Can difference speak?: representation and ethos of otherness with/in postmodern research, classroom, and online communication practices

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Can difference speak? Representation and ethos of otherness within postmodern research, classroom, and online communication practices

by

Oksana Hlyva

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

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Major Professor

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For the Major Program
To my family and

most preciously to my son
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines ways difference or otherness is represented at three research sites to underscore practical ethical dilemmas engendered by the postmodern crisis of representation. Inspired largely by Gayatri Spivak's influential Can the Subaltern Speak? the dissertation seeks to illustrate a practical usefulness of postcolonial and poststructuralist insights for rhetoric and composition as well as business and technical communication practitioners who aspire to reconcile their allegiance with the postmodern and post-ethnographic representation critique and prevalent modernist, positivist, and reductive institutional exigencies.

Embedded within the dissertation are three papers that elaborate on concrete representational practices in three specific research locales. Namely, the first paper draws on classroom observation and focus groups to argue for a cross-cultural composition pedagogy that, while benefiting mainstream students, can empower international students whose voices tend to be assimilated, if not excluded, by dominant composition discourses. The second paper proposes a student survey as a way of creating space for students' voices and compositionists' input, both of which are often missing from assessment processes. The final, third paper employs a rhetorical genre critique to scrutinize representational practices of three web sites featuring a newly independent Eastern European country and in so doing offers some suggestions for developing critical transcultural competence in business and technical communication students.

The overarching conclusion three papers reach is that, while difference can speak in various ways, rhetoricians continue to face a challenge of ensuring that this speaking is dialogical, that is, the subaltern talk is listened to. Not listening is not only unethical but also impractical, contends this dissertation, as it challenges such modernist binaries as local versus global/international difference, empirical positivist versus humanist rhetorically-based assessment, and public versus personal research representation. In terms of the last dichotomy, the dissertation, in a postmodern/postcolonial deconstructive spirit, reflects on the researcher's own positionality and metarepresentational modes. Throughout, the dissertation
provides a considerable space for reflecting on the methodology of the three studies from conceptualization to data analysis.
CHAPTER 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric prides itself on being the art of constructing knowledge in the face of uncertainty... However, the practice of rhetoric has been historically identified with analogues to the Greek polis, a restricted, homogeneous body of peers. (Flower 43)

As with any discipline, Rhetoric, Composition and Professional Communication (RCPC) ultimately preoccupies itself with ways of knowing. Not like every discipline, however, RCPC has long recognized that any representation of knowledge is discursive and ineluctably heterogeneous and polyvocal, that is, pregnant with a wide spectrum of differences both authors and readers invariably bring into them. Reaching as far back as to the first rhetoricians’ “human measure doctrine,” this cornerstone rhetorical belief in relativity of human knowing underwent several humanist revivals at various stages in history and culminated in more recent postmodern attempts to respond to the modernist erosion of “truths” as certain and accurate representations of reality. A host of post-theories have carried out a rather extensive critique of the unitary, coherent, stable, and transparent subject of Enlightenment. In practice, however, these theories are still being challenged by a pragmatic Cartesian desire for efficiency and certainty that relentlessly controls, if not erases, any instantiation of difference.

In brief, the Cartesian conception of knowing resides on “correct representations in an internal space, the mind” (Rabinow 235). Underwriting this epistemology is an assumption that any difference, variation or “disagreement has always to do with faulty observation, faulty language, or both, and is never due to the problematic and contingent nature of truth” (Berlin Rhetoric and Reality 11). As such, this conception of knowing, most widely used in scientific positivist discourses, has been producing metanarratives that are credible only because of what they exclude (Berlin Rhetorics 64).

Resisting this Cartesian modernist legacy, today’s rhetoricians who work, in Patti Lather’s terms, “with/in postmodern” call for a heightened awareness about workings of writing as a powerful representational system. Some point out that, as a way of knowing and making an order of “reality,” writing often ineluctably composes certain things out. This “ordering” of texts is symptomatic of the ordering of a society (Cintron x). Indeed, as the
author of the opening quote continues, “We stand within a history that has alternately marginalized and ignored the knowledge of the powerless and then (when we must listen) domesticated and assimilated that experience into mainstream ... schemas” (Flower 39).

Increasingly, contemporary rhetoricians preoccupy themselves with ineluctably reductive cultural representations—broadly known as the crisis of representation—and interrogate the nexus of representational schemas, power, and authority. In postethnography, which perhaps has treated these problematic relationships most amply, the representational crisis can be summarized in the following way:

First, they [postethnographic debates] raise the issue of representation and the question of power—the issue of who represents whom, and to what effect in the social world? ... Ethnographic reports have consequences for people’s lives: for the “natives” described, for researchers doing the describing, and for the social institutions surrounding both. ... Alongside the issue of representation is a second issue: the issues of writing and the question of invention—the issue of how I, as a writer of ethnographic reports, “see” what I see, and the question of who I am as I write. (Brooke 12-13)

The deeply entangled knots of power relations, representation and purported objectivity are further articulated through such notions as Teresa Ebert’s “resistance postmodernism”. While Ebert acknowledges the value of the “ludic” examination of the poststructuralist indefinite play of difference and excluded other, she calls for more by inquiring “into the power relations requiring such suppression” (889). Naturally, “resistance postmodernism” takes different forms for different people largely depending on their positionalities.

**Research Question, Papers and Interconnections**

This dissertation wrestles with the question of how difference comes to voice in postmodern and, at the same time, so pro-Cartesian environments, what representational forms it takes and what implications it has for the researched, the researcher, and the representational practice as a whole. In so doing, the dissertation brings together three distinct yet interrelated sites: a cross-cultural composition classroom linked to a learning community, a student survey inquiring into student communication instruction experiences, and web sites representing a young East European country. The following three papers have been prepared for submission to academic journals:
1. *Signs of Struggle: Towards a Productive (Re) Composing of Difference in a Cross-cultural Learning Community*

2. *A Case for a Student Survey: Students’ Insights on Communication Instruction in the Sophomore Year at a Large Research University:*

3. *Transcultural Ethos and National Identity Online: Three Travel Web Sites Representing Ukraine*

The papers interconnect in various ways. The first two papers inquire into how student differences are recognized (and not recognized) in the classroom and during the assessment process. *Signs of Struggle* theorizes what happens when compositionists let international students come to voice through an innovative cross-cultural pedagogy. *A Case of/for a Student Survey* argues for a research methodology that would include students’ voices in assessment and consequent curricular change. The final paper on *Transcultural ethos* scrutinizes web-based practices representing Ukraine whose ethos as a function of national identity does not reside in the nation-state itself. As such, its ethos construction, I believe, raises some important ethical and, at the same time, practical issues relevant to business and technical communication (classroom) practices.

The first and the third papers take Ebert’s notion of inquiry into pervasively globalized/ing contexts of the today’s classroom and online communication practices that for various reasons homogenize cross-cultural difference on global and local levels. The second paper responds to the increasing need for compositionists’ and students’ involvement in assessment in a research climate that often contradicts and overpowers major theoretical precepts of the discipline. To a certain degree a postmodern pastiche of three locales that feature difference and representational politics, the dissertation as a whole responds to the call for “multilocale” projects that reflect “the transnational political, economic, and cultural forces that traverse and constitute local or regional worlds” (Clifford qtd. in Kincheloe and McLaren 299).

Throughout the dissertation, I use ethnographic techniques and approaches. The semester-long study that consisted of classroom observations and focus groups, the rhetorical/genre analysis of web sites, even the analysis of the numeric survey study embrace “ethnographic lack of pretense” (Thaiss) to valorize situated and narrative ways of knowing over the illusionary objectivity. By responding to the postmodern crisis of representation as a
crisis of objectivity, I reflect on both methodology and my own positionality as important constituents of ethos construction throughout my research projects.

In sum, this dissertation wrestles with problems of representations for the specific research subjects: the cross-cultural learning community participants, the students who were invited to participate in the curricular assessment project, and Ukraine with three web sites representing its national identity. Simultaneously, the dissertation allows for reflecting on my own researcher’s "problem of representations of others’ representations" (Rabinow 250), thus following a trend that increasingly characterizes postethnographic writing.

**Dissertation Organization**

While each of the papers contains its own literature review section, I felt compelled to begin with some general theoretical “umbrella” or prelude that connects all three projects. (An occasional repetition as these theoretical discussions overlap is to be expected.) I then unfold the projects in the sequence that evokes my own journey of experiencing the intersections of representation, difference, and ethos as a student, a teacher, a researcher, an aspiring professional, and a Ukrainian citizen who has been residing in the North America for the past eight years. I conclude provisionally with some reflections on this “getting smart” journey\(^1\) of mine and offer some tentative implications that were prompted by my three projects. The references that are not included in the papers are provided at the end of the dissertation.

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\(^1\) Again, I borrow this idea and move from Patti Lather’s *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern.*
CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL PRELUDE: REPRESENTATION OF OTHERNESS WITHIN (POST)MODERN

"Why is 'difference' so compelling a theme and so contested an area of representation?" (Hall 225)

My research question premises on the nexus of the question posed by the British cultural theorist of representation Stuart Hall and Gayatri Spivak’s famous and compelling "can the subaltern speak?" To elaborate this relationship and to theorize how difference is recognized in our (post) modern world, I argue in this chapter that the problem of representation has been intersecting with the ethos of difference throughout rhetorical history culminating in the postmodern crisis of representation. To illustrate the intersection’s problematic perdurability, I trace some of its poststructuralist tenets to the Sophists. I then argue that the crisis of representation is central to postcolonial and post-ethnographic debates and conclude with the notion of postmodern praxis as a move towards more ethical representational practices.

Postmodern Crisis of Representation

We live in postmodern times characterized by a historical “condition” of crisis of master narratives that no longer seem transparent or innocent (Lyotard). In the research history, the crisis of representation (1986-1990) is recognized as one of the five phases that preceded the postmodern phase and “moved qualitative research in new critical directions” (Denzin and Lincoln 2-21). “A profound rupture,” this historical moment made fieldwork and writing more reflexive, brought to the fore the issues of gender, class, race, and ethnicity, interrogated research neutrality and objectivism, and pointed out its complicity with colonialism (Denzin and Lincoln 19). For Lather, “postmodernisms” came as response to “the contemporary crisis of representation, the profound uncertainty about what constitutes an adequate depiction of social “reality”” (21).

While technically the crisis of representation precedes the postmodern stage, Lather, among others, collapses the two terms into “the postmodern crisis of representation” (25). In philosophical terms, she observes,

the essence of the postmodern argument is that the dualisms which continue to dominate Western thoughts are inadequate for understanding a world of multiple
causes and effects interacting in complex and non-linear ways, all of which are rooted in a limitless array of historical and cultural specificities. (21)

In other words, today “our lives are no longer adequately representable through the unitary language of a particular political philosophy… [T]his is why we need to go to a Derrida, or a Lyotard...because they are the philosophers of ‘difference’ and “non-commensurability” for our times” (Chakrabarty qtd. in Chaturvedi).

Rupture in Representation: from Sophists to Poststructuralists

The very notion of rupture was inaugurated2 in Jacques Derrida’s influential “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” where he pronounces the “rupture” (959) to be marking a transition from structuralism to post-structuralism. This transition had some important implications for representing difference. One, perhaps overarching, implication is an understanding that “the center is not the center” (960) for signs define themselves by their relationship to other signs. “The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum” (961), points out Derrida, thus suggesting the importance of understanding that meanings are irreducably different. Elsewhere, this theorist of difference offers a very nuanced meaning of differance. For Derrida, differance means at least three things: 1) to differ—to be unlike or dissimilar in nature, quality, and form; 2) ‘differre’ (latin)—to scatter, disperse, and 3) to defer—to delay, postpone (Leitch qtd. in Berlin, Rhetorics 59). In this light, “writing becomes a metaphor for differance” (Berlin, Rhetorics 60) where the meaning is always irreducibly different, detached from what it represents, and not fully present. Without difference, according to Derrida,

we would not be able to imagine others as distinct from ourselves, or indeed, to conceive of a unique and individual self. Without that gap, there would be no meaning either—no intervening difference that would allow one word to signify another. But this means that difference, distance, absence and separation lie “at the heart” of meaning, being, and reality. (MacLure 3)

---

2 I use the word “inaugurated” arbitrarily, of course. If we agree with Bakhtin, for instance, discourse has no beginning and no end; instead every word is someone else’s. Indeed, even those significantly influenced by Derrida’s work go to the theorist who inspired postfoundational rupture: “Saussure’s structuralist theory radically unsettled notions of the relationships between language and reality, or words and objects, by proposing that signs took their significance from their relationships with one another, within language conceived of as a system” (MacLure 175).
Another important concept suggested by Derrida is that of deconstruction. Since one can not step outside of his/her structure or context, there is no objective examination of structure, and no attempt to interpret cultural structures can be exactly translated into rigid Cartesian scientific models. The researcher inevitably “accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed in denouncing them,” argues Derrida (962). Therefore, one’s modes of arguing need to be critically examined.

In many ways underwriting the postmodern crisis of representation, these Derridian notions can be traced back to the early Sophists who were the first to point out, for the most part performatively, the discursive and generative power of language. “When we speak, there is no permanent reality behind our words,” observed Antiphon (Sprague qtd. in Bizzel and Herzberg 22-23). By the same token, these original rhetoricians believed that

only a world of flux and impurity exists; and ... a mental operation cannot be divorced from this disorderly matrix. The desire for purity of thought and communication is a delusion, and even the force of logic is a form of violence (bia) mediated through the passions. (Struever 10)

This belief seems to have prefigured the critique of the Cartesian delusion about possible researcher/researched divide. As some researchers report, “objective, disinterested perspectives actually create a distortion in social analysis because what emerges from such research is not the everyday working knowledge of members of the social group but a distorted representation of this knowledge” (Faber 38).

Similarly, the Protegorian doctrine “of all things the measure is [hu]man” prefigured important rhetorical concepts of postmodern discourse emphasizing “change, not permanence, the many, not the one, the particular, not the universal” (Struver 37).

Accordingly, some theorists approach the human-measure model as “the starting point of an anti-foundational philosophy that concentrates on the relation of individual perception to the nature of knowledge” and see it as a praxis particularly suitable for accommodating the postmodern complexity and diversity of meanings (Mendelson xvi-xvii).

And, of course, sophistic rhetorical techniques of “finding” content (heuresis) that deal in the probable (eikos) which has a problematic relationship to the truth (aletheia) (Struver 12-13) clearly prefigure the problematics of representation as well as the simultaneous need for a rhetorical and ethical critique of any discourse.
Sophistic and, at the same time, so postmodern notions that truth and knowledge in their pure forms are not attainable, that they are kairotically constructed, controversial, perceptual, local, and power relations sensitive are not overtly recognized in practice. In fact, there seems to be a growing concern that ascribing to postmodern tenets openly even in academic circles is no longer safe, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 (Fish; Herndl and Bauer; Strickland). The demise of sophists and the very fact that their quintessential document postulating the “human measure” doctrine was burned for heresy illustrates the difficulty and perils of otherness speaking. Emanating from foreigners and apparently threatening the otherwise homogenous polis, the doctrine with its fate seems symbolic and symptomatic of an attempt to represent difference “under erasure”. It also serves as an early sign of the notorious challenge of reconciling theory and practice. Truly, while anything can go in theory, not everything ever does go in practice (Hernstein Smith 62). But allow me to turn our attention at least briefly to some postcolonial insights for, arguably, there are few theories that treat the problem of writing difference under erasure more evocatively than postcolonial theory.

**Rupture in Representation: A Postcolonial Perspective**

Building largely on poststructuralist vocabulary, postcolonial theory carries out the deconstruction of Western thought in humanities and social sciences (Mongia qtd. in Kelly). As such, the theory is gaining a new relevance in composition studies (Olson, Bahri), business and technical communication (Jeyaraj), and intercultural relations (Kelly). Overall, in Jarrat’s view,

The value of postcolonial theory for teachers of writing arises in part from its focus on the rhetorical situation of intellectual work applied to the question of difference. By pointing out that academic traditions of Western universities are built on several centuries of economic and cultural imperialism, this theory demands that scholars and teachers of literature and literacies ask rhetorical questions the answers to which had been for many years assumed: who speaks? on behalf of whom? who is listening? and how? (“Beside” 57, emphasis is mine)

Emanating for the most part from non-Western intellectuals, postcolonial theory in some sense enacts Derrida’s example of decentering as “the moment when European culture ...
had been dislocated, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference” (“Structure” 962).

Broadly speaking, postcolonial theory consists of two major discourses. “One is the writing of people whose subjectivities have experienced the influence of colonization; and the other is the writing of those involved in resistance to colonialism, its ideologies, and their present forms” (Adam and Tiffin qtd. in Kelly). Belonging to both camps, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak articulate most notably the rupture in Western representational practices of the other and the subaltern.

Said’s influential *Orientalism* argues that essentializing of the Orient and constructing it as the other, the Occident’s complete opposite, legitimized Western control and exploitation of that part of the world. In addition to exposing the colonial agendas of othering, Said’s critique suggests that the representation crisis lies in an understanding that behind the essentialized other, there is no real Orient:

In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as "the Orient." (21)

Representation, in other words, can be likened to illusionary artwork such as *trompe l’oeil* “that attempts to ‘fool the eye’ by passing itself as the object that it depicts” (MacLure 152).

In a similar fashion, Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak*, which dominates this dissertation, as well as the entire theoretical field, preoccupies itself (among other important projects she carries on simultaneously) with the voice or agency of the subaltern female. Making use of Derridian deconstruction, Spivak argues that the British abolition of sati, a ritual of immolation of Hindu widows, is caught between two representative metanarratives. On the one hand, the British narrative was tied to their idea of a civilized society whereby “white men are saving brown women from brown men." On the other, the Indian nativist argument was simple "the women actually wanted to die" (297). "The two sentences go a long way to legitimize each other," argues Spivak, “One never encounters a testimony of the women's voice-consciousness” (ibid). No, the subaltern cannot speak, argues Spivak, after providing another example of a failed attempt at self-representation undertaken by a young
A Bengali woman whose carefully prepared suicide was misread by the dominant culture. Like Said's Orient rendered silent and passive, Spivak's subaltern woman's voice gets re-inscribed into dominant discourses of her colonizers.

In addition to these rather dramatic illustrations of rupture in representation, Spivak makes an important pronouncement relevant to those who are in position to represent the subaltern. Specifically, she foregrounds a distinction between two meanings of representation in German. The first meaning of “Vertretung” signifies political representation or “speaking for” the subaltern masses since they cannot represent themselves. The second meaning, Darstellung, is more of a cultural practice or creating re-presentation, “portrait” or “proxy” (Spivak, “Can” 276-77). While the terms are related, warns Spivak, “running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know for themselves, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics” (276). By underscoring the complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying," Spivak simultaneously critiques the purported transparency of “the first-world intellectuals who masquerade as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves” (292). Accordingly, Spivak recommends "persistent critique" to guard against "constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence" (qtd. in Baldonado).

In sum, through their focus on representation issues and otherness Spivak and Said accomplish two major goals. First, the theorists expose “ferocious standardizing benevolence of most U.S. and Western European human-scientific radicalism (recognition by assimilation)” (Spivak, “Can” 294). Indeed, their practical postcolonial examples dramatically amplify Derridian “radical critique with the danger of appropriating the Other by assimilation” (“Can” 308). In Spivak’s cases, the Other literally ceases to exist as a result of this standardizing assimilation whereas Said’s Orientalism illustrates how essentialist assimilatory practices lead to colonization. Second, Said’s and Spivak’s postcolonial insights add to the representation theory the importance of reflexivity when focusing on difference for
the preoccupation with any form of non-consumerability may become a powerful colonial tool when deployed unreflexively and without consideration of the agency of the subaltern.³

Towards Postmodern Representational Praxis

If postcolonial issues seem too dramatic or too faraway from everyday practices, post-ethnography and postmodern praxis bring their ethical dimensions closer to home.

Over the past two decades, communication studies took an ethnographic turn with ethnography becoming a preferred methodological choice for communication researchers (Kirklighter et al). Defined as “portraits of diversity in an increasingly homogenous world” and “written representation of a culture,” ethnographies entail some serious ethical responsibilities, argues Van Maanen, “for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral” (xiii-xiv, 1). Accordingly, researchers increasingly “question the ethics, procedures, and authority of ethnographic modes of inquiry” (Kirklighter et al. vii) thus enacting what Bourdieu calls “a second break” (2). Since “all ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival” (Lather 3), researchers acknowledge the need “to question the presuppositions inherent in the position of an outside observer, who in his preoccupation with interpreting practices, is inclined to introduce into the object” (Bourdieu 2).

As the limitations of objectivist knowledge become apparent, the traditional positivitivist, or, what Van Maanen terms, “realist” ethnography gives way to a more “confessional” and “impressionist” or critical “post-ethnographic” research praxis that asks “questions of power, economy, history and exploitation” (Lather 3). As some aptly observe, “Ethnography exists where cultures meet,” (Bishop, Ethnographic 48). One notable example, Pratt’s influential essay “Arts of the Contact Zone,” sensitized researchers to the power

³ This section naturally does not do justice to the whole scope or complexity of postcolonial theory (or the work of Derrida). One disclaimer that seems appropriate is that not all postcolonial theorists emphasize the colonizer/colonized binary as my discussion of Said’s and Spivak’s work imply. Bhabha, for instance, uses such concepts as hybridity, in-between, third space that seek to collapse this dichotomy. While these concepts are useful, writing in, what LaCapra calls, the middle voice runs a risk of erasing “the legitimate role of any distinction” between the domineering and dominated as it “undercuts the problems of agency and [ethical] responsibility” (26; 29). Bhabha himself, warns about unwittingly reproduction of “the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment” where “the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation” (The Location of Culture 31).
differentials endemic to cross-cultural encounters. It also suggested that researchers' work is "both act and art" (Bishop, *Ethnographic* 49). Echoing sophists to some extent, this pronouncement takes us into a postmodern praxis.

Increasingly abandoning illusionary universal, neutral, and absolutely certain representations, researchers have called for recognizing that research is a form of political and ethical social praxis that necessitates methodological reflexivity and epistemological vigilance (e.g., Lather; Bloom; Porter and Sullivan; Citron; Herndl and Nahrwold; Hutchings). Porter and Sullivan, for instance, examine the dialectics between the researcher's self and the other to underscore the asymmetric power relationships with the other or those who are in the subject positions. Porter and Sullivan's definition of postmodern praxis implies ethical and political goals for critical researchers: to "respect difference, [acknowledge the other], care for others, promote access to rhetorical procedures enabling justice, and liberate the oppressed through empowerment of participants" (110, emphasis is mine).

