

Centering MENA Writing Scholarship within U.S. Transnational Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

MENA writing scholars have contributed significantly to multilingual, transnational, and decolonial writing studies by foregrounding indigenous and locale-based pedagogies that sustain multilingual writing. Learning from MENA writing program spaces can help US writing communities reaffirm international student writers' transnational linguistic and cultural literacies while magnifying their historical trajectories of language education. Such inquiry can bridge global North/South writing pedagogies by centering Global South epistemologies. Through interviews with four writing scholars who have been working in MENA-based writing contexts, this interview project explores previous writing initiatives, identifies current gaps, and examines how researchers analyze cultural, social, political, and historical MENA writing traditions. The reflections after each interview response aim to inform multilingual tutoring and teaching practices in US writing centers by recognizing postcolonial locales as valid and subaltern sources of knowledge. Drawing on interactions with regional scholars, the project highlights the urgency for US writing studies to adapt teaching strategies from multilingual MENA contexts. This collaborative work aims to debunk the monolingual Western writing rhetorical dominance and positioning MENA-inclusive pedagogies as central to reimagining global writing scholarship.

Keywords: transnational writing center, transnational writing program, translanguaging, multilingual, Lebanon

Although often underacknowledged in dominant Euro-American scholarship, transnational and translanguaging writing research emerging from the MENA region has made significant contributions to discussions on global language and writing pedagogy and assessment (McCallum & Coombe, 2020; Zenger, 2018). Such studies have further complicated monolingual administrative and instructional paradigms (Donahue, 2023), highlighting the importance of locally situated approaches to writing instruction. These and other contemporary studies have also revealed alternative models of assessment rooted in multilingual realities (Benraiss et al., 2025). Such efforts reflect a broader trend: transnational and translanguaging writing scholarship from the MENA region has meaningfully engaged global discussions on pedagogy and assessment, challenging the presumed universality of Euro-American frameworks (Azaz & Trentman, 2024). I draw support for this claim from my experience of multilingual writing teaching. In 2018, when I first began teaching writing in the U.S. as an international student from India, I noticed my students often struggling to navigate expectations for

academic U.S. English while also bringing their own linguistic resources into the classroom. For example, in one writing session, a student attempted to translate an idea from Arabic into English and hesitated to use certain expressions, fearing they might be “wrong.” In such teaching scenarios, I drew on my own experiences with linguistic diversity in India, a country shaped by deep multilingualism and complex linguistic hierarchies, and I was able to support my student in valuing their original expression while refining it for the classroom context. This experience illustrates how my positionality and teaching approach are shaped by both my personal journey and the broader complexities of multilingual education. As I navigated these intersections of language, identity, and pedagogy, I often referred to MENA writing pedagogy and language ecology scholarship (see also, Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Raja & Zahid, 2013) because in the educational context I come from, writing pedagogy was budding. I realized that while the U.S. writing/composition studies and their initiatives often present themselves as global models to aspire to, positioning their approaches as exemplary rather than seeking reciprocal exchange (Donahue, 2023), the MENA region offers valuable insights into supporting the writing needs of multilingual and multiethnic students.

Additionally, although scholars such as Franklin et al. (2023) repeatedly emphasize the importance of transnational sensemaking in college education, relatively little research attention is given to how the U.S. can learn from other intrinsically multilingual contexts. One example of such a context is the MENA region, home to a diverse group of writers who grew up speaking multiple languages across social contexts. Centering and exploring teaching methods and understanding the intricate writing context influenced by the linguistic and cultural practices of the MENA region can help writing teachers in the U.S. learn about MENA writers in their classrooms. This knowledge can enable U.S. teachers and tutors to provide adequate support for other global multilingual writers. It is with these assumptions that I interviewed four writing scholars from the field of MENA writing studies. The interviewees draw on their experiences within MENA writing studies to show how these experiences enabled them to challenge dominant monolingual epistemologies within rhetoric and composition studies. For example, most illustrate how working in multilingual, regionally grounded MENA contexts offered alternative ways of understanding a place and its interaction with writing, language, and pedagogy by going beyond standardized and/or English-only norms and countering persistent U.S. epistemologies. This piece attempts to reaffirm the MENA writing studies context as interventionist (Bou Ayash, 2019). Bou Ayash’s work (2019) is interventionist in that it challenges dominant monolingual and Eurocentric frameworks while foregrounding the sociopolitical and linguistic complexities of the MENA region. Drawing on ethnographic research, she examines the linguistic politics that sustain the status quo and disrupt prevailing writing norms by advancing localized, multilingual epistemologies grounded in specific sites. Importantly, this intervention extends beyond the MENA context and invites reconsideration of writing practices in the U.S., which is a central concern of this article. My own experience working as a tutor and teacher across languages in India, alongside my current position as a global Anglophone writer and researcher in U.S.-based writing center contexts, has made visible the constraints of English-only pedagogies and conventions. These experiences, particularly encounters with multilingual writers whose rhetorical practices exceeded institutional expectations, led me to engage more deeply with scholarship

emerging from the MENA region, including Bou Ayash's work. While both South Asia and the MENA region can be understood as part of the Global South, I caution against collapsing them into a singular framework. Each context is shaped by distinct linguistic histories, colonial trajectories, and local knowledge systems, and therefore offers different, though equally critical, perspectives on resisting monolingualism and Eurocentric epistemologies.

