

# Negotiating Writing Identities Across Languages: Translanguaging as Enrichment of Semiotic Trajectories

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*Drawing on findings from an ethnographic study of the writing practices of three plurilingual writers in Toronto, Canada, this article focuses on the translanguaging practices that these writers engaged with and discusses how these practices enriched their writing processes and products both in English and in their mother tongues. The author explains how these writers' translanguaging was a complex process with five dimensions: (1) lexical, (2) syntactic, (3) rhetorical, (4) conceptual, and (5) presentational (how to present, share, and disseminate text). The article highlights how translanguaging contributed to the participants' larger semiotic engagements. Moving beyond the formulations of semiotic agility as a technical skill, the author explains how translanguaging helped the writers maintain their writing identities by creating semiotic and semantic continuity in their writing trajectories.*

*S'inspirant des résultats d'une étude ethnographique sur les pratiques de rédaction de trois écrivains plurilingues de Toronto au Canada, cet article se concentre sur les pratiques trans-langagières que ces écrivains utilisent et discute de la façon dont ces pratiques ont enrichi leur processus et leurs produits d'écriture à la fois en anglais et dans leur langue maternelle. L'auteur explique comment le translanguaging de ces écrivains était un processus complexe en cinq dimensions : (1) lexical, (2) syntaxique, (3) rhétorique, (4) conceptuel et (5) présentationnel (comment présenter, partager et disséminer le texte). L'article souligne comment le translanguaging a contribué aux engagements sémiotiques plus larges des participants. En se déplaçant au-delà des formulations d'agilité sémiotique comme compétence technique, l'auteur explique comment le translanguaging a permis aux écrivains de maintenir leur identité rédactionnelle en créant une continuité sémiotique et sémantique dans leurs trajectoires rédactionnelles.*

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Dominant writing pedagogies and practices in educational settings in settler colonial states such as the United States, Australia, and English Canada are largely monolingual and monorhetorical: they are in English, and they are essayist. An emphasis on academic and report writing, in English writing

education in general and in English as a second language (ESL) programs, has left little space for the presence of languages other than English, and little room for genre flexibility and creativity. The continual practice of monolingual writing has been the result of hegemonic monoglossic language ideologies that explain using English as the only language of instruction in schools as normal and/or most beneficial. The supremacy of English, as the language of colonizers in these settler colonial countries has happened in tandem with the dominance of essayist literacy as the form of the academic communication that middle- and upper-class Europeans traditionally engaged with. This monorhetorical monolingualism has, thus, helped the colonial agenda of eradicating the languages and genres of “the other,” speakers of other languages and learners from different races and social classes. More recently in a globalized English education market, the industrial compartmentalization and commercialization of English has also contributed to packaging writing classes in simplified genre lessons in standardized forms of English, which is marketed as a “lingua franca” needed to be adopted as the international language of “success.” This ESL market has thus readily embraced the same monorhetorical and monolingual approach as a successful product design strategy to form its writing curricula. Over the past decades, a number of different academic and pedagogical trends have created opportunities for revisiting dominant writing pedagogies by attracting more attention to, for instance, multiliteracies, out-of-school literacies, writing as praxis, *écriture féminine*, post-alphabetic writing, multimodality, and so forth. The *translingual approach* (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011) in writing and composition studies has created yet another possibility for reflection on approaches that can challenge monoglossic and monolingual writing practices.

Drawing on findings from an ethnographic study of the writing practices of three plurilingual writers in Toronto, Canada (Kalan, 2021a), in this article, I focus on the translingual practices that the participants engaged with and discuss how these practices enriched their writing processes and products both in English and in their mother tongues. I explain how these writers’ translanguaging was a complex process with five dimensions: (1) lexical, (2) syntactic, (3) rhetorical, (4) conceptual, and (5) presentational (how to present, share, and disseminate text). Describing my conceptualization of translanguaging, I highlight how the writers’ translanguaging contributed to their larger semiotic engagements and how it helped these writers expand their semiotic trajectories or broader textual experiences (whether linguistic or non-linguistic and whether written or non-written). I also discuss how translanguaging, as a multiplier of semiotic possibilities, helped the writers maintain their writing identities by creating semiotic and thus semantic continuity in their writing trajectories. Translanguaging, in all the aforesaid forms, helped the writers who participated in my research to preserve their writing identities, which had matured and solidified in their mother tongues.

## Brief Overview of Translingual Writing Research

Conceptualizations that highlight inter- and cross-lingual connections have traditionally been of interest to both second language education (Cummins, 2019; Lewis et al., 2012) and writing studies (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2001). With a renewed identity and reenergized theoretical orchestration, the North American applied linguistics scene has refocused attention on translingual connections in a recent language theory movement that draws on the concept of *translanguaging* (Conteh, 2018; Li, 2018). *Translanguaging* is a concept that was first developed in conversations about bilingual education in the Welsh context. Later it was introduced into English and expanded by García and her collaborators in the United States (Bartlett & García, 2011; García, 2009; García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Lin, 2017; Li & García, 2017). They mainly mobilized this concept to disrupt the English hegemony for empowering Spanish speakers in English-Spanish dual-language programs. An important component of this new movement is intensified concern for more inclusive language learning environments where students' translanguaging is recognized as legitimate and valuable linguistic performance in the process of teaching and learning, an agenda shared with another similar research trend, *plurilingualism* (Galante, 2020; Piccardo, 2013).

