

The Postmonolingual Condition and Rhetoric and Composition Ph.D.: Norming Language Difference in a Doctoral Program



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Abstract: This article presents data from a 2013 survey of students enrolled in a longstanding rhetoric and composition Ph.D. program at the University of Louisville (U of L), a mid-sized public institution in the American South. The survey collected data regarding graduate students' perceptions of language diversity in the context of their professional development as composition teacher-scholars. It interprets the data in relationship to what Yasemin Yildiz has described as the "postmonolingual condition" of 21st century Western social life: a field of tension between monolingualist ideology and increasingly visible multilingual practices. Drawing from student recommendations, it suggests ways this program, and others like it, can leverage students' positive perceptions of and attitudes toward multilingualism to norm language differences in its mainstream rhetoric and composition graduate curriculum.

In "Reproducing Composition and Rhetoric: The Intellectual Challenge of Doctoral Education," Louise Wetherbee Phelps argues "the maturation of Ph.D. programs in composition and rhetoric creates a rhetorical exigency to study and theorize doctoral practices of education as deeply and seriously as we have undergraduate teaching" (117). As Phelps notes, every rhetoric and composition doctoral program "expresses and acts out vividly in concrete features a theory of the discipline: in its curricular content, requirements, qualifying exams and reading lists" (118). In so doing, rhetoric and composition Ph.D. programs reflect and reinforce matters of disciplinary "epistemology, ethics, and politics," (Phelps 117), including conceptions of language and language relations. Subsequently, these programs can be useful sites to examine dominant and emergent disciplinary language ideologies, the practices that follow from these ideologies, and the dispositions toward language that shape compositionists' professional practices as teachers, scholars, and administrators in linguistically heterogeneous institutions.

This article presents data from a 2013 survey of students enrolled in a longstanding rhetoric and composition Ph.D. program at the University of Louisville (U of L), a mid-sized public institution in the American South. I suggest the survey data reflect the "postmonolingual condition" of the program, insofar as Yasemin Yildiz defines postmonolingualism as "a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge" (5). The persistence and reemergence of multilingual practices is indicated by responses demonstrating doctoral students' awareness of and appreciation for language differences in their writing program as well as desires to engage multiple languages and English dialects in composition teaching and research. However, the continued dominance of monolingualist ideology is evident in the ways in which many participants tended to imagine these engagements as taking place through curricular add-ons and extracurricular activities. Drawing from student recommendations, I suggest ways this program, and others like it, could leverage students' positive perceptions of and attitudes toward multilingualism to norm language differences in its mainstream rhetoric and composition graduate curriculum.

Background

In *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, Yildiz argues the growing visibility of multilingualism in Western art, culture, and public discourse must be understood in terms of the postmonolingual condition of 21st century Western social life. For Yildiz, the prefix "post" has both historical and critical dimensions. On the one hand, it references the time since the emergence of monolingualism in the late 18th century as a dominant Western paradigm of language and sociocultural identity. According to the monolingual paradigm, "individuals and social

formations...possess one 'true' language only, their 'mother tongue' and through this possession [are] organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation" (2). On the other hand, the "post"-monolingual references growing resistance to monolingualism as "[i]ncreased migration and mobility, the advance of communication technologies, and the spread of media have...contributed to the sense that multiple languages coexist and interact in new constellations" in global-local contexts (3). Although Yildiz maintains a fully articulated ideological alternative to monolingualism does not yet exist, she notes that writers in a variety of fields are beginning to "suggest the possible contours of such a multilingual paradigm and contribute variously to just such a restructuring" (5).

In composition studies, the restructuring of disciplinary ideology to account for multilingualism is apparent in what Brian Ray has described as the "norming of language difference" in professional discourse (89). Ray cites and reviews A. Suresh Canagarajah's *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*, Vershawn Young, Rusty Barrett, Y'Shanda Young-Rivera, and Kim Brian Lovejoy's *Other People's English: Code-meshing, Code-switching, and African American Literacy*, Scott Wible's *Shaping Language Policy in the U.S.: The Role of Composition Studies*, and Canagarajah's edited collection *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms* to illustrate "linguistic diversity's inevitable yet tumultuous move to the center of [composition] teaching and research" (89). Paul Kei Matsuda ("Wild West") has also called attention to the "unprecedented attention" (128) language issues have received in recent composition monographs, journal articles, edited collections, awards, and featured sessions at the annual meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Matsuda observes "the issue of language differences [in composition]...has joined the ranks of new intellectual undertakings worthy of attention from all U.S. college composition scholars" ("Wild West" 131). However, in keeping with general trends in composition research, the vast majority of disciplinary scholarship on language diversity has focused on undergraduate students enrolled in FYC or developmental/basic writing courses administered by university writing programs. The implications of this movement for rhetoric and composition doctoral students, courses, and curricula have been largely unconsidered.

