

# A Rhetoric of Accent Fear and the Experiences of Multilingual Teachers of Writing

Eda Özyeşilpınar<sup>1</sup> and Mohammed Sakip Iddrisu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Illinois State University

<sup>2</sup> Arizona State University

## Abstract

*This article focuses on the lived experiences of multilingual writing teachers and presents what we, the authors, call "A Rhetoric of Accent Fear," which introduces accent fear as a form of linguistic racism. Through this framework, we reflect on our stories of accent fear as multilingual writing teachers; we practice forming relational connections across our experiences; and we use this relational connection to offer strategies for other multilingual rhetoric and writing scholars and teachers to navigate these sites of tension and in turn, challenge students' accent fears.*

Researchers in rhetoric and writing studies have been making significant contributions to laying bare the settler-colonial logic of White Mainstream English (WME). In *Linguistic Justice*, April Baker-Bell (2020) uses the terms WME and Black Language (BL) “to foreground the relationship between language, race, anti-Black racism and white linguistic supremacy...[to show] how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected. That is, people’s language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences” (2). Thus, Baker-Bell uses BL “intentionally...to acknowledge Africologist’s theories that maintain that Black speech is the continuation of African in an American context...that Black Language is a language in its own right...[She] also use[s] Black Language politically...to align with the...mission of Black Liberation movements like Black Lives Matter” (3). In relation to her intentional and political use of BL, Baker-Bell utilizes WME “to emphasize how white ways of speaking become the invisible—or better, inaudible—norm” (3). Centralizing linguistic justice as the primary premise and call to action of her book, Baker-Bell uncovers the rhetorical dimensions of Anti-Black Linguistic Racism that inflicts violence on Black students, their use of BL, and introduces Linguistic Justice as “an antiracist approach to language and literacy education” that aims to specifically dismantle “Anti-Black Linguistic Racism and white linguistic hegemony and supremacy in classrooms and in the world” (7).

In this article, we work with Baker-Bell’s framework of Linguistic Justice and engage rhetoric and writing scholarship that addresses the violent and harmful impacts of linguistic racism on students and scholars in the field with diverse linguistic backgrounds and communicative abilities that move beyond and challenge the hegemonic standards of WME and normative-canonized ways of communication and writing (Canagarajah 2013; Gilyard 2016; Lu and Horner 2013; Young and Martinez 2011). Frameworks such as

translingualism (Horner, Lu, et al. 2013), translanguaging (García and Li Wei 2014), multilingualism (Gonzales 2018), and anti-racist Black Language pedagogy (Baker-Bell 2020) attend to language fluidity, challenge linguistic racism, and recognize language diversity as an asset. The shared goal of this body of work is linguistic justice and language diversity, which calls for an ethical commitment to disrupting the hegemonic spaces and patterns of WME and developing culturally and linguistically sustaining and inclusive frameworks and pedagogical practices that honor students' cultural and linguistic histories and backgrounds (Alvarez 2014; Inoue 2015; Condon and Young 2016; Young and Martinez 2011).

This critical body of scholarship has directed much needed attention to the lived experiences of students with diverse linguistic backgrounds whose language abilities move beyond the racist limitations of the WME. In this article, we contribute to this work as we shift our focus to the lived experiences of multilingual writing teachers and present what we call "A Rhetoric of Accent Fear," which introduces accent fear as a form of linguistic racism. We use the term "multilingual writing teachers" to refer to writing teachers whose first-heritage languages are other than WME, who have diverse cultural and linguistic histories and backgrounds, and navigate not only linguistic differences but also cultural and social borders in and across the WME-dominant and white-privileged spaces of academic and professional settings.

In this article, as multilingual writing teachers, we tell our stories of accent fear. Across disciplines, scholars have theorized accent bias and its attendant negative stereotypes against multilingual speakers whose first-heritage language is not WME. Halcyon Lawrence (2021), for example, shows in her study that accent bias is real beyond the domain of speech technologies and contributes

to oppression, violence, and hostility against multilingual speakers with accented performances of the English language in students' evaluation of teachers. The stories we share demonstrate specific instances of how our students responded to our embodied accented performances of the English language which we came to recognize as manifestations of linguistic racism. We work with Baker-Bell's (2020) understanding of linguistic racism as our main definition which is "any system or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment of language based on membership in a race or ethnic group" (15). Using this definition as a critical lens, we reflect on our stories to fully capture the rhetorical dimensions and the complex power dynamics that inform our students' perceptions of our accents. As multilingual writing teachers with different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds—Eda, a Turkish-Muslim woman; and Mohammed, a Black Ghanaian-Muslim man—the student encounters we share here revealed to us that some students' perception of our different accented performances of the English language creates a site of tension, where and when our identities as writing teachers—specifically our ethos—are contested and resisted. We recognize this site of tension where and when students manifest accent fear as a form of linguistic racism.