Among different fields and research areas, translanguaging—as a discourse framed with the same or other terminology—has also attracted attention in writing studies and second language writing (Canagarajah, 2013; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011). In scholarly conversations centering around writing, the term “translingual” was popularized by Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur's (2011) manifesto, which called for a “translingual approach” in composition studies:

In short, a translingual approach argues for (1) honoring the power of all language users to shape language to specific ends; (2) recognizing the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within the United States and globally; and (3) directly confronting English monolingualist expectations by researching and teaching how writers can work with and against, not simply within, those expectations. Viewing differences not as a problem but as a resource, the translingual approach promises to revitalize the teaching of writing and language. By addressing how language norms are actually heterogeneous, fluid, and negotiable, a translingual approach directly counters demands that writers must conform to fixed, uniform standards. (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 305)

A focus on pluri- and translingual practices in writing has inspired a variety of different research foci. Some have studied the relation between translanguaging and student identity (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). For instance,

translingual writing has been discussed as connected with transnational identities (Canagarajah, 2020; Ordeman, 2021) in that “[t]he translingual subject can be defined as an identity position situated in the liminal spaces between nation-states” (Canagarajah, 2020, p. 50). Translingual practices have also been viewed as the linguistic engagement that can challenge institutional divisions and disciplinary alienation (Horner & Tetreault, 2017). Ayash (2019) has recently published critical ethnographies that focus on “translingual realities” in order to highlight “linguistic-ideological hegemonies in the teaching and learning of university-level writing” (p. 8).

There is also a growing number of publications focusing on how teachers can create space in the classroom for translanguaging as a pedagogical approach. For instance, Machado and Hartman (2019) and Zapata and Laman (2016) studied translingual text production. Galante (2021) and Beiler and Dewilde (2020) have written about translation as a valuable writing practice in multilingual classes. Guerra (2016) studied how translingual writing classrooms cultivate rhetorical sensibility. Machado and Hartman (2020) highlighted how translingual writing pedagogies can facilitate a focus on identity as a form of resistance. There have also been publications interested in the assessment and evaluation of translingual writing (Inoue, 2017; Lee, 2016).

With growing interest in translanguaging as a conceptual framework, the liberal use of the term “translanguaging” in conferences and publications has become a source of methodological concern in research communities interested in interlingual connections in second language writing (Silva & Wang, 2021). The popularity and frequency of the use of the word “translanguaging” has raised questions about similarities and differences between theories and applications that are packaged under this label (Poza, 2017). Matsuda (2014), a sceptic about the potentials of the translingual approach in second language writing, has written about the problem of “inflating” (p. 478) the term “translingual” in L2 writing theory and research:

Over the last few years, I have reviewed numerous manuscripts submitted to major journals in the field, and while many of them mention translingual writing as necessary for their work, they often fail to define the concept or to use it consistently. (p. 479)

Concerns about defining “translanguaging” in the context of one’s work in the current state of the field are justified. In the next section, I explain my conceptualization of “translanguaging” in connection with the findings presented in this article.

## Translanguaging as a Catalyst for Multisemiotic Engagement

Writing education in North America is heavily commercialized and compartmentalized in an industrial manner (Mbembe, 2016; Stenberg, 2015; Welch & Scott, 2016). As I have explained elsewhere in more detail (Kalan, 2021b), resembling Fordian assembly-line techniques, writing education is offered to students at different points of their education in components that are not always holistically and organically connected (for a Canadian case study illustrating educational compartmentalization, see Gentil, 2018). Introductory writing seminars, for instance, are separated from content-rich courses such as history, economics, and STEM courses. Typically, there are sharp demarcations between academic, creative, and technical writing courses. Second language writing is generally severed from mainstream writing education. In ESL schools, second language writing classes are typically taught separately from other skills and topics such as listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar. ESL writing classes are also strictly levelled: introductory, intermediate, and advanced. As a result of our compartmentalized educational structures, writing education has turned into refined content and pedagogical packages that limit learners' experiences with genre and rhetorical freedom, experimentation, and exploration. Learners in this model go through a controlled exposure mechanism which cuts out more complex, and sometimes messier, aspects of writing events.

Curious about what writing students might be missing as a result of this industrial approach, I conducted a research project to study plurilingual writers' *organic writing practices*. I perceive "organic writing practices" as engagements with textual production that encompass all the dimensions of writing, beyond the current narrow institutional categorizations of writing styles, genres, and rhetorical norms. I, for instance, wanted to learn about the personal, affective, sociocultural, discursive, multilingual, and multisemiotic layers of the act of writing. In this sense, writers' official writing (for instance, school and university assignments) and published texts are only part of their larger organic pool of writing that includes their out-of-school, online, genre-fluid, multilingual, and also incomplete and unedited writing. The empirical research that I conducted showed that organic writing practices that empower plurilingual writers are in fact practices that *complexify* intellectual, literate, linguistic, and textual practices rather than *simplify* them in small unconnected packages (Kalan, 2021a). Whereas the current industrial model limits and controls exposure to linguistic and rhetorical events by aggressive levelling, streaming, and refining, organic writing practices maximize exposure to textual complexity. A key component of this complexity is the multisemiotic events that writers take part in:

Instead of ... primarily a thing-in-itself ... writing [is] part and parcel of a larger semiotic activity that constitutes only one kind of human communicative interaction ... Understood from this perspective,

writing, which always appears in the form of a text, must take its place among the heteroglossia of other signifying elements that give meaning to cultural life and that in a sense, enable us to triangulate and make sense of the world and the people who inhabit it. (Kent, 2011, p. xix)

A multiplicity of semiotic engagements, as a result of movement between diverse linguistic, cultural, institutional, and discourse communities, creates opportunities for more effective semantic triangulation and meaning making. Semiotic interactions are varied and can include engagement with different art forms, digital platforms, cultural spaces, and discourse practices. Translanguaging multiplies semiotic interactions in all these textual, cultural, and discursive ecologies in that it enables plurilinguists to cultivate linguistic interactions in more languages, cultures, and communities, and thus in a larger number of semiotic conventions. Translanguaging is an important factor in intensifying and complexifying semiotic interactions, a catalyst for what I have elsewhere termed *radical semiotic engagement* (Kalan, 2021a). Semiotic engagement is radical when (a) it is free and frequent without the anxieties involved in following institutional and curricular notions of what counts as acceptable writing and (b) it challenges rigid and regimented linguistic and, thus, semiotic practices.

