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Exploring Alternative Writing Styles: A Journey into Free-Writing and Bilingualism

Cover Page Footnote

I am grateful for Dr. Xuan Jiang who inspired me to take an interest in research, introducing me to the exciting world of academic conferences and publications. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Vanessa Sohan, whose mentorship allowed me to grow as a writer and expand my researching abilities. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for their constant encouragement and the countless opportunities they have provided me.



Exploring Alternative Writing Styles: A Journey into Free-Writing and Bilingualism

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This digital media composition explores two alternative writing styles: free-writing, a term coined by Peter Elbow, and translanguaging, the practice in which writers incorporate different languages into their writing. This project's significance lies in helping college writers become more comfortable with the writing process and expressing their ideas more clearly. Doing so will promote inclusivity in bilingual education by creating an environment where students don't have to limit which language they use for their writing. Traditional writing practices emphasize writing in a structured and formal manner, often discouraging individuals from exploring their thoughts and ideas freely. Additionally, bilingual education often prioritizes one language over the other, neglecting the benefits of incorporating multiple languages into writing. There is a lack of research exploring alternative writing styles, such as free-writing and translanguaging, as well as their potential benefits for college writers; while some research exists, there is a need to explore these topics further and to promote the benefits of incorporating alternative writing styles in education and daily life. This project aims to fill the gap by providing firsthand experiences with free-writing in both creative and academic contexts and exploring the potential benefits of incorporating different languages into writing. Through personal reflections, examples of free-writing in Spanish, and scholarly articles, this project aims to encourage writers to try new writing techniques, promote inclusivity in bilingual education, and bring awareness to the many unique ways of engaging with translanguaging in the classroom.

Keywords: *alternative writing, free-writing, translanguaging, bilingualism*

Introduction

Writing can be a challenging activity, whether you're writing in your first language, or even the second or third language you may have learned. It can be daunting when working on a creative writing project, a more academic paper, or even when you are writing as a hobby—drafting content for a blog, perhaps. That's why it's important to be able to consider how taking an alternative writing approach can help you with your writing. Follow along as I talk about my ideas about free-writing and translanguaging.

I'll first be discussing free-writing, a technique coined by Peter Elbow, which I have used in creative writing, writing and rhetoric classes, as well as in my own work. I'll be sharing the many ways in which free-writing has helped me open up as a writer and explore my ideas in a more stimulating setting with less emphasis on the outcome of my text but rather on the process. Additionally, I will do my own free-writing, incorporating both English and Spanish, and reflecting on the process. Along with my own experiences, I will take it a step further and analyze these ideas in the context of scholarly articles and research.

This research will illustrate a better idea of how incorporating other languages into the writing process can positively impact students, and lead to a more inclusive and flexible approach to bilingual education. I hope publishing this writing on a website will allow for a fun and engaging way to learn about alternative writing styles. Maybe you'll be enticed to try new ways to approach your own writing in the future, like I did.

Purpose

The main goal of this article is to be written in an accessible and engaging format to better connect with the students who are looking to implement translanguaging and free-writing into their own writing. This article is published in both an academic journal and a website to give access to students in whichever platform they are most comfortable with. The website will provide a more interactive format by displaying images and providing direct links to the articles cited (a link to the website is listed at the end of this article). Through this dynamic, I seek to give student writers the best possible way to connect with their writing, as well as their own personal languages and cultures. In addition, I actively chose to write in a casual, free-writing fashion with the intention of combatting restrictive and exclusionary standard academic practices and attitudes as to how English writing should be. In doing so, I hope to show students, editors, and educators that student writing does not have to be limited by rigid standards; on the contrary, student writing can benefit immensely by writing outside of standard writing conventions as it could potentially help students better communicate their ideas.

Why You Should Adopt Free-Writing in/and Multiple Languages —A Literature Review

What are Free-Writing Exercises?

Free-writing exercises, also known as automatic writing, babbling, or jabbering exercises, are a way to improve writing skills (Elbow 3). The exercises involve writing for ten minutes (later increasing to fifteen or twenty), without stopping for anything, even editing. Even if you can't think of what to write, you should

continue putting something down.

The goal is to produce a piece of writing that will not be evaluated, discussed, or commented on. The purpose of free-writing exercises is to allow writers like yourself to bypass your inner editor and improve your writing by providing maximum feedback without any feedback at all. It is done in a way that helps you use your critical thinking skills and share your own voice in a context where there will be no critiquing or judgment (Wang & Zheng 11). The objective of free-writing is not to produce a perfect piece of writing, but to simply write without inhibition. Free-writing can help writers become more comfortable with the writing process, as well as improve their ability to express their ideas in writing.