The researchers who find the liberating, emancipatory rhetoric for various reasons uneasy may consider Lather's usefully nuanced notion of "empowerment". She uses the term similarly to Ebert: "to mean analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (4). At the same time, Lather sees empowerment as a process one undertakes for oneself" (ibid). For instance, writing one's way to some understanding of how power games may play out in specific locations for specific others "is not necessarily something done "to" or "for" someone" (ibid). Admittedly, saying that research projects can be undertaken for the researcher herself may strike an embarrassing cord with romanticism. In fact, some researchers note this romanticized connection with ethnographic research in general (Cintron 4). At the same time, however, Lather's nuance allows for a less presumptuous researcher's role by responding to Spivak's critique of the researcher as a crusader who sets out to liberate powerless others, thus rehearsing both Enlightenment and colonial narratives. In response to the pervasive concern about tendency to speak for the subaltern, Lather argues, that

...
critical intellectuals from universalizing spokespersons to cultural workers who do what they can to lift the barriers which prevent people from speaking for themselves. (47, emphasis is mine)

But even "non-liberatory" intentions do not behoove researchers from self-reflexivity.

Reflection on one's positionality and intersubjectivity is becoming a generic trope of postethnographic work (e.g., Citron, Bloom). Increasingly, researchers call for an honest reflection and making explicit research construction as representing process. Given the ineluctable incertitude of research practices, "what's needed most is not, then a set of rules but a process of reflection, self-questioning, and [on-going] discussion" (Hutchings 2).

In addition to such "deconstruction" of the researcher/researched Cartesian binary, researchers raise an important question of style as metarepresentation. Indeed, as Clifford asks,

If ethnography produces cultural interpretations through intense research experience, how is such unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account? How, precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined, cross-cultural encounter, shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more-or-less discrete "otherworld," composed by an individual author? (qtd. in van Maanen 1)

Researchers-deconstructivists begin to answer Clifford's question with their understanding of what it means to write "postmodern": "to simultaneously use and call into question a discourse, to both challenge and inscribe dominant meaning systems that construct our own categories and frameworks as contingent, positioned, partial" (Lather 1). Enacting this principle is easier said than done. On the one hand, postmodern researchers agree that "style should respond to the complexity and difficulty of the problem treated" (LaCapra 4). On the other hand, postmodern deconstructive stylistics are challenged by "the pressure of the same old calls for plain-speaking, common sense, hard facts, immediate practicality" (Morris qtd. in Lather 9) and of course linear and conclusive style.

Postmodern researchers resist "a singular "authoritative" voice" by making their writing into a postmodern "multivoiced" pastische weaving in quotes, excerpts and repetitions (Lather 9). In other words, following Derrida and Spivak, these researchers use their style rhetorically to perform what their research pronounces. Most feminist writers, for instance, through their style celebrate a dialogue that is "ongoing and contingent rather than already decided, locked in, determined, definitive" (Forbes 29).
These rhetorical choices are often driven by the belief that the modernist rage for “clarity” is never innocent or neutral (McLure 37). The postmodern stylistics acknowledges that “[t]he transparent virtues of clarity, righteousness, visibility and simplicity are not necessarily in the interests of those on the margins of power and prestige,” (ibid, 171). Indeed, to invoke Said’s example, the representations of the Orient were perfectly clear, coherently totalized and essentialized, as such they conveniently delivered the Orient to the Western imperialism.

In sum, this theorized discussion identifies major postcolonial and postethnographic theoretical issues that are relevant to those interested in adopting a postmodern praxis when representing students’ difference in classroom and assessment discursive practices and international difference online.

One final point that needs to be emphasized before we move to the specific research projects is that the very ground of postmodernity is “the disappointed hopes engendered by optimistic confidence in the continuing progress and imminent triumph of Enlightenment reason” (Lather 87). This understanding accounts for my cautionary use of “(post) modern” in the heading of the chapter. Similarly, while I support Lather’s move to see the crisis of representation as integral part of the postmodern, I’m cautious regarding her similar use of postrepresentational (25). The term may be applicable in reference to theory but hardly to practice. “Representation has not withered away” (308) argues Spivak and critiques postrepresentational rhetoric of some poststructuralists. A certain degree of cautionary scepticism, thus, permeates the entire dissertation that considers the representation of difference as an ongoing struggle for both the represented and the representer and seeks less occlusive ways of enacting a postmodern representational praxis.
CHAPTER 3. SIGNS OF STRUGGLE: TOWARDS A PRODUCTIVE (RE)COMPOSING OF DIFFERENCE IN A CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

A paper prepared for submission to *Composition Studies*

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**Abstract**

This essay positions a composition classroom linked to a cross-cultural learning community (CCLC) as a cross-cultural pedagogy that seeks a productive engagement with difference. Featuring postcolonial insights, the essay theorizes international difference as signs of struggle ranging from broad disciplinary tendencies to misuse this type of difference to a local classroom interpersonal dynamic often marked by authority differentials stemming from one’s *otherness*. The discussion of the latter is informed by a semester-long study that entailed classroom observation and two focus groups with CCLC student members. Despite the apparent struggles, the essay concludes that the CCLC serves as a pedagogical model that benefits US students while empowering international students.

If differences are “composed,” or inscribed into culture, then they can be recomposed so as to operate less monologically and monoculturally. (West 4)

We need teorias that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world, that will explain how and why we relate to certain people in specific ways, that will reflect what goes on between inner, outer, and peripheral. (Anzaldúa in Lunsford 4)

**Introduction**

In *Signs of Struggle: The Rhetorical Politics of Cultural difference*, Thomas West, the author of the opening quote, searches for what Gloria Anzaldúa calls teorias that may explain attitudes towards difference on local and global levels. To this end, West inquires into ways differences “continue to be written and inscribed into the cultural imaginary, and how this in turn affects ... how people think and feel about one another” (5). In the book foreword, Gary Olson endorses this move by wondering how desirable is the pervasive “melting pot” philosophy, for instance, for modeling a multicultural society in the classroom? Does melting away cultural differences benefit all or only those in dominant positions? (ix-x) Indeed, West
argues, prevalent promotions of multiculturalism overlook the issues of power in favor of a "harmonious, empty pluralism" (2). Instead of pursuing illusionary harmony, he suggests that differences should be seen as “not things that exist independent of social contexts and power relations... [but] rather [as] signs of struggle” (1).

Inspired by efforts such as West’s, this essay premises on the belief that in times of relentless globalization, (re) composing international difference in ways that consider the importance of immediate social contexts and endemic power differentials, affect and conflict is a task particularly well-suited for rhetoricians and compositionists. Accordingly, I theorize a first-year composition classroom linked to a cross-cultural learning community (CCLC) as one pedagogical possibility that strives to realize such a complex and challenging task. I will demonstrate that, unlike most cross-cultural pedagogies that distance international difference and/or avoid conflict, the CCLC acted as a site of multiple struggles. As such, it offered to its participants a very local and experiential opportunity to learn about otherness. While foregrounding its struggles, I emphasize benefits of such a learning experience for both international students and their hosts. In particular, the study findings suggest that the students were nudged to seeing cultural difference and consequently one’s cultural identity as multiple, contingent, and dynamic rather than stereotypical, exoticized, and fixed. In addition to making students’ conceptions of difference less ethnocentric, the pedagogy can be viewed as empowering international students as it permits some authority of otherness.

**Difference (Under) Theorized**

“We stand within a history,” argues Linda Flower in resonance with West, “that has alternately marginalized and ignored the knowledge of the powerless and then (when we must listen) domesticated and assimilated that experience into mainstream ... schemas” (39). She continues, overall “the practice of rhetoric has been historically identified with analogues to the Greek polis, a restricted, homogenous body of peers (that excluded women, foreigners, and slaves)” (43). Such exclusionary tendencies, I argue, apply to international cross-cultural difference. This section outlines some theoretical insights that may alleviate these tendencies and illustrates what I see to be major limitations of “cultural imaginaries” about otherness.
Increasing presence of international difference ignored

While compositionists and rhetoricians have long preoccupied themselves with issues of diversity, differences that characterize “international,” or “nonnative speakers of English,” in the relationship to their “host” (classroom) culture(s) have been given considerably less attention. The trend of steady influx of international students has “educational, social and economic implications for [hosts] as well as their guests” (Gabrenya 57). Yet, as some point, historically, composition and ESL studies have been institutionally split; as a result the former does not reflect the increasing trend of nonnative speakers of English populating US classrooms (Matzuda). Indeed, “[t]raditional composition teachers have tended to assume that they are addressing a monolingual, monocultural population,” observes Robert Kaplan (vii). Other researchers have argued that “[l]inguistically diverse students present new challenges to the disciplines, who may have planned their curricula with native speakers of English in mind, who may feel alienated from diverse students,” (Johns 141). The exclusion of cultural and linguistic international differences contradicts the overall “cultural work of composition’s efforts to make concepts of difference relevant to scholarly, pedagogical, and professional practices,” states Micciche (85). She points out another relevant gap as she argues that even discussions focusing explicitly on diversity presume that those who bring diversity to our classrooms are from the dominant mainstream culture (81) thus ignoring the fact that the US academia has been recognizably internationalized professionally (Manrique and Manrique 1-5).

International difference distanced

The subaltern status of international cross-cultural difference—its “not speakingness” (Spivak, qtd. in Bahri 40)—suggests that, far from being domesticated, this type of difference is distanced from the classroom. Such distancing contradicts widely-professed pedagogical goals related to globalization, global citizenship, multiculturalism, and the supposedly agreed upon need for cross/inter-cultural sensitivity in students.

Even in the related field of professional communication, where international and cross-cultural communication issues are arguably given more attention, these discussions are
limited. That is, these issues are frequently discussed “as if they functioned separately from our own cultural assumptions and, therefore, separately from the background of students” (Bosley, *Global 2-9; “Cross-cultural”). In other words, similar to an argument made about postcolonialism that by the very virtue of category distances critical issues related to *otherness within* (Bahri 36), issues of globalization and internationalization are not seen as immediately relevant and integral to classroom practice. Further, a study of professional writing textbooks suggested that typically non-native speakers are portrayed not only as distant *others* but also as less competent and difficult to work with (Miles 185). Combined with the pervasive emphasis on economic benefits and expansion, such treatments of international difference share some unfortunate affinities with postcolonialism as they perpetuate a perception that those weird *others* from faraway lands present interest inasmuch as their markets need to be “explored.” Such imaginaries are akin to the essentialized scholarship on the *other* that, according to Said’s *Orientalism*, for instance, assisted the West in conquering the Orient.

Aside the obvious ethical implications, one practical disadvantage of failing to integrate international cross-cultural difference in classroom practice is a missed opportunity to utilize repositories of cultural differences right in our own “backyard.” Instead, typical treatments of cross-cultural difference are reduced to decontextualized, essentialized and stereotypical factoids (Miles 179, Woolever 61) that do not do much good in developing cross-cultural sensitivity in students. In fact, as workplace cross-cultural trainers tell us, learning experiences that omit interactions with representatives of the cultures studied do not “readily transfer to practical and meaningful applications” because “merely teaching racial and ethnic facts” is not sufficient (Casmir 9-10). Moreover, an argument has been made that cross-cultural pedagogies that are “too brainy and insufficiently affective or experiential” (Gabrenya 58) result only in passive or superficial learning about difference (Sikkema and Niyekawa). Such superficial understanding of difference often translates into exoticized versions of difference (West), perceptions of *others* as inferior (Woolever 61-62) working with whom is “constrained rather than mutually beneficial” (Miles 18).

1 Of course, not all international students are necessarily nonnative speakers. In my study, however, all the international, foreign (born) participants came from countries where English is either a foreign language or one of the official state languages.
In sum, then, the weaknesses of professional communication approaches illustrate the risks of distancing international difference from the classroom and, in fact, open up new possibilities for making composition classroom practices more socially responsible and, at the same time, more practical.

**Difference assimilated**

In the past decades, compositionists produced a great deal of critical pedagogical work on multiculturalism largely responding to Pratt's contact zones and Bakhtin's heteroglossia. While Pratt herself envisioned the social space of contact zones as non-assuming "the same game ... for all players" (38), the concept has been frequently misapplied or "diluted," according to Olson, to "signify a multicultural melting pot approach to pedagogy" (48). The problem with this approach is that it de-emphasizes "systems of oppression and attempts to flatten out difference in order to strive for some mythical, elusive harmony" (Olson 47). By the same token, the concept of heteroglossia or multivoicedness has been (mis) appropriated to argue for a polite discussion where competing ideologies/cultures are equally respected and rationally discussed in "a classroom which is uncontaminated by issues of authority and power" (Corbett 36). The pervasive assimilating promotions of multiculturalism, then, tend to forget that differences are constituted "in relation to other meanings and identities ... [and these] relations involve questions of power" (West 11).

Compositionists and rhetoricians can expand their cultural work to include the efforts to recompose the tendencies to ignore, distance and erase international cultural difference by considering issues of power and authority. One such theoretical possibility is to follow Olson's call for reinvigorating composition scholarship with postcolonial theoretical insights.

**Towards a theoretical alternative: Postcolonial insights**

Echoing Anzaldua, West's project foregrounds the beliefs that cultural differences are "about the ways in which groups of people feel, talk, and think about other groups of people; about the assumptions and judgments groups make about other people; about how those assumptions and judgments "compose" society" (1). Considering what difference and the conflict it engenders signify, then, is necessary for "co-constituted social relations and real, ongoing change" (3).
The work of the postcolonial triumvirate of Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha has established a firm need for mobilizing such theoretical concepts as contact zone and heteroglossia. Both Spivak's influential *Can the Subaltern Speak* and Said's *Orientalism* illustrated powerfully how the subordinate is conceived as the "silent interlocutor" of the dominant order (Moore-Gilbert 452). Spivak's recent explanation offered a much-needed understanding that her *Can the Subaltern Speak* is not so much about distant postcolonialism as it is about institutionally validated agency of those who are different:

Unless validated by dominant forms of knowledge and politics, resistance [or put it more mildly, difference] could not be recognized ('heard') as such. The politics that emerge from this is the politics of demanding and building infrastructure so that when subalterns speak they can be heard. (Foreword, xx)

In addition to Spivak's call for the institutional infrastructure validating otherness, Bhabha's understanding of the "in-between" concept is relevant as it calls for unconscious or affective resistance to cross-cultural relationships that premise "on the implicit "hierarchy of (western) parents and (migrant) offspring". Instead of blending host and migrant cultures, Bhabha argues for a heteroglossia that encourages "the heterogeneous—even "incommensurable" because this heterogeneity, among other things, compels the host culture to reconsider its own foundational unity, identity and authority" (Moore-Gilbert 460-61).

Powerful and much needed as these quintessential postcolonial insights have been for seeing difference as a sign of struggle, affective "borderland," rather than a "feel-good" melting pot, these insights have been notoriously difficult to enact in practice. Indeed, perhaps one of the major criticisms has been that the seminal works of the postcolonial theorists do not tell us how subaltern groups and individuals within these groups can be heard or how they can speak on their own terms (Moore-Gilbert 459). The description of the CCLC that follows is my modest attempt to narrow down this gap.

**Difference Enacted: The Study, Participants, and Methods**

The CCLC (cross-cultural learning community), the focus of the study, enrolled both international and US students who were in their first semester at a large Midwestern university. The students' cohort took three classes together (First-Year Composition, Cultural Anthropology, and Learning Community Seminar), participated in a range of
extracurricular activities, had an international peer mentor, and lived in the same residence building. The CCLC was designed to

increase understanding and appreciation of human differences, to continue to develop interpersonal skills and communication/writing skills, to develop teamwork skills, to make progress toward a positive transition to the university, to identify and understand learning styles, and to increase awareness of international opportunities. (Fall 1999 Learning Communities Course Guide)

The data for this essay are drawn largely from the focus groups conducted with the CCLC participants at the beginning of their second semester and are complemented with some entries from the journal that I kept as an observer\(^2\) from the previous semester.\(^3\) Ten CCLC participants chose to share their experiences during the focus group sessions.

I conducted two focus groups: one with Tasha, Bob, Suzie, Conrad, Anne, and Jennifer, the U.S. students, and another with Saifi, Yamikani, and Juan, the international students. The US students came from the Midwest; all were predominantly of European descent, with the exception of one student who had some Native Indian lineage. All the international student participants came from non-European countries. For all of the three, English was a foreign language; however, in the case of two students, English was one of the official state languages in their home countries. All students were 16-18 years old. Because the teacher-student dynamic was one of the central themes of students' responses, the English instructor Roxana\(^4\), a US citizen born and raised in a foreign country, also became an important part of the narrative.

In my own attempt to respond to Spivak’s critique that less powerful groups (in this case, research subjects) are ineluctably spoken for, I conducted the focus groups in addition to classroom observations. Despite their unfavorable reputation, tarnished largely by consumerism, focus groups appealed to me for three major reasons. First, I saw them as one possible example of infrastructure whereby those typically spoken for come to voice. Second, due to their polyvocal and dialogic nature, focus groups often generate multiple, if not

\(^2\) As a participant observer, I felt more comfortable with a quieter and less involved role. While I audited the English course and participated in some classroom group activities, I tried to be more of "a fly on the wall" rather than a very active participant. For a discussion of relevant reasons why a researcher chose a "quieter" presence in her study as well as overall limitations of participant observation, see Wu (81-84).

\(^3\) All students enrolled in the learning community signed the informed consent form.
contradictory ideas (Abbott and Eubanks). Third, by inviting students to reflect on their experiences, I was seeking to enact a view of culture "not simply as lived activity but as the mediations of lived activities by language (Berlin xviii).

**Difference Lived and Mediated:**

**Beyond Exotica and Collaborative Struggles with Difference**

_I wanted to learn about other cultures, not through books, [but] through actual life experiences._ Jennifer

_I saw that some people ... were just willing ... to confirm what they have thought about other places. And when they found out that it wasn't exactly like that, ... they are not excited to be together with international students anymore. ... When they hear I don't live in trees, it's like, "What's the point of us learning about the [your] culture?"_ Yamikani

The opening quotes capture the overarching tension that the students pointed out during the focus groups. Jennifer’s statement encapsulated a major reason why the students, particularly the US students, joined the CCLC: to learn about different cultures firsthand. Yamikani’s comment is rather representative of all students’ initial disappointment with their cross-cultural encounters.

Bob, for instance, reported his disappointment with what seemed to him as “a lack of cultural conflict”: “there is less that they [foreign students] show their cultures ... they just adapted very well to American culture, more quickly than I expected.” At the same time, however, Saifi agreed with Yamikani’s skepticism about their hosts’ assumptions:

_A lot of ... American students have these wild fantasies about other countries. ... They think, “you go to school on elephant. Oh, you go to school by bus like we do? How boring!”_

In a similar vein, Juan felt that “normal, like, common American students ... don’t like to talk or interact with international students.” Somewhat discouraged, Yamikani agreed with Saifi that the initial difficulty of befriending US students was a quite natural way for the latter to avoid any possible conflict. She said,

_They find it easier to bond with people like them rather than go out and ... struggle with somebody who is very different. Because it can be quite a struggle, especially with things like language. Because just looking at me they don’t know if I can speak English._ (italics are mine)

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4 The instructor’s as well as students’ names are pseudonyms.
Naïve as the opening comments may sound (elephant rides to school, living in trees, assumptions that one’s non-white look automatically implies inability to speak English), they are telling examples of exoticized, stereotypical, and essentialist imaginaries of difference. Examples like these, then, set the context for describing a pedagogy that nudged students to moving beyond such shallow and reductive representations of difference to learn about other cultures through more multifaceted and complex experiences. I begin with my accounts as an observer and then gradually move to those that are based on what students shared with me during the focus group sessions.

Complexifying difference

In order to problematize students’ understanding of difference, the CCLC offered opportunities that emphasized the multiplicity and complexity of difference.

Naturally, students’ attention was drawn to language-related differences. In the composition class, for instance, the students watched and discussed a video *The Global Tongue: English* about various Englishes in the world including those used by hybridized and hyphenated cultures. Similarly, the major text—Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*—brought non-Western rhetoric into the composition classroom. To contextualize a bit, Achebe’s style supports the argument that African (American) cultures prefer a topic-associating to topic-centered linear rhetoric. The topic-associating style is characterized by a series of episodes implicitly linked to some person or theme (Canagarajah; Stefani). As I recorded in my diary, Roxana likened reading Achebe’s multi-layered story “to peeling an onion.” During the focus group session, Bob shared his perception of the style as “more relaxed than most American novels,” with “more offshoots” and—interestingly enough—“less important information.”

Bob’s comment revealing additional signifiers of a differing writing style suggests that the CCLC experiences did not stop at purely language-related differences. For instance, the students were prompted to consider broader issues of colonization and Christianity in Achebe’s story. Overall, in the composition class, students read and discussed essays that dealt with multiple instantiations of differences. Some examples included emotional dilemmas of children trying to fit in their new culture while being respectful of their old one, the stress experienced by children whose parents divorced, the ethics of businesses selling
“mail-order” brides, social stigma of individuals of “non standard” weight or height, and media portrayals of the Arab world. In addition, the learning community seminar invited students to discuss a variety of learning and problem-solving styles. In other words, it can be argued that the CCLC was designed in a way that would encourage its participants to see difference beyond most apparent linguistic difference one would expect to find when interacting with international students.

The diversity of the group in itself often resulted in complex discussions of difference. Here is a gist of the discussion I recorded about a play that featured racial issues; the students saw the play early in the semester and then were discussing it in class with the play’s African-American director.

As the discussion slowly (and somewhat tensely) progressed, some students pointed out that the black family in the play “looked better than the white family”: the former owned a better home and clothing whereas the white family was abandoned by their father.

Yamikani confessed that the play did not seem to present "real life contrasts" because in her home country, she said, they were taught the opposite about the life of Black people in the U.S. The play’s director agreed that such perceptions prevail within the U.S. as well: “People say that Cosby’s show is not realistic because it’s not possible to have two professionals in one black family.”

The US students’ reaction to Yamikani’s observation was not unanimous. For instance, Tasha found the contrast to be quite realistic. She rather forcefully observed that when her family visited a rich black neighborhood in Atlanta, she was the one who felt embarrassed about the car her family drove and the clothes they wore. She also concluded, “the fact that [she] joined the cross-cultural learning community is a proof that things [in terms of prejudice and stereotypes] have changed for the better.”

John, who fought in Bosnia challenged Tasha’s optimistic belief with his simple and laconic: “Stereotypes come back. I’ve seen countries in war and hatred.”

Clearly, the discussion of local or “domestic” racial issues was complexified by the international global twist. Complex as the discussion was, it was perhaps the most conflicting and heteroglossic experience that I observed. More intense conflicts were revealed by focus group responses regarding students’ collaborative experiences, their foreign-born instructor, and the residential domestic aspect of the learning community.

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5 While John did not participate in the focus groups, he signed a human subjects form allowing me to use the information I gathered as an observer.
Collaborating with others

In the composition classroom, the students engaged in various collaborative activities. Peer review sessions revealed an interesting group dynamic that Yamikani described as follows:

We had just automatically divided into these groups. This is a group of American students who like each other. This is a group of international students who never speak to any American students. This is a group of international students who speak to American students once in a while. And this is a group of American students who never want to speak to international students.

As Roxana persisted in making students cross each other’s cultures, such dynamic gradually “de-balkanized”. The final collaborative project that required students to make a presentation on one specific aspect of culture (e.g., food, religion, gender roles) showed most signs of regrouping. Most extensive from the cross-cultural collaborative standpoint, the project remained rather challenging and conflict-ridden, however.

