding that, as with most novel fields of research, not all of the "appropriate" questions have been conceived. Sometimes, an instructor has a vision for where they are going but lacks the fundamental inquiries that will drive progress. Similarly, the authors in this section first offer a literary synthesis as a means of providing the reader with their vision, and then offer ethnographic data as a means of validating and/or invalidating fundamental claims made by the theory of transnationalism.

### **Creating Transnational Spaces through Course Design focused on Genre**

In this section, authors conduct their research by designing course content and course materials that emphasize genre. They do so in order to foster ideas of transnational spaces through classroom discourse, classroom activities, and writing prompts. The roles of the authors in this section include Writing Program Administrators, Professors, and Graduate Teachers of Record, giving

the reader a unique perspective of how one can create transnational spaces based on their professional level of influence. Andrew Hollinger and Colin Charlton are writing program directors at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) where transnationals make up the majority of their student body. Their program is designed around *writing about writing* curriculum through transnational writing environments. Asmita Ghimire shares her insight as a transnational graduate assistant in a predominately homogeneous environment. She and Elizabethada Wright have built their transnational curriculum to address this type of dichotomy. Demet Yigitbilek shares a similar experience as the graduate teacher of record in a university in the midwest. She designed the course *Language and/as Identity* and uses her transnational experience to teach genre in her rhetoric classroom. All these authors offer reflections that are particularly helpful for course/program designers who are looking for research that includes comprehensive implementation of transnational pedagogies.

### **Creating Transnational Spaces through Assignment Design**

Authors of this section use specific assignments as a means of incorporating transnational pedagogy for specific course modules within a first-year writing course. Their aim is to create transnational spaces within their classrooms to achieve specific learning outcomes in addition to those common to first-year composition courses. Maria Houston and Ekaterina Gradaleva's chapter specifically studies the efficacy of a transnational composition assignment that teaches digital literacies as well as collaborative writing. Authors Phuong Minh Tran, Kyle J. Lucas, and Kenneth Tanemura synthesize data collected from numerous transnational composition assignments to compare their successes and failures and offer suggestions to instructors on how they can be used to create transnational spaces.

W. Ordeman  
January 2020

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# Author Biographies

## **Chapter 1 - Erasing the Idea of Monolingual Students in Translingual Spaces: A Study of Translingual Pedagogy in First-Year Writing**

**Norma Denaë Dibrell** is a former high school English teacher and current first-year writing lecturer at the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley. She is a native of the Rio Grande Valley. Her research interests include transfer, translingualism, feminist theory, first-year writing studies, cultural rhetoric and decolonial studies.

## **Chapter 2 - Translanguaging and Academic Writing: Possibilities and Challenges in English-Only Classrooms**

**Abu Saleh Mohammad Rafi** is a PhD candidate in Linguistics at James Cook University, Australia. He has been exploring the promises of translanguaging pedagogical approaches in the context of Bangladeshi higher education. Previously, he studied Sociolinguistics at Liverpool Hope University, United Kingdom.

**Anne-Marie Morgan** Professor and Dean of the College of Arts, Society and Education at James Cook University in Australia. She has over 25 years of experience working with teachers of languages in schools and universities. Her research interests include plurilingualism, translanguaging as classroom pedagogy, the teaching of languages including English, and the work of teachers in engaging with the diversity of student cohorts. She has over 50 major publications and has conducted more than 20 major research projects into languages education as Chief Investigator, including two current projects with the Australian Government and the Australian Research Council.

## **Chapter 3 - Language, Home, and Transnational Space**

**Dr. Naoko Akai-Dennis** obtained a PhD in English and Education from Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Her research interests are the relationship between language and self, autobiography as an inquiry, storytelling, and teaching of writing. Theoretically she is persuaded by post-colonial theory, post-structural feminist theory, and started to delve into post-humanist theory. She currently teaches College Writing I, College Writing II, College Writing I paired with Integrated ELL Level 3 Learning Community course, and an accelerated cluster Writing Skills II and College Writing for Early College Program at Bunker Hill Community College, Massachusetts, as an

assistant professor of English. She enjoys and appreciates the diverse community of students, staff, and professors at the college.

**Chapter 4 - A Confluence of Xings: A Nested Heuristic for Developing and Networking Individual, Programmatic, and Institutional Spaces of Transnational Work**

**Andrew Hollinger** has taught at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (formally UTPA) since 2012 in the Department of Language & Writing Studies, and has been the WPA for the first-year writing program since 2015. He teaches primarily first-year composition and technical communication where his previous experience as a high school teacher allows him to work closely with students transitioning from K12 or career paths into the university. His work focuses on writing pedagogy, writing administration, event theories and design, genre, and materiality.

