

MOBILIZING THE GLOBAL SOUTH: STRATEGIC USE OF MULTILINGUAL REPERTOIRE OF A LANGUAGE TEACHER IN THE U.S.

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With the influence of globalization, it is now natural to consider most of the areas in our globe as consisting of contact zones. As the distance between people from different language backgrounds is getting narrower with increased mobility, we are witnessing an increasing number of studies that examine contact zone communication, where people bring multiple linguistic and paralinguistic resources to the interaction. As the field is moving away from the view of language as a discrete, separate system toward a view that focuses on language use and practice as integrated and performative (Garcia, 2009; Hornberger, 2003; Canagarajah, 2013), it is imperative to understand more about how multilinguals use their linguistic repertoires and how they manage the differences that might arise during their interactions in the contact zone (Pratt, 1991).

The discussion of multilingual practice as drawing from multilinguals' repertoires is particularly important in U.S. college classrooms, where English is often considered as the only "norm" despite the increasingly multilingual campus (Matsuda, 2006). Despite the presence of the "Global South" everywhere on campus, multilingualism is not considered or practiced in classroom in the U.S. In addition, while there are a great many studies theorizing the reconceptualization of multilingualism as integrated and performative practice, there is still relatively little discussion of what it means to adopt this approach in practice. What can we gain by reconceptualizing language competence as language repertoire? What can we gain when we start utilizing our multilingual repertoire in the language classroom? This paper attempts to answer the above questions by illustrating how a multilingual writing instructor utilizes her linguistic repertoire in her writing course and what this achieves in terms of semiodiversity of the multilingual space as well as the pedagogical goal.

Data

Before I narrate the story of Kristine, let me introduce her briefly. Kristine teaches English writing to multilingual writers at different levels in different programs: an intensive English program (IEP), undergraduate ESL composition, and English composition at a research university in northeast U.S. She started her career with 9 years in a university in Kurdistan as an instructor teaching different subject areas such as literature and composition, and only recently came back to the U.S. Kristine and I first met as colleagues in one of the programs that she was teaching, and our relationship included the different labels of research participant and researcher as she became one of the participants in my research project. The data below comes from an ongoing research project, and has been collected since the summer of 2015 at the research university where Kristine and I work.

Kristine's story: Not the multilingual, but doing multilingual

While Kristine's linguistic repertoire includes multiple cultural practices and languages such as English, Farsi, Arabic, and French, she does not see herself as a multilingual as she "does not speak all the languages the same way." Particularly, Kristine does not value her long experience of teaching in Kurdistan. However, during my observation of her class and subsequent interviews, it was clear that Kristine was freely utilizing her multilingual resources in her class. One day in her academic writing course in the IEP, one of her students had trouble understanding what "taboo" meant:

Excerpt 1. You know *haram*

S: Kristine, what is taboo?

K: Taboo is something you don't talk about or avoid talking about.

S: um:

K: You know حرام (*haram*)

S: oh:

With her knowledge of Arabic, Kristine was able to help this student to negotiate the meaning of the unfamiliar word, *taboo*. Instances like this have been reported in a number of studies relating to how multilinguals negotiate meaning

using their native language. Kristine, as multilinguals often do, also utilized her knowledge in Arabic, enabling her class to continue discussing the subject matter.

Kristine's drawing resources from her multilingual repertoire did not stop at just helping her students to understand an unfamiliar word. In a different class, Kristine and her students were discussing possible options for one of their main assignments for the course, a definition essay. Here, Kristine gave an example of the word, *'ib*, as a sample topic for a definition essay, and brainstormed with students what this word means. Kristine reflects on her use of Arabic in class as follows:

I used two Arabic concepts (they are both words that we talked about, *'ib*, used to label something as shameful or disgraceful, and waste, which is connections, or nepotism) and explained how there is no direct translation in English, but I could still explain the concept enough so that the students could understand. Some of them even had a similar concept in their own language and used the concepts in their own languages. The writing that came from this assignment has been excellent students' writing. I have loved this assignment because it has given me a wide open window into other cultures. I think my examples were helpful and benefited the whole class.

Here, Kristine's use of Arabic is significant on multiple levels. First, she is able to achieve the pedagogical purpose, namely engaging her students in a brainstorming activity for a definition essay using a concept that they can best explain. In doing so, Kristine chooses a word that she and some of her students share together; by drawing on students as linguistic experts and resources, Kristine was able to make the classroom into more democratic dialogic learning space. From another perspective, the dialogic learning space also benefits the instructor as well; the students' multilingual practice also becomes a learning moment for the instructor. Indeed, Kristine reflects further, "During a brainstorm activity, two students wrote words in Arabic script, and I was able to

read the words and was familiar with the concepts they were trying to communicate. That helped to make a link."

The act of adopting a foreign word also expands the range of semiodiversity (Halliday, 2007). That is, the classroom becomes a space where the students are welcome to bring their own cultural practices and values and to engage in a dialogue with others and themselves, creating opportunities to make meaning around their multilingual resources. In this way, multilingual writing practice goes beyond what a typical monolingual English college classroom environment might allow students to do and be. Through the use of foreign words, Kristine is making her multilingual identity available to students, creating an opportunity to build solidarity between herself and her students as fellow multilinguals. In addition, by valuing multiple languages and cultural influences, Kristine and her students make their multilingual space more visible; she welcomes the semiodiversity of the classroom, and by doing so, she positions students as agents of their own meaning making practice, encouraging them to fully utilize the resources available in their own linguistic repertoires.

Language teachers do not tend to think of themselves as multilingual, influenced by the traditional understanding of multilingualism as "multiple monolingualisms" (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006), although they do already engage in performative language practice, drawing upon multiple linguistic resources (Tardy, 2011). When teachers do utilize their multilingual repertoires, it provides certain benefits: it helps the students in their negotiation of meaning, making semiodiversity of the multilingual space more visible, and thereby making the classroom more democratic and appreciating students' individual voices and agency. As this paper suggests, along with Tardy's (2011) findings, language teachers do engage in multilingual practices regardless of whether they define themselves as multilingual or not, or whether they value their "global south" experience or not. It is time to raise awareness of the everyday multilingual practices that language teachers engage in, which I believe will lead to a reconceptualization of multilingualism, more grounded in people's actual language practices.