Our framing of "A Rhetoric of Accent Fear" emerged out of our interrogation of the rhetorical dimensions of this site of tension. Thus, we introduce "A Rhetoric of Accent Fear" to capture how accent fear operates as a form of linguistic racism. This framework utilizes a translingual orientation to language fluidity and diversity, acknowledging that "[b]ecause language is always connected to power, history, and ideology, it is important to recognize that language diversity is tied to differences in our lived experiences, in our access to and benefits from privilege, and in our cultural and racial backgrounds" (Gonzales 2018, 4-5). Through this framework,

we reflect on our stories of accent fear as multilingual writing teachers; we practice forming relational connections across our experiences; and we use this relational connection to offer strategies for other multilingual rhetoric and writing scholars and teachers to navigate these sites of tension and in turn, challenge students' accent fears.

## A Rhetoric of Accent Fear

Our rhetorical framework of accent fear is an extension of how our students respond to and challenge our embodied accented performances and in turn, our racial-ethnic identities and ethos as multilingual writing teachers. "A Rhetoric of Accent Fear" is a framework that centralizes the connection between embodied accented performances and racial-ethnic identities and considers the critical role of linguistic racism when it comes to how unique accented performances of multilingual teachers are perceived by students in the WME-dominated spaces of our writing classrooms. Thus, we make the conscious decision not to use terms like native-speaker and non-native speaker of English in referring to writing teachers like ourselves. These terms are direct products of linguistic imperialism that privileges so-called native speakerism, reinforcing linguistic racism which continues to situate WME as the preferred norm and mode of communication in education. Instead, we turn to Laura Gonzales's (2018) use of the term multilinguals to refer to individuals who navigate multiple languages. Gonzales uses the term *multilinguals* instead of any other disciplinary term:

because the practice of working beyond standardized communicative norms is an embodied reality that extends to the core of individuals' humanity...[multilinguals] navigate linguistic movements alongside their identities, experiences, and aspirations, carrying difference in their

words and in their bodies. Thus, to study the work of multilinguals, it is important to embrace a framework that accounts for multiple layers of analysis, including but not limited to language. (2)

We employ Gonzales's conceptualization of multilinguals to attend to how we carry the linguistic differences of our accented performances in our bodies and how these embodied accented performances are connected to our racial-ethnic identities. Through the stories we share, we focus on the connection between our accented performances and racial-ethnic identities and address how our students manifested accent fear as a form of linguistic racism in response to this connection.

April Baker-Bell (2020) contends that standard language ideology and linguistic hegemony are helpful frameworks to understand language subordination, yet these frameworks fall short in capturing "the role that race plays in language subordination" (15). As Lippie-Green (2012) states, "a standard language ideology...attempts to justify rejection of the other because of race, ethnicity, or other facets of identity that would otherwise be called racism" (74). Therefore, Baker-Bell (2020) emphasizes the importance of making the relationship between language and race visible and central to our frameworks to understand and attend to linguistic racism. Baker-Bell specifically addresses Anti-Black linguistic Racism in her work, but also clearly demonstrates that "Anti-Black linguistic Racism is part of a larger system of white linguistic and cultural hegemony that advances the needs, self-interests, and racial privileges of whites at the expense of linguistically marginalized communities of color" (15). Linguistic racism, as Baker-Bell defines it, continues to dominate our field and the so-called academic standards of our writing classrooms. Such dominance is consequential and manifests in the daily experiences

of multilingual writing teachers whose first-heritage language is other than WME.

As multilingual writing teachers, we see the presence of linguistic racism in our classrooms, and one of the ways that we experience linguistic racism is how our students tend to respond to our embodied accented performances. Our language performances in the English language deviate from the expected WME performance—how a white-American writing scholar and teacher is expected to sound like. This site of tension is where and when students tend to manifest accent fear as a form of linguistic racism that translates into questioning and attacking our knowledge, expertise, and credibility as rhetoric and writing scholars and teachers.

## **Personal Narratives of Accent Fear**

In writing our personal narratives of how we experienced accent fear from our students as a form of linguistic racism, we work with an understanding that languages live, change, and move with and through our bodies across complex historical, social, and cultural contexts and that languages are always already linked to systems of power and control. Thus, we proceed with a translingual orientation to language because translingualism, as Esther Milu (2022) describes, “views language as a set of mobile, fluid, and hybrid practices that users draw upon to communicate. Translingualism rejects structuralist theories that view languages as discreet and separate. Instead, it acknowledges that multilingual speakers move across various language systems and draw resources from each to facilitate their communication” (377). Taken together, both a translingual orientation and our adoption of Gonzales’s framing of multilinguals function to describe our identities as international writing teacher-scholars and how these

identifiers situate and shape our linguistic performances in our writing classrooms.

While translanguaging centers our focus on language fluidity and difference as assets, we also recognize the determinist danger of reducing differences in language acts to sameness that creates a homogenized form of otherness (García and Li Wei 2015; Gilyard 2016; Gonzales and Zantjer 2015). Keith Gilyard (2016) addresses this danger as he emphasizes that “[w]e all differ as language users from each other and in relation to a perceived standard. Often elided, however, is the recognition that we don’t all differ from said standards in the same way. Given that context matters, a concept that is a key component of translanguaging, one would always want to be careful not to level difference this way” (286). Responding to Gilyard, Gonzales (2018) reminds us that “[t]o speak ethically of language fluidity, then, requires us to acknowledge the rhetorical and historical contexts in which this fluidity happens” (5). Recognizing the intricate ways language is connected to systems of power and that language diversity is an extension of our lived experiences, rhetorical, historical, cultural backgrounds are critical for us to reflect on how we experience accent fear from our students.

