



Zhai Nan, Mai Meng and Filial Piety: The Translingual Creativity of Chinese University Students in an Academic Writing Course

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Abstract: In this action research study, we explore how translingual resources can support creativity in a multilingual freshmen composition class in a US public university. We explore the efforts of two Chinese international students and their Chinese graduate

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student instructor to represent their linguistic and cultural identities within established pedagogical practices using translingual semiotic resources. They explore together how they can use their first language as a resource for academic writing, and in the process develop metalinguistic insights about the roles that their linguistic and cultural proficiency can play in academic communication. Our examination of the written artefacts and interviews with the students and instructor reveal how a translingual pedagogy can inspire multilingual speakers of English to make use of their own cultures and languages as resources for writing and teaching. We conclude with implications for teacher professional development and suggestions for actively developing critical awareness of language through creative use of all of students' linguistic and cultural resources.

Keywords: L2 writing; multilingual freshmen composition; translingual pedagogy; creativity

Introduction

At the higher-education institution where we teach, roughly 10% of the undergraduate population are international students. Our university offers multilingual composition courses: English academic writing classes that are reserved for multilingual students. Often, but not always, they are taught by instructors who are also multilingual academic writers. As more English learners pursue degrees in U.S. colleges and universities, composition courses have been adapted to address their needs, going by a variety of names and housed in different types of programs. English for academic purposes or English for specific purposes courses within intensive English programs, second language studies departments defined by applied linguistic approaches; ESL composition, multilingual or even translingual composition within first-year writing programs usually housed and administered by composition and rhetoric or writing studies faculty in English departments. Translingual approaches in composition are becoming increasingly popular in rhetoric and composition circles because of Canagajarah, Horner, Lu, and Trimbur's work in the area, along with others in the field of composition studies.

In most, for reasons that have been extensively discussed (Alptekin, 2002; Ayash, 2016; Hartse & Kubota, 2014; Lu & Horner, 2013; Matsuda, 2006), multilingual writers have been expected to conform to conventional usage of the academic English language and writing conventions, and the legitimacy and acceptability of multilingual writers' variations (in linguistic forms, style, genre) from written English conventions are judged from native-speakers' eyes (Hartse & Kubota, 2014; Matsuda, 2003). With this ideology, though first-year writing programs may offer additional attention and instruction that multilingual students might not receive in courses that are not reserved for them or designed for their needs, they are frequently modified monolingual English composition

courses—a form of sheltered instruction—that may embody the desire of the instructors to celebrate and validate the linguistic resources of their students, while helping them to assimilate into a monolingual view of academic language use.

We explore how an instructor and two of her students—all three Chinese students at a U.S. university—attempted to integrate their linguistic and semiotic resources into a writing assignment that was required for the course. We investigate the instructor's perspectives as well as samples of the students' work to discover opportunities for creativity within the structure of the academic writing course. Specifically, we focus on the following questions:

1. How do two Chinese multilingual students employ multilingual or translingual linguistic and semiotic resources in their written academic texts?
2. How does their Chinese multilingual instructor assist her students to employ multilingual or translingual linguistic and semiotic resources in their written academic texts?
3. How does employing these resources enable these students to demonstrate creatively their different linguistic and cultural identities?

Translingual Creativity

Norm-oriented academic writing courses, despite lengthy efforts at pedagogical updates and reform, still reflect a monolingual view that one's language repertoires exist as discrete entities and a teacher-centered pedagogy that depreciates the rich resources, knowledge, and experiences that multilingual students bring to classrooms (Lu & Horner, 2016). While university curricula, courses, and policies may see languages as existing in separate compartments and language differences as incommensurable contradictions, a translingual approach considers multilingual students' language repertoires as integrated and language differences as resources for meaning making in writing courses (Horner, Selfe, & Lockridge, 2015). Understanding translingual creativity can show instructors a way to help students to make meaningful connections between their translingual knowledge of the world and the facts that they encounter in their studies.

Creativity in writing, as with other kinds of creativity, can be seen as “finding connections and links where others have overlooked them...and finding a new way to present the information to excite a new audience” (Burns & McBride, 2016, p. 25). Some ways to develop creativity in first-year writing classes, include multigenre research projects that allow students to “make connections between sources and genres” and to “‘see’ something new” (p. 95) or translingual projects that offer students ways to explore connections between already-existing ideas and their life experiences. Such approaches require students to make intentional rhetorical choices and speak their own voices, helping students to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making about

how to communicate in new, effective, and engaging ways (Burns & McBride, 2016). For translanguaging projects, multilingual students will be able to explore “the diversity of writing possibilities and the rules that govern them” (p. 52), which is also the outcome and benefits of a multigenre research project claimed by Burns and McBride (2016).

Monolingual approaches to teaching and studying academic writing offer fewer affordances for helping multilingual writers to develop intellectual creativity and rhetorical attunement, an attentiveness to how language(s) can be used to communicate across difference (Leonard, 2014). They may ignore how language differences are resources for producing meaning to be used situationally and in accordance with dynamic social-historical, economic, and cultural relations of audiences, contexts and purposes (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Lu & Horner, 2016). Despite the fact that multilingualism and translanguaging both confront the monolingualist ideologies, a translanguaging approach, disposition, or orientation has the following distinct convictions, as enunciated by Lu and Horner (2016), Canagarajah (2013a), Sánchez-Martín et al. (2019) along with other translanguaging scholars. First, it emphasizes a more fluid and dynamic orientation towards language differences and language relations. As pointed out by Canagarajah (2020), while multilingualism disagrees with the monolingualist view of languages being separate from one another, but cognitively it may treat the relation of languages as a differentiated continuum in the mind. Second, translanguaging views difference as the norm and values linguistic diversity as creative resources for meaning making. Teachers who adopt a translanguaging approach encourage students to draw on their various linguistic repertoires, past writing, and virtual-material modalities to advance their fluid language and writing practices. Third, language is performative; it is “not something we have but something we do” (Lu & Horner, 2016, p. 208). Fourth, language is always emergent and interdependent on their practice and location in time, instead of static and standardized (Lu & Horner, 2016, p. 215). Fifth, writing, as well as other communicative practices, involves active negotiations of power, conventions, rules, and ideologies at both social-historical and individual levels.

