

# Linguistic Memory and the Politics of U.S. English

John Trimbur

**A**ccording to Mary Louise Pratt, a common misconception regarding the American public's view of language is that the U.S. is hostile to multilingualism. Instead, Pratt says, Americans are *ambivalent* about the multiple languages spoken on the street, at work, in the schoolyard, and in the homes where 25 percent of the population speak a language other than English. The politics of language in the U.S. are a tug-of-war between English monolingualism (which, as Pratt notes, gives the U.S. the “well-earned nickname of *cemeterio de lenguas*, a language cemetery” [111]) and the linguistic reality that the U.S. is now, as it has always been, a multilingual society. The ambivalence that Pratt so acutely identifies has its own specific histories in lived experience and linguistic memory. My task here is to look for the roots of this ambivalence in the formation of U.S. English in the late colonial and early national period, roughly 1750 to 1850, just as the American colonists were breaking away from England and, in the matrix of the new nation, establishing the relationship of English to other languages. The design of this essay is first to trace the postcolonial politics of language in the United States. Then I suggest how the linguistic memory that emerges from decolonization and nation building continues, often in unsuspected ways, to influence the language policy of the modern U.S. university and U.S. college composition.

## LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE FOUNDING FATHERS

One of the familiar liberal arguments about the politics of language in the United States, often taken up by opponents of the English Only movement, holds that the

**John Trimbur** is professor of writing and rhetoric and co-director of the professional writing program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He has published extensively in writing theory, including with Bruce Horner the Richard Braddock Award-winning “English Only and U.S. College Composition.” His current research is on the politics of English in the United States and in South Africa.

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great wisdom of the Founding Fathers is that they made no national language policy, whether through legislating an official language or establishing a corpus-planning language academy along the lines of the Académie française, as John Adams and others proposed. The Founding Fathers' noninstitutional stance—their refusal to give official status to English—is seen accordingly as evidence of their enlightened tolerance of linguistic diversity and a multilingual citizenry. This refusal to institutionalize English, however, should not be taken to mean the United States did not have a national language policy. Rather, to use Harold F. Schiffman's term, language policy in the colonial and national period was “covert” (14–15), whereby the politics of language diffused throughout civil society, making language policy a matter of custom rather than law, operating through cultural formations instead of state mandate. According to Schiffman, we must look for the grounds of language policy, whether the overt type found in state edict and national planning or the covert type characteristic of the Founding Fathers' United States, in “linguistic culture”—what he defines as the “set of behaviours, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language” (5).

Locating the Founding Fathers in the linguistic culture of their time helps us see their language policy, in keeping with the political philosophy of the era, as *laissez-faire* in character. According to the *laissez-faire* spirit of the age, as Joseph Lo Bianco puts it, “a foundational liberty of the new republic, or the very ‘*private-ness*’ of the language domain, made it inappropriate for there to be state involvement with language” (52; emphasis added). For the Founding Fathers, the state must be neutral in matters of language, recognize no favoritism in policy nor accord official status to any language. The Founding Fathers' neutrality, however, not only restricted the power of the state by keeping language policy out of the political domain (thereby explaining their reluctance to recognize linguistic rights as a basic political liberty); it also assigned language to the private domain, where language policy enters all the more persuasively into the civic networks, relations of production, popular discourse, and everyday practices of U.S. linguistic culture.

To put it another way, a *laissez-faire* language policy, despite its ostensible neutrality, may be just as programmatic as overt forms of language policy. The suppression of African languages through the slave trade and the formation of a plantation labor force offers the most revealing evidence of how language policy operated covertly, yet systematically, in the colonial and national period. Slave traders routinely separated speakers of the same African languages as a means of social control, and plantation owners paid particular attention to purchasing slaves who spoke different African languages in order to restrict communication and the possibilities of insurrection. Under threat of harsh punishment, which included having their tongues cut out, slaves were prohibited from speaking their native languages or teaching them

to their children. Instead, to manage work relations on the plantations, initially pidgin and eventually creolized versions of English were developed as linguistic innovations that, along with compulsory illiteracy laws that forbade teaching slaves to read and write, constituted the official and unofficial language planning of the planter class.

