Sites of Translation
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1 • Translation Moments as a Framework for Studying Language Fluidity

Languages do not exist as real entities in the world and neither do they emerge from or represent real environments; they are, by contrast, the inventions of social, cultural, and political movements. (Makoni and Pennycook, 2)

Coming into Translation

I was born in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, the industrial hub of a plurinational country with over forty-two nationally recognized languages. As the business center of Bolivia, Santa Cruz is one of the few cities in the country with semi-reliable Internet connectivity and global business potential. It is the place where people from all over the country come to make money.

Each day, thousands of people enter the city of Santa Cruz to sell products or provide services. As a result, when walking through the streets of this city, you will encounter several acts of translation, with over forty-two languages interacting to set prices, discuss negotiations, and build connections. Often, shared words are not available or necessary in these transactions. Instead, people employ any available mode to communicate, using their bodies, drawing figures, texting, singing, dancing, chirping, clapping, whistling, twirling, laughing—all to help each other overcome complex linguistic negotiations. In cases like these, translation is not just a classroom activity or a theoretical framework; it is a means for survival, as individuals rely on multilingual communication to sell products and make a living. In these contexts, acts of translation are inherently multimodal activities, as people extend beyond alphabetic words to layer communicative resources that might help them transform meaning beyond the limitations of any language or alphabet.

Having witnessed acts of translation at various stages of my life and
having negotiated my own linguistic transitions as an immigrant in the United States, I know that multilingual communicators have developed cultural, rhetorical, and technical skills through their lived experiences and practice these skills as they transform information across languages. When multilinguals cannot immediately decide on an adequate word in a specific language, we make do with whatever resources are most appropriate and available. This, I argue, is where creativity and survival render multimodal/
multilingual communication, in the spaces where common words are hard to access.

To understand how individuals transform information across languages by using a wide range of semiotic resources and practices, I call for a focus on “translation moments”—instances in time when individuals pause to make a rhetorical decision about how to translate a specific word or phrase for a specific audience in a specific context. As I mention in this book’s introduction, translation moments do not encompass the entire process of translation. Instead, translation moments are those instances when we pause and debate among several options to decide how a word, phrase, or idea would be represented best in a different language. To further illustrate here what I mean by translation moments, I will first share a brief anecdote from an early visit to one of my research sites. Using this anecdote as a grounding example, I will then discuss how translation moments can help researchers further understand the practices of linguistic fluidity in and outside the classroom.

Translation Moments in Practice: Sandra Translates Mazorca

After deciding that I wanted to study translation in a community organization, I began volunteering at local community events facilitated by and for Latinx community members. In particular, I was interested in seeing how we Spanish-speaking Latinx gente living in the United States leverage our resources (both material and linguistic) to help each other in la lucha of succeeding in English-dominant America. During this search, I volunteered to help with a Comprando Rico y Sano (Shopping Tasty and Healthy) event hosted by a local nonprofit organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Sponsored through a grant intended to promote healthy eating choices in the Latinx community, this event invited people from the area to learn more about healthy eating.

To help set up for this presentation, I was asked to lay out material—in both Spanish and English—to be made available for community members as they entered the venue. For example, on all tables set up for community members at the event, we laid out flyers titled MyPlate or MiPlato, illustrating portion sizes the sponsoring organization deemed to be adequate for dinner (see fig. 2).

As the presentation began, the health promoter (or promotora), Sandra, began sharing resources and discussing family eating habits for her community. Sandra presented information primarily in Spanish, though she used English when she thought it would be useful to help her audience
understand her message. Sandra began her presentation by assuring her audience that although they all came from different places, she would do her best to make sure they could understand each other: “Yo creo que nos vamos a entender, aunque somos de diferentes países” (I think we’re going to understand each other, even though we all come from different countries). Although all the participants in attendance identified as speakers of Spanish, Sandra understood that different Latin American countries use different Spanishes for different purposes and contexts. Hence, Sandra explained
that she would do her best to contextualize information in Spanish to fit the conventions of participants from different South American and Central American countries.