Accordingly, in this article, I use the term “translanguaging” to specifically indicate cross- and interlingual interactions that enrich the larger network of one’s semiotic experiences. Here, I use the words “cross-lingual” and “interlingual” broadly and interchangeably to indicate any convergence or interaction among the languages of a speaker’s linguistic repertoire or any coappearance of those languages that can complexify the speaker’s linguistic and textual performances. This conceptualization of translanguaging can help highlight the significance of organic textual practices in reaction to dynamics propelled by current compartmentalized, monolingual, print-based, and essayist writing education. In this sense, I use “translanguaging” in this article to refer to interlingual connections that contribute to what social semioticians have longed called “semiotic complexity” (Biggiero, 2001; Engebretsen, 2012; Goebel et al., 2019; Stöckl, 2009), or in other words: translanguaging as a trigger for multiplying semiotic possibilities and interactions, not only at the level of signs, but the interactions between writers and communities, institutions, discourses, and spaces. Translanguaging in this sense is about language, but it is about much more; it is about the semiotic complexity that results from moving between cultural, intellectual, and discursive spaces, or about “the connections between signs used in one communicative encounter with signs used in other encounters from other timespaces ... their relationship with the mobility of their users” (Goebel et al., 2019, p. 3). Accordingly, my interest in translanguaging is partly about interlingual relations, but also about how translanguaging contributes to semiotic complexifications that can resist

dominant pedagogical, rhetorical, and disseminational practices in colonial and industrial educational spaces.

## Description of the Research Project

The translingual practices that I discuss in this article are the findings from a 4-year participatory ethnography (Blomberg & Karasti, 2012) conducted to study the literate lives of three adult female plurilingual writers in Toronto, Canada. Participatory ethnography “addresses a shift in the conceptualization and practice of fieldwork relations and methodology toward a more dialogical relationship between researcher and informant” (Darrouzet et al., 2009, p. 66). In accordance with this approach, my participants were treated as coinvestigators and were invited to analyze their own experiences with translanguaging. The participants, who successfully wrote in English as an additional language, had recently arrived in Canada. The adverb “successfully” is intended to mean that the participants’ writing performances were recognized and accepted by Canadian literary, professional, and/or academic communities. This recognition happened by these communities’ willingness to publish these writers’ work and/or to bestow intellectual membership on them through, for instance, roles and positions in their associations. Thus, the participants’ writing skills were measured by how specialized communities perceived their writing rather than by a focus on their technical command of English and English writing.

The participants had different ethnic backgrounds and mother tongues. Moreover, each participant was recruited to represent second language writers who engage with a different writing genre. Clarice (all names are pseudonyms) was a Brazilian PhD student, who wrote in Portuguese and English. Clarice had published a number of academic papers in English, and a few in Portuguese. Choman was a Kurdish novelist who published her first novel in English only two years after her arrival in Canada. She wrote in Farsi, Kurdish, and English. Magda, who wrote in Hungarian, German, and English, was a Hungarian immigrant working in a governmental ministry as a professional development consultant and coordinator. Magda, in her position, heavily engaged with technical and transactional writing.

In the process of the research, I tried to identify the participants’ organic literacy practices that might have led to their success as plurilingual writers. The questions that guided the inquiry were:

1. What organic writing practices do effective plurilingual writers engage with?
2. What are the participants’ major intercultural and translingual practices? How do these practices figure in their organic connections with text?
3. What literate, artistic, and intellectual histories have shaped the participants’ writing identities? And what is the role of translanguaging in these histories?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted multiple in-depth phenomenological interviews (Vagle, 2018) to explore these writers' perceptions of their writing across and between languages and cultures. The interviews included individual and group exchanges both in person and in writing. In addition to the interviews, I observed the participants at work and at home whenever possible. I also observed their online writing activities. I, of course, collected all the participants' writings (if available) in all the languages that they wrote in. These writings included their published work along with unpublished texts that had some personal or professional significance for them. Memos describing the content and histories of each piece of writing were also used as a source of data. They explained when and where each text was written and what its content was. During and after data collection, thematic data analysis was conducted for major themes, meanings, and concepts in collaboration with the participants, who acted as coresearchers. This participatory role was significant because it would allow the participants to actively make sense of their remembrances of their literate trajectories in relation to the Anglo-American writing practices that they had adopted after immigration.

Following ethnographic writing traditions, below I share my findings organized in themes forming sections that bring together literature, narrative, data, analysis, and theory. "Whereas research reports are designed to allow readers to quickly access the components that most interest them ... ethnographies embrace literary approaches, which involve presenting the research as an unfolding series of examples, episodes, observations, contextual/informational insights, and epiphanies" (Harrison, 2018, p. 122).

## Findings and Analyses

My exploration of the literate lives of these plurilingual writers had a number of enlightening moments. I had deliberately recruited participants who engaged with different genres: Choman, fiction; Clarice, academic writing; and Magda, transactional and technical writing. In the process of my research, I realized that this categorization was hardly useful. Although the participants constructed their official CVs to project the image of a specialist in writing a certain genre for professional and promotional purposes, in their unfiltered literate lives, they engaged with a multitude of genres. Inspired by my first research question about the significance of organic writing practices beyond narrow institutional categorizations, I realized that an apt characterization of these writers' genre practices was to describe them as plurilingual writers with intensive multigenre experiences.

