

THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

English as an Additional Language

REBECCA L. WALKOWITZ

We cannot expand what we teach and what our students read in our classrooms without promoting a more robust engagement with the languages that operate both within and across literary histories. As I have argued elsewhere, reading literatures in English is not enough; to understand the history and future of literatures in English, we need also to read literatures that begin in languages beyond English (Walkowitz, “Less Than One Language” 114). This is true intellectually, but it is also true institutionally: the mission of teaching and research is predicated on an open and inclusive community, what philosophers call civic hospitality, and there is no civic hospitality without multilingualism. You need multilingualism if you hope to invite, nourish, and grow—and not simply welcome—a diversity of voices on campus, partnerships with communities off campus, and collaborations across region, culture, and nation. Civic hospitality involves changing our approach to language teaching, including what we often call second-language teaching, in ways that permeate the ethos of the university: these changes include revising how we organize syllabi, curricula, course placement, graduation requirements, and classroom dynamics, as well as dormitories, student services, admissions, departments, and schools. In this brief essay, I ask two principal questions: What language capacities must we cultivate if we hope to expand the range of literatures our students encounter? How do we revalue the languages we know and the additional languages our neighbors know?

We will not succeed in expanding literature pedagogy until we better integrate literature and language education with writing studies, creative writing, and second-language pedagogy. We are constrained in that integration by the monolingualism of our curriculum, our disciplines, and our schools. Paradoxically, the staunchest pillar of monolingualism in the academy has been the teaching of English to

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multilingual students—which is to say, the teaching of English to students who speak, write, or read some other language or languages. For many years now, a large and growing number of courses have been devoted to teaching English to undergraduates and graduate students we call foreign students, international students, or students of English as a second language. How we teach English in those settings has changed and is continuing to change, and we can learn from observing transformations in attitude and nomenclature. We need to embrace these new ways of thinking about who is learning English, what those learners know, and what other students—the ones we think speak English natively, intrinsically, or fluently—know or need to learn.

We need to embrace “English as an additional language” as an ethos for our community and as a curricular model for language pedagogy that is rooted in civic hospitality and social justice. “English as an additional language” has become the preferred term of art for second language acquisition on my campus and on many campuses because it approaches language diversity as a norm (English as one of many languages) and because it supports social justice goals that value and highlight the language contributions of all students. As a matter of curriculum in writing studies, we began with “English as a foreign language.” In the United States and abroad, courses with this label have targeted students who are visitors, immigrants, workers, or temporary inhabitants of the United States or other English-dominant spaces, but they have not generally included United States citizens or residents for whom English is not a mother tongue. Then, there was “English as a second language,” a term that withdraws the implication that there is a predetermined group of students for whom English is natural—not a “foreign language”—while retaining the implication that languages are learned in order, and that, ideally, students have learned English first. When we describe English as a foreign or second language for some of our students, we are affirming an internal trajectory from one language to another and an implied hierarchy within that trajectory: in both cases, we are teaching our community that English is first and best.

As a course title, English as an Additional Language is by no means universal even within the United States academy. We moved to this moniker at Rutgers only recently (Rutgers English Language Institute). But I strongly support the term and its implications—and not only for language education. There are conceptual benefits: “English as an additional language” asks us to think about additional languages inside English, multiple versions of English, and the premise that all languages are additional—other—to themselves, because there is no pure idiom, because languages depend on listeners as well as speakers, and because all languages are borrowed, stolen, and imposed (Derrida 1, 7). There are historical benefits: “English as an additional language” focuses our attention on the many languages that our neighbors, students, and colleagues speak, write, or understand; and the many languages that, at different moments in history and in different places in the world, have entered English and operated inside, outside, and alongside English. And there are political benefits: “English as an additional language” asks us to change the way we classify students, who are often divided into two categories, international and resident, that correspond, respectively, to language learners and language knowers. “English as an additional language” undermines the assumption that some students arrive knowing the language they need, whereas others arrive lacking that knowledge and are steered into remedial classes in which they are enjoined to catch up to the knowledge that resident users have. “English as an additional language” dissolves this pejorative dynamic, which has been central to English-language education, because it values socially and intellectually the present and aspirant multilingualism of the university community. It is therefore crucial to any project of social justice and equity on campus.