Given the growing numbers of multilingual students in US colleges, recent calls to modify the teaching of composition have included an emphasis on the translanguaging and multimodal (e.g. Horner, Selfe, & Lockridge, 2015). These calls emphasize approaches that recognize the legitimacy for multilingual writers to “negotiate standardized rules in light of the contexts of specific instances of writing” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 305). Canagarajah (2013a) has called for pluralizing academic writing that allows students to negotiate meanings by incorporating different linguistic and semiotic codes into their texts. Others have urged an approach to translanguaging writing that encourages multiple forms of semiosis, more than just “a menu of languages and modalities” (Horner et al., 2015, p. 13), but a disciplined practice of negotiation across different languages and modalities that cultivates the teacher’s disposition to appreciate the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students and the students’ ability to negotiate different language forms

(Canagarajah, 2013a, 2013b). This disciplined engagement must include use of different linguistic, artistic materials, and should not be limited to the linguistic forms of signs (Kramersch, 2009). Instead, literacy and language pedagogy should include visual, graphic, and vocal modes, because language learners feel and apprehend languages through all their different senses.

Sánchez-Martín et al. (2019) provided a framework of teaching digital composing using a translingual approach. In their article, the scholars reflected on their experiences as instructors navigating translingual pedagogies within their institutional contexts. Sánchez-Martín et al. (2019) reported that a translingual pedagogy helped students to become more creative and confident in using their language repertoires to achieve rhetorical purposes rather than just focusing on “standard” writing. Their translingual pedagogy was also beneficial for students to develop an ecological perspective towards languages, forms, modalities in their situated meaning-making practices. In consideration of the challenges by institutional designations, Sánchez-Martín et al. (2019) argued that writing instructors need to be open and be able to negotiate their translingual pedagogies with institutional expectations.

Because multilingual students are likely to have rich and diverse linguistic, cognitive, and cultural backgrounds, their needs, motivations, and identities need to be properly brought into the writing classroom. Creating assignments that invite students to bring their translingual creativity to their work will develop their capacity for intellectual creativity and will create more meaningful and inclusive learning experiences for multilingual students (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2019). Because all students, not just multilingual students, are in daily contact with multimodal environments and social networks and are writing with different mobile technologies, they must develop their ability to examine intertextuality and utilize all of the semiotic resources available to them, including colors, images, and symbols (Canagarajah, 2013a; Kramersch, 2009).

Building, then, on our belief that in a translingual communicative environment students are not passive replicators of language standards but as active negotiators and designers of meaning (Canagarajah, 2013a), we aim to explore how a process of translingual meaning-making can help learners to integrate their linguistic and cultural resources with academic writing conventions to create new meanings in ways envisioned by The New London Group (1996). Furthermore, we agree with Morrell (2017) that literacy pedagogy should envision new practices that reflect the considerable changes in our demographic and economical realities, both nationally and globally, and that do not work to limit opportunities but instead provide all students with chances to engage critically and collaboratively with multimodal texts. We also work from our assumption that translingual and multimodal writing pedagogy can support these goals by supporting the multiple and fluid identities of multilingual students and by helping them to develop authorial agency as well as social and cultural awareness (Cimasko & Shin, 2017; Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Research Method

Setting

The composition program.

The university composition program has offered undergraduate basic writing courses for English learners for over a decade. These courses have been taught by graduate student instructors in the English Department, some of whom have had multilingual language backgrounds. From early in its history, the program has aimed to help multilingual writers integrate their cross-language and cross-cultural identity work into their compositions, with a nascent and emerging translingual orientation to composition studies, drawing primarily on theoretical and conceptual frameworks from second language writing studies, serving as a guide for its pedagogical approaches.

Since many of the instructors are also multilingual or international students, the program also has made significant efforts to support and mentor multilingual instructors in the course through private tutorials with supervising professors, workshops on developing teacherly ethos and professionalism, and roundtables on multilingual and translingual issues. The training they receive is in keep with best practices in peer review with multilingual students (Horner et al., 2011).

The multilingual composition classroom

This study took place in the course section of a multilingual freshmen composition class offered in the Fall 2015 semester at a large, research-intensive university in the midwestern U.S. Each semester more than 300 international students, most of them freshmen and sophomores, were enrolled in the multiple sections of this course, which was supervised by a faculty member. The 15 students enrolled in this section were all multilingual international students (11 Chinese, two South Korean, one Albanian, and one Vietnamese). All were pursuing undergraduate degrees for which successful completion of the course was a requirement. All but one had received their high school education in their own countries and were in their first semester studying abroad. One student had attended a U.S. high school. The class met for 50 minutes three times a week.

The Graduate Student Instructor

Like her students, the instructor was also a non-native English speaker and an international student. As a new teacher and as a graduate student instructor in a U.S.-

dominant teaching program, she wondered how her identity as a young, female, Chinese, second-language speaker of English and international PhD student affected her students' views of academic English instruction and learning in her course. The instructor was particularly interested in how she could integrate a translingual pedagogy into her writing classroom without deviation from the department syllabus and requirements.

