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Linguistically Diverse Writers and the Shaping of a Scholarly Ethos: Rhetorical Listening as a  
Strategy in Composition Pedagogy

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of English

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Ashlynn T. Rader

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## Abstract

This thesis project advocates for a more inclusive approach to writing instruction, challenging traditional pedagogical practices that have historically excluded marginalized groups from fully participating in academic discourse. This project highlights the ways that Aristotelian interpretations of ethos continue to inform and shape contemporary writing pedagogy, despite their potential outdatedness in the context of the 21st-century composition classroom. By examining the Conference of College Composition and Communication's policy resolution entitled *Students' Right to Their Own Language*, this project recognizes the presence of linguistically diverse writers and their historical, ongoing struggle for academic legitimacy. Furthermore, this project proposes rhetorical listening as one strategy for composition pedagogy that places value on personal perspectives and diverse voices in student writing. Rhetorical listening, as an approach, aids in shaping and maintaining scholarly credibility for linguistically diverse writers. Finally, this research project suggests practical assignment designs for composition instruction that fosters community-based, empathetic, and collaborative practices that promote a more comprehensive approach to writing instruction.

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## **Introduction**

The discipline of composition studies has played a significant role in shaping and maintaining standard criteria for what is considered “good” writing in higher education. Formal academic writing or Standard American English (SAE) is often seen as the most legitimate and prestigious style of writing, while writing in “non-standard” English is viewed as inferior. The implementation of these writing standards privilege dominant forms of written communication while marginalizing others, resulting in a power imbalance for non-conformative writers. Further, the emphasis on SAE in college composition classrooms determines who is considered a “legitimate” or credible writer and, by extension, determines which voices are allowed to participate in scholarly discourse. This exclusionary practice has implications for linguistically diverse writers who feel that their natural way of writing does not align with the standard conventions of academic writing, thereby limiting their contributions to scholarly practice. More specifically, academic writing standards contribute to a linguistic hierarchy that perpetuates the oppression of low-income or non-native English-speaking students who feel that their natural language and cultural backgrounds are not valued in academic settings.

In recent years, composition theorists have come to recognize these exclusionary practices and have made strides to challenge traditional writing pedagogy with increased attention to diversity and inclusion. Although the writing process is generally seen as a solitary task, contemporary composition instructors recognize how outside historical, social, and cultural factors influence writing. Motivated by an ethical responsibility to practice equitable writing instruction that acknowledges how language and bodies are recognized or delegitimized by traditional practices, writing instructors must continuously reflect on writing pedagogy to ensure that composition studies remain accessible for all students, irrespective of linguistic and cultural

differences. Through continual reflection on writing pedagogy, instructors can help students establish a scholarly ethos or credibility that acknowledges the importance of student voice and diverse perspectives in writing. By critically examining rhetorical concepts and traditions that foreground contemporary writing practice, composition studies can move toward a more inclusive approach that values the linguistic diversity of all writers. Composition scholars bear a crucial responsibility for challenging and transforming existing power dynamics in writing by empowering students to develop their voices and contribute to scholarly discourse in meaningful ways.

## Chapter 1: Aristotle's Ethos

Beyond their Ancient Greek origins, Aristotle's rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos, and pathos) provide the framework for which contemporary rhetoric and composition theorists come to understand the capabilities of persuasive discourse. Often building on the insights of the classical tradition, 21st-century rhetorical scholars view Aristotle's articulation of ethos as foundational to analyzing communicative practices, specifically in college composition. As such, many contemporary rhetorical scholars refer to Aristotle's methods to develop their persuasive communication and composition pedagogy theories. For instance, composition instructors might rely on Aristotle's rhetorical appeals to emphasize the importance of establishing a positive ethos through careful attention to language use, logical argumentation, and self-presentation. By doing so, composition instructors encourage their students to think critically about their audience and the purpose of their message and to adapt their arguments accordingly to construct a persuasive, authoritative, and scholarly ethos.

The Aristotelian model of the rhetorical appeals suggests that a persuasive speaker should possess good sense, good moral character, and goodwill (Rhetoric. II.1, 1378a). Nevertheless, Westernized conceptions of the rhetorical appeals often overlook the historical, societal, and cultural constraints that limit the ability of minority groups to establish credibility, primarily due to the United States' history of racism and classism. For example, linguistically diverse writers, whose backgrounds might not align with the norms and values of the dominant culture, struggle to establish a positive ethos since their communicative skills are perceived as inferior. Therefore, Western appropriations of Aristotle's ethos may not be fully inclusive to marginalized Others, and the complexity of ethos relative to the lived experiences of nondominant groups receives little attention from rhetorical theory scholars. Therefore, while Aristotle's articulation of ethos

continues to inform Western contemporary rhetorical scholarship, careful consideration of how contemporary scholarship examines the lived experiences of historically oppressed groups is necessary for scholars to challenge racist language policies and practices.

### ***Analysis of the Aristotelian Ethos***

Analyzing Aristotle's definition of ethos can help contemporary scholars and educators develop a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context in which ethos originated, how it has been applied over time, and how it might be adapted toward a more culturally responsive model of persuasive discourse. As composition instructors seek to develop more inclusive strategies for communicating across diverse audiences and cultures, studying the etymology of ethos allows contemporary scholars to identify potential limitations or biases in Western adaptations of the rhetorical appeals, particularly as it relates to linguistic and cultural diversity. By examining the traditional definition of ethos and how it has been reimagined across various contexts, scholars can identify more innovative approaches to teaching and learning about persuasive communication in a globalized classroom setting. Further, exploring the evolution of ethos across time is critical to the future of rhetoric and composition studies.

Aristotle's rhetorical appeals have systematically altered the perception of rhetoric's persuasive power. For example, according to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, persuasion is dependent on the tripartition of the speaker's character (*ethos*), the speaker's appeal to an audience's emotional state (*pathos*), and the speaker's ability to skillfully present a clear, logical argument (*logos*). Aristotle further suggests that every speech is composed of three parts: the speaker, the subject of the speech, and the audience to whom the speech is addressed (*Rhetoric*. I.3, 1358a). The Aristotelian method of the rhetorical situation implies that persuasion circulates between the speaker and hearer, specifically that the speaker can present herself as credible from the hearer's

condition (or emotional state). Aristotle's *Rhetoric* argues that character significantly impacts an audience's judgment of the speaker, and the persuasive qualities of an orator's character must include practical intelligence, virtuous character, and goodwill; an orator's speech must present all three to establish credibility (*Rhetoric*. II.1, 1378a). In other words, persuasive functions of the speaker's *character* have the most success when a speaker can present the speech as worthy of credence.

Aristotle further asserts that each of these three persuasive qualities of a speaker is inextricably linked. For instance, if a speaker displays practical intelligence without virtuous character or goodwill, an audience will remain skeptical that the orator has good intentions. When all three persuasive qualities are presented together, an audience cannot rationally argue against the speaker's credibility. Aristotle does not associate ethos with a rhetorician's reputation but instead with the rhetorical competence and the persuasive capacity of one's speech:

The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence; for we feel confidence in a greater degree and more readily in persons of worth in regard to everything in general, but where there is no certainty and there is room for doubt, our confidence is absolute. But this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character (*Rhetoric*. II.4, 1356a).

According to Aristotle, the establishment of an orator's character is largely dependent on her ability to place the audience into a positive emotional state during the deliberation, which is advantageous to the persuasive intent of the message (Hyde, "Introduction," p. xvii). Ultimately, it is not necessary for a rhetorician to be inherently virtuous; it is only essential that a speaker *presents* herself as morally just and establishes credibility through the effects of her

communication. Therefore, the practice of persuasive discourse involves an active and fluid construction of the speaker's character, and ethos results from a speaker's ability to form dialectical arguments, which further inspires trust in an audience. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* suggests that ethos and pathos work together as a prerequisite of persuasion, and Aristotle recognizes this artistic process as one that transforms the spatial and temporal orientation of an audience or its way of being situated in relation to multiple factors (Hyde, "Introduction," p. xviii). In other words, a persuasive speaker must not only work to persuade an audience to believe that her message is true and virtuous but to simultaneously modify the lived space between the rhetor and her audience. While Aristotle's articulation of ethos and pathos remain relevant in teaching the origins of communication practices, it might not be fully inclusive in examining the establishment of ethos from marginalized groups. Writing at a time when only white males were allowed to participate in public discourse, it could be argued that Aristotle had a limited imagination of the capabilities of persuasion for oppressed Others. For example, a writer who speaks English as a second language may struggle to establish credibility in an English-speaking audience, even if the speaker possesses the personal qualities and persuasive expertise necessary to construct ethos, due to the linguistic differences and cultural biases held by the audience.