“English as an additional language,” insofar as it presumes a horizontal series of languages, rather than a hierarchical list, helps us pivot from the idea that students do or do not know a language to the idea of relative knowledge: a community in which every student both knows and lacks a language. Students know a language because they

speak Spanish, Arabic, Creole, Cantonese, English, or whatever language they have learned so far. And they lack a language because they are potential learners of one or more of the many languages spoken by other students and members of the staff and faculty. Every student is a language learner: this needs to be the new baseline. In an open and inclusive community, language education is not just for foreigners or visitors and not just for those who did not learn English at home; it is for everyone. For those of us who start with English, we need to reach out as well as draw in. We also need to acknowledge that the local is already global, already full of languages and versions of languages.

Affirming that our community is full of languages allows us to shift from deficit to contribution as we think about what students enrolled in English as an Additional Language know. Their competencies across and within languages—like all our competencies—are qualified and varied. And that is true of students enrolled in any English-language classroom: we are all learners of additional languages. The principle of additional languages functions specifically as well as generally. English and Spanish, for example, mingle in several regions of the United States, whereas there are different groups of neighboring languages in other regions of the United States and in other English-dominant nations such as Singapore, Australia, and South Africa. The additional status of English changes synchronically across place. It also changes diachronically across time, once we consider earlier axes of colonialism, migration, exchange, and globalization: English has always been additional, but not always in the same way.

To say that English is an additional language is not to say that it is a single or coherent language. Instead, we are clearing space for languages that are dominant elsewhere, for minor languages, and for minor uses of language by placing the dominant tongue in a supplementary position (Deleuze and Guattari). The horizontal register of the term *additional* assigns value to languages we use nonfluently, nonexclusively, and with varying degrees of competency, including the very minimal competency of recognizing the sounds, characters, or names of

languages we don't speak. Acknowledging the multilingual environment that threads through what appear to be monolingual situations, we become aware of borrowings across languages and the future debts and borrowings to come. In these ways, the additive quality of English is active and ongoing. The history of English is being written, right now, right here—and also somewhere else.

But it is one thing to say this, and another to teach it while also teaching works of literature. How do we create a more hospitable, less exclusive relationship to dominant languages and to literatures in dominant languages that occupy so much space in our universities? How do we explain to students that it isn't enough to know English to know English? How do we explain that anyone hoping to be knowledgeable about the literary history of any national language needs to read works of literature that began and that exist in other languages and needs to spend a great deal more time learning how to think about the languages of any one literary work?

In the space that remains, I'd like to offer some strategies for teaching English as an additional language in a classroom focused on English-language books. These strategies involve understanding the multilingual context of the "English" objects we encounter and directing our attention to objects that challenge our sense of fluency even when they seem to operate in a language we think is ours. Take, for example, this excerpt from the final pages of *Whereabouts* (2021), Jhumpa Lahiri's translation into English of *Dove mi trovo*, a novel she wrote in Italian:

The woman, who's wearing quite a bit of makeup, has a round face and large, flashing dark eyes. She reacts to the music, uninhibited, and at one point, noticing that she's in tears, I look the other way. Then she starts to teach one of her companions how to say goodbye in our language. She repeats it again and again, and they all start laughing. As if there were school children, they recite, together,
ar-ri-ve-der-ci! (156)

What is the language of this passage? How many ways can we answer that question? The passage

was written in Italian by a novelist who learned Bengali and English while growing up in the United States; she now lives in the United States and Italy. Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize for a collection of short stories she wrote in English, though she doesn't write fiction in English any longer. *Whereabouts* was written in a tongue that Lahiri learned as an adult. In that tongue, she has said, she will never be a native writer (*In Other Words* 229). But the excerpt you see on this page was not "written" by Lahiri, in the sense we usually attach to that action. Not really. The phrases you see were translated by Lahiri from a novel she wrote and first published in Italian.

We have here an Italian-language novel, written and subsequently translated by an author known widely as an English-language novelist, about a group of travelers whose language is so far removed from Italian that the narrator can't recognize what it is (155). We know that Italian is distant for the travelers, too, since they are learning to say "goodbye," an elementary phrase, on their way out of town. They know, or have learned, so little about the sounds and the common idiom that they pronounce the syllables, haltingly, one by one: "ar-ri-ve-der-ci!" This scene of rudimentary language education contrasts with the narrator's confident reference to "our language" (156). In fact, in the diegesis, there is no collective tongue. There isn't even collective knowledge—the ability to identify basic characteristics—of the multiple languages implied here. The travelers' language might be English. We don't know. Whatever it is, it isn't the narrator's language, and it isn't a language in which characters, writer, translator, and reader will ever coincide. Because the travelers speak a tongue that is ontologically unknown and unrecognizable, the passage generates the experience of an additional language, whether the book appears in Italian, English, or some other idiom altogether.