As we share stories of accent fear through our personal narratives, we are guided by Milu’s (2022) view of the relationality-building potential of translanguaging among scholars. Milu writes “language practice and difference...acknowledges the fluidity of language across boundaries and fosters relationality between language systems and practices” and people (382). Thus, Milu emphasizes the importance of relationality in addition to pluriversality in her framing of a decolonial-Indigenous-translingual methodology. This framework centralizes pluriversality—many worlds and experiences—and encourages us to form relational connections



across our differences and diverse lived experiences. Through this framework, Milu practices Andrea Riley-Mukavetz's (2014) "relational scholarly practice" (546). As Riley-Mukavetz's highlights, "Relationality and relational accountability are rooted in indigenous worldviews and theories...To practice relationality is to understand one's position in the world, one's relationship to land, space, ideas, people, and living beings, and to understand how these relationships have been and will always be at play with each other" (112). We practice relationality to make sense of our individual experiences of accent fear and the shared connection between our experiences through a reflective process. We reflect on our own positionalities as multilingual and international teacher-scholars in relation to our students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the larger socio-cultural and linguistic setting of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), a Hispanic serving institution (HSI) located in El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border region—where we experienced accent fear as a form of linguistic racism.

We do this reflective work and practice relationality by telling our stories. The power of story and storytelling as a knowledge-making practice has been amplified and privileged in cultural rhetorics and critical race scholarship. As Kimberly Wieser (2021) indicates, "story is something all humans share, and cultural rhetorics give us space to make connections between our stories, those of others, and stories in the field" (n.p.) In her award-winning work, *Counterstory*, Aja Martinez (2020) demonstrates that critical race counterstory, both as methodology and method, provides much needed space and opportunities for marginalized voices, perspectives, and experiences in rhetoric and writing studies. Making methodological choices to tell our stories is a critical intervention in the field, especially when these stories expose racism and disrupt master narratives of white privilege, as Martinez emphasizes. Thus, as Martinez continues, "critical race methodology recognizes that

experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices” (3). In this article, we privilege storytelling as a methodology and work with personal narrative as our writing method to share our lived experiences and use our experiential knowledge to show the harmful effects of accent fear on multilingual teachers like ourselves. Through our reflective process, we constellate our stories from a relational connection between our lived experiences, language differences, and how we experienced accent fear from our students. This practice creates space to make the differences in our experiences visible by showing the different ways students manifest accent fear in response to our identities as multilingual writing teachers.

## **Linguistic and Cultural Profile of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)**

UTEP’s unique location as an urban university and its diverse student and faculty profile has a significant influence on the university’s identity and ethical values. Reflecting the bi-national composition of the Juarez-El Paso region, 80% of UTEP’s student population identifies as Hispanic, and 4% are Mexican nationals (UTEP). Furthermore, UTEP serves international students from various countries outside of North and South America. In response, linguistic and cultural inclusion is vital for UTEP as an HSI with a mission of access and excellence. The majority of UTEP students and faculty celebrate the presence of various linguistic and cultural performances that move beyond the WME as these performances enrich the intellectual life across campus. While UTEP is an HSI amplifying and celebrating its racial, linguistic, and cultural inclusion and diversity across campus, it is equally important to address that UTEP also has a homogenous student population.

Most international students from countries other than Mexico were graduate students; still, the overall student demographics, undergraduate and graduate, is comprised of a fairly homogenous—racially, linguistically, and culturally—population of Hispanic and Mexican American students speaking primarily Spanish and English. As the authors, we both experienced this linguistic climate and cultural environment of inclusion and respecting welcoming diversity while simultaneously navigating UTEP’s linguistic and cultural homogeneity.

As a Visiting Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Writing, Eda joined this border community in the educational setting of UTEP as a faculty member and worked with undergraduate and graduate students. Mohammed was part of UTEP’s community as an international graduate student in the Rhetoric and Writing master’s program. He is from Ghana with a diverse linguistic background, speaking three Indigenous Ghanaian languages—Dagbanli, Ga, and Twi—in addition to Hausa and British English. As an international student and first-year graduate writing instructor, Mohammed worked with first-year students as a writing instructor during his time at UTEP. Eda, an international faculty member, and Mohammed, an international graduate student, both appreciated UTEP’s commitment to racial, linguistic, and cultural inclusion and diversity. However, we still considered ourselves as underrepresented, part of a minority, within the homogenous linguistic and cultural climate of UTEP. This linguistic and cultural underrepresentation we experienced manifested itself as accent fear from our students, which we consider a form of linguistic racism.