### ***Ethos as Spatial and Positional***

Over the last few decades, contemporary composition theorists have recognized a more richly diverse and inclusive sense of ethos than its classical notions. Rather than reducing the term to an "ethical appeal," contemporary scholars understand ethos as a term with a spatial and social emphasis. Specifically, Aristotle's examination of ethos as moral character reveals that the speaker does not innately embody a good sense of character. Instead, they must perform a combination of deliberate actions to reflect their wisdom, virtue, and goodwill (*Rhetoric*. II.1,

1378a). In contemporary illustrations of ethos, rhetorical scholars like Michael S. Halloran recognize the importance of the etymological, spatial, and positional relationship of ethos by suggesting that “the most concrete meaning given for the term in the Greek lexicon is a ‘habitual gathering place,’ and it is upon this image of people gathering together in a public space, sharing experiences and ideas, that its meaning as character rests” (60). Using Halloran's definition of ethos as a habitual gathering place, credibility is no longer synonymous with the traits of an isolated rhetor. Instead, social constructions of ethos recontextualize the ethical appeal as place-based and communally-driven, and the social nature of ethos suggests that it is not an individual quality but rather shaped by interactions that take place within a community. As a result, contemporary acknowledgments, such as in the case of scholar Nedra Reynolds, suggest ethos centralizes the negotiations between the rhetor and the community, where subjects are formed by the habits of their culture (Reynolds 328). In other words, ethos is more readily recognizable as a metaphysical space through which groups come together under shared values and experiences.

To shift attention away from ethos as character and toward a contemporary illustration, scholars like Michael J. Hyde interpret ethos as a “dwelling place,” further affirming the relationship between ethos and location. A dwelling “place” can refer to such metaphorical relationships and locations that ground an individual position. Considering ethos as a dwelling place rejects the notion that persuasion is the responsibility of the solitary rhetor and moves toward envisioning it in a shared public sense rather than private. Hyde describes physical texts as a meeting ground where a rhetor “invites others into a place where they can dwell and feel at home while thinking about and discussing the truth of some matter that the rhetor attempts to disclose” (“Introduction,” xxi). Binding ethos and pathos together, Hyde further asserts that an orator will first make his character present to an audience in a speech or text while

simultaneously constructing a space for people to “know together,” thereby creating a more collaborative deliberation (“Introduction,” p. xviii). Through defining ethos as a dwelling place, the orator’s speech or text is contextualized by the orator and the audience’s ongoing communal existence, where people socially construct values as a group. Disarticulating ethos from an individual body and instead associating the term with the communities where a speaker and her audience rest, scholar James Baumlin suggests that the rhetorical situation renders the speaker an element of the discourse itself:

No longer [is the rhetor] simply its origin (and thus a consciousness standing outside of or prior to the text) but, rather, a signifier standing inside an expanded text. The rhetor’s physical presence and appearance, gestures, inflections, and accents of style, all become invested in acts of signification (Baumlin, “Introduction,” p. xvi).

Baumlin articulates the role of the speaker by suggesting that the traditional understanding of the speaker as the sole authority and only source of knowledge (as standing outside of the text) excludes a more comprehensive understanding in which the speaker is seen as a signifier within the text itself. According to Baumlin, the speaker's physical presence, appearance, gestures, inflections, and style contribute to the act of communication, and these cues contribute to how the speaker's message might impact the audience. With this in mind, scholars can no longer traditionally define the speaker as the sole knowledge source. Instead, there is a shift in perspective that suggests that shared cultural identity and values are placed on the speaker. This shift in perspective suggests that “to have ethos is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks” (Halloran 60). This explanation implies that ethos is not a fixed quality, but rather is culturally contingent and open to interpretation. To have an ethos, as

Halloran suggests, is related to the embodiment of virtues that an audience sees as having high value. A person with ethos, then, is someone who is seen as embodying the qualities and values of a culture that are most respected by the audience they are speaking to. Marginalized groups, however, are disadvantaged in establishing such cultural connections with the audience, as their cultural norms and values often significantly differ from that of their audience. Linguistically diverse writers within a college composition setting, for example, are taught that establishing an ethos requires that they carefully adapt to the cultural expectations of their audience. For instance, a composition instructor might argue that all writers should adhere to the conventions of Standard American English to succeed in professional contexts, even though this suggestion erases some students' cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Further building on the theories of Halloran, Hyde, and Baumlin that suggest ethos is spatial and positional, scholar Nedra Reynolds suggests that a contemporary definition helps reestablish ethos as a social act: “[ethos] encompasses the individual agent as well as the location or position from which that person speaks or writes... referring to the social context surrounding the solitary rhetor” (326, 327). By recognizing the social context of the "solitary rhetor," Reynolds suggests that the speaker and audience are not disconnected from broader historical, political, and social contexts, and public discourse is always influenced by these existing social systems. For instance, a speaker or audience's position is never neutral because each brings with them a set of values that alter the communicative process. Ultimately, ethos is the product of a public's negotiation of character and the result of a shared concern or value set between the community members. In other words, it is the social ecology that determines what counts as a moral or ethical virtue, and it is within these publics that ethos as a spatial metaphor is formed. By considering the social production of discourse, as well as the position from which an orator

speaks or writes, reducing ethos to an “ethical appeal” becomes insufficient since it implies that the speaker acts in isolation without accounting for what the audience (or community) would approve. If subjects are formed by the habit of their surrounding cultures, ethos is reimagined as fluid and situational, circulating and transforming the discourse that surrounds the speaker (328).

Within its classical definition and contemporary usage, it is helpful to envision ethos as the social context surrounding the individual speaker and how the context shapes the speaker’s social identity. According to contemporary rhetorical scholars like Halloran, Hyde, Baumlin, and Reynolds, ethos can be reimagined as socially constructed rather than as the presented individualized characteristics of a solitary speaker, and this formulation implies location: where members of a community come together in a “dwelling space.” The articulation of ethos as spatial and positional grounds ethos. However, less attention is paid to *how* character develops in dwelling spaces so that individual rhetors can construct (and sustain) authority and speak or write persuasively from historically marginalized positions.

### ***Ethos and Pathos as Intrinsically Bound (“Rhetorical Stickiness”)***

Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* has effectively organized the Western imagination of the rhetorical appeals, providing the conceptual framework for which contemporary rhetorical scholars aim to apply to 21st-century experiences. More specifically, contemporary scholarship builds on the Aristotelian rhetorical appeals, explicitly theorizing the overlaps that emerge between them. For instance, an examination of the Aristotelian rhetorical appeals typically suggests that ethos, logos, and pathos all function simultaneously as *the* rhetorical appeals, somehow isolated from each other but stuck together in the rhetorical tradition as a tri-part analytical model (Sharp-Hoskins). However, such a basic interpretation of the rhetorical appeals further separates ethos,

logos, and pathos into discrete conceptual categories rather than perceiving them as equally contributable to inventing persuasive communication.

Contemporary rhetorical scholarship builds on the relationship between the rhetorical appeals, and a range of scholars in the last few decades has turned to diverse theoretical practices to focus on how language informs the rhetorical imagination or the ways the language and bodies function together to determine who is recognized and legitimized in public discourse. For example, scholar Kellie Sharp-Hoskins in her essay “Intrinsic Appeals Ratios,” reinterprets the classical rhetorical appeals into *intrinsic* ratios, where each ratio in combination, co-constructs conceptualizations of the relationships between discourse and bodies. Further, Sharp-Hoskins argues that while the classical rhetorical appeals “inform and shape our rhetorical imagination of language,” a deeper analysis of language (or deliberate ethos) and bodies (or embodied pathos) is necessary to reimagine who and what matters in contemporary rhetorical studies.

