One of the instructors teaching in the first-year composition (FYC) program that I direct emailed me a question a few weeks ago. One of her students was working on a research paper about medical treatments for food allergies. The student, who is from China, wanted to compare approaches in the United States and China, but some of her sources were in Chinese. The teacher wondered if she should require the student to translate the sources into English in order to cite them in her paper.

It is understandable why the teacher would ask this. In FYC, when we assign research papers, one of the subskills we endeavor to develop in student writers is their ability to select and effectively use appropriate sources—that is, we want to resist the Wikipedias and the WebMDs of the world. Sources written in a language unfamiliar to the teacher cannot be properly evaluated for appropriateness and for...
adequate attribution within the paper. Beneath that reasonable consideration is an even more basic one: this is a course on writing in English, in an English-medium university, in an English-dominant society. Shouldn’t students be reading and writing about texts in, well, English?

This question about the language of acceptable sources is only one of the possible implications of an English Only orientation to the teaching of composition and of the recent movement by composition scholars (from the United States and elsewhere) to question, problematize, and advocate resistance to this worldview. Applied linguists—including sociolinguists and scholars focused on literacy and writing development—have been examining such questions for decades under the labels of “language policy” or “World Englishes” (Kachru). More recently, composition scholars have begun writing about a “translingual” orientation or approach to writing studies and pedagogy (for example, Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur; Canagarajah), and this emerging movement has forged new alliances or at least commonalities among applied linguists, second language writing scholars, and composition researchers.

Thus far—a few years into the broadening translingual conversation—it has been a productive and constructive discussion. Numerous points of agreement can be observed in the three volumes described in this essay: *Cross-Language Relations in Composition; Shaping Language Policy in the U.S.;* and *Writing in the Devil’s Tongue.* Although there is philosophical agreement across authors on the big argument—that a rigid adherence to a monolingual or “standard” set of language and writing norms in composition is problematic—there is ambiguity and sometimes even contradiction as to the questions of “What now?” or “How do we then teach?” All three volumes do a better job of challenging than equipping, but that is not necessarily a criticism, given the authors’ own stated goals for their work.

I come to this topic wearing the hats of a writing program administrator (WPA) and second language (L2) writing scholar. At this moment of writing, I’m responsible for two distinct programs: the large FYC program mentioned earlier and a rapidly growing ESL writing program for first-years, who include both resident and international L2 students. As an FYC director working with thirty or so graduate student instructors per year (most of whom come to us with little or no training or experience in teaching writing, let alone working with multilingual students), I’m deeply concerned with issues of teacher preparation, curriculum design, and assessment processes that are sensitive and responsive to our extremely diverse student population at a large public university in Northern California. As the ESL director overseeing a teaching staff of well-trained L2 writing professionals, I’m kept awake nights thinking about how the students in our courses will fare when they get to the FYC course—and to the many other courses and challenges beyond our writing program. With this (large and elaborate) WPA hat on, I find the three volumes...
discussed here both challenging and a bit frustrating. I return to these reactions in the conclusion of this essay.

The collection edited by Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Paul Kei Matsuda includes nineteen papers (an introduction by Horner and eighteen chapters) and is divided into two sections. In Part 1, “Struggling with ‘English Only’ in Composition,” nine authors write about the history of English Only (mostly) in the United States and its effects on various populations and language groups. In Part 2, “Responses to Struggling with ‘English Only’ in Composition,” nine authors react to the papers in Part 1.

Given space considerations, rather than summarize all nineteen papers one at a time, I will synthesize the writers’ ideas under several broader themes that emerge, touching on various authors’ contributions as they arise in relation to the themes.

Theme 1: English Only movements in the United States and elsewhere are propelled by politics, power, and privilege. Early chapters in Part 1 (Trimbur; Lu) speak to this theme directly, while several later chapters (for example, Kells) touch on it in passing. In particular, John Trimbur’s “Linguistic Memory and the Uneasy Settlement of U.S. English” argues that even though the US founding fathers declined to enshrine a national language in the US Constitution, the history of the United States is one that has both unofficially and officially promoted English as the expedient and inevitable choice for commerce and for national unity. Other authors in the volume (and in the Wible volume discussed later in this review) further refer to late-twentieth-century English Only legislation and government policies adopted in various US states (Mangelsdorf; Millward; Richardson) as evidence that the historical view that acquisition of English is inevitable had shifted to use of English must be required and enforced. Whereas English Only had previously been a matter of power and privilege (to be successful economically, one had to assimilate linguistically), over the past half century, it has also become a contentious political force.

