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A Poetic Inquiry into Immigrants' Experiences with Writing in a Host Language

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Article abstract

With a focus on the intersection of creative writing and research, this article reports findings from a poetic inquiry project conducted within an undergraduate writing seminar to help pre-service teachers make sense of immigrants' experiences with writing in a new culture and language. A group of undergraduate students in Ohio were invited to make found poetry based on interview data from conversations with immigrants about writing in English as their learned language. Adopting Bourdieu's theories, the research reveals the dynamics shaping the writing culture in North America. The students' found poems reflect a sensitivity to the societal, political, and ideological foundations of writing. Importantly, the poems recognize writing as a tool for immigrants' identity negotiation and highlight how rhetorical control can be used for cultural assimilation. In response, some of the students' found poems advocate for rhetorical complexity and co-constructions of new cultural futures by immigrants and their hosts.

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"OUR CULTURE IS A PRODUCT OF ACTIVE WORD": A POETIC INQUIRY INTO IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH WRITING IN A HOST LANGUAGE

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Abstract: With a focus on the intersection of creative writing and research, this article reports findings from a poetic inquiry project conducted within an undergraduate writing seminar to help pre-service teachers make sense of immigrants' experiences with writing in a new culture and language. A group of undergraduate students in Ohio were invited to make found poetry based on interview data from conversations with immigrants about writing in English as their learned language. Adopting Bourdieu's theories, the research reveals the dynamics shaping the writing culture in North America. The students' found poems reflect a sensitivity to the societal, political, and ideological foundations of writing. Importantly, the poems recognize writing as a tool for immigrants' identity negotiation and highlight how rhetorical control can be used for cultural assimilation. In response, some of the students' found poems advocate for rhetorical complexity and co-constructions of new cultural futures by immigrants and their hosts.

Keywords: poetic inquiry; Bourdieu, doxa; second language writing; intercultural rhetoric

This article is an exploration of a poetic inquiry into a group of American youths' perceptions of immigrants' experiences in North America, with a particular focus on the role of writing in immigration processes. Here I curate and discuss a number of erasure poems created by the undergraduate students in my writing seminars in a private university in Ohio, United States. As an immigrant scholar myself, I have had to constantly reflect on my academic practices, including writing, in the institutions where I have taught and conducted research after immigration. Some of my research also has been about the experiences of multilingual writers who write in multiple languages across borders and cultures (Kalan, 2014, 2021, 2022, 2024). After my immigration to Canada in 2010, I had to move to the United States to serve as a writing instructor in Ohio just before the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States. I arrived in Ohio, an important swing state soon to be won by Donald Trump, amid heated conversations about borders and immigrants. This project is the outcome of my curiosity about how these students, all of whom were middle-class Americans born in Ohio, think about newcomers to North America.

Before starting my teaching position in that university, I had started conducting an ethnographic study of the literacy practices of three multilingual writers in Toronto, Canada (Kalan, 2021). In that project, I constructed the participants' literacy narratives so teachers and curriculum developers who read the findings could make better sense of the sociocultural and power-relational aspects of immigrants' writing practices as performed in the languages of their host countries. The three writers who participated in my project had published texts in English as an adopted language and had been embraced as effective writers by Canadian academic, literary, and professional communities. They were three women from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds: one from Brazil, one from Hungary, and the third from Iran's Kurdistan. As well as intentionally approaching writers with a diversity of mother tongues, I recruited these participants because each wrote in a different genre: one of them was an academic writer, one was a novelist, and one created different forms of technical writing. I conducted this ethnography to learn how these immigrants navigated intellectual, academic, and professional networks in Canada, and how they became members of those communities. I also wanted to document how participants dealt with issues such as discrimination, assimilation, and cultural difference after their arrival in North America and how those affected their writing practices.

While I was analyzing the data that I had collected for this ethnographic project, I moved to Ohio to teach the undergraduate writing and composition courses mentioned above, and interacted with groups of pre-service American teachers who attended my writing seminars. In these courses, I used the interview data I had collected for my ethnography to conduct a parallel project with the writing students. In this second project, I invited students, some of whom I thought might end up teaching immigrants and refugees, to share their thoughts about the interview data from my project in Toronto.

I started this project as a pedagogical practice to expose the students to non-Anglophone writers' perceptions of Anglo-American writing culture and their experiences with writing in English as an additional language. I was interested to learn how these pre-service teachers—and the other American students who attended my courses—interpreted the participants' words. As mentioned above, I conducted this project during Donald Trump's presidency, when his travel ban and border policies had created energetic competing social discourses in the United States about immigration, with one side supporting and the other criticizing Trump's attack on immigration diversity by limiting the entrance of communities such as Mexicans and Muslims into the country (Villazor & Johnson, 2019). This coincidence was significant because it revealed some of the thinking of the members of the dominant social group (i.e., white middle-class Americans, the university's main student population) about minoritized groups. My project would put these students in direct contact with immigrants' experiences and would encourage them to closely read their words, pause, and thoughtfully reflect on them.

In order to document these American students' interpretations of the data, I mobilized a poetic inquiry approach (Faulkner, 2017; Galvin & Prendergast, 2012; McCulliss, 2013; Prendergast et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2012), and invited the students to create erasure poetry out of the interview transcripts that I shared with them. Erasure poetry is a form of found poetry in which writers create poems out of a text that already exists by erasing some of the text while keeping the words that resemble a poem. I included this found poetry activity in my writing seminars as a catalyst for a conversation about immigrant students' experiences with writing in English as an additional language. In this article, I share the resultant poems as the findings of this poetic inquiry project.

As you will read in the following sections, what resonated most with these undergraduate students was descriptions of the Anglo-American writing ecology and the ways in which it imposes a certain cultural and rhetorical decorum on writers who write in English. In this article, I draw on Bourdieu's field theory as an interpretative lens, to analyze the students' understandings of how immigrants navigate the Anglo-American writing ecology as a social field. I first write about Bourdieu's field theory (1979/1984, 1984/1988, 1992/1996, 1997/2000) as the theoretical framework of the project. Next, I discuss my research methods, and then share the findings of the project in the form of erasure poems. Each group of poems has been organized based on themes that help us better understand writing in English as an additional language, not only as a linguistic skill but as a form of social existence in a new culture. I present each theme by sharing the students' poems, followed by analyses exploring how the poems address the overarching question of what the process of writing in an additional language reveals about experiences of immigration.