By articulating how the emotions produced by a rhetorical public<sup>1</sup> inscribe value to ethos, it is imperative to examine how discourse can become entrenched in social and cultural norms, often perpetuating hierarchical power structures that limit the ability of groups to construct a positive ethos. For example, in contemporary rhetorical scholarship such as Sara Ahmed’s *Affective Economies*, Ahmed defines “rhetorical stickiness” as a concept that intersects the importance of cultural history and language, implicitly arguing that the establishment of a speaker’s credibility is largely dependent on the audience’s feelings toward them. According to Ahmed, rhetorical stickiness refers to the ways that words, phrases, and concepts become deeply embedded in our cultural lexicon, often in such a way that assumes that such concepts hold a universal truth. When terms or concepts assume a rhetorical stickiness, it becomes difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> A *public* is a space of discourse constructed by discourse itself. I point readers to Michael Warner’s “Publics and Counterpublics” for a more robust definition of a public.

challenge or dislodge them from cultural consciousness, resulting in the perpetuation of oppressive power structures. One example of rhetorical stickiness is the use of language to justify discriminatory practices and sustain marginalization. Ahmed argues that emotions “stick” to bodies because such emotions are “bound up with the ‘absent presence’ of historicity” (Ahmed 120). In other words, an audience's feelings are immediately assigned to the bodies that these emotions encounter due to the historical presence of these emotions, meaning that the emotional contact between a speaker and her audience could be organized by an extensive history of misogyny, racism, ableism, etc. For instance, Ahmed uses the example of the history of white supremacy, which “sticks” hate to Black bodies, and subsequently, these bodies are “transformed into ‘the hated’ through a discourse of pain” (Ahmed 118). Further, this oppressive history chooses what “sticks” to a speaker, which may be the audience’s contempt and hatred of the characteristics presented by the rhetor.<sup>2</sup> If a speaker’s ethos must match an audience’s values or expectations of what they envision as intelligent or morally just, establishing credibility as a marginalized group becomes more complex. When a negative history binds an audience’s emotions, an audience will attribute such feelings to the *character* and the overall credibility of the speaker. Once the audience delegitimizes the speaker, the audience prevents the speaker from forming a positive ethos.

The concept of rhetorical stickiness is particularly evident in Standard American English ideology,<sup>3</sup> which suggests that one language is superior to other forms of English, specifically in the case of multilingual writers. For example, the history of education access and the ways that minority groups were restricted from receiving a college-level education contributes to

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<sup>2</sup> An audience formed on the basis of hatred, for example, can be considered a *counterpublic*. A counterpublic refers to a public organized through shared values that deviate from a wider public. See Michael Warner’s “Publics and Counterpublics” for a more comprehensive definition of counterpublic.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Standard American English

“rhetorical stickiness.” This legacy of inadequate education access creates a legacy of exclusion and marginalization. More specifically, the ways the composition classroom has historically been reserved for those who can communicate in academic English and also functions as a training ground, specifically designed to inculcate students in the conventions of academic English, while other forms of English are regarded as deficient. Therefore, linguistically diverse writers may struggle to gain access to the resources and skills necessary to foster what institutions of higher education regard as effective communication.

Such contemporary theories of ethos as place-based and socially informed suggest that an audience’s character evaluation relies on the dominant ideologies of the culture or through the audience’s reliance on stereotypes. Such adherence to stereotypes acts as “sticky” placeholders for bodies, a place for marginalized bodies to dwell and become isolated. Therefore, thinking of ethos (in the sense of a dwelling place or location) and bridging it to pathos (as “sticky” with a history of social relations) constructs and constrains the possibilities for a speaker to establish credibility. The overall assessment of a speaker’s ethos is shaped by a cultural and emotional investment within the dominant ideologies of discourse, and the historical legacy of racism, classism, or sexism within a culture specifically marks bodies and associates them with undesirable groups (Pittman 45). Ultimately, the audience signifies the perceived ethos of the speaker, which can perpetuate relations that maintain the exclusion of “othered” bodies.

### ***Situated vs. Invented Ethos***

The concept of ethos as credibility can be complicated by the existence of power relations and societal biases. For instance, a speaker's credibility may be impacted by the audience's willingness to accept and respect cultural differences and their evaluation of the speaker's language proficiency. It is helpful to consider the ways that linguistically diverse student writers

can negotiate and maintain authority in a university setting that often privileges the conventions of standard English. It is worth noting, then, the distinction between “situated ethos” versus “invented ethos” and the ways that linguistically diverse writers operate between the two. As Jacqueline Jones Royster suggests, situated ethos transpires when a speaker is marginalized through existing power relations that precede the rhetorical situation (65). A situated ethos implies that a speaker is located (or situated) in an often fixed, disadvantaged state, even prior to engaging with an audience. Thus, rhetors that are situated at a preimposed disadvantage “come to a rhetorical task with a reputation, that is, with a situated ethos more often than not deeply compromised” (Royster 65).

In examining situated ethos, it is the case that linguistically diverse writers and their identities are defined in relation to other individuals or bound up in outstanding environmental factors. For example, native language or home language is often placed in relation to standard English, which places the native language in a deficient category in academic contexts. Such a definition of situated ethos is important when considering the ways that students who are entering a university setting for the first time already feel like they do not hold any authority in comparison to their composition instructors. In this way, students are expected to mimic the conventions of academic English, and a lack of adherence to these standards offers an implicit assumption that such students are novice writers (situated ethos), as opposed to viewing students as making conscious rhetorical decisions in their own writing (invented ethos). In contrast to situated ethos, invented ethos is the ethos that rhetors actively construct through various personal means. For example, invented ethos implies that a rhetor establishes credibility through their prior knowledge and experience. In drawing on prior knowledge and experience, this invented ethos allows rhetors to present themselves as authoritative or as having ideas that are worthy of

the audience's consideration. For instance, if a writer is writing about a particular cultural tradition that they have grown up with, their personal experience and knowledge of that tradition will lend them greater credibility when writing about it.

### ***Establishing a Scholarly Ethos (Credibility) from the Margins***

The American university and its embedded institutions, such as the composition classroom, often prioritize an authoritative and logical ethos, which limits student writers' identities, reducing them to the cultural rules and conventions of communication. Viewing the composition classroom as a metaphysical "dwelling place" where writers and instructors intersect, student identities are shaped by this community-based space. However, academic dwelling spaces have a historical legacy of unequal power distribution, where certain voices are privileged over others. The silencing of alternative voices (for example, an academic voice opposed to their native or home language) polices student credibility, requiring them to "earn the right" to speak authoritatively and reap the benefits of such a position.

In this traditional power-driven model, students compete for the establishment of an authoritative ethos or for the right to be acknowledged through their communicative abilities. As an extension of the university, composition classrooms are influenced by the idea that they must prepare students to communicate in professional settings beyond the institution. Composition classrooms, therefore, prioritize the invention of a "scholarly ethos." In order to establish a scholarly ethos, writers must demonstrate expertise in the subject matter and adhere to the conventions of academic discourse. While a scholarly ethos is presented as universally attainable, the focus on constructing a scholarly ethos often leads to an overemphasis on the formal conventions of written communication, which is particularly challenging for students from diverse backgrounds who are entering an academic space for the first time. Although

composition classrooms aim to teach the conventions of academic writing, it is important to recognize the importance of student identity through more creative forms of expression, which value the voices and perspectives of all students, regardless of background or expertise in academic conventions.

Recent composition scholarship, such as in the case of Baumlin and Watts, explores the habit of positioning oneself and declaring authority within writing by the sharing of personal experience. The “scholarship of the personal” is promoted to maintain student voice and expression while simultaneously allowing for reflective processes to take place. Some prominent rhetorical scholars suggest that student voice acts as the origin through which a speaker makes claims to authority, and therefore, voice acts as a tool for emancipating groups that have been historically alienated from the conventions of the American university. Baumlin suggests that the use of a student’s natural voice allows them to claim space in public discourse, where they can be “seen and heard” (Baumlin 19). Similarly, Watts argues that the natural expression of a student’s voice within writing resists the oppressive, long-standing academic practices that are often presented as “promoting a genuine exchange of meanings between self and other” (Watts 7). If composition instructors are committed to facilitating authentic discourse between a speaker (or writer, in this case) and their audience, there should not be an expectation for students to mimic the dominant voice of the institution. Instead, students should learn to tell their own narratives in a “dwelling” community that encourages the exchange of values and personal experience.