Theme 2: English Only worldviews have permeated higher education and composition instruction. Ironically, as argued by several authors in this volume, though many US-based scholars likely opposed and voted against Reagan era pro-English ballot proposals, they have, consciously or not, perpetuated English Only attitudes in postsecondary education. Trimbur describes how US colleges and universities, starting in the late nineteenth century, began to move away from required or even recommended study of languages other than English. Because all classes are taught in English, teaching students to write effectively in “standard” English (and only English) has become an unquestioned and logical goal of writing instruction in US higher education. In his chapter “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition,” Matsuda challenges “the tacit and widespread image of composition students as native speakers of a privileged variety of English” (82). These deep-seated assumptions of homogeneity permeate every aspect of writing
instruction, from placement models to the language of writing prompts to the texts chosen to grading rubrics and assessment standards. Horner, in his introduction, argues that such responses from teachers and administrators “align their work with a tacit English Only policy” (7).

**Theme 3: English Only attitudes, whether in broader society or in higher education, underestimate and undervalue the reality and complexity of students’ language use.** Several authors in Part 1 talk about specific groups and users of multiple languages, of less privileged varieties of American English, and of the unique challenges faced by speakers of indigenous Native American languages. Contributions by Gail Hawisher, Cynthia Selfe, Yi-Huey Guo, and Lu Liu, by A. Suresh Canagarajah (“A Rhetoric of Shuttling between Languages”), and by Shondel Nero present multilingualism as a primary source of rhetorical adeptness—an ability to function well professionally and socially—rather than a deficit that must be overcome. Kate Mangelsdorf writes somewhat less optimistically about her students’ use of Spanglish, noting that the realities of “standard language ideology” (117) have permeated the students’ own self-images and certainly their writing practices. Whereas Canagarajah; Hawisher, Self, Guo, and Liu; and Nero present mostly positive portraits of successful scholars confidently negotiating their multilingual worlds, Mangelsdorf’s description of her undergraduates is more wistful: they operate in a world where their superb bilingual competency is not valued, even by themselves.

**Theme 4: English Only practices cause psychological harm (by making students feel inadequate) and even loss of culture (especially in the case of indigenous languages at risk of extinction).** Several authors (Richardson; Lyons) in Part 1 of the volume write eloquently about the damage that English Only worldviews cause to students from minority language backgrounds. Elaine Richardson notes, “Black language continues to be marginalized and degraded in the mainstream” (109). Scott Richard Lyons, writing about his own family’s Native American language, also speaks about the damaging double message that Native students receive: their parents’ language is considered inferior, but if they fail to learn it, they are excluded from participating in family life (128). Beyond the psychological damage that students undoubtedly sustain from these profoundly negative messages about their home languages, Lyons points out another cost: as indigenous languages die (and he claims that a world language becomes extinct every fourteen days), culture is lost as well.

The volume closes with a short piece by Victor Villanueva (“Reflections”) in which he laments, “I’m troubled that this conversation still goes on, that the matter hasn’t been settled” (244). Though he ultimately notes that “[t]hings could be worse,” it is still a gloomy final assessment (247).

Published in the same year as *Cross-Language Relations*, Xiaoye You’s history of English composition teaching in China over the past 150 years serves as an in-depth case study that proves the point made by several of the authors in Horner and col-
leagues’ collection: multilingual writers develop translingual rhetorical competence that reflects their languages and cultures, and the nature of this competence changes according to the social and cultural forces that shape it at any point in time.