As Sandra continued with her presentation, she paused when discussing corn on the cob as a potential healthy dinner option for the families in attendance. During this pause in her presentation, Sandra mentioned a previous presentation at which she used the Spanish word *mazorca* to describe corn on the cob. An audience member from Mexico who was at that previous presentation did not interpret *mazorca* to mean corn on the cob and instead thought Sandra’s suggestion was that audience members serve dry corn to their families (which did not seem right to the audience member).

In this moment in the presentation I attended, Sandra informed her audience, “When I reference *mazorca*, I mean corn on the cob.” Then she showed a picture of corn on the cob to further clarify what she meant when she used the word *mazorca*. She used the English phrase “corn on the cob” to further reference what her audience members may have heard in the past when referring to this food item, and she used a visual in this multimodal interaction, to provide added support for the clarification she was trying to make. Thus, Sandra’s navigation of how to translate the word *mazorca* required a pause in her dialogue, followed by the rhetorical combination of words, an image, and several gestures as she made her clarifications. In this specific instance, Sandra layered several semiotic resources to translate and adapt information for her audience, leveraging her linguistic, cultural, and material resources to help her along the way. Sandra’s pause in her discussion as she reached the word *mazorca*, followed by clarifications (e.g., telling a story about a previous presentation and using an image to show the audience what she meant by *mazorca*), encompassed what I came to define as a “translation moment.” If I were analyzing this specific presentation for this project, I would identify a translation moment in Sandra’s pause and would code the actions that followed as multimodal rhetorical strategies enacted by a translator during her translation process. In this specific instance, I would code Sandra as using storytelling, gesturing, and visuals as rhetorical strategies enacted to navigate this specific translation moment. Using the framework of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation, I would contextualize my coding of Sandra’s translation strategies within the broader cultural context of the event being analyzed, working to unpack the motivations and histories of attendees at this event and of Sandra herself as the translator.

Following this initial translation moment, Sandra proceeded to pause
at several points in her presentation and ask her audience how they defined specific words (e.g., “How do you say ‘beans’ to your kids?” and “How does your family describe grocery shopping?”), thus negotiating languages as she presented information to a multilingual, culturally diverse audience familiar with Spanishes and Englishes (and other languages) to various degrees. She situated the information she was presenting within the context of that specific audience during that specific presentation. The translation in this example required that the communicator, Sandra, not only find a literal replacement of words from one language to another but also situate these words to fit the specific cultural practices of her audience—what some technical communication practitioners call “localization” (Agboka; Sun). In this way, the translation required both the adaptation of words and the contextualization (i.e., localization) of ideas across languages, cultures, and modalities simultaneously.

Briefly Defining “A Revised Rhetoric of Translation”

In chapter 4, I further describe the framework of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation. Here, I find it important to clarify that my analysis of translation moments, while grounded in situated translation events (e.g., Sandra’s discussion of mazorca), is also directly linked to broader cultural contexts and embodied experiences. A traditional rhetoric of translation might be defined as one that situates language work within visible, often alphabetic activities (i.e., the actual process of transforming information from a source language to a target language). This traditional rhetoric positions translation as the replacement of one word in one language with a similar word in another language, or an “attempt to duplicate meaning interlingually” (Batova and Clark, 223). Traditional definitions of translation assume that translators are simply information conduits who replace words across languages. However, recent work in technical communication and translation studies counters this perception of translation as a word-for-word replacement process (Agboka; Batova and Clark; Gonzales and Zantjer; Sun; Walton, Zraly, and Mugengana).

For example, the concept of localization is now frequently associated with translation in technical communication. Localization aims to address linguistic and cultural expectations of specific cultures in specific contexts (Batova and Clark, qtd. in Gonzales and Zantjer, 273), accounting “for not only the replacement of words, but also [the adaptation of] materials to convey overall meaning from one culture to another” (Gonzales and
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Zantjer, 273). While the translation of a technical document might only entail the transformation of words from a source language to a target language, the localization of this document might encompass changes in images and visuals to meet the cultural expectations of users in the target language.