Moreover, this heavy genre engagement, rather than the result of a particular attachment to writing, was in fact only one manifestation of Choman, Clarice, and Magda's larger semiotic activities, including their engagement with art, music, drama, and filmmaking. From this perspective,



these writers' writing performances were significantly scaffolded by their larger semiotic experiences. Moreover, these semiotic engagements were not only a technical involvement for the sake of literate growth. The writers' multisemiotic lives were, more importantly, the outcome of their exploration of multiple professional, intellectual, social, and political discourses in different countries and cultures at different points in their lives. Interestingly, most of these discursive engagements occurred in out-of-school contexts.

Understanding plurilingual writers' literate lives requires identifying and making sense of experiences that diversify plurilingual writers' exposure to and interactions with multiple semiotic systems, and with the discourse communities and intellectual paradigms within which their semiotic interactions occur. One significant experience of this kind for my participants was translanguaging. Clarice, Choman, and Magda's plurilingualism allowed them to be part of multiple cultural ecologies. Specifically in writing, the writers' translanguaging provided them with plenty of intellectual courage for semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical experimentation. In what follows, I will explain how these writers' translanguaging had five different manifestations: (1) lexical, (2) syntactic, (3) rhetorical, (4) conceptual, and (5) presentational (how to present, share, and disseminate text). In the following sections, I unpack how the writers engaged with these forms of translanguaging. Next, I explain why plurilingual writers' semiotic agility should not be interpreted as technical dexterity only. Translanguaging intensifies trans-semiotic connections that sustain plurilinguals' writing identities across cultures.

### (1) *Lexical Translanguaging*

Clarice, Magda, and Choman performed lexical translanguaging while they wrote in English. They tapped into their plurilingual lexical repertoires in the process of writing in English in order to enrich their texts. These writers took advantage of three major types of lexical translanguaging. First, they directly embedded non-English words in their English texts to connect more deeply with the concepts that had been borrowed from non-Anglo-American contexts. When discussing the use of non-English words in Clarice's academic papers, she emphasized that she used her knowledge of Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, and French to include the original linguistic representations of theoretical concepts that the English-speaking world had borrowed from those languages. Besides being an attempt to recognize the contribution of other cultures to scholarly debates in English, using those words would create a tone of epistemic authority and academic ownership in Clarice's writing because of her text's linguistic proximity to the original concepts. She spoke about Paulo Freire's terminology as a more accessible example because of Freire's popularity in the English-speaking academia:

Sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously I use Latin equivalents ... for instance, Freire's *conscientização* for *critical*

*consciousness* or *modelo bancário* for the *banking model* ... I mean I don't do it to show off. For me it is a sort of epistemological attempt to better connect with meanings or better communicate the concepts with the readers by highlighting their lexical roots.

Next to the direct insertion of non-English words within the text, the second form of lexical translanguaging was the word choice based on non-Anglo-American textual aesthetics. For example, Choman spoke about her conversations with the editors of her novels about how the frequency and intensity of the literary devices that she used had impacted her choice of words:

In Kurdish and Persian literature, literary language is typically highly decorated in different ways. For example, I'm used to using a lot of alliterations to add to the musicality of the text. On different occasions, I've had conversations with my Canadian and American editors and agents about using alliteration. They believe I overdo it! They consider it bad taste ... at least in English fiction. I sometimes make concessions, but I don't feel I can totally give up.

Following this interview with Choman, I reread her stories with closer attention to her literary style. Use of alliteration with high frequency, as a translanguing literary practice, had impacted Choman's choice of vocabulary. Despite the editors' view, Choman's alliterations significantly contributed to the creation of her poetic prose style, for instance: /w/ and /l/ in "whirling into the wildfire;" /s/ in "the sun had sauntered down and disappeared;" and /m/ in "milky manteau matching her hair." Besides creating her signature poetic prose, these alliterations gave Choman's stories, typically set in Kurdish contexts, a local character deviating from dominant sonic aesthetics in English creative writing. In connection with our conversation about lexical translanguaging, Choman's native literary style imposed word choices that would not occur otherwise, although it did not happen in the form of direct insertion of non-English words.

The third type of lexical translanguaging was also indirect and rather complex. Magda's exposure to literary works in multiple languages had provided her with a rich lexical pool. Part of this reservoir was the English vocabulary that Magda had learned, not as an English learner in a school context, but as an avid reader curious about international literature. Many educated immigrants, before immigration, initially encounter English in scientific, technical, and literary texts with advanced vocabulary rather than in levelled courses in language schools. They often tend to use those English words as part of their specialized language in their mother tongues as physicians, engineers, managers, writers, and so on. When put in ESL education contexts, they use the same English vocabulary in their English writing. This vocabulary may not be readily accessible to native speakers of English because it might be too technical or not frequently used in everyday

English. The use of these words enriches their writing by giving it an erudite, scientific, or technical tone. Magda was conscious about this effect:

This interestingly happens with English words that I had learned from English literary books, Orwell, Hardy, Swift, and other older texts. I sometime use those words and they might sound weird or old-fashioned, but to me they are okay because those great writers used them.

For Magda, then, using loanwords that had long been internalized as part of her native vocabulary repertoire in her English writing was a significant form of lexical translanguaging.

Attention to translanguaging practices has given momentum to research interested in lexical translanguaging in the classroom (see for instance, Amgott, 2020; Bussert-Webb & Masso, 2018; Sherris, 2019). My research contributes to this trend by highlighting the value of direct and, at the same time, more subtle forms of interlingual vocabulary use. In mainstream writing pedagogy, lexical translanguaging is often treated as interference. In contrast with this view, I tried to exemplify forms of lexical translanguaging that plurilinguals take advantage of to enrich their English writing. Lexical translanguaging can elevate the quality of writing by allowing the appearance of less frequently used vocabulary, and thus by loading the text with new semiotic and semantic possibilities, an approach typically adopted in quality scientific and literary writing (Li-na, 2016).