Looked at this way, the Founding Fathers' laissez-faire language policy amounted not so much to linguistic tolerance or, as Shirley Brice Heath argues, a historical precedent for bilingualism. Rather its very covert nature virtually guaranteed the inevitable Anglification of language in the United States through the workings of labor relations, the market, and civil society. During the late colonial and early national period, a politics of English *mainly* (as opposed to the later, more virulent politics of English Only) secured "unassailable" status in the salient domains of power—government, work, education, religion, commerce.

In his well-known study of English language planning and reform, *Grammar and Good Taste*, Dennis Baron says that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "the major patterns of American language reform crystallized" (3). I agree that the late colonial and early national period offers a particularly telling moment for understanding the politics of English in the United States (and, as I've already suggested, the historical structures of American ambivalence about multilingualism). Still, once we identify the cultural logic in the language policy of the era, it becomes hard to accept Baron's claim that the efforts of American language planners and reformers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "have always fizzled out" (2), no more than "exercise[s] in futility" (5). Rather, state neutrality, the privatization of language, and the accompanying absence of linguistic rights can be seen at work in a language policy that was not so much "futile" as productive. While in some instances settler colonies, such as European Jews in Palestine and the Dutch in South Africa, developed new national languages—modern Hebrew and Afrikaans—the United States held to the language of the mother country, rejecting proposals for a new national language (Greek, Hebrew, and French were put forward). It should not be surprising, then, that Baron says "the question of one English or two pervades discussions of language in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth century" (33). What I want to show, however, is that this installation of an Anglo-American dyad in U.S. linguistic culture produces a systematic forgetting of the multiple languages spoken and written in North America and thereby constitutes a key source of American ambivalence toward multilingualism.

#### POLITICS OF ENGLISH IN THE POSTCOLONY

In postcolonial theory, ambivalence is often identified with the liminality of the postcolonial subject. However, one of the difficulties with the very idea of

postcolonialism, as Anne McClintock and others have pointed out, is that it's often employed as a singular ahistorical category—*the* postcolonial subject, *the* postcolonial condition, *the* postcolonial intellectual, postcolonial discourse, and so on. Accordingly, I must begin by saying it is critical to historicize ambivalence in order to identify its structures of feeling, to understand its historical processes and productions, and to clarify the potentialities for liberation entangled in its trajectories.

As I see it, postcolonial theory is a standpoint from which to analyze colonialism, anticolonial struggles, and the process of decolonization. To make good use of such a postcolonial standpoint, we need to draw distinctions between the displacements and settlements of historically specific colonial moments. If it is meaningful to think of the United States as a postcolony at all, we must recognize the term “postcolony” as an analytic one, rather than honorific or celebratory, an instrument to see what kind of colony was established in North America and what the process of decolonization signifies for the politics of U.S. English.

It is conventional to divide the colonial expansion of the European nations (and later the United States and Japan) into settler colonies and exploitation colonies. From this perspective, McClintock's characterization of the United States as a “breakaway settler colony” is pertinent and instructive. If it is true that the American colonists fought the first successful war of national liberation in the modern era, it is just as true that formal political independence from England resulted in shifting control of colonization from the metropolis to the colony itself. The United States as a new nation quickly turned to the project of forging a transcontinental empire, based on slavery and the relocation of American Indian tribes, by annexing the territories of the Louisiana Purchase and those that became Florida and Alaska through purchase, and conquering militarily the Mexican territories that now make up the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

As may be evident, one definitive quality of the U.S. postcolony is the shallowness and limits of the process of decolonization. Consequently, in terms of the politics of language, the story of decolonization has been told by literary and cultural historians as largely a matter of the relation between British and American English—of whether the new nation would develop its own variety of English to bring out its “revolutionary truth” or defer to received London standards. To be sure, some of the ambivalence that accents the politics of English in the United States can be traced to the “linguistic insecurity” Baron notes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. Still, representing the politics of language as the question of English (see Baron; Kramer; Simpson) amounts to a performance of the past that can be read symptomatically as a ritualized forgetting that the United States was then, as it is now, a multilingual society. To frame the politics of language in terms of Anglophiles and Anglophobes maintains a resolutely English-only perspective that pays

no attention, or attention only in passing, to the multiplicity of languages in North America and their relation to English in the colonies and the new nation.