Focus group responses diverged on the nature of conflict during the project. Yamikani and Juan attributed the possible tensions to cultural differences in terms of the I-versus- we approach to their team project:

• Almost everyone was doing their own thing. Whenever we came as a group, ... it was like “I am going to do this” instead of “WE are going to do this.”

• International students are more willing to work as a group; ... international students would try to find out what the group is doing so that they could share the information.

Saifi disagreed with his peers as he acknowledged that “most people are not used to teamwork in the first year of college, whether they are international or American.” Bob, too, felt that any difficulties they experienced stemmed more from “personality conflicts” than cultural conflicts: “I think it’s just the people we dealt with, [they] were really shy or really lazy... or they just personally weren’t suited for the project.”

Similarly, there was some notable disagreement in US students’ opinions about one team’s project related to ethnic food. Overall reticent Conrad did not pass an opportunity to express his disgust with the food the international students brought to the classroom. “Yak,” he said laconically. Bob, too, initially attempted to belittle the value of the project and the team effort overall: “I could have easily done it all by myself.” Yet, his stance was challenged by Anne’s insightful perspective:
If you did [the presentation on] the food, you would’ve had your American viewpoint on what the cultural food was ... whereas we had actually people from different cultures doing their food and it gave us an idea on how they perceive the food and what it meant to them.

Similar disagreements then appeared to be not only challenging but also insightful for students.

In contrast, students’ responses converged in the area of how leadership roles were divided. Both sides agreed that it was the American students who took the lead in the projects. The following comments shed some light onto possible reasons for this group dynamic (all italics are mine).

- I think American students were much more active. Because they *almost felt it was their job to be more active* (Saifi).
- American students were leaders; ...it’s something *natural*, because ... they are good speakers, they have writing skills, they know English (Juan).
- Some of the international kids, *we didn’t feel comfortable letting them speak*... Because first of all, they are kind of hard to understand sometimes (Jennifer).
- We weren’t sure [that] they understand what we wanted them to do.... I mean *could they handle what we wanted them to do? ... In the capacity we wanted them to do?* (Anne)

The last two comments offered by Jennifer and Anne clearly culminate the theme of comments that suggest a range of emotions: from unsophisticated disgust towards the food of the other to the explicitly stated lack of trust in other’s abilities. Combined with Bob’s earlier comment implying that Achebe’s writing style allows for “less important information,” they signify both interpersonal and cross-cultural struggle entangled in ethos of difference, authority and even power differentials. These signs manifested themselves in quite unexpected ways in students’ reflections on others as authority figures: the foreign-born guest speakers and in particular their English instructor.

**Struggling with the authority of the other**

“The American students especially were not really accepting of the idea that their teacher was a non-native speaker,” was Saifi’s summary of the teacher-student dynamics in the composition classroom. In a similar fashion, Jennifer shared that the instructor
just picked on my word choice all the time. All she did was, like, reword my sentences and get my paper back and it's all red marked, but it wasn’t because of my grammar, errors or anything like that. It was just her opinion.

When asked directly if they had a problem with a non-native speaker marking their papers red, Bob replied,

Yeah, ... it’s more than just the fact that *she’s not American*. ... I mean, I don’t ever expect to be able to know another language as well as I know English, especially, like, American dialect. And I think just the way she went about it was, like, “We want to use this word,” this big impressive word would look better, but ... in my writing ... I’m focusing it towards a group of students, using slang is ok... Using these big words that we, most Americans, don’t know... Some of the words she told me to use *I didn’t even know!* (italics are mine)

The instructor’s *otherness*, and the resultant resistance to her authority, seemed to have compromised the CCLC’s pedagogical objective of exposing the students to disciplinary differences through linking composition and anthropology courses. When invited to describe their experience of discussing the same text (*Achebe’s Things Fall apart*) in both classes, students overwhelming reported confusion. In agreement with Saifi, Yamikani summarized the situation in the following way:

Actually, what happened was the anthro teacher didn’t seem to like English teacher because the English teacher actually asked us what we talked about in anthropology, but in anthropology we were told not to listen to what our English teacher says... “This is the right thing.” And then we went to English and our English teacher asked what we discussed in anthropology, and nobody wanted to say anything because we have been told that ... [laughs]. Oh, it was very confusing... (italics are mine)

US students’ perceptions of the situation concurred. Tasha reported that “the first day we walked into anthropology recitation, we were told to forget everything that we were taught in English about the book.” For Conrad, this “suggestion” seemed to reaffirm his overall negative attitude towards the English class and as a result he “didn’t think the discussion of the book in English was relevant at all.” He added with an apparent pride in his voice, “I didn’t even listen most of the time.”

This dynamic seemed to be aggravated by some US students’ apparent discomfort with their instructor who according to them didn’t acknowledge their effort to learn about international difference. Tasha said, for example:

We didn’t come here blind... We knew we were going to deal with international people and we all chose to do that.... I don’t think we were given a credit for that.
She [the instructor] put me in a tough spot because she made me feel almost ashamed that I was American. I took offense to some arguments that she made and that some of the arguments that our guest speakers also made. Likewise, Anne felt that the instructor “almost denied ... that Americans had their own culture”. For Bob, a chance to express his view of his culture was denied when Roxana required the class to avoid writing on traditional Western holidays such as Christmas for one of the assignments. Amidst this discussion, the overall quiet Suzie rather unexpectedly felt compelled to speak up as one of the US students whose “culture” (i.e., Native Indian origin) was acknowledged. For example, in class, Roxana’s read Suzie’s paper (with her permission) that reflected on Suzie’s painful experience of being called “a prairie nigga” in school. During the focus group session, Suzie seemed to be somewhat uneasy about having been considered “a special kind of American.” Her reflection on Roxana’s effort to acknowledge Suzie’s ethnic background—which bordered with some skepticism (“I was viewed as, oh my god, an extra American!”)—was somewhat surprising given Suzie’s seemingly very amicable rapport with the English instructor as well as overall comfort level in the class.

The accounts presented so far clearly contradict Bob’s perception about the lack of “cultural conflict.” In fact, they reveal multiple signs of struggle. The US students struggled to recognize the authority of the instructor who may not speak “American dialect” (let alone see her as one of them, as an American). Both international and US students agreed on the challenge to make sense of complex dynamics among the “adults”: if the anthropology instructor does not “seem to like” our English instructor, should we at least listen to her? Suzie seemed to be torn between choosing to write about her different cultural identity and trying to be just like her mainstream peers. And finally, one of the challenges Roxana apparently faced was having the US students step out of their comfort zone without feeling that they were denied to express their own cultural identity. Cultural conflicts became all the more pronounced in the accounts of those students who experienced difference beyond the classroom walls.

I interpreted Roxana’s request as her way to prompt the students to explore rituals and celebrations other than traditional Western holidays. In addition, her comment that “too many papers have been written about these holidays” suggested to me her intention to prevent the students from recycling their old papers or papers written by other people, which would have been temptingly easy given the abundance written on the topic.
Living with the other

The residential aspect of the CCLC and mixed roommates arrangements were meant to let the students experience each other’s differences in more domestic affective terms than a classroom did. Bob, however, requested an American roommate. He explained,

I thought it’d be interesting to be around international people...but I thought it would be nice to have an American roommate, so that I at least could go back to my room and have my place where it was the culture that I was used to.... So that I’d have that “safety zone” in my room with an American roommate that I could interact with him, talk to, you know, on an equal level. (italics are mine)

In contrast to Bob, roommates Jennifer and Yamikani who in some sense sacrificed their “safety zone” had a chance to experience cultural conflict in full. Yamikani reported this aspect of the CCLC to have a more profound impact on the cross-cultural understanding between Jennifer and her than the classroom did:

I think it helps [me] to learn about the American culture. It helps [Jennifer] to learn more about my culture ... because most of the things that she finds to be weird are the things that she sees in our room.... Outside, I’m just a student, ... when I go to school, I wear jeans like just everybody does.... When I’m in my room that’s where I can wear my traditional clothes, I can eat my traditional food, I can listen to my traditional music... I’ll just behave the way I would behave when I’m at home because I’m in my room. ... She can see my hair standing up [laughs]. (italics are mine)

In addition, such experiences made Yamikani more cross-culturally aware: the CCLC “made me realize that if other cultures seem to be weird, maybe my culture seems weird, too.” Indeed, Jennifer, not without embarrassment, admitted her initial reaction to the African roommate—“Oh my god! She lives in a hut or she lives in the trees with monkeys!” At the same time, Jennifer reported that the experience was truly eye opening: “It made me realize little things that you never ever realize unless you interact with people.” It is comments like Jennifer’s and Yamikani’s that give some hope for productive cross-cultural learning encounters despite their ineluctably conflict-ridden and power sensitive nature.

Signs of hope

Conflicting as the experience appeared, at the end of the focus group sessions, the students indicated that they benefited from the CCLC experience in two major ways: it eased
their transition to the university culture and prompted a more complex and less ethnocentric understanding of others and selves.

The supportive community-like environment reportedly aided both the international and US students in their transition processes. Interestingly, the cross-cultural component of this learning community seemed to have helped some US students. Jennifer, for instance, noted how the awareness of her foreign roommate’s difficulties made her own transition appear easier.

The cross-cultural perspective of the composition recognized different “Englishes” and made room for assignments that the international students could relate to. After starting his next level English class, Saifi retrospectively noted,

Our instructor in English 104 was much more accepting... because she herself was from [the name of the country] and her English, too, was a bit more British. She always told me that my English is British, but she never meant that negatively. But now coming to English 105, to our instructor, British English seems to be, like, a totally different language. It’s like “because your English is much more British, you need some help with English....”

Likewise, Yamikani missed the flexible and accommodating style of her first English course: “[Roxana] tried to give you articles everyone could write about.”

In addition to making the transition process easier, the focus group participants’ understanding of others and themselves seemed to have become more sophisticated. Tasha’s initial reluctance to admit her possible prejudice at the beginning of the semester, for instance, was somewhat revised in her later account that she shared during the focus group:

I honestly had stereotypes... about people from the Middle East.... And I happened to do my paper on someone who practices the Islamic religion and I really got to learn a different point of view other than I see on TV. And I think sometimes being an American, I see on TV the craziness that they have.... And he [the study participant] helped me to realize that there is a peaceful side to that religion. And it really opened my eyes, and I think that was a big part for me: learning, and understanding, and overcoming the stereotype that I had.

Likewise, Bob showed a more contextual understanding of cultural difference when he reflected on a discrepancy between what he was told in the learning community seminar about different learning and problem solving styles of the Japanese and what he learned from directly interacting with a Japanese student in his class. Bob’s awareness grew to
accommodate the facts that the information presented in the seminar “may have been outdated” or “maybe that particular Japanese student was just different.”

The concluding comments Saifi and Tasha respectively made were particularly inspiring:

- Before coming here, it was almost, like, there’s one world culture. But now I realize that there are so many different cultures, and they are all equally good. It’s not like one culture is better than another; now I’m almost totally accepting of other cultures.
- It’s a lot easier for us who were a part of this CCLC to understand the need to meet a diverse group of people and to be able to interact with them....And I think we all can deal with [international] people better now when we have lived with them, and we understand a little bit more why people do these things that they do. I’m less judgmental.... (italics are mine)

Tasha’s comment combined with earlier observations expressed by Yamikani and Jennifer underscore the importance of learning about cross-cultural difference at a very local, domestic, and affective level.

**Under the Sign of Hope: Discussion and Implications**

The essay has considered the cross-cultural learning community as one possibility for profound and productive engagement with difference in the composition classroom. Overall, I tried to understand students’ struggles with difference in a local context of the micro-culture of the CCLC at its particular place and particular time. A limitation for some, this researcher’s move is in agreement with Bhabha’s argument that an affective and temporal understanding is best when we’re attempting to understand the other (Postcolonial). To summarize then, students’ responses coupled with my observations suggest that the CCLC participants had opportunities for deep and overall productive experiences with difference that few cross-cultural composition pedagogies can offer.

The essay was written under the sign of hope that international students “as subjects can be free from essentializing, naturalizing, constraining, and oppressive identifications” (Bloom 11). The CCLC gives such a hope. As a model of the infrastructure that can enable international students to speak on their own terms, this cross-cultural composition pedagogy sought to avoid orientalist pitfalls of benefiting the dominant group at the expense of the less powerful, silent and passive. Instead, the CCLC strove to be productive for both the US and
international students. As I discuss some major findings, I embed some tentative implications where applicable.

**Beyond exoticizing and reductive versions of difference**

It is fair to conclude that the CCLC took a stance against ... “exoticizing differences” and superficial “media-packaged versions of cultural identity” (West 2). In that respect, Tasha’s accounts seem to be quite notable. Initially very reluctant to admit that she may harbor some prejudice, she later confessed that, indeed, she had some stereotypes about the Middle East that stemmed from reductive mass media portrayals of this cultural group.

Tasha’s case is particularly interesting because it once again proves how difficult it is to have students recognize obvious (for instructors) socio-political conflicts and admit that prejudice and inequality do exist (see Berlin 102). The challenge appears all the more insurmountable given the current political climate. “At no other time ... has it been so difficult to imagine how to engage students, colleagues, and the nation at large in productive dialogue ... with difference,” writes Strikland in her review of West’s *Signs of Struggle*. Efforts undertaken by West, as well as by this essay, she continues, come to a world that is “truly struggling over difference” when attacks on difference are often seen as not only justifiable but also patriotic.

How much more difficult would it be to get our students to make revelations similar to Tasha’s in the post 9/11 world? And how much more urgent it becomes to come up with assignments and classroom infrastructure that would result in an understanding of the *other* that is not one sided or totally demonizing?

Jennifer’s trajectory from her initially naïve assumptions about her African roommate’s type of dwelling to the reflections on the eye opening nature of the firsthand experience of difference is also noteworthy. So is Saifi’s move from his initial annoyance with “crazy” American assumptions about his means of transportation in his home country to realizing that instead of “one world culture” there are different cultures that are all “equally good.” Trivial and domestic (Jennifer’s smelling Yamikani’s food and seeing her natural Afro hair stand up) as these accounts may seem, they gain more signification power when placed in postcolonial theoretical contexts. The teenagers’ naivete is less likely to be dismissed if we consider its domesticity in the context of Bhabha’s argument against the
naturalization of cultural difference as a "natural emanation of the fact that there are different cultures in the world":

a particular cultural trait or tradition—the smell of somebody’s food, the color of their skin, the accent that they speak with, their particular history, be it Irish or Indian or Jewish—becomes the site of contestation, abuse, insult…. It’s much more problematic and sophisticated reproduction of a ritual, a habit, a trait, a characteristic. The reproduction has to bear a whole set of significations, tensions, anxieties. (Staging 16)

Indeed, mere factoids on other cultures without experiencing "the embarrassment of making mistakes" involving otherness can never teach a truly profound understanding and appreciation of difference (Sikkema and Niyekawa). Out of all CCLC participants, Yamikani and Jennifer had most intense and rich learning opportunities because these opportunities were not confined to the cognitive realm. And while I admit that developing genuine cross-cultural sensitivity is not accomplished in one semester, I think it is fair to claim that these accounts signify some progression towards more complex and less ethnocentric, exotic views of difference among the CCLC participants.

**Beyond constraining and oppressive identifications**

Without the theme of ethos tarnished by otherness that I traced through most students’ reflective accounts, the overall representation of the CCLC would have fallen into the very trap of “everyone’s- happy” uplifting illusionary types that West and other researchers critique. In this respect, Bob’s “imaginaries” of otherness stand out. His casual attribution of less importance to the information in Achebe’s story. Or his reasoning behind requesting an American roommate with whom he could interact “on an equal level.” Or his apparent certainty that being a native speaker automatically makes him the authority in English whereas the non-native speaker’s status strips one not only of her professional credibility but also of American citizenship. I daresay these are not just “imaginaries” of one naïve first-year student. If unchallenged, they prevail at large.

The ethos and authority theme reached its apogee in the accounts on leadership roles and the student-instructor dynamic and most tellingly illustrated West’s (and Anzaldúa’s) argument that the way we feel toward others affects significantly how we act towards them. During their collaborative projects, the US students appeared to be the unquestionable, “natural,” as Juan phrased it, locus of authority largely due to perceived differences in
communication abilities. Some of these perceptions were valid (one of the international focus group participants demonstrated some difficulty with conversational English). At the same time, however, even "international kids" who came from countries where English was an official state language and whose English, while carried some accent, was very fluent did not seem to get much chance to speak. In other words, by the virtue of being "international," or having a non-European look (as Yamikani’s example suggests), these students fell into the category of linguistically incapable and thus were silenced during their class presentations.

Creating learning contexts that challenge these imaginaries may be a good opportunity for compositionists to go further than their colleagues in professional communication. Discussions, similar to Bosley’s (“Cross-cultural”), for instance, of how cultural differences can affect cross-cultural collaborations can help us understand why students like Yamikani or Juan experience some discomfort when the team discourse emphasizes the individual. While Bosley is right in noting that some cultural backgrounds can preclude students from speaking up in a group, she does not spend much time, if any at all, in acknowledging how possible authority and power differentials may prevent international students from speaking. Jennifer’s and Anne’s voices—"we didn’t feel comfortable letting [the international kids] speak"; "could they handle what we wanted them to do? ... In the capacity we wanted them to do?"—signify, to me at least, the implicit "hierarchy of (western) parents and (migrant) offspring" (Moore-Gilbert 461) that Bhabha critiques in cross-cultural interactions. Such early signs of entitlement to authority among mainstream students, I think, underscore the importance of interrogating the nexus of language and power and authority. Accordingly, compositionists may democratize their classroom practices by reflecting on ways the classroom infrastructure enables or disables the other to speak on his/her own terms, if at all.

The dynamics between Roxana and her students pose more questions that I can answer here. For one thing, there are some theoretical limitations: “How minority teachers affect the dynamics of power in multicultural classrooms is often overlooked in studies of teaching difference” (Micciche 80). This study speaks to the need for theorizing the teacher’s identity as a rhetorical construct and supports Micciche’s argument for “developing scholarship on the cultural location of non-native teachers [that] would ... generate more
narratives of non-native teachers’ experiences of cultural isolation and rejection in the profession and in classroom” (ibid).

Interestingly, contrary to the argument that the difference of non-native teachers is often a source of lowered credibility to international students (Micciche 81, see also Thomas), both focus groups indicate that Roxana’s “non-nativeness” proved to be more of an issue for the US students. Given the reported tendency to construct non-native speakers as inferior and less competent others (Woolever 61-62, see also Miles), it is of little surprise that the US students resisted their non-native instructor’s marking their papers red. Suzie’s apparent discomfort with Roxana’s singling her out as “a special American” due to her Native Indian origin did take me by surprise, however, for Suzie appeared to be rather comfortable in the classroom. In some sense, Suzie is similar to the minority kids from the essay read in class. Desperate to fit into their new culture of power, they chose to throw stones at an old ethnic food storeowner just to please their peers from the dominant culture. Perhaps, it was largely due to Suzie’s struggle to blend in with the rest into that melting pot critiqued by such scholars as Olson and West, that caused her skepticism about Roxana’s attempts to acknowledge her cultural and ethnic identity.

In Spivak’s spirit, I gave the student-instructor dynamics some prominence because of the “signifying” value of this seemingly “marginal” material. Does this theme raise any “constructive questions, corrective doubts” (Spivak In Other Worlds 258)? Are there any risks to the instructor’s authority when a non-dominant instructor puts mainstream students, in Tasha’s words, “in a tough spot”? Would the overall institutional infrastructure permit, tolerate, or support such courage? Was there anything in anthropology colleagues’ comments—or as students put it, “confusing criticisms”—that may have unwittingly further deligitimized Roxana’s professional credibility in the eyes of her students? (see Thomas, Manrique and Manrique, 63, 70) And why, despite all its pedagogical potential, the CCLC linked to English did not continue? Was there anything that could have been done to engage

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7 In “Three women’s texts and a critique of imperialism,” Spivak makes a far bolder and dramatic sophisticated move to forward her strategic position. Specifically, she turns marginal material, Bertha, Rochester’s first wife, from Jane Eire into a colonized woman to illustrate the dangers of Anglophone feminism: self-constitution of western women at the expense of women from less powerful cultures (qtd. in Moore-Gilbert 455).
students (and perhaps adults) in even more productive and sustainable dialogue with difference?

Towards a productive engagement with difference

As a researcher, I viewed the composition classroom with its long tradition of empowering the less powerful as a suitable space for looking for positive signs of struggling with difference. Overall, compositionists can create small but significant aperture in the context of the overall (communication) curriculum and culture at large that for various reasons occlude and discipline any instantiation of difference. The composition classroom linked to the CCLC responded to the established need for bringing international cross-cultural difference closer to home (Bahri, Bosley, Corbett, Matzuda, Woolever). As such the CCLC composition classroom was pedagogically recomposing the meaning of international, foreign, and global whose common imaginaries, similar to postcolonial, tend to “present the other as always beyond the local shores rather than in our very midst, and… [to privilege] the notion of distant difference instead of examining the complex ways in which difference and marginality are produced in particular [local] contexts” (Bahri 36).

Some researchers argue that the most obvious benefits of the commonly used cross-cultural 50/50 composition courses include better meeting the needs of non-native speakers who steadily populate composition classrooms and providing educational opportunities related to internationalization for mainstream students (e.g., Matsuda and Silva). A composition classroom linked to a cross-cultural learning community not only supports this argument but also surpasses it, I would say, in a rather unique way.

The infrastructure created by this learning community suggests some possibilities for moving beyond a somewhat putative perception that cross-cultural interventions accommodate only “needy” non-native speakers while offering “extras” to otherwise self-sufficient mainstream students, a view that may detract from the cross-cultural pedagogy’s sustainability. As first-year students, US students also have the needs that a learning community like this one can meet. In fact, in the field of higher education, benefits of learning communities to mainstream students in the first-year have been well documented (e.g., MacGregor, Tinto, Tinto & Goodsell-Love, Tokuno). While this study focused on cross-cultural aspects of this learning community, we can reasonably assume that the US
students benefited from all the support system and the small community feel that the CCLC provided in their transition to the university. It boosted their confidence, made them more comfortable in their new academic culture, and helped them to persist to the next semester.

Aside meeting obvious international students’ needs, the CCLC was in some sense similar to what Flower calls a “project of empowerment.” The infrastructure that permitted others to act as authority figures somewhat empowered the international students to challenge what Bhabha calls the narcissistic demand that [the dominant culture] should be addressed directly, that the other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines, replete, indeed, repeat its references and still its fractured gaze (The Location 98).

The most basic forms these challenges took were the international students’ refusal to satisfy the reductive and stereotypical assumptions about their “exotic” types of dwelling or means of transportation and even assumptions about communication-related inadequacies. Admittedly, the CCLC did not achieve a status of “the site of oppositional political impulses” in Bhabha’s sense (Moore-Gilbert 458) and, in fact, the CCLC could have been more empowering to international students. Yet, the very fact that these most basic essentialist imaginaries were challenged can be viewed as an important first step in that direction.

