Sites of Translation

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As I was wrapping up my work with both KLN and the Language Services Department, I also entered the academic job market, applying and interviewing for faculty positions with specializations in both rhetoric and composition and technical communication. While interviewing at different stages and sharing this project with people at institutions in various parts of the United States, I frequently got asked different versions of the same question: “Your work on translation and multilingual/multimodal communication is interesting, but (how) is it relevant here?” (Gonzales, “But Is That Relevant Here?”). While continued growth in international student enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities has led to increased need for training in multilingual communication (Redden), these conversations clarified for me that issues of language diversity are still sometimes segmented and positioned as only relevant to departments and institutions with large numbers of nontraditional students. In predominantly white institutions and in departments with small numbers of students who identify as multilingual, research on and practices about multilingual communication (e.g., the translation work presented through the project discussed in this book) are sometimes deemed interesting at best and irrelevant more broadly. In rhetoric and composition specifically, students who are institutionally classified as “English language learners,” “L2 learners,” or “multilingual learners/writers” or who are given other institutional labels to signal linguistic difference are sometimes assigned to remedial, basic, or pre-composition courses. This common practice can deem “traditional” writing courses, students, and faculty as presumably free from the responsibility of acknowledging and addressing language difference and its presence in all contemporary classrooms (Matsuda).

I aim to articulate more directly in this chapter that research on transla-
tion and multilingual communication, such as the case studies in chapters 5 and 6, is relevant and valuable to all facets of writing research, instruction, and practice. Rather than positioning translation as something relevant only to students and communicators who transform information across named languages (e.g., English and Spanish), I argue that writing researchers and teachers should recognize translation as a foundational activity for all writers and communicators, particularly if our disciplines and fields want to continue expanding our notions of writing beyond standard alphabetic modalities. Rather than segmenting translation work to something that only multilingual communicators do, we might recognize translation work of multilinguals as a model of how ideas can be rhetorically transformed for various audiences, learning from the multimodal strategies that multilingual communicators use to adapt their ideas across contexts and communities. It is key that we not only recognize that translation as relevant to all communication but also use translation frameworks to intricately account for ranges and dimensions of communicative fluidity in culturally situated contexts, leveraging (rather than flattening) difference as an opportunity for rhetorical action. To this end, this chapter provides specific implications for how the translation framework presented in the project discussed in this book can inform writing research and pedagogies across fields and disciplines.

Using Translation Moments to Research and Teach Multimodality and Digital Rhetoric

Chapters 5 and 6 present examples of various translation processes enacted by both student translators in a university organization and professional translators in a small business that offers language services. It is important to note that the translation process of each participant in my research was unique and directly related to the participant’s own history and lived experiences. Yet, by analyzing these diverse practices across contexts and zooming in on how translation practices are negotiated during translation moments, I was able to trace some patterns in the strategies frequently deployed by translators as they adapt information across languages. These patterns and strategies (introduced in chapter 2) are further illustrated in figure 16.

The translation strategies depicted in figure 16 (e.g., negotiating, repeating, gesturing) were deployed and layered by multilingual communicators during translation moments, when translators used a variety of se-
miotic resources to transform a specific word or phrase for a specific audience in a particular rhetorical context. At KLN, translation strategies like negotiating and using digital translation tools were used by participants as they translated news stories from English to Spanish for their community. In this specific context, translators like Natalie and Brigitte used their cultural and technological expertise to manipulate the algorithms of digital translation tools in a way that helped them develop more options for conveying meaning to their audience in Orlando.

In the Language Services Department, the translation strategies depicted in figure 16 were used differently, particularly because the transla-
tion work in that organization is often completed under tremendous pressure in a high-stakes environment, where community members are relying on accurate translations to facilitate other activities that impact their material realities. In this professional context, translators like Sara, Catalina, Holly, and Carla, among many others, were pushed to collaborate and deploy any possible strategy or resource to help their community through translation work, drawing from their professional training in translation and from their lived experiences to make decisions during translation moments. In the Language Services Department, rhetorical strategies like storytelling, repeating, and gesturing were used more prominently than digital translation tools and deconstructing—the two most frequently used strategies at KLN.

Both at KLN and in the Language Services Department, the exigency for language transformation is paired with participants' experiences in navigating communication across languages. By analyzing translation moments in each location, I was able to trace patterns in translation across research sites, while simultaneously pausing to recognize how each individual translation project rendered the deployment of unique, situated translation strategies. In this way, the strategies depicted in figure 16 represent examples of multilingual-multimodal activities in translation—examples that grew from situated analyses of translation in context and that can be expanded as researchers continue studying translation moments in and across other locations, communities, and languages. In essence, because the work presented through the project discussed in this book represents two small research sites, the multilingual-multimodal strategies that grew out of this project serve as only one example of how translation work can help us recognize situated composing practices that simultaneously blend and cross languages and modalities.

