

# Seizing an Opportunity for Translingual FYC at UMaine: Provocative Complexities, Unexpected Consequences

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# Outline:

1. Brief theoretical context for the translingual turn in composition
2. ENG 101: Sec. 505, Fall 2012
  - a) Institutional context, 2011: The State of Maine; the University of Maine; Intensive English Institute; opportunity created by absence of established 'separate but equal' L2 FYC courses
  - b) Pre-term
    - Envisioning the course; resources consulted in planning and decision-making processes
    - Advertising and Populating the course; tactics to create workarounds for a 'special' section
  - c) During-term
    - Reflections on a FYC course presented and framed specifically as "multilingual," including
      - Details from Syllabus
      - Comparison of monolingual and multilingual first-day reflective writing
      - Assignment sequence
      - Attrition
      - Persistent tendency of the course to be framed as "*multicultural*"
      - Peer-to-peer dynamics
  - d) End-term assessment
    - a) Role of the Writing Center
    - b) Comparison of monolingual and multilingual reflective essays: the remediation of monolingual students' linguistic awareness
    - c) Patterns in monolingual teachers' reception of "translingual" portfolios
3. Course Revisions for Spring 2013
  - a. Responses to multilingual students' critique of assignment sequence
  - b. Teacher-development: preparing monolingual teachers for L2 students' ideas about geopolitics of English
4. The arrival of StudyGroup™: "English Only Strikes Back"

**If** we accept as a working premise that

“a translingual approach is not about the number of languages, or language varieties, one can claim to know. Rather, it is about the disposition of openness and inquiry that people take toward language and language differences” (Horner et al., 2011(a): 311);

**And**

if we accept further that **all** students (and the social institutions in which they participate) would benefit by thinking of languages as always involving “groups of people working in collaboration to use all available linguistic resources” (Horner et al. 2011(b): 288);

**Then:**

the question before us is how to create and sustain institutional spaces and curricular practices (assignments, comments, and assessment practices) that best foster the conditions in which such dispositions can arise.

Documents also Construct Experience—and Documents *Persist*  
(Desmet 2005; Dryer 2008)

English-Only assumptions are embedded in documents over which WPA's have some control (*e.g.*, template language from program syllabi, rubrics, teacher handbooks, program textbooks), limited control (*e.g.*, course catalogues, placement procedures), and no control whatever (*e.g.*, antiquated handouts consulted by advisors in other departments; scripts memorized by campus tour-guides)

From: [-----@umit.maine.edu](mailto:-----@umit.maine.edu)>  
Date: Mon, Sep 10, 2012 at 10:18 AM  
Subject: Need info regarding your Eng 101 section

Hi Paige.

I have a first-year advisee who wants to drop your ENG101 section 14 (MWF10-10:50) because she says it is a multi-cultural section and doesn't suit her. She reports that you said you'd have to modify the course to accommodate her. Is this accurate?

Should we switch her to a different section? I don't want to move her if her objection is simply that she is uncomfortable with people for whom English is a second language.

Thanks.  
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## Readings for Assignment Sequence

Adopted from “Language and the Self”  
(Lu & Horner, *Writing Conventions* 2008, 429-32):

1. James Baldwin “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What is?”
2. Sandra Cisneros “Little Miracles, Kept Promises”
3. Haunani-Kay Trask “From a Native Daughter”
4. Langston Hughes “Theme for English B”

*First Reactions to the importance of language by monolingual students:* Language as a uncomplicated, necessary function (or else we couldn't communicate); construct of language difference – results only on conflict, as opposed to a hypothetical “world language”:

“We need languages to keep all of us tied together and keep us all on the same page. If someone is in need you can ask someone for help. If someone needs help with jobs around their house you can call someone to come over. There are so many different ways that we use languages throughout our everyday lives that we would not be able to function without it.”

*First Reactions to the importance of language by multilingual students:* More apt to see culture/geographical location/socio-economic status as influencing language; more apt to focus on specific linguistic differences within languages, with examples, and why they matter:

“Growing up, most, if not all of my teachers were products of colonialism. They lived and experienced the ills and separate but not equal school system adopted by the British colonizers. Evidently, I on the other hand was the product of the product of colonialism, through teachers and my own parents I can vividly remember my Swahili teacher explaining to the class that “The English language is a cold, cruel, calculated language meant to put down the people.”

*This pattern persisted into end-term portfolio assessment, with instructive results.*

## Example Portfolio Thesis Claims -- Monolingual Students

Both authors are related through the idea of the “self” and how it is your key to identity.

In my opinion Baldwin is wrong. I believe he is defining language because that is how we communicate and the self is simply who we are and not a form of communication.

Cisneros and Baldwin are closely related to each other through their strong opinions on controversial topics.

Through the points made in Baldwin’s article Cisneros’s letters can be clear.

The letters portray how people are proud of their heritage and education.

Language, therefore, is a revealing tool for identity that keeps cultures separated and helps to distinguish one individual or community from another.



## Example Portfolio Thesis Claims – Multilingual Students

The distortion of the native Hawaiian culture and language was used by westerners as a means of self-benefit

Overall language can be powerful in terms of the art of persuasion. Therefore I consider language as a double edge sword, for a more complete understanding of my thesis, I used the Spanish expression “everything that shines is not gold” to describe the nature of language.