You’s book is, however, more than a history. His target audience is clearly US composition scholars; he wants to challenge them to become “fully cognizant of the geopolitical differences and stakes involved in the teaching of English writing” (xi), to move beyond the “indifference” he perceives in the American academic community toward the teaching of English writing worldwide, and to become less “egocentric” (3). He pursues this goal through a careful description of how English writing was taught in China during five distinct historical and political periods between 1862 and 2008. In each of the five chapters, You describes the larger political context of that period, how the teaching of English writing was approached, and what the writing of Chinese students was like (with analyses of sample texts from each period). The connecting thread through all of the chapters is the awkward and often tense relationship between Westernized notions of English teaching and writing and the goals and values of dominant Chinese culture, values, and politics in each historical period.

You concludes that, although English was regarded in the early years with suspicion (“the devil’s tongue”), the forces of modernization and globalization in China have transformed the status of English there to one of “our” languages—“a daily tool just like a driver’s license” (168), an “additional language of the Chinese” (175). Because English is not solely the property of the United States or other English-dominant settings, You argues, “The field needs to accept that all users of English are legitimate owners of the language and that they can use the language in ways that best serve their particular needs” (180). He further challenges North American compositionists to “work closely with scholars and users of these Englishes in other locales to negotiate standards of English use, to formulate appropriate language policies, and to discuss how to effectively teach the language in light of local conditions” (180).

The call for scholars to become more global and inclusive in their scholarship and pedagogy is undoubtedly a worthy one with which most would readily agree, yet one wonders about the feasibility of the notion that “American composition studies need to pay more attention to those locales where their work has repercussions” (You 179). You appears to be arguing that such context-specific explorations and applications are the primary (sole?) responsibility of American academics; it might make more sense for scholars already immersed in the culture and history to initiate these investigations (as indeed You himself has done in the case of English writing instruction in China). That said, it certainly behooves US-based compositionists to become more aware of what takes place in English writing instruction beyond American borders and to be more open to scholarly contributions from other regions. You’s own description of current English language and writing norms in China is
especially timely and valuable given the recent influx of Chinese international students at US and other English-medium universities (Institute of International Education). In his recent book, *Shaping Language Policy in the U.S.*, Scott Wible examines language policy in the United States and how it influences and is influenced by composition studies. He approaches the topic through the lens of three official language policy documents adopted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: (1) the 1974 “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (SRTOL); (2) the 1988 “CCCC Guideline on the National Language Policy” (NLP); and (3) the 2006 “National Security Language Initiative.” The first two statements were developed and adopted by committees within CCCC, the third by the US Department of Defense during the second George W. Bush administration. Wible’s book begins with a lengthy introduction, and then, in each of the three policy statements (the three middle chapters), he provides a description of the historical context from which the statement arose and an analysis of its effects on education in general and composition research and pedagogy in particular. The volume concludes with an argument about how examination of these policy documents from the relatively recent past might or should influence composition studies going forward.

The 1974 SRTOL resolution was adopted to address concerns and conflicts that arose from new open admissions policies at US colleges, most notably in the large City University of New York (CUNY) system. For the first time, students who were speakers of nonstandard varieties of English were coming into higher education in large numbers. The CCCC’s SRTOL resolution staked out a position for the organization: that language minority students had the “right” not only to be treated with respect, but also to be allowed to use their own language varieties in the classroom (Conference on College Composition and Communication, “Students’”). In Chapter 1, Wible describes the work of the Language Curriculum Research Group (LCRG), a cohort of African American faculty from two CUNY colleges in the 1970s, funded for a few years by the influential Ford Foundation. LCRG’s work included careful research on differences between Black English Vernacular (BEV) and Standard English (SE), production of a composition textbook, and design and delivery of teacher-training materials and workshops. Unfortunately, further dissemination of LCRG’s work was impeded by mid-1970s “back-to-basics” advocates who argued that academic rigor was being sacrificed to bolster the self-esteem of these minority students (Wible 58).