The concept of localization, through its focus on culture and usability, is a move away from a traditional rhetoric of translation. While localization is used primarily in technical communication and user experience, A Revised Rhetoric of Translation is an orientation to studying language transformation across disciplinary and professional/academic boundaries. A Revised Rhetoric of Translation is a framework for approaching the study of language transformation in both academic and professional spaces, one that allows researchers to situate translation moments within their cultural-rhetorical contexts. While traditional definitions of translation might focus on the transformation of words alone, localization might highlight the cultural adaptation and usability of information across cultures. A Revised Rhetoric of Translation allows researchers to account for the transformation of words and other modalities, the localization of cultural elements in written and multimodal artifacts, and the lived experiences, cultural histories, and current material realities of the translator(s) and target audience(s) engaged in these activities. I identify and unpack translation moments through this multi-layered orientation.

Defining “Translation Moments”

The specific translation moment illustrated through Sandra’s discussion of *mazorca* is not an anomaly in the daily experiences of multilinguals. Indeed, communicators who move across named languages and cultures in their daily interactions often use multimodal resources (e.g., images, gestures, sounds) to convey their thoughts when specific words are not available or necessary. If we cannot immediately decide on a word to convey what we are thinking in a specific language, we will use other tools—our bodies, drawings, digital technologies, sounds—to get across our point. Thus, the rhetorical decisions that communicators make during translation moments are instances of multilingual, multimodal communication, illustrating the fluidity of languages beyond any standardized alphabetic systems. To define translation moments as interdisciplinary analytical frameworks, I draw on scholarship in sociolinguistics, rhetoric and composition, and translation studies.²
Defining “Translation Moments” through Sociolinguistics

Understanding translation moments requires us to acknowledge language as a living, fluid, constantly emerging practice. Since and before the early 1900s, linguists have challenged the structural perception of languages as discrete alphabetic entities, instead situating linguistic actions in the culturally bound ideologies and interactions of individuals (Gumperz and Hernandez). For decades, enunciated signs (i.e., words) have been conceived as always traversed by extralinguistic elements (Otiseguy, García, and Reid). These elements include the actions of speakers, the context in which the utterances are being shared, and the cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of those engaging in the interaction. This dialogic theory posits that language “acquires life ‘in concrete verbal communication, and not in the abstract linguistic system of language forms, not in the individual psyche of speakers’” (García and Li Wei, quoting Voloshinov, 6). Hence, language lives in and through human interaction and cannot be reduced to alphabetic structured categories that are extracted and transported from one context to another. Models for understanding translation across languages must also account for this fluidity, understanding that translation choices will change and adapt based on context and rhetorical situation.

Because language is always dependent on the context in which it is used, named language categories (e.g., Spanish, English, French) never reference one static set of codes. There are many Spanishes and Englishes constantly being developed, adapted, and repurposed in every interaction. As sociolinguists and educators Ofelia García and Li Wei explain, “English is regarded as a language only in comparison with the existence of other languages such as French, Spanish, or Chinese. None of these languages exist on their own, and all languages are in contact with others—being influenced by others, and containing structural elements from others” (406). Thus, when individuals who identify as bilingual or multilingual translate information, they are not moving across two or more sets of linguistic codes. All individuals draw on their entire semiotic repertoire in each interaction, identifying the utterances that are most appropriate for a specific audience in a specific context. If I identify as a speaker of Spanish and English, for example, I do not have two separate containers to draw on when I interact with a specific person. Instead, as psycholinguists and neuropsychologists have shown, individuals have one linguistic repertoire or container that they use in all interactions. As a person who identifies as a speaker of Spanish and English, I make decisions about which utterances
to use when talking with another individual. Sometimes I use Spanish, sometimes I use English, and sometimes I use both (what García and Li Wei might call “translanguaging”).

In addition, as I move across Spanish and English, I use my entire communicative repertoire to translate my ideas. Sometimes I translate using words alone, but I more often translate using words in combination with other objects, including but not limited to my body. When I translate, I use all my resources to make meaning, gauging the reactions of my audience and adapting my actions accordingly (Gonzales and Zantjer; Gumperz and Hernandez). In this way, the power of language fluidity lies not within bounded words and symbol systems but with the rhetorical expertise of the communicators negotiating meaning across contexts (Canagarajah). The point of analyzing translation from a rhetorical perspective (and through A Revised Rhetoric of Translation specifically) is not so much to gain an understanding of what words translators choose to use but, rather, to understand how, when, and why translators are choosing specific words or phrases in specific moments in time. For this reason, situating theories of linguistic mobility in an analysis of translation moments allows me to connect language transformations to their rhetorical contexts, understanding how the decisions that translators make are always influenced by both internal and external factors.