Survey

This survey was designed to investigate rhetoric and composition doctoral students' backgrounds and perceptions of language diversity in the context of their professional development as composition teacher-scholars. For the purposes of this survey, "language diversity" was defined as the simultaneous presence of multiple, shifting language codes (including both national languages and English dialects) in composition teaching and research. The web-based survey consisted of twenty-four questions. Participants completed background questions regarding their stage in the program, the courses they taught, and the languages and English dialects they use for communication. They were then asked to rate their agreement with statements about their teaching and scholarly practices on a six point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 6=Strongly agree) and clarify their responses through a series of open-ended prompts.

Survey questions solicited information about doctoral students' awareness of language differences in undergraduate composition classes and their professional preparation to teach students with minority language backgrounds, including but not limited to undergraduate students identified as "ESL" in U.S. universities. Additionally, the survey worked to gather information about doctoral students' perceptions of language differences in writing research, both as a focus of composition scholarship and as a condition of international writing research that takes place in a variety of languages. It also attempted to gauge participants' desires and professional preparation to conduct composition research on language diversity using English and other languages. Finally, the survey attempted to identify participants' perceptions of their language practices in the program to determine the degree to which they were using multiple languages and English dialects in their teaching and scholarship.

The invitation to participate in the study was emailed to all 39 enrolled rhetoric and composition doctoral students at U of L. It elicited 17 responses. The relatively low response rate (43.6%) impeded the generalizability of the data and the conclusions that could be drawn from it. However, I suggest the survey data is valuable for several reasons. First, the quantitative Likert scale data revealed trends in doctoral students' professional development experiences related to language and language relations within their program. Second, the comments participants made to gloss their Likert scale answers provided further insight into these trends, as well as recommendations for how their program could increase support for graduate students navigating composition teaching and research in the context of multiple languages. Finally, I believe the survey instrument, data, and analysis (see Appendix) can provide a model for other programs seeking input from their graduate students to gauge the strength of curricula and inform local decisions about graduate training to support language diversity.

Participants

The first three survey questions solicited background information about the participants. Responses to question 1 indicated three of the 17 respondents were completing coursework, six were completing exams, one was completing the dissertation prospectus, and seven were writing their dissertations. Responses to question 2 indicated all participants were fully funded graduate students who had either taught or were currently teaching as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). Respondents reported teaching courses in the first-year composition sequence [English 101: Introduction to College Writing (39%; n=17) and English 102 Intermediate College Composition (27%; n=12), English 105 Honors College Writing (5%; n=2)], as well as English 303: Science and Technical Writing (5%; n=2), English 306: Business Writing (16%; n=7), ENG 309: Inquiries in Writing (n=1). Three students also reported teaching literature courses, including Women and Literature, Writing about Literature, and American Literature II.

Responses to question 3 (What national languages and/or dialects of English do you use currently or have you used in the past and where and when have you developed your knowledge of these languages? Please discuss all languages you feel you have some familiarity with, even if not “fluent.”) indicated that all students who responded to the survey considered themselves to be on some level multilingual. All respondents reported using or having used other national languages in either personal or academic contexts or both, although most described their knowledge of languages other than English as limited to basic conversation and reading skills. Four participants reported speaking and writing multiple languages as a product of their experiences in the U.S. as foreign nationals or abroad as exchange students from the U.S. The majority described their language knowledge beyond English as developed through high school and college coursework. Three participants described themselves as multidialectals who used conventions associated with nonmainstream dialects like African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Southern American English in addition to the Standard American English conventions they used as teachers and scholars. Although these responses suggest that participants’ knowledge and use of other languages was primarily limited to contexts outside the Ph.D. program, they also counter the monolingualist assumption that rhetoric and composition doctoral students, like the undergraduate students they are being trained to teach (Matsuda “Myth”), are U.S. educated, English-only monolinguals with little to no experience communicating in other languages (Hesford et al.; Kilfoil).