She adopted an action research approach in order to understand how students could bring their linguistic and cultural resources into their work in ways that would not disrupt the primary objectives for the course. She also wanted to reflect on her roles in both intervening in and researching this process. This style of action research allowed her to integrate her reflective practice with her teaching and research and to extend her knowledge of herself as a teacher by trying out practical solutions to her class (Burns, 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). As an ongoing and comprehensive self-reflective approach (Burnaford, 2001), "doing the action" (Burns, 2010, p. 104) provided a critical lens through which to observe her teaching process and her students' translingual writing and learning practices.

The Writing Assignment

The focus of this study was an assignment that required students to write an expository essay to explain any concept of their choice. This assignment, the second major essay out of three assigned, was due in the middle of the semester. Students were required to write the essay in 800 to 1000 words and to utilize at least three articles as sources. As many students had difficulty in choosing a concept, the instructor encouraged them to write about something from their own cultures, explaining it for academic audiences from other cultural backgrounds. The instructor posted on the university's learning management system Canvas to suggest brainstorming ideas for students:

A lot of you feel difficult finding a concept to write about. It could be a good idea to introduce a concept from your culture/country, if you like it. In this case, imagine your readers are from a different cultural background (e.g. some of your peers from this class).

For those who accepted this invitation, the instructor mainly used the time of individual conferences to discuss in detail with students whether and how they would want to augment their writing with their native languages and scripts as well as images that they thought would be necessary and helpful to illustrate the concept. She did not make code-meshing or multimodality a requirement. The instructor was careful to keep this option as a voluntary response to her invitation, as she needed to teach in tandem with instructors of other sections.

During the writing project, the students first discussed their ideas with each other, then co-revised their first drafts with peers, and then consulted with the instructor for further feedback. During this process, students developed awareness of audience and

tried to think rhetorically in order to make their writing meaningful to academic audiences from different cultural backgrounds. And because all of the students had to review their peers' papers with the "openness and inquiry that multilinguals take toward language and language differences" (Horner et al., 2011, p. 305) and think about what their peers were "doing with language and why" (p. 311), even the students who did not employ code-meshing in their writing engaged in translanguaging practices. The whole writing project took four weeks. After the students had turned in their first drafts, she found that seven of the students, all native Chinese speakers, had written about concepts related to Chinese culture. All but one had integrated visuals from Chinese culture into their writing.

The Multilingual Writers

After the students had turned in their first drafts, the researchers found that seven of the students, all native Chinese speakers, had written about concepts related to Chinese culture. Six integrated visuals into their writing. Among the six students, we selected two students who provided detailed explanations of their essays as our participants.

Wei

Wei was a male freshman who intended to major in entrepreneurship. He had been learning English for ten years. Before coming to the U.S, Wei had already studied in a Chinese university for a year and then he transferred to get a degree in the U.S. university. Wei was an active student both in- and after class. Wei defined himself as an "arty youth" and he mentioned that he liked literature and arts but did not like academic writing.

Xiaojing

Xiaojing was a female freshman who intended to major in accounting. She had learnt English for nine years, but this was her first semester in the U.S. In class, she was a quiet student but she was an active question-asker after class.

Data Collection

Believing that these students' writing processes and strategies deserved closer attention, she collected their work and used multiple data sources to triangulate her observations. As a participant-observer of class activities, students' peer review sessions, and individual conferences, she kept records in the form of field notes composed as soon as possible after each session or meeting. She jotted down the reactions and concerns expressed by the students during different stages of learning and writing and noted how students

interacted in discussions and as peer-reviewers and as co-revisers. She kept copies of the different versions of written products including drafts, outline worksheets, and peer review worksheets, and she recorded all the comments from instructor and peers.

Interviews

In addition to collecting texts for analysis, the instructor also conducted semi-structured interviews with two of the Chinese students who had submitted writing with substantial references to Chinese linguistic and cultural resources. Each interview lasted 40 minutes, and each participant was interviewed once. Her purpose was to understand their writing and negotiating processes, the intuitive and intentional strategies they used in their essays, and the reasons why they wrote in particular ways.

Reflective journals

The instructor also wrote reflective journal entries on her thoughts, ideas, challenges, feelings, and inspirations during the different stages of teaching the writing assignment. These journals helped her to examine the role she played in the students' learning and the meanings inherent in her teaching in both formal classroom settings and after-class teaching-learning settings. In addition to reflecting on her teaching experiences, she also recorded "on-going" self-reflections on her activities and decisions as a researcher.

Zhai Nan, Mai Meng and Filial Piety

In this results section, we will analyze the specific examples which show the different kinds of semiotic and cultural resources incorporated in Wei's and Xiaojing's papers, including the use of images and their L1 linguistic resources.

Use of Images

Wei's expository paper focused on the concept of anime. As a big fan of the genre, he wanted to convey the idea that anime was more than a form of entertainment, but also a cultural product that combined visual art and fiction and that was highly influential in contemporary youth culture. To achieve this purpose, Wei incorporated five images from the Google and Baidu search engines that illustrated the concepts he wanted to discuss. During his interview, he offered his reason for incorporating the images, stating that they helped him to "effectively display my idea." Wei believed that images could effectively showcase the meanings of words when the audience might not be familiar with an

abstract concept. He emphasized that incorporating images was necessary for the purpose of his paper and his choices were not redundant:

If I put one image in each paragraph, you will definitely give me a C or D for my paper. I think a writer has to do it appropriately, knowing that it is an academic paper. I need to make it acceptable for my audiences. (Interview, March 26, 2016)

The student thought being “acceptable for audiences” and conforming to academic conventions were important to him, so he decided to incorporate images only when he thought it was necessary.