When a subject speaks from an authoritative position, they are announcing their individual presence in the world, which presents their own challenges for student writers. Establishing their authoritative presence through sharing personal experiences makes the speaker

vulnerable to the false assumptions made by an audience. As scholar Kathleen Ryan rightly suggests, “you [a speaker] raise the stakes when you claim your identity because you invite others to do the same” (133). Even with the existence of this dichotomy, “voice” has become a fundamental part of rhetorical studies. Critical reflections on the concepts of voice are concerned with confronting, deconstructing, and interrogating dominant language systems that deny difference and thereby mute “voice” from marginalized others. With these notions of voice, rhetorical scholars now have an ethical responsibility to provide spaces that uplift the perspectives of those on the margins of society, allowing them to be heard, understood, and integrated into dominant modes of discourse. To further acknowledge the expressive core of spoken or written discourse in ways that reaffirm or restore an agentive function to ethos, speakers or writers can aim to demonstrate their positionality within discourse. In other words, speakers and writers “name their identity” responsively and responsibly to explore ethos through a mode of cultural and embodied personal experience.

Additionally, allowing students to form an ethos from personal experience is more comprehensive than merely accepting objective and traditional ethos afforded to those within the dominant culture— it is also working to access the value of marginalized modes of expression. For instance, moving from etymological explorations of ethos to praxis, instructors can help students construct alternative forms of good character, goodwill, and practical knowledge rather than adhering to prevailing or traditional standards of speaking and writing. These new constructions of authority influence audience members or readers to reconsider their understanding of authoritative influence and the negotiation of speaker agency. Through a revised notion of authority that encourages “scholarship of the personal” that is expressive of a speaker’s identification within a subject of research, identity, and experience, ethos is once more

located as social and relational. The speaker must still strategically position themselves in relation to the audience and/or community, but instead, this positioning comes from a personal narrative or voice. According to scholar Kathleen Ryan, strategic positioning indicates how a writer makes deliberate decisions within a text or takes specific stances within the context of a community (129). In other words, writers garner credibility by first identifying themselves as holding a certain position or having particular kinds of knowledge or experience, further demonstrating their practical wisdom to an audience. As Nedra Reynolds writes, “unchosen characteristics— such as skin color and social status— limit an audience’s perception of a rhetors ethos,” so a writer must be intentional about what they choose to reveal to readers (325). Therefore, self-identification in written discourse should be regarded as fluid since such identification (or strategic positioning) varies according to how a speaker reveals important characteristics to an audience (Cherry 398).

In other words, writing explicitly as a member of a marginalized group creates a barrier to forming scholarly ethos— not necessarily because of the validity of a presented argument, but because the audience often projects beliefs or stereotypes onto the rhetor. However, explicitly stating one’s identity as coming from a marginalized space can also be empowering as it claims the authority of specific experiences. For instance, student writers struggle to find a sense of voice or authority in their writing because they view their identity as students as less credible than the identity of their instructors. Reynolds argues that ethos is a “way of claiming and taking responsibility for our positions in the world, for the ways we see, for the places from which we speak” (336). This self-conscious use of ethos allows student writers and instructors to acknowledge and challenge how authority is traditionally constructed, investigate how individual speakers are awarded or denied credibility, and reimagine the possibilities for a more

transcultural approach to ethos. A transcultural approach to ethos recognizes that different cultural groups have different expectations and values regarding communication, and therefore, this approach allows student writers to navigate the power dynamics of their specific institutional structure. The result of a transcultural ethos is a type of cultural fusion, which comes to represent a new and shared identity and transcends traditional cultural boundaries and challenges the asymmetrical power relations that limit the possibilities of cross-cultural collaboration.

Instituting a transcultural approach to ethos in composition classrooms encourages students to engage in critical reflection, opens up new possibilities for approaches to the rhetorical situation by offering a more comprehensive and inclusive definition of ethos, and challenges traditional models of composition pedagogy. Tracing the origins of ethos and further analyzing its grounding in contemporary composition scholarship explores the ways individuals might position themselves from marginalized spaces to establish their rights to speak and write discursively. Such a transcultural approach challenges the universally accepted notions of what it means to be a credible and authoritative speaker and ultimately provides the possibilities for a reconfiguring of composition pedagogy that serve to uplift oppressed groups rather than rejecting the bodies that remain outside of the rhetorical canon.

## Chapter 2: Analysis of The Students' Right to Their Own Language

*We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style... The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another... A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.*

- Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), 1974

Within the United States, monolingual ideology<sup>4</sup> has historically been recognized as necessary for “cultural preservation,” while simultaneously acting as a source of oppression and marginalization for non-native English or multilingual speakers (see, for example, Horner et al., for a more comprehensive discussion of monolingualism). Historically, monolingual ideology has profoundly influenced language policies and practices in the United States, resulting in asymmetrical pathways of power and access, which in turn has led to discriminatory practices and cultural marginalization. For instance, non-native English speakers may experience linguistic discrimination and exclusion in academic or professional settings, limiting their opportunities for social and economic mobility. Efforts to promote linguistic diversity have gained attention from

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<sup>4</sup> Monolingualism refers to the belief that all people, despite their cultural or linguistic background, should speak only one language, typically the dominant language of a specific region.

composition scholars in recent decades; however, the effects of monolingualism have lingering consequences for sustaining informed, inclusive, and cross-cultural practices in higher education. In an increasingly multicultural university environment, there is still much work to be done to promote cultural and linguistic diversity in contemporary composition classrooms. This chapter will explore monolingualism's historical and cultural impact on the formation of contemporary educational practices and agentive identity. More specifically, this chapter analyzes the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) policy resolution, the *Students' Right to Their Own Language* (SRTOL), which fundamentally altered the landscape for which composition educators explore and reflect on pedagogical practices that best serve marginalized students.

### ***On the Students' Right to Their Own Language Policy Resolution***

In the field of rhetoric and composition, extant scholarship suggests that privileging particular linguistic codes and practices can contribute to asymmetrical forms of power distribution. In an attempt to combat linguistic homogenization in higher education, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) issued a policy resolution known as the *Students' Right to Their Own Language* (SRTOL) in April of 1974, which proposes a resolution on language, thereby "affirming students' right to 'their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" ("Students' Right to Their Own Language"). Before the SRTOL policy was developed, composition instruction tended to focus on standardized, mainstream academic English that often ignored the various linguistic and cultural backgrounds of student writers. The SRTOL policy resolution is based on the principle that language is an integral part of a student's identity and that all students have the right to use their natural language or dialect in formal

academic settings. The implementation of this statement challenged traditional writing pedagogy and highlighted the importance of embedding students' cultural experiences within the writing curriculum. Further, the policy emphasizes linguistic diversity as a strength of an institution rather than recognizing it as a deficiency, which ultimately helped shift the traditional focus of composition pedagogy to a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach and urged universities to encourage the linguistic development of multilingual students.

The SRTOL policy resolution also establishes the premise that Standard English, like other forms of English, is fluid and subject to change. For instance, every language speaker possesses a large range of versatility, constantly entering various discourse communities and making subtle adjustments in dialect to fit a specific situation. By challenging the idea that Standard English is a fixed and unchanging language, the SRTOL policy sought to challenge the dominant view that all students need to adhere to a singular "correct" form of English to be successful in academic or professional settings. Further, the resolution emphasizes that English cannot be accurately measured, and thus, in no way does a "single, homogenous American 'standard'" exist ("Students' Right" 7). The policy statement effectively argues that despite the widespread belief of a "language of wider communication," standard English does not hold any inherent superiority over "nonstandard"<sup>5</sup> dialects, and rejecting nonstandard forms ultimately leads to rejecting students and their identities. According to the CCCC, "When speakers of a dialect of American English claim not to understand speakers of another dialect of the same language, the impediments are likely to be attitudinal. What is really the hearer's resistance to any unfamiliar form may be interpreted as the speaker's fault" ("Students' Right" 6). In other

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<sup>5</sup> *Nonstandard English* is an umbrella term that refers to dialect or vernacular that has not been historically recognized or proliferated by institutions in the ways that Standard American English has. Some examples include Black English, non-Englishes as first language, working-class English, etc.

words, the argument that varied dialects are “difficult to understand” is another way to reject diverse Englishes, which is rooted in the racialized bias of the hearer. Further, the socially prescribed modifiers of “correctness” in composition instruction and the perceived biases of a speaker create an unequal language power hierarchy.

