**UTEP as Contact Zone**

Although the two of us have different backgrounds and attended different universities, what ties us together was our choice to move to El Paso, TX. For the two of us, this city provides some of the comforts of home, but it also took some adjusting.El Paso, Texas is in a very unique location. Located next to the U.S.-Mexico border community procures challenges within the classroom…. Will help transition to the next part about writing practices.

According to Beatrice Méndez -Newman’s “Teaching Writing at Hispanic-Serving Institutions,” “Compositionists with little or no experience at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) quickly discover that traditional training in rhetoric and composition inadequately addressed the impact of many Hispanic students' sociocultural, socioeconomic, and ethnolinguistic makeup on performance in the writing class and on acculturation into the larger academic community” (17). When a large number of students in First-Year Composition (FYC) have different academic preparation and perspectives than the fictional “mainstream” student, classroom dynamics alter; this is where instructors at these institutions need to take into account the linguistic complexities at HSIs. “Compositionists at a HSI do not have to be Hispanic to be effective in the writing classroom. However, awareness of Hispanic students' cultural and ethnolinguistic identities should figure prominently in the construction of the writing classroom” (19) states Méndez-Newman. In *Latino/a Discourses: On Language, Identity, and Literacy Education*, Michelle Hall Kells, Valerie M. Balester, and Victor Villanueva write, “We know. We know of the Latinos and Latinas in our classroom. We know of their linguistic complexity, but we haven't found ways to translate this knowledge into classroom practices that aren't still founded on an assimilationist set of assumptions” (2). **[add transition to the next section….]**

One of the elective courses the two of us enrolled in was an Ethnographic study on our First-Year Composition Program. This course focused on the literacies/biliteracies practices of first semester composition students and instructors.  One of the things we quickly learned is that literacy practices are so ingrained with language ideologies and identities. As a result of our coursework, we have learned how the classroom can serve as a contact zone. In “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermath as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). Not only are we confronted with our own language ideologies but with student language ideologies as well. After examining our own language practices and the practices we discovered when interviewing students, we have come to realize that as instructors we will constantly be grappling with these issues.

While conducting research, our class observed that some instructors were adamant about not allowing students to speak Spanish in the classroom. The two instructors we observed welcomed and invited  students to use Spanish, Spanglish, or other languages in their classes. However, both instructors did not make it explicitly clear that these language practices were allowed in their classrooms. Interestingly, we found that despite the instructors’ openness to students using other languages in their writing or class discussions students did not often take advantage of this opportunity to make use of the linguistic capital they possess as a result of their bilingualism. Students we interviewed expressed to us that they often use Spanish, Spanglish, and other languages outside the classroom. It was quite common that students speak Spanish, or Spanglish, at home, with friends, and in text message conversations. However, one of the students we interviewed made it clear that speaking Spanish was something he only did at home and not at school. Most students we interviewed expressed that Spanish was an “insiders” language, a language only practiced among family and friends, and not shared among academic settings. Based on the interviews conducted with students we quickly realized how detrimental the dominant English standard language ideologies are to students. We found that even when given the option to make use of their varied language practices, they chose not to based on their assumptions and/or experiences about what is, and is not allowed in an English Composition classroom.

One student expressed during an interview that he understood he could use Spanish in his writing, or a source from a Spanish academic journal, but chose not to do so. He informed us that he felt comfortable in his knowledge that his instructor would not be opposed to him doing this, but that he would not use Spanish, or any other language in his research, or writing. When prompted to explain this, the student did not have a clear answer as to why he would not use Spanish when his instructor was open to this. It is important to note that while most students are bilingual they may not have a lot of experience writing in Spanish. We understand that this could be one reason as to why some students, despite knowing they can integrate Spanish into their work, choose not to do so.

**Transition?** As a result, each of us take on different pedagogical approaches to make sure that our classrooms are linguistically diverse. For example, we encourage students to use sources in Spanish when conducting research, if the student feels comfortable doing so, and the sources are appropriate. We invite students to communicate amongst each other in Spanish, Spanglish, or other languages as along as they are learning the rhetorical practices they need in order to communicate effectively. We find these practices in our classrooms helps the students understand the assignment guidelines easier, and promotes more conversation amongst each other. Fortunately, the unique location  and student body population at UTEP gives us the opportunity to not just read rhetorical theory, but actually put it into practice. Each of us is committed to taking action by attempting to dismantle SLI. We understand that SLI has a long history in and outside of the classroom, but we see our positions as scholars and instructors as an opportunity to continue to do research in this area of RWS, and encourage inclusion of language practices that exist outside SLI in the classroom. It’s not enough for us to know that we are okay with student speaking Spanish. We need to explicitly let them know that they are welcomed to make use of any, and all of their linguistic capital in the classroom. If students are more comfortable talking to one another in Spanish, Spanglish, or other languages, then we see no reason to stop this. We encourage that they use the language, and language practices that they feel most comfortable using. We do everything we can to let students know that we do not have a specific policy against them incorporating Spanish into the classroom. If students wish not to take advantage of this, then we encourage that they make use of all of their language skills. This may result in students using Spanish throughout their writing process. If a student prefers to only speak, write, and use sources in English we encourage them to do so. Our goal is to create an environment that allows the students the freedom to use all of their linguistic practices, because we view them as beneficial, and in no way detrimental to their development as writers. This is supported by the curriculum we teach as several of the assignments in our writing courses and writing program allow our students to move away from using alphabetic Standard Academic English practices and move into other modes of composing.

Jenn: What do you do to in the classroom to promote language diversity?

not something I thought about before asked by students if they could use sources written in Spanish. I realized that if they were more comfortable reading in Spanish, and translating the relevant information

The specific practices and activities in my composition classroom vary from class to class. At UTEP some classes are made up of students that are mostly bilingual, but prefer to concentrate on writing and practicing writing in English. Other class consists of groups of students that fret over grammar, and vocabulary because they feel inconsistencies in those areas impact the effectiveness of them communicating their ideas in a paper written in English.

Students I’ve taught can typically switch between speaking in English and Spanish easily. They will often use a mix of both in conversation. However, they usually have only been allowed to write in English, or there is the expectation that they must write in English throughout their writing process. To promote linguistic diversity in my classroom I have had to come up with ways that place value upon the many different, or nontraditional linguistic practices (how do I say this better?) they possess. One way of doing this is to regularly encourage students to work in Spanish if possible during their writing process. Of course, this is done at the comfort of the student.

This can occur if/when a student is researching and writing

allow students to use sources written in the language of their choosing. This came about when a student expressed that while researching his topic he found sources that were written in Spanish, and