

# Linguistic Pluralism: A Statement and a Call to Advocacy

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*This essay presents the trajectory of a syllabus statement on linguistic and cultural pluralism and its role in the articulation and revision of a pedagogical approach that foregrounds students' linguistic diversity and partnerships with local communities. In recounting the steps and stakeholders involved in crafting the statement, the author argues that this statement functions as an activist text. The author also contends that the field of composition studies should take on an activist agenda when it comes to language rights. Composition studies needs to go beyond merely accepting language pluralism to actively engaging and dismantling oppressive discourses and normative practices. By establishing explicit values and ideologies, the linguistic and cultural pluralism statement has the potential to promote and foster a culture of cross-cultural and global perspectives in the classroom through students' ties to local communities.*

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**T**he problem with the current sociopolitical climate resides not only in its power to promote alternative truths, fake news, and an anti-immigrant/women/marginalized groups

rhetoric but in its creation of a *culture* of pernicious self-expression at the expense of others, especially of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national minorities. A culture of bigotry, disrespect, and ignorance premised on the advancement of self and national greatness rallies people around toxic discourses and thereby renders them more acceptable. This culture normalizes hatred and bigotry. Recent incidents of individuals demanding the use of English because “this is America” (e.g., New York attorney Aaron Schlossberg’s viral rant) challenge us to intervene. One such intervention in that respect is a syllabus statement I developed on linguistic and cultural pluralism. I argue here that the statement can function as a social justice text both in and beyond the classroom by circulating in local and global, online and physical networks and communities. I developed an initial iteration of this syllabus statement in 2015 when, after my first year as assistant professor of English and the multilingual pedagogy coordinator at an institution of higher education in South Florida, I concluded that this statement was the best strategy to communicate directly to my students my beliefs about diverse language repertoires and their value in the writing classroom:

### ***LANGUAGE & CULTURAL PLURALISM***

*The ability to communicate in multiple languages and/or use varieties of English is a valuable asset. In this course, you are encouraged to use or draw upon your varied linguistic and cultural resources. Although we’ll employ English(es) and Standard Written English (SWE) for many situations, you may resort to other languages and rhetorical practices in particular assignments. However, remember that our discussed rhetorical principles apply. That is, consider audience, purpose, and rhetorical appeals. For instance, if most of your audience does not speak Spanish(es), you may need to provide translation or captioning; or, if a particular image has certain connotations in your culture, you need to provide adequate information so that your message effectively reaches the target.*

Although I had extensively explored translingual and transnational matters in my professional formation and scholarly work, in my role as multilingual coordinator, I grappled with direct applications of language and cultural pluralism ideologies to the classroom. This

pedagogical difficulty is due to the fact that the context of our school in South Florida is marked by what Blommaert and Dong (2007) and other migration scholars have called “super-diversity.”<sup>1</sup> As a Hispanic-serving institution, we are not just confronted with multilingualism but with flows of migration and globalization that permeate our local communities and the student population that we serve. Our students’ linguistic pluralism and our diverse ethnolinguistic communities made this matter more urgent, encouraging us to consider how the writing classroom can become an open, flexible space where linguistic pluralism is valued and affirmed. In what follows, I elaborate on the different conditions that shaped the development of the syllabus statement: institutional context (my appointment, curricular revisions, etc.); the history and impact of the Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) on my thinking and development of the statement; and other momentous actions such as CCCC 2018’s call for statements on social justice. While the statement was born in the classroom, for the students, its impact has extended beyond that space: it prompted me to re-envision a particular pedagogy and curriculum, specifically the Writing Across Communities approach initially developed by Michelle Kells (2007); it got adopted as language policy in the first-year writing program policy at our institution; it further influenced other work at the national level, specifically contributing to the NCTE position statement on Ethnic Studies Initiatives<sup>2</sup>; and it was included in the social justice and activism packet initiated by Asao B. Inoue, program chair of CCCC 2018.<sup>3</sup>

