

RAGHUNANDAN, JANIE, M.A. Whiteface as Rhetorical Metis in Sharmila Sen's *Not Quite Not White*. (2020)

Directed by Dr. Nancy Myers and Jennifer Whitaker. 32 pp.

Across her memoir, *Not Quite Not White: Losing and Finding Race in America*, Sharmila Sen recounts her endeavors to generate a series of embodied rhetorical strategies that enact what she refers to as “whiteface.” I argue that Sen’s decision to wear whiteface is a rhetorical strategy for survival that operates as the Greek concept *metis*, due to its concealment, responsiveness, and cunning ability to act. The need to survive in a new environment was initiated by her father’s unexpected job loss which propels them to emigrate to the US, therefore enacting exigencies on multiple levels of the family’s everyday life.

In her memoir, Sen illustrates the reality of how deeply and racially problematic assimilation is during a time in which the political climate of the US is charged with debates regarding immigration reform and race. With its 2018 publication, I interpret Sen’s memoir—her revelation of whiteface, her appropriation of it, and her need to express her personal and political responsibilities as personal and political exigencies—as her speaking to a larger *kairotic* moment in the US. As both narrator and rhetor, Sen is conscious of her US audiences and their perceptions of ethnicity and race based on US immigration laws. Keith Grant-Davie’s concept of a compound rhetorical situation supports my contention that Sen’s memoir serves both personal and political *kairotic* purposes for her, therefore, operating on multiple levels inside and outside the text.

RAGHUNANDAN, JANIE, M.A. Code Meshing: Practices for Writing Space in Post-Secondary Education. (2020)

Directed by Dr. Nancy Myers and Jennifer Whitaker. 26 pp.

This position statement aims to debunk myths regarding negative perceptions surrounding the use of multiple dialects in writing spaces, to illustrate how writing instructors may incorporate multidialectal and multilingual pedagogical strategies in US writing spaces, and to expand on traditional English writing instruction. English is already a multidialectal system in which speakers are encompassed in, and many speakers are already multidialectal and multilingual; therefore, a translingual approach via code meshing should be recognized in academic writing as well. Assessment based on solely an American cultural context further excludes speakers of other languages and perpetuates language hierarchy. A code meshing approach seeks to challenge and transform traditional writing practices, address standard language ideology and students' anxieties about academic writing, and the ways gatekeeping practices can consequently generate bias myths about language. Code meshing in academic writing further offers diverse possibilities for writing teachers and writing center consultants to encourage, strengthen, and advocate for students and their voices on the written page.

The writing spaces that I envision this position statement may apply to include post-secondary composition classrooms such as first-year writing or more advanced writing classes, consulting sessions in writing centers, and K-12 writing classrooms. This position statement urges writing instructors, particularly those in post-secondary education, and writing center administrators and practitioners to teach students the rhetorically strategic ways dialects and languages can function in academic writing. The

research supporting this document focuses on speakers of Ebonics, Spanish, and English as the primary dialects and languages incorporated in multilingual approaches for writing education.

WHITEFACE AS RHETORICAL METIS IN SHARMILA SEN'S

*NOT QUITE NOT WHITE*

AND

CODE MESHING: PRACTICES FOR WRITING SPACE

IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

by

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Approved by

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Dedicated to my family and ancestors, thank you for dreaming.

APPROVAL PAGE

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**WHITEFACE AS RHETORICAL METIS IN SHARMILA SEN'S  
*NOT QUITE NOT WHITE***

Just when I thought I had succeeded in following the rules of my own DIY whiteface manual, I found myself angry and overwhelmed by sadness. (Sharmila Sen, “How I Found My Race in America”)

In her memoir, *Not Quite Not White: Losing and Finding Race in America*, Sharmila Sen articulates the ways she faced race as a new immigrant in 1982, then, 30 plus years later, the sadness she dealt with when refacing her identity and relationship with race, along with personal and political responsibilities. Across the memoir’s four chapters, she recounts her endeavors to generate a series of embodied rhetorical strategies that enact what she refers to as “whiteface.” Readers are introduced to Sen as a storyteller and narrator on the first page of the preface, “The Mask That Grins.” The preface is a reflection on Sen’s graduate school experience in which she ruminates the affects of whiteface on her Brown<sup>1</sup> body. Her admission in the title of an invisible mask reveals a façade – something within her is hidden, and the personification of the mask not only reveals a distance between a person and the “mask” itself, but the rhetorically constructed grinning is also indicative of a performance. The public face is falsely grinning while her private, internal face remains hidden. From the memoir’s beginning, Sen exposes personal and secretive parts of her identity that she hid for years. Information later

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<sup>1</sup> I am electing to capitalize Black and Brown (in addition to White) as it affords a validation that lowercase articulation does not. The US’s history of oppression against racial minorities is reflected in institutional oppression, thus challenging the ways lowercasing racial identities perpetuate gatekeeping standards embedded in conventional academic writing affords Black and Brown bodies validation alongside each other in an academic context.



revealed in the preface illustrates the ways in which this concealment can be interpreted as a concealment of her dual identity.

Describing herself as a young, new immigrant, Sen contextualizes the term “whiteface” (i.e., “wearing whiteface”) as a reaction to her new environment, Cambridge, Massachusetts. This method becomes her embodied mode of survival for navigating her new world and assists her during her assimilation in the US. Whiteface is her rhetorical embodiment of White normativity. Throughout the text she provides examples regarding the ways in which she adopts western (mainly White) cultural and social habits such as dress, cuisine, and music. As she comes to terms with her identity, particularly race and ethnicity, Sen’s survival as a nondominant member of her new society creates an exigency. In her memoir, Sen illustrates how assimilation is deeply and racially problematic during a time in which the political climate of the US is charged with debates regarding immigration reform and race. With its 2018 publication, I interpret the memoir — her revelation of whiteface, her appropriation of it, and her need to express her personal and political responsibilities as personal and political exigencies — as Sen speaking to a larger *kairotic* moment in the US. As both narrator and writer, Sen is conscious of her audiences and their interactions with and reactions to ethnicity and race.

For Sen, whiteface is a multilayered strategy intended to cloak her anger and combat negative perceptions of Brownness and immigrants in order to appear amiable and acceptable to the dominant group. She declares, “Whiteface is sad, demeans me, is deadly serious, is a game we play when we know we are on the losing team” (xii). Her diction “sad, demeans me, is deadly serious” expresses the negative emotional effects of

whiteface on Sen's body, thus revealing how whiteface dismisses her cultural background and cloaks her cultural identity as well as her emotional state.

Sen's decision to wear whiteface is also a rhetorical strategy for survival, one which I argue operates as the Greek concept *metis*, due to its concealment, responsiveness, and cunning ability to act. I also interpret whiteface alongside Keith Grant-Davie's concept of the compound rhetorical situation, in which the writer and rhetor have multiple roles and the rhetorical situation is expanded beyond one particular moment of discourse. Grant-Davie's concept supports my contention that Sen's memoir serves both personal and political *kairotic* purposes for her, therefore operating on multiple levels inside and outside the text. Specifically, I examine the ways Sen articulates how her decision to wear whiteface when she arrived in the US was a personal *kairotic* moment which she responded to via *metis*. The second half of the paper examines how and why having to reface her identity (another major exigency) in the writing of this memoir 30 years later speaks to a larger political *kairotic* moment.

Across her memoir, Sen articulates moments of her rhetorical duality exhibited externally in public spaces via her dress, gestures, language, music, and food choices, and internally by reserving the Indian side of her identity for her home life. Sen's duality operates on social and personal levels to create an overall *kairotic* moment. Thus, the memoir resonates across two *kairotic* moments for Sen: one as a new immigrant trying to assimilate into US culture during the 1980s and one as a fully integrated US citizen all too aware of the negative political attitudes and practices of current US immigration policy. According to Jane Sutton, though *kairos* does not have one specific definition, it

is based on three aspects: “first, *kairos* calls for decisive action; second, it refers to the right moment to speak; third, it expresses what is appropriate.” Sutton’s interpretation of *kairos* is congruent with Sen’s purpose for writing as she states in interviews that she has been considering her own personal, social, and political purposes, urgencies, and responsibilities for writing, which she ultimately expresses throughout her memoir. Due to their unpredictable nature, these urgencies and her past experiences with migration and assimilation become Sen’s exigencies as a younger immigrant, while her 2018 publication is timely in the memoir’s inclusion into discussions of race, immigration, and assimilation.

### **Concealment and Anger: Whiteface is Not Blackface**

In 1982, Sen’s family emigrated from her native homeland Calcutta, India, where she spent the first 12 years of her life, to Cambridge, Massachusetts for financial necessity. Leaving behind a culture she loved and moving to another country created the exigency of exclusion and a lack of belonging in her new environment. Due to her background in India, her awareness of the fragility of socioeconomic and social statuses guides her transition in the US. Sen was born and raised as an elite caste member in India due to her family’s lineage of Indian prestige (a position she maintained until she was nine when the family experienced difficult financial times). She was “a speaker of the dominant language of my state, part of the dominant ethnolinguistic group, and a follower of the majority religion. I was an upper-caste Hindu Bengali” (*Not Quite* 12). Her maternal family was considered upper middle-class landowners and lawyers (12), and her paternal family consisted of scholars and intellectuals, thus she inherited both

financial capital and cultural capital (13). Therefore, her transition from Calcutta to Cambridge is not only affected by US cultural differences but also by the shift from an elite caste – one that did not carry the same context, value, and benefits in the US as it did in India.