In that respect, the infrastructure the CCLC provided for this move towards heterogeneous “oppositional” discourses is commendable. The CCLC in many ways acted as what West calls “a praxis of shelter” by creating opportunities for “therapeutic rhetoric” (9-10) when dealing with difference. Such opportunities included the small community environment, the approachable faculty and staff, the peer mentor, the classroom activities that took into account students’ possible challenges, the network of peers taking classes and living in the same residence hall, and even the “safety zone” students like Bob could resort to. In addition, the CCLC participants were offered an important reflective opportunity in a form of the focus groups at the end of the experience. All these aspects together helped students emotionally and cognitively grapple with differences and conflicts that these differences engendered. The project overall, I hope, added to our understanding how to learn and to teach theoretically grounded and socially responsible versions of difference while we work to compose communities of difference that do not collapse under the pressure of tension, communities that are not monologic, fragile, and rigid but multivalent, responsive, and open to revision. (West 12)
More (revised) opportunities like this cross-cultural composition pedagogy ought to be pursued by compositionists who wish to engage their students with difference and the subaltern more productively.

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CHAPTER 4. A CASE FOR A STUDENT SURVEY: STUDENTS’ INSIGHTS ON COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOPHOMORE YEAR AT A LARGE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

A paper prepared for submission to Writing Assessment

Oksana Hlyva

Abstract

This essay reflects on a survey study that inquired into student engagement with communication activities over the sophomore year at a large research institution. In so doing, it treats the survey design as inseparable from the study results and argues that this largely undertheorized research technique is both practical and rhetorically based. Designed collaboratively and recursively with major “stakeholders” including compositionists and students, the survey proved to be more than a “quick and easy” means of crunching numbers on students’ perceptions. Without reducing endemic rhetorical equivocality, the survey results suggested the need for a curricular change as well as some concrete ways this change might be implemented.

Introduction

In Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers, Lee Ann Carroll counters the common fantasy that college students should, or could, be taught to write over the course of a semester or two so that ever after they can “write fluently and correctly on any topic, at any time, in any context” (xi). Instead, Carroll argues for a more developmental perspective when approaching students’ literacy skills. Complex and idiosyncratic, communication competencies develop gradually rather than in the one- or two-semester first-year course in writing that many colleges rely on solely. To support her argument, Carroll draws on her study that traced the development of writing skills of twenty students from a midsize independent college over four years.

The publication of a number of longitudinal studies in recent years (Haswell, Sternglass, Beaufort, Curtis and Herrington, Fishman et al.) suggests that longitudinal naturalistic ethnographic studies like Carroll’s enjoy the respect of the profession. In fact, they are often preferred over studies whose “simple numerical positivism devalues the
meaning of writing” (White, “Teaching” 7). Indeed, as David Russell argues, representative qualitative studies on writing point “beyond the search for universal or autonomous approaches toward much more messy—and human—factors” (261). Writing itself, he explains, “is not a single generalizable skill . . . learned once and for all at an early age, but a complex range of accomplishments, variously tied to myriad human practices” (260). While naturalistic studies can best accommodate the complex nature of communication skills’ development, such studies are not always possible or practical because they are typically characterized by a significant time span and a small sample size.  

This essay considers a situation where a perceptible need for a change in the existing sophomore curriculum at a large land-grant research institution required a methodology that would allow for gathering relatively quick data using a relatively large sample size. In so doing, this essay proposes a student survey as a rhetorical means of research that can meet these pragmatic requirements without reducing endemic complexity of communication development to quick numerical values. In other words, I argue that when constructed dialogically with students and compositionists rather than designed by outside assessment experts, surveys can yield results that are beyond quick and easy positivist crunching numbers about student perceptions. Before I present and discuss the survey results, let me consider relevant theoretical context and provide background on the survey study and its design process.

Theoretical Context

Since the essay has two major foci, this section first briefly focuses on research pertinent to sophomore communication primarily in large research-oriented institutions and to the need for a more complex understanding of communication development in general. The section then offers a theoretical rationale for employing survey research to inform curriculum assessment.

1 Some exceptions of studies that focused on large numbers of writers over a long period of time include those done by Haswell and Sternglass.
**Sophomore communication and institutional and definitional challenges**

Arguably, with ample scholarship on writing in the first-year and advanced business and technical communication courses, sophomore communication is rarely in focus. Some recent exceptions can be studies in technical communication by Sibylle Gruber et al. and David Kmiec that discuss curricular and assessment efforts related to the integration of communication instruction in an engineering sophomore curriculum. Overall, however, assessment efforts tend to focus on the beginning and the end of student college career. Even Gruber et al., who explicitly focus on the sophomore year, admit the obvious limitations of assessing writing improvement over a year period and suggest instead that incoming first-year students and outgoing seniors should be assessed. Such practice is adopted by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the nationwide survey that annually samples first-year students and senior students on their engagement in behaviors known to contribute to student learning and development.

The studies by Gruber et al. and Kmiec nonetheless suggest a growing recognition of a certain hiatus in communication instruction itself in the sophomore year, especially in large institutions. In a study conducted over the first two years at a large research university, Elizabeth Jones and Michael Nugent arrived at two relevant findings. First, half of the interviewed faculty who taught lower-level courses that were meant to improve students writing skills admitted that writing was not their course objective (largely due to large class size). This finding supports a more general observation that, while faculty from disciplines, such as engineering, for instance, recognize the importance of writing, for various reasons faculty tend to be reluctant to teach it to their students (Gruber et al. 420, see also Fulwiler, Gorman, and Gorman; Walvoord). Second, the student writing assessment part of the Jones and Nugent’s study revealed that, despite positive correlation between various general education courses and growth in students' writing skills, overall, students' writing regressed after the first year and never increased beyond its original level.

Arguably, broader institutional contexts play an important role in communication instruction. At large research-intensive universities, writing instruction is reported to be “in spite of the curriculum” (Strenski 31). In addition to the large classes that often characterize lower-division courses, Strenski identifies other factors that are not so favorable for
communication instruction at institutions of this type. For instance, "publish or perish" tenure conditions remove most faculty emotionally and physically from the lower-level classroom; writing is usually assigned by "subject specialists within departments" "as a bureaucratic convenience—that is, to provide something to measure students' learning and to grade for the course" (31-32). The more recent study done by Carroll at a midsize, independent, Christian, rather affluent university where these conditions may be less prevalent reinforces the need to consider student communication development as gradual and requiring constant practice.

The institutional challenges seem to be aggravated by the tendency to underestimate the complexity of student communication tasks and abilities. "What are often called 'writing assignments' in college are, in fact, complex literacy tasks that call for high-level reading, research, and critical analysis," writes Carroll (xiv). Some researchers suggest a multimodal approach as part of viewing student literacy as complex and multifaceted (Kress, "English," "Literacy," "Writing"; George and Shoos). The evolution of WAC into (E) CAC (Electronic/Communication Across Curriculum), for instance, attests to the growing recognition that effective composition and communication skills nowadays cannot be reduced solely to effective writing skills, thus suggesting an increasing need for multimodal learning and instruction (Ochsner and Fowler).

Similarly, a recent study conducted at Stanford links early college writing to performance practices, thus underscoring the integration of oral and written communication modalities (Fishman, et al.)

This brief discussion identifies some most relevant institutional and definitional challenges as well as an increasing awareness about the need for consistently multifaceted communication instruction. Survey research can add to our understanding of how these issues manifest themselves at a particular research institution.

**Salvaging student survey research**

Admittedly, surveys with the instantaneous nature of their results and close affinities to consumerism and numerical positivism to a certain degree amplify the wide-spread distrust in numerical assessment that does not reflect the complex nature of communication.

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2 The trend towards multimodality is not entirely new. In some sense, it was prefigured by Emig's influential "Writing as a Mode of Learning" essay where she argued for seeing writing as a unique multi-representational mode for learning whereby simultaneously we learn by doing (hand), by depicting an image (eye), and by representing/restating/symbolizing in words (brain) (123).
development (e.g., White, “Language,” “Writing”; Holdstein). Justifiable overall, this distrust can be dangerous, however. By keeping compositionists on sidelines, this distrust can give outsiders power to conduct assessment and impose positivist methodology on such complex and human subject matter as communication (Huot; White, “Teaching”; Condon; McLeod and Miraglia).

If assessment is to serve the needs and interests of both students and the discipline, it ought to “recognize the importance of context, rhetoric, teaching and learning” (Huot 552). This mandate can be achieved through the following imperatives:

- involve important “stakeholders” such as program administrators, teachers, and students (Condon; Henning; Gleason);
- connect teaching and evaluation (Cooper and Odell);
- consider institutional context (Gleason);
- try to “avoid positivist measures that do not adequately reflect the complexity of …student learning” (McLeod and Miraglia 6-7);
- assume “ethnographic limitations” of any assessment (Thaiss 316).

Without compositionists’ involvement, realizing such imperatives for survey research, and any form of assessment, is very unlikely. In fact, the English faculty are encouraged to view assessment as a worthwhile research activity and participate in the process so that they can shape it to reflect local concerns and humanistic precepts of learning and teaching (Henning).

In most obvious sense, survey research reflects dialogic principles of education by allowing for students’ input in both assessment and curricular change. Given the critiques that student voice is often overwritten by academic discourses (Hoogeveen) and that most assessment tends to be faculty centered and top down (Fulwiler; Condon), ways of involving student voices in scholarship on teaching and learning are increasingly recognized as important (e.g., Huba and Freed; Hutchings). Some scholars contend, for instance, that “if we really want students to benefit from our studies of teaching and learning, we need to involve them in questions that guide our studies, in the design of our inquiry, in the process of collecting data” (Driscoll 31). Other researchers argue that one benefit of moving “from a model of students as subjects to students as collaborators” (Takacs 30) lies in opportunities for students to reflect on their learning (Alexander 51). In addition, this move encourages students’ identification as members of an academic community in which students and faculty
collaboratively seek knowledge (Bullock 51-52). In more general terms, student-centered assessment can help students move from the “spoken subject” to the “speaking subject” (Berlin 60-61).

Student-centered assessment often means self-reported assessment, which inevitably raises questions of validity. Yet, there has been some evidence suggesting that the risks of perceptual, attitudinal data can be controlled effectively. For instance, one study of 257 first-year students who completed a survey of their attitudes and achievement expectations in their introductory English course showed a significant positive correlation between students’ initial self-ratings and subsequent course grades (House and Prion). Another study reported that students accurately assessed their own level of writing proficiency once the assessment tools provided sufficient level of detail (Royer and Roger).

Largely underestimated, then, survey research holds a significant potential to enact the disciplinary beliefs about humanistic precepts of assessment and communication development as well as the role of students’ voices in assessment and curricular change. Before we discuss specific ways of how survey research adds to our current understanding of communication experience in the second year, the study background and methodology need to be explained.

**Study Background and Methodology**

This section offers general background for the study including the discussion of the process of the survey instrument development and the study participants. The study discussed here took place at a large land-grant Midwestern research university of science and technology. The study is part of a wide range of ongoing assessment activities related to a university-wide communication curriculum initiative called to address a growing concern about students’ communication abilities by adopting an integrated approach to four major communication modalities (written, oral, visual, and electronic or WOVE). Prior to the plan implementation, the assessment team sought student input on the existing communication curriculum. My involvement on the team as a graduate research assistant lasted for about two years, thus providing me with an opportunity to witness the study’s evolution.

The present survey study on student communication experiences in their sophomore year evolved from two smaller informal studies that deserve some mention as they influenced
both the design and analysis processes of the present study. First, I informally surveyed via email 20 juniors and seniors from a technical communication course that I was teaching at the time. Second, together with another research assistant, I conducted focus groups with a random group of 14 students.

Both preliminary studies made the overall process of the survey development rather recursive. More importantly, these studies secured—and benefited from—compositionists’ input in the assessment process from the very beginning. For instance, some faculty voiced their initial concerns about practicality of including students in assessment. A typical student, their argument was, lacks in the vocabulary and meta-understanding of communication (pedagogical) issues. One faculty member pointed out, for instance, that due to its implicit nature, communication tends to disappear into daily activities and tasks, thus often preventing students from reflecting on their learning process meaningfully. In order to minimize this problem, the focus group facilitators supplied participants with a detailed list of common communication genres and activities that were roughly broken into four major interrelated communication competencies: written, oral, visual and electronic. Practical suggestions similar to the one on making communication activities more explicit to students informed the subsequent stages of the study design and implementation.

**Survey instrument development**

The current instrument resulted from a rather extensive collaboration. The assessment team consisted of three English faculty members with experience in teaching composition, a faculty and graduate assistant from the university’s research institute, and myself, a English graduate research assistant.

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3 Researchers have recognized a wide range of ethical issues that may stem from the dual teacher-researcher role including power differentials (e.g., Hammack). In the case of this informal study, however, aside from a high response rate, my dual role was inconsequential. The study focused on students’ communication experiences at the university in general and not on the specific course that I was teaching. Moreover, my teacher’s authority did not preclude the students from offering a significant number of openly critical comments about their communication experiences at the university in general.

4 Recruiting participants for the focus groups study proved to be a significant challenge. Several calls for participation and a financial reward in addition to the conventional food incentives yielded the response rate as low as 14 participants out of 118 contacted.
In addition to being informed by the two previous studies, the survey drew on the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) by adapting some of its general categories on student development to more specific communication purposes. The survey also underwent multiple revisions to accommodate numerous suggestions offered by faculty from composition and other fields including faculty and administrators who were cautious about the proposed curriculum changes. Finally, the survey was pilot tested with some First-Year students to determine the instrument’s validity, usability, and adaptability to student audience.

The resultant survey (Appendix A) consisted of four sections:
1. General information section that solicited information on respondents’ background
2. Types and frequencies of communication activities section that inquired into students’ engagement with a range of specific written, oral, visual and electronic (WOVE) communication activities over their sophomore year
3. Communication abilities development section that required students to indicate the extent of their perceived growth in their communication abilities
4. Additional comments open-ended section that asked students to share any insights that the previous sections of the survey did not cover.

Sample and participants recruitment
A random group of 1000 sophomores was contacted via email. A total of 233 students responded by completing the survey electronically. Responses to general information section provided relevant data pertaining to respondents’ background. For the purposes of this essay, it may be relevant to note the gender makeup of the sample: 56.2% were female and 43.8% were male. Also, surveys respondents represented a wide range of colleges and majors with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Engineering being most represented.

Survey Results
The survey respondents were invited to reflect on types and frequencies of communication activities that they engaged in as well as to share their perceptions of communication development over the sophomore year. Not devoid of rhetorical equivocality, the survey results supported a need for a curricular change and also pointed to some specific ways regarding how this change might be implemented.
Types and frequencies of communication activities over the sophomore year

The students reported how many times they engaged in various WOVE communication genres on a scale that consisted of such categories as “more than 6 times,” “3-6 times,” “1-2 times,” and “never.” Table 1 presents percentages for each individual category (on the left). In addition, the last two columns (on the right) present combined percentages for the adjacent categories (i.e., “more than 6 times” plus “3-6 times”; “1-2 times” plus “never”).

Table 1. Frequencies of communication activities in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOVE communication genre</th>
<th>More than 6 times</th>
<th>3-6 times</th>
<th>1-2 times</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>More than 6 times and 3-6 times combined</th>
<th>Never and 1-2 times combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific research report based on field or lab observations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response (one or more pages) to course reading or published text</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one draft of a paper or assignment, required or not by instructor</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long report, proposal, essay (five pages or more)</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper/project that required citing ideas or info from published sources (print or electronic)</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand-up oral presentation before a group based on material you prepared in advance</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate in work groups with other students on major, graded classes projects or assignments</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview an individual for a class project</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 1 indicates, the combined percentages for the “more than 6 times” and “3-6 times” categories range from 2.3% to 54%. Accordingly, the combined percentages for the “1-2 times” and “never” categories range from 46% to 97.7%. Further, the highest percentages of respondents indicated that they frequently (3 times and more) engaged in the following communication activities:

- Writing a response (one or more pages) to course reading or published text (54%)
- Collaborating in work groups with other students on major, graded class projects or assignments (50.7%)
- Creating a table, figure, chart or graph from data (48%)
- Writing a paper/project that required citing ideas or info from published sources (47.7%)
• Writing more than one draft of a paper or assignment, required or not by instructor (42.3%)

At the same time, however, almost all respondents indicated that they rarely, if ever, designed a web page (97.7%) or interviewed an individual for a class project (93.6%). Similarly, very considerable numbers of respondents reported the lack of opportunities to practice the following:

• designing a PowerPoint presentation (89.5%),
• evaluating the effectiveness of computer-based communications (86.8%),
• developing a plan for formatting headings and subheadings within the body of a text (84.9%), and
• writing a long report, proposal, or essay (76.1%).

**Communication abilities development over the sophomore year**

In this section of the survey, the students shared their perceptions about the extent to which their educational experiences during their sophomore year contributed to the growth in their communication abilities. A Likert-type scale was applied with categories ranging from 1 to 5: 1=none; 2=minimal; 3=some; 4=significant; 5=very significant. The students commented on the growth in their ability to **create** (Table 2) and **evaluate** (Table 3) effective communication in general WOVE areas and in terms of such communication tasks as clear, logical reasoning; effective adaptation to audience; coherent organization; and appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics. Again, Tables 2 and 3 present percentages for individual categories (on the left); combined percentages for the adjacent values, i.e., “very significant” plus “significant”; “minimal” plus “none” (in the middle); and mean values (on the right).
Table 2. Percentages and means for questions on growth in ability to create effective communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOVE communication area</th>
<th>Percentages %</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining all four</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication task</th>
<th>Percentages %</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear, logical reasoning</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective adaptation of subject to audience</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherent organization</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 shows, the mean ratings for the general WOVE areas range from 3.16 for oral to 3.46 for written communication. Similarly, percentage wise, the highest of 49.3% reported a “very significant” and “significant” growth in written communication whereas the highest of 25.8% reported “minimal” and “no” growth for both oral and electronic communication.

As far as general communication tasks, the mean ratings ranged from 3.19 for appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics to 3.66 for clear logical reasoning (with the mean rating for coherent organization coming very close: M=3.62). Accordingly, the percentage values suggest that most respondents—61.3%—had experienced a “very significant” and “significant” growth in clear logical reasoning with the highest percentage
of 26.8% indicating a “minimal” and “no” growth in their ability to adhere to appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics.

Table 3. Percentages and means for questions on growth in ability to evaluate effective communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOVE communication area</th>
<th>Percentages %</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>9.2 31.3 36.9 18.4 4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>9.7 26.7 41.9 15.7 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>13.4 25.8 37.8 19.8 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>8.3 25.8 38.2 22.1 5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining all four</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>6.5 28.6 42.9 17.5 4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication task</th>
<th>Percentages %</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear, logical reasoning</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>11.5 42.9 32.7 9.7 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective adaptation</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>7.4 36.4 36.9 16.6 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherent organization</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>10.1 42.9 33.2 11.1 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>8.8 34.1 30.0 21.2 6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, the mean ratings for evaluating the general WOVE areas range from 3.09 for electronic to 3.26 for visual communication (with the mean rating for written communication coming high as well: M= 3.23). Percentage wise, the highest of 40.5% reported a “very significant” and “significant” growth in written communication with the highest of 27.6% indicating a “minimal” and “no” growth in electronic communication.

The mean ratings for evaluating communication general communication tasks are very similar to those for creating effective communication from the previous table. That is, the mean ratings range from 3.18 for evaluating appropriate style and correct grammar and...
mechanics to 3.50 for evaluating clear logical reasoning (with the mean rating for coherent organization being 3.46). Again, the percentage values support the mean ratings. While over a half of the respondents (54.4%) reported a “very significant” and “significant” growth in their ability to evaluate clear logical reasoning, close to one third (27.2%) indicated a “minimal” and “no” growth in their ability to evaluate appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics.

Both Tables 2 and 3 show that, on the 5-point scale, the mean ratings range from 3.16 to 3.66 for the create set of questions and from 3.09 to 3.50 for the evaluate set of questions, thus falling between “some” and “significant” scale categories. Also, the percentage values indicate a “minimal” and “no” growth in certain communication areas for rather significant groups of respondents. Finally, with the exception of oral communication, the mean ratings for the evaluate questions are slightly lower than those for the create questions, which implies that the students felt that their ability to evaluate had grown slightly less than their ability to create effective communication in these areas.

**Additional open-ended comments**

The students offered a wide range of additional insights in the final open-ended section, with some responses adding more equivocation to the quantitative results. In general, while some students reported positive communication experiences in some isolated courses, others explicitly pointed out that overall they did not have many opportunities to practice their communication skills consistently over their sophomore year. In fact, many felt compelled to comment on their First-Year English class(es) as the most intense communication experience in college.

**Positive perceptions of communication experiences**

Some respondents felt positive about their communication skills' development over the sophomore year. One student explicitly pointed out that the survey made him or her "realize" how much he/she "actually gained throughout the year." Another felt that the university "has done a great job so far by teaching me how to communicate with others." The student continued, "Much of what I have learned comes easy for me due to my personality as well."
In general, the students felt most positive about their oral communication skills (largely due to their Speech Communication class), electronic communication, and groupwork:

- My main growth has occurred in Speech 212 ... I have become a stronger speaker and feel that I can organize my ideas more clearly.
- I have taken advantage of communication the most through WebCT e-mail [a university-wide program]. It has been a very effective way to communicate with my instructors.
- I have been much more involved in group activity this semester than ever before. It has taught me to work outside of class effectively through meeting with people and communicating with email.

In addition, some positive perceptions were attributed to individual communication-intensive courses in philosophy, history, pre-law, advertising, and foreign languages that students took over their sophomore year. For instance, one student wrote:

All of my oral and most of my reading and writing experiences this year were in Spanish. These were very effective, and I feel that they were blended together well to make a well-rounded education in the language.

Some overall positive comments implied certain deficiencies in respondents' written communication experience, however:

- I haven't written very many papers this year compared to last but I really don't mind that. I still remember how to when the time comes.
- I have not had to write as much as I should this year, but through graphic design programs I have had many chances to present things to a class.

**Less positive perceptions of communication experiences**

A considerable number of respondents commented on the lack of communication experiences in their sophomore year and the subsequent insignificant growth in certain communication skills:

- I haven't needed to use my communication skills or develop them much because the classes that I have taken don't require me to do so.
- *sigh* I really learned most of the USEFUL stuff OUTSIDE of the classroom, through other things I do.
- It's obvious why I haven not enjoyed my college experience based on the fact that I want to work with communication for the rest of my life, and my answers [to the quantitative part of the survey] were mainly 'minimal.'
A number of students pointed out the large classes issue as a barrier to communication-intensive instruction:

- All my classes this year have been lectures and haven’t really had any classroom communication.
- In about half the classes I have taken, presentations by the class are not feasible.
- Most of my classes require me to just take notes and offer no opinion.
- There usually is no communication in the classes. The teacher usually just stands up in front and teaches the rest of the class. The students hardly ever get to interact. There is pretty much no writing. Evaluation of sources or anything like that is unheard of. So, to sum it up, there is no real communication at the sophomore level.