## *(2) Syntactic Translanguaging*

Describing her experiences with writing across literary traditions, Choman often called herself an “accented” writer. I asked her to describe the “accent” in her writing:

In Farsi when I only read the dialogues and the language that the characters used, I could tell you what their job was, for instance, or their social status. I could tell how educated the characters were and where they came from ... only from the way they spoke ..., but I still don't have this ability in English.

The way the characters speak includes grammatical features that, for instance, make their speech colloquial or formal, features such as contractions, fragmented sentences, double negatives, non-standard grammar constructs (e.g., “less” vs. “fewer”), or the length of sentences. Choman continued, focusing specifically on the role of grammar:

When I think about a character ... and write about them in English ..., I feel I unconsciously use the speech features ... like grammar, register, or vocabulary ... that I imagine for the characters in Kurdish or Farsi. Then I mix those with what I know from English. It's always difficult to tell which is which.

This grammatical hybridization was an important component of dynamics that gave Choman's prose a sound that she referred to as an "accent." In this form of syntactic translanguaging, the structures are error-free but less familiar than the more established, or more frequently heard, grammatical constructs. Rather than functioning as an "error" or "interference," this formalistic hybridity made Choman's fiction exceptionally strong in that it gave her stories, often about Kurdish characters, a local colour that suitably fit the narrative and elevated the text aesthetically. Choman's translanguaging in this sense was an advantage at the service of multiplying textual tones through alternative syntactic constructs. The "accent" was, in fact, an advantage rather than a problem.

Clarice had similarly experienced the connection between syntactic translanguaging and semiotic enrichment in her academic writing. "Long sentences" are typically deemed as undesirable in dominant Anglo-American editorial practices. However, in most Romance languages, such as Portuguese (Clarice's mother tongue), there is less sensitivity about the length of sentences, and they are an accepted rhetorical feature (LoCastro, 2008). Long sentences in Indo-European languages, including English and Portuguese, are typically created through grammatical constructs such as clauses (adjectival, adverbial, and nominal), and participle and appositive phrases:

In my articles, sentences often grew longer than the length observed in most English academic writing. I always felt those additional clauses and phrases created more space for me to unpack the complexities involved in concepts. Because I write a lot in English now, I feel I have long moved out of that phase.

Clarice did not heavily engage with Portuguese academic writing and comfortably adopted Anglo-American academic writing as the norm. Nevertheless, her perception of the function of additional phrases and clauses is important because she regarded it as the clarification of complex concepts. This interpretation stands in contrast with the dominant editorial view in English writing that long sentences create ambiguity. Clarice saw her longer sentences as a rhetorical means to demonstrate and unpack complexity. In connection with my definition of translanguaging, Clarice and Choman's grammatical hybridization, rather than a deviation from the norm, can be explained as enriching the process of signification by creating new aesthetic, stylistic, and semantic possibilities.

### (3) *Rhetorical Translanguaging*

As stated in my second research question, I was interested to learn what it meant to write across rhetorical cultures dominant in different languages. An area of inquiry in second language writing research, *intercultural rhetoric* has long brought attention to the fact that English learners create different forms of rhetorical fusion by combining their native rhetoric with English

composition formats. The attitude of the field, however, has been rather problematic in that it often portrays the presence of the writer's mother rhetoric as an undesirable cultural influence. Intercultural rhetoric is an updated version of Kaplan's (1966) *contrastive rhetoric*, which has been criticized as reductionist, prescriptive, essentialist, and insensitive to cultural differences (Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Scollon, 1997; Spack, 1997). Even in the later reconceptualization of the field as "intercultural rhetoric" (Connor et al., 2008; Ene et al., 2019), the focus is still on identifying rhetorical differences in different cultures rather than actual "intercultural" rhetorical encounters in order to create genre diversity.

In contrast with this dominant mentality in the field of intercultural rhetoric, I was interested to see if my participants' experiences showed that rhetorical fusions could in fact positively impact writing outcomes in additional languages, although in constructions that might not entirely look like "English rhetorical structures." Intercultural rhetoric has been traditionally concerned with academic writing in English because the field developed in response to questions about how to teach writing to international university students for academic purposes. For this reason, in the process of my research, I mostly addressed intercultural rhetoric in Clarice's writing because she engaged with academic writing more than the other participants. I wanted to see how she perceived the impact of intercultural rhetoric on writing and publishing in English. She explained:

When I first started writing—you know for real—in a North American context, I was pretty much trying to assimilate my writing to that particular venue [Anglo-American academic rhetoric required by professors and journals]. [After a while], I started using all my [Brazilian] criticality into my writing and all of a sudden people started to like it. And I was like, "Oh, okay, awesome." Then I continued. ... It is also a matter of being confident enough to know who you are and to know that there is value in it.

I asked Clarice to clarify what she meant by her "criticality" and how it impacted her rhetorical choices. She explained, "In English you teach school kids simplified structures like the five-paragraph essay. At university everything changes all of a sudden. You are required to provide more analysis ... more critical reflection." In contrast, Clarice felt, there was more room for intellectual maneuver in Brazilian Portuguese rhetoric taught at school. As a graduate student in Canada, Clarice felt she had a rhetorical advantage over some of her Canadian friends, who struggled to move beyond formulated linear paragraph development to offer deeper analyses: "You know ... it's an intellectual trend in the South ... with theorists like Freire, who is more known in the North." South and Latin American intellectuals have long conceptualized reading and writing as complex processes that involve ideology, politics, and praxis. Far from the Anglo-Americentric

scholarly conversation about second language writing, there is a research trend in philosophy of rhetoric in Latin America that discusses the necessity of creating alternative discourses about writing and rhetoric:

[C]ritics have tended to generate answers to this question by theorizing a Latin American singularity as an exception to Euroamerican discourse. This type of thinking has been used to ground the critical practice of locating counterhegemonic alternatives to Western thought and subjectivity, and in turn, to establish the claim that geopolitically local subalternized rhetorical practices form an exceptionally unique way to undermine and resist the West. (Cortez, 2018, p. 125)

Clarice's critique of an overemphasis on the "five-paragraph essay" in schools is in line with concerns about the industrialized nature of North American writing education which was discussed in the introduction. Over-regulation of writing in Anglo-American schools—through centralized curricula, drills-based mass instruction, and rubric-centered industrial assessment—has resulted in a genre hierarchy with the English essay, refined and simplified, at the top. Rubrics in this system are used as industrial assessment tools that homogenize rhetorical practices for mass production of assignments. Such a curricular and assessment approach saves time and facilitates the management of large numbers of students. It, however, comes with a price: A monogener mentality that, wittingly or unwittingly, (1) eradicates the organic diversity of genres, and (2) promotes lack of interest in complex analysis, and the rhetorical flexibility that it often requires. This industrial mentality particularly challenges second language writers who are used to more organic writing processes. Setenay Yener, a Turkish college student in the United States, was featured in Robertson's *Writing Across Borders* (2005), an influential documentary about intercultural rhetoric. Setenay explained her experiences with over-regulation of writing in American universities:

When I first got here and started my college education, and started taking writing lessons, I was really surprised at all the format and guidelines I had to pay attention to because you had to do everything in a certain way like 12 font and double spacing and all these things I'd never learned before. I had never used a computer before I came here, and I was really surprised about that because there's all these guidelines you have to follow and all these formats you have to pay attention to. (0:57)

It is difficult to claim that this amount of stylistic and rhetorical control is based on a realistic vision of good quality writing. As Clarice explained, in most meaningful academic writing, you benefit from rhetorical flexibility rather than genre replication. In the influential Bakhtinian conceptualization of genre (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), "each reproduction of a text by a subject ...

is in fact a new performance, a new text, a new event” (Thomson,1984, p. 31). Thus, representations of a single genre are as much about differences as about similarities. From this perspective, second language writers’ rhetorical backgrounds, rather than a problem, can provide them with the ability to create rhetorical fusions that can best serve their communicative needs. Rhetorical translanguaging is an organic practice that can multiply textual and semiotic possibilities, and hence provide plurilingual writers with a reliable command of handling nuanced genre differences.

#### *(4) Conceptual Translanguaging*

One major cross-lingual transfer that Choman, Magda, and Clarice took advantage of was reusing the concepts that they had developed in their non-English texts in their English writing. These concepts included themes, subjects, meanings, philosophies, and ideas that these writers were attached to and had worked with over the years, often sociocultural issues that preoccupied them. The flow of these concepts between their texts in multiple languages was a form of semantic translanguaging, or the transfer of meanings from one language to another. The conceptual threads that thematically connected these writers’ texts in multiple languages were vividly visible. Consciously or unconsciously, Magda, Clarice, and Choman had created a consistent conceptual foundation in their writings across languages that functioned as an intellectual safety net for them to lean against, a robust reservoir of meanings that they could comfortably draw upon when needed. This conceptual resource was particularly helpful when they wrote in a new language because it provided them with more time to spend on linguistic features rather than ideas.

Magda, for instance, was deeply attached to issues about sustainability and the environment. When she was still in Europe, she worked on a number of writing projects with other European colleagues. She wrote guidelines and educational materials in Hungarian, German, and also English. The theme that connected those materials was sustainability. The same conceptual orientation in Canada informed a significant portion of her English textual production, with the documents that she, as a consultant, prepared for her professional development workshops. Choman had written stories in Farsi that centered around women’s issues, especially the struggles of Kurdish women. She never managed to publish her Farsi fiction because of the censorship in Iran. Nevertheless, after her immigration to Canada, she used the same themes in her English writing, in both her creative writing and journalism. Clarice, similarly, used her knowledge of drama as a conceptual thread that connected parts of her textual life in different languages. Clarice studied drama in Brazil for a while. She became interested in Brazilian dramatists such as Augusto Boal, who created a theatrical movement called the Theatre of the Oppressed. She later used drama as a pedagogical tool in

her ESL classes, in which she cowrote plays with her students in English. As a researcher in Canada, she wrote academic papers in English about the impact of performance-based pedagogies in language education.

As explained previously, when I use the term “translanguaging” in this article, I refer to cross-lingual performances that help multiply writers’ semiotic interactions, which can in turn facilitate writers’ migrations between genres, institutions, and cultures. How does conceptual translanguaging contribute to our semiotic activities? Conceptual translanguaging provides a solid semantic base for communicators. It equips them with a sense of certainty and confidence about the meaning they intend to communicate. Once writers are confident about their knowledge of their content, they can more freely engage with constructing new semiotic possibilities to present that content. Semantic confidence, thus, encourages semiotic flexibility and experimentation.

The connection between cross-lingual transfer of conceptual and linguistic skills has been extensively discussed in second language education (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006). Cummins (2017), for instance, wrote:

[A]lthough the surface aspects ... of different languages can be distinguished, there is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages. This common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related proficiency from one language to another. (p. 106)

The notion of conceptual translanguaging, discussed in this section, is another contribution to the literature that highlights cross-lingual transfer. Here, however, I am specifically focusing on conceptual transfer in second language writing. I would also like to stress that conceptual fluency can facilitate linguistic engagement in learned languages by creating more space for semiotic experimentation.