When Sen was nine years old, her father's unforeseen unemployment in India meant the family could no longer afford luxuries she knew as a child, and their socioeconomic status descended towards the poverty line (57). In this situation her cultural capital was not viable; therefore, when presented with the prospect of moving to the US, the family packed their lives into five suitcases (67) and flew across oceans and continents for a better life. The circumstances of her father's unexpected job loss and opportunity to emigrate to the US creates a major exigency: "The First Remove" as she refers to the situation and also the title of chapter two (55). This abrupt shift in culture, society, nation, and economic status becomes a major exigency, which resulted in further exigencies that follow her during her adolescence and young adult life, such as her decision to perform whiteface. In the last chapter, Sen reveals she had to reface her decision to wear whiteface, the sadness its success had brought and the stakes and repercussions of whiteface.

I argue that Sen's concealment of herself and her anger is a purposeful rhetorical strategy for survival, that manifests into three main forms of *metis*: embodiment, resourcefulness and practicality, and craftiness and cunning. The concept of *metis* originates from Greek mythology after the Greek Titan goddess Metis, and her intelligent, corporeal ability to respond cunningly and intelligently in situations of

struggle (Flynn 10; Hawhee 46). Many scholars observe the Greek figures Odysseus and Athena's use of *metis* as a strategy for survival, thus *metis*' history of survival is established in scholarship as well (Dolmage 161; Flynn 10; Hawhee 49). For Sen, her utilization and embodiment of whiteface is a multilayered strategy: it functions not only to cloak her anger, which is perceived as threatening, but also through her resourcefulness and cunning she appears amiable in order to combat negative perceptions of Brownness, immigration, and its material effects. As a result of *metis*' survival strategies, Sen's mask of whiteface becomes her face; therefore, her employment of whiteface is both a successful and despairing reality.

Sen recognizes the dualism of her identity, but found it unharmonious, and she did not know how to reconcile it in public, thus one dominates and one conceals. Sen expresses how ordinary cultural and social norms shifted and, ultimately, lead to her concealing her beloved homeland and her Indian identity. She explains, "once I had watched Hindi movies in crowded Calcutta cinema halls. Now I watch Hindi movies behind closed doors with Ma and Baba. I avoided speaking Bengali in public. I ate with my fingers only at our family dinner table" (*Not Quite* 92). She articulates the ways even mundane pastimes, such as movies and dining etiquette, altered her everyday performance of what formerly felt normal but now had to be done in private.

In the preface, Sen reflects on whiteface and highlights that the main distinctions between blackface and her concept of whiteface are tied to one's emotional state and racial privilege, which effects the way concealment operates. This clarification is purposeful and necessary for wider audiences to understand her terminology and

rationale behind her concept of whiteface, while also serving as a frame for the memoir, hence its placement in the beginning. She poses, “why do blackface and brownface bother me? Because I have been wearing whiteface for so long. Because my Halloween never ends...The truth is that the opposite of blackface is not whiteface” (xii). Sen explains that whiteface is not used for the same purpose as blackface, which is entertaining to audiences who subconsciously interpret it as “a game you get to play when you are already the winner” (xii). Sen reveals a racist, veiled power dynamic within the performance of blackface<sup>2</sup> when she indicates that it is used by “winners”; it is a “game,” and a “Halloween” costume. Her diction and descriptions of blackface suggest that there is unrecognized privilege for White individuals, because they have the *choice* and *ability* to take off the mask of blackface whenever they choose, whereas that is not the reality for people of color.

For Sen, whiteface is not a game or costume she can easily shed when she is finished being entertained. Blackface is not cloaking the anger of White individuals unlike Sen’s intentions for whiteface, which is used to mask her anger. She states, “blackface makes me angry because whiteface is not its opposite...The age of Achilles is over...Anger is a militant black. Anger is a shrill woman. Because we know this, many of us hide our anger behind elaborate masks of comedy” (xii). Justifying the use of whiteface, Sen clearly articulates that whiteface functions as a comic rhetorical means to

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<sup>2</sup> In the US, blackface has a history of racist practices as it is a pervasive political stereotype used to oppress people of African descent. See the National Museum of African American History & Culture, Smithsonian for further discussion of how, according to historian Cockrell, the performance of blackface by white individuals cannot be thought of separately from racist mockery and stereotype. See Clark for further discussion as Leonard, professor of comparative ethnic studies and American studies, explains blackface is embedded in toxic, racist culture.

hide the anger of subjugation. Her reference to Greek mythos and perceptions of angry individuals (i.e., militant black, shrill woman) acknowledges it was not in her best interest to be perceived as an angry Brown woman in modern times. Sen highlights the idea that it was essential for her to be a “good” immigrant and creates this perception of a good immigrant by following (White) American customs because they were normative, yet she conceals her cultural customs. Referring to the title of the preface, she further reveals the mask of whiteface she wore was a grin that was intended to mainly to conceal her own anger. She states, “in the early decades of the twenty-first century, I know that if I stop grinning, I will frighten others with my anger. Anger is the useless emotion of people with grievances” (x). Her smile was a reaction to the context that surrounds the time and space. She admits that she could not effectively use her anger to solve problems, so instead she decided to conceal it under the cloak of friendly visibility.

The smile is a strategy used to conceal her anger regarding racism that appears during Sen’s experience in higher education, in which she encounters institutional oppression. She frames the preface as a reflection of a particular moment: Yale graduate school circa 1998. The first sentence of the preface reads, “When I was in graduate school at Yale University over twenty years ago, I once asked a friend of mine why everyone always gravitated toward us two at student parties” (ix). She recalls what her friend, an African American male, responded: “‘we smile,’ he tells me, ‘because it is the only face we can show. If we stop smiling, they will see how angry we are. And no one likes an angry black man.’ *Or an angry brown woman*, I add, silently editing our conversation” (x). This statement implies that they smile and laugh out of necessity. In

order to be read as civil to their non-minority peers and White colleagues, their “choices” to react otherwise are limited due to the scrutinized gaze placed upon their Black and Brown bodies.

Sen’s smile is one of the physical markers that indicate her whiteface concealment; out of this concealment ultimately emerges a dual identity. One part of her identity, her external self, is presented to the outside world, whereas the other half is preserved and sealed away for her internal world – her home and as she called it the India in her mind. She explains, “I lived in multiple worlds. I did not want my Indian world to touch my American one” (160). In the US, her whiteface embodiment manifests into *metis* from this point on to react and cope with the exigency of having to face her cultural identity in an environment in which she is a nondominant part of the community. Sen’s external world projects the pressure to conform as well. Sen, as a narrator, unfolds how isolating it felt to be the new, foreign kid in school, while Sen, as a rhetor, makes an appeal towards *pathos* aimed at both American-born and foreign-born audiences because one can sympathize with the bullying and loneliness of a young girl. When Sen enters middle school in the US, she acknowledges, “I felt very lonely at the time... To be the foreign kid with an odd-sounding name was no fun in the public school classrooms. Kids with foreign accents and strange-smelling food would be teased mercilessly” (*Not Quite* 93). From an early age, she realizes she could conceal her foreign identity by adopting whiteface, thus enacting *metis* via embodiment.

Sen implements whiteface on an embodied level as she alters her physical and mental modes of being in the world, observed when she reworks her dress, gestures, and



language choices to American norms. Scholars such as Debra Hawhee support the idea that *metis* must be enacted in the body as it has more complex layers because there is a “corporeality of *mētis*: as a kind of intelligence, *metis* cannot be thought separate from [sic] bodily state” (57). Sen’s embodiment of her dual identity and use of whiteface is responsive in nature, and her awareness is contingent upon her surroundings. Her space dictates how she reacts and performs – in the privacy of her home she embraces her ethnic and cultural identity and in public she aims to appear “American.” She states, “Despite all my attempts at Total Americanization, I still craved Hindi films...I kept all this a secret from my new friends at school...At home I spoke in Bengali and listened to Hindi music tapes” (*Not Quite* 91; 92). She reveals to readers that despite how much she desired being perceived as American, she did not want to forsake her favorite Indian pastimes, but she expresses it had to be enjoyed secretly. Sen continues, “I built a secret palace for the Indian me inside my mind. A palace furnished with memories of another country and fueled by homeland cassette tapes and pirated videos” (92). Although she loved and adored her Indian culture, as seen with her diction “palace” which carries a connotation of elegance, this beloved place had to remain in her mind rather than in public expression, and highlights her need to repress and hide things she loved. Perhaps Sen also felt the need to hide her Indian culture because she felt embarrassed to express her difference. Not only does Sen appeal to readers’ emotions by displaying a longing for her beloved homeland and the measures she went through to keep her memories of it alive, but she also portrays the reality of assimilation: to assimilate to one country, one must forgo the love of another.

Due to the exigency of Sen's move to the US, she crafts whiteface as a feasible resource to succeed in her new environment. When Sen first arrives in the US, she articulates her struggle to fit in and her coping mechanisms of adopting American mannerisms, foods, music, television, and fashion as resources. Her utilization of these resources of American culture was an influential component to her overall assimilation process as it created another layer of concealment. Forging this practicality is a key factor of *metis* in the way Sen performs whiteface. Jay Dolmage articulates *metis* as "the craft of forging something practical out of these possibilities, practicing an embodied rhetoric" (149). In other words, another aspect of *metis* is one's ability to be resourceful and practical in a given situation, which complements the embodied nature of *metis*.