Data Analysis and Discussion

The first set of questions referred to participants’ work as GTAs and ongoing development as teachers through coursework, workshops, and other programmatic resources and requirements. Responses showed that most participants (76.47%, n=13) noticed undergraduate students whose language practices reflected a variety of national languages and English dialects in their classes (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Graduate students’ responses to the statement “I notice students whose language practices reflect a variety of national languages and dialects of English in the classes that I teach.” (N=17)

Response	N	%
Strongly agree	5	29.41
Agree	4	23.53
Somewhat agree	4	23.53
Somewhat disagree	2	11.76
Disagree	1	5.88
Strongly disagree	1	5.88

Moreover, the majority (88.23%, n=15) thought language diversity was increasing in U.S. higher education as compared to 30 years ago, when the program in which they were enrolled was developed (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2. Graduate students’ completions of the statement, “Compared to 30 years ago, language diversity in U.S. higher education is:” (N=17)

Response	N	%
Increasing	15	88.24
Largely the same	2	11.76
Decreasing	0	0

Most respondents (82.35%, n=14) also indicated that they felt responsible for addressing the specific language needs of students with language backgrounds different from mainstream English monolinguals, including students commonly identified as “multilingual,” “multidialectal,” “basic writers,” or “ESL writers” (see [Table 3](#)).

Table 3. Graduate students’ responses to the statement “In my teaching, I feel responsible for addressing the specific language needs of students with language backgrounds different from mainstream English monolinguals, including students commonly identified as ‘multilingual,’ ‘multidialectal,’ ‘basic writers’ or ‘ESL writers.’” (N=16)[\(1\)](#)

Response	N	%
Strongly agree	4	25
Agree	7	43.75
Somewhat agree	3	18.75
Somewhat disagree	1	6.25
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	1	6.25

However, fewer participants (76.47%, n=13) felt confident in their ability to teach students with diverse language backgrounds. Of those who agreed they felt confident, only three “strongly agreed,” while eight only “somewhat agreed” (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Graduate students’ responses to the statement “I feel confident in my ability to teach students with diverse language backgrounds, including students commonly identified as ‘multilingual,’ ‘multidialectal,’ ‘basic writers’ or ‘ESL writers.’” (N=17)

Response	N	%
Strongly Agree	3	17.65
Agree	2	11.76
Somewhat agree	8	47.06
Somewhat disagree	2	11.76
Disagree	2	11.76
Strongly disagree	0	0

This lack of confidence can be tied to comments participants made when asked about their professional preparation

to teach composition in linguistically diverse institutions. Most students (82.45%, n=14) said they felt under-resourced in this area. These responses aligned with the results of several recent studies in which writing teachers reported a lack of professional preparation to teach multilingual students (Braine; Ferris et al.; Matsuda, Saenkhum, Accardi; Williams). However, in this case, a number of participants made a distinction between their theoretical introduction to language differences in composition teaching through coursework and their practical training in these matters. The vast majority (94.12%, n=16) agreed that they felt “knowledgeable about scholarship devoted to language diversity in writing teaching,” although only three “strongly agreed” with this statement. One participant wrote, “I feel like I’ve read a lot about this issue, but have received little concrete training in how to teach to it,” while another wrote “I have had a few courses which promote the theoretical value of respecting and engaging with students from different language backgrounds, but I really haven’t seen any resources or support which expound upon the practical side of that issue.”

Several participants commented on how the program could provide them with more practical training to respond to language differences in the composition classroom. One student recommended an optional TESOL certification, one recommended a “separate course for those interested in special attention to this subject,” four participants suggested incorporating language teacher training into the English 602 teaching practicum course, and seven others recommended optional pedagogy workshops. Most recommendations involved adding on to the current curriculum, which some participants acknowledged would be practically problematic. New certifications, courses, workshops would require additional resources to create and maintain them and compete with core courses and requirements for the time and attention of students and faculty. As one student wrote, “I’m not sure how these activities could scale...It seems like most resources—workshops, websites, handouts, whatever—would be necessarily simplistic.”

Curricular add-ons also risk reinforcing what Paul Kei Matsuda has identified as a monolingualist “policy of linguistic containment” in U.S. institutions where language differences are “quarantined from the rest of higher education” in special classes and programs (“Myth” 641). Under this policy of containment, language differences are approached “as a defining problem for and characteristic of the socially ‘different,’ seen as both linguistically and socially embodying something other than ‘the norm’ and hence requiring a ‘different’ approach—likely in a different location, curriculum, or program segregated from ‘normal’ writers” (Lu and Horner “Translingual” 583). However, the suggestion that language training be incorporated into the existing teaching practicum course, the only required course for all students in the program^[2], worked against the often prevailing sense that language issues are separate and marginal matters to be taken up through additional, non-credit bearing workshops and programs. As Sidney Dobrin has argued, the teaching practicum course is “the largest, most effective purveyor of cultural capital in composition studies,” a space in which teachers are not only “trained...but one in which they are enculturated into cultural ideologies of composition” (21).