Zhai nan

The first image showed a white male watching anime on his four computer screens (see Figure 1). Wei explained that “*zhai nan*” is an emerging popular Chinese term for describing young men who like to stay at home watching anime and who rarely make connections with the outside world. The student made strategic search and choice of the image based on his understanding of his audience.

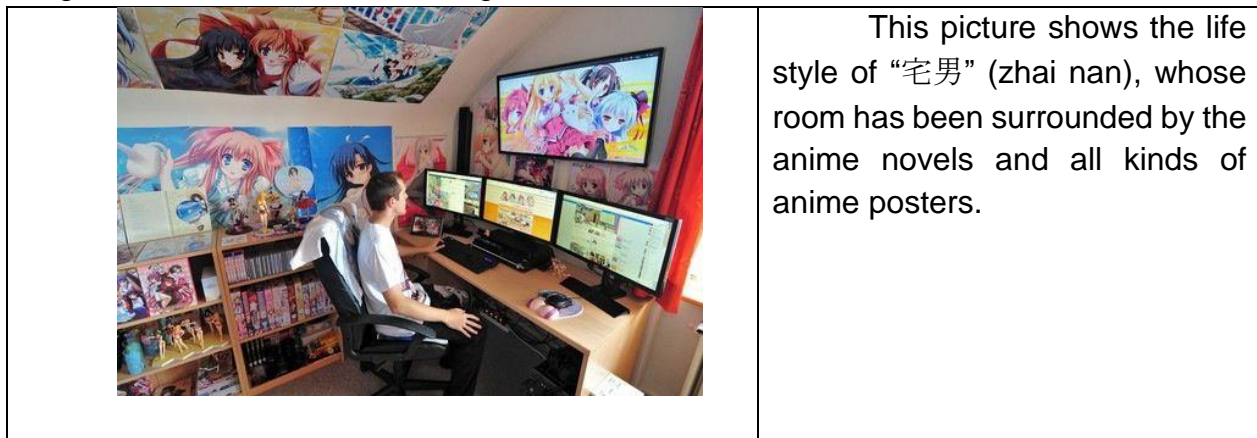


Figure 1. Wei’s “*zhai nan*” image and caption. Otakulover/-. (2013, March 29). Otaku room [Online image]. *Amino*. Retrieved from https://aminoapps.com/c/anime/page/blog/otaku-room/dxtb_uLNrNVIDpVLbM7ommnj8WxPII.

Knowing that his potential audiences would be anyone in a U.S. research university, he did not choose an image with an Asian male, but rather a Western-looking young man in order to make his U.S. audience feel more connected to this exotic concept. Wei explained:

In the image, there is a ‘*zhai nan*’ in the middle, playing with his computer and surrounded by many anime girls. His room is full of posters and anime books.

What's on his three computer screens seems to be "barrage websites" with anime characters. This image is a perfect choice that vividly shows how a zhai nan's hobby and life is. (Interview, March 26, 2016)

Wei stated that all the elements in the image could fully manifest the meaning of "zhai nan", and he associated the details in the image with his own experience. He admitted that he liked to watch anime on "barrage websites" where he could directly read and respond to other audiences' flowing comments while watching the anime itself. The student mentioned that "barrage websites" were popular among Asian youngsters and that was the way he socialized with people with similar interests at home. The image resonated with his identity as an Asian young man who was a fan of the popular anime culture. His purposeful choice of the image helped to manifest his own identities in English academic writing.

Mai meng

Figure 2 illustrates the concept of 'mai meng' in Wei's paper. The two images placed side-by-side, one anime girl and an animated critter, a trained, secret-agent guinea pig from Disney's animated *G-Force*, show how 'mai meng' is used to describe a cute character who makes adorable facial expressions or behaves in a cute manner.¹ Wei wanted to show how anime has introduced new words and concepts into the everyday language of Chinese youth.

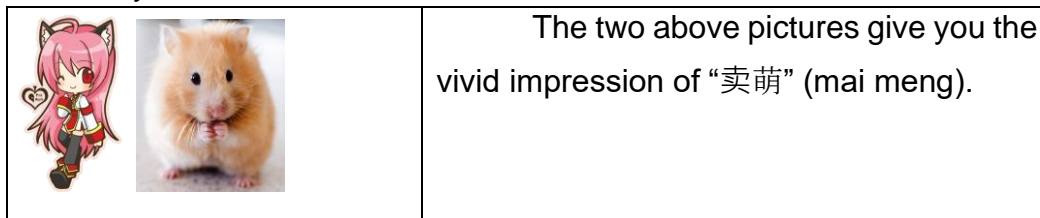


Figure 2. Wei's "mai meng" images and caption. P-inkapple. (n.d.). *PinkApple SD* [Online image]. Retrieved from <https://www.deviantart.com/p-inkapple/art/PinkApple-SD-176199194>. Untitled photograph of a guinea pig. Retrieved from <https://www.goodfreephotos.com/animals/mammals/hamster-standing-up.jpg.php>.

¹ Note: The images cited in Figure 2 are replacements of those in the student's paper because of copyright regulations. Such images proliferate on the web and readers can find them online using search terms such as "adorable/smiling *G-Force* guinea pig", "adorable anime character".