Some very isolated comments suggested that the large classes nonetheless offered some learning experiences:

Over the course of the past academic year I have had very little communication experiences in the classroom except for evaluating how well the professors are able to communicate, organize, and adapt to their classes. This may sound minimal, but has proved effective in that I have been able to see what professors do, what works and what doesn’t.

While comments like this one suggest an admirable degree of perception on the behalf of the student, other comments implied that the students may have started seeing communication as external to the curriculum in their discipline at least in their lower division courses:

- It [communication] usually just seems to get in the way of course material, and the first two years of the music curriculum are just getting down the basics. I know in the next two years, I’ll be getting into more teaching environments, and then the need for communication skills will be present.
- I think that some classes I took don’t really fall into the lines of this [survey] because they are more math related.
- Since most of my courses this year seemed to be business oriented, there weren't as many papers or speeches to write.

**Other comments**

Among a wide range of assorted comments, the most distinct theme was related to the First-Year English, even though it was unsolicited by the survey. In short, several respondents explicitly indicated that they had more significant communication experience and that their communication skills had grown more during their first year:

- The most I had to speak or write and use communication skills was in [FY English].
- My writing and things were greatly helped in my freshman year. But I have not had much development during this year.
Other isolated comments suggested a need for balancing communication skills in English classes and other classes in general. For instance, while some students pointed out the opportunities to practice their electronic communication skills in their computer networked classes, there were comments implying that "strictly on-line courses" did not necessarily result in growth in their communication abilities. There were also comments speaking to the need to make First-Year English classes more challenging as well as find "a middle ground" or balance of challenge and support for learners who may need the latter.

Survey Results at Glance

To summarize the most notable survey results:

- 2.3% to 54% respondents indicated that they engaged in the listed communication activities 3 times and more in their sophomore year with 46% to 97.7% reporting that they never or only 1-2 times did so.

- The survey respondents felt that their abilities to both create and evaluate effective communication grew to "some" and "significant" extent with a slightly higher confidence in their ability to produce effective communication than in the ability to evaluate it.

- Written communication and the ability to reason clearly and logically appeared to be the areas of the most growth with approximately half respondents reporting a very significant and significant growth. On the other hand, electronic communication and the ability to apply appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics received the lowest mean ratings with more than a quarter feeling that there was a minimal and no growth in these communication areas.

- For additional qualitative comments, a number of students listed mostly oral and electronic communication activities in some isolated courses over their sophomore year. At the same time, however, a significant number of respondents felt that they had experienced a limited growth in communication abilities during that period of time. A number of students felt compelled to comment on their First-Year English course(s) with some noting that these courses had been the biggest influence in their communication growth.

Discussion and Implications: Beyond Quick and Easy

As Kathleen Blake Yancey observes, increasingly assessment has been viewed as a knowledge-making endeavor and understood as a rhetorical act. This understanding informed this essay's goal to illustrate the survey design as a recursive, evolutionary and dialogic process that sought to include multiple voices of students, compositionists, and those who may not have shared the enthusiasm of the proponents of the new curriculum. In other words,
the study possessed all the characteristics Huot, among other scholars, call for: it was site-based, locally controlled, rhetorically-based, and accessible to those whom the curricular change is likely to impact (562).

A common frustration with assessment is that it rarely, if ever, yields clearcut outcomes (e.g., Condon). The study results did not escape this rhetorical equivocality. Indeed, in some instances, the percentage values split right around the middle: with approximately one half respondents feeling positive and another half feeling less so about their communication development over their second year. While the overall results do appear to be positive (e.g., some and significant growth), it is safe to state that this study’s results combined with those from the two previous studies do suggest a need for a curricular change at the institution where the study was conducted.

Broadly speaking, the study findings compel a change that agrees with Carroll’s argument for a more developmental perspective towards communication instruction that recognizes a slow, incremental and complex process of communication skills’ growth. Carroll counters a widely-held fantasy that First-Year writing course(s) could or should meet all the communication needs (even of those students who were generally successful in high school (xi)). Instead, Carroll suggests “focusing on First-Year writing courses as a point of transition, not a final destination or a detour to fix literacy problems before students begin their real journey” (123). The understanding that learning to communicate is a gradual incremental process that requires continuous exercise without which communication skills are subject to regression needs to inform a change in the communication curriculum in the second year at the given institution.

**Towards a more developmental and complex perspective on communication instruction**

The survey results support my theoretical observation about a likely gap in the sophomore year. For significant numbers of the survey respondents, it appeared to be the case:

- 46% and more indicated that they never or seldom engaged in a wide range of communication activities with some percentages reaching as high as 97.7%;
- 27.6% reported electronic communication to be the area of “minimal” and “no” growth;
- 25.8% and 42.9% reported “minimal” and “no” growth in their ability to adhere to appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics and to evaluate it respectively.
These numbers were rather high, especially given the natural inclination of respondents to overestimate their abilities, especially in anonymous studies whose completion is rewarded financially.\footnote{Because of the prior difficulties with recruiting students for the focus groups study, in order to maximize the response rate for this study, we offered each respondent a voucher to be used at a university's bookstore.}

The numerical values were augmented by the distinct qualitative theme on limited communication experiences (primarily due to the large class size) and the respondents’ obvious urge to comment on their First-Year English (despite the survey’s explicit goal to learn about \textit{sophomore} communication experiences). Similar themes—suggestive of a somewhat inconsistent communication development—emerged from the informal email survey and the focus groups studies that were conducted prior to this survey study. Not infrequently, did the participants comment on the chasm between First-Year English courses and upper-level communication courses that some students would not take until their senior year with lecture and multiple-choice quizzes reportedly being the most frequent communication instruction genres in-between.

While these findings may seem deterministic as they only reinforce the earlier reports on the extent of communication instruction afforded by large research-oriented institutions (Strenski; Jones and Nugent), more optimistically, they do open up new opportunities for a curricular change. So the questions these findings raise are as follows. How can large institutions design their communication curricula so that students’ communication skills improve rather than regress after their first year (Jones and Nugent)? So that the curriculum does not perpetuate students’ perception that their “writing career” ends once they are through with their First-year English courses (Gruber et al.)? So that more students can report learning about communication in large lecture classes, often unavoidable in large research-oriented institutions? And so that students’ communication development is more consistent and evenly distributed?

In the context of her institution, Carroll recommends moving the second semester of First-year composition to an upper-level course (124). There is no need to pressure students to master all academic writing skills all at once, she argues. If we agree that students’ communication skills develop best when they are practiced consistently, we may agree with
the advisability of moving the second FY course to the sophomore year to fill in the gap identified by the survey study.⁶ What may this course be like?

Both quantitative and qualitative responses supported the need for communication instruction that would weave in oral, visual and electronic other communication skills in support of written ones (Kress, “Literacy”; McComiskey; Ochsner and Fowler). Therefore, a new curriculum needs to integrate communication modalities that build on each other’s strengths.

High percentages of students reporting minimal to no growth in their ability to apply and evaluate appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics deserve some mention here as well. Interestingly, survey respondents perceived a more complex ability to reason logically and clearly and organize their ideas coherently to have grown most (M=3.66) whereas their more mundane ability to apply appropriate style and correct grammar and mechanics to have grown least (M=3.19). Some may argue that this finding may be due to students’ original superior ability to use correct style, grammar, and mechanics. Such interpretation diverges, however, with the findings from the studies that preceded this survey. The email survey and focus groups participants not infrequently shared that inadequate grammar skills held them back in their advanced-level communication courses. The perception further agrees with the reported institutional practice to assign writing for purely bureaucratic reasons such as grading (Strenski, 1988) and the material conditions of often crushing workloads force instructors to obsessively mark for grammar (Connors qtd. in Mountford). Perceived or real communication instruction deficit, this finding also supports Carroll’s results. In her longitudinal study, students pointed “to the value of more homely skills, like finding an appropriate organizational structure and paragraphing, using transitions, developing some kind of controlling idea, constructing introductions and conclusions, and improving style and editing” (120 emphasis mine). If there is anything to learn from this complexity, it is that perhaps that among other things some more sophisticated grammar instruction could be woven more consistently in communication

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⁶ Discussions of logistical issues this move may entail are beyond the scope of this essay.
curriculum, the one that is approached more rhetorically (Micciche) and cross-modally (Kress and van Leeuwen). 7

These findings suggest then that the new sophomore course needs to build on the First-Year counterpart by offering more extensive and meaningful multimodal contexts and more consistent opportunities for practicing critical evaluation skills without overlooking some students’ more basic skills, which are likely to regress, if neglected.

**On a final note: Ethnographic limitations and collaborative advantages**

Like any study, this one has some “ethnographic” limitations, which are inevitable given the complexity of identifying what counts as appropriate communication development. When designing similar surveys and interpreting their results, researchers need to keep firmly in mind Russell's observation that communication development is messy and "variously tied to myriad human practices” (260). Accordingly, the survey study discussed here is just one possible way of approaching and defining variable students’ communication competencies and literacies. For instance, respondents’ limited exposure to various communication modalities (WOVE) that this study identified is very likely due to the survey’s overriding theoretical assumption that student literacy cannot be reduced solely to writing skills (Kress, “Literacy”; McComiskey; Ochsner and Fowler; Fishman, et al.). Likewise, the respondents' perceived growth in communication abilities or the lack of it could be due to a variety of reasons including their metacognitive awareness and perceptiveness towards learning-to-communicate experiences, and simply their motives for completing the survey. 8

While the sample size is consistent with some other survey studies (House and Prion; Jones and Nugent) and provides a relevant understanding of student communication

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7 In addition, of course, grammar instruction could be more emphasized in the first English course that remains in the first year, and, as some have argued, writing instruction featuring grammar could be extended to grade schools and community groups (Parks and Goldblatt).

8 Some may also add the respondents’ initial competency arguing that students with initially high communication competencies are naturally likely to report minimal growth in their communication abilities. Indeed, the survey study assumed a considerable room for developmental growth in communication abilities of a typical university sophomore (at a land-grant university). This assumption turned out to be not unsubstantiated. The fact that 51.1% survey respondents placed out of the first English course and only 1.7% placed out of the second English courses does seem to suggest
development in the sophomore level university-wide, its size does not allow for any conclusive statements about each individual college and discipline within the university. More in-depth studies may be needed in order to learn about the nature of communication experiences in the sophomore year in individual units. Such studies need to take into consideration possible disciplinary differences and expectations of what constitute literacy (e.g., Waldo).

The benefits that resulted from the involvement of compositionists and students outweigh the study’s possible limitations, however. If the study had been conducted solely by assessment experts who may often lack a nuanced understanding of composition disciplinary practices and beliefs, outsiders’ meanings and interpretations might have been unwittingly imposed or some important subtleties in both survey design and analysis might have been overlooked. For instance, the initial concern expressed by some faculty about the students’ metacognitive awareness informed survey design that resulted in the more detailed and specific survey instrument. Namely, in addition to providing a detailed list of possible communication activities and tasks for respondents to comment on, the survey, at the suggestion of some outside faculty members, invited students to consider specific courses that asked them to engage in these specific communication practices. Likewise, when interpreting the survey results for this essay, I was influenced by my teaching experience that, while not very extensive, gave me some insights into the challenges my own students faced.

The extent and quality of survey results confirm the argument that once students are given an opportunity and provided with sufficient structure and level of detail they can meaningfully and sufficiently reflect on their learning experiences (Royer and Roger). One survey respondent, for instance, explicitly indicated that by completing the survey, he or she realized how much communication-oriented instruction he/she had had over the past year. In a similar vein, the additional open-ended section solicited comments that may not have been prompted by the quantitative part of the survey. It may be noteworthy to mention that students’ responses tended to be unusually detailed for the question that is typically left blank a significant room for growth in communication abilities among considerable numbers of the survey respondents.
in surveys. While the survey design (respondents could not proceed without completing all the questions) and the financial reward are likely reasons that contributed to this verbosity, the extent and quality of open-ended responses reinforces my overall argument that sufficient guidance and structure ensures meaningful and useable feedback from students.

The described study, then, in addition to illustrating both practical and rhetorically-based nature of the student survey, speaks favorably to the need for bringing students’ voices into assessment, as well as curricular change, more systematically. Equally important is the essay’s argument about the critical importance of having compositionists partake in managing endemic rhetorical complexity of assessment instead of having outsiders reduce it to quick positivist measurements.

References Cited


Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. Your responses will have a direct influence on communication instruction at ISU. The survey will take 15-20 minutes, during which you will be asked to reflect on your communication experiences over the past two semesters: Fall 2004 and Spring 2005. The survey consists of four sections and includes six pages.

In appreciation for your help, we are offering a voucher worth $20 for use at the University Book Store if you are among the first 300 students to complete our survey.

Your name will not be reported in connection to this survey. For data management purposes, however, we need to know your ISU ID number.

Next >>
2. General information

Please provide the following information.

* 1. Please enter your ISU student ID number (middle 9 digits).

* 2. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male

* 3. How many college credits did you earn prior to Fall 2004?

* 4. What is your major?

* 5. What is your college?

* 6. Have you taken English 104?

* 7. Have you taken English 105?

* 8. Please provide the following information regarding your Fall 2004 semester courses.
   - How many credits did you take?
   - Please list the courses and include course numbers (e.g., Engl 202, Econ 201) or list course name if you can't remember the number (e.g., "World History").

* 9. Please provide the following information regarding your Spring 2005 semester courses.
   - How many credits are you taking?
   - Please list the courses and include course numbers (e.g., Engl 202, Econ 201) or course name if you can't remember the number (e.g., "World History").
3. Types and frequency of communication activities

This section of the survey asks you to list the number of times you have engaged in four kinds of communication: written, oral, visual, and electronic.

Using the scale, first indicate how often you engaged in the following written communication activities this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005). Some activities will apply to multiple items. Next, please list the courses in which you engaged in the communication activity (e.g., Hist. 101, Soc. 203, HHP 218).

**Written Communication**

* 10. This academic year (Fall 2004,* Spring 2005), how many times have you written a scientific research report based on field or laboratory observations?

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<tr>
<th>More than 6 times</th>
<th>3 - 6 times</th>
<th>1 - 2 times</th>
<th>Never</th>
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* 12. This academic year (Fall 2004,* Spring 2005), how many times have you written a response (one or more pages) to a course reading or published text?

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<th>More than 6 times</th>
<th>3 - 6 times</th>
<th>1 - 2 times</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</table>

* 14. This academic year (Fall 2004,* Spring 2005), how many times have you prepared more than one draft of a paper or assignment, whether or not required by the instructor?

* 15. Please list the courses in which you prepared more than one draft of a paper or assignment, whether or not required by the instructor.
* 16. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you worked on a long report, proposal, or essay (5 pages or more)?

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<th>More than 6 times</th>
<th>3 - 6 times</th>
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</table>

* 17. Please list the courses in which you worked on a long report, proposal, or essay (5 pages or more).

* 18. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you worked on a paper or project that required citing ideas or information from published sources (print or electronic)?

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<th>3 - 6 times</th>
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</table>

* 19. Please list the courses in which you worked on a paper or project that required citing ideas or information from published sources (print or electronic).

<< Prev  Next >>
Using the scale, please indicate how often you engaged in the following oral communication activities this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005). Then list the courses in which you engaged in these communication activities (e.g., Hist. 101, Soc. 203, HHP 218).

**Oral Communication**

* 20. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you made a stand-up oral presentation before a group based on material you had prepared in advance?

More than 6 times

3-6 times

1-2 times

Never

* 21. Please list the courses in which you made a stand-up oral presentation before a group based on material you had prepared in advance.

* 22. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you been required to collaborate in work groups with other students on major, graded class projects or assignments?

More than 6 times

3 - 6 times

1 - 2 times

Never

* 23. Please list the courses in which you have been required to collaborate in work groups with other students on major, graded class projects or assignments.

* 24. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you interviewed an individual for a class project?

More than 6 times

3 - 6 times

1 - 2 times

Never

* 25. Please list the courses in which you interviewed an individual for a class project.

<< Prev  Next >>
Using the scale, please indicate how often you engaged in the following visual or electronic communication activities this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005). Then list the courses in which you engaged in these communication activities (e.g., Hist. 101, Soc. 203, HHP 218).

**Visual Communication**

* 26. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of printed or electronic images (charts, graphs, photos, pictures, cartoons, etc.)?  

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<th>More than 6 times</th>
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<th>Never</th>
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</table>

* 27. Please list the courses in which you have been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of printed or electronic images (charts, graphs, photos, pictures, cartoons, etc.).

* 28. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you developed a plan for formatting headings and subheadings within the body of a text?  

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<th>More than 6 times</th>
<th>3 - 6 times</th>
<th>1 - 2 times</th>
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* 29. Please list the courses in which you developed a plan for formatting headings and subheadings within the body of a text.

* 30. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you located and inserted an already created visual (e.g., table, graph, chart, figure, digital image, page layout for instructions) into a document of your own?  

More

* 31. Please list the courses in which you have located and inserted an already existing visual (e.g., table, graph, chart, figure, digital image, page layout for instructions) into a document of your own.
32. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you created a table, figure, chart, or graph from data?

- More than 6 times
- 3 - 6 times
- 1 - 2 times
- Never

Electronic Communication

34. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of computer-based communications (web sites, digital slides, videos, animations, etc.)?

- More than 6 times
- 3 - 6 times
- 1 - 2 times
- Never

36. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you received directions from an instructor on effective ways to communicate by email?

- More than 6 times
- 3 - 6 times
- 1 - 2 times
- Never

38. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you designed a PowerPoint presentation?

- More than 6 times
- 3 - 6 times
- 1 - 2 times
- Never

33. Please list the courses in which you have created a table, figure, chart, or graph from data.

[Blank]

35. Please list the courses in which you have been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of computer-based communications (web sites, digital slides, videos, animations, etc.).

[Blank]

37. Please list the courses in which you received directions from an instructor on effective ways to communicate by email.

[Blank]

39. Please list the courses in which you designed a PowerPoint presentation.

[Blank]
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* 40. This academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005), how many times have you designed a Web page?

* 41. Please list the courses in which you designed a Web page.
Student Survey on Communication Experiences during the 6. Communication abilities development

We are interested in learning about the development of your communication abilities (Fall 2004, Spring 2005).

* 42. Please indicate to what extent your educational experiences during this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005) have contributed to growth in your ability to CREATE effective communication in the following areas:

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<th>Very significant</th>
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<td>Oral communication</td>
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* 43. Please indicate to what extent your educational experiences during this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005) have contributed to growth in your ability to ACHIEVE each of the following in your own communication:

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* 44. Please indicate to what extent your educational experiences during this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005) have contributed to growth in your ability to EVALUATE effective communication in the following areas:

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* 45. Please indicate to what extent your educational experiences during this academic year (Fall 2004, Spring 2005) have contributed to growth in your ability to EVALUATE the following elements in communications by students and others:

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7. Additional comments

* 46. This survey cannot possibly cover all your communication experiences. Please help us out by sharing some comments about your classroom communication experiences and your growth as a communicator during Fall 2004 and Spring 2005.

Thank you for completing the survey. If you are among the first 300 respondents, you will receive an email confirming your response within the next two days. The email will include information about how you can pick up your $20 voucher for the University Bookstore. If you have any questions, please contact Michael Mendelson at mendy@iastate.edu or Donna Niday at dniday@iastate.edu. Thank you.
CHAPTER 5. TRANSCULTURAL ETHOS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY ONLINE:
THREE TRAVEL WEB SITES REPRESENTING UKRAINE

A paper prepared for submission to a journal in technical and business communication

Oksana Hlyva

Abstract

This paper explores ways three web sites devoted to travel in an East European country construct their ethos. More specifically, the paper scrutinizes how multiple macro- and micro-level online ethos markers fuse to represent the new independent nation of Ukraine to primarily English-speaking audiences. In so doing, the essay combines the concept of transculture with generic criticism thus suggesting ways of theorizing and teaching about ethos that are both more socially aware and more pragmatic than the traditional Aristotelian conception that assumes a unitary and stable rhetor.

Introduction

In outlining future directions for research on relationships between information technology and writing, the IText working group observes that Web technologies allow researchers to explore cornerstone theoretical issues in new ways (Geisler et al). One such fundamental rhetorical issue that they identify is ethos. “[A]s citizens, students, consumers, and researchers depend increasingly on electronic media for information and exchange, understanding the sources of credibility and the motives for trust will become increasingly important,” the group writes (283). “How,” for instance, the group asks, “can electronic genres provide new forms of stabilizations that will promote trust?” (285)

This essay explores ways ethos is constructed in the rather novel context of travel web sites representing newly independent Ukraine to predominantly English-speaking audiences. Specifically, I analyze various (generic) ethos markers present at three web sites to argue that each site’s ethos is bound with Ukraine’s complex national identity thus challenging the traditional Aristotelian conception of ethos premising a unitary and stable rhetor. The rhetorical critique this essay provides, then, offers a problematized understanding
of ethos as a factor of national identity, an understanding that is arguably important despite the de-territorialized and globalized nature of the Web environment.

After the theoretical framework driving this essay, I provide background and a rationale for choosing to focus on travel web sites representing Ukraine. Then, I present my methodology and analyze three sites. I conclude with some theoretical and pedagogical implications.

**Theoretical and Analytical Framework: Ethos, Genre and Transculture**

Ethos is found to be a key factor determining whether one’s opinions are heard or ignored in computer-mediated communication (St. Amant “When”). Indeed, as some researchers point out, while an organization’s credibility may begin with having a web site, the mere online presence does not guarantee that the organization will attract visitors and achieve the intended communicative outcomes (Spyridakis; van der Geest and Spyridakis). It is by creating an appropriate ethos that web sites persuade potential visitors to take action and interact with the organization (Hunt “The design”).

While web sites serve a classic rhetorical function of persuasion, the ethos involved is arguably different from the traditional Aristotelian conception. For Aristotle, “persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible.” As such, persuasion “should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak.” When online, however, ethos depends on a confluence of factors, most of which are not intrinsically tied to the identity of the site’s author (Burbules; Geisler et al., Warnick). Departing from a unitary “inventor” of ethos at the moment of speaking, online credibility is distributed among multiple factors (Burbules). Some of the ethos dimensions are assessed simultaneously (Fogg et al.) whereas others more incrementally with trust being built slowly as users experience a site over an extended set of encounters” (Nielsen, para 2). Not necessarily always methodical or objective, credibility judgements are invariably reflective of social, community-based values and preferences (Warnick).

This complexity engendered by the absence of a stable authorial identity is amplified by a polyvocal nature of the medium. The very cultural milieu for ethos departs from a Greek
virtually homogenous and geographically-bound polis and moves to a vastly heterogeneous mix of audiences and rhetors in Appaduraian global ethnoscape, or “a loose agglomeration of diverse people unmoored from one specific place yet simultaneously connected to many places” (Sapienza 446). Increasingly, the Web is both used and authored by inter/multi/nationals with hybrid cultural and linguistic identities that further problematize the well-known “mix of values, interests, and information requirements” (Hunt, “The design” 364). This hybridity adds to the already variable standards for what constitutes credible information displays (St. Amant, “A prototype”; “When cultures”). One interesting way to theorize how these complexities play out in the case of specific Ukrainian travel web sites is through intersections of ethos with genre and the concept of transculture.