In terms of their own language practices as teachers, most participants disagreed with statements that they used language conventions associated with other national languages (82.35%; n=14) or non-standard varieties of English (64.70%; n=11) in their classes. However, those participants who acknowledged using multiple languages and English dialects in their teaching described these practices as productive. One wrote that discussing English dialects and language change helped them teach academic writing in the context of the globalization of academic research and the linguistic heterogeneity of modern academic discourse. Another wrote that their unintentional use of Texas and South Texas dialects sometimes “opens up discussions of different words for different object, phrases, and actions.” Three others wrote that they used discussion of the plurality of languages and dialects to teach students about the contextual nature of correctness in writing. One of these participants wrote:

Because I have some experience with southern and midwestern dialects, I've sometimes brought scans and transcripts of actual Civil War letters, and used them to illustrate points about grammar and “correctness” (in conjunction with some scholarly texts, like Joseph Williams' “Phenomenology of Error”). I find that students enjoy “negotiating” with these texts, and I can usually get them to change their ideas about error and correctness when I teach these.

Several participants suggested undergraduate composition students can find pleasure in discussing nonmainstream linguistic forms and practices perhaps seen as transgressive in an “English” writing class, and that this pleasure can be pedagogically useful.

However, as one participant acknowledged, GTAs take risks when they use language conventions associated with non-standard English dialects in the classroom. They wrote:

I speak in a Southern dialect sometimes in the classroom and that is just because it occurs when I am speaking so I do not plan it. I think more students feel comfortable talking to me because they recognize the authority is different in that way. However, I have had students in class make fun of how I

say certain words because of my Southern accent/dialect. That is actually uncomfortable to be honest, and I could have used it as a teaching moment about different dialects, but because I am a graduate teaching assistant and did not feel so much authority, I did not say anything.

This response suggests that while the use of diverse language resources can help instructors develop solidarity with students, GTAs using nonmainstream dialects risk undermining their institutional authority, which, as Wendy Hesford, Edgar Singleton, and Ivonne M. García have argued, is built in relationship to their ability to represent and transmit linguistic forms and practices associated with mainstream academic culture and, by extension, Standard American English.

Hesford, Singleton, and García observe that graduate programs often tacitly discourage multilingual teaching assistants from using their full range of linguistic resources in their teaching. Handbooks and workshops for international GTAs work to assimilate them to mainstream academic forms and practices, and in so doing, cast linguistic and cultural differences as barriers to graduate student teachers' institutional legitimacy and effective teaching of mainstream students. Hesford, Singleton, and García limit their critique of the monolingualist assumption that GTAs should teach exclusively in (Standard American) English to international graduate students and institutional authorities (e.g. the graduate school, the English department, the writing program) who enforce these expectations. However, the above participant's response suggests that this critique can be extended to domestic, multidialectal GTAs and undergraduate students who, ironically, can work to enforce a Standard American English-only norm, even if these students (as at U of L) are often the victims of such enforcement. Given the institutional monolingualist bias that frames their liminal role as both students and instructors, it is perhaps unsurprising that most participants reported not using their diverse language resources in their teaching.

As with the questions about their teaching, participants' responses to questions about their scholarship revealed ambivalence about the place of non-Standard American English forms and practices in their professional development. While most participants felt responsible for addressing students' language differences in their classes, fewer participants were interested in making language diversity in teaching writing a focus of their research (see [Table 5](#)).

Table 5. Graduate students' responses to the statement "I am interested in conducting research on and writing about language diversity in writing teaching." (*N*=17)

Response	<i>N</i>	%
Strongly agree	2	11.76
Agree	3	17.65
Somewhat agree	4	23.53
Somewhat disagree	3	17.65
Disagree	5	29.41
Strongly disagree	0	0

This lack of interest might be considered surprising, given the recent prominence of research about language issues in composition and the fact that most participants felt knowledgeable about scholarship devoted to language diversity in writing teaching (see [Table 6](#)). Moreover, while only two students strongly agreed that they felt confident conducting this type of research, slightly more students indicated that they felt confident in their ability to perform this research than were interested (see [Table 7](#)).