Anglo-American Rhetoric as a Social Field

When immigrants write in their hosts' language, not only are they required to utilize linguistic and rhetorical features commonly used in that language, but they also need to navigate the cultural norms that regulate the relations of the humans who are involved in construction, evaluation, dissemination, and consumption of written text. The people involved in the dynamics of writing cultures include curriculum developers, teachers, assessors, reviewers, employers, publishers, and so on. These people's judgments about immigrants' school and university assignments, emails, resumes, application letters, and other forms of written communication affect immigrants' lives in their new contexts. The importance of the impact of such human networks on text generation and consumption requires studying writing in additional languages as an investigation into the social ecology of the dominant language—in our case, English. The poems shared in this article reveal some aspects of this ecology. Throughout this article, I use the word "ecology" as a metaphor to discuss English writing as a social space that includes humans who produce and consume texts and those who regulate textual production and consumption activities, as well as the texts themselves.

To embed the project in theoretical ground, I use Bourdieu's field theory (1979/1984, 1984/1988, 1992/1996, 1997/2000) as a lens. Bourdieu's conceptualizations can help one more easily see the impact of humans' relationships and positions within social networks on textual production dynamics:

> Bourdieu argued that in order to understand interactions between people, or to explain an event or social phenomenon, it was insufficient to look at what was said, or what happened. It was necessary to examine the social space in which interactions, transactions and events occurred [Bourdieu 2005/2000, p. 148]. (Thomson, 2012, p. 65)

Similarly, in order to understand the phenomenon of writing, it is not enough to look at what was written, we need to study the social space in which texts are produced, or the network of humans who surround, react to, and interact with the text and with its writer. Bourdieu calls this social space a *field*, where people come together to interact based on their *habitus* and *social capital*. For Bourdieu, "[h]abitus refers to a person's taken for granted, unreflected — hence largely habitual—way of thinking and acting" (Leander, 2010, p. 3), or a person's character, habits, and inclinations. Social capital is,

> membership in groups, and involvement in the social networks developing within these and in the social relations arising from the membership [which] can be utilized in efforts to improve the social position of the actors in a variety of different fields. (Siisiainen, 2003, p. 195)

One's habitus and social capital facilitate one's entrance into a social field and sustain one's membership in the field.

The relations among the humans in a social field are regulated by certain rules or *doxa.* In Bourdieu's work, "doxa" refers to,

> the apparently natural beliefs or opinions which are in fact intimately linked to field and habitus. It is the assumptions of an epoch which are taken for granted and lie beyond ideologies (orthodoxies), yet which can generate conscious struggles. (Deer, 2012, p. 115)

Doxa, thus, are the unwritten rules by which established members of a culture function, and which they use to regulate new members' cultural behavior. This article, in a sense, is an investigation concerning the doxa or the hidden cultural manners that regulate the Anglo-American "Writingworld" (Kalan, 2021, p. 89), or, English writing when imagined as a social field with human actors whose perceptions, decisions, and interactions impact the formation of textual products.

Identifying cultural norms is particularly important when we are interested in understanding the literacy practices of immigrants and refugees. Upon arriving in their host countries, immigrants enter social circles which may not appreciate their habitus and social capital because they were developed and earned in other cultural contexts. "Doxa, as a symbolic form of power, requires that those subjected to it do not question its legitimacy or the legitimacy of those who exert it" (Deer, 2012, p. 116). Before arrival in their host nations, immigrants develop their writing practices in different languages, genres, rhetorical systems, and communication contexts. Thus, when they start writing in their hosts' language, they need to navigate the doxa that regulates the intellectual, academic, and professional fields that they would like to join. In other words, as new members of a social circle, immigrants need to develop the *feel for the game* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) in order to make their intellectual capital visible.

My project, accordingly, can be theoretically defined as the identification and critique of the doxa in the world of English writing, imposed by socially and racially dominant speakers of English (traditionally referred to as "native speakers"). The pre-service teachers and other American students in my class, as members of the dominant culture, read the words of immigrant writers in order "to make explicit the forms of misrecognized symbolic power (i.e., doxa) that underpin the implicit logic of practice, expectations and relations of those operating in these fields" (Deer, 2012, p. 117).

Meaning Making through Poetic Inquiry

The research approach that guided this project was poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2017; Galvin & Prendergast, 2012; McCulliss, 2013; Prendergast et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2012). Poetic inquiry is a form of qualitative research that, as a form of arts-based inquiry (Finley et al., 2020), deploys artistic creation in the process of research to reveal and express complex meanings:

> Poetic inquiry is the use of poetry in inquiry crafted from research endeavors, either before a project analysis, or as a project analysis, and/or poetry that is part of or that constitutes an entire research project. The key feature of poetic inquiry is the use of poetry as/in/for inquiry. (Faulkner, 2017, p. 210)

Researchers who mobilize poetic inquiry use the flexibility of poetic lyricism and imagery as an epistemological tool to tap into the complexities of phenomena. In this form of research, we use the hermeneutic potentials of poetry to unveil meanings that remain hidden or unnoticed in conventional academic language. "Poetic inquiry is a way of knowing through poetic language and devices; metaphor, lyric, rhythm, imagery, emotion, attention, wide-awakeness, opening to the world, self-revelation" (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxxvii). As well as generating new meanings, poetic inquiry facilitates an alternative form of communication of findings, drawing on audiences' appreciation of poetic language as a more familiar linguistic form in comparison with academic writing (Fernández-Giménez et al., 2019; McNiff, 2017). Although some readers might find engaging with poetry difficult, or even daunting, depending on the resultant poems and how they are disseminated, poetic inquiry can escape the constraints of academic language in order to reach a more diverse audience. Additionally, the participants who contribute to poetic inquiry projects by creating poems, as was the case with this project, may embrace the research more comfortably knowing that they are not being viewed as *subjects* of the study but co-investigators and meaning makers.