What I'm getting at here is that we need to decenter but not dismiss the Anglo-American linguistic dyad as the central focus of a politics of language in the U.S. postcolony, to relocate it instead in the wider circulation of peoples and languages in the geohistorical region of the circum-Atlantic world. This is the polyglot vortex that produced, as Paul Gilroy puts it, a "new structure of cultural exchange [. . .] built up across the imperial networks that once played host to the triangular trade of sugar, slaves, and capital" (157). To understand the cultural exchanges that shaped U.S. linguistic culture—its linguistic memory and its habits of forgetting—requires a transnational perspective that enables us to see how U.S. English took shape in relation to other languages.

#### THE ANGLO-SAXON SURROGATE

"Newness," Joseph Roach says, "enacts a kind of surrogation—in the invention of a new England or new France out of memories of the old" (4). Surrogation, as Roach explains it, involves a substitution for the missing original that results in a systematic (and systematically incomplete) forgetting. When "actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric"—when, say, someone dies or retires from work or, for our purposes, settles new lands or breaks ties with the old—then the incumbents, according to Roach, "attempt to fit satisfactory alternates." However, since "collective memory works selectively, imaginatively, and often perversely, surrogation rarely if ever succeeds." Whether through deficit or surplus, the "intended substitute" is inevitably an inexact fit, a source of ambivalence more than a resolution to the anxiety of displacement. Thus, as Roach notes, "selective memory requires public enactments of forgetting, either to blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or, more desperately, to exaggerate them in order to mystify a previous Golden Age, now lapsed" (2–3). In *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Roach shows how circum-Atlantic memory, through such public spectacles as parades, carnival, Wild West shows, auctions, funeral traditions, and blackface minstrelsy, as well as works of British and American theater and literature, both retains and tries to forget the consequences of the diasporic and genocidal history of colonization and slavery.

In the politics of language, we can see how the settlement of the English colonies and the War of Independence looked to the historical primacy of Anglo-Saxon origins and linguistic memories of an older, pure English speech. In the colonial and national period, thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster called up an ancestral, free-born Anglo-Saxon surrogate in order to "erase evidence of diaspora

and mixture” and to “promote myths of monocultural autochthony” (Roach 109). The Anglo-American dyad Franklin and Webster installed in linguistic memory, as surely as the selective memories Roach identifies in other cultural domains, involves an incomplete substitution and systematic forgetting. In part, this forgetting entails the conceptual erasure of indigenous populations by representing American Indian languages as extinct or dying. In part, it denies the suppression of African languages and makes the inventive hybridity of African American language into a deficient and disabling dialect of English. Most of all, the “genius of Anglo-Saxonism,” as Roach says (and Franklin and Webster demonstrate), is its capacity “to perpetuate itself by simultaneously expanding its boundaries in the name of freedom and disavowing its consequent affiliations in the name of race” (109).

Benjamin Franklin’s infamous tirade against Pennsylvania Germans in his “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind,” written in 1751, presents a remarkable instance of Anglo-Saxon expansionism and its racialized identifications and divisions. Here is a key passage from Franklin’s “Observations”:

Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion [. . .] (234)

As can be seen, for Franklin the English claim to Pennsylvania rests on priority of settlement and the purported originality of the English settler colonists. The very notion that Pennsylvania could be “founded” by Europeans depends in the first instance, of course, on the replacement of aboriginal sovereignty and native patterns of land use by English settlement and the entitlement of free-born subjects of the British Empire to expand the territory of “Anglo-Saxon Liberty.” By installing such an Anglo-Saxon surrogate in the gap between the mother country and the new world, the displaced English settlers in North America seized on a readily available fiction to represent themselves as being at home in the colonies—a means of remembering and forgetting that in turn erased native inhabitants and cast the “swarm” of Pennsylvania Germans as illegitimate invading rivals.