With this image, Wei also made purposeful choices. He found the two pictures separately on Baidu and combined them together because he was aware of the differences between of “cuteness” in Western and Eastern cultures. As he explained that he used visuals was that he thought that translation could not convey the accurate meaning that people from another culture experienced:

Sometimes it is difficult to find the right English word. I would say 宅男 (zhai nan) is still an easy one, but for words like 卖萌 (mai meng), you cannot find any word to translate it, because it is a product of the combination of the Japanese and the Chinese culture. For Chinese, it's popular to praise a young woman saying 'zhege meizi hen meng'(This young woman is cute). But for Americans, they would praise that a young lady is 'pretty' instead of 'cute'. (Wei, Interview, March 26, 2016)

This multimodal semiotic resource helped Wei to express meanings which he would not have been able to be express using simply words.

Another choice that Wei made was to combine two pictures together into one to show the meaning of “mai meng”. Because the word “meng” in Chinese is normally used to describe females, children, or animals. The student, taking consideration of both the cultural context and the pragmatical context of the word “mai meng”, incorporated two pictures of both a little comic girl and a cute animal character. In terms of the choice of the two pictures, Wei also demonstrated his thoughtfulness because he wanted to make readers feel comfortable by not using a real person's photo:

'Mai meng' is more commonly seen in Asian girls' selfies, but I think putting a girl's selfie in my paper is not good. I think the image with the animal not only shows what 'mai meng' means but also makes people feel comfortable when reading my paper. The other one with the anime character is also good because it is cute and it is not a real person. (Wei, Interview, March 26, 2016)

Dragon Ball

The third and fourth images were from *Dragon Ball*, which Wei used as examples to support his argument that some anime characters were adapted from folklores, myths, or oral traditions. In order to make *Dragon Ball* vivid to his audience, he incorporated the images of the character Sun Wukong and explained in the captions about the character's customary equipment, the golden cudgel and the flip-over cloud, which were derived from classical Chinese literature (see Figure 3). He also provided an illustration of the giant monkey that Sun Wukong would transform into when he needed to fight epic battles (see

Figure 4).² He explained that “*the best examples for a paper discussing the concept of animation were from the anime itself*” (Wei, interview, March 26, 2016).

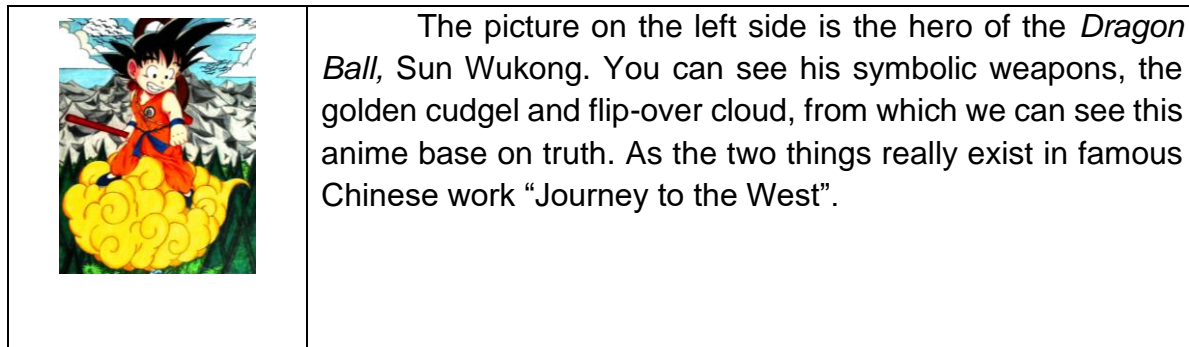


Figure 3. Wei’s *Dragon Ball* Hero Sun Wukong image and caption. JeanneBrooksVocke (n.d.). *Goku on Nimbus* [Online image]. Retrieved from <https://www.deviantart.com/jeannebrooksvocke/art/Goku-on-Nimbus-256807458>.

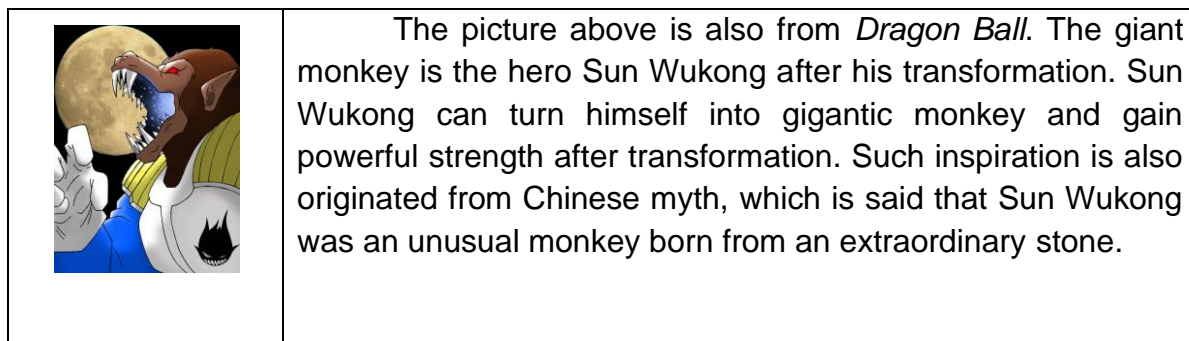


Figure 4. Wei’s image and caption on *Dragon Ball* Hero Sun Wukong transforming into a giant monkey. Kui39. (n.d.). *The Great Ape*. [Online image]. Retrieved from <https://www.deviantart.com/kui39/art/The-Great-Ape-125545109>.