Butler-Kisber (2010) holds that, in poetic inquiry, poems are created in two main ways: generated poetry and found poetry. Whereas in generated poetry, the researchers use their own words, in a found poetry approach, the poem is extracted from the participants' words or other textual data. My project was a found poetry project in which the students created poems out of the interview data that I shared with them. There is an established tradition of employing found poetry in literacy and language education research (Pindyck, 2017) and in other research fields that make use of textual performance as a source of data. For instance, Allen and Simon (2021) invited eighth-grade students to create poetry out of pages torn from Ray Bradbury's (1953) novel *Fahrenheit 451.* They used found poetry to allow students to reconstruct, and "unsettle" (Allen & Simon, 2021, p. 43) this canonical text. Burdick (2011) used found poetry as a form of data analysis in which the participants and the researcher collaboratively generated meaning by co-creating poetry based on interview data. Dill et al. (2016) worked with lesbian, gay, and bisexual migrants in Johannesburg to create erasure poems that showed how the participants interacted with society, were recognized, and enacted their rights. In a teacher education program, Meyer (2008) asked pre-service teachers to use found poetry to explore their identities as teachers, and Prendergast (2006) used found poetry as a form of literature review to curate and connect texts and the theories that they represented.

In this project, the found poetry approach allowed students to "turn data into poetry" (Owton, 2017, p. 43). At the same time, the students also used "poetry as reflective writing"

(p. 85) to think about their own and other people's writing practices and processes. I invited the students to create erasure poetry as a form of found poetry. In erasure poetry, also called blackout or redaction poetry, poets erase words from an existing text in a manner that the remaining words construct a poem. Using erasure poetry to make sense of data is particularly significant when the poet-researchers are themselves stakeholders in a social relation because of their positionalities. Erasure poetry not only allows researchers to interpret interviewees' words, but also encourages them to listen to their own voices in a dialogic relationship with the data:

> This kind of engagement [erasure poetry] does not ask students to come to one meaning, but to understand the self as it may play itself out across a medium or narrative. Students are asked to engage simply to create sense for themselves. . . . Erasure poetry. . . challenges the poet to discern their own discourse within the text and enact their voice through creative manipulation of the source material. (Callaghan et al., 2018, pp. 91, 99)

The found poems shared in this article are as much about the original writers' experiences of English writing culture as they are about white Anglophone pre-service teachers' perceptions of the culture. Hence, in connection with Bourdieu's field theory, the poems that you will read below describe the doxa that rules English writing culture, identified both by new (immigrant writers) and established (the American students) members of this social field. Cultural norms and doxa that facilitate or prevent one's membership in a social circle are complex. They are at times difficult to identify even by the members of these circles. My hope is that the linguistic leeway provided by poetry can reveal some of these norms and doxa in this creative textual dialogue.

Methods and Materials

I distributed interview transcripts (from Kalan, 2021) among undergraduate students in four different writing seminars, and asked them to identify poems in the texts that I randomly shared with them. The transcripts, printed on letter-sized paper sheets, contained words from the three multilingual writers described above— three women who were recent immigrants to Canada and who actively used writing because of the academic and professional requirements of their careers. These women had spoken with me about how they navigated the dominant writing culture in Canadian educational and professional settings. They shared their perceptions of the culture's dynamics, regulations, and expectations. They explained how they negotiated their native rhetorics in the new environment, and when they decided to adopt their hosts' rhetorical culture. These writers also spoke about times when they resisted the culture to remain connected with their native writing practices.

Some of the students in my writing seminars were pre-service teachers who, at some point in their future careers, will likely teach students with immigrant or refugee backgrounds.

I decided to share my interview transcripts with them so that they could closely read and reflect on these transnational writers' perceptions. Also, engaging in creating found poetry would allow the students to act in the role of my co-investigators by engaging in data analysis through text creation. In this form of data analysis, the words and statements picked to constitute a poem represent significant themes that can be presented as research findings.

Before the students started to read and work on the interview transcripts, we discussed the role of empathy in research and creative processes. I invited the students to approach the writers' words in a conscious attempt to learn from them beyond the current media hype. I highlighted that the students now had the opportunity to work with other people's words, an act that would require an ethical stance of respect for others' thoughts and opinions. I also emphasized that I would maintain the same attitude when interacting with their poems. I clarified that I would use their poems in future presentations of the project with ultimate respect and appreciation of their will to engage in such a dialogue by avoiding judgment or criticism, and, instead, would utilize genuine intent to learn from their poems. We also discussed how creating poetry would allow this form of deeper, and thus more respectful, connection and dialogue. Unlike genres like persuasive writing and debate, poetry does not aim for finality. Instead, it invites interpretation, making it a collaborative genre built on mutual understanding.

In the process of creating the poems, the students had the choice to work solo or in pairs. Each student or pair received one randomly chosen sheet to work on. They had to complete the task in 50 minutes, since that was the class time available to us. During this period, they were free to converse with their friends, share their work in progress, and seek feedback. I provided copies of the same data whenever the students were not content with an emerging poem and decided to start from scratch. I also clarified to the students that what mattered most in this process was their interpretation of the words and the meanings that they saw emerge from data, and that the literary quality of texts was of secondary importance. Aesthetic quality was encouraged but was not a priority. This decision was based on two reasons. First, it would allow the students, who did not typically engage with writing poetry, to participate in the process without a fear of being aesthetically judged. Second, it would give our inquiry a phenomenological character because the students would submit the work that represented their immediate interpretation of the words (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). After creating the poems, the students shared their work with the class during the same session, if we had time, or the next one. Students made comments and I took notes of significant themes to use later as entry points to ensuing phases of the data analysis process, although most of the reflections to discuss the findings happened later by myself.