To teach my students about the principle of additional languages, I have come up with the following axioms for my English literature classroom:

1. English is only one of the languages in which English-language works are published.
2. English is only one of the languages in which English-language works are read.
3. English is only one of the languages in which English-language works are written.

The third is the toughest one, which is why we take it last.

To think about the first axiom, "English is only one of the languages in which English-language works are published," we look at the novel *Never Let Me Go*, by the Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro. Before we read the text, we look at versions of the book, which has been published in several English-language editions and has also traveled out into editions in many, many other languages. I bring a large stack of editions into the classroom and place them before the group on a table (fig. 1). I ask my students to consider, How many novels do we have here? How many editions? How many different languages are represented? Which edition, do you think, is the first edition? Is there only one first edition, and is it the same edition for all readers? I invite students to handle the books and rearrange them (fig. 2), and we return to these questions again after we have read one of the versions. Ishiguro's novel tells a story about valuing copies (human clones, tape cassettes, generic stories, secondhand objects). The text can help us consider how we identify, organize, and value its own original and translated editions (Walkowitz, "Unimaginable Largeness").

As a way of examining the second axiom, "English is only one of the languages in which English-language works are read," I ask students to consider when they first encountered a book in translation. Some say they have never read a translation at all! Others mention the Hebrew or Christian Bible, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, or *The Communist Manifesto*. I show them the tales of Hans Christian Andersen and a more recent children's book, *The Adventures of Shola*, which the Basque writer known as Bernardo Atxaga published both in the Basque language and in Spanish in 2011. The 2013 English edition, translated from the Spanish by Margaret Jull Costa and produced by the independent press Pushkin Books, won the 2014 Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation.



FIG. 1. The spines of editions of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* in Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Norwegian, and Spanish.

Pushkin Books is one of several small presses that is trying to increase and diversify the translation of literature into English by increasing and diversifying the translation of children's literature into English. Reading literature in translation, especially literature that highlights its movement from one language to another, is one way that children come to regard literature in the dominant language as literature in an additional language. We can give children the

opportunity to experience their language as one among many since the works they read in English are works being read simultaneously in other languages. They learn to be a work's additional readers rather than its first, primary, or native readers, and they learn this from the start.

For the final axiom, "English is only one of the languages in which English-language works are written," we can return to the passage from *Whereabouts*,



FIG. 2. The covers of editions of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* in Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Norwegian, and Spanish.

in which Lahiri has produced an English-language work by translating rather than by writing. Of course, translating is also a kind of writing, and most translators would be the first to say so. But Lahiri has gone out of her way to present herself as a translator of her own work, not as a rewriter. She does so, for example, by appearing twice in the copyright

material: once as writer and again as translator. In her new fiction, English is an additional language while also being the language of her greatest fluency and renown. She is thus not only a translingual writer, someone writing in a third language, she is also a translingual translator, someone translating from a third language that appears to be a first language

into a second language. Why would she do such a thing? Lahiri's fiction has become increasingly sensitive to racism's effects on perceptions of fluency, especially for migrants of color and first-generation residents, both in Italy and in the United States (Walkowitz, "On Not Knowing"). Embracing Italian, a language she will never speak or write fluently, Lahiri chooses not knowing as a strategy of antiracist cosmopolitanism. She makes English into an additional language within her works, even in the versions of the works she publishes in English.

We see another important example of English as an additional language in the archiving, collecting, composing, publishing, revising, and translating that appear throughout the novels and essays of Valeria Luiselli, who was born in Mexico, now lives in New York, and for a long time assigned the languages she used for writing to distinct genres, using Spanish for fiction and English for essays. She has written in two languages for many years, and indeed her formal and informal education was multilingual: she learned about Latin American novelists, she has said, while attending an English-medium boarding school in India ("Interview"). Luiselli's recent books have drawn on her experience of being an interpreter and translator for undocumented children in federal immigration court. In this sense, her books are made from translation. But in other senses too. *Tell Me How It Ends*, about the forty questions undocumented children are required to answer before the court, began as an essay in English, was later rewritten and expanded as an essay in Spanish, and then was in part reprinted and in part translated into English by a translator working "in consultation with the author" (*Tell Me* iv). Moving across and between languages is an engine, not simply an afterthought, of Luiselli's production.