Gunther Kress explains that the concept of “mode” (rooting the term multimodality) is “a term that allows us to get away from using language for everything. In other words, you might say there’s visual language, and there’s gestural language, and there is a language of flowers. We now say there are different modes, and modes are resources whereby we can make meaning material” (“What Is a Mode?”). In professional/technical translation work, a reliance on alphabetic language is often inefficient, as the whole challenge of the translation activity is to convey meaning beyond linguistic barriers by using whatever resources are most effective or readily available. Sometimes, linguistic translations come through easily, but often, as evidenced in the translation moments depicted in chapters 5 and 6,
alphabetic language is not the most reliable source of communication, leading translators to leverage other modes to transform meaning. By using rhetorical strategies like gesturing, sketching, or seeking information using digital translation tools, translators enact multimodal communication, moving away from “using language for everything” to using the most effective mode to convey a specific word or idea for a specific audience.

By learning about the translation strategies of multilingual communicators, writers of all backgrounds can intricately see the connections between modalities and rhetoric, using and expanding the strategies presented in figure 16 to describe how communicators can layer and repurpose meaning across languages and modes simultaneously, for specific rhetorical purposes. Because the multimodal elements of translation are enacted based on rhetorical exigencies, understanding and teaching multimodality through translation work allows us to keep rhetorical purpose and modality use in conjunction. In using translation and translation moments as a framework to teach multimodality in rhetoric and composition, we can continue to illustrate how, as Arola, Ball, and Sheppard remind us, multimodality is always inherently tied to and motivated by rhetoric. Likewise, by understanding the technical elements embedded in translation (e.g., visuals, logos, and seals in mirror translations) and by linking these elements to the professional needs and experiences of multilinguals, technical and professional writers can also trace translation moments experienced in professional contexts as information is made accessible to linguistically diverse users.

In addition to analyzing the translation moments like the ones shared in this book, writers can document and analyze how they navigate translation moments to various degrees in their daily activities, whether they are translating across named languages, within the same language, and/or across various digital tools and platforms. By pausing to recognize when we experience translation moments and by tracing the semiotic resources and practices that we deploy to navigate these moments, we can continue to account for the ways in which our multimodal composing practices are always tied to broader discursive goals. Using translation moments as analytical units can help us see ranges and degrees in language fluidity and how we deploy specific communicative practices when communicating with different audiences. Rather than flattening language difference by merely saying that everyone translates, translation moments allow us to see how, when, and why translators use different rhetorical strategies to make information accessible for specific audiences at specific moments in time.
Using A Revised Rhetoric of Translation to Connect Languages, Modalities, and Cultures

While the concept of translation moments can be used to analyze the specific multilingual and multimodal elements deployed in language transformation, the framework of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation allows us to make deeper connections between these multilingual/multimodal translation elements and their surrounding cultural influences. As Kress (“What Is a Mode?”) clarifies, modes are “cultural resources for making meaning,” practices situated within our lived existences that allow us to make (and interpret) meaning through touch, visuals, smell, and more. Putting Kress’s definition of modes in conversation with the lived experiences of multilinguals who navigate meaning across languages, we can see that the modalities that communicators choose to use and the modalities that specific communicators can interpret are entirely dependent on several cultural factors. For translators like Sara, Brigitte, Natalie, and others, working across semiotic resources and layering communicative practices is not a stylistic choice or preference. Instead, translation practices are situated both in a specific rhetorical situation (e.g., the transformation of a birth certificate from Spanish to English) and in the cultural history and experience of the individual translator(s) completing this task. For example, if Sara in the Language Services Department is translating a birth certificate, the strategies she uses to navigate translation moments in that project will depend both on the situation that prompted the exigency for the translation (e.g., a mother needs to enroll her child in school) and on Sara’s skills, training, and experience (e.g., Sara’s cultural background, her training and knowledge of translation dictionaries, and how she may be feeling on the day that the translation project arrived). Thus, orienting to translation work through A Revised Rhetoric of Translation can help researchers, teachers, and practitioners of writing to understand the cultural influences and the rhetorical context fueling linguistic choices in a specific moment.

In “Cultivating a Rhetorical Sensibility in the Translingual Writing Classroom,” Juan Guerra illustrates the importance of connecting communicative practices to culture and experience.

We falter in our efforts to help our students understand what a translingual approach is because we have been leading them to think that we expect them to produce a particular kind of writing that mimics what we call code-meshing rather than getting them to understand that what we want instead is for them
to call on the rhetorical sensibilities many of them already possess but put aside because of what they see as a jarring shift in context. (231–32)

As Guerra argues, the reason some recent efforts to embed linguistic difference in the composition classroom have been unsuccessful is not because writing teachers are failing to encourage students to use their entire linguistic and composing resources. Rather, these pedagogical challenges arise when teachers fail to understand how students’ linguistic resources are always tied to broader cultural-rhetorical contexts. In other words, we experience challenges in teaching language diversity when we tell students to translanguaging (to work across languages and modalities in the classroom) without setting up the cultural-rhetorical environment that will facilitate these interactions.