It is in light of these developments that I present the trajectory of the statement, the contexts for its authorship, and the impact on various practices. The statement is intended to create a space where students of multiple languages and cultures have access to all of their resources and ties to communicate in and beyond the classroom. I ultimately argue that the field of composition studies needs to do more than simply tolerate and be acclimated to linguistic pluralism. Rather, composition scholars need to advocate actively for language rights and global perspectives in local, regional, and professional communities. Such a view presupposes that the classroom space serves as a community where difficult questions are discussed, including those related to language standards and ideologies of power implicated in the respective standards.

## THE INITIAL ELABORATION OF THE STATEMENT

In an essay in *College English*, Dana R. Ferris (2014) notes that the reviewed scholarship advocating for cross-cultural/ translingual approaches seems to promote “philosophical rather than pedagogical” agendas (80). A paraphrase of Ferris’s critique may be turned into this question: What do we *do* when we take on a translingual approach and how? While scholars promoting transnational or translingual pedagogies—Steven Alvarez (2017), Suresh Canagarajah (2013), Jay Jordan (2012), Ghanashyam Sharma (2016), or Brian Ray (2013), to name a few—have taken active steps towards pedagogical implementations, the feasibility of adopting a translingual approach in teaching continues to pose difficulties. This question, then, remains standing: What do we as transnational/translingual/multilingual scholars do to advocate, mainstream, or enact a translingual approach to writing?

In my first year as assistant professor, specifically in my capacity as the multilingual pedagogy coordinator, I envisioned the translingual approach as a concrete form of social justice; this meant taking actions that would allow the multilingual lives of our students to thrive, beyond visiting the writing center. It also meant that I had to learn more about my students and the local communities that would allow me to deeply understand them. While scholarship in linguistic pluralism has been wrestling with labels such as bilingual, multilingual, translingual, ESL or ELL, and others that assign students to pre-established identities defined by institutional expectations, my students seem to defy these linguistic, ethnic, or racial categories of identification. Enrolled at a medium-sized liberal arts university in South Florida, my students are indeed multilingual, but their relationships with languages of the world are flexible and changing as they themselves are moving across contexts. My students’ linguistic repertoires include Cuban Spanish, Mexican Spanish, Jamaican patois, French, German, Italian, Puerto Rican Spanish, Creole, American English, British English, Arabic, and several others. Many of my students went through the process of acquiring one language and losing another, only to commit themselves to relearning the initial language. Many carry with them histories of reading and writing that cannot be squeezed into English-only academic contexts. In South Florida, Spanish or Portuguese or

Creole or even Russian and Romanian permeate our social worlds—in stores, local neighborhoods, radio programs, or homes. Given this richness of linguistic repertoires, I crafted a syllabus statement that would inform students that their language and culture are valued in my classroom. Since the syllabus is one document that students are asked to read and abide by at the beginning of each course, the statement proved to be the best venue for affirming the value of language rights in my writing courses. Reflecting on its value for my students has in turn enabled me to develop the curriculum for a course on academic discourse, to enhance my pedagogy, and to consider pedagogical strategies for faculty training that would advocate for language rights. This statement thus became my own STROL position statement.

I studied STROL history and reception as a graduate student when I became interested in multilingual and transnational writing. Geneva Smitherman's (1995) article on the background of the STROL document has been particularly influential since then in guiding my thinking about the subject. She recounts the different stages in the conception of the STROL, the committee work involved in drafting it, and the challenges and responses to the statement, such as CCCC's support of the proposal, which was offset by NCTE's refusal to publish the already endorsed statement in 1974. The efforts in drafting STROL reveal not only the abundant theoretical work that has informed the writing of the statement but also the need to accompany it with a document on pedagogy and practical suggestions for its active implementation. Despite the STROL committee's sustained work of nearly four years in collecting and organizing the practical side of the statement, CCCC changed its position on the publication of this document; this was due to various sociopolitical tendencies, including the move toward a more conservative stance at the national level, which rippled into all other areas of social life. Given all the work invested in this issue, it was surprising to learn that the pedagogical collection failed to be published, especially since that work could have influenced classroom practices across the country. Did students know of such efforts? To what extent have students been impacted by the subsequent adoption of this resolution? Despite its limitations, STROL has indeed shifted the conversation about language rights even if its implementation was temporarily

stalled. Smitherman ended her overview of the STROL resolution with profound foresight on its impact on language pluralism:

We're now in the period of a new paradigm shift, from a provincial, more narrowly conceived focus to a broader internationalist perspective. We thus are being forced to address the issue of multiple linguistic voices, not only here, but in the global family. NCTE and CCCC, having grappled with these issues through the "Students' Right" era is, I think, well-positioned for a leadership role in formulating a national language policy for this nation. (26)

Since Smitherman's 1995 call for attention to "multiple linguistic voices," there have been some efforts to continue the work of STROL with an internationalist perspective. But a noticeable, even if contested at times, "paradigm shift" toward the valorization of multiple languages and dialects has occurred more recently with work published in the early 2000s and henceforth (e.g., the special issue on Cross-Language Relations in Composition in *College English* (2006); Donahue's (2009) "Internationalization" and Composition Studies: Reorienting the Discourse"; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur's (2011) "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach"; *Literacy as Translingual Practice Between Communities and Classroom* (2013), ed. A. Suresh Canagarajah; *Transnational Writing Program Administration* (2014), ed. David S. Martins; and numerous other publications). Like with STROL, the emphasis has been on theoretical underpinnings, and despite isolated examples (see Canagarajah's (2006) "Toward A Writing Pedagogy of Shuttling Between Languages"), pedagogical suggestions, lesson plans, and classroom activities have remained rather invisible. Having learned the lesson of praxis from the history of the STROL resolution, I crafted the syllabus statement on linguistic and cultural pluralism to ensure that this important theoretical work is enacted pedagogically. My intention was to start in the classroom with a grassroots text that would engage local students and local communities. Traditionally, we think of grassroots as originating in the local community, unfettered by institutional constraints. Yet, here I argue that this statement functions as a grassroots text because it was motivated by what students bring to the classroom, students whose agency and power leverage is generally inconsequential to the classroom curriculum.

Thus, the syllabus statement emerged from a localized learning experience—a specific class project in which students brought their own ties and linguistic repertoires to the classroom experience.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND CIRCULATION OF THE STATEMENT AT BARRY UNIVERSITY**

Due to a fortunate set of circumstances, the statement moved beyond one classroom to shape curricula at our institution. At my recommendation as the multilingual writing coordinator, the director of our first-year writing program decided on the immediate inclusion of the statement in our common syllabi in the first-year writing program. The adoption of the statement in my classroom and beyond coincided with two other appointments that have been influential in this regard: a fellowship with our community and service learning center and teaching of a new course in the first-year writing program, “Techniques of Research,” the curriculum of which I developed collaboratively with other colleagues. While the service-learning fellowship allowed me to understand the various ties that our institution has already established with local communities and learn about community-based research, the new course offered the site where I exercised the practical application of the statement. With these appointments, I was able to explore how the statement on linguistic pluralism can take full expression by drawing on three strands of work: theoretical, pedagogical, and community-based. The theoretical work was informed both by community-based scholarship and scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition such as Juan Guerra (2008) and Michelle Kells (2007), who have sought to bridge academic and community-based discourses, including multilingual and ethnically diverse ones. Critiquing a traditional Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) model, Kells (2007) proposes the Writing Across Communities approach, the goal of which is to engage “ethnolinguistically-diverse student populations, a model that is not assimilationist in intent” (92) and foreground multiple sources of knowledge, in particular those produced by local communities outside academia. Intended to serve as a revised version of the traditional Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Kells advocates for the Writing Across Communities, or WAC 2.0, approach, the tenets of which underscore the following core values: citizenship, environment, ethics, and a communicative action. Most importantly,

Writing Across the Communities as informed by Villanueva seeks to disrupt the “assimilationist model,” in which academic discourses continue to be privileged over other genres and forms of knowledge (Kells). Within this frame, the students, specifically underserved students in academia—e.g., Latinx and Native American—and their ties to their communities become the basis for theory and praxis in literacy education.