Additionally, the SRTOL statement sought to address the cultural and linguistic discrepancies between “nontraditional” students and traditional pedagogical models in higher education, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable approach to writing instruction. Smitherman suggests that while many “nontraditional” students (who might be entering a university setting for the first time) do not follow the conventions of academic discourse, they often have other unnoticed strengths and communicative abilities, such as “creative ideas, logical and persuasive reasoning, or innovative ways of talking about the ordinary and mundane” (Smitherman 359). In other words, although linguistically diverse writers come from backgrounds where the conventions of Standard American English are not naturally applied, they still have valuable insights to offer the composition classroom. Rather than recognizing these linguistic and cultural differences as a “problem to be fixed,” composition instructors can move toward fostering diverse perspectives in their writing pedagogy. For example, when students are able to use their own language skills or rely on their cultural experiences in writing, they are far more likely to feel invested in the writing process, and therefore establish a stronger sense of student *ethos* in their writing by affording them the opportunity to speak from a position of personal expertise.

As a result of the SRTOL statement, the policy resolution challenges the commonly held and false assumption that Standard American English<sup>6</sup> is the language of power and the only sophisticated form of English (see, for example, Laura Greenfield's "The Standard English Fairytale"). The SRTOL policy resolution provides a framework for challenging standard English ideology and refuting the association between standard English and social status. Ultimately, the SRTOL policy resolution rejects the cultural assumption that a linguistic hierarchy exists, and it emphasizes that students' language use is often tied to their cultural heritage, and therefore, students should be allowed to express themselves in ways that are true to their cultural backgrounds. For a more culturally responsive approach to writing instruction, continuous effort must be made to analyze how attitudes toward standard English are manifested in all classroom practices and, therefore, must be modified to include the lived experiences of marginalized groups.

### ***Responses, Challenges, and Controversies Surrounding SRTOL***

Since its introduction in 1974, the SRTOL has been met with positive responses and controversy. On one hand, the policy resolution received praise from many composition educators for its efforts in valuing linguistically diverse student writers and advocating for the development of culturally responsive teaching strategies (see, for example, Geneva Smitherman's and Victor Villanueva's *Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice*). However, the SRTOL policy resolution has also been met with resistance, as some educators argue that the usage of non-standard English might hinder students' ability to succeed academically and professionally (see Lisa Delpit's "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and

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<sup>6</sup> *Standard American English* (SAE) or *Edited American English* (EAE) refers to the formal system of speech and writing that adheres to fixed norms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc., and is generally endowed with more prestige than other dialects in composition classrooms.

Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children,” which argues that composition instructors do a disservice to their students if they do not teach them the conventions of standard English as a way of acquiring power and status). Amidst polarizing viewpoints, the SRTOL statement successfully generated discussion among composition instructors surrounding the best practices available to serve the growing population of linguistically diverse student writers.

In 1971, only three years prior to what would become The Students’ Right to Their Own Language policy, the CCCC worked to persuade the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) to endorse the policy change before publication. The persuasive efforts of the CCCC did not come to fruition, and instead, at its 1974 convention, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) passed a similar and less convincing version of the *Students’ Right* resolution. In their statement entitled, *Resolution #74.2*, the NCTE claims that the organization “accepts the linguistic premise that all dialects are equally efficient as systems of communication” but goes on to affirm that students should still learn the “conventions of what has been called written Edited American English [EAE]” (“Resolution on the Students’ Right to Their Own Language”). The NCTE resolution remained problematic, as the privileging of the conventions of standard English was deliberately avoided in the CCCC’s *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* resolution due to the fact that grammar usage, spelling, punctuation, and other conventions were typically the only aspects that composition instructors chose to address, further neglecting other aspects of the writing process (Smitherman 371). In contrast, the SRTOL statement argues:

Dialect... plays little if any part in determining whether a child will ultimately acquire the ability to write in EAE [Edited American English]... if we can convince our students that spelling, punctuation, and usage are less important than

content, we have removed a major obstacle in their developing the ability to write.

(8)

The statement emphasizes the importance of content, as opposed to grammar mechanics, which indicates that writing instruction should focus on the clarity of student's message and the overall expression of ideas. Although teaching the conventions of grammar mechanics is important, grammar correctness should not take precedence over the overall expression of the student's writing. Rather, instructors must strike a balance between teaching grammar mechanics and helping students develop their ability to effectively convey their ideas. By shifting focus and placing greater emphasis on the overall expression of ideas, students are less likely to become fixated on their writing's correctness, which inhibits their ability to both become invested in the writing process and communicate effectively.

The SRTOL policy statement suggests that grammar mechanics and stylistic conventions are typically easily accessible metrics of writing, but they should not be overemphasized in the overall teaching of writing ("Students' Right" 12). While the SRTOL statement does not suggest that grammar conventions are useless to the writing process, it does argue that rigid perceptions of grammar conventions lead to a shallow, formulaic style of student writing that lacks depth. For instance, when linguistically diverse students are taught to prioritize grammatical conventions over depth of analysis, the student's purpose for writing becomes centered on assimilating to academic writing and instructor standards rather than on the content of their message. As a result of the overemphasis on grammar conventions, student writers lose agency in the writing process, often willing to trade in their own voice, style, and authenticity to assimilate to academic standards. To address this issue, the SRTOL resolution emphasizes the

ways that instructors can reinscribe student *ethos* by seeing student deviations from Standard American English as intentional stylistic choices rather than as mistakes in need of revision. Further, the SRTOL acts as a guide for instructor pedagogy, arguing that teaching surface-level grammar mechanics asks students to codify their home language,<sup>7</sup> even if it is not the most natural language for them to write in.

### ***Code-Switching and Code-Meshing***

The introduction of the SRTOL policy resolution generated debate among composition instructors and set the stage for an important discussion surrounding the language rights of students. This debate resulted in the formation of two polarized groups of composition theorists, each with their own pedagogical practices aimed at addressing concerns of linguistic diversity in the composition classroom. On one hand, proponents of the SRTOL policy change advocate for the recognition and use of diverse Englishes or dialects, reaffirming the idea that all students should have the right to express themselves in ways that feel most natural to them. On the other hand, critics of the SRTOL resolution argue that students are disadvantaged if they do not learn the conventions of Standard American English, believing that such conventions are necessary for the academic and professional success of all students. Despite these polarized views, both sides typically suggest *code-switching* as a pedagogical practice and a solution to the usage of nonstandard English.

Code-switching, according to scholar Vershawn Ashanti Young, can be defined as a “hybrid language performance” that involves the “use of more than one language or language

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<sup>7</sup> "Codifying language" refers to the act of standardizing a language or dialect by following a set of conventions and language norms. Although this codification process can serve as a tool for helping students recognize various rhetorical situations, codifying language without sensitivity can privilege standardized English over other language varieties and dialects, further contributing to the marginalization of linguistically diverse writers.

variety concurrently in conversation [or written text]" (Young 49). In theory, code-switching implies that students should actively consider their audience and choose the language variety most appropriate for the situation at hand. Theoretically, scholarship like Rebecca Wheeler's "Codeswitching: Tools of Language and Culture Transform the Dialectally Diverse Classroom" argues that code-switching allows students to honor their linguistic backgrounds while also fostering the conventions of the "language of wider communication" (471). In practice, however, code-switching asks students to only use their natural language or vernacular in informal settings but to uphold the conventions of Standard American English in professional contexts, which perpetuates linguistic hierarchies that have a significant impact on the success of linguistically diverse writers.

