

## Promoting a Truly Thriving L2 Writing Classroom for Bilingual and Multilingual Learners: A Review of Losey and Shuck's Plurilingual Pedagogies for Multilingual Writing Classrooms: Engaging the Rich Communicative Repertoires of U.S. Students

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Promoting a truly thriving L2 writing classroom for bilingual and multilingual learners: A review of Losey and Shuck's *Plurilingual Pedagogies for Multilingual Writing Classrooms: Engaging the Rich Communicative Repertoires of U.S. Students*.

Kay M. Losey & Gail Shuck (Eds.), *Plurilingual pedagogies for multilingual writing classrooms: Engaging the rich communicative repertoires of U.S. students*. Routledge, 2022; 204 pp.: ISBN 9781032190198, \$180 (Hardcover), ISBN 9781032186184, \$52.95 (Paperback), ISBN \$52.95 (ebook).

Given the predominant role of standardized English language in writing courses, instructors and administrators in the US are urged to reflect on the way traditional writing approaches often prioritize native-like pieces of writing at the expense of ignoring the resources, the skills and, most importantly, the identity of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. The book *Plurilingual pedagogies for multilingual classrooms: Engaging the rich communicative repertoires of U.S. students* edited by Kay M. Losey (Grand Valley University) and Gail Shuck (Boise State University) provide insights into how a plurilingual approach to writing could be implemented.

This book features two parts. Part 1 is intended to support college-level and secondary teachers in ESL and composition courses. Part 2 is oriented to directors of writing centers and programs. Although each part is oriented to a different audience, the main purpose of the book is to highlight bi/multilingualism as an asset rather than as a problem to be solved. To achieve this, at the beginning of each chapter, authors share powerful experiences that motivated them to leave behind a monolingual writing approach as well as information about their institutional context. Authors offer their expertise on different aspects of writing instruction and the writing process. Some authors also include their learners' attitudes towards a plurilingual pedagogy. Each chapter concludes with a section called "Options and Opportunities," offering advice and providing additional resources. In this way, the structure of each chapter acknowledges the fact that what works in one context must be adapted to suit another.

The book draws on the principles of plurilingualism (Cenoz and Gorter, 2013). Plurilingualism is a competence that can be acquired by all speakers; it encompasses different degrees of proficiency in different languages and is therefore dynamic. Most importantly, within this view, plurilingualism also involves the development of a pluricultural competence. It is also grounded in a translingual writing pedagogy where scholars such as Garcia (2008) argue that multilingualism is a complex system that requires speakers to navigate available options within their own individual repertoires in particular contexts and that signal particular identities. The book contributes to the fields of bilingual education, TESOL, and writing instruction. Most importantly, each chapter sheds light on the application of evidence-based strategies that allow those interested to embrace a plurilingual stance and strategies that facilitate the creation of writing courses that are more accessible and equitable to all bi/multilingual speakers.

One implicit message of this book is that despite the fact that this pluralist language ideology will (and should) look differently depending on the needs, goals and challenges of each educational context, it must be reflected in multiple layers of writing instruction. Chapter 5, for example, explains what student-teacher relationships, course policies and assessment should look like within a plurilingual writing classroom. It emphasizes the importance of learning about

students' linguistic backgrounds and their current uses of language and literacy via surveys and discussions, establishing language policies that explicitly welcome language difference and not measuring success in writing in terms of English language acquisition. In the same vein, Chapter 6 also introduces the concept of "classroom ecology" (Inoue, 2019) to provide educators with a clear rationale on the importance of creating assignments and real-life tasks that prompt bi/multilingual writers to explore and embrace their plurilingual identity while utilizing linguistic resources as they see fit. By acknowledging writers' investment and commitment, classroom ecology also highlights their communicative strengths. One example presented in Chapter 12 stands out. Three students from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) on the Mexico-US border worked with an organization that helps unhoused women who do not speak English. Using their biliteracy skills, they were able to create a bilingual newsletter to secure donors and contributions from the whole community. While the likelihood of reproducing this particular task in other institutions may be limited, it serves to highlight the stakes involved when plurilingual abilities are nurtured and incentivized.

Another strength of this book is that some chapters invite us to reconsider the definition of certain concepts often associated with a plurilingual approach. For instance, Chapter 2 challenges the notion of "bi/multilingual writer" including not only those learners who know two or more languages but also those who have been traditionally labeled as monolinguals when they are, in fact, users of different non standardized varieties of English and are often "othered." Similarly, Chapter 4 presents a broader definition of "communicative resources:" learners bring more than just their home languages and linguistic practices to the writing classroom; they bring a wide range of digital practices and both educational and non-educational experiences with technology. This idea is particularly relevant within a plurilingual approach to writing because it aligns with the concept of multimodal writing where color, design, letter fonts, animation and sound contribute equally to the meaning of a text, particularly in this digital era. Although readers could benefit from more theoretical information on the concept of multimodal pedagogy, information is provided about course materials that educators can use to learn more about this topic or to incorporate it in their respective classrooms. The book *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (Arola, Sheppard and Ball, 2014) is a good example of such resource listings.