Our shared experience of encountering accent fear as a form of linguistic racism inspired us to work together on this article. Responding to a call of papers about the experiences of writing

instructors with diverse linguistic backgrounds and abilities, Eda emailed the Rhetoric and Writing program to see if there was any interest in collaborating on an article about accent fear. As a graduate student in the program, Mohammed reached out to Eda because he had some challenging experiences with students due to the racist implications and effects of our accent fear in the classroom. After telling our stories to one another, we realized that accent fear as a form of linguistic racism is what we both experienced as multilingual writing instructors. However, our shared experiences with accent fear had some key differences that directed our attention to the importance of the relation between race, language, and white linguistic supremacy, which appears even more critical considering the linguistic history of this border region.

In *Educating Across Borders*, María Teresa de la Piedra, Blanca Araujo, Alberto Esquinca, and Concha Delgado Gaitan (2018) study the experiences of transfronterizx students in the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border region with a focus on a Dual Language (DL) program to understand how transfronterizx students navigate and utilize various linguistic and non-linguistics resources and tools to communicate across the border. As part of their study, de la Piedra et al. investigate the linguistic history of this border region and address the fact that the Spanish language has been oppressed in the area. For example, they indicate that for a long time, many DL programs reinforced white supremacist language ideologies by positioning WME as the dominant language, the norm, while devaluing and oppressing the Spanish language. Today, as the authors continue, some programs and schools continue to punish and prohibit students from speaking Spanish, which shows that white supremacist language ideology continues to exist in the region and is instilled in the students from a young age (44-45). The context the authors provide about the linguistic history and the violent effects of white supremacist language ideology in the region

helped us better understand how and why our students manifested accent fear as a form of linguistic racism.

After reflecting on our shared yet different experiences of accent fear, we realized that this form of linguistic racism we experienced in this border region is an extension of the white supremacist linguistic history of the region. Many students in the region internalized white supremacist language ideologies because they have been conditioned to consider Spanish, their home language, as a deficit while learning and speaking English as a sign of privilege. We want to address that we are cognizant of the rarity of the cases we present here, and we recognize that these cases do not represent most of the UTEP students' perceptions about multilinguals across campus. As multilingual writing teachers at UTEP, we not only experienced resistance from our white-monolingual students challenging our ethos but also received adverse reactions from our Latinx students, who are also predominantly bi/multilinguals like us. Thus, we argue that accent fear, as we experienced it, is also a sign of internalized linguistic racism, an inevitable outcome of the long history of white supremacist language ideology in the region.

## **Accents across Linguistic Borders: Who We Are as Multilingual Writing Teachers**

As multilingual writing teachers, we come from different countries with different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds and, as a result, have different relations to and perceptions of what it means to have an accent. We both recognize the linguistic imperialism and the neo-colonial logic of language hegemony as the underlying reasons for accent fear.

Eda, from Türkiye, was exposed to the harmful implications of accent fear in her country when she learned English as her second language before coming to the U.S. She internalized accent fear, which was mainly rooted in the perception that not sounding “American enough” in her speech, writing, and the way she expressed herself meant that she was incompetent and lacked the necessary so-called academic rigor that was required for success in graduate school in the U.S. Eda has also experienced the harmful effects of accent fear as a multilingual graduate student in the U.S. In the WME-dominated spaces of academia, Eda has seen how her embodied accented performance of the English language was perceived as a concern, which was then used to question her competence and capacity to be successful in graduate school. Now as a faculty member, Eda continues to see how accent fear as a form of linguistic racism is manifested across the WME-dominated spaces of higher education. Her students tend to use accent fear to question her ethos, once again her competence and qualifications to teach “writing in English.”

Unlike Eda, Mohammed, from Ghana, was not exposed to any negative perceptions about having an accent in the multilingual and culturally diverse environment of his country. Mohammed fluently speaks three Indigenous Ghanaian languages—Dagbanli, Ga, and Twi—in addition to Hausa and British English (the language of instruction in all schools in Ghana). Mohammed has never considered speaking not only the English language but any language with an accent as a sign of deficiency or linguistic incompetence. However, his embodied accented performance of the English language became a site of contention when Mohammed experienced accent fear from his students while teaching writing at UTEP as a multilingual-international writing instructor. At the time, Mohammed was a master’s student and that tense experience happened on the first day of his first-time

teaching first-year composition (FYC) as an instructor of record in any U.S. college.

Even though our backgrounds and relations to performing with an accent are different, we both found ourselves in a site of tension that emerged out of our students' accent fear as a form of linguistic racism. In this site of tension, students used our accents to make our multilingual identities hyper-visible, which reduced who we are to a homogenized state of linguistic Otherness. This state of Otherness, as Jaqueline Jones Royster (1996) articulates, expects "nothing of value, nothing of consequence, nothing of importance, nothing at all positive from its Others" (35), and this was apparent in how our students perceived our accented performances as multilingual writing teachers.