Here, I briefly describe the process of compiling this piece. Upon locating the call for submissions themed "On Our Own Terms" (the first issue), I reflected on the contribution of the MENA writing scholarship in my professional and personal writing trajectory. This activity involved reviewing the archives of my teaching materials and revisiting scholarship from the fields of MENA writing, language, and literature that inspired me to create those materials. Later, using Google Scholar, I reviewed the latest open-access scholarship in writing center studies and writing studies in the MENA region, including book reviews, resource reviews, and scholarly publications. This process guided me to the current MENA writing conversation, intersecting with culturally sustaining, community-engaged, feminist, and class-conscious language ideology pedagogies, and led me to my first interviewee. I connected with other colleagues through networking and reading each person's work before contacting them. Here is a brief introduction to each interviewee:

- Erin Zimmerman | former American University of Beirut (AUB) Assistant Professor and Director of the Writing Center and Writing in the Disciplines Program | MENA Region Engagement: 5 years (Teaching, Writing Center Administration, and WPA)
- Marwa Mehio | former AUB Writing Instructor; current New York University Abu Dhabi Writing Instructor | MENA Region Engagement: 14 years (Teaching, Writing Center Work, and Research)
- Maya Akiki | Writing Center Coordinator & Instructor, Lebanese American University | MENA Region Engagement: 20+ years (Teaching, WPA, Workshop facilitating, Fulbright Scholar)
- Jennifer Nish | former AUB Assistant Professor | MENA Region Engagement: 4 years (WPA, Teaching, and Research)

I modeled my interview questions on the methodological and genre approach used by KC et al. (2023).

Main question

As an expert in writing pedagogy and someone who has engaged with MENA writing programs and writing centers, how have you nurtured multilingual and transnational writing development in your teaching or tutoring environment?

Possible Follow-Up Reflecting Questions

1. How have you managed the complexity of multicultural, multilingual settings compounded by issues such as marginalization, postcolonialism, geopolitics, gender, language ideologies, and others?
2. How has your experience working in the MENA writing scene impacted your teaching/tutoring and your research agenda moving forward, fostering multilingual/transactional research tendencies?

The following sections present verbatim responses from each interviewee. The interviewees edited their own responses to meet this journal's editorial guidelines and are listed as co-authors. I then end this piece by reflecting on the relational nature of each interviewee's teaching and tutoring experiences, highlighting how their work in the MENA region informs and challenges dominant U.S. writing discourse. The following interview section explores how writing administrators and educators based in the MENA region contribute to conversations in rhetoric and composition studies and language teaching, both within and beyond the U.S. (Arnold et al., 2018). With a commitment to collective literacy development in the region, MENA writing studies—having originally adopted the writing center as a U.S.-based conceptual model—has since expanded its practices to support writers in other languages as equal stakeholders in their communities, thereby challenging the assumed adequacy of contemporary U.S. writing scholarship in addressing MENA writers' extensive multilingual literacies (Bougata, 2018).

While U.S. writing programs often prioritize English-language processes—despite the presence of institutional foreign-language policies (Lape, 2020)—writing programs in the MENA region adopt pedagogical approaches that are responsive to a multilingual student population, shifting language practices, and locally situated ecologies (Eleftheriou & Sayed, 2025; Salaberri-Ramiro & Zaafour, 2023). Given the region's diversity, these approaches vary widely across institutional and national contexts. Establishing scholarship and research infrastructures such as the MENA Writing Studies Journal can challenge dominant narratives in writing. This article aims to enhance the limited visibility and engagement with multilingual writing ecologies and pedagogical practices from the MENA region. Much of U.S.-based writing studies scholarship is shaped by monolingual assumptions, which often overlook how writing centers in multilingual contexts function not just as support spaces but as sites of innovation. By foregrounding the voices of educators who have lived and worked in MENA writing contexts, this piece disrupts the tendency to view such sites from distant and privileged positionalities, instead centering their situated expertise. I hope the interviews below provide rich food for thought for all writing programs by illustrating how the MENA region enhances writing development through the diverse language lenses of multilingual writers (Zimmerman). This includes exploring World Englishes, recognizing various language varieties and modalities (Akiki and Mehio), and implementing translanguaging approaches (Nish), all while drawing attention to the nuances of local cultures.

Interviews & Responses

In this section, I share verbatim accounts from each interviewee and analyze them in a reflective note after each response. I aim to show how engaging with MENA writing scholars can deepen the understanding of multilingual practices that US-based writing educators often see in their students.

