The Mother (Murdered) Tongues: Perspectives on Translingual Practices in English-Only Teaching and Learning among ‘Non-Native Monolingual’ Speakers of English

**1. Title:**

# The Mother (Murdered) Tongues: Perspectives on Translingual Practices in English-Only Teaching and Learning among ‘Non-Native Monolingual’ Speakers of English

Abstract:

The endorsement of English-only teaching and learning practices in countries where English is a second language has become popular. The question, therefore, remains if the exclusive use of English in teaching and learning in ESL countries can be reconsidered from translingual perspectives to achieve not only linguistic competence but also academic success. We invite participants to question the normative assumptions that define languages as fixed and what such assumptions mean for a monolingual English speaker in an English as a second language country. Also, what does destabilizing this normative monolingual status of English-only teaching and learning practice in ESL countries mean for effective academic writing performance? Finally, in what ways do indigenous languages serve as a vehicle for translingual practices in teaching and learning in ESL countries?

The purpose of this project is to develop an edited collection featuring timely conversations about the ways to approach transcending monolingual assumptions of English-only teaching and learning practices in ESL countries.

# 2. Facilitators’ information:

* Name: Olalekan Adepoju
* Pronouns: he/him/his
* Affiliation: The College of Staten Island
* Email address: olalekan.adepoju@csi.cuny.edu
* Bio statement/background (What expertise do you bring to this project?) He is a college professor who teaches courses in writing and rhetoric at the College of Staten Island, New York. His research interests lie in the intersections of rhetoric, transnational writing, empathy, and social justice, particularly among the ESL population. He has authored various articles, each contributing valuable insights to the field of English language, Rhetoric, and Composition. Olalekan Adepoju is an experienced educator both in Nigeria and the US. Before moving to the US, he taught English composition primarily in an English-only context to secondary school students. In the US, Olalekan has continued to teach composition courses to ESL students as well as serve as a mentor to non-native English-speaking writing instructors.
* Name: Ganiu Bamgbose
* Pronouns: he/him/his
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* Bio statement/background (What expertise do you bring to this project?) Dr Ganiu Bamgbose is a lecturer in the Department of English, Lagos State University. He holds a PhD in English with a specialization in humor studies The hallmark of his scholarship is humor as a tool for social re-engineering. He has published in both local and international journals. His works have appeared in journals such as the *European Journal of Humor Research*, *Israeli Journal of Humor*, *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *Linguistik Online*, *Legon Journal of Humanities*, *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, among others. He has published two books and co-edited one. He currently teaches and researches in aspects of applied linguistics such as pragmatics, (critical) discourse analysis, stylistics, sociolinguistics, and the English language in Nigeria. In addition to his two books on grammar, Ganiu has published over a hundred newspaper articles on the use of English language in Nigeria, giving him great insight into the challenges experienced by the users of the language for academic purposes and as the language of academic writing.

# 3. Primary Contact:

Olalekan Adepoju

# 4. Description (please include a Works Cited):

In all the countries where the English language is used as a second language, the language has continued to function as the primary language of teaching and learning as well as an official language. The English language serves as the mediating language with the assumption that it would mitigate the challenges of linguistic pluralism in those ESL countries. Sadly, given the prominence of the English language, the indigenous languages are suffering from extinction and endangerment as more users, especially the more youthful population, are becoming monolingual speakers of English. This development has come as a piece of unsurprising news to language scholars and policy experts because of the assumptions that have normalized an English-only (monolingual) language education policy.

Scholars have observed that this state of English-only practice as the language of teaching and learning is promoted by the prestige greatly tied to competence and fluency in the use of the English language (Ayodele, 2004; Brock-Utne, 2007; Mwinda & van der Walt, 2015; Bamgbose, 2020). Bamgbose (2020) observes that English has become the language of the home among many Nigerians, and it is even a taboo in some homes to speak the indigenous mother tongue as it is derogatorily described as vernacular. He further submits that this societal prestige for the English language in Nigeria, for instance, has resulted in hybrids who neither speak their indigenous languages with pride nor speak the borrowed language with finesse, resulting in a situation where the Nigerian speakers negotiate the much-revered English through the linguistic peculiarities of the indigenous languages that they do not cherish.

