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As an NCTE member, you have access to over a century of journal issues online. Most recent two years limited to current subscribers.
As readers can see from our table of contents, March 2015 is another of those issues in which various stars aligned, and we were able to publish a grouping of articles centered around a common theme, all without prior special arrangement. As readers also likely know from attending conferences in rhetoric and composition these days (and, I’m guessing, other fields both aligned and not aligned with English studies), the topics of language diversity, rhetorical approaches to language and linguistic communities, translingualism, and transnationalism are front and center in our field’s scholarship. The four articles we offer in this issue provide a range of approaches to these topics—some of which may be slightly unexpected, and each of which I hope provokes ample discussion among our readers. From material rhetorical transnational formations to local dialectical practices that teach transnationalist lessons, to religion and translingualism and, finally, to ecological intersections with translingual practices, our four article contributors both respect and test definitional boundaries and praxis. In addition to these featured articles, we offer in this issue a multi-authored open letter on the topic of translingualism and transnationalism, specifically as relevant to scholarship on L2 concerns.

Many College English readers know that my own areas of scholarly expertise are fairly far from translingualism or transnationalism, so my ability to weigh in on which of the approaches presented here is the most or least radical is thus quite limited; as is often the case with the work we publish, I learn from it. What intrigues me about the four articles we present—which employ such diverse sites of study as the Gee’s Bend quilts, undergraduate students’ religious discourse and accounts of religious experience, Pidgin dialects and regionalism in Hawaiian poetry, and theories of “Material Translingual Ecologies”—is the sheer range of approaches and application of terms presented, and the ways in which each article takes up linguistic differences as relevant to cultural identities, and also to smaller subcultural identification patterns, as its primary charge. Whether it is Jay Jordan’s aim to “reanalyze[ing] through a materialist rhetorical lens some key principles of translingualism and examples...
of translinguaging work” (362); Georganne Nordstrom’s assertion that “[b]ecause language is a practice represented and reproduced by place, examinations of language use provide an access point into the dynamic interaction between place and writing” (315); Vanessa Kraemer Sohan’s response to “the call to explore material objects as epistemic spaces by studying the semiotic practices of the Gee’s Bend quilters, who demonstrate the power of the needle as pen” (292); or Mark Alan Williams’s contention that although translingual approaches are typically about language difference, they might also “help us better recognize and use the differences we make within social structures like religion” (335), particularly “the complex and incomplete negotiations of religious difference” undertaken by many of our own students (335), each piece in this issue argues for a new attention to inherent power in language as either a spoken or written utterance, or an embodied discourse showcased in a culture’s material production.

In addition to my interest in these compelling—and perhaps competing—views of language and discourse, I am also interested in translingualism and transnationalism in both a broader and a more pragmatic sense, as a faculty member and a writing program director in an institution (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) that currently boasts the largest international student population of any public college or university in the United States. As just one snapshot of this reality, in fall 2014 (I write this introduction just as our fall semester is beginning) we include, as 10 percent of our incoming first-year class, a substantial number of students from China. So more than ever, I have a specific interest in better understanding and being able to teach students who are neither native born nor enculturated by American standards—as many of our readers also do, I’m sure. As some of the authors here acknowledge, the notion of a “second language” speaker is no longer a complete definition of the nonnative speaker (or student) in our classrooms and in our communities. But moreover, as the seven authors of the open letter at the end of our issue attest (and the additional scholars endorsing the letter agree), to say “second language” is not necessarily the same as saying “translingual” or “transnational.” Nor are translingual and transnational themselves interchangeable terms. As these authors of the letter collectively remind us, “[W]e wish to emphasize the importance of encouraging the development of L2 writing and translingual writing as related yet distinct areas of research and teaching” (379) because, as they note, “there seems to be a tendency to conflate L2 writing and translingual writing, and view the latter as a replacement for or improved version of L2 writing. This is not consistent with our understanding of the field of L2 writing” (379).

There is much to consider in this March issue—as I hope is the case with every issue of CE that we put together for our readers. I hope you will consider the scholarship here as researchers and community members who increasingly work in a multilingual world that represents itself through not just words but also actions,
as well as through social and material reactions to cultural (and cross-cultural) phenomena. Of course, getting at the core mission of CE, as the journal for the scholar-teacher in postsecondary English studies, I also hope you will consider this issue’s features in terms of how you might bring such topics to your students, and even—perhaps—bring them right into this discussion by sharing this issue’s important work with them, in your classes.