## **Stories of Accent Fear**

### **Eda's Experience of Accent Fear**

In Fall 2018, my first semester of teaching as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) program at UTEP, I taught an upper-level workplace writing course which I designed by taking a rhetorical and cultural approach to workplace communication. Shortly after I posted grades on assignment 2, one of my students, whom I will call Samantha, came up to me after class to discuss the grade she received on the assignment. Samantha did not share her racial-ethnic identity, nor did she ever self-identify as a Latinx student. However, she described her linguistic abilities in English and Spanish, which is important to consider as I describe the nature of the conversation that took place between her and me. Samantha self-identified as proficient in the English language and partly bilingual in the Spanish language. Samantha never clarified what she meant by "partly bilingual" nor

did she ever reveal what her first-heritage language was. I interpret Samantha self-identifying as being “proficient in the English language” in comparison to her expression of “partly bilingual” to describe her language proficiency in the Spanish language as a sign of her prioritizing English over Spanish. As addressed before, due to the history of white supremacist language notions in the region and the fact that those notions are instilled in the students of this border area from a young age, I consider Samantha privileging her linguistic proficiency in English as a sign of her internalized oppression of Spanish. In other words, Samantha likely considers English as the language of superiority and privilege, which are notions produced by white supremacist language ideology. These notions have been used to oppress the Spanish language in the region by reinforcing linguistic racism that positions the Spanish language as the language of the uneducated “immigrant” non-American/non-citizen Others. Samantha’s was an effort to make me see her as a well-educated student and not consider her abilities as “less-than” because she speaks Spanish. Yet, she tried to accomplish this by demonstrating accent fear by attacking my accent and, in turn, identity and ethos.

After Samantha approached me, I invited her to my office to go over her paper and my comments. When I pulled her submission, I saw that she only submitted half of the assignment, which was the main reason for the lower grade she received. The conversation got very uncomfortable for me when Samantha blamed my accent for not knowing about the second half of the assignment, which is why, as she explained it to me, she only completed the part that she submitted. Allowing her to complete the missing half of the assignment was not a good enough solution for Samantha because, as she argued, she failed to complete the second half of the assignment due to being unable to understand my accent. For Samantha, the situation was my fault. Therefore, as she pointed



out, asking her to complete the missing part of the assignment was unfair and extra work for her.

Samantha refused to complete the missing work and was very persistent about me changing her grade. I tried to explain why her not completing the missing component was unfair to every other student in class who completed both parts of the same assignment. Unfortunately, denying her request turned the entire conversation into a very personal confrontation and attack on my multilingual identity. During what ended up being over an hour-long meeting, Samantha attacked my ethos to justify her argument that she received a low grade because my accent was a barrier for her successfully completing this assignment. After asking me how long I have been teaching and whether I held a doctorate degree or not, Samantha told me that she attended private schools her entire life and that she was majoring in communication studies and minoring in linguistics. I perceive Samantha highlighting her private school education and that she was minoring in linguistics as a strategic way for her to situate herself as someone with access to the privileged spaces of the WME. Demonstrating her access to WME, Samantha posited herself as someone who speaks not only better English, but the “correct” English, and she used this so-called privilege to attack the way I use/speak the English language as a multilingual.

This racist rhetoric is how Samantha manifested accent fear in her interaction with me. I consider Samantha’s focus on her privileged private school education and her repeatedly stating that she knows how to write perfect papers with perfect grammar because she was minoring in linguistics as strong signs of internalized linguistic racism, which is one of the consequences of students like Samantha growing up in “a system of white supremacy...upholding racist policies and practices,” as Baker-Bell (2020) writes (6). Thus, the accent fear Samantha manifested and used to attack my identity,

linguistic, and cultural heritage as a multilingual writing teacher was internalized linguistic racism. Her attack on my identity was just another way of Samantha trying to prove that she deserves access to the privileged spaces of WME that she fits in.

## **Mohammed's Experience of Accent Fear**

I am from Ghana and recently graduated from UTEP with an M.A. in English Rhetoric and Writing Studies, receiving the outstanding graduate student award. In Ghana's multilingual and culturally diverse environment, I learned four languages (Dagbanli, Twi, Ga, and Hausa), and because British English is the language of instruction in all schools, English is the fifth language I was exposed to, which has been part of my life since childhood. My knowledge of these other languages has been a significant asset to me in an increasingly multicultural global context where intercultural communication has become part of my daily life. Although only one of those languages (Dagbanli) is my mother tongue, in different spoken and written contexts, I draw from appropriate linguistic and rhetorical traditions from any of these languages to achieve a rhetorical end. My accents in speaking these local languages have never been a source of concern for me in my interactions with native and non-native speakers of these languages. However, the question of accent became a site of contention when I started teaching first-year composition (FYC) as a master's student and graduate teaching assistant (GTA) at UTEP.

In Fall 2018, my first semester of teaching FYC as a GTA, I entered my first class at 7:30 in the morning. I had twenty-five students, mostly freshmen and women, with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. My plan for the day was typical of any first day of classes: introduce myself, discuss the syllabus, and get to know my students. I stated that I am Ghanaian and talked about my

experiences of teaching English for over a decade in different parts of the world. I mentioned the fact that British English is the main language of instruction in Ghanaian schools without realizing that me not having a British accent would grab one of my student's attention. Midway through that introduction, a white female student, whom I will call Lisa, interrupted to ask, "But English is not the native language of the people in Ghana, and besides, you do not have a British accent. How can you teach me to write in my mother tongue?" Her voice was loud and drew the gazes from the other students. Calmly, I responded that she was right about English not being my native language, but I was competent enough and had the academic training to teach the course. Later, another student, this time a male-Latinx student, whom I will call Carlos, who self-identified as a second language speaker of English, asked, "Do you have plans to return to Ghana to teach there because I can hardly understand you?"