In Chapter 2, Wible turns his attention from language policies focused on nonstandard varieties of English to those pertaining to languages other than English. He explains how, during the 1980s, the rhetoric of President Ronald Reagan inspired various conservative leaders to pursue (with some success) English Only laws at the state and federal levels as a means of building unity through a common national language. In response to these developments, in 1988 the Language Policy Com-
mittee of CCCC wrote the NLP guidelines document, adopted by the organization in 1988. The NLP statement built upon stated English Only goals by promoting “English-plus” as an alternative approach (1) to help students “achieve oral and literate competence in English,” (2) to “assert the legitimacy of native languages and dialects,” and (3) to “foster the teaching of languages other than English” (Wible 89). Thus, the NLP built on the good intentions of some English Only supporters to ensure that language minority students had access to learning English (point 1), while adding its support for immigrants and others maintaining heritage languages and dialects (point 2) and arguing that all Americans should be multilingual to foster better communication within the United States and beyond its borders (point 3). Wible’s history in this chapter carefully chronicles not only the rise of English Only legislation and the formulation of the NLP, but also the fifteen years of language policy activity that followed the adoption of the NLP, as CCCC worked to raise awareness and change attitudes about linguistic diversity, not only among its own members but also within the larger society.

Chapter 3 of Wible’s book turns from language policy statements authored by CCCC to one adopted by the US government, specifically the National Security Language Initiative of 2006 (US Department of State). This initiative arose from national security concerns following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It called for strategic educational investments to promote multilingualism, specifically focused on “critical-need languages” such as Chinese, Russian, Arabic, and Farsi (Wible 117). After describing the historical context of this initiative, Wible moves fairly quickly to critiquing it because its goals were militaristic and because it promotes multilingualism by Americans outside of US borders but not within them. Nonetheless, Wible notes that the openness to multilingualism that the initiative entails provides an opportunity for language and composition scholars to work together as advocates for American multilingualism. Rather than simply teach military, intelligence, and diplomatic personnel critical-need languages, scholars focused on English and other modern languages should make sustained efforts to promote multilingualism among all US residents. As to composition in particular, Wible argues that instructors should work toward helping students achieve “translingual and transcultural competence” (138) in their written communication.

Wible concludes the book by summarizing the purposes and potential of language policy statements for advocacy, for scholarship, and for teaching. Most notably, Wible asserts that language policies afford compositionists opportunities to be “public intellectuals who can provide leadership in public debates on linguistic diversity” (173). It is clear from the volume as a whole that this “public” potential animates Wible’s thinking more than does delving into specific classroom applications for composition instruction.
From Policy to Practice?

As I noted at the beginning of this essay, the primary goals of the authors and editors of the three volumes appear to be philosophical rather than pedagogical: to raise awareness and to encourage advocacy regarding English Only policies, and to foster multilingual and translingual worldviews among composition scholars. As Catherine Prendergast notes in *Cross-Language Relations*, “Readers of this volume shouldn’t expect its chapters to provide lesson plans” (230). Wible similarly observes that scholars should not study language policy statements “expecting to find a host of activities to use the next time they step into the classroom” (176).

However, a number of the authors do, directly or implicitly, suggest some possible classroom implications for the ideas they have shared. Further, on several points there appears to be a bit of tension or contradiction across the various authors as to how an anti–English Only worldview should be lived out. For example, in *Cross-Language Relations*, several authors seize on the term “linguistic containment” (Matsuda 85) as an argument against separate placement or course pathways for second language students in composition programs. However, these arguments appear in tension with Matsuda’s own comment later in his essay that “many students do need and even prefer these placement options” (93), a sentiment also expressed by Susan Miller-Cochran (“Language Diversity and the Responsibility of the WPA”). Not all sheltered or ESL writing class placements are a bad idea springing from bad motives; one person’s “containment” is another’s “support.” Perhaps my reaction is colored by my position as the WPA of such a support program, but my view—that options are beneficial, that student choice should be honored—is shared by other second language writing experts (for example, Silva; CCC’s Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers).

Similarly, most authors discussed here, in the spirit of the SRTOL, clearly believe that teaching linguistically diverse students to produce Standard English in their writing is an inappropriate, futile, or damaging thing to do. However, as Wible notes, CCC’s 1988 National Language Policy had as point 1 that building students’ “oral and literate competence in English” (89) is a primary goal (though “competence,” of course, is open to substantial interpretation). Further, Lyons says this: “[I]f you have Native students in your class, go ahead and teach them what they need to survive: Standard English [. . . .] It would mean you are doing your job” (Horner, Lu, and Matsuda 138–39). In short, there is a lack of specificity and possibly a lack of agreement among authors as to what “competence” in written English might entail and whether teaching students about Standard English is a helpful or harmful idea.