Table 6. Graduate students' responses to the statement "I feel knowledgeable about of scholarship devoted to language diversity in writing teaching, including but not necessarily limited to work on students commonly identified as 'multilingual,' 'multidialectal,' 'basic writers,' or 'ESL writers.'" (*N*=17)

Response	<i>N</i>	%
Strongly Agree	3	17.65

Agree	6	35.29
Somewhat agree	7	41.18
Disagree	0	0
Somewhat disagree	1	0
Strongly disagree	0	0

Table 7. Graduate students' responses to the statement "I feel confident in my ability to conduct research on language diversity in writing teaching." (N=17)

Response	N	%
Strongly Agree	2	11.76
Agree	5	29.41
Somewhat agree	2	11.76
Somewhat disagree	3	17.65
Disagree	5	29.41
Strongly disagree	0	0

Discrepancies between participants' interest in, awareness of, and confidence pursuing scholarship on language diversity might be accounted for in various ways. Language-related knowledge has been historically devalued in rhetoric and composition graduate education (Tardy; see also MacDonald, Matsuda "Myth"), due in part to "the field's disciplinary origins and relations that link it more strongly to the humanities and areas like cultural studies than to the social sciences and fields like applied linguistics" (Tardy 186). While participants in this study may have become conversant in recent scholarship associated with translingual literacies and approaches through coursework and other doctoral requirements, they may not have developed the background in theoretical and applied linguistics necessary to conduct language-related composition research. Moreover, as the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages has described, language study in the humanities is often associated with instrumentalist practices, introductory courses, and contingent faculty positions. Participants may have been wary of linking themselves with low-status language teaching practices and, by consequence, failing to position themselves to compete as new scholars for publications, jobs, awards, etc., associated with established traditions of high-status disciplinary research and theory (see Horner and Lu "Working").

The sense that language differences were not matters of scholarly inquiry for most participants was further reflected in the linguistic practices they reported as researchers. Only two students (11.76%) agreed that they used diverse language resources in their scholarship (see [Table 8](#)).

Table 8. Graduate students' responses to the statement "I use languages beyond 'standard English' in my scholarship, including but not necessarily limited to conventions associated with other national languages and dialects of English." (N=17)

Response	N	%
Strongly Agree	1	5.88
Agree	1	5.88

Somewhat agree	2	11.76
Somewhat disagree	3	17.65
Disagree	6	35.29
Strongly disagree	4	23.53

Other responses reinforced the sense that most participants read and wrote exclusively English-medium scholarship and did not pursue research and publishing in non-English medium contexts. Most did not feel knowledgeable about non-English medium scholarship on writing and writing instruction (see [Table 9](#)), and most indicated they did not feel confident in their ability to read scholarship in other languages (see [Table 10](#)).

Table 9. Graduate students' responses to the statement "I feel knowledgeable about non-English medium scholarship on writing and writing instruction." (*N*=17)

Response	<i>N</i>	%
Strongly agree	1	5.88
Agree	1	5.88
Somewhat agree	2	11.76
Somewhat disagree	3	17.65
Disagree	6	35.29
Strongly disagree	4	23.53

Table 10. Graduate students' responses to the statement, "I feel confident in my ability to read non-English medium scholarship for the purposes of my research." (*N*=17)

Response	<i>N</i>	%
Strongly agree	1	5.88
Agree	2	11.76
Somewhat agree	4	23.53
Somewhat disagree	2	11.76
Disagree	4	23.53
Strongly disagree	4	23.53

These responses suggest that a lack of knowledge and confidence led participants to adopt a linguistically parochial perspective about writing and writing instruction in their pre-professional scholarly development. As a number of composition scholars have argued, this perspective is endemic to the field of rhetoric and composition, notwithstanding the fact that scholarship in writing and its teaching takes place worldwide in a variety of languages (Donahue; Foster and Russell; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue; Muchiri et al.), and, as Silva, Leki, and Carson have stated "[e]xamination of the large area of studies of writing in languages other than English...would repay consideration by adding needed depth to theories of rhetoric and writing" (402).

As with teaching, relatively low levels of knowledge of and confidence in using other languages for research purposes can be linked to participants' assessment of their professional preparation in these areas. Five students wrote they felt the graduate program did not provide any resources or support for graduate students to read and write scholarship in languages other than English. Several others wrote that the foreign language requirement was the sole gesture toward this goal but questioned its usefulness. At the time of the survey, the program required students to demonstrate competence in two approved foreign languages (i.e. French, German, Spanish, Italian, Latin, Greek, or Russian) or proficiency in one through graduate modern language coursework, which would not otherwise count toward their degrees, or translation exam. However, one student wrote that the "culture around the requirement is that it is a 'hurdle' to get past and not an enriching and useful activity." Another wrote that restrictions around the language requirement limited its usefulness, stating "[t]he language requirements are a bit strict in what is or is not counted as a viable language option. For example, I'm interested in scholarship coming out of Scandinavia, but neither Norwegian nor Swedish are 'approved' languages."³ Finally, one student linked the ineffectiveness of the language requirement to the ways in which the language exams, which required students to translate short passages from another language into English to certify their proficiency, failed to reflect disciplinary views on learning and assessment:

The language exam/requirements were just not useful. I think they should be removed and replaced with courses we could take or directed study where we could study languages and it's not based on proficiency, especially since many scholars in rhetoric and composition complicate what proficiency means. Therefore, it seems rather ironic that this program makes us become "proficient" in a language when we critique "proficiency."