Erin Zimmerman's Response

Every morning, when I left my apartment to walk to the American University of Beirut (AUB) campus, the lovely men drinking coffee on the corner would smile at me and say, “Hi! Bonjour! Keefik?” (Hi! Good morning! How are you?). In Beirut, Lebanon, I could walk across campus or down the street and hear individuals speaking English, French, and Arabic. Sometimes, entire conversations were held in one language; other times, all three languages would appear in the same sentence.

As a monolingual American who studied Spanish through grade school and college, I had a particular view of language learning. I knew folks who spoke another language with their parents, but since they only spoke in English at school, I didn’t have much concept of when and how they learned the language and to what extent it was part of their identity. I knew they had immigrated to the U.S. or their parents had immigrated before they were born. I did not think too much about it; I simply knew that they were bilingual.

In graduate school, I had many conversations about scholarship and practice related to multilingualism because of working in writing centers and teaching composition classes. At that time, terms like native English speaker, English as a second language, and English language learner were prominently used. I also worked in institutions where the few multilingual students were predominantly international students. Those characteristics reinforced my view of multilingualism – that multilingual individuals grew up speaking one language and, somewhere along the way, learned another language, most likely by taking classes in school different than their first/home language.

Living in Beirut changed that. I spoke with AUB students, who told me that they had a difficult time identifying their first language, or L1. All or some of their languages were completely intermixed into their identities: used at home, at school, at church or mosque, and seen on the television and other media. And, of course, they were making hundreds of conscious and unconscious decisions about their language use every day. Because I spoke so little Arabic and French, students and other acquaintances consciously made decisions to speak to me primarily in English. Even so, there were times when another language would slip in. My favorite was the use of the word “bas,” which means “but/only” in the Lebanese Arabic dialect. Many students would regularly use “bas” even when every other word in the conversation was spoken in English: “I really appreciated what this writer was explaining, bas I took issue with their”

After these experiences, I no longer perceived a multilingual student as someone who grew up speaking another language, studied English at school, and then traveled to an English-speaking

country to practice their language skills. This shift has served me well in my current position at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Unlike my previous U.S. universities, UNLV is regarded for its diversity, and what became immediately interesting to me was the fact that the multilingual students here are more likely to be Generation 1.5 than international students.

Harklau et al. (1999) describe Generation 1.5 students as immigrants who have “traits and experiences that lie somewhere in between those associated with the first or second generation” (p. vii). Generation 1.5 students have typically lived for a significant time within U.S. culture and/or were educated in the U.S., so they have different language learning experiences and needs than international students. These authors observed at the time that most scholarship centered on international students and that many practitioners dismissed Generation 1.5 students’ language patterns as lack of preparation (p. vii). Scholarship in writing center studies still focuses more prominently on international student writers than Generation 1.5 writers; Thonus (2003); Williams & Severino (2004); and Eckstein (2018) are some of few who have considered how writing centers can specifically serve Generation 1.5 writers.

Though not strictly defined as Generation 1.5, my AUB students had language experiences that have helped me re-envision the training I run with writing center consultants. In 2021, Brianne Taormina-Barrientos spearheaded a research project to learn about UNLV’s Generation 1.5 students’ perceptions of our writing center’s services. Using those findings, we designed a curriculum that included discussions of various types of multilingual writers, their specific needs, and tutoring strategies that might best support them.

The training had previously touched on Severino’s (1993) assimilationist, accommodationist, and separatist stances; characteristics of Standard Academic English; and strategies for working with multilingual writers. The strategies we covered were more appropriate for international students or students who learned English as a Second Language. For example, “Don’t underestimate their knowledge of grammar. Since they have learned English, they have been taught grammar concepts and can identify and can differentiate word forms, etc.” and “You may have to repeat yourself more, change your wording, talk slower, or annunciate in order for the student to understand.”

Our revisions highlight the different characteristics of international and Gen 1.5 writers to better guide tutors. For instance, we discuss how some international students know grammatical terminology and rules because they studied those when learning the language; meanwhile, Generation 1.5 writers might be more like monolingual English speakers who learned the language by listening and speaking so do not clearly remember grammatical terms and rules. Similarly, we touch on navigating the resistance international students might give to one-to-one tutoring because it is unfamiliar to them; whereas, Generation 1.5 students might have experienced peer review or similar active learning techniques in their high school settings and therefore appear more prepared to engage in a consultation.

Looking back, it strikes me as odd that I moved to Lebanon to teach writing when I was so uninformed about multilingualism. Working with AUB students helped me shed this naive categorization of students as either native English speakers or non-native English speakers and compelled me to recognize the ways that language learning – as well as speaking and writing with that language – was occurring between and beyond those opposing categories.

Though many of the adjustments I made to my pedagogy probably would not have been obvious to others, I found I was rethinking much of what I had been taught about teaching and tutoring. In my first semester as a writing center administrator, I drew on my own tutor training to instruct my new staff. I had been taught that tutors should only communicate in English with writers because doing so gave them opportunities for language practice. Since I was not fluent in another language, this wasn't a tenet I ever had to question. Within a few weeks in the AUB Writing Center, I began to question it and had discussions about it with my staff. They all believed that shifting between languages helped their writers. As a result, we agreed that the language of the writing (we also had Arabic writing tutors) should be the primary language used in the consultation, but that tutors should use their judgment to switch languages in moments when they thought it would best help a writer learn.