Informed by Guerra (2008) and Kells’ (2007) initiative, I developed a revised version of WAC 2.0 in the form of a curriculum (readings, assignments, and community-oriented discussion) for Techniques of Research. In this pedagogical approach, translingual writing pedagogy and linguistic pluralism principles are affirmed not only through the statement but in all aspects of the course. In this framework, writing is connected to multiple social spheres and sources of knowledge, including nonacademic ones; students’ experiences, accents, and places of belonging are valued and centered, and diverse writing conventions and rhetorical traditions are explored and interrogated. Accordingly, writing is not taught as an inflexible monolith but as a rhetorical practice, adaptable to multiple audiences as well as diverse institutional, national, or linguistic contexts.

In practice, the WAC 2.0 approach implemented in the Techniques of Research course was developed to valorize students’ diverse linguistic repertoires and their ties to the local communities. The revision of the curriculum started with a core assignment, the community-based research project, which offered a means to learn about academic discourse. Rather than a mere assignment in the curriculum, the community-based research project became the cornerstone of the course; it captured the students’ attention and commitment, and it engaged them beyond their own expectations. It also represented a site where change and revision occurred in light of students’ interests and their community connections. In the first part of the course, students read academic texts and practice writing in traditional academic genres. Students learn to read critically, take notes, and then summarize, critique, and synthesize academic texts on topics such as hybrid academic writing (Bizzell, 1999), transcultural citizenship (Guerra, 2008), codeswitching (Kells, 2004), alternative literacy sites (Moss, 2010), and sponsors of literacy (Brandt, 1998).

Since this part of the course involves academic discourse communities unfamiliar to many first-generation college or international students, I purposefully choose texts that “speak to each other” (Guerra, 2008 and Kells, 2004); Brandt, 1998 and Moss, 2010). I have also invited several authors of these texts to communicate a short message to our class via video or email. Through this additional, more personal engagement, my students understand that authors and their texts are connected and that through writing, we form communities of discourse to which they can also belong.

In the second part of the course, students engage in a community-based research project, which expands their knowledge and connects the classroom to local and transnational communities. Students choose a community partner, conduct interviews about literacy, language, or rhetoric-related issues, and practice research skills through primary source data analysis. The community-based project has been extremely successful in terms of the students’ engagement in and outside of class as well as the quality and originality of scholarship they produce. As the centerpiece of the course, in which students’ linguistic pluralism and community ties become most visible, this project has been sufficiently flexible to allow different iterations. One semester, the community-based project was centered on family as a community. One student interviewed his Haitian father about his literacy history and collected data in Creole with his sister as a translator; another, inspired by Kells’ (2004) work, investigated the impact of local dialect in Bahamian students’ writing; a group of three students who each speak three different Spanishes (Venezuelan, Mexican, and Argentinian) investigated codeswitching and compared their findings with that of their peers. Another iteration of this course took a more expansive view of community, focusing on community organizations. Students partnered with various nonprofit organizations working on social issues, such as homelessness, food justice, immigrant rights, and housing affordability. Students’ projects focused on literacy of marginalized groups (e.g., Haitian communities, immigrant older women), the food justice and communication strategies of a local worker-based human rights organization, environmentalism and wildlife activism, the training and literacy involvement of People Acting for Community Together (PACT)—an organization committed to keeping public officials accountable—and many other local organizations.