This irony reinforces the sense that language requirements are outside of the mainstream rhetoric and composition graduate curriculum and inessential to the real work of composition professionals (Horner et al. "Language"; Kilfoil; Tardy).

Several participants offered suggestions for making the language requirement more useful and palatable to students. Six called for more opportunities for graduate students to take modern language courses outside the department, with one suggesting that students be advised to take these courses after completing their departmental coursework toward the degree. Another suggested that foreign language coursework might count as graduate credit toward the degree.⁴ However, some participants raised questions about the feasibility of learning other languages in light of the material conditions of graduate student labor. As one wrote, "I'm not sure how the time needed to learn any of these languages would be grafted onto our current model of PhD studies. I used Christmas money to buy some books to self-teach myself Latin, but because of the demands of writing a diss, I have not cracked those books." Another wrote, "If I really wanted to take other language classes, I expect I would be allowed to do so—but it would be on my own time, and I have precious little free time for extracurricular activities."⁵

Five participants wrote that they would benefit as scholars from developing additional language resources. One was "interested in scholarship coming out of Scandinavia" but indicated they didn't have the language knowledge necessary to access this scholarship, while another wrote, "For my dissertation, it would help me to be able to read French, and for my own research interests in classical rhetoric, it would be great to have reading knowledge of Latin and Greek." Another wrote about the need to teach rhetoric and composition graduate students to use other languages for scholarly purposes in response to the global dominance of English:

English may be the dominant language in the world, but there is a variety of untapped scholarship/voices that, because they are not translated into English, are silenced. If we are able to read German or French or Spanish, I think graduate students could utilize a very rich source of information on language use and writing that is ignored due to our monolingual society and value of scholarship that is English only. Teach us the skills, technologies, and literacies of translation, and we could start untapping those sources sooner than later.

And finally, one other wrote, "Additional resources (classes in foreign languages, etc.) might be helpful for those of us planning to read foreign scholarship and/or translate, but I think a lot of us have research interests that don't necessitate those goals."

While this last comment casts research interests that involve reading and/or translating foreign scholarship as outside the norm, all the students surveyed agreed that the acquisition of language knowledge beyond Standard American English is useful for graduate students entering the field of rhetoric and composition (see [Table 11](#)).

Table 11. Graduate students' responses to the statement "I believe that the acquisition of language knowledge

beyond 'standard English' is useful for graduate students entering the field of rhetoric and composition." (N=17)

Response	N	%
Strongly Agree	7	41.18
Agree	6	35.29
Somewhat agree	4	25.53
Somewhat disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0

The answers elicited by this question, along with other survey responses, suggest that while institutionalized monolingualism had worked to shape graduate students' professional development experiences in the program, many were adopting dispositions toward language that recognized multilingualism as a condition of composition teaching and research in global-local contexts. Moreover, many responses indicated participants saw language differences as resource for, rather than impediment to, meaning making in composition scholarly and pedagogical discourses (Horner et al. "Language").

Conclusion

Yildiz argues the pressures of the monolingual paradigm "have not just obscured multilingual practices across history; they have also led to active processes of monolingualization" and education "has been one of the primary means of such a social engineering of monolingual populations" (2-3). Various studies of composition's history suggest the field's development can be read as part of the norming of monolingualism in U.S. colleges and universities, in so far as composition has ensured that U.S. writing instruction takes place in English-only (Horner and Trimbur), aligned its programs and pedagogies with English native speaker discourse (Trimbur), and maintained a "myth of linguistic homogeneity" in writing programs that informs their frequent neglect of second language writers (Matsuda "Myth"). In historical context, the contemporary move to embrace language difference as "a new norm" (Ray) in college writing instruction suggests a paradigmatic shift in disciplinary work that will require compositionists to develop new knowledge and capabilities in order to be meaningful.