### *(5) Presentational Translanguaging*

Any semiotic performance, including writing in additional languages, occurs in a mode of presentation with two dimensions that, to some degree, shape the structure of the semiotic product: First, the material framing of the semiotic structure (oral, written, PowerPoint, film, sculpture, painting ... ), and second, the venue of presentation and the rules that govern it (conferences, journals, festivals, art galleries ... ). Writing processes are not separable from presentational contexts; they are rather the outcome of dissemination dynamics. When language learners engage with linguistic performance in a new language, they often face new presentational circumstances. Such an encounter is challenging, yet, at the same time, it sharpens language users’ genre dexterity by encouraging them to create a diversity of semiotic arrangements.



In educational settings, a presentational culture also includes the nature of written assignments and the assessment culture. Evaluation of written text in schools and universities in Anglophone countries is about much more than the text itself. There is always a certain presentational etiquette to follow: dominant genres, submission culture, required styles, knowledge of rubrics, making sense of instructions, negotiation strategies (such as asking for extensions), perceptions of text borrowing (for instance, beliefs about plagiarism), feedback traditions, and grading approaches. Instead of approaching students' perceptions of effective presentation as cultural issues that need to be fixed, in my research, I was interested in instances of presentational translanguaging that enriched my participants' writing performances.

My research with Choman, Clarice, and Magda shows that one important form of translanguaging in second language writing is the process of revisiting perceptions of dissemination rules when writers move from one linguistic and cultural context to another. The subject of presentational differences and similarities between different cultures emerged at different points in my conversations with Choman, Clarice, and Magda. Choman, for instance, thought that in Canadian organizations, the communication culture was significantly different from what she had experienced before:

The shift from an oral to a written communication culture was an interesting experience. If you are after funding to make a film, as a few of my friends and I intend to do, you should prepare an application package including letters, proposals, histories, but if you want to deal with a Kurdish TV station, there is no written application; it's all oral interaction.

Part of Choman's translanguaging as an immigrant would occur within the larger context of cross-institutional presentation cultures. She had to explore new genres to put together application materials. Similarly, for her creative and journalistic writing, she needed to observe publishing dynamics and institutional presentation etiquettes: "You should know who has what redlines. I know I can say things in what I write for this newspaper that I cannot say when I write for that one. I play with redlines."

Clarice also shared the same experience: "The power relational aspect of the language also includes the mechanics of the language. I will mindfully choose the lexical terms and/or grammar styles necessary so I can have access to a certain type of publication or audience." These experiences are significant because they highlight the impact of dissemination dynamics on writing traditions. Dissemination dynamics, particularly those in new presentational cultures, are a force imposed by imminent communicative and hermeneutic circumstances. Thus, a journey across presentation traditions creates space for new semiotic arrangements and possible rhetorical fusions.

Rhetorical fusions, as opposed to rhetorical conformity, are an organic identifier of translanguaging practices because presentation requirements cannot always dictate full control over multilinguals' rhetorical decisions. After clarifying her consciousness about stylistic requirements of different English journals, highlighted in the above quotation, Clarice added:

The problem is when major changes are necessary in order to have access to an audience. In this case, I have to make sure I'm not selling my soul to the devil, that is, changing my language to the point that the meaning of my message doesn't represent what I originally wanted.

Clarice's warning about "selling one's soul" in the process of stylistic and rhetorical decision-making highlights the fusional character of presentational translanguaging, and translanguaging in general. As stressed so far, translanguaging in the process of writing in additional languages is an asset at the service of multiplying semiotic possibilities. An emphasis on the resultant semiotic agility, however, should not be interpreted as developing technical mastery for a smoother migration from one writing culture to another only. As Clarice underlined, while facilitating comfortable rhetorical transfer and adaptation, semiotic agility also enables plurilingual writers to create rhetorical fusions that help them avoid the "devil" of unquestionable conformity to the dominant presentation ecosystem. This dynamic will help plurilingual writers assert their identities when they write in a new language. In this article, similarly, an emphasis on the multisemiotics of translanguaging in second language writing is not intended to promote technical agility only, but it is meant to help envision a form of critical semiotics that seeks a rhetorical fluidity that can embrace English learners' semiotic legacies. I will unpack this critical dimension in the following section by clarifying the connection between semiotic agility and identity.

## **Semiotic Agility and Writing Identity**

An emphasis on pluri- and translanguaging complexity as a means of developing semiotic agility could be interpreted as a technical view of translanguaging. Based on a skills-based interpretation, translanguaging helps learners multiply semiotic experiences: the more semiotic engagement learners have, the more prepared they can be for handling diverse forms of textual consumption and production. In other words, through a technical lens, translanguaging trains one's semiotic muscles for wrestling with new genres and rhetorical practices. Nevertheless, my research shows that there is more to translanguaging than technical semiotic training.

In my third research question, I had asked what intellectual histories had shaped the participants' writing identities, and how translanguaging contributed to writers' intellectual journeys. Translanguaging helps writers

maintain their writing identities while migrating between cultures and languages. The current industrial writing education, as previously explained, delivers writing programs, courses, and lessons in ready-made packages that focus on specific genres and skills. Such regimented curriculum will not leave much room for recognition of students' complex and diverse writing trajectories. This negligence becomes particularly problematic in second language writing, where teachers and curriculum developers might be detached from students' mother tongues and cultures and thus struggle to comprehend students' intellectual trajectories. In this process of heavy compartmentalization, there is little space for linguistic, semiotic, rhetorical, and genre diversity. In the current writing education, we are too busy teaching "writing skills" to treat students as "writers" with unique writing trajectories and intellectual legacies that shape their writing identities (Moje & Luke, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2018; Williamson, 2019). Nevertheless, organic writing practices are significantly informed by students' writing identities:

Because a writing identity is a way a learner understands writing and the self as a writer, this construct includes beliefs about what writing is, who may write and for what purposes, evaluations of personal ability, effects of past experiences, and expectations about how one might use writing or who one might become as a writer (Hall, 2010, 2012; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Consideration of these facets of children's writing development goes beyond concern for the skills and strategies that comprise the technical ability to write. Writing identities give broader consideration to the totality of the child and the cognitive, psychological, and social-emotional relationships to writing. (Wagner, 2016, p. 32)

The connection between translanguaging and identity has been studied in multiple projects (see for instance, Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Dutton & Rushton, 2021; Schreiber, 2015; Li, 2014). By extension, translanguaging can, indeed, be understood as a means of sustaining learners' writing identities.