Wei also cited a Western scholar’s book to support his idea in his paper: According to *Mínguez-López* (2014), heroes serving for anime are modeled after well-known figures in folklores, religions, and myths... *Mínguez-López* (2014) analyzed the popular anime *Dragon Ball* (《七龙珠》) in his book to illustrate such idea ... And the characters are mostly originated from the eminent Chinese novel called *Journey to the West* (《西游记》).

² Note: The images in Figure 3 and 4 are replacements of those in the student’s paper because of copyright regulations. These images proliferate on the web and readers can find them online using search terms such as “*Dragon Ball* Sun Wukong,” or “*Dragon Ball* Great Ape.”

Instead of providing too much background information, which might distract from his main argument, the student used the captions for the images as a space to inform non-Chinese readers about the relationships between the anime character Sun Wukong and traditional Chinese stories such as *Journey to the West* (e.g. Kherdian, 1992). Wei strategically used images and captions in his paper to help readers understand his meaning.

Use of L1 Linguistic Resources

In addition to the images, Wei also employed Chinese characters as a semiotic resource from his first language. For example, in the first draft where he discussed the effects of anime on language, Wei wrote: “Many new words are coined from anime, such as ‘otaku’ (宅男), referring to those fanatical anime fans, or 卖萌, meaning someone pretends to be innocent and pathetic.” The instructor commented on his draft: “Otaku or 宅男? Do you want to use the Japanese word or the Chinese word? Do both words exist in Japanese and in Chinese?” Then in the final paper, Wei deleted the Japanese word and only kept the Chinese characters and pinyin: “Many new words are coined from anime, such as 宅男 (zhai nan) ... or 卖萌 (mai meng)...” During the interview, Wei mentioned that his original intention was to reach as many audiences as possible because he knew the word “otaku” existed in both Japanese and Korean, and he thought “it might be easier for American audiences to understand this word than the Chinese word 宅男.”

However, after seeing the instructor’s comment, Wei did further research and found that “otaku” had a negative meaning in Korean and Japanese, whereas the Chinese meaning of this word had a different connotation. In Japanese and Korean, “otaku” indicates a negative and stereotypical view of people who have obsessive interests, especially interests in Japanese anime and manga; whereas in Chinese, although the word originally refers to men who indulge themselves in Japanese manga, anime, or games, it gradually evolves to refer to men who normally like to stay at home and distance themselves from the outside world. During the interview, Wei explained, “Actually nowadays in Chinese this word has ambiguous meanings ... Some people think it is negative but some people think it is neutral.” Therefore, Wei finally decided to keep only the Chinese word, in case the Japanese word caused confusion. He wanted to focus on the influences of anime on Chinese and popular culture, not on linguistic differences between Chinese and Japanese.

The second student, Xiaojing, focused on the concept of filial piety, which is an important Confucian concept and a prevalent traditional cultural value among the Chinese. In her paper, Xiaojing explored the concept from historical and political perspectives and argued that filial piety is often used as a propaganda tool by Chinese

rulers from ancient to modern day. Drawing on her own critical awareness of Chinese cultural values, she generated insights into this topic by addressing both Western and Eastern critical perspectives. For example, in the introduction, she wrote:

In ancient China, filial piety was written in law and applied in exams by emperors of different dynasties. In modern China, filial piety is used for solving social issues. It may seem weird that filial piety, which should only be personal behavior, has earned greater attention than other virtues among rulers from ancient time to present. Indeed, filial piety is unique from other virtues with great political implications because it can decrease interclass conflicts, consolidate rulers' political power, and solve social problems.

In her paper, Xiaojing accessed L1 linguistic resources by using three Chinese sources and one English source. All of the Chinese sources she used were translated into English and then incorporated into her writing. For instance, she cited and critically analyzed an article written by a Chinese professor on the *People's Daily*, which is "the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party" (*People's Daily*, n.d.). The student disagreed with the professor's opinion that filial piety was significant in today's society in order to promote individual families to take care of their elderly themselves, as the Chinese public institutions could not bear the increasingly heavy burden of care for the elderly. Xiaojing wrote:

The government propagandizes filial piety because filial people would take care of their parents when their parents are old ... Therefore, this tough social issue can be solved and the financial stressed to the government and public institutions will be released.

Xiaojing engaged her L1 academic source in L2 critical analysis. In fact, English academic writing provided her an opportunity to express her own criticality which could not be otherwise freely and comfortably stated if written in Chinese. The creative connections that she built through translingual writing allowed her to examine her L1 culture and ideology with a different eye. In this way, she built connections between the two languages and used another culture's perspective as resource of meaning-making. In the end of her paper, Xiaojing cast a question for her audience:

Now we know that the propaganda of filial piety has an internal meaning of political purpose, do we still need to regard it as a pure virtue and behave in a filial way?

This was what she really wanted to express to her audience: to raise awareness among her audiences of this issue and to even call her Chinese readers into action, although indirectly.

Building Confidence through Translingual Creativity

Both students acknowledged that the flexibility of topic choices and being able to incorporate different semiotic and cultural resources allowed them to explore their own interests, creativity, and identities. In his interview, Wei thought it was important to find a creative topic and write about topics that were less explored and that “other people normally do not think of.” He believed that this was important for him as a multilingual writer because in his major courses, he found that “some American students’ ideas were very ordinary but they could use their language to build greater advantages than us new international students.” For him, choosing an “unordinary” topic or creatively using L1 resources is a way to demonstrate his own strength which native speakers of English might not have.

Wei acknowledged that the topic of anime was his interest and he was excited about demonstrating his own expertise on the topic. The translingual and multimodal semiotic resources (i.e. the visual images and the Chinese characters) that he creatively employed in the paper were all resonated with his real-life experiences as a Chinese young person and lover of anime. In his paper, he was also able to cite and use a variety of anime as specific and up-to-date examples to help support his argument.