Franklin’s xenophobic fear of a “colony of Aliens” who threaten to “Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them” certainly fits, as Heath suggests, into a larger pattern in the United States, where the language of non-English-speakers who are seen to pose a social, economic, or political threat becomes the “focus of argument” about linguistic status and political legitimacy (10). In a sequence of rhetorical moves that have become standard in the politics of U.S. English, Franklin begins by asserting the linguistic priority of English and its authenticity as the language of settlement. Then he constructs an unbridgeable divide between English speakers and

German speakers that is warranted not only by linguistic and cultural difference but also, revealingly, by the lack of a shared “Complexion.”

Franklin’s move from language to complexion leads him to disaffiliate English settlers from Germans on the grounds of racialized identities. In a now familiar gesture, language and race become proxies for each other as Franklin divides the world between the “black or tawny” people of Africa, Asia, and Native America, the “swarthy” people of Europe (which includes not only the predictable Spaniards and Italians but also Swedes and Germans), and the Saxons and English alone who “make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth.” Linguistic memory merges with natural history as Franklin maps a racialized taxonomy across the surface of the globe. What is most troubling to Franklin is the recognition that, according to the categories of his own invention, “the number of white People in the World is proportionately very small.” In Franklin’s articulation of language and race, the installation of an Anglo-Saxon surrogate in the multilingual and multiethnic world of the circum-Atlantic provokes the realization that whiteness is surrounded and outnumbered. “I could wish their Numbers were increased” (234), Franklin says, in one of those moments of Anglo-Saxon linguistic and racial paranoia, when Empire, to use Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s terms, becomes aware of the Multitude.

The diaspora of the circum-Atlantic world, as Roach says, puts “pressure on autochthony, threatening its imputed purity, both antecedent and successive, because it appears to make available a human superabundance for mutual assimilation” (43). In the case of Franklin, the founding myth of the English colonies, with its claims to priority of settlement, takes place in a geohistorical landscape in which the Anglo-Saxon minority is threatened by swarming multitudes and a Babel of languages. The overwhelming number—the “herd”—of racialized others threatens miscegenation and promiscuous liaisons of all sorts. Predictably, Franklin calls for a halt to immigration to Pennsylvania that might “darken its People.” Nonetheless, Franklin’s desire to bring forward an authorizing, autochthonous Anglo-Saxon origin of language and liberty kept colliding with the linguistic and cultural impurities of the circum-Atlantic world, the “alien double,” as Roach puts it, who appears “in memory only to disappear” (6). The “whiteness” of Franklin’s imagination, to use Roach’s words, “could not exist even as perjury” without the necessary “failures of memory to obscure the mixtures, blends, and provisional antitypes necessary to its production” (6).

The pressures of the circum-Atlantic world, in other words, could not but provoke new and inventive strategies of linguistic memory and forgetting. In the case of Noah Webster, Franklin’s rival German is no longer the source of linguistic, cultural, and racial anxiety but instead is assimilated and refigured in a shared Teutonic linguistic culture. As Thomas Paul Bonfiglio notes, “Webster believes in a profoundly Germanic infrastructure in the English language” (83) that reaches back to Biblical

times before the separation of Noah's sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Vernacular words in Celtic and Teutonic languages—the foundation, for Webster, of an English rooted in antiquity—acquire a primacy and historical pedigree in their affinity with words that were part of a common language before the linguistic dispersion of Babel. According to Webster, while Shem and Ham are the sources of Semitic and Hamitic languages and cultures, Europeans are the descendants of Japheth. From these ancient roots, Webster argues, Teutonic influences shaped not only Greek and Latin but, more tellingly for his purposes, the English spoken in the United States and England.