Trask explained how the westerners conceptualize the word *discovery* as a method of ownership, finding something that was lost and as a method of conquering. Trask also explain how Hawaii rejected the idea of being discovered by the western culture. Based on these different interpretations of the same word, the use of language can change the course of history.

Cisneros is trying to draw a picture of their status in the community and their essential or emotional needs. However, that made me curious to analyze what difficulties could stand in the way of speakers of an “other” language.

Throughout this semester of the multicultural English section I have grown in my understanding of language, and the great power it holds. I am an 18 year old, white female who has rarely traveled outside of New England, let alone the country. Due to this lack of experience with other cultures, my understanding of language and culture was little to none upon entering this course. In the first assignment, the class was assigned to write a paper about the ways in which language shapes cultures, practices, and values. I struggled when writing this essay because my knowledge was so limited.

Relative to their first-day reflections, we can see in the monolingual students final reflective essays evidence that *their* language awareness has been remediated.

## **Examples of Reviewers' Comments on Multilingual Students' Portfolios**

Connections to purpose are insufficient but adequate

The point of reference for the analysis was not always apparent

Purposes are not always clear...Support for claims + content could often be stronger

Lines of inquiry occasionally observed

## **Examples of Reviewers' Comments on Monolingual Students' Portfolios**

Some very strong analysis and connections between texts

Analysis present and sound

Excellent work; Controlling purposes are focused and apparent

Enjoyable to read– thank you

# How Ready are your Assessment Practices for Language Difference?

Monolingual writers in Section 505 tended to focus their portfolio essays primarily on the assigned readings (and tended to get kinder portfolio review remarks in terms of critical understanding), while the multilingual students focused on integrating a global perspective (and tended to get critical remarks concerning adequate lines of inquiry, and suffering controlling purpose).

Yet portfolio reviewers, while being critical of these seemingly ‘outlandish’ integrations, praised multilingual students for “creativity” and “interesting insights” whereas the domestic speakers were praised for more “thorough” work.

The portfolio assessment checks for standards that the diverse writing situations often don’t satisfy, or satisfy in “odd” ways: what counts as evidence, lines of reasoning, adequate support, amassing research without a clear controlling purpose, tangents, “overwriting” or, curiously, too *much* support. All of these “errors” were noted for multilingual students, whereas monolingual students did not have these “issues” identified.

Generally speaking, it appears that our portfolio reviewers and our assessment rubric were unprepared for translingual writing and topics , as all reviews of multilingual portfolios were internally contradictory.

## Modifications: Spring 2013

Multilingual Section: Eng. 101 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 2-11-13

What kind of relationships between languages have you identified?

Social?

Historical?

Contemporary?

Other?

How aware is your essay in terms of the roles languages have in societies?

Which societies have you discussed in your essay? How have you defined each society?

What kind of roles does language play in each society?

Have you incorporated a global perspective(s) in your analysis?

How globally aware is your analysis?

How linguistically aware is your analysis?

What have you learned so far about the importance of language?

What do these questions suggest about what I'm expecting from your analytical insights?

## Multilingual Responses to Modifications

Multilingual Section: Eng. 101 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 2-11-13

What kind of roles does language play in each society?

**The role language play in each society are only to speak what you are told**

What have you learned so far about the importance of language?

**I have learned language come in many forms and sometime it is not easy to either except others language or just your own. I also learned sometime people do take speaking for granted because it does not natural to some people**

What do these questions suggest about what I'm expecting from your analytical insights?

**I think these questions suggest you are expecting to understand these essay if you have not read the story before.**

## Monolingual Responses to Modifications

Multilingual Section: Eng. 101 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 2-11-13

What have you learned so far about the importance of language?

**I have learned that language is a far more complex concept than I ever imagined. I had never thought about language in terms of the relation to our personality and our identity. Also, how I am at an advantage being an American speaking the dominant language of my culture, English and how many other cultures are faced with obstacles in terms of the way they speak. This differs even within cultures in America, as discussed in Tony Earley's work.**

What do these questions suggest about what I'm expecting from your analytical insights?

**These questions suggest you are expecting a combination of thoughts and importance of different issues surrounding language such as roles and global values. These questions make you think deeper about your writing and how you may or may not have incorporated specific issues. Before seeing these questions I didn't think about the big picture about language and its true meaning. I will include more of these perspectives in future writing.**

# English-Only Strikes Back: Who Owns ENG 001?

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### NEWS

## UMaine partners with Study Group to enhance international enrollment

Flagship campus hoping to eventually gain 300 international students annually

By Jesse Scardina

Posted on Feb. 18, 2013, at 12:45 a.m.

In an attempt to increase the University of Maine's international appeal the University of Maine System is currently negotiating a partnership with Study Group USA Higher Education LLC, an international organization that recruits college students looking for educational opportunities.

"In spring of 2012, the [UMS] board of trustees began the process by which they were looking at the concept with finding an international partner for the purpose of recruiting international students," said UMaine Vice President for Administration and Finance Janet Waldron.

UMS sent out a public request for proposals before deciding to contract with Study Group, a program that works with over 40 colleges around the world and 200 education counselors who work in over 30 recruitment offices.

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