In Mwinda & van der Walt’s (2015) study of possible strategies for transitioning from English-only to translanguaging practices in Namibian schools, they noted that although Namibia educational policy supports the use of local languages alongside English, this principle is not embraced fully by many schools, as English serves as the main language of teaching and learning (101). While this endorsement of English-only instructional practices has become popular, learners’ competency and performance in the language are still reported as insufficient. Bamgbose explains that the coveted English is, surprisingly, not spoken with the expected competence despite the neglect of the indigenous languages. In this project, we conceptualize this phenomenon as the murdering of English (that is, English as the murdered tongue) while also neglecting the mother tongues.

On the contrary, it has been established that linguistic and academic competence thrives better when teaching and learning practices are supplemented by their indigenous languages (Fafunwa, Macauley and Sokoya, 1989). Ene (2007), using Nigeria as a case study, submits that education through indigenous languages will stimulate learners for productivity more than the foreign language, and make learning more functional. However, the primary challenge is re-orienting the stakeholders of the English-only medium of teaching and learning in ESL contexts, including administrators, teachers, learners, and parents, on embracing practices that consider the use of multiple languages in literacy development, for instance, the translingual practice.

Many decades ago, the resolution for the Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) was formalized and adopted in US composition classrooms. This resolution, Larson (1974) argues, represented a shift in attitude toward considering language varieties in the composition classroom in the United States. In ESL classrooms, the exclusivity of English in teaching and learning has also experienced a decline. It has been documented in research that although formal classroom activities in ESL classrooms are performed in English, students employ the use of different language practices, including those they bring from home when talking, arguing, trying to make their points, and collaborating on a project together (Garcia and Sylvan, 2011; Abraham and Kedley, 2021). The question, therefore, remains if the exclusive use of English in teaching and learning in ESL countries can be reconsidered from different theoretical perspectives to achieve not only linguistic competence but also academic success.

In this project, we invite participants to think about this reconsideration from the perspective of translingualism. We see translingual practices as a unique theoretical perspective for transcending monolingual assumptions of English-only teaching and learning practices in ESL countries. As Horner and colleagues (2011) aver, translingual practices help us to see differences in language as a resource for producing nuances in writing, speaking, reading, and listening instead of a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage (303). Invoking Pennycook’s (2019) submission on translingual practices, we ask participants to question the normative assumptions that define languages as fixed and what such assumptions mean for a monolingual English speaker in an English as a second language country. Also, what does destabilizing this normative monolingual status of English-only teaching and learning practice in ESL countries mean for effective academic writing performance? Finally, in what ways do indigenous languages serve as a vehicle for translingual practices in teaching and learning in ESL countries?

Works Cited

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Abraham, Stephanie, and Kate Kedley. "You Can't Say Pupusa Without Saying Pupusa: Translanguaging in a Community-Based Writing Center." *Community Literacy Journal* 15.1 (2021): 5.

Horner, Bruce, et al. "Language difference in writing: Toward a translingual approach." *College English* 73.3 (2011): 303-321.

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# 5. Annotated schedule:

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| --- | --- |
| Day 1: Wednesday, February 28, 2024 | |
| 12:00 p.m-12:30 p.m | Conference welcome |
| 12:30 p.m.-2:00 p.m | Keynote on a theme related to collaboration |
| 3:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. | Work session   * Start by sharing reflection and mapping questions * Groups based on mapping activity to begin sketching out collection sections * Individual writing activity – outlining * Screen break each 60-75 minutes |
| 8:00 p.m. | Social Activity – Trivia night |
| Day 2: Thursday, February 29, 2024 | |
| 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m. | Reports from groups on day 1 work session.  Deep listening for commonalities, redundancies and spaces for change or movement. |
| 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. | Writing in small groups  15-20 minute break at a time(s) chosen by group |
| 3:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m. | Whole group activity on mapping theoretical frameworks for sections and individual contributions.  10 minute break during this block |
| 4:30 p.m.-5:00 pm | Individual work – shaping theoretical frameworks for individual proposals |
| 8:00 p.m. | Group dinner (A portion of the facilitation stipend will be used to distribute food delivery gift cards to facilitate a shared meal.) |
| Day 3: Friday, March 1, 2024 | |
| 12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. | Reports from groups on day 2 work session.  Individual writing session to finish proposals  Screen breaks when needed |
| 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. | Meet in small groups or whole group (group decides) to prepare for deliverables presentation |
| 3:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m. | Showcase of deliverables |