Poems Found

Once I started to analyze the poems that I collected from the students, I ordered and put the poems together in different arrangements to allow them to create meaningful organic connections. In this process, three groups of poems had to be put aside and excluded. The first group of unused poems had a semantic detachment from the rest of the poems to the degree that they could not be incorporated into the narrative that was developing of thematic connections between the poems. I was, however, careful not to discard work that would negate or seriously challenge the narrative or represent a significant alternative perspective. The literary quality of a second group of poems did not match the average aesthetic ambiance of the rest of the poems, although literariness was not a main consideration. Those poems also were put aside to create a relatively homogamous literary quality. In this case, I made sure that the meanings that those excluded texts carried were represented by the remaining texts. Third, from poems that contained similar content, the one with better poetic qualities was chosen and added to the poems that defined a theme. This was necessary because some of the poems looked very similar when students happened to work on the same data; they visibly displayed the same key words or sentences.

In what follows, I have curated the students' poems under six interconnected themes, and provided analyses that explain how the poetic rendition of the transnational writers' perceptions can help us make sense of English writing as a social field with humans that gatekeep and regulate it, and the doxa they use for textual control. Please see Appendix A for a selection of images of the original poems.

1- Culture as "Active Word"

Poem #1

I
changes
mediums

There I create
vibrant
And
creative
context

Our culture
is
a product of
active
word

This first poem sets the theoretical tone and conceptual orientation of the students' perceptions of the writers' words. The key concept in this text is *culture as active word*. The metaphor lends itself to interpretations that can broaden understandings of engagement with writing. "Culture" is not a fixed entity. "[C]ulture is fluid and continuously evolving as people adapt their cultural practices to the new realities of their day-to-day lives" (Capstick, 2021, p. 8). Language reflects this fluidity, and it can also facilitate cultural transformation because "word" is "active" [Poem #1]. Words constantly re-signify according to the meanings that we load onto them. Words re-signify in response to how we arrange them, frame them, format them, present them, interpret them, and re-use them. "Language creates culture and culture creates language. Language, therefore, must be investigated within the social context of the community that uses it" (Patil, 2015, p. 149).

If cultural practices are not fixed entities, it is not fair to view novice writers as the receivers of a fixed and formulated writing culture or rhetorical tradition. Emergent multilingual writers can be viewed as contributors to an evolving culture. If "word" is "active" [Poem #1] and rhetorical traditions are constantly evolving, second language writers' rhetorical backgrounds can actively construct the ecology in which teaching and learning writing occurs. As I have also explained elsewhere, this mentality can drive teachers "to regard learners as having come to the classroom with rich literate backgrounds. It also requires a willingness to learn from students" (Kalan, 2021, p. 146). As stressed in the poem, second language writers are capable of experimenting with "mediums" to create "changes" [Poem #1]. Culture is a "vibrant and creative context" [Poem #1] and student writers are able to contribute to this context.

This interpretation of "culture" and "word" puts human agency in the center of the process of language learning and language use. Through this lens, humans are not consumed by literacy norms; instead, humans create and re-create those norms. Meaning is not captured in language; it is created through language. Language is only a hermeneutic tool in the hands of humans as hermeneutic agents with meaning-making agencies. The poem, thus, is about a choice: to police culture or to (re)create it. The former leads to pedagogies of control and gatekeeping, the latter to pedagogies of creative construction of rhetoric. It is not difficult to see that, for a society which claims to welcome newcomers, adopting a view of culture as an ever-evolving product in a creative process is a pragmatic choice as well as an ethical decision. Engagement in this creative process has an ethical dimension because a vision of "better futures" requires "creativity as ethical aspiration and ethics as creative aspiration" (Montuori, 2011, p. 225).

2- Perceptions of the North American "Context" and its Socioracial Hierarchy

Poem #2

American
competition
of power
is
a
fight

complicated
language
exists
to
create
freedom

Poem #3

you don't
game
system
there
whole
they
paid
gets
money
hypo[critical]
prob[lem]
part of
you're
I say. Yes … unpaid work. Yes
this then? the system has
You're attacking the system but
yourself as well.

Poem #4

They are not paid
And we know it
sometimes
the system
is ridiculous
protecting
some perspective of
motivations.

can
be
meaningless

The students and I spoke about why the poem presented in the previous section stated a need for constructing a "creative context" by recognizing that the "word" is "active" [Poem #1]. We asked why the context is often viewed as stagnant, and why they felt it was necessary to re-construct and transform the culture that regulated our lives, and, in the same manner, our literacy practices? We decided that the poems in this second section could be read as a response to those questions.

These poems highlight that the North American economy is a highly controlled caste "system" [Poem #3 & #4] with designated social roles and norms, and, hence, with engineered income differential. It is widely recognized that this social stratification in North America has a determining racial factor. "Differences in economic outcomes by race have persisted for centuries in the United States and continue up to the present day (Myrdal, 1944; Duncan, 1968; Margo 2016)" (Chetty et al., 2018, p. 711). Immigrants, typically speakers of languages other than English, fall into the same economic pattern. "There is a substantial wealth gap between immigrants and the native-born" (Osili & Paulson, 2009, p. 285) in the United States. Against this backdrop, these found poems make better sense. "American competition of power is a fight" [Poem #2], but there is a method to the madness. It is a "game" with its own rules. There is a "system" that "hypocritically" and "problematically" has created a hierarchy with the immigrants at the bottom, as the system thrives on "unpaid work" [Poem #3], or perhaps more accurately: underpaid. "Even with higher levels of education, English proficiency, and many years of work experience in the United States, undocumented workers from Latin America are paid significantly less than legal workers in the same jobs" (Gomberg-Muñoz, 2012, p. 347). Controlling language use is an important tool in constructing this hierarchy:

> I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell

> her how to pronounce my name. “If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong.” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 75)

As perceived by the students, dominant literacy practices freeze genres and rhetorical behaviors into formats that are designed to propel one’s assimilation into the system. “These generic forms, at first productive, [are] then reinforced by tradition . . . they continue stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they lost any meaning that is productive in actuality” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 85). The system uses rhetorical prescriptions to regulate, centralize, and standardize language and genres because it knows, and perhaps fears, that “complicated language” can “create freedom” [Poem #2].