Not only does Sen articulate the ways she resourcefully and practically employs American culture in her memoir, but she also expresses the effects of her resourcefulness in articles about the publication. She mentions the ways in which she adopts whiteface into her life by observing the social and cultural cues that were normative in her new environment. She claims in her article "How I Found My Race in America: When I Stopped Smiling Like a Good Immigrant, I Risked Becoming an Angry Brown Woman" published the same month as her memoir:

I tried to be a good immigrant by assimilating as swiftly as I could when I arrived in the United States as a young girl. I tried to be a grateful immigrant by learning to talk, dress, cook, eat, drink, dance, and even think like an American...I was entrepreneurial. I fashioned myself to increase my chances of finding success. I wore whiteface.

Sen's need to "assimilate as swiftly" as she could conveys the urgency felt in the exigency of her family's move to the US. As a response to the exigency, Sen's decision to be entrepreneurial was a rhetorical move and reveals her resourcefulness at a young age. These physical changes were not just for aesthetics, as she understood there were benefits to belonging rather than remaining an outsider. Those benefits were contingent upon how well she assimilated, which she understood in order to find success. Sen's decision to wear whiteface can also be interpreted as a rhetorical decision with Sen as narrator and Sen as rhetor incorporating invention as a form of persuasion insofar as she uses invention to create her own practical strategy of determining which resources would aid her transition and ultimately her survival in her new environment.

The ability to be cunning and crafty, an additional strategy of *metis*, is characteristic of Sen's use of whiteface as a performance of assimilation. In "Sophistic *Metis* An Intelligence of the Body," Hawhee connects the embodiment of *metis* to a manner of being and thinking, often described as a crafty and cunning ability and acted on in the "heat of the moment" (47). Hawhee explains that *metis* becomes a "mode, his habit, his way of encountering the world" (52). This ability to improvise in the moment reappears so much so that it becomes a part of Sen's identity and mode of being. Even though *metis* is translated and understood through the body, it also stresses the importance of certain intellectual characteristics. Hawhee cites scholars Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant for their study of the concept *metis*; their interpretation of *metis* "generally refers to instantiations of 'intelligent ability,' all of which emphasize practicality, success, or resourcefulness in a particular sphere" (46). Sen's use of

whiteface as a cunning ability is highlighted when her White peers ultimately forget she is not White.

Moreover, when Sen unpacks blackface and whiteface metaphors in the preface, one can observe her rationale for having to be crafty. She explains circumstantial and racial differences surrounding her graduate school experience: White students in her graduate program have the privilege of expressing their true emotions in public, whereas it may be risky for non-White individuals due to material and affective consequences of being seen as other. Therefore, because Sen recognized there was a limited range of expressions for her Brown body, she crafted a smile, a cunning idea due to the connotation of a smile as a sign of amiability and warmth rather than animosity. Her crafted smile became her aid for navigating the predominantly White academic space in which she was encompassed. Readers are aware of her crafted smile's success because she illustrates how colleagues still surround her and laugh along with her. Therefore, she accomplished her goal of belonging among her American peers without revealing what was originally concealed via her cunning and crafty ability.

As an additional outcome from the exigency of moving to the US, Sen mentions feeling displaced, especially because there are no other people who shared a similar geographic, cultural, or ethnic background; therefore, she had no community outside her parents and home. This lack of community resulted in isolation and created tension within her sense of identity, and she toggled with who she was, who she was becoming, who she wanted to be, and how she wanted to present herself to the world. Sen discusses Frantz Fanon's idea of third-person consciousness, which is similar to W.E.B. DuBois's

concept of double consciousness,<sup>3</sup> in which the world perceives a person of color in a particular perspective, the person of color sees themselves in a different perspective, and the thirdly being perceived as a foreigner. She asks the audience to imagine “a world in which every word and every concept you would apply to yourself has been created by people who see you as inferior, as threatening, as other. Third-person consciousness makes me see myself *only* as others see me. I became foreign to myself” (*Not Quite* 147). In this moment of tension, the audience can see her grappling with ontological issues – because she has been so othered by society, she has othered herself from herself, and cannot recognize her own being. For Sen, *metis* is so integral to her identity that she no longer knows how to dissociate from it. Hawhee, as a part of her explanation of *metis*, illustrates, “the mask does not hide the face, but rather, the mask is the face” (61). In other words, the mask of whiteface fuses with her identity and *metis becomes* the face—it is her way of being and navigating in the world. The mask of whiteface Sen wears is contingent upon the space she occupies: she wears the whiteface mask for American peers, in school, and at work, and no mask for her home space with her parents with whom she can express the Indian part of her identity. Whiteface is her disguise, but the mask of whiteface becomes her external identity/face and it is difficult for her to distinguish it from her internal identity.

As a further result of whiteface and the exigency that invented it, Sen hides her cultural identity for so long by wearing whiteface, and wearing it so successfully, that her

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon’s idea of third-person consciousness expands upon the concept of double consciousness, which specifically focuses on the experiences of African Americans and how they are viewed; however, he extends this concept to other intersectional layers of how foreigners are perceived.

peers have also forgotten that she is foreign-born and Indian. In chapter four, Sen shares her gradual desire for the removal of whiteface, which was initiated by multiple comments by white classmates. Sen explains, “In New Haven, I was once warned by a fellow student that I had to be careful when walking around town. ‘Sometimes,’ this white classmate told me, ‘you turn a corner and realize you are the only white person walking on the street’” (*Not Quite* 180). She continues with other examples of confused white peers: “‘I always forget you are Indian,’ a high school friend told me... She meant it as a compliment. She meant I was not a strange foreigner. That made me even sadder” (180). These comments convey her peers did not see her as a foreigner, but as a fellow white counterpart. Her performance and enactment of whiteface has resulted in her erasure of her Indian identity as it is now unrecognizable to her white classmates. She has succeeded in her mission of whiteface; however, the outcome of it is unpredictable sadness and erasure. Sen must reface her identity as she realizes how her classmates perceive her and how people would have perceived her ancestors and family members. She states, “I, who had worked for so long to hide my difference, felt suffocated by the embrace of sameness...I no longer yearned to be seen as white...I did not wish to leave behind my fellow Indians...and disappear into whiteness” (181). The recognition of the success of her whiteface results in emotional and mental distress for her, but also helps her to realize she intended and desired to be American, not to be white. These comments from her white peers and her own realizations about her identity help her recognize the difference between being American and being White, and indicate that invisibility was not the goal. Whiteface is a necessary strategy for Sen’s survival, because as a rhetor, Sen

needs whiteface to persuade her White audience in Cambridge that she belongs. On the other hand, as an outcome, she is angry that whiteface is the only face she can show them in order to be accepted.

### **The Stakes of Whiteface for Sharmila Sen**

As a result of whiteface, Sen's mask becomes her face completely and has a material and sociocultural effect. Whiteface's success helped Sen earn Ivy League degrees from Harvard and Yale, which had material effects such as success on the job market. As an assistant professor at Harvard and as the editor-at-large for Harvard University Press, Sen's biography on the first page of her memoir positions her as a well-educated, successful scholar and professional. She has assimilated into American culture and society so well that she has also acquired the prestige of social and class privilege due to the ways her educational background, as well as the performance of whiteface during that time in her life, has allowed her to elevate her status as a member of society. This short biography paints Sen as a holistic and successful figure in both her personal and profession life by positioning readers for one interpretation by presenting herself through western ideals of success. Perhaps this representation is reflexive of her present life, and the memoir is a revelation of her past and how she got to where she is today. Her *metic* strategies of concealment and survival had worked so well that she must now reface herself, and as a result, creates the next exigency. However, before she refaces her identity, she explains the personal and political stakes surrounding assimilation.

Sen could not have predicted the numerous outcomes of whiteface nor its success, because the stakes of assimilating were so necessary for her as a new immigrant. While

examining her stories of assimilation, the mask of whiteface is an intentionally executed persona and performance: Sen cannot express her true emotions, so she smiles and conceals her Indian identity to avoid negative material effects. When she was younger the exigency of her unexpected move to the US created dire stakes and tensions for her because of the threat of deportation and exile, as well as the lack of citizenship and legal rights. Thus, the perceptions of appearing like a hostile and ungrateful immigrant were imminent and perilous. As she became a mother, the stakes were heightened because they began to intimate not only her life in the US, but also her children's. Sen illustrates the fact that there were risks before and after one emigrates, and the need to be perceived as a "good immigrant" was essential for survival in her family's new country. She explains, "We waited for almost three years in India for our visas because Baba was too nervous to emigrate without a green card" (62). Sen's experience also demonstrates the emotional stress that may occur while preparing to emigrate. The need to legally immigrate condemned Baba to live in distress for three years, because for the family to successfully obtain their visas meant that pressure had to be endured.

When Sen's family finally arrived to the US, the pressure to succeed was immense especially due to the distressing process of obtaining visas; therefore, the family did not take many risks. Sen emphasizes,

We were making a historic leap from one continent to another, yet we were an extremely risk-averse family. Many immigrants carry these twin traits within themselves and some even pass them on to the next generation... Having left the comforts of home we know all too well that there is no safety net of kinship or citizenship to catch us should we topple. This made us cautious. We check the lock on the door three times before going out. We save more than we spend... At work, we beat every deadline in the office and never pass up a second gig to make



extra money. We tell our children to keep their heads down, study hard...As risk-averse immigrants, we do not rock the boat. (62; 63)

Sen relates to other immigrants who may have experienced similar feelings, and she explains to audiences the many cautions immigrants face in areas of their life from jobs to finances to child-rearing practices. She highlights the point that when emigrating there is a huge risk at first surviving because there is no external support such as familial support or the safety, comfort, and privilege of citizenship. Because there is such a lack of support, the need to be cautious is not only intensified but also necessary for their survival in the US as seen in Sen's examples of locking the doors three times for physical safety, saving extra money, working harder to secure financial support and education, and passing down these cautions to the next generation.