Matsuda argues that composition's history, which "can be characterized as a struggle to dissociate itself from language issues," has created the conditions for "a huge void in the knowledge of language issues" in the field ("Wild West" 130). Consequently, many modern compositionists aware of and interested in language differences in writing and writing programs lack the knowledge base to explore this new "linguistic frontier" (Matsuda, "Wild West" 130) in teaching and research. Christine Tardy agrees that compositionists often lack the meta-knowledge about language to address linguistic diversity in pedagogically informed and effective ways. She argues for integrating insights from second language acquisition and bilingualism into rhetoric and composition graduate education to better equip future teachers with the knowledge to "understand, support, and facilitate the multi(or trans)lingual development of their students, to make pedagogical choices that are broadly informed and context sensitive, and ultimately, to adopt dispositions that value and build upon the linguistic resources of their students" (187).

I believe graduate programs like U of L's can adjust their curricula to leverage their students' awareness of and positive perceptions of multilingualism in public, classroom, and disciplinary discourses to support their development of informed professional dispositions toward language. To do so, surveys like the one I have discussed here can be useful, since listening to graduate students about how they perceive their professional abilities, interests, and practices related to language and language relations can help administrators and faculty imagine how to make these changes. In this case, the program might consider developing specialized courses, workshops, and materials that address language issues in composition. The program might also consider ways to support students taking courses in allied fields, like applied linguistics. However, the program should be mindful of graduate students' limited time and resources and also consider ways to integrate transdisciplinary research in language (Tardy) and multilingual professional practices into its mainstream rhetoric and composition graduate curriculum.

For instance, including research from applied linguistics in core courses, like the composition teaching practicum, and the exams that follow from these courses, might lessen the material burden of pursuing knowledge “outside” rhetoric and composition proper. Additionally, revamping the language requirement to make graduate students’ development of new language resources a central component of their learning, through inviting and supporting scholarship in multiple languages in seminars, comprehensive exams, and dissertations, might better position students to teach and conduct research across languages. Of course, any adjustments to curricula are often challenging and involve time and resources many programs’ struggle to achieve. However, if language differences are to become the new norm in composition’s professional practices as well as discourse, adjustments are needed to ensure future faculty develop the desire, confidence, and tools to address matters of language diversity in writing programs in thoughtful and effective ways.

Appendix: Survey Questionnaire and Tabulated Likert-Scale Responses

Rhetoric and Composition Ph.D. Students’ Perceptions of Language Diversity Survey

For the purpose of this survey, “language diversity” refers to the simultaneous presence of multiple, shifting language “codes” (including both national languages and dialects) in U.S. higher education.

1. At what stage are you currently in your Ph.D. program?

Drop down menu: coursework, exams, prospectus, dissertation

2. What courses have you taught or are you currently teaching?

Drop down menu: ENG 101, ENG 102, ENG 105, ENG 303, ENG 306, ENG 309, other (space for text), not teaching/on fellowship

3. What national languages and/or dialects of English do you use currently or have you used in the past and where and when have you developed your knowledge of these languages? Please discuss all languages you feel you have some familiarity with, even if not “fluent.”

4. I notice students whose language practices reflect a variety of national languages and dialects of English in the classes I teach.

Strongly agree	5
Agree	4
Somewhat agree	4
Somewhat disagree	2
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	1
TOTAL	0

5. Compared to 30 years ago, language diversity in U.S. higher education is:

Increasing	15
Largely the same	2
Decreasing	0
TOTAL	17

6. In my teaching, I feel responsible for addressing the specific language needs of students with language backgrounds different from the mainstream English monolinguals, including students commonly identified as “multilingual,” “multidialectal,” “basic writers,” or “ESL writers”?

Strongly agree	4
Agree	7
Somewhat agree	3
Somewhat disagree	1
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	1
TOTAL	0

7. I feel confident in my ability to teach students with diverse language backgrounds, including students commonly identified as “multilingual,” “multidialectal,” “basic writers,” or “ESL writers”?

Strongly agree	3
Agree	2
Somewhat agree	8
Somewhat disagree	2
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	0
TOTAL	0

8. What resources and support (coursework, requirements, trainings/workshops, etc.) does your Ph.D. program provide to prepare you to teach students with a wide range of different language backgrounds? Would additional resources be helpful? If so, please specify. [space for text]

9. I feel knowledgeable about scholarship devoted to language diversity in writing teaching, including but not necessarily limited to work on students commonly identified as “multilingual,” “multidialectal,” “basic writers,” or “ESL writers.”