Attention to the necessity of this sense of freedom is important because it has been documented that minoritized populations actively construct and nurture their own languages, language varieties, and manners of languaging beyond the grasp of official languages and standardizing institutional norms (Alim et al., 2016; Baker-Bell, 2020; Smitherman, 1986; Smitherman & Alim, 2021). What language learners bring to a stagnant culture, their mother tongues and their native rhetorics, can complexify and enrich language through intercultural and translingual connections (Kalan, 2022). “Translanguaging allows students to actively participate in lessons and simultaneously use more complex language practices to comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, discuss, and engage with complex content” (Collins & Cioè-Peña, 2016, p. 119). Semiotic complexity, through linguistic and rhetorical diversity, creates “freedom” [Poem #2]. If a writing ecology does not treat “complexity” as “freedom” [Poem #2], it constantly polices language and writing genres to penalize genre-flexibility, translanguaging, and multimodality, among other rhetorical practices.

Because of the poetic nature of the students’ texts, it is difficult to define the meaning of “complicated language” and to explain its relationship with “freedom” [Poem #2] in the context of these poems. In the previous paragraph, however, I took the liberty of connecting the connotations of these words to genre-fluidity, translanguaging, and the use of multiple modalities. This is because, over the past decades, the fields of language and literacy education have created a range of pluralized concepts that attempt to highlight the complexities of literacy engagement and languaging, and that advocate for accommodating multiple ways by which minoritized students engage with language. Since the publication of “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies; Designing Social Futures” (New London Group, 1996), language and literacy research has witnessed the emergence of concepts such as transliteracies, cross-linguistics, intercultural literacies, translanguaging, plurilingualism, multimodality, and so on.

In the poems in this article, the same consciousness of the complexity and plurality of literacy engagement is markedly juxtaposed with a discourse interested in social hierarchies, class, and income: “American competition” [Poem #2], “game / system / gets / money” [Poem #3], and “They are not paid / And we know it” [Poem #4]. This juxtaposition is

significant because it helps us better understand the possible roots of the doxa that regulate second language writers' rhetorical practices in the North American context. If a pedagogy of rhetorical and linguistic plurality is not currently the norm and is presented by researchers who pluralize literacy concepts as a need that has to be addressed, it might be because this rhetorical hierarchy reflects the social hierarchy. Rhetorical policing, thus, might in fact be an instrument at the service of keeping the current social order and reinforcing social assimilation for the members, which is the main theme of the poems in the following section.

3- Assimilation and its Checkpoints

Poem #5

Just do it
assimilate
conform
do this
do that

they
say

Poem #6

They won't succeed
because
you have to do it differently
changing
adapting
your previous approaches

Poem #7

negative
positive
negative
we have to try
carefully
style and tailor
to adapt to

I was Ok

The social dynamics portrayed by the poems in this section include a specific strategy to maintain the status quo: assimilation. “Just do it” [Poem #5] in this context does not mean “do what *you* want”; it means “do what *we* want”: “Assimilate / conform / do this / do that” [Poem #5]. These words from the interviews stood out to my students, who happened to belong to the dominant racial population in the United States, and possibly the dominant economic class. They picked these words and framed them as a poem to highlight that their society asked newcomers to “change” their “previous approaches” and “adapt”; otherwise, “they won’t succeed” [Poem #6].

Knowing the interviews were about writing in the hosts’ language, the students, similar to the interviewees, saw a link between societal coercion for conformity and the pressure for rhetorical assimilation. The theme underlined in these poems is echoed by current conversations about the nature of Anglo-American academic writing: “Academic language is a raciolinguistic ideology that frames racialized students as linguistically deficient and in need of remediation” (Flores, 2020, p. 22). In this educational ambiance, a difference in the manner of expression is not often considered as only a difference in style but a deficiency in content; meaning, no matter how intelligent a second language writer’s content is, it will be ignored if the writer does not demonstrate familiarity with the dominant rhetorical culture.

Cultural differences can be more readily discernible in writing compared with other linguistic performances. The concentration of thought captured and recorded in writing allows written texts to lend themselves to close readings that reveal the multiple rhetorical, literate, and intellectual layers that have informed the written product. Also, writers who engage in academic and literary writing draw on ideologies, discourses, and concepts that they have intellectually absorbed gradually and over time. Transnational writers often, understandably, bring the dearly earned discursive foundations of their writing into the adopted languages in which they write (Kalan, 2022). These foundations might remain hidden in casual speech or informal writing, or they might be visible but not considered noteworthy; in contrast, in formal/academic writing, they are more easily identifiable because this form of writing can, and usually is, systematically scrutinized (by teachers, assessors, editors, publishers, employers, etc.). Rhetorical performances, in the same manner, take a considerable time to develop and thus stay with writers as they migrate between cultures. Rhetorical features are deeply rooted in genre trajectories developed in one’s language and culture. Every rhetorical performance is a conversation with a genre trajectory, a conversation that might not be recognized when writers move to new cultures.

The observability of writing and the persistent presence of discursive and rhetorical components of writing have convinced the North American writing studies scholars to create research fields such as contrastive rhetoric (Connor, 1996; Kaplan, 1966) to identify and “fix” non-English writers’ rhetorical practices by mapping out rhetorical differences that are treated as obstacles in the process of creating “well-constructed” English texts. Contrastive

rhetoric's inclination to problematize the rhetoric of the "other" can, in practice, turn into pedagogies of gatekeeping and assimilation, or pedagogies of language policing (Amir & Musk, 2013; Blommaert et al., 2009) which target students' rhetorical and cultural identities. The following poems highlight the interviewees' experiences with their hosts' language policing practices.

Poem #8

teacher
corrected
mistakes by red marks
students
afraid of failures
"I'm not good enough"

Poem #9

My supervisor
is
a ghost
I cannot see

the system
a
game

if you don't play
you are
out

Poem #10

the teachers
told us
No
then I just realized
these are my ideas
and
then
think
motivated

When writing in their hosts' language, immigrants can lose their sense of textual ownership as a result of assimilationist assessment approaches and feedback practices. They are "told. . . No" [Poem #10]. They are "corrected by red marks" [Poem #8] by gatekeeping "ghosts" [Poem #9]. The writers learn that if they don't play the game, they are out [Poem #9].