Further, as a new immigrant, Sen illustrates the need to be read as civil while also explaining the nuance behind her anger. She specifically describes the way anger is perceived from certain bodies and the ways she felt the need to mask her own anger when she was a new immigrant. In the preface, Sen mentions the play *Look Back in Anger*, by British playwright John Osborne, as a site of reference for how the public perceives anger from White, male bodies (xiv). Feminist rhetoric scholar Karma R. Chávez maintains in her article "The Body: An Abstract and Actual Rhetorical Concept" the distinctions between dominant members of society and bodies that become othered: "It is only through bodily difference in contrast to the unspoken, yet specified, white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual male standard that particular bodies come to matter" (242). Chávez explains that oftentimes in scholarship, the abstract body is based on White men

(244), which positions everyone else as always-already the other – an observation Sen not only witnesses but also lives.

Chávez's interpretation of the body supports Sen's analysis regarding the way White male bodies versus Black and Brown bodies are perceived when angry. Sen contends, "When the Angry Young Man is white, male, and British, he is a cultural icon, an artistic rendering of midcentury Britain's social and cultural struggle" (xv). After establishing White, male, British men as the acceptable person for anger, she questions whether other bodies can be granted the same ease of expression and how that may be demonstrated. Sen ponders, "Can the Angry Young Man be black? Or a woman? Or an immigrant? I think not. There are other words we use for angry blacks, angry women, and angry immigrants. Those creatures are threatening, unnatural, ungrateful, a problem" (xv). By the naming of "creatures," but not "humans" or "people" and by the negative connotation from her list of adjectives specifically directed at marginalized bodies, she implies her awareness of these negative perceptions and the ways she did not want to be perceived as a new immigrant. Explicitly stating a question and answering it may function as purposeful discomfort for her audiences, particularly White audiences who may not understand her necessity for whiteface because of dissimilar lived experiences. Perhaps this discomfort works to also to inspire growth and awareness for people who do not share similar identity markers as herself.

Sen's recognition of how different bodies are perceived when angry led her to make visible decisions that transformed the way she dressed and her manner of speaking, including which languages to speak in which spaces. Sen continues,

I have spent many decades carefully arranging my words, my gestures, my clothes, and my surroundings so that I do not appear threatening, unnatural, or ungrateful...I did not want to be perceived as the ungrateful immigrant who does not pass her naturalization examination, the unnatural woman who is never promoted at work...I feared being perceived as the threatening creature who might be detained longer by customs and immigration officers, and even worse, whose children might be seen as threats and problems as well...white men can openly rage against everything changing *and* against nothing changing. I envy them, for their rage is not arrested. (xv; xvi)

It is imperative that Sen illuminates the material effects that the legal system threatened as well as how her multifaceted identity as an immigrant, woman, and mother could be drastically affected. If she wanted to stay in the US and become a citizen, it was essential for her to pass her naturalization examinations. Failing would result in possible deportation, a lack of citizenship, a lack of educational and financial opportunities in the US and would limit her citizenship rights. Through the references to the “unnatural woman who is never promoted at work,” Sen highlights the gendered threat presented by the wage gap in many workplaces and the ways in which women are often overlooked for promotions due to institutional misogyny. Further, she mentions the fear of being detained by customs and immigration officers, which speaks to the mobility and the apprehension regarding mobility many immigrants internalize. She also acknowledges that her choices to remain non-angry affect not only her status as an immigrant and working woman, but also greatly influence how her children will be perceived. Therefore, she implies that these threats may be generational, and her apprehension thereby is justified. By establishing that certain bodies are perceived as threatening, unnatural, and ungrateful, and by listing the imminent legal and professional consequences, Sen, as a Brown, immigrant woman, validates why she took numerous

material steps toward avoiding negative perceptions of Brownness and immigration.

Ultimately, she articulates that the public expression of anger from a Brown, immigrant woman can lead to life-altering consequences and immeasurable stakes for her and her family.

Besides her need to hide her anger due to the negative material effect in the US, Sen's background in India may have also influenced her need to wear whiteface. As a child, she knew that there were negative consequences when one does not belong to the dominant group and that society's perception of outsiders is disdainful. In reference to the treatment of Anglo-Indians and other biracial people in India, Sen states,

Indian society—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—generally treated biracial men and women as outsiders. Some Anglo-Indians tried to pass as white and went to great lengths to keep their Indian blood a secret...The stakes were high on both sides. Those who wished to pass knew that if their secret was revealed, they would face social ostracism or economic loss. Those who policed the racial lines feared that their culture would be endangered by alien invasion. (19)

This idea of passing was introduced to her long before her arrival to the US and was perhaps where the idea of whiteface originated. But, as she articulates, the stakes were high, so she masked the Indian part of her identity in order to avoid social ostracization if her mask was unintentionally unveiled. She also recognized that the dominant group feared others invading their culture, and, as she states throughout the preface, she did not want to be perceived as a threatening or ungrateful immigrant. These necessary precautions influence her need for *metis* and her particular use of *metis* and speak to her personal exigency to assimilate after her move. The last line of the quotation refers to the ways some dominant members of society view foreigners apprehensively, suggesting that

Sen directs part of her argument toward current White nationalism in the US, thus commenting on a larger *kairotic* moment in US politics.

### **Conclusion: Sen's Multiplicitous Purposes as a Rhetor and Narrator**

As a result of whiteface and the exigency of the family's move to the US, Sen became a minority and lost many advantages from her dominant Indian social and cultural privileges. She continues to express how small changes led to feelings of transformation, unfamiliarity, and discomfort. As a new immigrant, she recalls, "I was changing into something else. For the first time, I saw myself as a minority, a person of color. I did not like it" (*Not Quite* 92). Ultimately, these changes led her to grapple with her sense of self in terms of race in the US: for the first time she had to face her identity as a nondominant member of society, one which was constructed around race rather than social and cultural capital. Due to the unexpected nature of the move, race becomes an ontological struggle Sen grapples with across the memoir to her various audiences.

In an interview with the CARGC Book Series at the University of Pennsylvania, Sen claims that it is important for her audiences to understand how race and identity are intertwined, especially in the US. She states that the central idea of the memoir is that race is integrally connected to American identity: "part of becoming American is inevitably tied to understanding what race is and having racial identity," which can be difficult for US-born audiences understand because many "[new immigrants] can't be mapped on to black or white dichotomy" (CARGC Book Series). Her point is relevant to the social and political climate in the US with the term "people of color" as a monolith, homogeneous identity, and one community, which is part of the political exigency Sen

comments on. Paromita Shastri, reviewer of Sen's memoir, notices the political commentary Sen is making in the text which is tied to Sen's purpose for publishing it in 2018. Shastri articulates: "The nation that most of the world sees as an immigration heaven has a daily struggle with assimilating a myriad of skin colours between white and black, the not-white, the persons of colour." Writers such as Shastri recognize that the term "people of color" becomes ambiguous because people are confused with races between White and Black. Shastri speaks to Sen's point that the US as a nation, despite being a home for many immigrants, struggles with understanding the nuances of assimilation, especially for people who do not fall into the White/Black binary.

Sen, as a rhetor, also highlights in chapter one how US major historical and legal moments regarding 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration<sup>4</sup> set precedents for how people of color are perceived in the US. Specifically, she analyzes the changes made by the US Census in the way they categorized people, and she explains how racial labels are perceived in this century. Sen notes: "Contemporary racial labels used in everyday American parlance are an odd amalgamation of the geographic (Asian), the linguistic (Hispanic), and the pseudo-biological (black, white)" (6). In other words, she observes that racial labels are derived from various identity markers, including language and geography, rather than just skin tone. By establishing and explaining the legal history of immigration, the US Census, and the ways people have been and are currently categorized based on race, Sen puts the memoir in direct contact with the current political and *kairotic* moment in the

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<sup>4</sup> Sen mentions laws about ethnicity quotas and laws such as the Immigration Act of 1917 and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (*Not Quite* 6).

US. She builds a foundation for the memoir as the text remarks on how race has been perceived in the past and the ways it is presently shifting which are contingent upon the immigration laws.

Following Sutton's interpretation of *kairos*, I interpret Sen's outreach and appeals to broader immigrant communities as also making political commentary on the rise<sup>5</sup> of White nationalism in the US; Sen's commentary on race, immigration, and assimilation in the US can also be interpreted as a *kairotic* moment as she challenges White nationalism. She concludes in chapter four of her memoir that to be American is to also embrace one's racial and ethnic difference. Sen explicitly states the goal of the memoir is for people to understand the multifaceted experiences new immigrants may face and to understand that people may emigrate for numerous reasons that may be voluntary, involuntary, economical, or more nuanced. Sen strives to appeal to new immigrants (just one of her many audiences) in America, similar to herself, in order to spread awareness and compassion that they are not experiencing their transition to the US alone (CARGC Book Series). She also highlights that code switching is an aspect of their lived experience, which relates to performativity.