While the code-switching phenomenon seems like a logical solution to teaching students the conventions of Standard American English while nurturing their home dialect, it suggests an underlying assumption that there is already something inherently "wrong" about a student's natural language or dialect in the first place. Scholars who advocate for code-switching tend to ignore the linguistic hierarchy that is perpetuated by switching dialects. For instance, scholars like Lisa Delpit understand the value of linguistic differences in composition studies but argue that informing students of the ways in which they operate within the "codes of power" is essential to their success. As defined by Delpit, the "codes of power" can be viewed as the "societal rules and expectations one must meet to participate in the culture of power" (282). While the exploration of the "codes of power" is useful in understanding systemic language hierarchies in composition studies, they ultimately imply that it is up to the individual writer to shape themselves in accordance with the codes of power if they want to achieve success, which reinforces the exact marginalization that Delpit seeks to resolve.

Further, the codes of power equate to language and self-presentation (i.e., the ways one speaks, writes, and communicates as a whole) and how a writer presents themselves to the dominant cultural norms of society. In other words, institutional systems such as schools and workplaces are already in the hands of those within the dominant demographic, and therefore, Delpit argues that if composition scholars want students to become active participants in the culture of power, instructors must inform them of the “rules” of culture before they can acquire any power or status. While Delpit’s theory is sensitive to the implementation of diverse Englishes in composition classrooms, code-switching and other proposed theories alike construct a linguistic hierarchy that privileges Standard American English as the most sophisticated form of communication.

While code-switching can restrict student writer agency in academic writing, composition scholars can work to promote student writer agency in other contexts. For example, posing a solution to the problematic nature of code-switching, linguist scholar Suresh Canagarajah in his essay, “The Place of World Englishes in Composition,” advocates for *code-meshing*. Code-meshing can be defined as a language practice that combines various languages and dialects and, as a result, forms a hybrid of native language and Standard American English instead of the popularized code-switching that many other scholars suggest (598). This code-meshing approach allows multilingual writers to see their variety of English used in academic texts, affirming the idea that their natural way of writing is valued and respected in scholarly discourse. Furthermore, code-meshing allows linguistically diverse writers to place less emphasis on grammatical conventions and instead focus on the main points of their message. Emphasizing the importance of their message gives students the freedom to draw on their personal experiences with writing, which lends them authority and credibility. Additionally, code-meshing establishes the idea that

“nonstandard” dialects are already fully compatible with standard English, despite the wider monolingual narrative in the United States. Code-meshing encourages the negotiation of grammar and style rules as an attempt to break down linguistic and cultural barriers for students and instructors. Rather than viewing language varieties as a lack of proficiency, scholars like Canagarajah argue that student language should be treated as independent and intentional forms of critical writing.

In contrast to code-switching, code-meshing as a practice encourages the conscious and strategic blending of different languages or dialects, which helps maintain the linguistic identity of students. In support of code-meshing, composition scholar Vershawn Ashanti Young in his essay “Should Writers Use They Own English?” argues that language standards stigmatize certain linguistic varieties and contribute to a monolithic view of English. Young suggests that code-switching often asks students to continuously navigate between multiple languages or dialects, which can create a sense of self-consciousness and awareness of how one's language is perceived by others, resulting in a "double-consciousness" where writers are constantly viewing themselves through the lens of expectations and judgments (61). This constant self-monitoring is detrimental to writers, stifling students from expressing their linguistic and cultural identities in an authentic way. To disrupt language hierarchies and unequal power dynamics, code-meshing empowers writers to negotiate linguistic differences through the assertion of their linguistic and cultural identity in their writing. Young argues that code-meshing does not require students to “hold back their Englishes” but rather allows students to bring their home languages more strategically forward (62). When code-switching is offered as the best strategy available to multilingual writers, students are constantly aware of how their language is perceived and feel the pressure to conform to the dominant language conventions. In contrast, code-meshing secures

a student's right to represent their language, cultural identity, and personal voice in all forms and venues. An important aspect of the conversation surrounding code-meshing and code-switching is the recognition that linguistically diverse writers may not always have the capability to freely "choose" how they speak or write. This further highlights the limitations that linguistically diverse writers face in creating an authoritative voice in academic writing.

### ***Implications for Composition Pedagogy***

The implementation of the SRTOL policy resolution stimulated debate within composition studies surrounding the general best practices for teaching multilingual writers. As a result, composition scholars suggest code-switching or code-meshing as practices, with hopes of finding inclusive alternatives to writing pedagogy. Since the publication of the SRTOL policy resolution in 1974, student-centered approaches to writing that emphasize students' language rights have become commonplace. However, considering the ways that the SRTOL statement challenged traditional writing pedagogy and conventions in the 1970s, it begs composition instructors to continuously reflect and evaluate the best practices available to foster student agency, identity, and self-expression in their writing. To remain committed to untangling complex language histories and challenging systemic structures of inequality in higher education, the composition classroom can act as a *contact zone* where students can collaboratively negotiate and construct meaning without fear of judgement. The SRTOL statement reminds composition instructors that they have an ethical imperative to promote inclusive pedagogies that actively address issues of power, privilege, and access. This reflective effort and commitment to inclusive practice must be ongoing and unrelenting to ensure that the future of composition studies remains relevant to the needs of diverse student populations.

To further understand core values as educators in relation to the ever-changing environment of academia, the SRTOL policy resolution encourages composition educators to reflect, challenge, and change traditional pedagogical practices and begin to implement strategies that validate language variations in an evolving multicultural environment. As the SRTOL statement argues, “When students want to play roles in dialects other than their own, they should be encouraged to experiment, but they can acquire the fundamental skills of writing in their own dialect” (12). It is acknowledged through the SRTOL statement that acquiring writing skills in various dialects is advantageous to the writing process, and the implementation of the conventions of Standard American English are not necessary to produce the “essential functions of writing” (12). In other words, maintaining student agency and voice is integral to the writing process. To help students foster and construct a scholarly ethos, it is critical for composition instructors to view language differences as intentional rhetorical choices made by the student to further contribute to academic discourse. Moving toward a student-centered pedagogy, the SRTOL statement persuades composition educators to define better practices that support and serve linguistically marginalized students. A student-centered pedagogy invites educators to affirm students in their language rights, which means that writing assignments should encourage writers to explore writing and use their specific knowledge. Likewise, a student-centered pedagogy should make a conscious effort to resist the use of a single standard to judge students’ writing.

### Chapter 3: Rhetorical Listening

Classical theories of the rhetorical situation foreground the ways in which composition theorists analyze communicative practices between a speaker and an audience. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, for example, is primarily concerned with oral communication and assumes that students will learn the rhetorical situation by producing and analyzing enthymemes. Aristotle's theories of communication contribute to traditional models of the rhetorical situation, where a sender-to-receiver model defines the intersection of a speaker and her audience. The sender-to-receiver model suggests that the sender (in this case, a speaker or writer) must skillfully create a message that the receiver can understand. However, these traditional models of the rhetorical situation centralize the speaker's ability to encode a message, and they are only secondarily concerned with *how* an audience receives a message or how they *listen* to it. Likewise, these traditional models often emphasize a speaker's individual responsibility to establish an authoritative ethos, which can perpetuate dominant cultural narratives and exclude alternative perspectives, particularly in the case of linguistically diverse writers.

However, while the traditional sender-to-receiver model provides a framework for understanding effective communication, it implies that communication occurs in a linear fashion and reinforces the misconception that individual rhetoricians are solely responsible for convincing an audience of the credibility of their message. In reality, however, how an audience listens to a message is a complex and multifaceted process that requires practice and intentionality. To combat traditional models of the rhetorical situation, Krista Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness* introduces rhetorical listening as a

transformative approach to engaging in and studying effective means of cross-cultural dialogue. At its core, rhetorical listening explores intersecting identifications of a speaker and audience, further examining how such identifications may precede the persuasive capabilities of a speaker. Defined more specifically as a trope for interpretive intervention<sup>8</sup>, rhetorical listening “signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture,” which can facilitate dialogue across differences and similarities (Ratcliffe 1).