In these projects, students learn not only about their selected community issue but also gather authentic primary data through interviews. These interviews are transcribed and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. As part of the final project, students present their findings in a class presentation that is open to community members. Although the boundaries between classroom and community cannot be erased, this project establishes important dialogues with local communities and opens up the classroom space to numerous other sites that as an instructor I could not have anticipated. As students conducted their research, they brought perspectives from a variety of national contexts, including that of Haiti, South Africa, Scotland, Canada, Poland, Gambia, Angola, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Trinidad, Cuba, and Sweden. At times, in the same class, as many as eleven different ethnolinguistic communities were featured in students' projects, which means that this learning experience enlarged their horizon beyond their own project. Overall, these projects enhance students' agency and ability to act and write as legitimate producers of knowledge about literacies that have been long neglected in academia.

While the curriculum is oriented toward the students and their already existing ties to communities, it also becomes an expression of linguistic justice and activism. This outcome is accomplished not only in the students' choice to document their own family histories of migration and literacy or to conduct interviews in Spanish or Creole, the language of their interlocutor, but also in how they make visible rhetorical and language practices that are often hidden or neglected. The curriculum is permeated by students' worlds, by their rich ethnolinguistic repertoires, and the linguistic pluralism of local communities becomes the core learning site where students reflect and write about its connections to academic literacies.

There is also a recursive movement in how academia and local communities interact. We started with a syllabus statement to valorize students' linguistic pluralism; we changed the curriculum to accommodate their rich linguistic repertoire and community ties; and now, students bring what they are learning in the classroom to the community and return to class with the new knowledge gathered in and by the community. Based on their work, we<sup>4</sup> continue to revise

the curriculum and to maintain ties to local communities. Thus, activist work is in fact taking place in the classroom, as it is being transformed from the outside in. Typical community-based curricula build bridges between academia and local communities; they establish partnerships that involve the two parties in an expected fair exchange. However, in proposing partnerships between two entities, we seem to assume that they are separate, and conditions must be created for interactions and dialogues. In part, I agree. At the same time, we have to assume, as Michelle Kells (2004) stipulates, that our worlds, our communities, and our identities are more hybrid and dynamic than we often acknowledge. This reality means that activist work in the community does not have to be separate from activism in the classroom. The mobility of knowledge and bodies between academic and local communities challenges this dichotomy. I contend that students' projects become a form of activist research because they give voice to immigrants, marginalized groups, and hidden community workers whose work remains largely unacknowledged. Students' work also challenges the classroom and community dichotomy, allowing our curriculum to become permeable to change and adaptable to local communities.

## **LINGUISTIC PLURALISM STATEMENT IN ONLINE SPACES AND AT CCCC 2018**

The statement also circulated in scholarly online communities, specifically the Transnational Composition Special Interest Group of CCCC—now the Transnational Composition Standing Group—and CCCC Latin@ Caucus. Similar to its role in the context of the classroom discussed above, the statement functions as a grassroots text in online professional networks, whereby through casual conversations rather than a programmatic platform of change, it proposed a new approach to classroom practice—that is, to valorize linguistic pluralism.

The distribution and reaction to the statement came at an opportune time when the Transnational Composition Group (at the time, a SIG) was working actively in increasing its visibility and reach on online spaces (e.g., the creation of blog space for the group and social media presence). Among these, the formation of a Facebook

group in particular brought likeminded scholars together where rich conversations on language rights and diversity emerged and where numerous ideas, questions, call for proposals, and publications on linguistic pluralism began to circulate. Some scholars proposed new versions to the original statement. Others engaged in dialogue and discussed the potential for adopting and adapting the statement to their local institutional context. In a provocative article, “Clarifying the Multiple Dimensions of Monolingualism: Keeping Our Sights on Language Politics,” Watson and Shapiro (2018) report on the Facebook group’s conversation about linguistic diversity and first-year writing outcomes. The referenced exchange includes many scholars’ contributions and suggestions in response to the syllabus statement I shared. As Watson and Shapiro compared different versions of outcomes centering on linguistic diversity, they questioned the readiness of their institution to adopt a strong stance on this issue, exposing our predisposition to maintain the status quo:

While we in composition studies may have grown more sensitive to and welcoming of cultural and linguistic differences in the classroom, we remain far from united in pursuits to combat explicitly in our pedagogies the politics of standardized English. We struggle to detach from the powers of standard language ideology, so deeply engrained within our discipline and professional identities. While most writing teachers would readily agree that standardized English (hereafter \*SE) will “create/enhance privilege and power,” many may still be more reluctant to proclaim and denounce how standard language ideology serves to “oppress, marginalize, alienate.”

In other words, Watson and Shapiro (2018) reveal that it has become normative to be surrounded by and accept linguistic pluralism but not to explicitly denounce, challenge, and engage with cultural norms and Standard English (SE) and their role in perpetuating power hierarchies and privilege. In taking a stance to critique language standards and privilege, one may ask whether holding a dual position is possible—that is, to support both linguistic pluralism and its critique of SE and to maintain SE as a primary means of instruction given its implicit acceptability in formal and professional contexts. Could linguistic and institutional standards be deployed in

the interest of the students, especially minority students, who have been traditionally marginalized in academia? Evidently, standardized discourses and practices can still be useful to students' short-term goals—college success or employability. However, denying students the knowledge and exposure to multiple types of discourses impedes their holistic learning and long-term development. SE is not the only acceptable standard—it is the widely acceptable standard in the U.S. context. However, in the context of globalization and increased mobility, SE is simply just one of many other normative discourses rather than the only standard. Many students bring with them a variety of accents and languages, some of which hold a privileged, average, or lower status depending on the sociohistorical context and circulation. Many of them already possess a language or dialect that holds more privilege and another that is less valued. The issue is to make such conversations more explicit and to engage students in a critical examination of academic discourses and language standards such as SE. In my classes—specifically in the class discussed in this article, which in fact centers on academic discourse—we read and write in traditional academic discourse. We read traditional scholarly articles along with Geneva Smitherman's 1977 article "Soul 'N Style," written in African American vernacular. We read Bizzell's (1999) work on hybrid and academic discourse, but we also read Guerra's (2008) article that mostly uses hybrid discourses drawing on personal experience and formal academic research. Throughout the course, students learn how standardized academic discourses have been changing, which, in fact, is an essential lesson: that standards are the product of sociohistorical and economic factors, some deeply sedimented due to academic cultures and institutional expectations.

Although not meant as panacea, an explicit statement on language pluralism pushes one to affirm that along with English, Spanish, Spanishes, French, Creole, Portuguese, and any other languages are valued in the writing classroom. An explicit statement on linguistic pluralism challenges instructors to think critically about language and academic discourses and how they are shaped by formal institutions, professional expectations, and local communities. Our student outcomes are not just a formulation of one standard. Rather, they capture the multiple socioeconomic and political contexts of our times. In addition to the syllabus statement for our first-year writing program, we also considered outcomes established by Quality

Enhancement Plan (QEP) implemented by our General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) of which I have been a member for four years. Being a Hispanic-serving institution with a long history of commitment to social justice, our school's curriculum and specifically the QEP outcomes capture our core values: social justice and community engagement. One of these QEP outcomes, listed below, brings to attention the issue of power and privilege. This outcome, coupled with the syllabus statement, shaped not only the direction of the course mentioned earlier but also the development of the Writing Across Communities pedagogy. The outcome reads:

Students recognize the extent to which cultural standards, institutional practices, and values oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create/enhance privilege and power. (Quality Enhancement Plan, General Education Curriculum Committee, Barry University)

This outcome shows that advocacy for language rights does not rest on one single action or one single statement. Rather, it is the product of multiple strands of work, many of which I referenced previously: scholarship on multi-, pluri-, and trans-lingualism; service-learning and community-based research; professional service and online communication with transnational scholars; institutional service; and committee work such as the GECC involvement, etc.