Defining “Translation Moments” in Rhetoric and Composition

In rhetoric and composition, theories like translanguing support the fluid, socially constructed notion of language established by sociolinguists (Li Wei; Vigouroux and Mufwene; Canagarajah). Through a translanguing framework, languages are treated “as always emergent, in process (a state of becoming), and their relations as mutually constitutive,” rather than “as discrete, preexisting, stable, and enumerable entities” (Gonzales, “Multimodality,” quoting Lu and Horner, “Translingual Literacy,” 587). A translanguing orientation to rhetoric and composition, as presented by scholars like Lu and Horner, Canagarajah, and many others, envisions classrooms as what García and Li Wei call “translanguaging spaces,” where students are encouraged to enact the full potential of their linguistic repertoires to make rhetorical arguments for various audiences. As defined by García and Li Wei, translanguaging spaces “allow multilingual individuals to integrate social practices (and thus ‘language codes’) that have been formerly practiced separately in different places” (508). Translanguaging spaces establish
“a social space for the multilingual user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance” (Li Wei, 1223).

Li Wei’s notion of translanguaging practices as “coordinated and meaningful performance[s]” is critical to my presentation and analysis of translation moments. Because language is a performance contextualized in the exigencies and affordances of specific rhetorical situations, it is important to acknowledge how our linguistic performances are influenced by extrinsic cultural and social factors. In the cases of sociolinguistics, education, and rhetoric and composition, theoretically acknowledging the translanguaging practices of students has been a long, ongoing battle for advocacy and justice in the establishment and recognition of classrooms as translanguaging spaces. In rhetoric and composition specifically, countless studies illustrate the important work being developed to establish and maintain language policies that honor our students’ cultural and linguistic histories (e.g., Canagarajah; Young and Martinez). These studies have presented rhetoric and composition teachers and practitioners with useful frameworks (e.g., translingualism, translanguaging, code meshing, code switching) for theorizing language diversity in classrooms and community contexts.

Yet, as scholars like Juan Guerra argue, there is a difference between, on one hand, “policy issues” in regard to language use and, on the other hand, what he deems to be a “matter of practice” in language negotiation. Theories like translingualism, for example, provide a useful orientation to theorizing language difference, particularly in reference to the inherent linguistic diversity that is present and should be valued and protected in rhetoric and composition classrooms. In my discussion and use of translation moments, I aim to reference these theoretical orientations to language diversity (orientations that acknowledge the linguistic diversity present in all communicative contexts) to account for both language policy issues and matters of practice, material exigencies that take place on the ground as communicators navigate their linguistic repertoires to make meaning in specific moments in time; that is, I aim not only to acknowledge that language diversity is present in all communicative acts but also to understand how these linguistic transformations take place in specific rhetorical contexts. This is where translation studies and the profession of technical translation inform my understanding and presentation of translation moments.
Translation Moments in Practice: Perspectives from Translation Studies