### ***Locating Rhetorical Listening***

As suggested by Ratcliffe, rhetorical listening involves the practice of identification, a complex process involving both conscious and unconscious communicative elements (47). On the conscious level, identification takes place through shared experiences, beliefs, values, or interests. For example, a group of people may form a rhetorical public through shared political ideology, thereby identifying with one another based on a common set of beliefs and values. On an unconscious level, identification can occur through examining and understanding another person’s perspective, even if this perspective is not shared by all. When practicing rhetorical listening, a speaker and an audience are invited toward places of common ground<sup>9</sup> with other people, texts, and cultures. At these intersections, a speaker and audience work to locate their individual identifications and come together to recognize shared experiences *and* differences.

The process of rhetorical listening involves looking introspectively at one’s assumptions, biases, and prejudices and how they might collectively contribute to an audience's understanding of the speaker's message. Rhetorical listening promotes self-reflection, which in turn fosters the

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<sup>8</sup> According to Ratcliffe, interpretive invention involves the use of cultural knowledge to move beyond the surface-level meaning of a text and helps identify the complexities of a given text, further generating new or innovative concepts.

<sup>9</sup> Readers can also think about “common ground” as a habitual dwelling space, as previously referenced in Chapter 1.

opportunity for receptive dialogue through establishing connections between personal claims and cultural logics without disregarding the differences between the two. Similarly, implementing rhetorical listening on the conscious and unconscious levels bridges the gap between a speaker and an audience who might have varying world views or experiences. As a concept, rhetorical listening does not eliminate the need for identity negotiations in public settings (in this case, within a composition classroom). Instead, it offers a means of consistently navigating the shifting perspectives, identities, and viewpoints of others. Through engaging in rhetorical listening, individuals can acknowledge that viewpoints and identities are not static or autonomous but are multifaceted and further influenced by cultural frameworks. According to Ratcliffe, rhetorical listening fosters the exploration of identifications that establish and maintain more meaningful connections through:

1. *Promote an understanding of self and others*
2. *Proceed with an accountability logic*
3. *Locate identifications across commonalities and differences*
4. *Analyze cultural logics through which claims function (26-34)*

Since rhetorical negotiation always exists, rhetorical listening is presented as a method to engage in that negotiation process. The first aspect involves "promoting an understanding of self and others," which implies that genuine understanding arises from actively engaging in discourse and listening attentively to comprehend the claims made by the speaker, rather than using communication solely to reinforce one's own cultural logics or assumptions. The second aspect involves "proceeding with an accountability logic," which acknowledges the interconnectedness of people and emphasizes the ethical responsibility that each person has to be concerned with the well-being and quality of life of all people. This approach involves recognizing the ways that

language can be used to perpetuate unequal power structures and highlights the importance of taking responsibility for one's role in perpetuating or challenging those structures. The third aspect, "locating identifications across commonalities and differences," suggests that by locating commonalities and differences, people are more prepared to understand the complex ways social, cultural, and historical contexts shape identities. Such an approach recognizes the shared experiences and values that connect people while fully recognizing the differences that make each perspective inherently unique and valuable. The fourth aspect that Ratcliffe defines is "analyzing cultural logics through which claims function," which argues that critically examining the cultural frameworks that shape the claims made within discourse is necessary to move beyond the surface-level content of a message. By analyzing the cultural logics through which claims function, an audience is in a better position to understand how power operates within communication and how certain voices are privileged or marginalized. Collectively, these individual principles of rhetorical listening contribute to the creation of a communication model that prioritizes equity, specifically by foregrounding identity negotiation and challenging cultural power dynamics within discourse.

### ***Rhetorical Listening and Dysfunctional Silence***

While silence is an important factor in listening techniques and understanding, it can also be used to dismiss or marginalize voices and experiences. According to Ratcliffe, silence can be understood as a form of communication in its own right, and therefore, it deserves further analysis. For example, silence can be used to signal a range of communicative meanings, from attentiveness and respect to indifference and hostility. In the context of rhetorical listening, intentional silence can foreground marginalized voices, creating a safe space for them to be heard. However, when used rhetorically, silence has the ability to oppress, particularly when it is

used to dismiss the experiences of marginalized groups. Using Ratcliffe's theory, dysfunctional silence refers to situations in which people remain silent due to outstanding power imbalances or cultural norms. Dysfunctional silence can occur in a variety of contexts, including personal interactions, public discourse, and academic environments (Ratcliffe 85). Ratcliffe argues that academic discourse might exclude students from participation because these students may feel silenced by a curriculum or classroom environment that does not reflect their own lived experiences and privileges certain forms of knowledge or expression over others. This silencing is particularly evident in composition classrooms that privilege Standard American English. Establishing Standard American English as the dominant voice contributes to a level of cultural dissonance for students who speak English as a second language or who come from non-white, non-middle-class backgrounds. As a result, dysfunctional silence occurs when the marginalized student feels unable to speak out, often due to power dynamics or a lack of confidence in their own skills. When students from linguistically diverse backgrounds are silenced, their perspectives and experiences are excluded from academic discourse. Such exclusion reinforces the impression that only those who conform to the power dynamics of the dominant culture are capable of contributing meaningfully to academic and professional conversations.

Further expanding on Ratcliffe's theory, the perpetuation of dysfunctional silence can be attributed to the absence of opportunities for self-expression in academic writing. If composition instructors fail to conduct further analysis of the best practices available for linguistically diverse writers, dysfunctional silence persists. For instance, if a person of color is speaking about their experiences with racism and a listener responds with silence, this signals a lack of engagement in the speaker's experiences and reinforces the idea that these voices are not valued in public discourse. In many ways, further analysis of silence exposes the ways that silence is racialized,

where it is “no longer merely about the absence of speaking voices; it is also the absence of hearing ears” (Ratcliffe 85). The dominant white culture's decision to marginalize the voices of minority groups hinders their access to public discourse. Within this frame, people are hesitant to speak about differences and commonalities and are unable to thoughtfully hear them when they are discussed. Moving away from dysfunctional silence toward rhetorical listening, Ratcliffe suggests that students and instructors can actively engage in communication by considering the broader context of a message rather than focusing on the literal meaning of the words spoken (87). Rhetorical listening becomes a symbolic representation of a broader, more inclusive process of learning to engage critically with communication in a more holistic way. Rhetorical listening allows people from various backgrounds to listen to broader social factors, such as the speaker's identity and the surrounding historical and cultural context.

### ***Facilitating Rhetorical Listening in Composition Pedagogy***

Traditionally, composition studies have focused on written texts as the primary mode of communication and have readily paired production (writing) with reception (reading) and linked the two through the effects of oral communication (Ratcliffe 84). In Ratcliffe's framework, listening is commonly associated with the practice of oral discourse, and therefore, does not gain adequate attention from composition instructors. A lack of research on listening in composition studies has much broader implications, including the privileging of certain types of discourse, such as academic writing, over other forms of communication. The privileging of academic written text can contribute to the marginalization of certain groups (i.e., those with low-income backgrounds or linguistically diverse speakers) who may not have equal access to the conventions of academic writing (Ratcliffe 83). If one of the goals of composition studies is to

help students reimagine existing texts, ideas, and cultural practices to generate new possibilities and insight, traditional approaches to interpretive invention remain insufficient.

Traditional approaches to interpretive invention often emphasize logical argumentation as the primary means of constructing new concepts or arguments in academic scholarship. This emphasis, although not inherently wrong, prioritizes academic cultural logics while devaluing other forms of agentive expression, (such as the use of personal narratives) which are equally valid forms of interpretive invention.<sup>10</sup> While these dominant tropes for interpretive invention in rhetoric and composition studies have focused on reading, writing, and oral communication, contemporary scholarship does not adequately explore student reception differences. To foster a more inclusive learning environment that values effective oral communication while also emphasizing student reception differences, it is essential to acknowledge that all students bring unique experiences and attitudes toward writing, reading, and oral communication. These differences impact their ability to engage with course materials and transfer knowledge beyond the classroom setting. By taking into account the multiple ways that students receive and interpret information based on their experiences, incorporating more varied forms of pedagogical approaches to communication is necessary. As one pedagogical approach, incorporating rhetorical listening into curriculum design challenges the traditional emphasis on written texts in composition studies by emphasizing the connection between the effects of listening and oral communication. Further, it provides opportunities for students to engage with the material in broader forms and exchange ideas with peers.