Choman, Clarice, and Magda's engagement with translanguaging not only enriched their semiotic experiences, but also helped them maintain their writing identity all along their journeys across rhetorical traditions, languages, institutions, and cultures. As illustrated in the previous sections, Magda, Clarice, and Choman's lexical translanguaging enabled them to make use of their intellectual legacies by inserting the vocabulary that represented their past textual engagements. They used grammatical translanguaging to recreate the syntactic tone in which they used to communicate while writing. Similarly, their rhetorical fusions created a textual voice that would resemble their previous writing. More visibly, Clarice, Choman, and Magda's conceptual translanguaging, created a thematic continuity that connected their writings in different languages, cementing a semantic harmony that encompassed their seemingly unrelated textual projects. Representational translanguaging

was also significant in that it allowed them to make use of their presentational habits in the post-production phase in organic combination with the new presentational cultures that they entered through immigration or by learning a new language. Representational translanguaging provided Clarice, Magda, and Choman with a sense of authorial ownership that confirmed their writing identities. To sum up, semiotic multiplicity, intensified by translanguaging, creates space for plurilingual learners and writers to reinsert their linguistic and intellectual identity in the process of writing in additional languages.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

Embracing learners' translingual practices in writing classes can be interpreted as allowing students' first languages to physically appear in their English writing. Although a commendable practice, this pedagogical interpretation does not do justice to the potentials of translanguaging as defined in this article. This interpretation, in lukewarm pedagogical practice, can lead to viewing the presence of students' first languages in the process of writing in English *only* as a step towards the ultimate goal of complete transition to English language and rhetoric. It is important that teachers adopt more complex notions of translanguaging in writing that treat students' languages as connected with their semiotic, and thus artistic, cultural, and intellectual lives. This shift of mentality is significant because it is not realistic to ask students to produce good writing and at the same time undermine their intellectual and writing identities. Teachers need to understand that the latter view of translanguaging often takes the form of advocating for patience for the gradual disappearance of students' first languages by tolerating their presence from time to time.

A move away from viewing translanguaging as first language (L1) lexical and syntactic interference to appreciating rhetorical, conceptual, and presentational translanguaging helps us see the discursive and political dimensions of writing pedagogies of translanguaging. As I exemplified, lexical and syntactic translanguaging have variations that are much more complex than the appearance of a "foreign" word in English. A complex interpretation of translanguaging can reveal the power imbalances between minoritized students and teachers, and also between dominant and otherized cultures. It seems much less problematic to pronounce that a student's grammar is "wrong" than to criticize a student's conceptual understanding of the world. Embracing translanguaging in all its complexity can reveal to teachers that when they are evaluating their students' writings, they are in fact judging their cultural, ideological, discursive, and rhetorical existence, although at the surface they seem to be accessing their use of English.

Over the past centuries, colonial monorhetorical and monolingual writing pedagogies have dominated everyday teaching and have been solidified by multiple layers of educational policy. The lack of pluri- and translingual

writing spaces in schools has helped colonial institutions to retain the control which enables them to otherize multilinguals' world views and intellectual paradigms as "interference." If they choose to, teachers could be part of the solution to this problem. Teachers need to see the connection between colonial education and their own perception of quality writing. This perspective will help teachers to put themselves in a democratic relationship with students in an attempt to not only teach the students but to learn from their perspectives. Such a move will facilitate teachers' and students' resistance against prescriptive curricula. A pedagogy of translanguaging in writing will provide the teachers with the confidence needed to challenge received curricula by moving towards rhetorical fusions and experiments that help complexify experiences. Teachers in this approach, do not tolerate translanguaging as baby steps in a writing process, but encourage it as a significant intellectual practice. They also appreciate it as a political act that allows minoritized students to make their discourses, conceptualizations, philosophies, and literate skills part of second language writing classes.

## Concluding Remarks

Writing identity is what writers conceive themselves to be; it is their perception of their writing skills, strengths and abilities, their beliefs about quality writing, and their preferences for the content and discourses that they see worthy of framing in writing. Forming one's writing identity also includes sociocultural negotiation, which in the process of writing can resemble receiving social validation of genre knowledge in cross-cultural encounters (Gentil, 2011). Writing identity is not an abstract entity. Writing identity is manifested in the manner that writers arrange signs and mobilize semiotic signification in the process of writing, and in pre- and post-writing stages. When writing in additional languages, translanguaging creates some familiar semiotic ground for language learners to see their writing identities as relevant to the task. In this article, accordingly, I have been discussing translanguaging as part and parcel of semiotic agility, and as a catalyst for enriching semiotic dynamics. Translanguaging intensifies semiotic interactions and sharpens semiotic agility. It is important to help learners develop semiotic agility because well-constructed textual products are not an outcome of simplifying rhetorical structures and writing processes, but complexifying them. Plurilingual writers cannot help but engage with translanguaging when they communicate and write in their additional languages (Payant, 2020). This is an intellectual privilege. Writers' plurilingualism significantly multiplies semiotic events and interactions because it happens at different levels including lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, conceptual, and presentational. It only seems reasonable to take advantage of translanguaging in everyday writing pedagogy as an important resource.

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