Without that experience at AUB, I would have had a much more difficult time considering the characteristics of UNLV's Generation 1.5 student writers and preparing my staff to work with them. This more flexible view of multilingualism serves me well as a writing center administrator: The central goal I set for my tutors is to help each writer consider their own unique experiences learning to write in order to find the best strategies for moving their writing forward. My new view of language learning means that I conduct training so that tutors are prepared to consider the needs of multilingual students who are not international, which gives them a stronger foundation for building flexibility. At the very least, they are not limited to using strategies that assume a writer's low language comprehension. Having such a deep realization of being unaware makes me strive to inform and prepare my staff to support all the types of multilingual writers they see.

Reflection

As Zimmerman reflects on her efforts to adapt writing center pedagogies to local contexts, she reveals the tensions that emerged when the U.S.-based writing center training models are applied in global settings. Acknowledging the “politics and privilege” embedded in her professional trajectory, she observed how Western pedagogies are often positioned as universal. Her narrative highlights how such frameworks can inadvertently reproduce normative assumptions that do not always align with the needs of multilingual writers. Bougata (2018), drawing on a raciolinguistic perspective, similarly shows how writing proficiency in the Arabian Gulf is often evaluated through the lens of Western standards, shaping how scholars and administrators value local versus foreign expertise. His work underscores the need to center localized knowledge and recognize the socio-political realities and experiential realities that inform writing practices in the region. Zimmerman's experiences in Beirut further informed her development of specialized academic and professional

resources in her current role as a writing center director once back in the U.S. These resources address the needs of international students and Generation 1.5 students across social, pragmatic, and cultural factors. Zimmerman's insights resonated with my own work and experiences as an assistant director of a writing center operating in the U.S., where engaging with global multilingual writers requires ongoing attention to diverse linguistic, cultural, and institutional needs and/or factors that shape one's writerly choices.

Maya Akiki's Response

The MENA region has often been known for its richness in culture. With most of the region situated in strategic locations, it has constantly been considered of significance to many Western countries that continue to assert political and cultural influence in the region. From colonialism to globalization, the inhabitants of the MENA region have adopted, both consciously and unconsciously, the historical, political, and cultural impacts brought forth by mostly Western countries. Today, that influence remains apparent in most areas, but especially in the education sector. In Lebanon, specifically, the vast majority of the locals are at least bilingual, speaking two or more of the following languages: Arabic, French, English, and even Armenian. As such multilingualism, a term that has transcended the limitations of language and has been described as an "intrinsically social way of life and cultural practice" with "sociopolitical implications" (Franceschini, 2011, p. 345) and transnationalism, defined as "forging and sustaining multistranded social relations that linked their societies of origin and settlement (Schiller et al., 1992, ix) have both had a remarkable influence on Lebanese students by shaping their identities as writers. They have as well affected their choice of themes in academic writing, literature and creative writing. In Lebanon, multilingualism has empowered students to access, understand, and integrate the diverse literary traditions they usually encounter in their environment.

Recently, the English language has become increasingly prevalent among Generation Z and Generation Alpha due to their continuous exposure to technology and social media. However, its prevalence does not necessarily ensure its dissemination in the rigor and richness required for academic study of any kind, which I have seen firsthand. This is increasingly common among Arab international students who often come to us through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) program at LAU. These students generally come from a high school that exclusively taught—save for a few miscellaneous classes every once in a while—in the country's most common language, and more often than not, it is Arabic. Students who receive the MEPI scholarship generally come from underprivileged socio-economic statuses, which means they do not have the ability to enroll in expensive international schools. This is also common among Higher Education Scholarship (HES) students awarded through the USAID program at LAU: these students—as a rule—come from small public schools, and these schools, more often than not, teach in a mix of Arabic and French, do not have the luxury to support their students with their English studies. So, even as these students grow up in this multilingual environment, their serious treatment of the English language on even a pseudo-academic level is virtually non-existent. It becomes abundantly clear that these students are

only exposed to the English language (and, in some cases, multilingualism as a whole) through social media. Therefore, this uncritical and unsupervised exposure to mostly fragmentary and subpar social media English (save for a few considerable exceptions), albeit helpful in the initiation phases of English language learning, quickly loses value. There is a dearth of vocabulary and sustained grammatical structure, such as is found in novels and essays, that makes social media vis-à-vis English writing a double-edged sword.