# 6. Modality:

Please indicate one preference.

**Zoom (Feb 28-Mar 1)**

# 7. Number of participants:

We estimate a productive session would include a minimum of 12 and maximum of 20 participants.

# 8. Participant background:

Our aim for this project is to provide an avenue for educators, administrators and policymakers in countries where English is used as a second language to discuss innovative and inclusive language teaching practices. We recognize that scholars have started giving increasing attention to practices that problematize English-only instructions in countries where English is used as a second language. For this project, we seek to bring not only scholars but also other stakeholders in education such as policymakers and administrators together to outline a transnational theoretical framework to address this focus. We seek a range of identities and expertise from all stages of careers, including experienced teachers (either elementary or secondary school) teaching assistants, graduate students, early career researchers, and other professionals. To that extent, we invite language teachers, pedagogical linguistics, and educational policymakers from different ESL countries around the world to contribute to this collaborative.

# 9. Preparation:

1. Participants will be asked to read a brief text before the conference.

**Parmegiani, Andrea. "Translanguaging in a bilingual writing programme: the mother tongue as a resource for academic success in a second language." Language, Culture and Curriculum 35.3 (2022): 290-302.**

1. Participants can also bring a copy of their country’s National Policy on Education to the conference if they can find one.

# 10. Final-day deliverable:

We intend to present a general outline or framework for the future edited collection, including main topics and associated theoretical frameworks. Each participant will compose (or begin) a proposal for the collection. We will have a general timeline of the work needed to produce and where we hope to end up.

# 11. How will participants get credit?

Participants will be invited to contribute to the collection as authors. The facilitators will be authors and co-editors.

# 12. What happens after the conference?

We intend for the participants to have a rough proposal and outline of how to move their chapter forward at the end of the conference. Afterward, facilitators will check in with participants once in two months. We will plan a writing workshop on Zoom in the fall to share progress reports and provide feedback as needed.

# 13. Working and learning environment:

We believe that the focus of our project welcomes discussions on inclusion and diversity in the language of teaching and learning in ESL countries. We necessarily hope to de-emphasize the domination of oppressive teaching and learning strategies warranted by English-only practices in these ESL countries, many of which had experienced different forms of colonialism. Hence, as facilitators, we will foster an inclusive and accessible environment by centering our common history, problematizing dominant ideologies and assumptions that permeate teaching and learning in ESL contexts. Our workshop process is designed to center diverse perspectives that can enhance the ideas and practices that are ultimately forwarded in the collection. We know virtual meetings come with their challenges, but we are designing our workshop with the 2021 Watson Conference Commitments in mind. We intend to make it as flexible as possible as participants can take as many breaks as they need to make their experience worthwhile, and we will use technology during our evening gatherings to connect through games and shared meals. Throughout the workshop, we will promote care and accountability through our discussion structures and leadership strategies. For example, we will create discussion guides for small group and large group discussions that will state our expectations for participants to be mindful of their participation in those conversations. We will not tolerate hostile or harassing behavior, especially that which functions to oppress marginalized groups. Participants who commit this behavior will be removed from the Zoom meeting. We agree that participation is a privilege, not a right. The success of our collection depends upon our ability to interrogate the teaching of writing from diverse perspectives; we are committed to creating an inclusive environment that allows participants and facilitators to approach the workshop as a space for learning and growth.