Some immigrants manage to strike a fine balance of remaining in the cultural and rhetorical game and, at the same time, hold on to their "ideas" [Poem #10]. It is important to recognize that writers ultimately write about their ideas. Because of the poetic make-up of the text, what "idea" in Poem #10 means is open to interpretation. Here I draw on my other work about translingual writing (Kalan, 2022) to define ideas as understandings, perceptions, knowledges, subjects, and discourses that second writers bring with them into the languages that they learn. This "conceptual translanguaging" is significant because it creates "a consistent conceptual foundation in their writings across languages that functioned as an intellectual safety net for them to lean against, a robust reservoir of meanings that they could comfortably draw upon when needed" (Kalan, 2022, p. 77). This conceptual familiarity, or, in simpler terms, the ability to write about what matters to them, keeps them "motivated" [Poem #10] because it makes the act of writing meaningful to them. Hence, while gatekeepers regard writing in an adopted language as accepting a new rhetorical citizenship, immigrants treat writing as a means of preserving their transnational historical identity.

4- Writing as a Means of Preserving Identity

Poem #11

The stories I wrote
really simple things
the story . . . had
to stand up and speak up
to give meaning to my life

I am
involved in
movement

Poem #12

hardships
my life
is
hard
But

give up
may not

Poem #13

I
advocate
experience
it is liberating

Poem #14

get the hell out
believe
don’t wait
just do it

play
sing
go big

rock
with
energy

I have been given this chance
I value this cause

Poem #15

literature
I wrote
I was
I wasn’t
I didn’t belong
I was
a rebel

culture

a
community
of
one

I ended the previous section by emphasizing how conceptual translanguaging can make the process of writing more meaningful for immigrant writers. Attempting to write in a new language not only includes the linguistic creation of a text but also the re-discovery of the self in a new culture and the re-expression of one's identity in a new language. "Immigrant learners construct their identities in the process of acquiring an L2 and socializing with host communities" (Zhang, 2021, p. 3). Writing across languages is as much about linguistic communication as it is about remembering, maintaining, and recreating one's identity in a new social context as a survival strategy.

This section's poems help us recognize "writing as an identity practice" (Stooke & Hibbert, 2017, p. 6), especially for language users who write in an adopted language. If facilitated effectively, writing in the language of one's hosts could be an opportunity for identity negotiation while one creatively constructs a sense of continuity in one's history.

In these poems, the students interpreted the interviewees' words to mean that writing "stories" about "simple things" [Poem #11], about seemingly insignificant experiences, even in a second language, can "give meaning to [your] life" [Poem #11]. In a new culture, writing is a space where we can make sense of our lives by defining ourselves and (re)casting our identities. Writing allows us to reflect on identity questions in the processes of immigration. One can write about the "hardships" of life and imagine how not to "give up" [Poem #12]. One can discover the "rebel" in oneself and use writing to create a "community of one" [Poem #15] and to take refuge in one's solitude. Alternatively, one can imagine how to "experience" [Poem #13], "get the hell out" in the world, be part of society, "go big" and "rock with energy" [Poem #14]. Writing across, and in, multiple languages gives one the "chance" [Poem #14] of imagining one's identity under different lights, and of re-examining one's existence by loading different meanings onto one's texts. One must value this complexity as the possibility of a re-articulation of the self in a new context. In this sense, writing in immigration is a "cause" [Poem #14], a social cause that can facilitate survival in an adopted home.

Writing as a means of developing academic identities, especially in an additional language, has been explored in multiple publications (see for instance, Hyland, 2002; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019; McKinley, 2017; Rahimivand & Kuhi, 2014). There has also been a recognition of the connection between writing and identity in creative writing, where writing can be more personal (Chamcharatsri & Iida, 2022; Leahy, 2005; Lim, 2010; O'Rourke, 2007). Scholars have also, specifically, studied immigrant and refugee literature (Bakara, 2020; Gallien, 2018; Hron, 2009; Ireland et al., 2004; Schiltz et al., 2019). They have shown

interest in newcomers' written products and how they help us make sense of immigrants' identity negotiation and formation.

Sustaining and organically developing one's identity is a survival strategy (Howie, 2003). Identity preservation and construction drives action and intensifies interactions between community members, especially for newer members of a social circle. Writing in the language of one's hosts is an important form of social interaction. It is significant that the poems that these students created based on multilingual writers' experiences indicate the same ideas about evaluating and stating one's being in a new culture and using writing at the service of this engagement.

5- Genre Flexibility

Poem #16

I
rather
be
creative
Silly
Or even
stupid
When
write
I

Poem #17

communication
was
interesting

out
there is no poetry
in
everyday life

If we regard the very substance of writing in other people's language as identity re-construction rather than delivering orthodox genres and standard lexical and linguistic features, we develop a writing philosophy that advocates for rhetorical flexibility to help us prioritize expression (Elbow, 1998; Murray, 1985) over delivering standardized products. Genres are living things that evolve in accordance with discursive, social, historical, and

technological developments (Bakhtin, 1981); what remains constant is not genres, but the human desire to express and communicate. This view of writing has significant implications for language education, where most immigrants, regardless of their age, start their new lives in a new society:

> When we cultivate a setting for writers to write like writers—and as people—rather than as students and subjects, when we return to the yellow pads of paper— or any relic that reminds us of our fundamental desire to express ourselves through writing, we become better, more humanistic teachers. (Shafer, 2019, p. 48)

Similarly, the two poems presented in this section can be interpreted to mean that writing practices that can facilitate nuanced identity negotiation thrive on an acceptance of rhetorical complexity. “There is no poetry in everyday life” [Poem #17]. The stress on poetic language in this poem is interesting. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained that metaphors are not merely symbolic linguistic features that complexify meaning to create poetic language; they create a poetic imagination that leads to and requires rhetorical diversity. Embracing rhetorical and genre diversity is essential because, as explained in previous sections, “complicated language exists to create freedom,” [Poem #2] the necessary social foundation for accepting diverse identities. People need to be free to be who they are.