When Sen describes how her family waited to get their green cards before emigrating, she, as a rhetor, depicts the political exigencies that occurred during their process of transitioning to the US. She simultaneously forewarns immigrant audiences who have already emigrated to the US, or are planning to move to the US, and she

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<sup>5</sup> Within the last decade the US has experienced an increase in social movements advocating for marginalized individuals on social media platforms and in protest across the US including Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, LGBTQ+Rights, Criminal Justice Reform, Indigenous Rights, etc. See Paul.

informs native-born American audiences who may not understand multidimensional immigrant experiences. When she states her family waited three years to get approved, she conveys to native-born American audiences that her family did not emigrate illegally, which may appeal to audiences who have preconceived notions about how people do and *should* emigrate. Secondly, her example showcases to both immigrant and native-born American audiences the reality of the lengthy waiting period when preparing to legally move to the US, and how tedious the process of obtaining a green card may be. Sen illustrates the gravity of the bureaucratic steps toward immigration and naturalization.

Additionally, Sen describes to both foreign- and native-born non-academic audiences the nuances of institutional racial oppression as she experienced during graduate school. The story of the smile in the preface reveals the ways that Black and Brown bodies are marginalized in academic settings. Even though Yale is an Ivy League institution, which may not be relatable to the common person, she contextualizes readers by indicating curiosity that perhaps led to feelings of discomfort, which may be more relatable to minorities. This revelation of imperfection and discomfort might be Sen's way of appealing to non-academic audiences. She states, "finding ourselves to be the only minority students in a great many of seminars...we often joked with each other privately about race and identity as a way of blowing off some steam" (*Not Quite* ix). This quotation reveals multiple layers regarding the dynamics of their friendship and the expression of concealed feelings. As the only two racial minorities in their program at the time, they found community in each other in ways they could not confide in other non-minority students, insofar as they could only communicate these feelings in private and in



a joking manner. However, the lightheartedness of a joke disguises serious feelings, and their need to “blow off some steam” speaks to their frustration. She reveals a layer of isolation embedded into her graduate school experience as well as a need to escape and vent to another minority student who may understand her lived experience. Sen’s attempt to appeal to non-academic audiences also reveals the nuances of community building that Black and Brown bodies perform in order to cope with institutional oppression.

Sen’s perspectives on identity regarding race and motherhood are influenced by her children – another purpose the memoir serves. She expands on this personal *kairotic* exigency in another article she wrote around the time the memoir was published and in the CARGC Book Series interview. In Sen’s article “How I Found My Race in America: When I Stopped Smiling Like A Good Immigrant, I Risked Becoming An Angry Brown Woman,” she articulates, “When I became the mother of three children, the future demanded something new of me.” In this realization, she conveys to her audience that it was a personal *kairotic* moment for her due to the timeliness and weightiness: the urgency to break and forfeit the mold of whiteface was imperative because she did not want her children to hide their identity like she hid hers. Decades after her own arrival to the US, Sen now experiences what it means to be a foreigner raising native-born American children as she sees the country through her children’s eyes. As a teenager, she “learned one America and as a mother I learned another America” (CARGC Book Series). In this interview she explains what is at stake with raising her children in America. In these moments, I interpret Sen as both the narrator and the rhetor because

she demonstrates her understanding of her lived experience and how it evolves due to her children's existence.

I interpret Sen's multiple roles, as a rhetor and narrator, and her wide audience through Grant-Davie's idea of the compound rhetorical situation. Grant-Davie defines the term "compound rhetorical situation" as a "discussion of a single subject by multiple rhetors and audiences" (265). According to Grant-Davie in his article "Rhetorical Situations and their Constituents," the role of the writer/speaker is multiplicitous. He explains: "exigence, rhetor, audience, and constraints can interlace with each other" (277). Sen is not only the rhetor in her memoir, but is also narrating the situations, constraints, and exigencies, many of which overlap. This overlapping is demonstrated as she transitions to a different school system and environments different from India. Additionally, her experiences are witnessed by a dual audience: as a rhetor, her audience includes readers of her memoir, and as a narrator her audience includes the other characters within the text that bear witness to her. Further, Grant-Davie cites Douglas Park, who claims, "a particular publication can create a context that partly determines the nature of the audience for a discourse that appears in it" (271). Therefore, due to the way Sen contextualizes race, immigration, and assimilation in her 2018 memoir to an audience of immigrants and non-immigrants, the discourse in the publication cultivates the audience. Audiences grasp the nuances of specific moments of her life via her multiple roles as rhetor and narrator.

Furthermore, Grant-Davie's idea that writers are also part of the audience supports my contention that Sen is her own audience, as someone who was a younger

immigrant, a socially and politically aware American, and as a mother. Grant-Davie suggest that:

Writers are also readers of their own texts, they can alternate between...they might draft with a sense of audience in mind, then reread to see what sense of audience is reflected in the text they have created. In some instances, writers may be their own intended audiences. (271)

The author as the intended audience is observed in Sen's memoir as she states in interviews that part of her intentions for the memoir is to appeal to immigrants like herself. When she states in the CARGC Book Series the different reasons people emigrate and how race is tied to identity in the US, she draws on her own experiences as a young immigrant who once experienced this process. In Sen's rhetorical choice to connect her personal life to the text, she bridges the gap between rhetor and narrator as she imagines herself as part of the audience while also crafting a social and political message targeted at current US conversations regarding race and immigration.

Across her memoir, *Not Quite Not White: Losing and Finding Race in America* Sen grapples with feelings of displacement because of her emigration, her process of assimilation, and the exigencies of her unexpected move and refacing her identity. Sen's memoir represents not only the story of a young immigrant transitioning to America, but it also explores the added layers of her intersectional identity by articulating how her newly discovered racial identity as a Brown woman influences her worldview. In Cambridge, her invention of whiteface to combat negative perceptions of Brownness and immigrants' masks large parts of her identity, resulting in feeling unrecognizable to the world without it. I interpret her term and concept of wearing whiteface as the rhetorical

concept *metis* in that whiteface is a practical, resourceful, and cunning mask she adopts to perform normativity in her new environment and to combat feelings of anger and negative perceptions regarding Brownness and immigration. However, she relies on the concealment of the mask so much that it becomes an integral part of her identity as an American.

The removal of whiteface was a process of accepting her ethical and racial identity. Sen could not recognize her foreignness as also Americanness when she first arrived due to fear of failure, deportation, and poverty; ultimately, whiteface was invented for her survival. As an older adult and mother, Sen comes to terms with whiteface and her position as a Brown woman assimilating in America. Therefore, in this text she unfolds how her lived experience and her realizations regarding race in America portray the nuances of a larger conversation about race, assimilation, and immigration in the US. Due the memoir's 2018 publication, it can perhaps serve as a vehicle for social commentary considering the timeliness and appropriation of it. As a result of the *kairotic* moment Sen enacts, her memoir may also be used for activism and education surrounding race and immigration in the US.

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## CODE MESHING: PRACTICES FOR WRITING SPACE IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

### Part One: The Issue and What's at Stake

This position statement aims to debunk myths regarding negative perceptions surrounding the use of multiple dialects and languages in writing spaces, to illustrate how instructors may incorporate multidialectal and multilingual approaches in US writing spaces, and to expand on traditional English writing instruction. In recent decades, many linguists and secondary English education scholars have recognized the fluidity of the English language, particularly as a multidialectal system (Curzan; Horner et al, Lee and Handsfield). Horner et al. establish English, and language in general, as always-already multidialectal and multilingual due to language variation and “language learners as also language users and creators” (307). The researchers explain that it is unrealistic to have a “linguistically homogeneous situation” (i.e., language with no variation) (Horner et al. 303). In writing classrooms, scholars such as Alice Y. Lee and Lara J. Handsfield establish that “bilingual and bidialectal students dynamically move across and among languages” (160). Thus, because English is already a multidialectal system in which speakers are encompassed, and many speakers are already multidialectal and multilingual, a translingual approach via code meshing should be recognized in academic writing as well.

The writing spaces that I envision this position statement (or parts of it) may apply to include but are not limited to post-secondary composition classrooms such as



first-year writing or more advanced writing classes, consulting sessions in writing centers, and K-12 writing classrooms. Writing instructors in these settings have an ethical responsibility toward educating students on the ways languages influence digital and global spaces that already exist within a code meshing context via writing and conversation such as social networks, media, video and audio spaces (i.e., podcasts). Kim Brian Lovejoy<sup>6</sup> asserts that instructors should “be honest about the function and uses of multiple dialects and languages in our society” which is influenced by the rising effects of globalization (123). I would also expand that use to academic spaces which have huge potential for the inclusion of code meshing as many publications, academic resources, and networking extend to digital spaces. Drawing on Lovejoy’s analysis, I urge writing teachers and writing center administrators and practitioners to teach students the rhetorically strategic ways dialects and languages can function in academic writing (123). It is no longer enough for instructors to recognize or simply value students’ home and community languages and dialects; they need to teach pedagogically reviewed methods, such as code meshing in academic writing, so the appreciation of various languages becomes developed into implementation as well.