This syllabus statement—along with a revised Writing Across Communities approach that honors linguistic pluralism and then proposes the involvement of multiple stakeholders, as Kells (2007) rightfully noted—seeks to challenge standards and assimilationist agendas that continue to place minority students at the margins. The literature on language difference and WPA is often formulated in response to “*the needs of its culturally and linguistically diverse student population*” (Watson 2014, 71-72, italics mine). Similarly, Gail Shuck (2006) explains that many institutions are compelled to “address the needs of this more diverse population” (59). This framing developed in response to “needs” positions multilingual students as always lacking or in need of some form of intervention. While more attention and support offered to a particular category of students is certainly welcomed, it becomes problematic when it

is done without acknowledging what the student already brings to the writing classroom. Needs are always established based on a fixed, U.S.-centric standard, pushing student writers toward assimilation. Rather a better approach is to acknowledge the value and the inherent limitations of language standards with respect to multiple discourses.

Finally, a revised syllabus statement (see Appendix) served as a catalyst for reflection among our Transnational Composition Group in the context of social and activist work at CCCC 2018. In response to CCCC Program Chair Asao Inoue's (2018) call for statements from individual members and CCCC groups, our group engaged in conversation about our contribution to our professional organization. The purpose of the project, as explained in Inoue's call, was to create a collection of statements for a workshop session, an all-convention event, titled "Literacy, Language, and Labor for Social Justice: Outward and Inward Reflection" to engage us as an organization in reflecting and "identify[ing] organizational activism/ social justice/ and diversity needs." In other words, we were provoked to state *explicitly* our social justice commitments or perhaps, to identify a lack thereof, to reflect individually or collectively on social justice needs, and if applicable, to act on those commitments. Our transnational composition group decided that the syllabus statement on linguistic pluralism articulated well our core values and commitments. Our collective decision to include the syllabus statement—that is, a pedagogical document rather than a theoretical principle—could have arguably emanated from the trend that I've highlighted throughout this essay: an overemphasis of theory and thereby, failure to achieve praxis when it comes to language rights and social justice. Our professional organization needs to actively consider the paradigm shift that Geneva Smitherman (1995) beckoned 24 years ago, that we move "from a provincial, more narrowly conceived focus to a broader internationalist perspective," from a monolingual expression and mindset to plurilingual and transnational approaches to language and writing, in theory, and in practice.

Originating in the classroom, with the students in mind, the syllabus statement on linguistic pluralism started from a local, specific context, and it gradually shaped a certain pedagogy—Writing Across Communities—with an emphasis on translanguaging writing.

From there, it spread to other scholars and institutions and the larger professional community with similar interests in language rights and social justice. To a certain extent, the move from local, departmental, institutional, and national contexts has been gradual and organic, starting from below, from casual conversations without a planned agenda. In this way, I have argued that the statement operates as an activist, grassroots text shaped by local, unrehearsed efforts for change. Although grounded in a particular local context, the reception of this text in various communities also shows its permeability to various contexts and purposes. In essence, the circulation of the statement calls for explicit conversations and actions at all of these levels where it has been introduced: the classroom, department, academic institution, and professional network. Only in this way, can we build a culture that affirms linguistic pluralism, one that would permeate our classrooms, curricula, campuses, and local communities. Given how deeply the ideology of monolingualism has been entrenched in our mindset, we need to combat it by building a culture of linguistic pluralism through an involvement of multiple stakeholders. In the development of the Writing Across Communities initiative, Kells (2007) highlights a series of colloquia at University of New Mexico (UNM) that allowed faculty to grapple with a traditional WAC approach that would be more attuned to the students' unpreparedness for academic expectations, the financial struggles of that region, and the ethnolinguistic and cultural pluralism of the local communities. In their initiative, they engaged multiple agents across the campus, including the tutoring center, the provost, faculty from various disciplines, and other campus initiatives (100). These stakeholders, as shown earlier, can operate at the level of the campus, department or professional network. Yet, the task is the same: we need to state our values explicitly and to take an activist stance in terms of language rights. Tolerating pluralism is one type of value. Advocating and working for language rights and global perspectives in composition involves a completely different set of practices and values. It shows commitment to engage with and dismantle privilege and power discourses with students, with teachers, and with local communities.