**Colin Charlton** graduated with a PhD in English and a specialization in Rhetoric & Composition from Purdue University in 2005. He has taught at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (formerly UTPA) since 2005, where he has been the Department Chair of Writing & Language Studies since 2015. He teaches at all levels, but really enjoys his work in transitional and first-year writing courses and teacher training courses at the upper-undergraduate and graduate levels. His research includes writing pedagogy, event theories and design thinking, and (writing program) administration.

**Chapter 5 - All Writers have more Englishes to Learn: Translingual First-Year Composition classes' Promotion of Composition's Threshold Concepts**

A PhD student at the University of Texas at El Paso, **Asmita Ghimire** holds a Master of Arts in English from Tribhuvan University, Nepal and Master in English, Linguistics and Writing from the University of Minnesota Duluth. She was invited to the Young Scholar program organized by the British Academy of Writing 2018 where she presented and published "The Other Side of Afghan War: Women, War and the Question of Social Injustice." Focusing on transnational and translingual writing, she and Wright are publishing a special edition of *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*.

Professor at the University of Minnesota Duluth, **Elizabethada A. Wright** teaches in the Department of English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies and is a member of the faculty at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities' Literacy and Rhetorical Studies Program. She has published in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Rhetoric Review*, *College English Association Critic*, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, as well as in a number of other journals and books.

### **Chapter 6 - Translingual and Transnational Pedagogies Enacted: Linguistic and Cultural Trajectory Narratives in First-Year Composition**

**Demet Yigitbilek** is a PhD student in English Studies at Illinois State University (ISU) where she mainly designs and teaches FYC, theming them around what excites her at the time. Her research interests center around translingualism and linguistic diversity in Applied Linguistics, Second Language Writing, and Composition Studies. Her teaching is greatly influenced by her transnational identity as a Turkish scholar who has taught in Spain, Turkey and now in the US higher education. She enjoys experimenting with new ideas and pushes students to think beyond the walls of the classroom. So far, she has taught FYC as Language and Identity, Critical Writer-Researchers, and Composing In/Of Our Lives.

### **Chapter 7 - Learning by Writing: Possibilities of Tele-Collaborative Transnational Education In and Beyond a First-Year Writing Classroom**

**Ekaterina Gradaleva** is an Associate Professor at Samara State Technical University. She is a graduate of Samara State University with a Doctorate in Germanic Languages. At present, she lectures EFL and Business English at the Department of Linguistics, Cross-Cultural Communication and Russian as a Foreign Language, and serves as a scientific mentor supervising student research in Linguistics and Business Studies. Her research interests involve Cultural Studies, Professional Communication, Project-Based Learning, and Teaching English for Specific Purposes.

**Maria Houston** is an English Faculty member at Texas A&M University in Texarkana. Maria currently teaches courses in Digital Writing and is in process of designing a Business Course with a focus on professional communication and cultural intelligence. She has an extensive record of publications in Second Language Literacy, Transnational Pedagogy, Collaborative Programming and Transnational Digital Rhetoric and Communications.

### **Chapter 8 - Investigating Translingual Practices in First-Year Writing Courses: Implications for Transnational Composition Pedagogies**

**Puong Minh Tran** is a PhD Candidate in Second Language Studies/ESL at Purdue University. Her research encompasses second language writing, intercultural competence in writing studies, transnational composition pedagogies, Backward Design in curricular development and World Englishes. Puong is a member of the Transculturation in Introductory Composition project which focuses on intercultural competence development in first-year writing students and which has received several internal and external grants, including the CWPA Research Grant from the Council of Writing Program

Administrators in 2018. Phuong's work on cultural studies can be found in the edited collection *Building a Community, Having a Home: A History of the Conference on College Composition and Communication Asian/Asian American Caucus* (2017). Her other publications are forthcoming in the *Journal of World Englishes* and the edited collection *Teaching and Studying Transnational Composition*. At Purdue, Phuong is an instructor of mainstream and L2-specific First-Year Writing and Professional Writing.

**Kyle J. Lucas** is a PhD student in the English Department at Purdue University. His research focuses on the use of genre analysis and corpus linguistics to analyze student and professional academic writing. He is particularly interested in analyzing and comparing the rhetorical structures of research articles across academic disciplines. His most recent project involves English for Specific Purposes research in the field of philosophy. Other research interests include the role of critical thinking instruction in English for Academic Purposes curriculum as well as how genre-based and corpus-based analytical approaches can be used as pedagogical methods in English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes classrooms.

**Kenneth Tanemura** is a PhD Candidate in Second Language Studies/ESL at Purdue University. His research focuses on motivation in heritage language and L2 learning, and particularly how the L2 motivational self-system as conceptualized by Dörnyei can measure stages of learning. Kenneth is currently involved in various collaborative, duoethnographic projects about disciplinary identity and motivation in L2 researchers, specifically how scholars are motivated to investigate the integration of disability studies in the L2 writing syllabus, and the motivation to explore and analyze motivation itself as a subfield of applied linguistics. He also has work forthcoming in the *Journal of World Englishes*.

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