Additionally, the research supporting this document focuses on speakers of African American Language (AAL in this position statement draws from Lee’s scholarship), Ebonics, English, and Spanish as the primary dialects and languages incorporated in multilingual approaches during writing education. These dialects and

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<sup>6</sup> The scholarship from Lovejoy is based on his chapters in part four, “Code-Meshing and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for College Writing Instruction” of the text *Other People’s English*. See Young.

languages are dominant across the US; therefore, rather than consolidating all languages into a translingual approach and ignoring their linguistic familial difference, this position statement aims to focus on Ebonics, Spanish, and English and dialects in between because of their common usage in US writing spaces, which is the demographic for the policy statement.

Although a majority of research on code meshing in writing spaces is grounded in K-12 research, analyzing this peer-reviewed research and implementing its suggested strategies can help writing instructors in post-secondary settings as well due to the topical relevance of teaching language conventions. K-12 research also provides the language for approaching code meshing applications and the demographic of students that gain the most access. Lee and Handsfield's article, "Code-Meshing and Writing Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms," which was published in 2018, incorporates up-to-date discourse surrounding code meshing and recent terminology. For the purpose of this position statement, I elect to use the term Ebonics as a dialect used by African Americans and the term Dominant American English (DAE), as opposed to Standard English or Standard American English, is used "to reflect how dominant sociopolitical factors influence what is considered standard" (Lee and Handsfield 159). Lee and Handsfield establish DAE is not considered the "gold standard" for writing, but rather is one version of English among many varieties and is influenced by a writer's purpose and audience (166). The intention is not to eliminate DAE, dispute its importance, or invalidate proficiency in DAE, but rather they argue that "monolingual instructional frameworks are insufficient" (166). Challenging monolingual frameworks in writing instruction and

education is a necessary step toward understanding language evolution and expanding upon traditional English writing instruction.

Another essential factor to address in a multilingual/multidialectal framework is for writing instructors to recognize and challenge the idea and issue of what is *considered* correct/incorrect and how that is tied to language hierarchy. In her article “Why ‘Correcting’ African American Language Speakers is Counterproductive,” Lee illustrates that dialects exist across a variety of English speakers regardless of their ethnic or racial background, while also pointing out why correcting AAL speakers, for example, is unjust because DAE is inherently problematic and speaks to a larger issue of language hierarchy. Lee states, “language is far more multidimensional than being simply ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect.’ This dichotomous perception points to a linguistic hierarchy that, in many ways, is representative of a racial hierarchy that overarches our society” (28; 29). Therefore, correctness regarding grammar or syntax is a surface-level issue in language whereas the larger, underlying issue is tied to racial hierarchy. According to the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement,” the best approaches for writing assessment, in regard to both teaching and learning, mutually respects linguistic diversity and variety in language. The CCCC researchers assert, “assessments that are keyed closely to an American cultural context may disadvantage second language writers.” Therefore, assessment based on solely an American cultural context further excludes speakers of other languages and perpetuates language hierarchy.

Furthermore, it is important to note the issue and confusion surrounding the differences between code switching and code meshing, and why code switching is not recommended as a multilingual writing approach. Lee and Handsfield make an important distinction between code meshing and code switching. They state:

Code-switching risks forcing a binary in which both languages cannot coexist within school contexts. In contrast to code-switching, code meshing involves the intentional incorporation of more than one language within writing to ‘exploit and blend those differences’ (Young et al., 2014, p. 43) in a way that frees students to exercise identity and agency within their language use. (161)

In other words, code meshing blends languages rather than allowing one to dominate over another; this blending of languages further grants students the ability to highlight their agency and identity within their language as well. Horner et al. also subtly address code switching as an insufficient method due to the power dynamics and hierarchies it can create. These power dynamics carry material effects as one can interpret certain languages or language variations as only appropriate for certain settings, such as DAE for public spaces, and other variations confined to private spaces. The concealment of one’s language also risks erasure due to apprehension brought about speaking publicly.

On the other hand, code meshing bridges various languages with DAE. This position statement follows the approach of scholars Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Y. Martinez to incorporate code meshing as “the blending of minoritized languages with DAE, encompassing both oral and written language practices” (qtd. in Lee and Handsfield 160), and recognizes, as Lee and Handsfield define, code meshing as "a writing practice in which languages are intentionally integrated, particularly with

sentences” (160). In other words, code meshing can be used as a strategy for joining various minoritized languages such as Spanish with English in order to form sentences. Perhaps this strategy can be used to teach students that language and the written form do not have to be formulaic and that there is more than one way to write. Code meshing also allows students to actively engage in linguistic variation (i.e., there is more than one “correct” way to articulate the same idea). Therefore, code meshing as a pedagogical approach can be used to build community among students and teachers in that it can cultivate aware, engaged writers (Lovejoy 121).

### **Part Two: Considering the Context for Code Meshing**

Vershawn Ashanti Young discusses why students view writing as a formulaic style in his article “Should Writers Use They Own English,” and how that is related to the apprehension encountered when one speaks in their dialect or native language. Young defines the term “standard language ideology” to explain why students feel hesitant to use their native and cultural dialects: “Standard language ideology is the belief that there is one set of dominant language rules that stem from a single dominant discourse (like standard English) that all writers and speakers of English must conform to in order to communicate effectively” (62). As a result of standard language ideology, people feel as if they cannot express themselves in an academic context with their dialects due to discrimination encountered. For example, students may feel embarrassed to speak in their native dialect or language because it sounds different from the norm, so, as a result, they may manipulate their voice to sound like DAE. Essentially, Young highlights that people

are taught to respect the dominant language even if they do not know how to reproduce it (i.e., in speaking, writing, etc.).

As a goal of code meshing, it is necessary for writing instructors to challenge gatekeeping writing practices that can consequently generate bias myths about language. Similar to Young's analysis, Horner et al. hope to acknowledge language differences in writing spaces by debunking myths regarding language variance, questioning traditional language practices, and aspiring to expand them:

This [translingual] approach calls for *more*, not less, conscious and critical attention to how writers deploy diction, syntax, and style, as well as form, register, and media. It acknowledges that deviations from dominant expectations need not be errors; that conformity need not be automatically advisable; that writer's purposes and reader's conventional expectations are neither fixed nor unified. (304)

Therefore, they push for a non-prescriptive approach toward teaching writing, acknowledge how dominant language creates perceptions about language use and its misuse, and especially emphasize writing as unfixed and non-uniform. Similar to Lee's research on code meshing, Horner et al. highlight the importance of honoring and celebrating students' languages. This recognition mitigates and sometimes alleviates the consequences in the erasure of language variety and language discrimination, which can result when dominant language practices remain unchanged.

Another gatekeeping practice necessarily challenged by code meshing is a prescriptive approach to English language and writing education. In the introduction of her text *Fixing English Prescriptivism and Language History*, Anne Curzan explains descriptivism and prescriptivism as the two main interpretations linguists take toward

approaching lexicon changes in Modern English. Curzan establishes that “Prescriptivism can and does influence the history of a language” (4). Therefore, because language evolution is inevitable, prescriptivism does not stop the evolution of language.

Prescriptivism does not “fix” the language, but in turn can create anxiety about language, produce a “belief system” regarding “the correctness of standard varieties of English,” and form a formal versus informal writing dichotomy (6). As a result, these outcomes “can perpetuate class and educational hierarchies based on language use” (6). Despite the fact that prescriptivism does not prevent language evolution, it results in negative affective and educational experiences that lead to many apprehensions and anxiety related to writing. Similar to Young’s standard language ideology, specific use of dialect, such as Ebonics, is often dismissed in writing spaces and, as a result, the exclusion within prescriptivism breeds.

Often investigated as a popular dialect in US-based code meshing research, Ebonics reflects the linguistic cultural heritage of African American students and their social reality tied to Black identity. Published in 2016 and accredited by CCCC, the scholars of the “Statement on Ebonics” apply the term Ebonics to encompass a language system used by people of African descent and is categorized within Black Language. African American Language is also part of Black Language system. This interpretation of Ebonics implies a multitude of Black Language forms; because there are a variety of Black Language forms, it is necessary to debunk myths regarding Ebonics and other forms. Similar to other minority languages, but not intended to homogenize languages by grouping them together, Ebonics suffers from negative perceptions regarding language

acquisition and cognitive ability in relation to learning DAE, and often times becomes othered. The CCCC'S researchers mentioned above articulate:

Like every other linguistic system, the Ebonics of African American students is systematic and rule governed, and it is not an obstacle to learning. The obstacle lies in negative attitudes toward the language, lack of information about the language, inefficient techniques for teaching language and literacy skills, and an unwillingness to adapt teaching styles to the needs of Ebonics speakers.

Therefore, not only is Ebonics misunderstood by non-users, but the negative material effects carry over to one's educational experience: speakers face prejudice due to a lack of understanding, and instructors are also unaware of useful and legitimate approaches to encouraging and meshing Ebonics in writing spaces. The researchers emphasize the validity of Ebonics as a linguistic system, which may be perpetuated by the lack of proper care often encountered because writing instructors and students may be unwilling to see Ebonics as a language system. CCCC's researchers also analyze how the historical effects of colonization and enslavement of African bodies have affected the history and development of Ebonics in the US and the ways the negative myth emerged. There are strong supporting statements in favor of Ebonics and other forms of Black English that articulate the ethical imperative at stake: Black English is representative of Black identities and lived experiences, and their linguistic cultural heritage can be recontextualized into knowledge in the classroom through a translingual approach that may enhance their reading and writing skills. It is important for educators to understand this as it carries material implications – when educators other one's language use, they also question the speaker's/writer's very identity.