Although UTEP is largely homogenous with a majority Mexican American student population, the university has been committed to linguistic and cultural diversity with an increasing presence of international students and faculty. Thus, I perceived the underlying premise of my students' impetus to challenge my linguistic proficiency and teaching ethos as versions of linguistic racism manifested in accent fear. As a multilingual teacher in a writing classroom, I contend that both students exploited my non-native accented performances and their internalized accent fear as justifiable grounds to challenge and interrogate my legitimacy as their writing instructor, disregarding both my academic qualifications and professional credentials.

## A Translingual Orientation to Challenging Accent Fear

We work with a translingual orientation to language to challenge our students' accent fear. Horner et al. (2011) conceptualize a translingual orientation to language as an approach that perceives "difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, *speaking, reading, and listening*" (303; emphasis added). Given that our students perceived our accented performances as problems or deficiencies that disqualify us as so-called legitimate writing teachers in a WME-dominant writing classroom, we contend that a deliberate translingual orientation to language differences is critical in our writing pedagogies. We argue that a deliberate translingual orientation offers us ways to have students understand what accent fear is and how accent fear operates as a form of linguistic racism perpetuated against multilinguals whose Englishes are different from the "perceived standard" (Gilyard 2016, 286). Through a translingual orientation to language and writing, students are exposed to various linguistic resources, tools, and abilities while exploring that they already use these different linguistic resources in their writing and composition, that they construct meaning in diverse and complex forms and ways, which are not deviations from the dominant expectations (Chen 2017). Chen notes that this promotes writing and writing instruction as a form of negotiating meaning between speakers and listeners, and writers and readers.

As our writing classrooms and universities at large become increasingly linguistically diverse, this orientation offers the opportunity to facilitate respect and mutual relationality between students and teachers. Our capacity to build relational connections grounded in our lived experiences and our differences, as Milu's

(2022) translingual framework advances, is predicated on establishing a foundation of linguistic respect and fluidity, including fluidity in accents. These promising potentials of a translingual orientation to language and writing instruction prepare teachers and students to come to terms with the fact that variations in accents, in speech and in writing, are legitimate linguistic realities in the writing classroom as a “contact zone” (Pratt 1991, 32) and that the pursuit of WME as the only acceptable English is counterproductive in writing instruction and learning.

Given that our writing classrooms are by default linguistically diverse and multicultural (Matsuda 2006), we assert that a translingual orientation to language and writing instruction creates a space where students and instructors would perceive and *practice* language diversity as an enriching and resourceful asset for knowledge construction and meaning making through writing. At the pedagogical level, we emphasize the need to deliberately practice and promote language diversity as an asset and negotiate meaning making, in spite of language differences, within this translingual approach as a pedagogical pathway for minimizing what Paul Kei Matsuda (2014) identifies as “linguistic tourism”—an alluring fascination with language differences even if meaning is impeded in the manifestation of such differences—in the writing classroom (482). Matsuda cautions that uncritical fascination with language differences and characterizing “language users or uses based on differences alone would also mask similarities and might lead to stereotyping” (482). Thus, we contend that as a pedagogical practice, a translingual orientation to differences in language use geared towards negotiating meaning between teachers and students and writers and readers holds a great potential for encouraging students, especially historically marginalized multilingual students, to find value in their multiple linguistic resources, including Indigenous languages and language practices,

and to invoke rhetorical tools embedded in those languages in the service of their writing development. This, we believe, will move us, as teachers and students, an inch closer to “an explicit valuation of *all* languages in the writing and readings assigned to students, spoken in the classroom, and produced through scholarly work” (Cushman 2016, 235; emphasis in original).

Pedagogical practices that limit students’ desire to explore their varied linguistic resources abound in the U.S. education system: a reality that Django Paris and Samy Alim (2017) observe as causing historically marginalized students to “to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures and histories in order to achieve in schools” (1). Students’ exposure to authentic accented performances from multilingual writing teachers and their fellow students may encourage them to use and not deny or lose the relevant linguistic resources and cultural literacies available to them in the writing classroom. In fact, Xin Chen concludes in his 2017 study that multilingual student writers became more aware about their linguistic repertoires and its affordances “if they are appropriately introduced to the concept of translingualism” (25).

Among others, the promising potentials of a translingual orientation to language is rooted in its emphasis on a more deliberate and active use of different linguistic resources including accents—written and spoken—as tools available for students (and instructors) to interrogate and challenge language biases in the classroom. As we explain below regarding the use of classroom dialogic and explicit conversations on accents, a translingual approach focused not only on writing but also on *talking* about accents as linguistic resources creates affordances for instructors and students to rethink accents: not as deficits but as resources necessary for identity constructions, negotiations, and meaning making.