The Benefits of Incorporating Spanish into Academic Writing

When you incorporate Spanish, or any second language, into academic writing it can have an impactful role on language proficiency, culture awareness, and overall academic success. “Translanguaging” is a way to communicate with others using a variety of languages that you know (Vogel & Garcia 5). In regard to talking in Spanish and English, this can be viewed as talking “Spanglish,” which includes saying words in Spanish, as well as words in English when you are speaking or writing (Henderson & Ingram 254).

Code meshing is an approach that involves the inclusion of other languages and dialects into the dominant language being used to teach or communicate. This, in effect, would allow for more linguistic diversity in academic settings (Canagarajah 598). Code meshing recognizes that people have diverse linguistic experiences, especially minority writers who frequently contribute a different perspective to the discussion at hand. When there is more diversity, students and writers are given an environment where they can be more comfortable with self-expression.

Translanguaging: A Valuable Tool for Bilingual Learners

There are many great uses of translanguaging that can transfer to bilingual learners and the ways in which they approach their writing. Take a writing program implemented at Bronx Community College, for example (Parmegiani 290). This program united ESL (English as a Second Language) courses with academic literacy courses in Spanish, focusing on translanguaging in college writing. In this case, using the mother tongue, Spanish, to assist with a student’s academic success in English proved to help them improve their writing skills.

Additionally, there are several ways to implement translanguaging throughout all stages of the writing process: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. These can all affect how a student’s writing and voice evolve. Translanguaging can serve as a self-regulating system for bilingual students, whether their goal is to become proficient in both languages or to thrive in the standard monolingual academic language (Velasco & Garcia 9). The objective here would be seen in the writing itself, rather than the act of speaking in these languages.

Online peer feedback can also be a contributing factor to how students can benefit from introducing translanguaging into their own writing. Taking a multi-language approach can allow for better results where

the students feel more comfortable sharing feedback with others (Paul Sun 338). This format allows students to use multiple perspectives and angles to view their peer's assignment, while also ensuring that the best critique and assessment of their work is given. This feedback process enhances the results students get from implementing translanguaging in a classroom where English is a foreign language.

Putting Translanguaging Into Perspective: A Case Study

The concept of translanguaging can be found in a variety of different ways. Clarice Blanco, who is a doctoral student in writing and rhetoric, approached this topic from a unique perspective. Her article discusses the obstacles that come with balancing your dominant culture expectations while still giving focus to your diverse heritage (Blanco 11). She broaches the topic of the "In-Between" which she has labeled as a space that takes place within her mixed cultural background. Blanco includes some sentences in Spanish, as well as adding sections in poetry and bolded phrases. While this is a professional article, she takes on this task from a distinct perspective and provides a format for her writing that would be considered alternative to the norm.

My Personal Backstory with Free-Writing

Before I begin, I think it is interesting to note that this section first started as a free-writing exercise. Here, I wanted to share my experiences with free-writing and I let my ideas flow.

Free-Writing and Creative Writing

I took a Creative Writing course at FIU in 2022. Each week we had to spend 5 minutes free-writing. We also had to write either a short story or the first chapter of a longer piece as our bigger project. Before this experience, whenever I had a story idea in middle or high school it never became more than a page or two of writing. I would always get overwhelmed by how much writing I would have to do to get the story I was trying to tell across. And I guess a part of me also didn't think I had what it takes to turn those small ideas into captivating narratives. I used to think my writing and ideas couldn't be interesting or important enough to be set down on paper. Then when I took this class, we would have to write every day for 5 minutes and since it was so small, it kind of took some of the pressure off and helped me make little attempts at writing consistently.

When we would do a free-writing exercise in class, the professor would ask if there were any volunteers to read their writing. The younger me would have never volunteered to read my creative writing out loud, but there I was, raising my hand. Sometimes when I felt excited about what I wrote, I would share it and get the occasional laugh or comment from my classmates. It was starting to feel safer to get my own thoughts and ideas out on paper. At one point we started working on our stories; I decided to go for the first chapter of a longer piece. My manuscript ended up being 9 pages, which is the most I had written for a story in a very long time. It was thrilling to see how much I had accomplished and how my story had gone from such a small idea to something much bigger.

Free-Writing and Academic Writing

This creative writing class not only helped me with my writing hobby, but also my academic writing. Before, I had found myself getting overwhelmed with having to write large pieces of writing, like research papers and final writing projects. Sometimes, it seemed impossible for me to have enough to say about these topics. I suppose I was scared that I would run out of words to say, and it would take me a long time to actually start on the assignments (which is ironic because once I actually started writing, I found myself going well beyond the minimum word count). After this experience, I was able to tackle my writing with a much better approach and mentality.

Overall, this writing felt good and helped me become a better writer. In a way, I wrote a lot of this writing for myself, to help me explore myself as a writer in a more creative way. It helped me better communicate how I approach writing in general, whether it be academic, technical, or creative.