Moreover, the challenges are common among students, faculty, and administrators. It is obvious that students are not completely prepared for academic writing and research, where they tend to translate complex academic ideas, resulting in confusion, misunderstanding, miscommunication, and frustration. In some cases, their frustration may lead to academic misconduct while recently resorting to plagiarism and AI tools, specifically in their major courses. As a result, the role of the English department and the Writing Center as service units has become of utmost importance for the administration and faculty. The Writing Center has always been considered a safe haven for students. As a coordinator, I often receive frantic emails from students asking about the services due to an issue they faced in class. I make it a point to meet with them and have conversations about writing, after which I refer them to a tutor that I consider would match their “vibe.” For instance, a Lebanese-Armenian student once walked in the center. One could tell she was of Armenian descent based on her accent. She told me she had issues with “thinking in English,” so I figured it would be similar to my students who “think in Arabic” while writing. A tutor at the center who was also of Armenian descent smiled her biggest smile and invited this tutee to sit with her. I no longer understood what they were saying as that musical yet fully strange language filled the room. The only words I could make out were “critical analysis,” “transitions,” and “guidelines,” and I assumed they were discussing the prompt. Despite my cluelessness, I decided to observe the session. From the context, I could tell that the tutee could express herself more freely, knowing that the tutor could tell where she was coming from. The tutor listened carefully and asked her how she felt about the writing and the feedback she received. My tutor, a big fan of Stephen North, said: “It is not about this assignment; it is about you as a writer.” The tutee nodded as if having an “aha” moment and proceeded to read her writing. Then, I heard the tutor say: In Armenian, that works because [mumbles in Armenian], but in English, the phrase cannot work that way. I admit I asked her about some of the things they spoke about after the session; otherwise, I would not have had any clue. The tutor then explained to me that the tutee was overall frustrated. She felt her writing was misunderstood, and the tutor pointed out the social aspects and differences in language requirements and connotations between Armenian and English. It was very clear that the Armenian student was working hard to score a decent grade on her assignment, but she could not promote her ideas with clarity due to the language barrier. She was so down, demotivated, and anxious. The session at the center gave her the boost she needed to overcome writer’s block and start writing confidently. I still remember when the Armenian student returned to the center two weeks later with a smile on her face and a box of chocolate. It was her way of celebrating the moment with the Writing Center team.

Meanwhile, the writing process can be challenging as an English instructor teaching different courses in the sequence. Most students find it very frustrating every time I press the start button. Even though they are well equipped and prepared to write, their worries and concerns start to surface. As such, I keep on encouraging them to think in the target language and to produce simple ideas that can be elaborated. For example, I always remind students to “Keep It Short and Simple” (KISS) in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity. They are also advised to avoid translation and to focus on the use of concise English language. They usually address their ideas in groups and receive peer feedback before they start drafting their essays; this social space usually empowers them and helps bridge the gap between those who “Write” and those who “Can’t Write”. Since I believe in the Writing Center tutoring approach, I always assign conferencing sessions to students, listen to their writer’s voice, and provide constructive feedback for improvement. In these sessions, I meet with students individually and adopt the Socratic Method approach, a form of cooperative dialogue to promote critical thinking and critical literacy. By offering conferencing sessions, students communicate their ideas orally to overcome writing frustration. I am fond of conferencing, which is one of the best formative assessments since it provides an individualistic approach to students’ learning and allows me to reflect on my teaching methods and practices. I believe the process will be complete once students revise their work and polish their final product by trusting their ears while reading aloud and identifying their odd-looking words, phrases, and expressions. So far, these strategies are very successful because they help students develop their pieces of writing in the English language confidently and with style.

As a language instructor and Writing Center coordinator, I learned that teaching language and writing should be engaging, creative, and based on strong foundations. In addition, the process requires clarity in communication, tangible guidelines, and being a compassionate listener.

Reflection

Akiki describes multilingual writers’ academic and social lives at her university, noting how colonial histories shape writers who operate across languages and modalities. She also argues for centering writers’ everyday language practices and engagements as a key focus of writing center research in the MENA region. According to her, in multilingual writing environments, writing centers can function as experimental spaces where writers’ linguistic repertoires and intellectual trajectories are recognized as central to meaning-making and knowledge production.

In this way, Akiki extends Banat’s (2018) call to understand writing as a social practice and builds on Bou Ayash’s (2019) critique of monolingual frameworks, which challenge what she identifies as the “linguistic myopia” of dominant writing instruction (p. 35). As an administrator of a multilingual writing center in the U.S. South, I find Akiki’s framework particularly generative for my writing center practice. Her emphasis on dialogue across global writing center contexts highlights the importance of sustained engagement with colleagues and scholars working in different linguistic and cultural environments.

In my own work with multilingual writers, such exchanges are crucial for understanding how shifting linguistic, cultural, and institutional dynamics shape writers' rhetorical choices. For my own writing center practice, Akiki's perspective opens up several possibilities. These include examining the social positioning of English varieties within specific regions, engaging with non-alphabetic and multimodal literacies, and developing intercultural and intracultural pedagogical materials that reflect the lived experiences of our writers. It also requires critically rethinking writing center research practices, ethics, and institutional missions to better support writers navigating complex global and postcolonial realities. These efforts aim not only to provide academic support but also to activate and sustain writers' diverse literacy practices.