An auxiliary myth surrounding multilingualism is that it disrupts cognitive ability; however, this belief is associated with power dynamics embedded in language. Lee and Handsfield address the myth of standardizing languages and language varieties, particularly looking at AAL, in which “learners have finite cognitive space available for language learning” (159). In other words, there is an assumption that one can be fluent in only one language, and that fluency dominates one’s cognitive ability to learn language. Part of the myth includes the fear that if one learns multiple languages, they will not have strong development in DAE. The authors explain that: “this myth underlies concerns that any time and energy spent speaking AAL, Spanish, or other marginalized languages somehow limits students’ potential to develop DAE” (159). Therefore, the authors reflect the underlying fear and prejudice embedded in the myth: that speakers of DAE see other languages as threatening and misinterpret the cognitive development of learning multiple languages. Lee and Handsfield continue by stating, “in short, which languages or language varieties are deemed ‘standard’ has more to do with who is speaking them than the relative value of specific grammatical structures for communicative and cognitive purposes” (160). Thus, when writing instructors teach code meshing to a multilingual audience, it is important to challenge who establishes DAE and how that distracts from realistic issues such as communicative and cognitive purposes.

Writing instructors must also simultaneously recognize that although not all African American students or Ebonics speakers are in agreement with promoting academic conventions that incorporate their languages and dialects, it is important to teach writers that they have choices and that one language should not be more valued

than another. Intentions should be guided at bringing awareness about language difference, and code-meshing efforts to acknowledge the value of various dialects and languages in formal writing (Lovejoy 128). Further, writing teachers should be aware and prepared that students may object, and when this happens to “encourage them to not to restrict or stigmatize other students’ voices, but if the narrower understanding of standard dialect is what they want to emulate, so be it” (129). In other words, students should not demean or discredit other students for embracing language and dialect variety in formal writing, while also respecting those who choose to use DAE as well. Overall, because of the ways code meshing challenges and seeks to transform traditional writing practices, it is crucial for teachers to reflect on the influence of standard language ideology, students’ anxieties about language, and the ways gatekeeping practices can consequently generate bias myths about language.

### **Part Three: Practices for Writing Classrooms and Writing Centers**

Code meshing in academic writing offers diverse possibilities for writing teachers and writing center consultants to encourage, strengthen, and advocate for students and their voices on the written page. Young discusses dialects as a way to incorporate a student’s voice in academic writing and explains that writing teachers must practice empowerment through code meshing by informing both teachers and students that there should be more than one academic way to write right. Code meshing allows for various dialects and vernaculars to be utilized in conversation through informal forms of communication (e.g., social media or texting), and it is effective in conversation and may help students develop their ideas. It may aid in establishing and validating student’s sense

of identity with language(s) as well. As a result, when students feel comfortable using their own dialects and languages within the discourse, perhaps their anxieties about writing will be alleviated as well due to the way they develop personal voice.

Instructors can treat various languages and dialects in writing spaces as legitimate by offering pedagogical techniques, including multimodal approaches, that address how language is socialized (Lee). Lee's first pedagogical recommendation for teaching AAL speakers, for example, is to build a foundation based on honoring AAL and its speakers by utilizing a "critical language pedagogy approach" (31). This approach acknowledges the history and legitimacy of AAL as a language while also addressing "how language, race, and power are deeply entwined" (Lee 31). Lee cites educational language scholars to further explain critical language pedagogy as an approach that "meets the goals of both bolstering racial identity while also equipping students with academic literary needs" (31). Putting this approach into practice begins with cultivating conversations with students regarding their perceptions considering language that is "right" and "wrong," which reveals the ways language is socialized and how students' are affected by negative perceptions of language. Lee encourages these conversations by also employing literature, audio, and visual aids that contain AAL as well; however, instructors should be mindful to verify that these resources do not contain or promote stereotypical depictions of AAL speakers.

Lee's approach to code meshing through AAL can also be considered as a way for instructors to honor, understand, and teach multilingualism through code meshing, the ways language, race, and power are connected, and acknowledge other dialects. From

conversations about “right” and “wrong” language instruction, teachers can raise questions regarding the power dynamics of who determines what is “right” and “wrong” thus shifting the conversation into a “mini-lesson” (32). Lee’s suggested “mini-lessons” can highlight AAL as a legitimate language, with rules and conventions, which has been studied by numerous researchers. Her mini-lessons address not only the historical influences operating behind AAL, the inventive approaches to discourse, and the way it is appropriated by white audiences, but also the ways language, race, and power are all linked (32). Lee also asks instructors to acknowledge other dialects, which avoids excluding students and helps them recognize how these dynamics may influence their own home languages and dialects.

As writing instructors adopt various pedagogical approaches to code meshing, their evaluation process for students’ writing shifts as they begin to understand how students’ home and community dialects and languages influence their voice in writing and how writing groups may cultivate student voice. In addition to a “critical language pedagogy approach” and conversations that cultivate mini-lessons, Lee also proposes a similar “contrastive analysis approach” that emphasizes student development of voice and communication. As opposed to code switching, she suggests that throughout the entire school year instructors should permit student writing that contains dialects and languages to gain an understanding of their voice, needs, and writing patterns; afterwards, instructors can arrange writing workshop time in which students work together in temporary “fluid guided reading and writing groups” (32). However, it is important to note that not all speakers of a dialect or language will incorporate that dialect or language

into their writing. It is possible that students may incorporate only some aspects of code meshing and additional instructions may be needed. Therefore, student-centered pedagogy is essential for recognizing students' specific writing needs due to their individual abilities. Instructors are recommended not to penalize work that contains languages and dialects for speakers and non-speakers, to give feedback during conferences (either one-on-one or in small groups), and to allow students to revise and resubmit writing (32).

In their article, "Code-Meshing and Writing Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms," Lee and Handsfield discuss the ways code meshing can be a translingual practice in writing classrooms through mentor texts. Instructors "can incorporate code-meshing through the use of multimodal mentor texts and tools, such as graphic novels, digital texts, and applications that enable music and movie production" (164). These various genres of writing, from song lyrics to newspaper articles, can include and engage many sensory experiences as well in order to expand students' approaches to writing. In particular, the mentor texts can include literature that uses diverse languages, therefore modeling writing that incorporates language variety for students to practice different formats, genres, and strategies of writing. These multimodal resources help students to understand language variety while also introducing them to digital literacy. Similar to the mentor text Lee mentions, "samples of writing" are an important aspect of code meshing that Lovejoy describes more in depth in his chapter "Code-Meshing Through Self-Directed Writing." Instructors are encouraged to show students samples of writing that demonstrate a variety of genres and styles in order to expose them to different dialects

and explore dialects in addition to DAE (134). Lovejoy provides the samples of writing he demonstrates to students, including established feminist scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Sharing samples of writing can open up conversations about and explore dialectal varieties and create discussions about purposeful, rhetorical choices writers produce with language and dialect variety via code meshing. Overall method of introducing students to numerous genres and voices, mentor texts/samples of writing allow teachers to honor and celebrate various languages and dialects in the classroom.

Self-directed writing is another teachable method for code meshing in academic writing (Lovejoy). Self-directed writing is a flexible student-centered pedagogical method that grants students agency in choosing their own writing topics (within a guided, topical scope and criteria of the instructor) and incorporating their own home and community dialects in writing spaces. A key factor in code meshing is acknowledging and accepting students emerging and evolving communication which affects norms and conventions (135). For example, Lovejoy explains the concept of *uptake* as a way for multilingual and multidialectal students to negotiate meaning and introduce diction variation. In conversation, groups are less likely to comment on irregular expressions as incorrect; instead, if a word or expression is used in an alternative way and the group adopts its usage, then it is considered an *uptake*. Conversely, if it is not adopted it is simply dismissed (133). Lovejoy describes this interaction among discourse communities to illustrate code meshing interactions as well as to assert that an aspect of teaching code meshing is for instructors to be willing to understand and engage in the way's words are

used, negotiated, and interpreted in various contexts. Lee and Handsfield's strategy of mentor texts can be used to model and encourage potential *uptake* in writing spaces within a self-directed writing methodology as these methods employ code meshing in the writing classroom.

Writing spaces should not only encourage students to feel comfortable using their dialects and languages, but also learn about writing as a process of revision rather than a one-draft method. Lovejoy's method of self-directed writing revives the way the writing process can be taught because it produces "new tropes of composing through code meshing" (136) as well as alleviates students' writing anxieties, as discussed in Curzan's text. Lovejoy states that all features of the writing process, such as brainstorming, editing, proofreading, revising, and publishing, are still employed via code meshing through self-directed writing (136). Lovejoy highlights student revision in the writing process as an integral part of code meshing. He maintains that students can revise and include *uptakes* they invent during writing practice as the process of learning and teaching writing in the classroom as a "dialogic characteristic, where writers build community expectations" (134). Aspects of the writing process are expanded when students share their chosen writing with peers and are provided with peer and instructor feedback that further helps to revise. Lovejoy adds performing (i.e., a read-aloud) as an extra step in the writing process, as it recontextualizes code meshing in academic settings due to the way it recognizes varied voices. Lovejoy's incorporation of self-directed writing through code meshing as a way to teach the writing process allows students to "see how code-meshing writing is developed from start to end, through dialogue, revision, and craft" (139). This

interactive, dialogic method not only teaches students an engaging writing process, but also builds community, collaboration, and helps students develop their individual voices as writers.