Luiselli's award-winning *Lost Children Archive*, published in 2019, is her first novel composed in English, but it too appears to be a compilation of translated and untranslated materials: third- and first-person narration collated with audio transcription, legal documents, and candid Polaroid images. English is the language of narration, but it can never be more than a language of transmission, since so much in the story is lost or missing: unspoken

words, pieces of paper, ephemeral sounds, narrative endings, and clarity about the source of the Polaroids. Luiselli attributes much of what is missing to the systemic injuries of bureaucratic monolingualism. She conveys the texture of compiled voices not only through multiple languages on the page but through multiple media and representations of media: descriptions and transcriptions of sounds as well as the reproduction of images. The unprocessed archive, which structures so much of her work, conveys the experience of overheard or secondary experience.¹

Luiselli generates nonfluent books on purpose, and this has been part of her literary project from the beginning. Like Lahiri's work, Luiselli's incorporates translation, and she acknowledges that translation often spurs new writing, which in turn leads to more translation. When she interprets in the courts, she is not simply rendering words interlingually, from one language to another, but "reconfiguring" them, changing syntax and paragraphs to make her language meaningful for an audience that includes children (*Tell Me* 63). She is creating additional idioms of English and Spanish, or additional languages within languages, which are sensitive to age and maturity as well as region and nationality. In *Lost Children Archive*, she sometimes writes directly in the lexicon of children, forcing us to translate between an immature idiom and an adult story. Luiselli has a great deal of respect for limited points of view and a great deal of sympathy for and solidarity with characters whose points of view are blocked by violence, coercion, and poverty. She refuses to assimilate and digest those perspectives. Even in English, we are reading untranslated sources. Translation is a topic, a metaphor, and a structure of her writing.

Luiselli and Lahiri are showing us how the monolingualism of dominant languages impedes hospitality and how fiction can generate hospitality by centering the transmission of voices across languages. Contemporary writers in English are keen to add seeing and hearing to reading as one way of demonstrating the long history of intralingual writing and the relative fluencies that can make us speakers in one language and writers or listeners in

another. Many writers have used second or third languages. Over the long span of literary history, as we know, translanguaging is the norm rather than the exception. But Luiselli and Lahiri are intentionally manipulating literary history by producing translations rather than originals. They are making additional languages primary to the work of composition, circulation, and reading.

In her editor's column for the October 2020 issue of *PMLA*, Wai Chee Dimock proclaims that "monolingualism cannot and should not exist in one language alone" (845). At first, I wondered if she was arguing that more people should speak only one language or that people who use minor tongues should have the opportunity to speak only one language. I can see why she might do that. But then I noticed the interesting paradox of her statement: if we seek to nourish communities of various sizes, we need to find ways to displace the tyranny of one monolingualism at any scale, which means displacing the tyranny of English. In classrooms, this involves emphasizing new temporalities of reading and cultivating a new, more pervasive engagement with several languages and several versions of language.

So here is my brief.

We need to teach practices of future-oriented reading, or what I call future reading, which emphasize the presence of literary works in additional languages, both within what appear to be single editions and across editions that have not yet arrived. Future reading approaches the work historically and proleptically: it is the horizon of the work in many languages, some of which are yet to come; it is the work in the context of its past; and it is the work in the context of multiple presents.

Future reading involves a new temporality of reading because it makes room for works whose first publications appear in second languages or multiple languages; and because it may involve encountering works that appear at once in multiple languages and multiple versions of one language. In the classroom, we need to allow for the desequencing of original and translation as well as the desequencing of composition and publication.

Future reading also involves the desequencing of object and encounter, in which we consider

how reading contributes to the production of the work, or how the work emerges in the process of handling, interpreting, viewing, listening, circulating, and rewriting—that is, in the process of being read, including all the activities we now understand that "reading" can involve.

In support of future reading, we need to recognize all languages as additional languages. One way to do this would be to alter the way we teach reading in any language. We need to place what we have typically considered later or secondary stages of reading—reading works published in translation—at the start of reading, so that all readers are reading works that began in multiple languages, even when they are reading only in one language. Reading in translation is not an alternative to learning additional languages: it can be a pathway.

The diffusion of linguistic fluency is a condition of the inclusive ethos that I have called civic hospitality. We need to support language engagement and acquisition. It is not a matter of going back to old requirements. Instead, the goal is access and acquaintance in the service of learning how other languages work, how we work when we learn other languages, and how it is to experience both fluency and lack of fluency. We need to regard our languages less possessively. We need to share more and own less. In tongues we have regarded as dominant, we need to embrace our status as language learners, honor the additional languages that our students bring to the classroom, and place multilingual education at the center of any education worthy of the name.

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1. David James eloquently describes the novel's reliance on "echoes" and other ways of distancing "originating utterance" (411).

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