Marwa Mehio's Response

Teaching in the MENA opens up particular linguistic, ideological, and contextual considerations. My teaching has moved me around the region, from Lebanon to the UAE and Turkey. My pedagogical approach has been influenced primarily by my own education and teaching career in Lebanon and then expanded by the other contexts I moved to. While I turn to strategies for engaging multilingual students and tools for enhancing their learning based on their educational backgrounds, my main concern has been student agency. Working with students in Lebanon, I noticed early on that some tend to believe that they are "bad" writers and that "good" writing is elusive, often citing the idea that only Shakespeare can get an A on a paper. Some also seek to follow strict guidelines for effective writing, such as using longer and more complex words to make the writing more sophisticated. There was a desire for perfection and native fluency that upon investigation, seemed to stem from a belief that English is the only path to success and that any reliance on other languages they spoke would weaken their writing. These beliefs are common worldwide, though problematic and rooted in unequal power dynamics, and moved me away from goals of literacy that are rooted in less rigid and more critical ideologies of language. To address these ideologies and work with students to challenge them while also developing academic literacy, I needed an approach that responds to their educational and ideological backgrounds.

I consequently worked to localize pedagogical methods in relation to the tools used but also the content of the course by focusing on ideological and historical factors influencing students' education. I first understand agency through Canagarajah's (2004) definition, not only as having a voice or choice in learning but as students' capacity to influence their learning and the world around them. From there, I approach teaching as a method that not only helps students achieve the direct practical learning outcomes of a composition course, but also critically interrogate the ideological factors and power dynamics influencing their learning and use of English in any capacity, as well as their attitudes toward the language, its value, and their positioning as users of academic English.

This transformative pedagogical method draws on Kumaravadivelu (2003) who argued that language and literacy classes need to design methods that resist pedagogical traditions that reinforce colonial ideologies and the world order. Indeed, we often reinforce such power structures even as instructors

considered nonnative speakers in non-English-speaking contexts through the ideologies we pass on in our teaching, whether intentionally or not (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). In Lebanon, these include such ideologies reinforced in many schools as the supremacy of English as a language for education and advancement and the irrelevance of Arabic (Orr & Annous, 2018). Such ideologies do not only denigrate local languages and cultures but also shape students' agency in using the language. While they may become fluent in English and experts in writing academically, using these literacies within these structures that promote native speakerism and superiority means they may never feel fluent enough, believe that other languages and literacies in their repertoires are not useful, and blindly accept what they are taught instead of "bring[ing] their native cultures and languages into language classrooms and negotiat[ing] with the dominant (competing) discourses" (Liu & Tannacito, 2013, p. 359). By creating our own methods, we can begin to transform these ideologies and encourage students' agency as writers and communicators.

In my teaching, I address these ideologies head-on, having discussions about the attitudes students have toward language, the ideologies they believe and see around them regarding language and language speakers, what it means to be an English speaker, etc. We also interrogate the origins of these beliefs, the value of each language and how it can be used, and the ways in which some values and ideologies are rooted in racial and cultural superiority. To do this, I adopt a postcolonial critical pedagogy, as it focuses not only on the role of the individual in their learning, their agency, and their transformative potential, but on the structural and historical factors informing the circumstances they are in, the ideologies surrounding them, and the language and its power (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Zembylas, 2018b). I reference the work of educators in the region, such as Akar (2016) and Zakharia (2017), who describe ways of localizing critical pedagogies which, though "critical", often do not align with local ways of knowing and may reinforce similar oppressive structures and ideologies.

In Lebanon, for example, I took into consideration the colonial and divided history of the country, the role of language in creating a multicultural and fragmented society, and how these issues intersect in the composition classroom. I found myself going down the path of peace education and exploring how a postcolonial approach (Zembylas, 2018a) can actually be adopted in a composition class, reinforcing the learning outcomes but also creating space for students to use language with authority while interrogating their understandings of peace. Through a postcolonial perspective, students interrogate concepts of peace and plans for social cohesion that are outlined by those in power or international organizations and are influenced by global definitions of peace that often do not reflect reality or the desires and needs of people (Zakharia, 2011; Zembylas, 2018a). When students are given the tools, they begin to investigate these concepts through the language used, the histories behind them, and the power that informs them. They also use language to discuss and redefine what peace means to them and, in this way, they develop their agency surrounding peace itself and the language they are using to communicate it. Through these negotiations, students begin the work toward transformation and change, starting from the classroom, and then in their communities by rejecting understandings of peace that are imposed and developing their own

through discussion and dialogue. When these conversations happen, they contribute to my own continuing transformation as an “unfinished” instructor, in Freire’s (1998) words, and give hope in a context that is sometimes seen as hopeless.

The purpose of these methods is to allow students the space to come to their own understandings, interpretations, and uses for academic English on their path to becoming agents of their writing and communication. The goal is not to villainize English but rather to help students learn the literacies they need in order to become successful while putting their use and value into perspective and understanding the structures and histories that inform this value. While I developed this approach in Lebanon, I have adapted it to other teaching contexts as it depends on students sharing their beliefs and experiences and developing the discussion from there. I have worked with students to understand the context, students’ backgrounds and beliefs, and the ideologies that surround their learning, in order to work with them to develop their agency. My research has also focused on pedagogies that can enhance agency and work toward transformation, and the ways in which they can be localized, such as critical pedagogies and peace education as well as understanding the contexts I am working in by exploring language ideologies.