We argue that explicit and intentional conversations create spaces and opportunities for students to draw from their embodied linguistic and cultural experiences and accented performances. Opening space for having explicit in-class conversations is an effective pedagogical strategy for students to see accent fear and how it operates as a form of linguistic racism. It is critical for students to challenge and move beyond hegemonic language ideologies that privilege so-called native speakerism through racialized hierarchical binaries such as NEST vs. NNEST (Matsumoto 2018). Aslan and Thompson (2017) write that “Anglophone identity (e.g., Galloway, 2014) seems to lie at the root of the NEST/NNEST dichotomy” (290) and in turn, “reinforcing labels such as native and *nonnative* can create false assumptions about language learning” (289) which also applies to the ecology of a writing classroom.

To illustrate the pedagogical potential of a translingual orientation to challenge accent fear, we present a two-fold strategy to generate a classroom dialogue that help students first, to understand the importance of intercultural communication and the need to be responsive to and respectful of cultural differences; and second, to engage with the idea of Englishes in global and local settings. We start with one of Eda’s lesson plans which introduces students to ethics of intercultural communication in the context of professional-business communication in a global setting. Eda uses two pieces by Mike Fromowitz: “Cultural Blunders: Brands Gone Wrong” (2013) and “Hall of Shame: More Multicultural Brand Blunders” (2017). In these two pieces, Fromowitz offers various examples of how different major companies use wrong strategies and produce offensive messages in their advertisements because of not paying attention to cultural differences, resulting in disrespect and unresponsiveness to the regional cultural values of multi-

lingual-cultural consumers (“Hall of Shame” 2017). Eda suggests having a respectful discussion over the different examples Fromowitz offers with students and using this discussion to talk about Fromowitz’s own conclusion about the importance of understanding and being respectful of cultural and linguistic diversity in professional communication. Eda’s use of this discussion on respecting cultural and linguistic differences—how different people from different cultures speak and communicate differently—is an effective transition to Mohammed’s in-class activity on Rey Agudo’s 2018 article “Everyone Has an Accent.”

After reading Agudo’s piece, Mohammed invites his students to reflect upon and write about their accents and other linguistic idiosyncrasies. Mohammed’s goal in this exercise is not only to create a space for conversations about accents and make his students realize that accents are part of our linguistic behaviors, but also to help them destigmatize their accents and rethink their accents as assets, not deficits, that they can use for different audiences to achieve diverse rhetorical ends. During this intentional in-class discussion, one of Mohammed’s students who was very active on Blackboard, an online learning management system, but never spoke or asked a question in class mentioned that her discomfort with her accent accounted for her silence in class. After the exercise, Mohammed observed a significant shift in class engagement among his students. For example, the student who was insecure about her accents became active during class discussions. Another student who was a border commuter student recalled that at the U.S.-Mexico border, officers sometimes claimed they could not understand his accent and that always made him timid. Following that class exercise, he expressed a sense of self-confidence in his accent.



Although we developed these strategies for our writing classes where many of the students self-identify as bi/multi-linguals, these activities could also be employed in classroom ecologies where most students self-identify as monolingual speakers. One strategy we offer is introducing students to differences in accented performances by addressing the diversity of regional accents in the U.S. Linguist Rosina Lippi-Green (2012) notes that there are geographically designated accents, such as “a Maine accent, a New Orleans accent, an Appalachian accent, a Utah accent” and social/racial group accents such as “Native American accents, Black accents, Jewish accents” (45) among others. Likewise, Randall Alford and Judith Strother (1990) observe that pronunciation is the major difference in regional varieties of U.S. English, and there exist common stereotypes about regional dialects and accents used “for humorous, condescending, or derogatory purposes” (480). Using the linguistic diversity of regional accented performances as a departure point is a strategy that introduces fluidity, difference, and diversity as relatable conversations for many monolingual students, which is quite important because many monolingual students do not think that these conversations are related to their experiences. This strategy can be used to address students’ different experiences with their own accented performances, and these experiences can be used for students to destigmatize stereotypes about regional, social, and racial accents. Through this self-reflective work, students can engage in class conversations about how certain regional accents are used to discriminate against racial and ethnic minority groups in the US and unpack the underlying connections amongst race, ethnicity, and language both in global and local settings (Baratta 2018; Romney 2010; Selvi 2014).