Rather than merely pushing students to incorporate modes and languages in our classroom projects, A Revised Rhetoric of Translation teaches us the importance of recognizing how these languages and modes are tied to various histories and lived experiences, as well as how the specific layering of these communicative resources and practices may have real consequences in the lives of our students and their communities. Just as Carla in the Language Services Department relived her experiences as a mother when interpreting for a patient during a birth, students in our classrooms and professionals in our workplaces may be both reliving and sharing their lived experiences as they blend languages and semiotic resources through their work. Translating and translanguaging thus requires teachers and researchers of rhetoric and writing to support the language work in which students and professionals engage and to appreciate the practices that students deploy, not as adherences to or deviations from our own expectations, but as evidence of multilinguals’ own rhetorical and cultural labor.

Putting “context aside” is impossible within the framework of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation, as evidenced by the experiences of the translators depicted in this book. When clients like Teresa walk into the Language Services Department, they put a face and a story to the work of translation, causing translators like Sara and Catalina to develop the rhetorical sensibility needed (Lorimer Leonard) to understand the context and exigency for the multilingual, multimodal work in which they will engage to translate Teresa’s documents. Similarly, student translators at KLN frequently reflect on their own educational and personal experiences as they translate for their community. They frequently reference “their” Latinx community in “their” city of Orlando, bringing with them a critical understanding of how their trans-
lation choices (and the semiotic resources that they incorporate into these choices) may be perceived by audiences from a specific physical location and from the various cultures represented in the same city. Thus, for the translators depicted in this book and, as Alanna Frost and Suzanne Blum Malley remind us, for multilinguals in general, “modality matters,” and choosing the wrong language or mode in a specific interaction may render drastic consequences, both for the individual translating and for the audiences or clients receiving the translation work.

As writing researchers, teachers, and practitioners continue developing models for discussing language fluidity, I encourage us to keep in mind the cultural situatedness of language use, resisting the tendency to generalize or perhaps unintentionally erase layers and dimensions of cultural difference as we argue for all language as “multilingual” or “translingual.” I hope that we can use the framework of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation to continue to recognize that all composing and communicative acts are different in very unique, cultural and rhetorical ways and require acts of translation (Gilyard). By continuing to listen for this communicative difference through frameworks like the one presented in this book, we can continue recognizing (rather than erasing) the dimensions, ranges, and intellectual work embedded in the multilingual/multimodal practices already being enacted in our classrooms, professions, and communities, with and without our prompting.

By sharing stories of the translators who were gracious enough to be included in this book, I sought to make an intervention in contemporary conversations about language diversity in writing research and instruction, allowing us a space to pause within our discussions of language fluidity to further understand how language is transformed and repurposed by individuals who identify with heritage languages other than standardized Eng-lishes. Through this discussion, I aimed both to illustrate how multilingual communicators navigate languages and technologies simultaneously and to reposition the work of translation as a cultural-rhetorical strategy, or techne, in itself.

In “Wampum as Hypertext,” Angela Haas urges researchers to “resist the dominant notions of what it means to be technologically ‘literate’ or ‘advanced,’” pushing us to “critically reflect on the struggles for and engage with discussions [about] digital and visual rhetorical sovereignty” (95). In linking Indigenous rhetorical practices to contemporary discussions about technology, Haas argues that what we position as “discoveries” or recent developments in rhetoric may actually erase (intentionally or not) long-standing cultural practices that have been taking place for centuries both
in and outside our classrooms and workplaces. Elaborating on this argument, Haas continues by explaining that the word *digital* “refers to our fingers, our digits, one of the primary ways (along with our ears and eyes) through which we make sense of the world and with which we write into the world” (84).

My goal for this book was to illustrate the multilayered ways in which multilinguals make sense of the world as they are simultaneously impacted by the world—a world that inherently excludes the communicative and intellectual contributions of people who work outside the limitations of Western, English-dominant rhetorical frameworks. To be sure, the frameworks that I present in this book are not, as Haas cautions, new “discoveries.” Although the stories of my participants serve as representations of why language diversity matters to contemporary discussions about writing research and practice, I encourage writing researchers, teachers, and professionals to further engage with the rhetorical work of translation, pushing this project further into analyses across different contexts, languages, and communities.

As we consider how to expand concepts like translation moments and *A Revised Rhetoric of Translation*, I also encourage us to think about the ways in which translation in itself can serve as a technology that can help us and our students continue repositioning writing beyond standardized written English. As a techne that facilitates creativity and craftsmanship, translation can help us continue recognizing and giving credit to the rhetorical, creative work of linguistic diversity, helping push against deficit models that, for many decades, have been geared toward linguistically diverse individuals in the United States. By recognizing translation as a powerful technology that is already embedded in the cultural practices of marginalized communities, we can better account for the intellectual labor of language translation that takes place both inside and outside our classrooms. Furthermore, in teaching translation as a technology (through concepts like translation moments and *A Revised Rhetoric of Translation*), we can continue to reposition language diversity at the center of our classroom and professional practices, rather than isolating language transformation work to something that only applies to some populations. In this way, we can “consider how our commitment to communities [and diversity] challenges [and informs] our disciplinary norms” (Ríos, “Cultivating,” 63). By leveraging translation and all its multilingual/multimodal elements, we can also continue to focus on the many powerful contributions (rather than challenges) that language diversity offers us, our students, our communities, and our fields of study.