Genre as a vehicle of socially-based ethos

In recent years, a more nuanced and socially-based communal view of ethos (than traditional Aristotelian) as a “habitual gathering/meeting place” (Halloran, Gurak) has been found more appropriate for studies of online ethos (e.g., Hunt “The Design,” “Establishing”). The habitual aspect of this revised conception of ethos intersects with genre as "a fusion of substantive, stylistic and situational characteristics" (Miller 152).

As typified forms and topics, generic characteristics signal “a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology” (Berkentrotter and Huckin 21). In the online context, the consideration of such generic social features as “domain names, frequent and attributed updates, corporate trademarks and identifiers” (Geisler et al. 284) becomes increasingly important. In addition to what we already know about components of ethos from the classic rhetorical theory (knowledge, intelligence, moral character, and goodwill), the group encourages scholars to investigate authority, interactivity, cultural diversity markers, autonomy and affiliation among other complex socially-determined dimensions (ibid).

The theoretical intersection with genre allows for an exploration of the fusion of substantive with visual and structural features, which is particularly apt given the visual richness of the medium. In fact, online communication scholars increasingly extend Aristotelian ethos as invention of topoi to formal characteristics (Hunt “The Design,” Spiridakis, Warnick; Yli-Jokippi). Warnick argues that an average user pays more attention to design look and information design/structure than the site content, functionality, and
identity of site operator. In addition, she found visual aspects to be more consequential on travel, finance, and e-commerce web sites than health, news, and nonprofit organization sites thus suggesting that the importance of visual elements depends on a genre.

Finally, when viewed as a social action (Miller), genre can help to demystify discourse conventions that establish credibility and reflect its attendant power relationships. Cultural anthropologist and linguist Pratt, for instance, combines genre theory with ideological critique to study the rhetoric of travel writing. Pratt illustrates how—through its large repertoire of generic tropes often reflective of postcolonial attitudes—travel writing helped to “produce” Africa and South America for European readerships. These tropes, she argues, are transcultural, that is, they fuse the tropes of the dominant with those of the less powerful.

**Transcultural view of ethos**

Pratt uses the concept of transculture “to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (6). Originally introduced to challenge the reductive binary of acculturation and deculturation that operates from the standpoint of the dominant culture interests (F. Ortiz qtd. in Pratt 228), the concept is rather apt for a study analyzing the discursive authority of a less powerful culture communicating in a foreign medium and language.

The transcultural view of ethos responds to the issue of certain monodirectionality in business and technical communication. Similar to the acculturation/deculturation model, the widely employed localization/globalization approach (see Spyridakis) often follows a direction from the writer whose native language is English to the reader who uses English as a second language (Subbiah qtd. in Arnold 203). Largely because the web is “dominated by content produced by Americans for Americans” (Arnold 197), little is known about how cultural variations may manifest themselves in web-based discourses constructed for (North-American) English-speaking audiences by non-North American web designers (Yli-Jokippi; Zahedi, van Pelt, and Song). Even less is known about online ethos constructed by, say, former East-European nationals residing in Canada and thus blurring North-American into what Hawisher and Selfe call postmodern hybrid identities.
Another theoretical value of viewing ethos transculturally is that it foregrounds the problematic space for national identity in our precipitously globalizing times. The transcultural view of ethos challenges not only the commonly-used binary of localization/globalization but also the attendant claims about the emerging "transnational," "global consumer culture," "world culture" instantiated through relatively “culturally-neutral,” “universalistic” patterns (Sackmary and Scalia). Such approaches deceptively presuppose the existence of a local national culture untainted by globalization influences. Moreover, they overlook the fact that there is no such thing as a “neutral international communication environment” and global is not truly global; instead, it always reflects Western biases (Hawisher and Selfe; Hedley; Keniston; Nfiaye).

The intersections of ethos with genre and transculture then can offer a more socially aware view of ethos than the traditional Aristotelian conception allows for. Informed by this combined theoretical framework, business communication professionals may be better equipped to realize the IText working group’s call for participation in shaping the future of web-based discourses by defining and redefining our relationship to globalizing and “universalizing” national cultures. Genre approach among other things promises to bring some orderliness to the otherwise dauntingly complex process of analyzing ethos multidimensionally and transculturally. Before I delve into these complexities, however, some background on the country and the rationale for my focus are necessary.

**Background and Rationale**

*Why Ukraine?* Historically overshadowed by its “big brother” Russia, Ukraine remains to be quite a terra incognita for most North American readers. Overall, the scholarship on the whole East European region has been generally scarce (most likely as a result of the cold war era). The available discussion has been limited to Russia (Artemeva; Hagen; Koszegi, Vetschera, and Kersten). One notable exception is St. Amant who recently introduced Ukraine to the technical communication discourse community: “its location, its well-skilled workforce and its increasing access to the world via online communication technologies could make it an important region in the future” (15).
In transition historically, economically, politically, ideologically, and culturally, Ukraine's identity can be defined as "an amalgam of three distinct, culture-specific influences: national cultures, culture of imposition, and culture of adoption" (Lubecka 42-43). For native Pole Lubecka, a national culture is the core of each culture that makes it a unique, distinct entity. By a culture of imposition, she means the culture imposed during the years of the Soviet regime. And finally, the most recent development is the culture of adoption whose attractiveness, mainly economic, made East and Central-Europeans, especially in the years immediately after the fall of Communism, strive for an uncritical identification with the values of the West, often very superficial, commercial, and totally opposed to respective national cultures. (43)

The interplay of these socio-political influences in the national identity construction through web-based discursive practices is worthwhile exploring at least in a cautionary sense lest the culture of adoption turn into yet another culture of imposition.

Why travel web sites? The primary reason for choosing travel web sites is theoretical and inspired by Pratt's study on how travel writing constructs less powerful cultures discursively. Second, it seems reasonable to expect the national culture, or what makes Ukraine unique, to be an attractive feature that travel agencies employ to market the country to English-speaking audiences. The third reason is rather materialist: Ukraine's web infrastructure is not developed well enough to allow for a genre-based analysis of national identity issues. In other words, Ukraine does not enjoy the same status of a global villager, as say, the US or other Western society. High access costs make this supposedly global medium rather elitist (Arnold, St. Amant, Hawisher and Selfe, Lubecka) and not many companies or organizations cannot afford maintaining a web site. This materialist nuance adds an interesting dimension to the habitual concept of ethos: some cultural groups are habitually excluded.¹

These reasons combined make Ukraine an interesting new site for studying online discursive authority largely because once included in the global village community, it is naïve to assume that Ukrainian web sites will have a truly "authentic" voice. Rather, similar to Pratt's transcultural representations, these sites' characteristics are likely to engage with

¹ Nedra Reynolds makes a similar feminist argument about ethos as a habitual gathering place.
the terms of the dominant metropolitan through “partial collaboration with and appropriation” of the dominant idiom (7). The dominant idiom is likely to reflect the culture of imposition or the culture of adoption the Web proliferates.

The essay, then, responds to Geisler and her colleagues’ call “to participate with other information researchers in shaping the evolution of future IText technologies in directions consistent with social values, human needs and capacities, and our best knowledge” (270).

As this essay was being written, Ukraine moved from a little known former Soviet republic to a young independent country whose fight for the right to elect its president democratically was in the world’s media spotlight for weeks in the late fall-early winter 2004. For many, the election battle epitomized a struggle of a young Eastern European country trying to retain its national cultural core while undergoing major socio-economic and political realignments with its still rather domineering Eastern neighbor and newer global/Western/often US-based powers. The web sites analyzed here reflect this struggle, too. [As such, this exploration steps into a rather uncharted territory suggesting to business communication professionals the importance of considering the role communication practices may play in realignments young nations like Ukraine are facing. Such political considerations can inform business communication practices that aspire to be both ethical and practical because these considerations reflect the exigencies of authoring and evaluating credibility in relentlessly globalizing communication contexts.

**Research Questions, Web Sites, and Methods**

The research questions I posed for this study were as follows:

- How does Ukraine’s national identity get represented in the ethnoscapic environment? What challenges do the specific travel web sites face when building their ethos?
- What (generic) situational, substantive and stylistic features are fused into web sites’ solutions to these challenges?
- Do these challenges and solutions have anything relevant to say to business communication instructors?

To answer these questions, I surveyed around 15 web sites linked to the *Ukrainian Language, Culture and Travel Page* site, which is perhaps one of the most comprehensive web-based resources on Ukraine’s travel and culture in English. Maintained by Linda
Hodges, an American of Ukrainian heritage, an author of the equally authoritative fourth edition of *Language and Travel Guide to Ukraine*, this “umbrella site” serves as an important endorsement for the web sites linked to it.

I then selected three web sites that I thought were most elaborate and interesting with the respect to their own cultural identity, as it was apparent though the agencies’ physical addresses.

To analyze these web sites, I used several interrelated approaches. First, I printed the web sites’ primary pages and color coded the categories pertinent to substantive and stylistic ethos markers, thus essentially appropriating theme analysis, often used in qualitative ethnographic research. As a result, I was able to come up with a heuristic for analyzing transcultural ethos (Appendix). Far from being exhaustive, the heuristic serves a good starting point for understanding major generic factors of transcultural ethos of travel web sites.

Second, I combined rhetorical analysis with a genre approach, which according to Lorelei Ortiz focuses on the microanalysis of rhetorical features at the level of genre (36). This theoretical combination is further elaborated in the following section.

Third, like Ortiz, I used multiple passes to identify rhetorically significant patterns with respect to ethos and national identity issues. To a certain degree, this multiple-passes approach models a “real-life” situation where users often revisit a particular site over an extended period of time (Nielsen). Likewise, I made an effort to account for the evolving, fluid nature of web-based discourse. For instance, one of the web sites appeared to have undergone some revision between the time I was preparing my conference presentation on this topic in the fall 2004 and the time when I was working on this essay in spring 2005. My analysis, therefore, reflects the relevant changes the site underwent during this period.

Finally, I adopted Lorelei Ortiz’s notion of “ethnography of communication” or the focus on how the language use reflects culture and ideology which often depends on the researcher’s familiarity with the culture(s) under analysis (36) (in my case, with Ukrainian and North American cultures). Such recognition of the researcher’s role is in agreement with the overall nature of credibility as a perceived quality. Indeed, “[w]hen one discusses credibility, it is always from the perspective of the observer’s perception,” argue Fogg et al.
Likewise, judging the credibility of information "is always partly judging other values with which one is choosing to identify, or to challenge" (Burbules, section IV, para. 2). What follows, then, is a critical evaluation of multiple ethos markers from a perspective of an observer who, while born, raised and educated in western Ukraine, has been living and receiving her graduate education in the US for almost seven years.

**Three Web Sites: From Global, Universal to Transcultural Ethos**

Given the complexity of Ukraine's national identity, it is reasonable to expect that the major rhetorical challenge for web sites representing Ukraine will lie in reconciling three major cultural forces shaping its identity. Two organizational points need to be mentioned before I proceed.

First, the analysis here predominantly focuses on the web sites' opening pages and the pages that function as About page. While these places most logically contain most persuasive credibility-building features (Warnick), I quickly discovered a need to consider places where the site provides information on the country in general (in addition to the information on the agency).

Second, for convenience's sake, in my analysis I separate generic characteristics that, according to Miller, fuse into specific representations. Thus, I begin the analysis of each site with its situational characteristics such as electronic and physical addresses, as most readily available authority markers, and target audiences. I then proceed to visual/information structure, which Warnick reports to be one of the most important credibility builders on travel web sites. Then, I discuss substantive categories and textual stylistics. I conclude the analysis of each site with a brief rhetorical critique in addition to a more general discussion at the end.

**Ukraine Travel: A myth of globally universal and culturally-neutral ethos**

To a certain degree, the Ukraine Travel site at www.ukraine-travel.de (figure 1) has an "ethnoscopic" identity whose national "belongingness" is hard to determine. While the site's domain extension is German (de), the site's opening page states that the agency's office is in Ukraine's capital. One of its secondary pages states explicitly that it's "a Ukrainian travel agent." Under the Contact, the site provides two physical addresses: one in Ukraine
and another in Germany. According to a personal communication with Hodges, a business
person with a German name approached her to link the agency’s site to her “umbrella site.”

Two parallel versions of the site in English and in German suggest that, broadly
speaking, the site targets English- and German-speaking audiences interested in travel to
and/or business in Ukraine. The analysis here focuses predominantly on the English version
of the site.

**Visual design and information structure.** The site conveys a global, universal ethos
through a “culturally neutral” visual design and fairly standard information
structure. The web site is least colorful of all the sites analyzed. Its cool cosmic-like white and blue color
scheme is complemented by the only image of a glass globe transmitting a light
that runs across each of the pages.

The layout of the opening page also adds to the universal feel. The page
is divided into four major frames: two horizontal
frames on top and two vertical frames. The top horizontal frame consists of a dark blue panel
with a glass globe, the agency’s name **Ukraine Travel** in the prominent top left corner, and
the link to the other language version in the top right corner. Under the blue frame with the
globe, the main horizontal menu bar lists topics such as **Home** (that is, its pictorial image),
**Services**, **Hotels**, **Visa**, **Info**, **Groups**, and **Contact**. This menu bar stays the same for all pages
of the site. The vertical left sidebar lists variable link topics (on the opening page, they
include *Homepage, Hotel in Kiev, Hotel in Odessa, Hotel in Yalta, Prices, FAQs, References,*
and *Links*) with a significant amount of free space in the page’s lower part. About two thirds
of the opening page is taken up by the central frame that balances some text and bulleted
items with some white space. The site’s text typography and its overall visual design and
structure that are strictly parallel in its German version contribute to the site’s global
universal ethos.

**Substantive categories.** The site’s most convincing content categories are
concentrated in the central frame of the opening page:

- "Hotel rates 40% lower than official rates";
- "Central office location, right in the center of Ukraine’s capital"; "Local offices in
Ukraine’s major cities";
- "Secure credit card processing; German office";
- The preview of reference/reviews/client testimonials page;
- “10 years of experience”;
- Clientele: "the football club "Dynamo Kiev," FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Juventus
Turin, Leeds United, and French national team";
- "Business relations with more than 100 Ukrainian tour agencies and international
partners."

It needs to be noted that the above category “**German office**” (through which “secure credit
processing” is done) was originally set in the bold typeface. Another feature that
underwent revision was the information regarding the agency’s rather impressive clientele
and business relations that for some reason was not on the opening page when I first accessed
the site back in the fall 2005. Instead, this information was rather inconspicuously tucked
under the *Contact* category thus being relegated to a secondary page.

In addition to saturating the opening page, substantive features pertinent to ethos are
sprinkled throughout the site. For instance, the *Visa services* page emphasizes the fact that
agency is registered with the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry.

A page called *Info* introduces Ukraine by telling the visitor right away that “[*a]*
journey to Ukraine is a very different experience than ...a visit to Poland.” It starts with
praising “the spaciousness of the country, the fruitful fields and the original life in the
village.” It then assures the reader that “[l]ife in the cities is quite similar to the West” and
that “[m]any young people are eager to learn English and strive for western values and
lifestyles.” Further, the Info page admits that there are “a lot of musts and regulations” related to visa and custom services. “[H]ospitals and health centers are mostly in terrible conditions and medical service is far from Western standards,” the list goes on.

**Textual stylistics.** The opening page emphasizes “safe, fast, and reliable” booking, “no hidden costs”; “secure credit card processing.” Throughout the site, the vocabulary pertaining to safety, reliability, and honesty is reiterated. The opening page also states that the agency offers a “wide selection” of tour packages and characterizes the agency as “leading,” “experienced,” with a “proven record of providing high level ground services.”

Besides some word choice, grammar, punctuation issues and typos, a more culturally and politically savvy visitor will notice that the spelling of proper names follows the Russian rules of transliteration. Ukraine’s capital Kyiv is spelled Kiev, its major square Khreschatyk is spelled Kreshchatyk, other cities such as Lviv and Dnipropetrovsk are spelled Lvov and Dnepropetrovsk respectively.

**Ukraine Travel: Rhetorical critique**

Overall, the site ascribes to global universality and superficially achieves it through blurring its cultural identity and using “universal” visual stylistics devoid of any (photographic) images specifically related to Ukraine. A more detailed look behind the cosmic coldness and aloofness, however, reveals that the site is far from being rhetorically neutral and has not escaped messy challenges of constructing a transcultural ethos.

On the micro level, the transliteration of Ukrainian proper names indicates Russian influence. A petty issue for some, it is important to those visitors who are protective of Ukraine’s vulnerable independent national identity. With its Ukrainian-speaking west and predominantly Russian speaking east, the language politics in Ukraine has been particularly sensitive. After centuries of the tsarist rule in the east followed by seven decades of the Soviet domination systematically imposing the language of the “big brother,” Ukraine is finally permitted to have Ukrainian as its official language, which is very symbolic of its new independent identity. It is of little surprise, therefore, that “some Ukrainians consider the use of Russian as a reminder of the past Russian sphere of influence—a memory that they may find highly objectionable” (St. Amant, “Ukraine” 17). Similarly, the initial typographic choice of using the bold type for the German bank that will safely handle Westerners’ money
reveals that the purported neutrality and universality tends to lie within the dominant culture, in this case the culture of adoption. This observation is in line with similar arguments made by Pratt, Hawisher and Selfe, and Nfiaye.

On the macro level, the overall visual design with its pretentiously neutral feel is called to serve an important rhetorical purpose of establishing the site's credibility with the culture of adoption. The honesty about bureaucracy and material conditions is safely relegated to the secondary Info page; this not-so-favorable information is preceded by the assurances that Ukraine is very much like a Western country. Overall, the site works hard to say visually and textually that Ukraine is a worthy and safe place for Westerners to visit (and to spend their money which will be handled by the “right” kind of a bank).

In sum, the site’s global, universal, “culturally sterile” appearance is called to control and tame any cultural difference that may not be to the liking of the culture of adoption. At the same time, the site reveals some lingering influence of the culture of imposition.

**Chumak/Ukrainetour: Towards transcultural ethos**

Chumak/Ukrainetour at www.ukrainetour.com (figure 2) is a site of a Canadian agency run from Toronto by a group of fairly recent immigrants from Eastern Ukraine. The site apparently targets an English-speaking audience interested in Ukraine and Russia. With Canada’s Ukrainian Diaspora being perhaps the largest in the world, people of Ukrainian descent are very likely to be among its audiences.
Visual design and information structure. Unlike the previous site, the Chumak site contains considerably more visual images, mostly photographs of major tourist destinations.

Structurally, the site’s pages consist of two horizontal and three vertical frames. Similarly to the Ukraine Travel, this site’s top horizontal frame contains the agency’s logo and some visual images. In the strategic top left corner, one can’t miss the agency’s logo that consists of a somewhat anachronistic image of a wagoner and a large-sized word CHUMAK in the upper case. A wagoner or carter in Ukrainian, the word Chumak visually connects the corresponding image with the image of a plane that is set at the backdrop of pictures of major Ukrainian and Russian cities. In so doing, it’s most likely implying that the agency bridges old, more primitive times with modern, more technologically advanced and perhaps even affluent times. Under these images, the horizontal menu bar lists the site’s major topics/categories: Home, About, Tour Info, Language courses, Services/Fees, Searches, Tour links, and Order forms.
Unlike the previous site with two vertical frames, the Chumak site has an additional "photo sidebar" that captures the agency’s major destinations in Ukraine and Russia. Adjacent to the "photo sidebar" is another vertical menu that lists additional categories: Accommodations, Car transfers, Air/train tickets, and Visa Support. At the bottom of this frame, towards the center, a photo collage lumps several images including the Russian Kremlin in the foreground and Ukrainian St. Sophia Church in the background. Perhaps it is these two frames that make the textual information of the central frame so crowded. Approximately one third of the page, it is considerably less space than the previous site allocated for its textual message on the opening page. As a result, the text is very dense with very limited white space available.

Overall more colorful than the previous site, the Chumak site also presents some color variability in its typography. Specifically, while the text body is set in blue, red is used throughout the site apparently for emphasis. At the bottom of the opening page, for instance, the "warm friendly welcome" statement is set in red.

Substantive categories. The site’s substantive ethos-building features are distributed between its opening and About pages. The central vertical frame of the site’s opening page emphasizes the agency’s “10 years of experience,” “personalized tours,” and “a wide range of services.” In addition to the standard visa support services, travel-related arrangements, the agency conducts people search and archival research, as well as offers “Russian and Ukraine [sic] Language Studies” through its “Russian/Ukrainian language school.” The site’s About page stresses that the agency has “direct connections and agreements with partners in Ukraine and Russia” and is staffed with “highly educated people with university backgrounds and multiple language proficiencies, who are well traveled and have many years of experience in assisting Western clients.”

Like the Ukraine Travel site, the Chumak site has the Tour info page. This page provides some general introduction to Ukraine emphasizing its “unique works of architecture and art, ... homelands of many famous writers and poets, ... the natural beauty... and the hospitality of our people.” This page also offers appealing photographic images of Ukraine.

Textual stylistics. The vocabulary throughout the site emphasizes “personalized” approach (personalized tours, personalized language instruction) and expediency. In addition,
the word choice of the logo deserves a special attention here. Unlike the previous site, the Ukrainian-Canadian site has a Ukrainian logo, Chumak, which is different from its English domain name, Ukrainetour. Chumaks, who traveled across Ukraine and to the neighboring lands in their wagons to trade salt and fish, were very important for Ukraine’s economy in the 17th - mid-19th centuries (Odarchenko). A very common feature of the Ukrainian folklore, Chumak as a logo holds a great potential for appealing not only to first-wave immigrants but also to their descendants and more recent immigrants.

**Chumak: Rhetorical critique**

Unlike the Ukraine Travel site, the Chumak site has a more pronounced hybrid cultural identity and does not purport at any universality or neutrality. As such, the site’s struggle to accommodate the three cultural influences while building its transcultural ethos is significantly more apparent than the previous site analyzed.

The most obvious challenge lies in balancing different textual formats. The site uses the sidebars and the bulleted menus that typically convey the ethos of logic and structure in the culture of adoption (Hunt “The Design”). Still, it heavily relies on a more narrative meandering ethos of embedding links in the text that characterized the print culture of imposition. (Natasha Artemeva, for instance, reports her challenges when convincing Russian engineers to conform to North-American formats of paragraphs and bulleted layouts in their periodic reports.) The site’s textual density is very likely to annoy the Western audience, more accustomed to ample amount of white space.2

One element that can possibly tip the balance in favor of the culture of adoption is the site’s use of the About category, a generic feature on most Western organizational web sites. Chumak is the only site of the three analyzed that uses the category explicitly.