In a stroke of linguistic nationalism, Webster makes American English historically antecedent to British English. As Webster says in his *Dissertations on the English Language*, published in 1789, there is a “surprising similarity between the idioms of the New England people and those of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Congreve, &c. who wrote in the true English stile” (108). Webster's linguistic nationalism hinges foremost, it is important to see, not on postcolonial innovation but on a restoration of the linguistic memory of an English that “seldom uses[s] any words except those of Saxon origin,” a language free of the Latin contaminants of the Roman conquest and the Norman yoke. “[T]he people of America, in particular the English descendants,” Webster says, “speak the most *pure English* now known in the world” (288). As Baron notes, “Webster recognizes that Americans owe their language to the mother country” (45). Nonetheless, for Webster, the English of the British Empire is a language in decline, a decadent and impure product of neologism, loss of standards, and intercultural contact. “Let it be observed,” Webster says in 1816, “that so far as a difference between the language of Englishmen and of Americans consists in our use of words obsolete in the higher circles of Great Britain, the change is not in *our* practice but in that of Englishmen. The fault, if any is *theirs*” (qtd. in Baron 58). American English, as Webster sees it, “still adhere[s] to the analogies of the language, where the English have infringed them. So far therefore as the regularity of construction is concerned, we ought to retain our own practice and be our own standards” (129).

According to Webster, American English not only has a purity of origin but also a uniformity of expression that guarantees its function in binding the nation into a common speech community. In contrast to the linguistic situation in England, Americans are not divided by local dialects. “The people of distant counties in England,” Webster says, “can hardly understand one another, so various are their dialects.” In the United States, however, “in the extent of twelve hundred miles in America,” he continues, “there are very few, I question whether a hundred words [. . .] which are not universally intelligible” (288–89). Perhaps, but only if you ignore the Plantation Creole spoken by slaves, who made up more than one-fifth of the population when Webster was writing, and the various linguistic hybrids spoken

along the borders of the United States, where French, Spanish, and Native American languages interacted with English through annexation, trade, and diplomacy. Further, the pidgin spoken by the multiethnic crews aboard sailing ships in the circum-Atlantic triangle trade combined “nautical English,” the “‘sabir’ of the Mediterranean,” the “hermeticlike cant talk of the ‘underworld,’” and “West African grammatical construction” to shape a new language of the underclasses (Linebaugh and Rediker 153). The uniformity of English that Webster has in mind, as has so often been the case in the United States, is the language of the New England settlers, the Anglo-Saxon descendants whose own regional dialect became the surrogate for a missing English of national unity.

#### TOWARD A NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY ON LANGUAGE

Webster’s legacy, as Michael P. Kramer puts it, is having shaped “American linguistic history into a final, open-ended chapter of the Anglo-Saxon spirit” (62). Certainly this is the linguistic memory that has been institutionalized in English studies, U.S. college composition, and the modern U.S. university. Since the overturn of the classical curriculum and the establishment of graduate education on the German model in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.S. university has drastically curtailed the educational role of languages other than English—whether Greek and Latin in the old-time American pietistic colleges or German for those Americans who went to German universities to get PhDs. Instead, English has become the unquestioned medium of instruction and the vernacular of modernity, identified with science, technology, and the professions. First British and then American literature replaced the classics as the cultural heritage of university education, and English composition has become the single universal requirement in undergraduate education in the United States. In turn, the other modern languages have been territorialized in departments of French, German, Spanish, and so on, as national literatures, assigning to English only the status of a living language (Horner and Trimbur).

Along similar lines, from the late nineteenth century on, language policy took on a decidedly more overt English-only character in the political domain. For example, oral knowledge of English was required for naturalization by the Nationality Act of 1906 and English literacy by the Internal Security Act of 1950. Settlement house workers and other progressive reformers designed Americanization campaigns to assimilate new immigrants to English and to American culture. Beginning in the late 1880s, a number of cities and states proposed legislation, aimed mainly at German language schools, to restrict or ban altogether bilingual education and instruction in languages other than English, sometimes bringing forward “research” studies to show bilingual education is a harmful “*burden* for children” (Schiffman 236). With

the entrance of the United States into World War I, anti-German sentiment intensified, and state Councils of Defense banned the use of German not only in schools, churches, and the press but also at work and in phone conversations. Such overt attempts to favor English and curtail other languages by way of state intervention have continued, of course, in the English Only movement and in more recent legal attacks on bilingual education.