Peter Newmark defines translation as “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the [author] intended [in] the [source] text” (5). Similarly, Müller defines translation as “the replacement of text in a source language by text in a target language equivalent in meaning” (207). The notion of linguistic “replacement” embedded in traditional definitions of translation echo the static conceptions of language embraced by early structural linguistics. However, while there are still some cases in which translation is perceived as a simple process of language replacement, Newmark clarifies that “translation cannot simply reproduce, or be, the original [source]” (76). Instead, all translations are products of broad rhetorical negotiations, which include factors like “the individual style or idiolect of the Source Text (SL) author,” the “conventional grammatical and lexical usage” for a specific type of text, “content items referring to specific Source Text culture[s],” “the typical format of a text,” and the “expectations of the readership” (Newmark, 5). Thus, in practice, translation reflects fluid, multimodal conceptions of language, positioning translators as the individuals who perform intellectual rhetorical work and coordination of semiotic practices as they make decisions about how information can be understood by audiences from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The more recent “critical turn” in translation studies posits that “classic conceptualizations of translation do not fully capture its complexity and contextuality” (Yajima and Toyosaki, 93). Critical perspectives in translation studies position the work of translators as political, reflecting the cultural histories, lived experiences, and ideologies of the individuals who perform linguistic negotiations as they transform information across languages (Baker; Robinson; Tymoczko). Since translation “takes place in a specific social and historical context that informs and structures it,” political and cultural forces always influence the decisions that translators make in the moment of translation (Jacquemond, 93, qtd. in Yajima and Toyosaki, 91). As a translator adapts information across languages, the translator has to consider the perceived intentions of the author(s) of the source text, the linguistic and grammatical features of both a source language and a target language, the nature of the information being presented in the source text, and the potential dispositions to language encompassed in the envisioned audience for the translation.

In addition, because translation now frequently takes place in digital contexts, translators have to account for the digital and multimodal design elements embedded both in their source text and in their translated docu-
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ments (Gonzales and Turner). Translators must understand how to replicate meaning across languages using alphabetic, visual, and digital elements, moving across platforms and languages simultaneously to accomplish their work. Throughout this process, a translator must also negotiate her or his own perceptions and positionality on the issue(s) being described in the source text, doing her or his best to successfully represent the intentions of the source text’s author. In this way, contemporary translation practices are multilingual/multimodal activities that require extensive rhetorical negotiation. Translation moments, in turn, are analytical frameworks that can help rhetoric and composition researchers and technical communicators better understand how and when specific modes are deployed by multilingual communicators throughout the translation process. Thus, translation moments can inform how researchers, teachers, and practitioners understand language fluidity as a situated practice (rather than only as an ideological orientation or policy).

Figure 3 illustrates how translation moments fit into what might be considered a typical translation workflow in a professional context (Dimitrova; Gonzales and Turner). In the diagram, the “input” segment on the right-hand side represents the beginning of the process, where a client submits an initial translation project or when a translator first opens a document to translate. The “output” segment on the left-hand side represents when the translation has to be delivered, returned to a client, or published in a particular venue. Thus, figure 3 emphasizes that translators are typically working with the understanding that they will have to deliver a translated product based on a predetermined timeline; there is always an exigency and expectation for translation work, pushing professional translators to make informed rhetorical decisions for particular audiences in specific moments in time.

In addition to the submission and delivery periods, figure 3 illustrates other common activities encompassed in the translation process: reading, research, language transformation, design, formatting, editing, proofreading, and collaborating. Although every translator’s process is slightly different (Dimitrova), the activities labeled in figure 3 are common practices in the written translation workflow (Gonzales and Turner). For instance, following the initial submission of a translation project, the translator may do some preliminary reading of the document to assess the type of language or project encountered. Next, the translator might do some research on the topics being covered in the document being translated, aiming to understand the subject area that the translator will be working within for this project. After getting a better sense of the
subject area at hand, the translator might begin actually transforming words on the document itself. Then, the translator may engage in some design activities while transforming visual information on the translated document. Throughout this process, the translator may also engage in formatting, editing, and proofreading activities and may even collaborate with other translators, to share ideas or garner stories to help with decision making in the translation process, before delivering the final product. Thus, the gray text and gray segmented lines in figure 3 represent activities that may be experienced at different lengths and to different degrees, depending on the context of the translation and the specific experiences and common practices of a translator.

Although the solid gray lines in figure 3 represent discreet translation activities within the translation process, the multi-shaded lines in the diagram represent translation moments. As evidenced by the varying lengths of the multi-shaded segments in figure 3, translation moments are not consistent across the entire process of translation. Instead, translation mo-
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ments are instances of rhetorical negotiation that can take place at different points throughout the translation process, as translators pause to decide which word to use for a particular audience, which sentence phrasing would be most effective in a particular context, and how to best convey a specific idea in a particular language. Much like pauses in the writing process, translation moments are instances where translators pause to think and decide how to transform a specific word, phrase, or concept.