Strongly agree	3
Agree	6
Somewhat agree	7
Somewhat disagree	1
Disagree	0

Strongly disagree	0
TOTAL	0

10. I am interested in conducting research on and writing about language diversity in writing teaching.

Strongly agree	2
Agree	3
Somewhat agree	4
Somewhat disagree	3
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	0
TOTAL	0

11. I feel confident in my ability to conduct research and write about language diversity in writing teaching.

Strongly agree	2
Agree	5
Somewhat agree	2
Somewhat disagree	3
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	0
TOTAL	0

12. I feel knowledgeable about non-English medium scholarship on writing and writing instruction.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	1
Somewhat agree	2
Somewhat disagree	3
Disagree	6
Strongly disagree	4
TOTAL	0

13. I feel confident in my ability to read scholarship written in languages other than English for the purposes of my research.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Somewhat agree	4
Somewhat disagree	2
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	4
TOTAL	0

14. I feel confident in my ability to write scholarship in languages other than English for contribution to a non-English medium conference or journal.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	1
Somewhat agree	0
Somewhat disagree	1
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	12
TOTAL	0

15. What resources and support (coursework, requirements, trainings/workshops, etc.) does the your program provide to prepare you to read and write scholarship in languages other than English? Would additional resources and support be helpful? If so, please specify. [space for text]

16. In my teaching, I use language conventions associated with other national languages.

Strongly agree	0
Agree	1
Somewhat agree	2
Somewhat disagree	5
Disagree	8
Strongly disagree	1
TOTAL	0

17. In my teaching, I use not only Standard English dialect but also other dialectal forms of English.

Strongly agree	3
Agree	2
Somewhat agree	1
Somewhat disagree	6
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	1
TOTAL	0

18. If you agreed with the previous statements, please describe the languages and dialects of English you use; when, why, and how you use them; and what teaching opportunities they enable. [space for text]

19. I use languages beyond “Standard English” in my SCHOLARSHIP, including but not necessarily limited to conventions associated with other national languages and dialects of English.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	0
Somewhat agree	0
Somewhat disagree	5
Disagree	8
Strongly disagree	3
TOTAL	0

20. If you agreed with the previous statement, please describe these languages; when, why, and how you use them; and what lines of scholarly inquiry they enable. [space for text]

21. I believe the acquisition of language knowledge beyond “standard English” is useful for graduate students entering the field of rhetoric and composition.

Strongly agree	7
Agree	6
Somewhat agree	4
Somewhat disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

22. If you agreed with the previous statement, please describe what type(s) of language knowledge you feel is most useful and why? [space for text]
23. What resources and support does your program provide to help you develop language knowledge beyond “standard English?” Would additional resources and support be helpful? If so, specify. [space for text]
24. 24. If you have any other experiences with or opinions about language diversity in the context of your role as a graduate student, please feel free to add them here. [space for text]

Notes

1. Due to a technical problem with the survey instrument, only 16 answers were recorded to this question. ([Return to text.](#))
2. English 620 Research in Composition is also required of all students. However, students have the option to substitute other research methods courses in the department. No substitutions are offered for English 602. ([Return to text.](#))
3. This student’s comment does not acknowledge that according to the Graduate Program Guidelines (2013) students could petition the graduate committee to approve other languages for them to use to complete the requirement. However, the comment reflects to the perceived barrier listing particular approved languages in program policies places on students’ development of additional language knowledge. ([Return to text.](#))
4. While one graduate foreign language course could count toward the degree according to the rules, this student seemed to be referring to undergraduate language coursework. Undergraduate language courses focus on developing students’ language knowledge, rather than their knowledge of the literature and culture of that language. The latter is the focus of modern language graduate courses at U of L, which assume the student already has substantial language knowledge. ([Return to text.](#))
5. Though graduate programs have traditionally assumed that graduate students would have a background in another language by virtue of undergraduate coursework, this presumption is increasingly problematic. Under the pressure of state and federal budget cuts, many universities have scaled back their modern language programs and classes. For instance, at the U of L of New York at Albany in 2010, administrators responded to sweeping budget cuts by eliminating undergraduate majors in a number of languages. In 2011, George Washington University’s Columbian College of Arts and Sciences eliminated undergraduate language requirements as a budget-saving measure. As reporter Lisa Foderaro observes in an article in the *New York Times*, “small, interactive” foreign language courses are both expensive to run and can seem unnecessary in a world increasingly dominated by English. The paradox, however, is that universities are eliminating these courses at the same time they “embrace an international mission.” SUNY Albany’s motto is, after all, “the world within reach.” ([Return to text.](#))

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"The Postmonolingual Condition" from *Composition Forum* 40 (Fall 2018)

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