What appear to be departures from the laissez-faire language policy of the early republic must be seen, Schiffman argues, as arising from and codifying ideas already prevalent in American linguistic culture rather than sharp breaks. I have shown some of the ways the “Anglo-Saxon spirit” that underwrites the linguistic culture of English monolingualism took root in the colonial and national period, from the 1750s, when Franklin was agitating against the Pennsylvania Germans, to the 1850s, when the publication of *Moby Dick* in 1850 and Matthew Perry’s opening of Japan in 1853 marked symbolically the movement outward from the circum-Atlantic world to the trans-Pacific rim in the age of high American imperialism. Until quite recently, the Anglo-Saxon surrogate of Franklin and Webster’s era fit reassuringly into a taken-for-granted narrative of American exceptionalism, where the Pilgrims strode forward on their “errand in the wilderness,” toward the manifest destiny that loomed on the western horizon. By the late nineteenth century, however, fraught with Social Darwinist fears of immigration from southern and eastern Europe, race mixing, and the loss of Teutonic vigor, Anglo-Saxonism hardened in the imperialist ethos of the “white man’s burden,” as Rudyard Kipling urged on his fellow English speakers in the brutal pacification of the Philippines following the Spanish American War. Not surprisingly, the United States made English an official language for the first time in the conquered territories of Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

The issue here is not simply Anglo-Saxon hegemony in linguistic memory, the imposition of English on colonized people, or the Americanization campaigns directed at immigrants around the turn of the previous century. Rather what is crucial is the relentless monolingualism of American linguistic culture, the strategies by which English is meant to replace and silence other languages. If anything, this unidirectional monolingualism has been codified in melting-pot ideologies as a “natural” language shift to English only (with consequent loss of mother tongue) that occurs by the third generation in immigrant families, thereby making bilingualism and the maintenance of home languages appear to be aberrant and un-American. In other words, U.S. English inevitably figures as a loss of memory, a language of forgetting whose very ground of speech is the displacement of other languages. And yet, as Roach suggests, “the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred” (4). Linguistic memory—the incomplete forgetting of ancestral languages—virtually guarantees ambivalence about multilingualism in the United States, as traces of other languages—embedded residually in mundane rituals, ethnic and

racial identifications, the names and taste of food, the sound of a word, a style of dress—collide with English monolingualism and its Anglo-Saxon heritage.

From a certain angle, it would appear that “memory imperfectly deferred” is compulsively resurfacing in the U.S. university, in the form of multiculturalism, postcolonial theory, and transnational studies. The emergence of this counter-memory has indeed recast the study of history, literature, and culture, with works such as Roach’s *Cities of the Dead*, among many others, that take as their unit of analysis not the nation-state and the national character of the old American exceptionalism but instead the circulation of people and intercultural exchange across national borders. Still, as Marc Shell and Werner Sollors have pointed out, there is a remarkable silence within this recent and important body of work, as well as across the university curriculum, about the multilingualism that the Anglo-American linguistic dyad has traditionally erased.

The primacy of English as the medium of instruction in the U.S. university retains a powerful hold on teaching and learning, curtailing the development both materially and programmatically of a multilingual curriculum. Take, for example, Hampshire College, surely known for its progressive education. In 1994, a third of the curriculum consisted of courses in “cultural diversity,” and yet there were no “foreign” language courses at all. In contemporary English studies, while English-language writers across the global diaspora and works of world literature in English translation are widely read, there is no apparent institutional or critical space for the vast nonanglophone literature written in the United States. To test this point, check the table of contents of Shell and Sollors’s groundbreaking *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature*, with its original texts and English translations, to see how many writers you’ve ever heard of. Another instance of systematic forgetting is the reference volume *Asian-American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Cheung and Yogi), which explicitly excludes “works written in Asian languages, unless they have been translated into English” (Sollors 14).