Reflection

As an applied linguist by training, I saw the value of Mehio’s observation that writers’ deliberate focus on semantics and intentional meshing of languages offers an opportunity to explore various language representations and practices among writers from postcolonial territories. Mehio also illustrates how writers engage with the language of colonizers as a sword against it or employ their language practices as markers of cultural pride and identity. Together, these examples present the ideological dimensions of language practice, rendering everyday participants “transcultural and translingual” (Bou Ayash, 2013, p. 98) within a sociolinguistic landscape.

Mehio’s insights serve as a decolonial pedagogical inspiration and linguistic representation for writing teachers, particularly those working in second-language writing classrooms in the U.S. As a writing teacher from another postcolonial country in the Global South, one of my key takeaways from Mehio’s work is the importance of establishing practical pedagogical and andragogical writing goals that seriously consider and address important aspects of language and their possible connections to writers’ country of origin, race, citizenship(s), and immigration. I felt motivated to brainstorm ways to incorporate other languages into my writing classrooms and to discuss impactful, inclusive methods for learning and utilizing languages based on the linguistic assets that writers already possess. I found this emphasis on critical thinking in language production, especially from the MENA region, intellectually stimulating for my student writers as well as for the teachers, tutors, and administrators with whom they engage in institutional contexts. This encourages students to develop a critical approach to language rather than viewing it through a hierarchical lens. It also provides practice-based professionalization tenets for writing teachers and scholars of the West.

Jennifer Nish's Response

Working at the American University of Beirut (AUB) pushed me to embrace accountability, reciprocity, and expertise in my teaching and research. Reflecting on my experience in Beirut has highlighted the importance of:

1. Supporting multidirectional relationships between writing programs outside the U.S. and those within the U.S.
2. Analyzing types of authority and expertise to value or make space for different sources of expertise in program administration and teaching.

I directed the Communication Skills Program at AUB for a year and a half, starting in my second semester as an assistant professor, which was a very fraught experience. My experiences have taught me that rhetoric and composition as a field needs to engage more fully with the globalization of higher education, exemplified through things like branch campuses, American-style universities outside of the U.S., transnational accreditation processes, and transnational flows of people and resources (such as faculty, students, money, and knowledge) in connection to higher education. I draw inspiration from activists (INCITE!, 2003) who use “community accountability” as a framework for understanding how people in a community are responsible to each other and can respond to harm and violence without relying on police or prisons. WPA work is enmeshed in institutions and formations (universities, academic disciplines) that produce, contribute to, and/or are complicit in structural and epistemic violence. Therefore, WPAs and graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition need to foster (more) accountability between (a) writing programs and the communities in which they operate, and (b) writing program work taking place within and outside the US. The latter is especially important when writing program work involves the exchange of knowledge and resources between institutions that have transnational power and privilege (e.g., U.S. universities with resources and power that come from U.S. imperialism and colonization, directly or indirectly) and people who are marginalized and oppressed within these same violent systems. Examples of these resources and power include U.S. land grant institutions that profit from stolen Indigenous lands (Goodluck et al., 2020); U.S. universities that partner with the U.S. Department of Defense; and university funds tied to systems of violence, such as military violence. Campus movements in solidarity with Palestine that call for divestment, for example, highlight the ways that structures such as university endowments and institutional partnerships can involve transnational power and violence. Education and knowledge production have also been directly and indirectly tied to colonization and imperialism (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014; Vora, 2018).

US graduate programs need to integrate transnational approaches to rhetoric and composition, and particularly to think about how they are preparing graduate students who will increasingly need this knowledge. Many students earn U.S. graduate degrees and then go on to faculty or administrative positions in other countries, work at/with branch or satellite campuses of U.S. universities, engage students from diverse countries in undergraduate and graduate courses, and develop research and

consulting projects that require ethical engagement with differently-positioned people and institutions. There is a strong history of transnational work in U.S. rhetoric and composition scholarship, including work that explores writing programs and their work in many different places, but I don't think that work is as central to the field as it should be (i.e., in research generally or in graduate education).