## References

- Agudo, Roberto Rey. 2018. "Everyone Has an Accent." *New York Times*, July 14, 2018.  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/opinion/sunday/ev  
eryone-has-an-accent.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/opinion/sunday/ev<br/>eryone-has-an-accent.html).
- Alford, Randall L. and Judith B. Strother. 1990. "Attitudes of Native and Nonnative Speakers Toward Selected Regional Accents of US English." *TESOL Quarterly* 24(3): 479-496.
- Alvarez, Steven. 2014. "Translanguaging Tareas: Emergent Bilingual Youth as Language Brokers for Homework in Immigrant Families." *Language Arts* 91(5): 326.
- Aslan, Erhan and Amy S. Thompson. 2017. "Are They Really 'Two Different Species'? Implicitly Elicited Student Perceptions About NESTs and NNESTs." *TESOL Journal* 8(2): 277-294.
- Baker-Bell, April. 2020. *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy (NCTE-Routledge Research Series)*. London: Routledge.
- Baratta, Alex. 2018. "'I Speak How I Speak': A Discussion of Accent and Identity Within Teachers of ELT." *Criticality, Teacher Identity, and (In)equity in English Language Teaching: Issues and Implications*: 163-178.
- Canagarajah, A. Suresh. 2013. *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Chen, Xin. 2017. "Translingual Practices in the First-Year International Students' English Academic Writing." *INTESOL Journal* 14(1).
- Cushman, Ellen. 2016. "Translingual and Decolonial Approaches to Meaning Making." *College English* 78(3): 234-242.

- Fromowitz, Mike. 2013. "Cultural Blunders: Brands Gone Wrong." *Campaign Asia*, October 7, 2013. <https://www.campaignasia.com/article/cultural-blunders-brands-gone-wrong/426043>.
- Fromowitz, Mike. 2017. "Hall of Shame: More Cultural Brand Blunder." *Campaign US*, February 10, 2017. <https://www.campaignlive.com/article/hall-shame-multicultural-brand-blunders/1423941>.
- García, Ofelia and Li Wei. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism, and Education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gilyard, Keith. 2016. "The Rhetoric of Translingualism." *College English* 78(3): 284–89.
- Gonzales, Laura and Rebecca Zantjer. 2015. "Translation as a User-Localization Practice." *Technical Communication* 62(4): 271–84.
- Gonzales, Laura. 2018. *Sites of Translation: What Multilinguals Can Teach Us about Digital Writing and Rhetoric*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Horner, Bruce, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur. 2011. "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach." *College English* 73(3): 303–21.
- Lawrence, Halcyon M. 2021. "Siri Disciplines." In *Your Computer is on Fire*, edited by Thomas S. Mullaney, Benjamin Peters, Mar Hicks, and Kavita Philip, 179-198. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lippi-Green, R. 2012. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Lu, Min-Zhan and Bruce Horner. 2013. "Translingual Literacy, Language Difference, and Matters of Agency." *College English* 75(6): 582–607.
- Martinez, Aja Y. 2020. *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*. Champaign, IL: Conference on College Composition and Communication.
- Matsuda, Paul Kei. 2006. "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in US College Composition." *College English* 68(6): 637-651.
- Matsuda, Paul Kei. 2014. "The Lure of Translingual Writing." *PMLA* 129(3): 478-483.
- Matsumoto, Yumi. 2018. "Teachers' Identities as 'Non-Native' Speakers: Do They Matter in *English as a Lingua Franca* Interactions?" In *Criticality, Teacher Identity, and (In)Equity in English Language Teaching*, edited by Bedrettin Yazan and Nathaniel Rudolph, 57-79. New York, NY: Springer.
- Milu, Esther. 2022. "Hip-Hop and the Decolonial Possibilities of Translingualism." *College Composition and Communication* 15(3): 376-409.
- Paris, Django, and H. Samy Alim. 2017. *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*, 33-40.
- Riley-Mukavetz, Andrea M. 2014. "Towards a Cultural Rhetorics Methodology: Making Research Matter with Multi-Generational Women from the Little Traverse Bay Band." *Journal of Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization* 5(1): 108-125.

- Romney, Mary. 2010. "The Colour of English." In *The NNEST Lens: Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL*, 18-34. Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones. 1996. "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own." *College Composition and Communication* 27(1): 29-40.
- Selvi, Ali Fuad. 2014. "Myths and Misconceptions About Nonnative English Speakers in the TESOL (NNEST) movement." *TESOL Journal* 5(3): 573-611.
- Young, Vershawn A. and Aja Martinez. 2011. *Code Meshing as World English: Policy, Pedagogy, Performance*. National Council of Teachers of English.

## About the Authors

**Eda Özyeşilpınar** is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition in the Department of English at Illinois State University where she researches and teaches border rhetorics, digital-cultural rhetorics, and rhetorical theory and histories of rhetorics (rhetorics of and from non-Western and underrepresented groups). Her award-winning research appeared in *Review of Communication*, *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics*, *Methods and Methodologies for Research in Digital Writing and Rhetoric*, *Kairos*, *Rhetorics Change/Rhetoric's Change*, and *Immediacy*.

**Mohammed** is a multiple award-winning PhD candidate in the Writing, Rhetorics, and Literacies program at Arizona State University. In his research, Mohammed employs Indigenous decolonial methodologies and rhetorical theories to explore rhetorics and literate social practices of resistance, healing, and belonging among minoritized Indigenous, racial, and linguistic populations. To do this, Mohammed uses a combination of methods such as qualitative interviews, on-the-ground participant observations, and public discourses across digital spaces to collect and produce data for analysis. His research has been published in *Community Literacy Journal* and *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*.

© 2023, Eda Özyeşilpınar & Mohammed Sakip Iddrisu. This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY). For more information, please visit [creativecommons.org](https://creativecommons.org)