Free-Writing in Spanish

I learned Spanish at home, followed by English when I began Pre-K. As I started to grow older, I had more sources of English in my life than Spanish. My Spanish consisted of my family and the Spanish classes I had in school. My English consisted of my brother, school, my friends, and the internet once I started to have access to it. There were also books, which I would read in English.

It was almost like English was slowly consuming me and taking every part of my identity. It wasn't until recently, after taking some classes in college about language and alternative rhetoric, that I realized I had grown out of touch with my Spanish.

3 Free-Writing Exercises While Brainstorming

Figure 1

Free-Writing Exercise 1

“Este es mi primer "free-writing exercise" y lo estoy escribiendo en la aplicación de notes en mi teléfono. Aquí voy a brainstorm ideas para mi proyecto. Yo quiero empezar introduciendo lo que es un free-writing ejercicio para estabilizar la definición con mi audiencia. En esta sección voy a quote a Peter Elbow que fue el que primero introdujo esta frase. Yo aprendí sobre el gracias a mi maestra. Después voy a tener una sección donde hablo de mi experiencia pasada con free-writing ejercicios in situaciones como escritura creativa y mis clases académicas. Ahora mientras que escribo esto me recordé que tuve una clase sobre el proceso de escritura donde teníamos free-writing ejercicios al empezar cada clase. En la siguiente sección de mi proyecto voy a tener los free-write ejercicios que estoy escribiendo y mi reflexión junto con escritura incorporado las lecturas que encontré en mi research y de la clase.”

Figure 2

Free-Writing Exercise 2

“Unas de las lecturas en mi clase es un memoir por Richard Rodriguez. El habla sobre su experiencia siendo un estudiante en una escuela prestigiosa con una beca. El se sintió como si tuvo que distanciarse de su herencia y familia para enfocarse en la escuela y tener success académico. El se estaba desconectando de su cultura y teniendo dificultades encontrando su lugar en sociedad. Hay muchos estudiantes que han tenido una experiencia similar en sus estudios, que se sienten como si tienen que cambiar quien son para tener buenos grados en la escuela. Esconden parte de quien son para aparecer como todo el mundo, pero lo unico que eso hace es limitar las formas que te puedes expresar y comunicar con otros. Sabiendo más de un idioma te das más oportunidades en tus estudios y tienes más experiencias de las que puedes escribir.”

Figure 3

Free-Writing Exercise 3

“ Cuando estaba leyendo uno de los artículos, leí una parte que habla de la forma que estudiantes bilingual aprenden. Aunque estén en una escuela que les enseña en español y inglés, todavía separan los dos lenguajes como si los estudiantes fueron monolinguos en dos lenguajes. Esto enseña el attitude que se tiene para estudiar con más de un lenguaje y lo poquito que se sabe de cómo pueden trabajar los lenguajes juntos. En mi proyecto, estoy tratado de ver como los dos lenguajes pueden ser incorporado en el proceso de escritura. No es nadamas tener un papel académico en inglés y escribir unas cuantas oraciones en español. Este proyecto se enfoca más en como puedo usar mis lenguajes mientras que estoy haciendo research, generando ideas, y avanzando con mi escritura. Algo más que encontré interesante fue como un estudio enseñó estudiantes en primary usando más de un lenguaje en todas partes del proceso de escritura. Algunos lo usaron para planear y otros en el producto final.”

Reflecting on My Spanish Free-Writing Exercises

English is Still Prevalent

I do most of my thinking and writing in English, so it was somewhat difficult to transition to Spanish. In my first couple of free-writing exercises, you will notice some words that I couldn't remember in Spanish at that moment like “brainstorm” and “quote,” which I left in English. As I was doing the free-writing exercise I decided to just write it in English and keep going because it was more important to continue the flow of thoughts that a free-writing exercise provides rather than stopping and trying to remember the word or searching it up online.

Mixing My Languages

Additionally, as I carry on with this activity, I can try to do a free-writing exercise with a mix of English and Spanish, or Spanglish if you will. I am still getting accustomed to writing in Spanish, so this mixture of languages wouldn't come so organically. However, it is definitely something worth considering once I feel more comfortable writing and thinking in Spanish, allowing me to expand on this further.

A Unique Perspective

Writing in Spanish helped me see my ideas from a different perspective, almost like an outsider looking in. While reading and writing in English come more naturally to me now, with these free-writing exercises, I had to put a little more thought into what I was saying. As I was reading them back, I was able to see how some of my ideas transferred from English (and reading the articles) to Spanish (and getting my thoughts in writing).

Linking Language and Identity Through Alternative Writing Practices in Academia

Translanguaging Pedagogy

Translanguaging can be seen as a theoretical lens that serves to dispute the traditional views of bilingual and multilingual students in academia (Vogel & Garcia 1). One way to present this view is to see those who speak multiple languages as people who connect to one united linguistic repertoire, rather than numerous separate language systems. This approach to language pedagogy encourages the teaching and learning process to involve a more diverse practice of languages that does not solely focus on pushing forward one language and ignoring all the others. This allows for a favorable view of how multiple languages can positively affect communication and academic writing.