As evidenced by the varying lengths of the multi-shaded line segments in figure 3, translation moments can vary in frequency and duration, depending, once again, on the context of the translation project and on the specific experiences and practices of the translator. Translation moments can take place during any other activity in the translation process (e.g., during research, design, or formatting), as translators pause to make decisions within their process. Translation moments can also extend between activities—for example, as translators move between editing and design in order to make a specific decision about how to transform a word or phrase from one language to another. Hence, a translator may experience several translation moments during a translation process, pausing as needed to define and transform a specific term, word, or concept.

During these pauses (i.e., translation moments), translators may use a wide range of different strategies (e.g., Sandra’s layering of a visual with various gestures) to contextualize translations for their particular audience. These strategies include the use of words in both source and target languages (e.g., Spanish and English), but they may also encompass the use of other semiotic resources and practices, such as visuals, gesturing, and storytelling. Thus, translation moments are the instances where multilingual communicators are pushed to think beyond the limitations of alphabetic languages and symbol systems, using any mode or resource available to make meaning (e.g., using Google Translate, gesturing and telling stories with another translator, or drawing or sketching a description for a concept that may not have a specific name in a given language). For this reason, as I discuss further in chapters 2 and 3, translation moments represent the rhetorical invention embedded in the translation process, signaling a space where translators employ multilingual, multimodal resources to make information available across languages. Although we can understand all language as fluid and constantly in motion, situating this fluidity within the work of translators and, more specifically, within translation moments can help researchers more intricately understand how, when, and why multilingual communicators layer communicative practices and semiotic resources to make information available across languages. Following this
understanding of what translation moments are and how they fit into the more general activities of translation, chapters 2 through 6 of this study move on to describe the various strategies and practices performed by translators during translation moments and to make a broader argument for the value of translation in the research and pedagogies of rhetoric and composition and of technical communication.

• Drawing on my work with the communities described in this project and on my own experiences as a translator, I understand that translators do not pull from distinct, static sets of linguistic containers (e.g., labeled “Spanish” or “English”) in any given interaction. Based on the same experiences, I also understand that any translation interaction requires translators to present a “final” version of their linguistic conversions, whether through written translated documents or through live verbal translations of information (what practitioners call “interpretation”). Hence, I situate the studies presented in this project within the work of translators because of the very exigency embedded in this profession, because of the need to provide a translation “answer,” even if this answer changes in each utterance within any given context.

As I will further discuss in the case studies presented in chapters 5 and 6, translation moments extend theories of language in rhetoric and composition (e.g., Canagarajah; Horner, Lu, et al.), sociolinguistics (e.g., García and Li Wei), and critical translation studies (e.g., Yajima and Toyosaki), situating language fluidity in the multilingual, multimodal communicative practices of contemporary writers and professionals. Translation moments are analytical units that may be coded within the translation processes of multilingual communicators, providing a framework for studying the process and practice of translation rather than solely focusing on the products of these negotiations. Perhaps more important, translation moments are inherently multimodal and multilingual, reflecting the lived experiences of multilingual communicators who constantly think across languages, modalities, and technologies, to transform and adapt information for various audiences.

In translation studies, researchers have begun to pay attention to how translators leverage multimodal resources when translating information, acknowledging the role that visuals and other non-alphabetic resources play in the communication of ideas across languages (Ketola). In rhetoric and composition, researchers have also recently begun to acknowledge multimodal resources as part of the translingual orientation to writing, emphasizing how digital and non-alphabetic tools and technologies can be
used to communicate ideas beyond the limitations of standard written English (Canagarajah; Lu and Horner). By embedding translation moments within these conversations, coding specifically for how multimodal resources are leveraged during translation processes, I position translation as a multimodal activity that can further impact how we recognize and respond to language difference in both professional and academic spaces. To this end, in chapter 2, I further explain how I studied translation moments, such as Sandra’s discussion of mazorca, to better understand how individuals layer multimodal resources to translate information rhetorically. In addition, I there further contextualize my study of translation moments in my relationships with the translators who make this work happen, arguing that to fully understand and acknowledge the work of translation, scholars and teachers need to make increasing efforts to understand the cross-cultural, multilingual lived experiences of linguistically diverse individuals.