While incorporating multiple codes within one piece of writing is an effective plurilingual pedagogical strategy, this book demonstrates that it is not the only one. For this reason, Chapter 3 invites educators to reconsider the importance and the place of learners' home languages in different writing activities, including brainstorming in the form of free writing and pair discussion, as well as both oral and written feedback. This chapter provides solid evidence that demonstrates the benefits of allowing bi/multilingual learners to use their L1 and their L2 in peer review activities. This is particularly important because if learners only use the language they are still learning to produce oral or written feedback, they might be focused on aspects related to the language itself (e.g. correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.). Hence, they are more likely to ignore those aspects that can actually contribute to the improvement of a particular text (e.g. content, style, tone, etc.). Indeed, this might be a significant factor underlying the limited success of 'target language' peer feedback in writing programs.

Another key topic addressed across multiple chapters of the book is how to assess the writing skills of bi/multilingual learners within a plurilingual approach. Certainly, alternative teaching

methods in writing require alternative forms of assessment. As Grosjean (1989) points out, bilinguals are not the sum of two monolinguals. In other words, their performance in writing should not be compared to the performance of monolingual learners. Indeed, developing a plurilingual competence requires much more effort than approaching writing from a monolingual perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to provide bi/multilingual learners with some kind of reward and benefit that guarantees them equal access to educational opportunities such as scholarships, fellowships, internships, job offers and so on. Chapter 5, for example, proposes and explains the idea of “grading contracts” where learners choose the grade they want and that they will get as long as they attend classes and compose and submit assignments following established guidelines and course goals. The role of the teacher is to provide feedback that supports and protects learners’ intellectual work while relying on a fuller range of communicative resources. In other words, the focus is not placed on the final written output but on the learning process and on those procedures, such as translation, that allow each learner to access and utilize their bi/multilingualism to their benefit. Thus, grading contracts not only facilitate a more inclusive and supportive educational context but also recognize the uniqueness of bi/multilingual learners’ linguistic assets and how these contribute to their academic progress.

Another strength of this book is that authors share case studies where educators were able to bring change to their institutions and to create plurilingual spaces. Disrupting monolithic language ideologies in first-year writing programs as well as ESL composition programs requires a lot of reflection, flexibility, creativity, and collaboration. Specifically, it requires faculty to unlearn certain teaching practices that favor those systems whose aim is to eliminate linguistic diversity.

Chapter 7 is a clear example of how instructors can influence the way an institution may fulfill the needs of bi/multilingual learners by changing their teaching practices, regardless of the amount of resources available. For instance, one of the challenges that rural schools in the US face when serving this population is related to a shortage in teachers with TESOL and bilingual certifications. Still, two teachers from one rural school believed in the importance of learners using their L1 as a resource in L2 development. Such a belief was reflected in their interactions with learners: they allowed them to use Spanish to access content and participate in class and they consciously encouraged them to write in whatever language they felt comfortable.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 highlight the importance of being reflective practitioners who constantly and critically examine what can be improved. The main message of these chapters is that convening a small group of instructors with shared interests and creating initiatives such as orientations, writing groups, reading groups or faculty development workshops can be the first step into aligning programmatic commitment to plurilingualism to every day teaching practices (Vallejo and Dooly, 2020). The key is to be exposed to plurilingual scholarship and research as well as to bi/multilingual writers to be able to brainstorm and create spaces that are more linguistic and culturally inclusive.

Although the book does successfully accomplish its main purpose, some issues that might affect writing instructors and administrators remain to be examined. From the point of view of instructors, how can they negotiate their beliefs about plurilingual language, learning and teaching and the beliefs of bi/multilingual learners who consciously privilege standardized forms and who may actually identify more with the dominant culture? Perhaps, the answer lies in the

importance of sharing with our learners our teaching philosophy and our experience learning another language and in the importance of selecting or designing materials that facilitate conversations about language difference, identity, race, power, social justice and inclusive pedagogies.

Understanding why language differences should not be viewed as deficits, but rather as valuable assets, requires continuous effort and innovative approaches from teachers. This need accentuates the importance of recognizing and rewarding L2 writing instructors for their labor and their commitment to exploring alternative methods. A possible model described in Chapter 6 might be adapted: from the point of view of administrators, the authors discuss the importance of rewarding “students’ labor” as a way to compensate for their effort for investing their linguistic resources in composition without risking their intellectual work. In the same vein, one can argue that we should reward instructors for their time and intellectual commitment to make their composition classrooms more inclusive. One potential solution is to encourage and support those instructors to share their work and their learners’ accomplishments at professional conferences, where they can be truly recognized as insightful and resourceful experts. Similarly, they could also be invited to contribute their knowledge and understandings about these topics to publications such as books like this one. In any type of recognition, the goal should be to acknowledge their instructional and professional development contributions as equally important and valid as those made by research teams.

Despite a limited treatment of learned monolingual ideologies on the part of learners and a lack of incentives for teachers to integrate plurilingual approaches, the stories of plurilingual pedagogies in action detailed in this book comprise an important contribution to the field. What makes this book special is the fact that authors do not engage in monologues where they explain terminology or provide findings from their research but engage instead in a conversation where they describe how theory informed their practices and how their practices informed their theory. This approach is particularly productive and meaningful for readers who are writing and language instructors. Hence, I encourage readers to take the information from this book as a good starting point to question the effectiveness of any teaching approach that prioritizes one language, one identity and one culture over others and to reflect on how to create plurilingual spaces within their classrooms. This in turn will allow for a plurilingual approach to writing. A key element during this first step will be to invite our learners as well as our colleagues to participate in this process as many of the authors from this book have illustrated.

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