It is crucial to call attention to translanguaging strategies and the ways in which they can magnify communication and writing skills in multilingual contexts. Dialogical pedagogy, which involves feedback from instructors as well as peers, gives a push towards thinking more critically and regarding metacognitive awareness in your writing (Canagarajah 401). Students who use these approaches make use of recontextualization, interactional, and voice strategies. This then impacts how they see themselves with reference to their unique culture and writing.

Meshing Free-writing and Translanguaging into Your Writing Process

As seen in my reflections, I was able to brainstorm ideas for this article by reading through the scholarly sources and then writing down my thoughts in Spanish. I then used this practice to reflect on my ideas and transfer them to the writing I have for this article in English. This allowed me to think about what I learned more organically and incorporate perspectives that were not originally used when I would write academic papers solely in English. It helped me challenge my point of view and think more critically of how I communicate my ideas; thus expanding my knowledge of and approaches to writing.

This process can also be implemented in the classroom, at any age level, but more specifically at the college level. A guide created for State University of New York instructors delves into a variety of unique ways of including translanguaging pedagogy in the classroom, which involves an alternative method like free-writing. Students would be in a position to facilitate their writing process by commencing with a free-writing exercise. This would “open up the floodgates for writing” and give you the opportunity to start your paper without any pressure (Espinosa et al. 30). There would be time to write down your thoughts freely and be

able to gauge whether it's exactly how you want to phrase something or if it needs more thought later on. If you ever feel overwhelmed with how to start your paper it could be a good idea to use free-writing to brainstorm what ideas you have for the assignment. Additionally, this exercise can be done using your full linguistic repertoire. You may start by writing in English and then continue the thought in another language, like Spanish.

Improving Communication and Cultural Awareness

In academia, one can be pushed into fitting into the box of the “smart academic student” with a focus on English, while all other languages are ignored or left to be forgotten. This can result in students suppressing parts of themselves as they are taught that the only way that they can succeed is with English. However, that does not need to be the case. It can be a great tool to use all our languages when pouring our thoughts and ideas into our writing. Even if the final product is solely in one language, implementing several languages into the writing process can be a learning experience and a great way to think more critically of your writing.

Moreover, there was a study done in a university in Bangladesh that observed the role of translanguaging pedagogy and the effects it had on bilingual students in their academics. A negative impact was shown in the way that students presented their work when there was a policy that only English could be used in the classroom, with less students feeling comfortable engaging in the class (Rafi 193). When translanguaging pedagogies were added to the course, there was a significant improvement in the ways that the students interacted with the course, as well as with their classmates and professor. However, there were some mixed reactions that dealt with the potential for an English-only bias and the challenge that could come with language separation traditions. Nonetheless, this study proved to be fruitful and engaging for the students and their abilities to write and communicate in multiple languages while in a college classroom.

If you're a bilingual learner, don't be afraid to use your home language in your academic writing. It can only benefit you in the long run! Let's encourage our educators to recognize the value of our home languages and incorporate them into the learning process to facilitate more effective communication and academic growth.

This actually brings me to a text that was introduced to me in my Alternative Writing and Rhetoric class. Richard Rodriguez's chapter, “The Achievement of Desire,” brings up some important ideas that have left an impact on me (Rodriguez 625). These ideas revolve around the cost of his academic success and how it impacted his relationships with his family traditions and cultural heritage. It also focuses on his multifaceted identity and how it allowed him to embrace certain parts of his culture once he started seeing the effect that English had on his life. He discusses how as he goes through his education; Rodriguez feels a growing sense of alienation from his family and culture when there's a push to focus on school and academics. For him, it's almost as if his success comes at the cost of his identity. There are many other bilingual students that can relate to this experience. It's very important to stay rooted in one's languages and cultures and not let yourself get lost in defining your identity on solely one language or one culture; there is more that makes up who you are.

Concluding Thoughts

Overall, I am a Cuban-American college student who is determined to integrate both of my cultures and languages into my life and not let English be the sole defining factor of my identity any longer. Exploring alternative writing styles such as free-writing can help writers become more comfortable with the writing process and improve their ability to express their ideas in writing. Incorporating different languages into our writing can also lead to a more inclusive and flexible approach to bilingual education. My experience with free-writing in Spanish has allowed me to explore my bilingual identity and reconnect with my Spanish roots.

I hope this article has inspired you to try free-writing and to experiment with different languages in your own work. Remember, the goal of free-writing is not to produce a perfect piece of writing, but to simply write without inhibition.

To access Galiano's website, please visit <https://mgaliano2002.wixsite.com/mariasbooknook/urj-article>

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