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## APPENDIX

### **SYLLABUS STATEMENT ON LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL PLURALISM**

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Representing the Transnational Composition Standing Group

*This statement, first adopted by the FYW program at X University, with several universities in the US following, engages language politics and seeks to expand notions of “appropriate” cultural expression in course materials as acts of literacy activism.*

The ability to communicate in multiple languages and/ or use varieties of English is a valuable asset. In this course, you are encouraged to use or draw on your varied linguistic and cultural resources. Although we will generally employ English(es) and Standard Written English (SWE) in the classroom, you may resort to other languages and rhetorical practices for particular assignments. To ensure effective communication, we need to consider audience, purpose, and rhetorical strategies on the premise that not all rhetors have the exact same understanding of rhetorical principles. Hence, whenever you deem necessary, supplement information, resources, and experiences that would enhance the communication practice. For instance, if most of your audience does not speak Spanish(es), you may need to provide translation or captioning; if you discuss writing in international sites or cite authors unknown in Anglophone spaces, offer additional commentary or footnotes to facilitate your audience’s understanding of your rhetorical context; or, if you use a particular image in your multimedia project that carries certain cultural connotations, you need to provide supplementary information so that your message effectively attains the intended purpose. Remember that words, accents, and discourses have power. In this class, you’re invited to explore, reflect on, and interrogate power dynamics manifested in personal, home, professional, and academic discourses.

## NOTES

- 1 Drawing on Vertovec, Blommaert and Dong explain that new migration patterns create “a layered immigrant space” with old and new immigrants shaping labor relations and linguistic repertoires that are much more diverse than in the past (7-8).
- 2 The NCTE statement on Ethnic Studies Initiatives in K-12 Curricular can be found here: <http://www2.ncte.org/statement/ethnic-studies-k12-curr/>. As the statement shows, members of our Transnational Composition Group, specifically Sara Alvarez and myself, have contributed to the formulation of this statement given that at that time, Fall 2015, the syllabus statement that I initially crafted has been circulating on social media sites.
- 3 This initiative, under Asao P. Inoue’s leadership, collected statements on social justice and activism from our CCCC members and established groups, all gathered in a packet shared online before the conference and distributed to all attendees at CCCC 2018. The online packet can be found here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TGx9g2lXigcZU3QcF27wD2QaxfgMH5fJHVmh0Y6T0hY/edit>
- 4 The part of the curriculum was developed in collaboration with two colleagues, Kathryn Comer at the time the Director of the First-Year Writing (FYW) Program, and Paige Banaji, the current Director of the FYW at Barry University.

**Ligia A. Mihut** is an assistant professor of English at Barry University where she teaches first-year composition, techniques of research, and professional writing courses. Her areas of research include immigrant literacies, multilingual pedagogy, and cross-cultural rhetorics. Drawing on two years of ethnographic work on immigrant literacy, she published two articles, “Literacy Brokers and the Emotional Work of Mediation” and “Permeable Cosmopolitanism: An Immigrant Perspective” and is currently working on a book, *Immigrants, Brokers, and Literacy as Affinity* exploring literacy’s entanglement in networks of socio-economic and political frames. As the recipient of the 2015-2016 CCCC Research Initiative Award (with Alvarez, Khadka, and Sharma), Mihut is also working on a comparative study of writing practices in four different countries, Romania, Nepal, India, and Colombia.

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