Dominant academic, technical, and literary genres are often regulated. They are policed by educational institutions, academic conferences, journals, and the publishing industry (Alogali, 2018; Chen, 2020; Hamid et al., 2019; Vintiadis, 2021). Editorial and publishing dynamics can treat creative expression as abnormality, undesirable quality, or polemic subjectivity. This genre control apparatus has powerful arms that reinforce rhetorical gatekeeping: rubrics, checklists, peer review processes, and an industrial editorial structure that dehumanizes writing; that “blinds” the editorial process in the name of objectivity; that controls writers through genre prescriptions to minimize “subjectivity” and, hence, ironically, their human agency. From this perspective, dominant genres are as much about controlling communication as about facilitating it. The poems that the students created describe creative subjectivity as a value as opposed to a nuisance because effective multilingual writers, such as the writers that I interviewed, would “rather be creative, silly, or even stupid” [Poem #16].

6- Writing as Social Action

Poem #18

literacy
through books, through theater, through movies, through music
has
started
to

change
the
environment
culture
background

Poem #19

this is
the world
we are in

I
exist
to
change
people

change
is
in the
people

Creating space for immigrants' identities, histories, and discourses in textual ecologies can contribute to societal debates about national identities in the wake of the waves of inevitable immigration resulting from the unequal distribution of global wealth and resources. Western countries' involvement in global military, political, and economic activities has often led to the dislocation of populations who eventually seek refuge in the West as the main reservoir of global wealth. More recent waves of immigration have, more than ever, created conversations about diaspora identities:

> The third wave of modern migration, now in full force and still gathering momentum under dialectical processes of globalization and counter-globalization, leads into the age of diasporas—creating a worldwide archipelago of ethnic/religious/linguistic settlements oblivious to the trails blazed and paved by the imperialist-colonial episode and following instead the globalization-induced logic of survival under the planetary redistribution of life resources and political power. . . . The new migrations cast a question mark upon the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, and neighborhood and belonging. (Bauman, 2018, p. 661)

In this scene, if we desire to bring together scattered communities, immigrants' texts can be regarded as a valuable source of knowledge for decision and policy making, a power

differential that can strengthen discourses that seek justice. Immigrant literature is a source of valuable content detailing how our societies currently function. This body of texts can also help us imagine better futures by reflecting on the firsthand experiences of immigrants and refugees.

Immigrants' texts can help us identify the current social doxa and hopefully modify it to facilitate the entrance of new members and to maximize their performance as social actors. If rhetoric can be used as a tool of assimilation, as we previously discussed, it can, in the same manner, be mobilized to change society to embrace difference. "Literacy," as engagement with multimodal forms of semiotic creation, ". . . theatre . . . movies . . . music . . ." can change the "culture," the "environment" [Poem #18].

The students who created these poems were impressed that the interviewed writers did not consider themselves as linguistically or culturally lacking. In contrast, they were individuals who "exist[ed]" with a mission: "to change people" [Poem #19]. They were not the problem that needed to be fixed; they were the solution to the problem. Through this lens, the "error" that needs to be corrected is not the other's rhetoric, grammar, or punctuation; it is a delayed "change" which is "in the people" who have dominated the culture [Poem #19]. If communication, and in the same virtue, writing, is meant to create any human or societal progress, part of the process of understanding the message is accepting the messenger, not as an act of charity, but to learn from them as knowers of knowledges that we do not have access to. In this sense, immigrants' engagement with writing is a form of social action. Writing in this manner is a form of action because it helps immigrants (re)define themselves as social actors and because it initiates and impacts human relations in their new context through text.

Conclusion

The poems that you have read in this article are interpretations—by groups of middle-class, white, English-speaking, undergraduate students—of three immigrants' experiences with writing in English as an adopted language. The students, some of whom were pre-service teachers, read transcriptions of interviews with the newcomers to Canada who had shared their experiences as academic, literary, and technical writers in their host country. The orientation of the interviewees highlighted the sociocultural writing ecology in which these immigrants' texts were constructed, assessed, and published. In this sense, the project was less about writing and more about the context in which writing occurs. This orientation requires a sociological approach to writing; hence, I adopted Bourdieu's theorizations to better identify the doxa, or dynamics, that rule the writing culture of the immigrants' hosts as a social field.

The students' found poems communicate that they are sensitive to the fact that perceptions of writing are usually informed by larger societal and political patterns. The

poems recognize that rhetorical and genre tolerance requires a view of culture as a fluid and ever-evolving concept. The students highlight that writing is the surface layer of underlying ideological and identity-related foundations that are often invisible. Most significantly, immigrants can use writing as a form of survival, and, on the other hand, immigrants' hosts can use rhetorical control as yet another means of assimilation. Through their poems, these students recognize the political nature of writing, and recommend rhetorical complexity as a means of making space for immigrants and their hosts to embrace different identities and to co-construct new cultural futures.

From this angle, a culture, as a social field and its doxa, can change so that it can embrace new members. Bourdieu explains that what makes people follow a field's doxa is *illusio*, or the social stimuli that convince people to take the game and its rules seriously. Bourdieu intentionally uses the word "illusio" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to emphasize that most cultural norms are merely illusions that become serious only because of human agreements that can change at any moment. Thinking about the meaning of illusio might enable us to have a flexible approach when it comes to imposing the orthodox doxa. Reminding ourselves that a belief in the universal reliability and relevance of some doxa might only be an in-group illusion will allow creative possibilities of reforming our social fields so that the new members of the culture feel they belong in the game.

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Appendix A
Examples of Students' Found Poems

The following are representative images of the poems created by the students. The poems you read earlier were transcribed for smoother integration within the article. The images were not embedded within the text due to the large number of the poems and the inconsistent visual quality, which might detract attention from the arguments.