My experience at AUB also helped me engage more responsibly with culture and multilingualism in my teaching. AUB students have an incredible amount of linguistic and cultural knowledge that I wanted to invite in and value in the classroom. Transnational and multilingual approaches were not an emphasis of faculty in my graduate program, so despite my interest in transnational feminist theory, my coursework and dissertation did not connect transnational feminist theory to composition pedagogy. When I started at AUB, my syllabi, readings, examples, and classroom activities were heavily based on my US-oriented training and background. I wasn't able to learn enough about Beirut, Lebanon, or AUB before I had to start work, so I created opportunities to learn from students within and alongside the syllabus and readings. I did my best to learn and educate myself alongside my teaching because my training in transnational feminist scholarship and practice emphasized the ways that knowledge and practice are shaped by local cultures, histories, and political contexts and therefore the same phenomenon manifests differently in different contexts. As an educator, I wanted to bring localized readings and examples into my courses as soon as possible, but I had limited time and energy. The best approach I could find was to position my courses as a space to which everyone brought knowledge and expertise – me about the fields AUB had hired me to contribute to and the students about approaches to rhetoric, writing, feminism, and activism (topics emphasized in my courses) from their communities. If I struggled to find locally relevant readings, I tried to develop assignments or lessons that engaged with the gap between our context and the reading.

Once, at a post-panel Q&A on transnational American studies at AUB, scholars and audience members discussed how syllabi convey a particular way of thinking or prioritize some types of knowledge. For example, if students always learn about marginalized people and knowledge as a unit or a set of readings that are added on to one lesson or unit, or toward the end of the syllabus, they may not have the time and space to integrate that learning as thoroughly as something that's introduced early on or often. If a course is structured as a chronological introduction to a topic and the earliest lessons focus on a time period when the scholars writing and publishing were mostly cis, straight white men with class privilege teaching similarly-positioned students, the earliest anchors that students have to try to make sense of their emerging knowledge privilege a particular, limited worldview. This challenged me to think about how I incorporate different topics into my syllabi and find approaches that would provide a more diverse set of entry points or theoretical anchors throughout. For example, if students need to be introduced to histories that are exclusionary, I might pair older texts with more recent ones that offer commentary or perspective on that history. I also often incorporate genres other than textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and books in ways that fit with the theme or approach of the course. Although this work started with my attempts

to make sure my teaching was relevant to students in Beirut, it has been central to my development of undergraduate and graduate courses at my subsequent jobs at Texas Tech and Michigan Tech.

Reflection

From Nish's response, I gathered that when Western writing theorists attempt to construct theories about institutional practices in the MENA region without lived experience or historical association with those spaces, they risk doing a disservice to the region's complexities and local knowledge. For Nish, such outsider perspectives often stem from limited exposure to colonial histories and local contexts, leading to analyses of writing tendencies based on cursory observations. As a result, these analyses frequently overlook the inherent cultural and place-specific differences that define postcolonial spaces. Nish highlighted that institutionalized writing initiatives often operate under Western ontologies and axioms. I agree with her suggestion that readers engage with the culture of these institutions if the goal is to foster genuine educational collaborations and ethical initiatives that allow scholars to "learn from the diverse writing practices and pedagogies in the region and [spark] interest in transnational collaborations" (Arnold et al., 2018), rather than a spirit of 'conquering and changing.' Another key theme in Nish's response is the commitment to observing differences in languages and other literacy practices in the region as an ethical approach to interpreting the targeted writing culture. In short, Nish implies that there is no singular understanding of the MENA writing space; writers bring diverse histories and literacies that shape their work.

While managing a writing program in Beirut, Nish highlighted areas in U.S. writing scholarship that, until recently, have often been overlooked, as also noted by Arnold (2016). Nish pointed out that institutions and programs frequently neglect the effects of globalization, focusing instead on the local US without also considering the very dynamics that shape the teaching of writing beyond the Western world. Drawing on her engagement with diverse communities and complex social dynamics in the MENA region, Nish emphasized the potential of transnational feminist writing research to foster more equitable and globally aware practices. In my own writing center work, Nish's perspective has encouraged me to continue incorporating global Anglophone writing perspectives into tutoring and pedagogical conversations. Doing so allows the writers I work with to engage with a wider range of linguistic and cultural perspectives, while also creating space to reflect on how their own language practices and identities shape their writing. In this sense, Nish's insights not only critique existing gaps in writing scholarship but also inform how I, as a writing center WPA, continue to adapt my practice to better support multilingual writers in the US, being mindful and alert to writing studies work outside the US.

Conclusion

Suresh Canagarajah (2018) reminds us that “translingual is not about using language to conform to dominant meanings, conventions, contexts, and social relationships” (p. 43). Considering the importance of the above orientation seriously, in this piece, I have examined how writing pedagogies are shaped by specific linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts, particularly within the MENA region. Through interviews and reflective engagement with participants’ narratives, this article has put U.S.-based writing center practices into dialogue with multilingual writing contexts beyond the United States. I hope this approach was helpful in revealing how writing programs in the MENA region function as sites of linguistic negotiation, relational pedagogy, and locally grounded knowledge-making, and challenging the assumption that U.S.-based models are universally applicable. The findings from interviews underscore the need for U.S. writing programs to move beyond monolingual frameworks by more intentionally engaging with multilingual writers’ lived experiences, expanding the range of texts and literacies valued in writing instruction, and recognizing the situated expertise of educators working across global contexts. By foregrounding these perspectives, I aim to contribute to ongoing efforts to reimagine writing center work as transnational, relational, and responsive to the complex realities of multilingual writers.

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