As to Xiaojing, she mentioned during the interview that she had chosen to write about filial piety because she “had been thinking about it and had always wanted to write about it,” but that she had got no chance in her previous writing experiences before she came to study in the U.S. She also acknowledged the importance of her ideas. She noted, “I think it is important to have a really good idea in your essay. A beautiful language is not as important as a brilliant idea.” In her interview, Xiaojing commented that “From the Qing Dynasty and even now, the leaders want to make people silent and they want to resist some Western ideas in China. I think blind loyalty is not good.” For her, being able to write on this “Chinese” topic in English allowed her to demonstrate her own thinking and identity that she had always wanted to express. And it allowed her to speak back to scholarly authorities and government media of her own country in a critical way. As to her choice of sources, Xiaojing mentioned that it was difficult for her to find good English sources on this topic, so she brought in mostly Chinese sources in her paper:

I was not able to find very good sources. Even though there are some English sources about filial piety, they are not very useful for my argument. But I think

sometimes if you read sources first, it can limit your thinking. (Interview, February 28, 2016)

Xiaoqing was not worried about the lack of sources because she thought that sources sometimes could limit thinking and creativity. Creativity, in her paper, can be seen as a way to make new meaning of old concepts and view it from another culture's perspective, as she utilized her advantage of being able to shuttle between her L1 resources and L2 thinking. Through her creative use of cultural resources, Xiaoqing was able to explore her own identity and reflect on her life experiences in different cultures. As she commented during her interview:

When you learn a new language and culture, you can see the reflection of your own culture in the new culture. You can compare and contrast. I think this is a positive impact on language learning. (Interview, February 28, 2016)

Both students thought that L1 could help with their L2 writing because it could bring them different ideas. For example, Xiaoqing mentioned that she could get inspirations from her L1 and she thought more languages meant more resources:

I think it's an advantage because I know more than one language, so when searching for sources, I can read both Chinese sources and English sources. (Interview, February 28, 2016)

The two students also remarked that "some ideas and meanings could get lost" if translated into English and they believed that each language had its own cultural connotation which sometimes could not be found in another: "many words and expressions cannot be found in English," therefore some semiotic resources such as their L1 characters, L1 sources, visual images could help them creatively express the ideas they wanted to convey.

Wei and Xiaoqing both also mentioned that following conventional rules sometimes cost them their creativity. Wei was satisfied with his strategy of incorporating two languages in writing: "both Chinese and English readers could understand my idea. But if other people don't like it, I guess maybe they are used to standards and rules." Similarly, Xiaoqing also pointed out that creativity could be achieved through strategically and purposefully breaking norms and rules to achieve the writer's goal. She was not concerned that her paper did not look like it was written by a native speaker, because she "indeed was a non-native."

Although both student writers mentioned that norms could limit ideas and creativity, they acknowledged the importance of making papers "acceptable" to readers. As Wei said:

You cannot make it illogical and unreasonable to your reader. So, when you are adding something innovative, you have to make sure that its purpose is to serve your idea and it should not be disruptive. (Interview, March 26, 2016)

Wei tried to take the reader's stance to distance himself from his work enough to help decide whether his innovations were acceptable. Similarly, Xiaojing mentioned that her only concern was if any language issue made her audience unable to get her point. To both students, making ideas appealing to their readers were their most important goals. As long as their creativity did not make their readers "feel distracted," their attempts could be regarded as successful.

In this section, we have demonstrated how these two multilingual writers employ a variety of translingual semiotic resources, including images, L2 text, and L2 resources. We have also shown how they reported building confidence in their English academic writing through their use of these resources. Having the freedom to bring in their backgrounds allowed them to creatively demonstrate their linguistic and cultural identities.

Building Instructor Confidence Through Translingual Creativity

The instructor also discovered some of the benefits of encouraging translingual creativity for building her confidence as a first-time teacher of academic writing—both in terms of knowing their ways of thinking and their writing strengths and difficulties. Whenever she had a conversation with students, she would encourage them to become experts in their own topics. Asking for the story behind non-English word choices such as "zhai nan" or "filial piety" helped Wei and Xiaojing to reflect on their composing process and develop their metalinguistic abilities. They were encouraged to actively explore their ideas and consider how to present them to their audiences, rather than focusing on following conventional rules.

The instructor reported that doing this action research altered her view of her identity and positionality as an international researcher in a setting where Western academic discourse was dominant. She reported that she often felt frustrated about the difficulties of learning and researching in a Western country, and that she did not know how to integrate her culture and her experience into her research, teaching, and language learning. As a doctoral student in social science, she felt that she was not competitive with her U.S. peers within the U.S. academic context. She found it painful to detach from her Chinese culture and identity, but she felt that it was necessary in order to succeed in her studies. She wrote in her reflective journal:

As the writing instructor and researcher and an English language learner, I also learned a lot from my students while using this approach. Perhaps most powerfully, this approach liberates multilingual composition teachers to consider that Standard Written English should not be the only target, and that a multilingual writing classroom should respect the real-life language practices of multilinguals' and enable them to use their languages as resources.

Through this action research, she found that a translingual approach created a new space for learning (and teaching) that gave voices to non-Western learners, teachers, and scholars, including herself. A translingual pedagogy can inspire more non-native speakers to make use of their own cultures and languages as resources for teaching and researching.