Figure 1
Poem #1

Figure 2
Poem #14

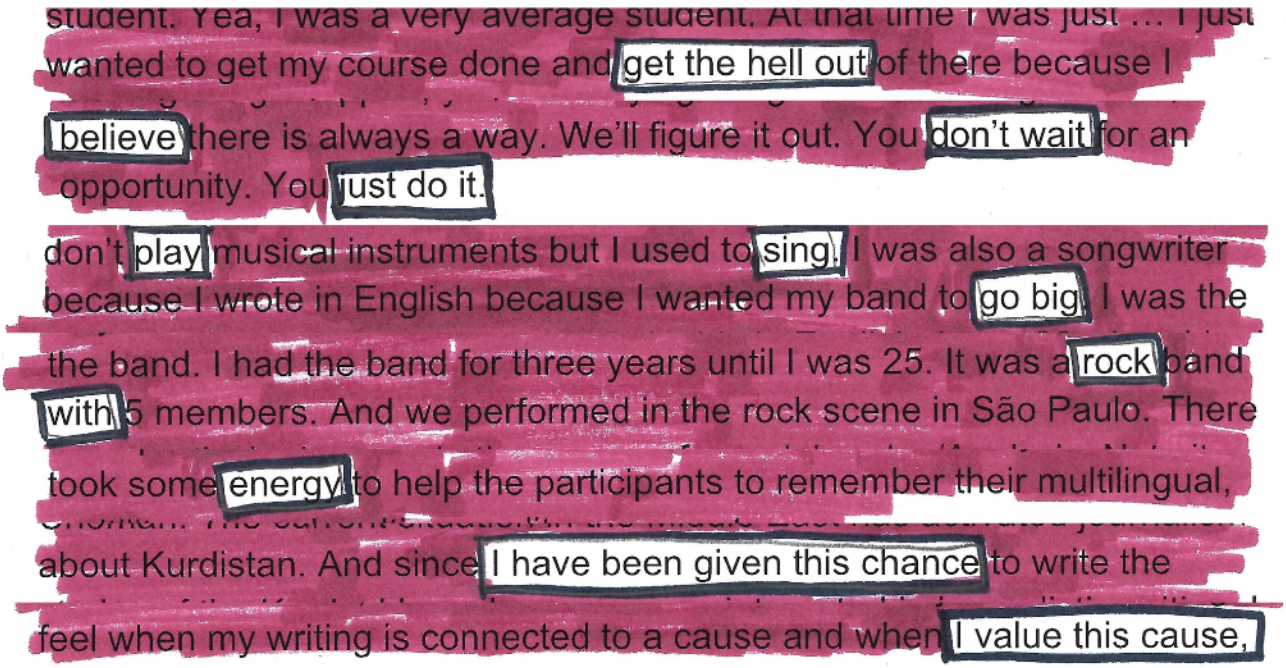

Figure 3
Poem #17

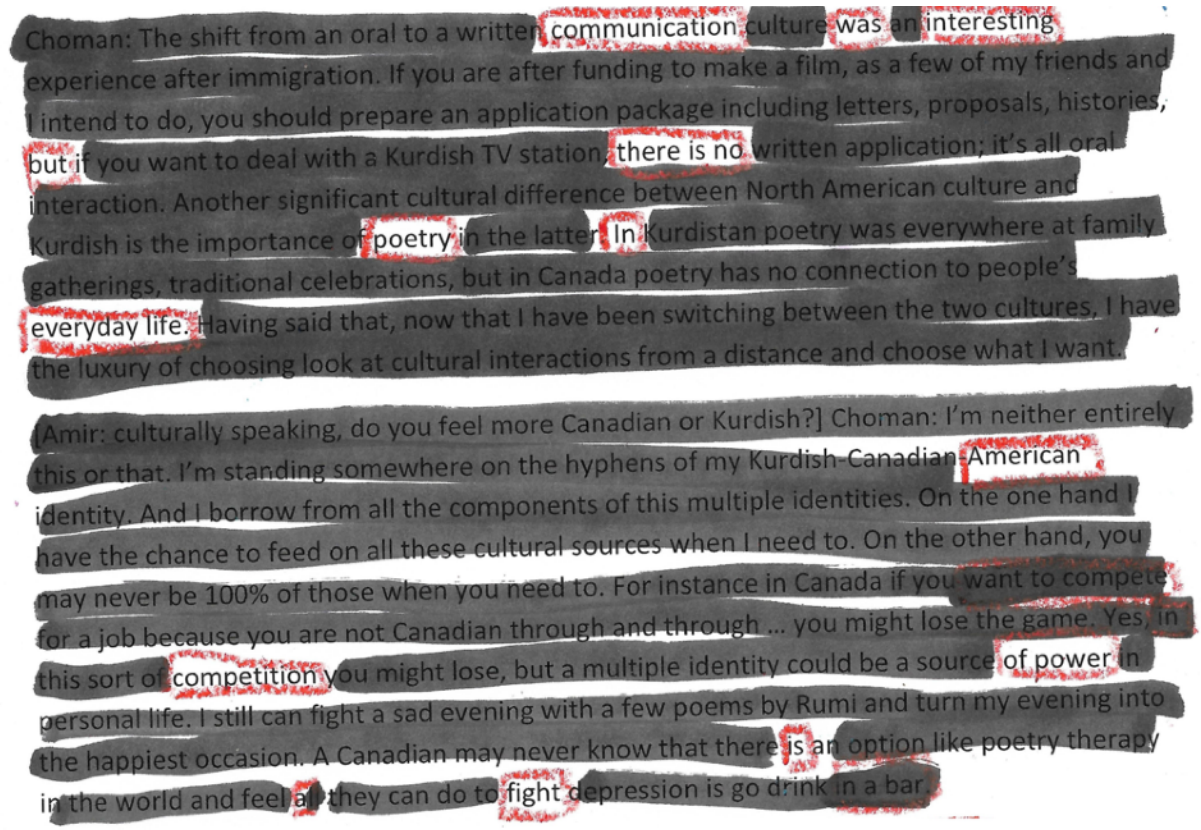

Figure 4
Poem #30