A further point of tension along these lines is the absence of precise parsing between pedagogical applications for students who are native speakers of English (but of a nonstandard variety) and those who are second language learners of En-
Cross-Language Relations and Shaping Language Policy in the U.S. discuss both groups of students, but it is never quite clear whether admonitions against teaching or requiring Standard English in the classroom should apply equally or in the same ways, whether students are speaking and writing in a dialect that systematically varies from the standard or are producing various forms of English “interlanguage” (Corder; Selinker) because they are “incipient bilinguals” still in the process of second language acquisition (Valdés 99). In other words, students in our ESL program who produce lexical or syntactic variations (or “errors”) from standard US academic English are in intermediate stages of second language acquisition and still sorting out how English works (or could or should work). Should our teachers be hands-off and let the students figure it out (or not) in their own time, or should they be helping students to analyze language models, study rules (where there are rules), and apply their knowledge to their own evolving written production? I know how our students would vote, but I’m not entirely clear how the various authors in these volumes would answer this question.

Two other practical applications arise from these three volumes, and with these there is little or no disagreement across authors. First, in all three books, teachers are encouraged to engage students in reading and writing tasks that help them become aware of their own linguistic histories and resources so that they can “shuttle” between languages and discourses more comfortably (Canagarajah, “A Rhetoric of Shuttling between Languages” in Horner, Lu, and Matsuda). Although many of the suggestions along these lines are productive and useful, it should be mentioned that not all students find it equally fascinating to, for example, “pursue cross-language work [. . .] to challenge the norms of the English language” (Mao 193 in Horner, Lu, and Matsuda), any more than all students find it riveting to “write about writing.” After all, our students, including those from linguistically diverse backgrounds, have a broad range of interests, and not all are destined to become linguists, anthropologists, or composition scholars. For some populations, perhaps one assignment or writing project to raise student awareness of their own language use would be more appropriate than designing an entire course along these lines.

Another shared application across these volumes is the need to prepare teachers to work successfully with linguistically diverse students. It is certainly not controversial to argue for more or better teacher preparation, but as both Susan Miller-Cochran and Jody Millward note in the Horner, Lu, and Matsuda collection, this can be easier said than done. Graduate programs providing preservice teacher training may not want to realign themselves to include or require coursework about linguistic diversity, and many composition programs are heavily staffed by adjunct instructors who cannot or will not engage with on-campus faculty development opportunities. Further, the desired nature of such teacher preparation efforts is left a bit vague. Some authors might characterize it as simply helping teachers to move
beyond their default assumptions of linguistic homogeneity and their insistence on Standard English production. Others would argue that teachers need specific, proactive knowledge and strategies to help all students function well in their classes. These two goals do not have to be mutually exclusive, but they might be: to the extent that teachers accept the former worldview (“Everybody’s language backgrounds and choices are valid and worthy of respect”), they may fail to appreciate the need for the latter (“Some students come into writing classes with unique instructional needs that can be met only through careful planning and attention”). While we do want new teachers to have enlightened perspectives and not just a classroom toolkit, we also want them to be equipped in practical ways to understand and meet all of their students’ needs as best they can.

Opposing English Only attitudes and promoting multilingualism are worthy and necessary outcomes to pursue. These three books, taken together, do valuable work in presenting histories (of language policy in the United States, of English composition instruction in China) and current realities (the diverse student populations in the United States and the widespread use of written English(es)) to meet their stated goals of helping composition scholars be first more aware of and engaged in these issues. Classroom teachers who might want detailed answers for their specific contexts and students will have to find ways apply the principles for themselves, but the authors of these volumes are aware of—and unapologetic for—this limitation.

Notes

1. I should qualify the adjective “reasonable” here. It is a “reasonable consideration” only if the teacher is actually following up and checking sources written in English. If she is not, it doesn’t much matter what language the sources are written in.

2. I am well aware of the problems and limitations associated these days with the term ESL, but that is what the program is currently called at my institution.

3. For instance, having a translingual worldview allowed me to respond helpfully to the teacher’s question about allowing her student to cite sources written in Chinese without being required to translate them.

Works Cited