This community building and collaboration via a dialogic code meshing method can expand beyond a writing classroom and into writing center consultations due to the already existing collaborative and conversational nature of a writing session. Although a code meshing approach to academic writing may be concerning due to the unpredictable expectations and criteria of professors with different perspectives toward academic writing, writing center consultants/peer tutors may advocate for student voices in academic writing. Writing center consultants can create a positive affect in sessions for writers, as they can empower them through code meshing beyond the written page. As Young and Martinez state, code meshing can have both oral and written language applications as it blends minoritized languages with DAE (qtd. in Lee and Handsfield 160); therefore, a code meshing approach can be utilized during conversation in academic settings such as writing centers. Possibilities for code meshing extend beyond the written page as consultants can develop rapport with writers, fracture stereotypes of consultants as proxies for writing instructors or as writing authorities, and mediate tone and diction use between consultants and writers. Another way consultants can utilize code meshing is by discussing with writers in the center their stylistic and structural options such as lexicon choices (i.e., incorporating words in their home and community dialects or languages), various punctuation marks (e.g., stating words in between dashes or using parentheticals as asides in papers) or incorporating a consistent personal voice. As



Lovejoy articulates, it is important for students to understand “that language is rich and multifaceted, capable of expressing complex meanings in diverse ways” (134); therefore, as consultants discuss syntactic options for writers, they may emphasize the possibilities of language variance while including student voice in academic writing.

Contrarily, many students acknowledge in the writing center that their instructors require a distinct academic style and tone, usually DAE, which may be a reason code meshing is faced apprehensively by students. Difficulties in determining how and when to code mesh may also arise because different disciplines and discourse communities have their own set of jargon, specialized knowledge, shared values, connections, different criteria of evidence, etc. Oftentimes instructors associate correct grammar with DAE during their evaluation of student writing; thus, code meshing has to be taken into consideration when recommended by consultants in order to avoid jeopardizing students’ grades. Further, part of writing center consultants’ responsibilities is to support students’ best choices for their writing while considering and making apparent writing constraints such as audience, genre, topic, circumstances of writing, and professor expectations and criteria. Another responsibility of consultants is to remind writers of the potential offered by code meshing regarding their voice and writing as they consider their stylistic, linguistic, and syntactical choices for their papers. However, consultants should be aware that not all writers will accept code meshing as an approach and may choose DAE, which is their choice. If an instructor is not already teaching and encouraging code meshing, it is advised that students ask their instructors about their requirements as well, then evaluate what their choices are. Therefore, while consultants should be mindful of their job

responsibilities, students' apprehension, and professor expectations, code meshing can still be presented orally as consultants and writers discuss the writers' choices and address concerns in the paper.

#### **Part Four: Addressing Apprehensions**

It is important to address writing instructors' concerns and questions about multilingual, translingual, and code meshing approaches. In order to implement the strategies for code meshing above, this position statement recommends that writing programs and writing center administrators reassess "the design of writing curricula" and the "hiring, training, and professional development of writing teachers" (Horner et al. 309). Scholars who research and implement code meshing approaches anticipate difficulties for writing instructors in US writing spaces and offer open-ended suggestions and conjectural advice (Horner et al. 310).

- **Monolingual Instructors:** Although monolingual instructors teaching multilingualism and code meshing approaches can benefit from comprehension in one or more languages, these approaches do not exclude monolingual speakers, nor require instructors to be multilingual, because this approach recognizes the fluidity of multiple dialects within English (Horner et al. 309). People who identify as monolingual can still incorporate code meshing as it is not limited to multilingual speakers; conversely, not all multilingual speakers will take a multilingual approach and may instead opt for a monolingual approach. Students' choices should be presented, nonetheless.

- **Monolingual Students:** A class of solely monolingual students can still benefit from a multilingual/multidialectal approach due to the way students are already multidialectal in their everyday uses of English in communicating their wants and needs (Horner et al. 311). The English language's origins are also already "linguistically heterogeneous" (311) as it draws from global language families to create English words. Therefore, monolingual speakers are already working within the structures of a linguistically diverse language (i.e., English) and will inevitably interact with multilingual speakers in workplaces and higher education and those in their communities as fellow citizens or employees. Ultimately a multilingual/multidialectal approach "can facilitate writers' interactions with the full range of users of English and other languages" (311). In other words, a multilingual/multidialectal approach for monolingual speakers can be a resource to communicate and connect with people in real-world interactions. For example, in workplaces and communities there is an increasing demand to "work across differences, not just of language but of disciplines and cultures" (Horner et al. 312). Drawing on a "range of language resources" (312) provided by translingualism can produce an openness toward multilingual and multidialectal speakers to further build community and foster collaboration.
- **Errors in Writing:** Multilingual, translingual, and code meshing approaches do not excuse errors in academic writing, as all writers make mistakes (Horner et al. 310); it is important to acknowledge how to go about addressing errors in

writing. Rather than assuming a student's error is a mistake, instructors should first ask the writer to clarify the purposes behind their writing choice, which may reflect the common usage or grammar of their home language or dialect rather than that of DAE. As Lee and Handsfield mention above, it is important to observe students' writing patterns, needs, and voice in order to understand their writing before evaluating for a grade. If the idea or content is illogical then more revision may be vital as comprehension is necessary. However, if spelling, punctuation, or syntax issues arise, consider how these concerns are addressed in a student's home and community dialects and languages, as students may be imitating different conventions in their writing. Mentor texts/samples of writing are a resource for instructors to follow along with and may verify how various dialects and languages can be used as they model code meshing. Horner et al. also remind educators and students to "be more humble about what constitutes a mistake (and about what constitutes correctness) in writing, rather than assume that whatever fails to meet their expectations" is an error (310). Therefore, the relationship between instructors and students needs to consider writing patterns, comprehension, and what constitutes a mistake before assuming errors.

- The Slippery Slope: Because of the way multilingualism disrupts traditional writing approaches, addressing the function of "standard," or DAE, is necessary. Multilingual, translingual, and code meshing approaches do not equate to no standards of writing. When addressing the "standard," or DAE,

writing instructors are encouraged to teach the ways in which standards are linked to “historical, variable, and negotiable” factors that “change over time, vary across genres, disciplines, and cultures, and are always subject to negotiation” (Horner et al. 311). In other words, standards exist within a context that is influenced by historical and traditional factors of language use, but due to language evolution, it is subject to change and negotiation. This openness can in turn generate new approaches to writing, such as code meshing.

- Fluency: Concerns about fluency or students’ cognitive ability for language acquisition can be addressed by educators by reevaluating their assumptions about fluency and how one learns the basics of a language. A linear structure toward learning the basics of a language, such as understanding mechanics before higher-order aspects of writing is a misconception. According to Horner et al., “language users’ spoken fluency with a particular language—even their ‘home’ language—will fluctuate in relation to the genre and topic and circumstance of the speech situation” (312). In other words, fluency will vary depending on genre, audience, circumstance of the speech, and topicality. As a writing consultant, I observe countless native English speakers struggle with these exact factors and it does not equate to fluency, but rather conveys the difficulty within academic writing. Thus, instructors are advised not to assume that correct mechanics equates to fluency.

Overall, a multilingual/multidialectal approach to writing instruction does not exclude monolingual instructors nor students, as everyday uses of English are already fluid. This approach can benefit students' ability to communicate and connect with people in real-world interactions, thus becoming a resource, not a hinderance, meant to cultivate community and collaboration. Further, before assuming an error in students' writing, instructors are encouraged to observe students' writing patterns and what constitutes correctness as students may be imitating conventions from their home and community language or dialect; samples of writing/mentor texts may also be a useful resource for instructors to learn the syntactical and stylistic patterns from various dialects and languages. Along with not assuming errors, instructors are advised to reconsider the function of DAE and fluency as they have historical implications and presuppose students' cognitive ability for language.

### **Part Five: The Way Forward**

Due to the organic ways translanguaging occurs among multilingual students, it is imperative that writing instructors recontextualize academic writing to reflect students' everyday linguistic experience. As translingual scholar Suresh Canagarajah states, there is an ethical imperative for writing instructors to "consider discourse and rhetorical strategies to judge translanguaging appropriateness and effectiveness and to develop a critical orientation to assessment and instruction" (402). As code meshing strategies transform traditional language and writing instruction in the US, writing teachers, writing program administrators, and writing center administrators must undergo adequate training to provide appropriate, pedagogical methods for application in writing spaces. Building

on the previous analysis of Young and Martinez, in which code meshing encompasses the oral and written forms, code meshing in the writing center can function to benefit numerous dynamics in a writing center session by bridging gaps among consultants and writers.

As many linguists and English education scholars iterate, “code meshing offers culturally sustaining alternative for writing instruction” (Lee and Handsfield 166) that further builds community and collaboration, advocates and honors student voices, and celebrates their linguistic strengths. Methods such as Lovejoy’s self-directed writing “is one way to engage code-meshing by giving students choice and freedom to write about what they know, care about, and value as young people” (140). Therefore, code meshing teaches students rhetorical strategies by utilizing their linguistic backgrounds while also fostering agency by encouraging them to write about topics of their choice and interest.

Further, it is important to be mindful of the linguistic challenges that may occur when blending diverse languages with DAE, and how code meshing outside US-centered research may take different forms; thus, this position statement supports new research to expand upon existing scholarship. The revision of statements such as this one and other writing pedagogies should be updated, sustained by the comprehensive research on writing pedagogy, and accepted by best assessment practices in order to enrich students’ language education and academic experiences.

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