But perhaps even more interesting is the agency’s struggle to reconcile its economic aspirations to cover destinations in Russia with a need for cultural sensitivity and respect

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2Interestingly, after my presentation of this study at the ABC Convention, Kittie Locker who was in the audience wondered if I was not implying that Ukrainian users may be more comfortable with such dense textual presentation. It is hard to speculate in the absence of any relevant usability studies and with audience awareness concept only beginning to gain importance in Ukraine’s communication practices (St.Amant “Ukraine”). Based on print document design practices, it may be quite safe to assume, however, that Ukrainian users may long for ample white space less than their Western counterparts.
towards the independent national identity of the country the site chose to foreground (at least as its domain name, Ukrainerout, suggests). By lumping Russia and Ukraine, the site is very likely to offend the Ukrainian Diaspora and perhaps even to make its older members apprehensive about using the services of the agency.\footnote{3} The site's promiscuously postmodern photo collages, the use of Ukraine and Russia almost interchangeably (e.g., Ukraine/Russia), the wrong adjectival form (Ukraine language instead of Ukrainian language), the use of red for emphasis, and again Russian transliterations of Ukrainian proper names—all this combined may inadvertently evoke rather unpleasant memories of the culture of imposition that many Ukrainians fled.\footnote{4} As a result, the Ukrainian Diaspora as one of the site's major audiences may find the agency not very trustworthy.\footnote{5}

\footnote{3} From my personal experience, I remember how much effort and persuasive power it took my family to convince my relative, who immigrated to England in late 1950's, that it's safe to visit independent Ukraine and no one is going to send him to Siberia.

\footnote{4} Ukrainian diaspora in Canada appears to be rather vigilant about similar issues. For instance, Your Independent Ukrainian Internet Newsletter published a call for action in response to the resurgence of russified spellings of the infamous Chernobyl. "Articles are appearing in the media about the 20th anniversary of the "Chernobyl" [sic] disaster, yet it seems a few years ago they were getting "Chornobyl" right. The only way to make it right is to let the media sources know it's wrong.... It's important to do it now, while the issue is front and centre," writes the newsletter's contributor Cholkan. He sets a personal example by writing to the BBC website and pointing out the mistake: "It's simply odd that you adopt the Russian version of a Ukrainian town's name, instead of the Ukrainian one. If Peking has become Beijing, then certainly Chornobyl can be corrected as well. Like the after-effects of Chornobyl, russified spelling is also an unwanted remnant of Soviet times."

\footnote{5} If the previous site was designed by an "outsider," apparently by a German national, a reader may naturally wonder about possible reasons how and why former Ukrainian nationals overlook national identity issues. The most plausible explanation may be that the sites' designer(s) originally have come from the Eastern part of Ukraine that was considerably more russified as it was annexed to Soviet Russia earlier than its Western counterpart. Other possible explanations may be that the site's designers may be of Russian ethnicity even though they used to reside in Ukraine, or, the site's authors may have immigrated to Canada before Ukraine's independence or shortly afterwards so that there had not been enough time for them to develop a sense of separate national identity. And finally, the language and cross-cultural awareness on the part of any local Canadians who may have assisted with the site's design did not allow for a more nuanced, politically correct ethos.
**Ukraine-Rus: Towards transcultural ethos**

The site of Ukraine-Rus' International Agency at www.ukraine-rus.kiev.ua (figures 3-5) has the Ukrainian domain extension (.ua) with its agency’s physical address in Ukraine’s capital Kyiv. The site’s opening and *Our team* pages suggest that, as an “incoming tour operator,” it apparently targets English-speaking tourists, businesspersons, and Ukrainian Diaspora.

**Visual design and information structure.** The Ukraine-Rus site is most colorful and visual of the three web sites analyzed and differs structurally from the previous two sites and thus warrants more illustrations (Figure 3-5). Out of the three web sites, the Ukraine-Rus site has the most pronounced cultural identity that is evident right on the site’s opening page that has an ethos of a portal to the whole Ukraine (Figure 3). With its intense emphasis on vibrant Ukrainian national imagery and color, the page welcomes the visitor to Ukraine. The page leaves it up to people wearing Ukrainian traditional costumes, cultural artifacts, architectural landmarks, animation, and the sounds of bandura, an ancient Ukrainian instrument, to establish the initial ethos of the site. The textual information of the page is limited to “Welcome to Ukraine” at the top of the page and such categories as *Incoming Tour Operator, Cultural Tourism, Business Travel* and agency’s logo *Ukraine-Rus*’

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6 The apostrophe mark here is used to denote a “soft” sound in the original Русь as in Київська Русь (Kyivan Rus). I omit this transliteration feature for the simplicity sake.
at the bottom of the page. By clicking on any of the categories at the bottom, the visitor is invariably taken to the site’s Our team page that acts as the site’s About page.

The central feature of Our team page (Figure 4) is a group picture of the agency’s staff with their names and titles (blocked out for privacy reasons). Underneath, is a letter from the agency’s president. Our team page has considerably more text (than the opening page) that is arranged in horizontal and vertical menus, which makes this page’s layout similar to those of the opening pages of the other two sites. The horizontal menu lists such categories as Home, Partnership, Weather, and Links. The vertical sidebar contains the following categories: Our team, News, About Ukraine, Picturesque Ukraine (tour package), Cultural Heritage (itineraries catalog), Slavic Wreath, My Ukraine (Tour for Ukrainian Diaspora), Business travel, Services, Contacts, and Search. Some of these categories contain fold-down menus that break down information into more detailed subcategories. The central frame with the letter from the agency’s president, while less crowded than the text on the humak site, is still relatively dense.

**Substantive categories.** The president’s letter on Our team page (Figure 4) builds the agency’s credibility by emphasizing the following substantive features:

- 12 years of experience
- “the unrivalled sightseeing tour packages” —not a brag given their 21 tour packages featuring major destinations both in Ukraine (including places of Jewish
heritage, folk art, fairs, archaeological excavations, and wine tasting) AND in two other, “now independent, Slavic states”: Russia and Belorus (Figure 5)

- experience with organizing international events and catering for governmental delegations
- recognition by the President of the country and being listed in the Golden Book of Ukrainian Entrepreneurship as “the best foreign tourism operator”

**Textual stylistics.** The site’s most notable textual feature is the choice of the logo and the domain name Ukraine-Rus that draws on the historic relationship between Ukraine and Kyivan Rus. While the spelling of the capital in the url address follows the Russian transliteration rules (i.e., Kiev), throughout the site it is spelled Kyiv.

**Ukraine-Rus’: Rhetorical critique**

Clearly, Ukraine-Rus is on the other end of the spectrum from the global, “universal” Ukraine Travel site analyzed first. The site has a considerably more personable ethos with strong individual, group, and national manifestations. As far as the national characteristics, the initial impression of national imagery perhaps has more of a “wow” ethos than efficient functional ethos (Hunt “The design”). Indeed, to download the animation and music, one needs to have fast speed networks. The “wow” effect, however, may be explained by the agency’s ambition to impress site’s visitors with what Ukraine and thus the agency has to offer. In fact, instead of the conventional About page, the site has the About Ukraine page (in addition to Our team page).

Perhaps the most notable rhetorical strategy is the Ukraine-Rus site’s choice of the logo and domain name. The strategic hyphenation of Ukraine with Rus
(Русь⁷), by invoking historic ethos, enables the agency to meet its economic interests without hurting Ukraine’s national identity. Indeed, the site structurally, stylistically and textually conveys a more nuanced and therefore inclusive ethos than the Chumak site. In addition to the tour packages on Ukraine that may appeal to Ukrainian Diaspora and anyone interested solely in Ukraine, Ukraine-Rus offers a tour called Slavic wreath or “historic and cultural tour of three independent Slavic states” that used to comprise Kyivan Rus (Figure 5). The description of the tour suggests that it was developed collaboratively with the agencies from two other Slavic states. The site’s consistently inclusive historic ethos make the postmodern bricolage of architectural landmarks from the three destinations (the lower central part of Figure 5) appear less offensive than the similar image on the Chumak site. Similarly, the Russianized spelling of Ukraine’s capital in the url address seems to be reasonable (to make it easier on users who may have difficulty typing in the more recent spelling) as long as throughout the site the Ukrainian spelling of the Ukraine’s capital is honored.

**Three web sites in summary**

At the first glance, the web sites analyzed are quite different. The first site Ukraine Travel apparently hosted by Germans was designed from a standpoint of the culture of adoption. The second Chumak site designed by East Ukrainian nationals residing in Canada exhibited most residues of the culture of imposition. And the third Ukraine-Rus site hosted by an agency in Ukraine’s capital clearly aspired to best represent the national culture. In addition, the first site differed from the rest largely due to its “culturally-neutral” visual design whereas the heavy reliance on the national imagery on the third site made it structurally different.

At the same time, however, the web sites exhibited certain similarities in the substantive categories and hierarchical placements they invoked in the process of ethos construction. All of the three emphasized their extensive experience, qualified professional staff, a variety of services, previous clients, partnerships and recognition from relevant authorities. The first two web sites utilized the strategic potential of the opening page as the first interface with web sites’ visitors by placing these categories in the central vertical frame

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⁷ It may be noteworthy to draw a distinction between Ukrainian equivalents of Россия (Russia) and Київська Русь (Kyivan Rus).
of the opening pages. Similarly, with the exception of the third site, the agencies’ logos were prominently placed in the strategic top left corner of the opening pages. In other words, while differing in some ways, certain web sites’ features clearly participated in Anglo-American online genre conventions in terms of the hierarchical placement of most important information. An overarching similarity across all the web sites, however, was the reliance of their ethos on visual and textual representations of national identity of Ukraine and the relationship between (trust)worthiness of the web sites and their agencies (trust)worthiness and reliability of the country the web sites represent.

**Discussion: from Rhetor-centered to Transcultural Ethos**

Since users “perceive credibility by evaluating multiple dimensions simultaneously” (Fogg, Soehoo, and Danielson para. 9), this exploratory study set out to decompose what may constitute or undermine ethos on three specific web sites representing travel in Ukraine. For my analysis, I employed generic criticism (Foss, 2004) primarily because a more traditional Aristotelian approach excludes “all evaluations other than the speech’s potential for evoking intended response from an immediate, specified audience” (Campbell qtd. in Foss 27). Similarly, the transcultural view of ethos I adopted seemed appropriate for a situation when less powerful culture is represented in the foreign language and medium. The resultant analysis suggests that rather than being intrinsically tied to the individual rhetor’s identity and the persuasive power of his/her claims at the moment of speech, the dimensions of ethos are multiple and deeply embedded in socio-political, economic, and historic cultural contexts.

Indeed, the ethos dimensions on travel web sites featuring Ukraine range widely. They range from most innocuous typographic, transliteration and spelling decisions to more global structural and visual design choices such as the web sites’ page layout, the use of menus and white space, and the placement and arrangement of both visual and textual information. With the respect to the visual, the analysis supports relevant studies (Warnick; Fogg, Sohoo, and Danielson) that suggest that, like in antiquity, appearances do matter because most users base their judgments about site’s credibility on its design look. Indeed, for the Ukraine Travel site the purportedly global, universal, and culturally neutral visual
design seems to be the key to gaining trust of Westerners. The Chumak site is a good example of how textual density and certain pro-Russian visual elements may dissuade visitors from using the agency’s services. The quite extreme Ukraine-Rus site seems to be also driven by the importance of appearance as it frontloads the site with Ukrainian imagery, color, and animation.

This similarity with the classic conception of ethos notwithstanding, various markers of the site’s autonomy and affiliation, as predicted by Geisler et al., add rich social basis for ethos evaluation. In the case of the web sites analyzed, these markers were apparent in domain names, logos, physical and cyber addresses, partnerships, certifications and licenses, as well as overall rhetorical choices appealing or not to the national culture, the culture of adoption, and/or the culture of imposition. All these various dimensions combined contribute to a specific transcultural ethos of each individual site often struggling to represent the young nation in the foreign language and medium and to reconcile major cultural forces that shape its amalgamated national identity.

**Theoretical Implications: Towards Productive Transcultural Ethos**

Displacing the ethos of a unitary stable author with what Burbules (2001) calls “distributed credibility” allows more room for collective sentiments [that] with all their wisdom and insight, all their biases and exclusions, shape the content of information, shape the standards by which it is judged, and shape the negative spaces, the absences, of what is not to be found there (IV; para. 2).

By exploring these messy complexities, my analysis sought to reveal what Burbules calls “blind spots” or ethical dimensions of the ethos construction processes that the Aristotelian approach does not foreground (Foss 27). Admittedly, the Travel Ukraine site may serve best its immediate purpose of creating the right ethos with right people. But transcultural dimensions of ethos construction encourage an understanding that even most benign topographic choices are not innocent of power issues, thus suggesting a need for questioning the ethics behind inviting Western tourists to Ukraine while German banks reap the benefits.
Other theoretical implications from this exploratory analysis of the amalgamated national identity extend beyond the case of Ukraine. Some parallels can be also drawn with other young nations in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and perhaps even countries that used to be part of an empire and now struggle to balance their national identity with the overwhelming Anglo-American influences that the Web ineluctably exerts. As such, this essay extends Pratt’s and Hawisher and Selfe’s efforts to make educators consider more closely how Internet communications are constructing postmodern hybrid identities. Similar to the project "Virtual Slovakia" done by a doctoral student Gephardt (Lindberg), my project encourages constant critique so that these postmodern hybrid identities are productive rather than postcolonial.

**Pedagogical Implications: Towards Transcultural Literacy**

Despite the ethnoscapic and pervasively globalizing nature of the web, the representations produced by the travel web sites analyzed here are clearly laden with national identity issues. While this feature may be largely due to the nature and purposes of travel web sites, national identity issues are not limited to this genre. As such, these issues are of considerable relevance to the business and technical communication classroom.

Soon after the Ukraine’s historic elections, a DC-area marketing and communications firm admitted its role in “aiding Ukraine with strengthening democracy” by creating a website that served as “the primary public forum that enabled political dialogue in the chaotic 12 months prior to the election.” The site reportedly “became the virtual freedom plaza for the democracy movement” (para.2). As this example suggests, U.S. communication specialists play an important role in shaping young nations like Ukraine. As professional communicators are increasingly likely to find themselves working with Ukrainian colleagues (St. Amant “Ukraine”), this example identifies some underexplored potential for business and technical communication pedagogies. Indeed, as Cook argues, today “communicators need to be multivariate, possessing a variety of literacies that encompass the multiple ways people use language in producing information, solving problems and critiquing practice” (5-6, emphasis added). Cook suggests layering multiple literacies—basic, technological, rhetorical, social, ethical and critical—in the classroom; I add transcultural literacy to the
mix. Such multiple global literacies are important if business and technical communication practitioners want to nurture both productive and socially responsible cross-cultural web-based communication.

The generic criticism of transcultural ethos this essay offers is one possibility for enacting such multilayered pedagogy. Such critical analysis can be employed in the business and technical communication classroom as for a starting point for a complex discussion of ethos and national identity in the globalized environment. For instance, students can be asked to explore questions similar to the ones Foss (196) poses: What does participation in a genre do to and for a specific cultural group? Who does this participation empower and whom it silences? What conceptions of a specific culture are entailed in generic representational practices?8

One benefit of employing a critique similar to the one this essay offers is that it encourages students to see that overlooking national identity issues is both unethical and impractical. In other words, instructors can nudge students to an understanding of important issues related to the mythology of global, universal and neutral (web-based) communication practices and possible risks of the culture of adoption becoming complicit in actions of the culture of imposition. At the same time, in more pragmatic terms, examples similar to the Canadian-Ukrainian Chumak site can illustrate to students that a lack of cultural sensitivity may also have some economic ramifications; that is, nationally conscious visitors may be simply reluctant to trust the agency.9

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8 A classic example of a specific generic misrepresentation practice is a very frequent misuse of the definite article with the name of Ukraine (i.e., the Ukraine). Typically, the names of countries do not require the use of the article unless they are plural collective names (e.g., the United States of America, the United Kingdom). The article is used with regions or areas that are part of a bigger entity (e.g., the Midwest, the Midlands). The use of the article with Ukraine (inadvertently) implies that it is not a separate entity; such conception of the country thus offends some Ukrainians.

9 A similar example to illustrate my claim about costly mistakes would be a story of Ukrainian wine labels depicting Stalin that outraged the Ukrainian Canadian community. Produced in Ukraine's Crimea, apparently labeled in Canada (Canadian Distributors Ltd.) wines carried a label with a photograph of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill meeting in Yalta during the Second World War. The wine distributors' apparent attempt to commemorate the historic conference's 60th anniversary was received unequivocally by the Ukrainian-Canadian community:

what happened as a consequence of the Yalta Agreement [was] the mass enslavement of witnesses to genocide with the West's complicity... We don't want Stalin exalted here in Canada, even if only on a wine label." (Ukrainian Canadian Liberties Association)
In terms of some specific practical activities, students can be invited to critique typified rhetorical choices employed on specific web sites and then led to develop a heuristic they would apply if asked to design a web site for similar situational requirements. One example of such heuristic can be the appendix presented at the end of the essay. Another possibility may be to encourage students to critique individual web sites and suggest ways how they could be revised and redesigned. For more advanced business communication courses incorporating web design, students may be actually encouraged to contact these travel agencies and offer their suggestions, if not their web design services.

Finally, using a generic criticism approach when layering transcultural literacy with basic, technological, and rhetorical literacies holds a great potential for teaching to consider ethical implications of the habitual nature of web representations. Web-based genres contain, I think, the unprecedented potential for embracing the “unembraceable” in business communication pedagogies: students can be taught how to be pragmatic, yet socially-responsible, generic, yet particular by learning to construct the ethos that balances economic needs with a transcultural sensitivity and the due respect towards national identity. Overall, I think, business and technical communication professionals need to explore opportunities for utilizing the potential for teaching transcultural literacy more earnestly. A critical analysis of how various dimensions of ethos interplay on specific web sites representing a specific country is but a first step in this direction.

**Web Sites Analyzed**


Needless to say that the provincial Liquor Control Commission promptly stopped the sales of the
References Cited


wines whose labels were so offensive.

Hedley, Allen R. "The Information Age: Apartheid, Cultural Imperialism, or Global village?" *Social Science Computer Review* 17 (Spring 1999): 78-87.


Appendix: Heuristic for Transcultural Ethos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language/Translation issues</td>
<td>What language/s, if any, is/are used apart from English? Is it a text-only translation, or are visuals also “translated”/adapted to accommodate cultural differences? Is it a unified ethos across translated versions or an autonomous/decentralized ethos (Hunt “The design”)? If applicable, how is the disputable language issue resolved? Does the site honor the state’s official language? What, if anything, do agency’s name, logo, and domain name mean? Are they translated into English or transliterated? If possible to determine, are proper names transliterated using the appropriate transliteration rules?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber and physical addresses</td>
<td>What country hosts the site (country abbreviation in the domain name)? What’s the agency’s physical address? How easy is it to locate on the site?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recency/updates</td>
<td>How dynamic/evolving is the site?</td>
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<td><strong>Substantive characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information about agency and staff</td>
<td>How do various components of site’s and agency’s authorship interact? What gets emphasized and what not? What affiliations are foregrounded? E.g., extent and nature of previous experience; partners and/or previous clients; official registrations and recognitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range and variety of services provided</td>
<td>What’s the scope of agency’s activities: strictly limited to travel and accommodation or extends to visa support services, language courses, people’s search, etc? Does the site offer any information on the country it represents? How does the presentation of this information contribute to the overall ethos of the site?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Structural and visual stylistics</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Visual information structure and texture</td>
<td>Do the visual information structure and texture convey an ethos of logic and tradition or are links embedded and have a more narrative, meandering ethos (Hunt “The design”)? Is the information presented in bulleted or more textually dense format?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout/navigation</td>
<td>How are the menus arranged? Do site designers arrange information that is important for ethos building in ways that is expected by Western audiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text typography</td>
<td>Is the text typography universal or culture-specific? (Kostelnick, 1995) How universal is universal? How neutral?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphic files and Photography Animation/other media (e.g, audio)</td>
<td>Expediency vs. wow ethos (Hunt “The design”)? How does one impress and persuade in a foreign language? What ethos does photography with its arrangement convey?</td>
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<th><strong>Textual stylistics</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Word choice</td>
<td>What themes and values are reiterated by lexical means? How do they reflect different cultural forces present in transcultural ethos?</td>
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CHAPTER 6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS:
BEYOND POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATION

The crisis of representation is an erosion of confidence in prevailing concepts of knowledge and truth. Whatever "the real" is, it is discursive. Rather than dismissing "the real," postmodernism foregrounds how discourses shape our experience of "the real" in its proposal that the way we speak and write reflects the structures of power in our society. In post-representational theory, language is productive, constitutive force as opposed to a transparent reflection of some reality capturable through conceptual adequation. (Lather 25)

Beginning and leaving are always awkward. They are both anti-postmodern and difficult. Initially, I struggled to enter the ongoing and complex discourse on representational problematics. The challenge I face now is to tie up loose ends, at least major ones, and to pin down some important meanings. The very idea that conclusions might produce definitiveness and certainty causes anxiety for many postmodern rhetoricians, especially those who agree that the Cartesian "notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation, needs to be abandoned" (Rorty 6).

This postmodern anxiety is enhanced by the challenge of the very question underwriting this project. For Spivak's compelling question, I'd argue, cannot be answered unequivocally. Nor should it be.

In looking for answers to my own research question of how otherness comes to voice at three specific research sites, I used the postmodern as "the code name for the crisis of confidence in Western conceptual systems" (Lather 159) whose representations are often postcolonial in nature. To me, the question of praxis became the question of making theoretical issues of the postmodern and postcolonial representation of difference relevant and practical to research, pedagogy, and communication practices in general.

The major goal of this chapter is more modest, however, as it reflects on the process of my own "getting smart" to which praxis, as a "self-creative activity through which we make the world," is central (Lather 11). Accordingly, I first account for my reliance on
postcolonial theory by explaining the major similarity among my research subjects. I then
analyze the extent to which my three research sites acted as what Spivak calls
"infrastructures" enabling the others to speak, reflect on their representational struggles, and
share my researcher's dilemmas as a way of responding to Spivak's call for "persistent
critique." Finally, I summarize major theoretical insights and strategies that helped me move
beyond the notorious postcolonial problematics as well as offer some provisional
implications.

**Research Participants as Postcolonial Subjects**

No matter how hard I tried to resist it initially, I couldn't help viewing my research
participants as similar to postcolonial subalterns. In postcolonial terms, "everything that has
limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference" (de Kock
31). In the most literary sense, international students, especially those from non-European
countries, and Ukraine as a newly independent nation are postcolonial as both groups,
historically, have been subjugated by more powerful cultures. Largely due to economic and
material disparities, both research populations still struggle to speak for themselves and are
often composed out of professional discourses in our field. This subaltern status of "not
speakingness" (Spivak qtd. in Bahri 40) is shared by students in general as their voices are
typically rendered passive by dominant assessment and classroom discourses.

Their subject and marginal positions often cause such research populations to be
spoken for and in complex multi-layered discursive processes their voices often get
ventriloquized, as with Spivak's Hindu woman whose "best interests" British colonizers and
local patriarchs fought to "protect." That is, students' voices are often missing from
curricular and research efforts designed to improve students' educational experiences
(Bishop, "Students Stories"; Driscoll; Takacs). Some observe that the hierarchy of power and
privilege is so endemic to the academy that it "erase[s] student differences even at junctures
where teachers presumably aim to foster inclusion and diversity (Hoogeveen vii). Other
researchers add that "as academics, we stand in a profession more accustomed to speaking
"for others" than listening to their unanticipated, resistant meanings" (Flower 39). This is not
to mention the influential Paulo Freire's critique of the narrative nature of teacher-student
relationship whereby the teacher is invariably a narrating Subject and the student’s role, as an object, is reduced to passive absorption of that grand narrative (52-53).