Discussion

Wei's and Xiaojing's academic written texts conformed to academic conventions, displayed rhetorical development, while also deploying various translingual semiotic resources such as visual images, L1 vocabulary, and L1 academic resources. Both students engaged in meaning-making processes that allowed them to creatively employ semiotic resources available to them while strategically representing their own linguistic, cultural, and academic identities. For instance, both Wei and Xiaojing chose to write on topics that reflected their long-time interests, and about which they were eager to demonstrate their own thinking and expertise.

These student writers' choices of semiotic resources for discussing their interests not only showed their willingness to relate to a divergent multicultural audience but also showed their concern and awareness for academic readers in Western research universities. For instance, Wei chose to use a visual image with a Western-looking person and to delete the Japanese word "otaku" from his first draft. These choices demonstrated his ability to make rhetorically-effective decisions about how to reach a wider, non-Chinese, audience. His purposeful use of the images to illustrate the concept of "mai meng" also showed his appreciation of the differences in the cultural understandings of "cuteness." By creatively juxtaposing contrasting images to illustrate the meaning of "mai meng," he could successfully convey his ideas to his audience without getting stuck in superfluous cultural comparisons that were irrelevant to his main argument.

Similarly, Xiaojing engaged her L1 academic source in L2 critical analysis. The creative connections that she built through translingual writing allowed her to examine her L1 culture and ideology with a different eye. Using her L2 cultural practice as a resource, Xiaojing demonstrated her knowledge of her western readers' understanding and perspectives on the idea of filial piety. By involving her English readers in her critical

analysis of Chinese sources, she obtained more power to have an equal conversation with authorities in her L1 background.

Therefore, the students' written texts demonstrated that by creatively playing with translingual semiotic resources, multilingual students were able to further explore their own interests, the relationship between their L1 and English, as well as appropriately express their own identities in academic writing. By enriching their written texts through various semiosis, the multilingual student writers were able to experience writing as an "adaptive, emergent, multimodal, multisensory, multilateral, and multidimensional" process that intrigues both the multilingual student writers and their audiences (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 924).

Implications for Teaching and Researching Multilingual Writers

The students made the decisions described in this paper, we believe, in part because they shared a cultural background with their instructor, because they were assured that she would understand what they were trying to communicate. This suggests that it is easier for students to feel comfortable with their translingual writing efforts when they know that the instructor shares some of their linguistic and cultural background. Would they have done this, we wonder, if the instructor had been from a non-Chinese background? Would they do it in other classes where the instructor didn't know much about their background? Why didn't the non-Chinese students in this class take up the advice as well? To them, they probably think it's a "risk-taking" choice. This is a limitation of our research but also indicates that multilingual teachers should address students' potential concerns of adopting translingual creativity in high-stakes writing, either it's for NESTs or multilingual teachers from a different background. A translingual instructional approach alone is not enough; necessary reform of the assessment of writing is needed to provide safe spaces for students to "take risks".

Monolingual ideology that stipulates that languages are meant to be pure and that they must be used separately does not confirm to multilinguals' real-life communicative practices. Insistence on monolingual conventions is an exclusionary practice, a kind of nativism that would be unacceptable elsewhere. What we value about academic conventions is the way that they enable us to communicate clearly and logically, concisely. But we don't teach clear and concise communication by insisting that students adopt conventions without fully understanding them. So the translingual practices can be a bridge to understanding academic conventions, or better still, helping to modify and revise what gets taught about them.

The multilingual students in this study understand that academic writing conventions do not allow them to express their ideas, so they approach the course with "get it over with" mentality. They see English as a tool for communication but focusing on

monolingual academic conventions gives them the idea that academic writing is distant from their own lives. This has been shown to be the case with many underprepared students who have come to the university (e.g. Bartholomae, 1986; Hull & Rose, 1989).

Applying a translingual approach systematically throughout a whole semester, especially when instructors and students do not have a shared background, would require instructors and program administrators to consider the following questions: What impacts does the match between the teacher and the students (e.g. whether they are from the same or different cultures) have on learning? What are some classroom activities, texts, etc. that might be effective for a translingual pedagogy? What kinds of assessment should an instructor use in a translingual classroom? Based on our research findings and in response to these questions, we provide several pedagogical implications. Firstly, writing instructors can use texts and classroom activities that reflect multilingual students' different cultural identities and that help students reflect on their English learning experiences. This helps to cultivate students' and the instructor's disposition to be invitational toward all the linguistic diversity in the classroom. Secondly, instructors can have open conversations with students through both in-class meetings and after-class conferences to understand and address students' specific concerns about academic conventions. Thirdly, the topics and forms of writing assignments should be designed in a way that addresses multilingual students' interests and invites them to draw on their rich linguistic and cultural resources. Lastly, writing instructors and program administrators should develop more student-centered assessment, for instance, bringing in students' own voices of how they will be assessed (Inoue, 2017). All these require multilingual writing instructors to develop "a sophisticated knowledge of language" and writing program administrators support instructors in making pedagogical decisions that value multilingual students' experiences (Tardy, 2017, p. 184). In order to address more practical issues of how to enact translingual pedagogies, more classroom-based studies need to be done to reflect on this.

Conclusion

We have explored how using translingual linguistic and cultural semiotic resources allows Chinese multilingual instructor and her students to demonstrate creativity and explore their identities as multilingual academic writers. A translingual pedagogy can inspire more and more non-native speakers to make use of their own cultures and languages as resources for teaching and researching. Applying a translingual approach to writing instruction brought many benefits to the students, but also to their instructor. For these reasons, a pedagogical change in multilingual instruction is valuable for letting the plural voices of multilingual teachers and learners be creatively used in the construction of meaning.

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