In the field of writing studies, until quite recently there has been very little discussion of writing in languages other than English in composition classrooms, and the writing that takes place in Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Arabic, and other language courses has remained largely invisible, both conceptually and programmatically. For this reason, the question “Should We Invite Students to Write in Home Languages? Complicating the Yes/No Debate,” raised by Peter Elbow and coauthors (Bean et al.), is especially noteworthy because it focuses attention on potentially productive relations between English and other languages and dialects in composition. Nonetheless, the trajectory of writing instruction, for Elbow at least, remains largely unidirectional, with composing in a mother tongue represented not in terms of biliteracy but as a move toward a finished essay in English. In another recent experiment in cross-language relations, Isis Artze-Vega, Elizabeth Doud, and

Belkys Torres have developed strategies for a bilingual composition pedagogy at the University of Miami, using bilingual texts, journals, freewriting, and class discussion in Spanish, and bilingual writing assignments in the style of Gloria Anzaldúa that call on students to embed Spanish (or other languages) in predominantly English compositions. To my mind, this latter work is particularly significant because, by figuring Spanish as a medium of writing equal to English, it begins to address explicitly the status of languages in the writing classroom and the problem of language policy in the writing curriculum.

The question traditionally asked in writing studies is how cross-language relations inhibit or facilitate students' mastery of academic literacy in English. I think the question needs to be changed, to ask instead how such available linguistic resources can be tapped to promote biliteracy and multilingualism. I want to imagine a new configuration of languages in the U.S. university and in U.S. college composition that realigns the old Anglo-American linguistic dyad, making English not the center but the linking language in multilingual writing programs, multilingual universities, and a multilingual polity. To do this would require a shift from the unidirectional and subtractive monolingualism that has long dominated writing programs in the modern U.S. university to an active and additive multilingualism in which a range of languages are involved as the medium of writing, as the medium of instruction across the university curriculum, and as the medium of deliberation in the public sphere.

I realize that the Anglo-American linguistic dyad is a coalition of the willing and that English monolingualism exerts a strong undertow on how we think about other languages. But it is precisely for this reason that, as Geneva Smitherman argued in 1987, academics in speech, language, and writing studies need to "take up the unfinished business of the Committee on the Students' Right to Their Own Language" by calling for a national public policy on language that would (1) teach standard edited English as the language of wider communication, (2) recognize the legitimacy of nonmainstream languages and dialects and promote mother tongues, along with English, as the medium of instruction, and (3) promote the learning of one or more additional languages, such as Spanish or other relevant languages. The exact configuration of languages to be studied and learned will depend on individual interest and local circumstances. The key point for Smitherman is that the "three-prong policy [. . .] constitutes an inseparable whole" (31) that is meant to change the status of languages in the United States by reconfiguring their relation to one another.

What Smitherman's proposal for a national language policy makes clear is that multilingualism does not mean simply affirming the linguistic rights of minority language groups to use their own language as they see fit. Certainly, a national public policy on language must defend such rights, which have never been fully recog-

nized in the United States. As I see it, however, multilingualism signifies more than the tolerance of many languages. It also entails the status planning of languages and an additive language policy whereby all students as a matter of course speak, write, and learn in more than one language and all citizens thereby become capable of communicating with one another in a number of languages, code-switching as appropriate to the rhetorical situation. The goal of such a national language policy, I believe, goes beyond a discourse of linguistic rights to imagine the abolition of English monolingualism altogether and the creation in its place of a linguistic culture where being multilingual is both normal and desirable, as it is throughout much of the world. If anything, the multilingual language policy I'm advocating would loosen the identification of language with racialized and ethnic groups by putting multiple languages into circulation as means of participating in public life and linguistic resources of reciprocal exchange.

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