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<sup>10</sup> Other examples of traditional approaches to interpretive invention include the emphasis on established (primary) source texts as canonical or authoritative. When source texts are seen as the basis for generating new ideas, students are stifled from drawing on their own personal experiences or insights as means for knowledge construction.

While composition instruction generally promotes collaborative engagement among students and instructors, traditional/less inclusive methods may still persist in some contexts. In applying rhetorical listening to pedagogy, there is a shift away from traditional approaches to teaching based on reflective techniques. For instance, instructors might face institutional or curricular constraints that have already established traditional methods or a singular, standard approach to teaching writing (the adherence to Standard American English, for example), and it is challenging for individual instructors to move away from these established norms. A lack of reflection or professional development opportunities leads to the reliance on traditional methods. Rhetorical listening, or listening pedagogically, advocates for more collaborative dialogic communication, where instructors actively listen to students and shape course curricula around student experiences. Reflecting on the term "pedagogy" and analyzing its inherent power dynamics is essential to fostering a collaborative classroom environment between instructors and students. For instance, the term "pedagogy" is typically linked to the instructor's specific design for learning. By expanding its scope to encompass students' involvement in the learning process can empower students by giving them greater responsibility for their own writing and learning. Similarly, identifying the goals and learning outcomes that guide instructor pedagogy helps focus teaching and learning activities, as well as provides a foundation for assessing students' progress. Setting clear expectations and outcomes will promote student engagement as active consumers of knowledge once they are working towards specific goals. For example, a goal might include helping students learn how to use rhetorical tactics effectively and encouraging students to consider power dynamics in aspects of their lives outside of the composition classroom.

### *Practical Applications for Rhetorical Listening in the Composition Classroom*

One of the goals of contemporary practices in composition pedagogy aims to help students understand the intricate ways in which communication and language shape individual perceptions of themselves and others. Therefore, some of the goals of instruction should include rhetorical listening and student agency to acknowledge how writing and language use are deeply tied to power, identity, and representation, which could be misused as a tool for marginalization. Although some instructors might resist bringing awareness to the uncomfortable discussions of power relations and race, it is necessary to move away from colorblind ideologies. For instance, rather than viewing linguistic deviations of academic English as a problem to be fixed, it can be more effectively navigated and defined in course goals or practices. Rhetoric and composition instructors should work to acknowledge how racial categories already impact the field and reflect on how many of these unspoken categorizations of race or class shape its theories and practices. One way to achieve this goal is through the incorporation of rhetorical listening, which enables students to recognize how bodies are racially or ethnically marked via socialization and how these bodies are often unproductively stereotyped in environments of learning.

Developing student listening skills in the composition classroom involves helping students recognize how bodies are marked by differences prior to entering a classroom and how such listening skills can help them resist socialization/identification based on race, class, gender, etc. By developing listening skills and discussing these differences, students construct a sense of awareness of how cultural norms and biases shape their perceptions of self and others. As a pedagogical approach, rhetorical listening builds on individual voice, emphasizing a form of listening that empowers students to resist being socialized solely based on linguistic or cultural differences. It also encourages students to share their own lived experiences, engage with diverse

perspectives, and asks them to challenge dominant cultural narratives that perpetuate social hierarchies. Further, rhetorical listening values student voice in a classroom community, which helps students bring their own experiences into the writing process, providing opportunities for students to authentically construct a scholarly credibility on their own terms. Advocating for students to write based on personal experience helps students develop agency and ownership over their education.

In addition to establishing clear and distinct goals for composition courses, it is equally important to reflect on potential grading criteria. Instead of focusing solely on grammar conventions, instructors could evaluate how effectively the writer constructs a message that conveys a personal voice throughout the text or connects the personal to the cultural. Instructors can create assignments using rhetorical listening by designing writing activities that encourage students to engage in a critical or reflective manner while also maintaining their own voice. By drawing on Ratcliffe's theories of rhetorical listening, which include promoting an understanding of self and others, using accountability logic, identifying commonalities and differences, and analyzing cultural logics through which claims function, instructors can design assignments that align with these objectives (26-34). The subsequent curriculum and assignment designs can be located at many levels and can be tailored to fit various contexts, audiences, and genres. When considering rhetorical concepts of agency in a first year writing class, writing across the curriculum initiatives, and in writing center tutorials, each design can be scaffolded at all levels. Some potential curriculum designs and assignments that achieve each of Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening goals might include:

1. **Personal Narratives:** Personal narratives allow students to foster a deeper understanding of themselves and others by reflecting on their own experiences, considering how these

experiences contribute to a broader social, cultural, or historical context, and how their identities are impacted by outside factors. As a concept, creative nonfiction curriculum designs allow students to combine personal experience to research and consider the ethical implications of their language use. More specifically, personal narratives can be incorporated in writing across the curriculum initiatives because they can be easily tailored to specific disciplines. For example, students in a history course can write a personal narrative about an event, sharing their perspectives, insights, and reflections, which allows students to connect their own experiences and perspectives with the subject matter that they are studying closely.

2. **Peer Review Workshops:** Structuring peer review workshops can be applied at many levels. Science courses, for example, may include peer review workshops where students evaluate the scientific accuracy and methodology of their peers' work. More broadly, during peer review workshops, students have the opportunity to read and critique their peers' writing, which helps them gain an understanding of the social and cultural contexts that shape the claims of others. Peer review workshops result in an accountability logic, where students take responsibility for their constructive feedback while also allowing them to identify commonalities and differences across perspectives. Instructors can help students develop a sense of authority over their own learning and writing by assigning guidelines for providing feedback.
3. **Reflective Writing Assignments:** Reflective writing assignments ask students to locate and explore the intersections of their own identities and examine the larger contexts in which their experiences are situated, which helps them gain a deeper understanding of their own biases or assumptions. Encouraging students to reflect on their ideas or

arguments allows students to assume responsibility or a sense of ownership in their education. Reflective writing assignments can be scaffolded at many levels. As one example, writing prompts and other resources that encourage writers to engage in reflective writing can be applied to writing center tutorials. Reflective assignments can be designed to align with specific assignments, or they can be general. Reflective assignments are also a great way of helping students develop genre awareness and assisting students in understanding how to convey their own insights in writing, even when performing research tasks.

4. **Cultural Analysis Assignments:** Cultural analysis assignments help students critically analyze cultural assumptions and stereotypes that might influence how they write and communicate. Students in first-year writing, for example, can be asked to research and analyze how different cultures are represented in the media, popular culture, or other forms of media communication. They can critically assess the accuracy of these cultural representations and further reflect on the implications of such portrayals on individual communities. Largely, cultural analysis assignments allow students to examine the historical, social, and cultural roots of communication styles and traditions, allowing students to resist conventions if they choose.
5. **Freewriting and Journaling:** To help students develop a greater sense of self-awareness, freewriting and journaling are offered as reflective assignments for students to explore their own thoughts and experiences without the pressure of producing academic or polished written work. Freewriting allows students to construct a more authentic and personal voice, both helping them communicate in deeper ways, but also giving them the authority of self-expression.

## **Conclusion**

This project provides an analytical framework by which current and future composition instructors can envision a more equitable and inclusive approach to the writing process. This project serves as a starting point for reevaluating and challenging traditional writing pedagogy that may perpetuate exclusionary practices. This analytical study calls on composition instructors to examine their own biases, assumptions, and practices that may unintentionally marginalize linguistically diverse writers and English varieties. Throughout this analytical framework, this project draws upon the insights of composition scholars to actively address issues of linguistic oppression and social inequality in the 21st-century writing classroom.

Some future recommendations include engaging in ongoing reflection that encourages a student-centered approach that helps writers develop their written modes of expression in ways that feel most authentic to them. This pedagogical reflection process can promote the inclusion of marginalized voices by fostering student agency in genre choice and providing continued support for students to engage in diverse, collaborative forms of written communication. Composition instructors can actively contribute to a more inclusive and empowering writing environment that honors and values all students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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