If mainstream students’ voices are not included systematically, those of international students tend to be even more unheard (Johns, Kaplan, Matsuda, Wu). Admittedly, Derrida’s definition of differance as something scattered and dispersed can partially account for this aporia: the international student population, while growing fast and steadily, remains relatively thinly dispersed across US campuses. In more blunt terms, however, it is largely “due to their cultural and linguistic differences” that international students as ESL writers are excluded (Wu 80). And finally, Ukraine, as an example of international difference, illustrates that “not all cultural subjects enjoy equal access and credibility in the public spheres through which we constitute our identities and social realities” (Herndl and Bauer 562). Caught between still powerful residues of the Soviet culture of imposition and newer Western/predominantly US-based influences, often exerted by the pervasive online medium, Ukraine perhaps comes closest to Spivak’s Hindu widow.

Given these theoretical (and ontological) postcolonial identifications, can and how these subaltern groups speak in the specific research locales studied? And what postcolonial and postmodern insights are useful in recognizing and understanding this speaking?

**Three Research Locales as Infrastructures for Speaking and Listening**

Spivak’s question whether the subaltern can speak is essentially a question of possibility. It prompts a question of what “infrastructure” (“Foreword” xx) can make subaltern speaking possible? All the three infrastructures examined within this dissertation are pregnant with such possibilities. They range from endless possibilities the Web holds for different voices from places like Ukraine to simultaneously speak to the whole world to more local opportunities such as the cross-cultural learning community and the student survey assessment study on the US heartland campus. The CCLC presented international students with several arenas for speaking: three classrooms that were part of the innovative cross-cultural pedagogy and the focus groups that followed.

Spivak’s notion of infrastructure raises a question if, when the difference speaks, it is “recognized (‘heard’) as such” (“Foreword” xx), thus adding to the original question a more
dialogical, transactional meaning that assumes a listener in addition to a subaltern speaker. When viewed through this theoretically nuanced lens, the three sites reveal signs of struggle for both the represented and the representer.

**Struggle of speaking for oneself**

Spivak critiques representation practices that leave the real other out while speaking for the other. My research experiences suggest that responding to this critique by engaging typically silent subjects in representational acts is not easy, to say the very least.

While my drive to find or “hear” “truly” Ukrainian representations in the predominantly English-speaking medium after centuries of Russian domination was admittedly overly ambitious, some challenges encountered in the student survey study came as a surprise. First, recruiting participants for the focus groups and the survey that informed the study proved to be unexpectedly difficult. After numerous failed attempts to invite students to share their experiences with communication instruction at the university, the assessment team literally had to “buy” students’ participation with some food and financial incentives. Second, insightful overall, the focus groups included some comments that were somewhat difficult to listen to as they suggested that some students (even at junior and senior levels) are not used to an idea of speaking constructively without reproducing the only discussion format they are familiar with, i.e., course evaluations. As a result, some of the responses, e.g., venting about a specific instructor or accusing him or her of focusing more on liberal “leftist” agendas at the expense of “content” issues such as grammar, proved to be of little relevance and thus quite unusable for the assessment purposes.

Disagreeing with Spivak that the subaltern cannot speak would be naïve for even when difference is permitted to speak, with its ethos so seriously tarnished, difference is not always listened to. Indeed, there was so much difference and conflict in the cross-cultural learning community that it ceased to exist after the first semester despite all its promise as a unique cross-cultural pedagogy. In addition to the institutional non-listening, the host students quite literally disallowed their international peers speak during their collaborative presentations. The former were disinclined to listen to the different voice of their foreign-born instructor, let alone their international peers.
Similarly, the assessment study raised some not very comfortable questions of how often researchers, teachers and administrators have time and/or patience to listen to unedited, contradictory, and messy albeit “authentic” voices of our mainstream students (not to mention various subaltern student populations). Because students’ voices can complicate our understanding, points out Bishop, they are often omitted in research designs or reports (qtd. in Lindgren 87). As a research assistant, I can attest to the challenges of having some faculty agree on the practicality of including students in the assessment efforts in the first place as well as hours spent on “distilling” students’ data to make them more usable and relevant. As students’ entangled and often contradictory comments were reduced to some usable “soundbites,” inevitably some faculty’s schemas may have been imposed on students’ speaking on their own terms. This relentless reduction process that often marks research activities and that is at heart of representation runs counter to the very irreducibility of difference.

**Pressures of reductionism**

In the process of writing up all of the three studies, my major representational struggle as a researcher lay in reconciling two contradictory exigencies. Validated by Derridian difference *ad infinitum*, I became even more acutely aware that difference is always in detail as even a seemingly minor nuance can make a difference. This awareness, however, ran counter to the very practical need to condense and reduce the material.

But how does one reduce a semester-long experience foregrounding difference to several pages of written text? I kept asking myself when writing up my CCLC study results. How do I make sure I produce a fair representation of this promising, albeit subaltern pedagogy, too promising to let it die partially because the faculty didn’t get along or so it seemed to the students? To a certain degree, this paper is an attempt to provide some, no matter how insignificant, space where the subaltern talk can achieve some higher dialogic level of utterance than what was accomplished by the learning community itself. As such, while the paper details all the benefits of this pedagogy, it departs from “feel-good” accounts on cross-cultural experience that are critiqued by such scholars as Flowers, Olson, and West. Ironically, then, the paper sought to capture a “real” cross-cultural learning experience with all its contradictions entangled in the process of *otherness* coming to voice.
Or how does one condense the complex relationships between the newly minted state such as Ukraine and its more dominant sociopolitical influences? How does one respond to Spivak’s critique of “packaging cultural differences “for transnational consumption” in ways that totalize and deny complexity” (qtd. in Lather 40) without making the paper too theoretical for a journal in business and technical communication? And where do those seemingly minor examples of misrepresentations that to me are full of significations and power tensions between Ukraine and Russia belong? Mere theorizing and nuancing of complexities of national ethos online, I realized, would be of little practical interest to the audience who may not share my passion for the subject. Some material had to go while other was relegated to (or saved by) footnotes.

Or how do students speak on the own terms without producing too cumbersome quotes? What about voices that for various reasons seem irrelevant? How do I make sure something really important does not get composed out in my pursuit of a streamlined and clear line of argument? And what do I do about this “irreduceable aboutness” (LaCapra 5) as I server students’ comments from their locations and move them into my own?

And finally how does one control this “aboutness” on “more structural and comprehensive levels such as narration, interpretation, and analysis”(ibid)? How do I account for my own otherness that ineluctably plays into ethos of representation of others and myself? Where do my reflections on my positionality come in given the ineluctable need to reduce, condense and streamline?1

These questions were largely prompted by the pervasive concern that practical yet reductive essentialized representations further other those in less dominant positions. My own otherness played out in interesting and challenging ways.

Researchers ethos from periphery

The crisis of representation overlaps with the crisis of legitimization (Denzin and Lincoln), thus calling for reflexivity on researcher’s methodology and positionality when building her ethos. In all three papers, I foreground methodology and reflect on studies’

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1 It has often been noted that all research is autobiographical (Kirsch, Latta, Wu). While researchers most often acknowledge this fact “in an epilogue, a footnote, a reflective afterword, or other marginal places” (Kirsch 158), some even make it a focus of their project (e.g., Latta “Which me is the me that got the Ph.D.? Reflections on a graduate research project”).
construction and analysis thus treating research design and its “constructedness” as no less important than the data it produced. To some extent, establishing ethos for focus groups and student surveys necessitated this foregrounding. I did not do as much in terms of reflection on my own situatedness, however. This chapter, I think, is an appropriate place to do so.

For some, ethnographer’s ethos “in part, is a product of living and viewing from the periphery” (Cintron 4). While ethnographic approaches best mediate the personal versus public binary, the intersection of my own often peripheral vantage point with those of my research participants aggravated representational problematics to some extent.

With the determination to bring the marginal to the center, the move largely inspired by Spivak, came an anxiety similar to the one surrounding any overt reference to sophists. As some find Spivak’s other work converge with sophistic rhetoric (Jarrat, Rereading; Berlin Rhetorics), I was concerned that my projects may be perceived as Spivak’s as scrupulous strategic misrepresentations (Jarrat, Rereading 70). Accordingly, I was extremely preoccupied with issues of objectivity. At times, I ironically lapsed into a modernist attempt to represent reality as a truth by providing abundant detail (famous “thick description”) and “hiding” behind my data including students’ voices (data speak for themselves). The level of detail and the extent of students’ commentaries that I provided, which admittedly may detract from the clarity and linearity of my argument, are signs of that struggle.

The personal intersection has been particularly problematic in the CCLC project that started my inquiry into the relationship between ethos of difference and representation. As an international graduate student and TA, at the very outset of my graduate studies in the US, I was naturally curious about the ways others like me represent themselves and get represented in the (composition) classroom. In the CCLC project, this curiosity led to a quandary similar to the one reported by another researcher. His Latino research participant’s experiences resonated with those of the researcher’s himself “as a Latino gaining a foothold in an academic community that often felt and made [him] feel foreign” (Galguera 58), thus causing him to agonize over the objectivity of his accounts. On the one hand, one of my interests admittedly lay in learning how students perceived others including their foreign-born instructor as authority figures. On the other hand, the extent of agreement among both international and US focus group participants and as well as often “unchecked” student
comments exceeded any hunches I had about the tarnished ethos of the other. This “finding” notwithstanding, I obsessively reread both the data and analysis numerous times to make sure that my write-up was balanced, no “epistemic violence” was incurred on any of the participants, and no important details were left out. Did I unwittingly other the US students? I kept asking myself. And did I further other Roxana? Because accounts of non-native speakers as instructors in the composition classroom are limited (Micciche) and not always positive (Thomas; Manrique and Manrique), I was concerned that I may have unwittingly had my own concerns (legitimated by some research) speak for Roxana’s. And this approximation would be “inaccurate.” After all, even though we shared our foreign-born identity, our cultural capital and the resultant authority were quite different. Roxana was a more mature and experienced “naturalized” lecturer whereas I was an international visa student working on my master’s degree at the time when I was conducting this research project.

In the assessment project, my otherness as a foreigner was enhanced by my deviation from both the Cartesian epistemology that underpins quantitative research methods (including surveys) and from conventional ethnography as a preferred research choice of many compositionists.

And, finally, my project on Ukraine most explicitly drew on the ethnic aspects of my identity. The seemingly obvious advantage of having insider’s knowledge of Ukraine’s culture, history and language politics complexified representational matters considerably. The more subtle understanding my insider’s knowledge permitted, the more I cringed at all the three web sites under analysis selling Ukraine to either Russian or Western masters/clients and essentializing what Ukraine, at least the way I know it, is about.

These concerns that stemmed from my own otherness were informed by the postcolonial and postmodern critique of representation, even though the critique tends to imply representers from more dominant positions than the one I speak from. Among other things, these concerns underscore the unnaturalness of the researcher/researched dichotomy pointed out by a range of researchers (Bloom; Citron; Faber; Segal, Pare, Brent, and Vipond; Wu). Unlike in traditional ethnography, “used by Western researchers to study faraway, exotic cultures,” my case was similar to Wu who studied others like her. “When the
researcher studied a group mentally close to her, the line between us and them became smudged," reported Wu (81). Indeed, it is hard to remain detached when seeing russified representations of my “independent” home country proliferated by web discourses, especially given my firsthand experience of systematic indoctrination that those who speak Ukrainian and call themselves Ukrainian are inferior to the “big brother.” Likewise, it is hard to remain neutral when hearing the discourse of distrust, disrespect and even occasional disgust towards the other in the composition classroom. It is even impractical not to take an advantage of a rare opportunity to make the overwhelmingly Cartesian institutional research culture aware of differences in research practices in our discipline (by means of the compositionists' collaboration with such assessment groups as the Research Institute for Studies in Education).

In some sense, then, denaturalizing the researcher and researched and personal and public dichotomies not only makes researchers reflexive of possible postcolonial representational implications but also helps them move beyond this notorious problematics.

Towards More Socially Responsible Representational Infrastructures

The combination of theoretical, methodological and other rhetorical choices assisted in my quest for solutions to various representational dilemmas as I was pursuing a goal of making issues of postmodern and postcolonial representation relevant and practical.

If “the question of action remains largely underaddressed within postmodern discourse” (Lather 12), making postcolonial theory practical and relevant is all the more difficult. Indeed, very little empirical work has been done to illustrate how postcolonial theoretical insights may be enacted in practice (Moore-Gilbert 459). The challenge doubles when someone who does not belong to the dominant mainstream culture has such aspirations. Among other things, I was worried—and still am—that, due to my own otherness, my cautionary intentions may be read as accusatory, if not pretentiously emancipatory.

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2 MacLure who scrutinizes representations of the standard English issue in the British press argues that “it's the discourse of disgust and revulsion towards the dialect that surrounds the issue” (22-47). This revulsion towards dialect is “ultimately indistinguishable from revulsion towards the speakers themselves” (35) and is one manifestation of persistent and pervasive discursive economy of exclusion (38). This connection seems to be analogous to the relationship between the student’s
Postcolonial theoretical interlude

Theorists from (more) dominant cultures (e.g., Olson, Lather, Pratt, Flowers, West) who most explicitly articulate the practical need for postcolonial frameworks were particularly helpful in this respect. These theorists validated my interest in difference and attendant power issues despite the natural desire to flatten difference and conflict. Together with Spivak, they helped me see ethos of difference as an ongoing struggle and prompted to consider to what extent the “infrastructures” of the three research sites were enabling difference to speak on its own terms.

Spivak’s call for incessant critique of representation had perhaps the most influential impact on this dissertation. In the case of Ukraine and non-native speakers whose representations in disciplinary scholarship are so scarce, it appeared to be particularly important to consider their possible “allegorical significance” (Shohat qtd. in Baldonado). Hence, my scrutiny of web representations of Ukraine’s vulnerable national identity (e.g., even seemingly innocuous postmodern photo collages may jeopardize Ukraine’s ongoing struggle to break away from Russia) and the deconstruction of my own representational modes (e.g., my explicit concern about possible othering of Roxana). Throughout my writing process, I firmly kept in mind an understanding that my ideas will circulate (even within some limited audience) and may amalgamate into some fixed representations of my researched subjects.

Methodology interlude

Informed by postmodern, postcolonial, and poststructuralist (and feminist) theories, the methods used in this dissertation converge in several interrelated goals. They include aspirations to do research with participants rather than on participants (Addison and McGee 3) thus emphasizing “mutuality,” which is defined as “sharing the potential to adopt a range of subject positions and to establish reciprocal discourse relations” in the meaning construction process (Wallace and Ewald 3). Such methods recognize that a researcher cannot step outside her research (or her background and social situation), attend to the disgust towards one’s ethnic food and distrust that others can handle the task of representing their food discursively (via oral presentation) in the CCLC project.
affective, the relational, and the local (Forbes 29), and above all allow the other to participate in “the quest for more empowering ways of knowing” (Lather 85).

The multirepresentational methodology I employed (focus groups, surveys, and generic criticism) was my way to respond to overwhelmingly Cartesian research practices. As such, this methodological move can be viewed as an attempt to enact Stephen Toulmin’s famous call for humanizing modernity. By adjusting disciplinary claims about nature of knowledge, Toulmin believed, we can balance “the hope for certainty and clarity in theory with the impossibility of avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity in practice” (175). The chosen methodology, thus, responds to the need to revive four elements that were considered largely unimportant in modernity: the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely (Toulmin 176).

The focus groups and the survey, their limitations notwithstanding, allowed the students to come to voice, thus somewhat alleviating the burden of Spivak and Said’s critique that most Western discursive practices render less powerful others as passive and silent. Realizing the modernist limitations of classroom observation, I added focus groups to the CCLC study to at least minimize the researcher’s gaze. Not only did this addition reveal far more interesting and conflict-rich material than a purely observation study would have, it also provided students with a much needed opportunity for what West calls “therapeutic rhetoric” of reflecting on their conflicting experience with difference.

Similarly, the survey empowered its respondents by letting them feel as part of the research university community rather than passive recipients of curricular innovations. “Research is all about learning from others,” argues David Morgan when making a case for focus groups (53). Indeed, both focus groups and surveys can open up lines of communication that faculty may not so readily employ in their practice. “For a short period

3 Gesa Kirsch, for instance, critiques interviews because they may “formalize conversations, emphasize a question and answer format, imply, a hierarchical relation between interviewer and interviewee..., positions the interviewee as an object of examination, and can predetermine answers through the assumptions, categories and word choices reflected in questions” (qtd. in Lindgren 90). In my case, however, while I determined the focus groups’ questions, the researcher/researched hierarchy was less of an issue largely due to my own non-dominant status as an international female graduate student. I doubt, for instance, that CCLC participants would have been equally comfortable sharing their not so flattering attitudes towards their international peers or Roxana, had the facilitator been someone from a more dominant culture. Likewise, a considerable share of not so positive comments expressed by students through different stages of the survey study does not support Kirsch’s concerns.
of time, participants are … sharing their experiences, preferences, and beliefs. …

[Researchers] are there to learn from them, not to teach them something," continues Morgan (53). Both focus groups and surveys as research techniques can recuperate the voice of students as the often represented spoken subject. In general, focus groups and surveys present a timely and dialogic research option when ethnography is not possible or practical.

Likewise, the generic criticism I employed for the web sites’ analysis was crucial for managing complexities and particularities of national identity issues online and showing their relevance to the business and technical communication classroom. Overall, the theoretical and methodological intersections of representation with genre appear to be rather useful. In sociological terms, genre is viewed “as a vehicle for the formation and enactment of habitus (Bourdieu) and structural reproduction (Giddens)” (Geisler et al. 277). For both sociologists, often-unconscious “habitual” and “routinized” discursive practices reproduce larger sociocultural arrangements:

Routinization of daily life allows people to move through activities largely uncritically and without a great deal of self-reflection. These daily routines evolve into habits, then into certainties, and then into bedrock principles. These principles become self-referential and recreate new rituals and rites of passage that only reinforce their own legitimacy. (Giddens quoted in Faber 51-52)

These habitual routinized generic bedrock representations need to be constantly questioned or deconstructed.

Rhetorical strategies interlude: Deconstruction

In this context, Derrida/Spivak’s notion of deconstruction proved particularly relevant. The first step of deconstruction, according to Lather, is to “identify the binaries, the opposition that structure the argument [and to]...create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms which transcend a binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms (13). In addition to interrogating the metarepresentative researcher/researched divide, I also questioned the local versus global binary that routinely informs composition, business and technical communication practices. Instead, I argued for the importance of bringing international difference “closer to home” by seeking more opportunities similar to the CCLC. I also offered viewing Ukraine’s ethos as transcultural rather than residing in the illusionary local or global. In other words, both papers agreed with
Said’s demand for “both global vision and local articulation” (Bartolovich 129) and in so doing showed the relevance of cross-cultural difference to the classroom. The paper that deals with compositionists’ dilemma of whether to trust or not to trust numeric assessment studies argues that by collaborating with assessment experts compositionists can have more say in the process thus finding some compromise between the modernist methodology and the postmodern subject matter.

Deconstruction, Lather continues, foregrounds “the lack of innocence” (13). Indeed, the deconstruction of the pretended cultural neutrality of the Ukraine Travel web site featuring Ukraine, for example, revealed obvious biases in favor of the Western audience. If even seemingly minor typographic, spelling or the definite article use are not innocent or neutral, how can more elaborate representational practices be?

Integral to postmodern praxis, deconstruction “carries an ethical and political charge” (MacLure 179). It shows how “every social order rests on a forgetting of the exclusion practices through which one set of meanings has been institutionalized and various other possibilities … have been marginalized” (Shapiro quoted in MacLure 179). As such, deconstruction is similar to Ebert’s “resistance postmodernism” for it resists “the institutionalized forgetting that takes place when matters attain the status of common sense” (MacLure 179) or, the status of, what Giddens calls, routinized bedrock principles. Habitual imaginaries about international students, for instance, tend to foreground the benefits the latter reap from studying at US universities but overlook the fact that, in addition to bringing revenues to universities, these students add to universities’ cultural capital by allowing schools to boast about their international reputation and diversity. This is not to mention broader socio-cultural and political implications of instilling Western values as integral part of educating international students.

Above all, deconstruction can be viewed as a form “empathic unsettlement” that “poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing and spiritually uplifting accounts of … events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit” (LaCapra 41-42). In so doing, deconstruction carves an important space for what Spivak’s calls “constructive questions, corrective doubts” (In Other Worlds 258).
Implications: Emphasis on practical

But perhaps the most important binary that this dissertation sought to deconstruct was practical versus ethical. Oftentimes, in order to be practical, otherness needs to be composited out. Throughout my research projects, the both-and relationship was emphasized. I argued, in other words, that not listening to the other is not only unethical but also impractical. The examples I included ranged from most pragmatic economic ramifications for not recognizing national identity issues in web design practices to more lofty ones. For instance, ignoring and distancing international difference precludes compositionists from using cross-cultural difference as a resource right in their classroom and thus jeopardizes their pedagogical goals for cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship. With the rest to the latter, exact forces of globalization causing the nation-state become a less significant marker of difference may be theoretically (and endlessly) debatable. Business and technical communication practitioners, however, face a very real and practical challenge of deciding if and how we want to participate in “a power play” called globalization (Woolever 51).

The emphasis on practical, together with Spivak’s concept of infrastructure, allowed me to anticipate a possible critique of those who may see my obsession with difference as somewhat romanticized. Focusing irreducibly on one’s differences may be impractical not only because it may not be listened out but also because the theoretical overkill may be against best interests of those in subaltern positions who actually need to learn how to participate in the “culture of power.” Admittedly, international students in order to succeed need to open up to the dominant culture and language. The same applies to online discourses of a young state like Ukraine: in order to be heard and succeed politically and economically, it needs to adopt the master language(s) of the new medium. Even the English faculty (often admittedly other in the dominant Cartesian, positivist research culture) need to adopt the tools of the latter in order to have their say in the course and the outcome of assessment processes.

And finally, in a truly practical spirit, some possible implications from the projects carried out within the framework of this dissertation are along the lines of needs to:

- create more space for bringing students’ voices into research and seek ways of making these voices usable without completely erasing their differences;
• engage in assessment activities and seek some compromise in research methodology, if we want to resist Cartesian assessment culture and the discipline's subaltern status in this respect;
• enact more productive, socially responsible cross-cultural pedagogies that challenge illusionary binaries of all sorts.

Coda

All the three projects as well as this dissertation overall can be viewed as Derridian "becoming space" that looks "into the future in ways that both mark and loosen limits" (Lather 101). In recognizing that representational problematics is as relevant as ever lies perhaps one of the most pressing tasks for rhetoricians as we seek representation practices that are not deterministically postcolonial but less occlusive and more responsive to listening and therefore more fecund and productive.
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