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# CREOLE COMPOSITION

## Academic Writing and Rhetoric in the Anglophone Caribbean

Edited by Vivette Milson-Whyte, Raymond Oenbring, and Brianne Jaquette

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# 13 Postcolonial Composition: Appropriation and Abrogation in the Composition Classroom

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This chapter starts from the premise that composition instruction in the post-colonies serves students best when taught as *postcolonial composition*. For composition to avoid perpetuating the imperialistic language practices that extend from the colonial period, it is necessary to take an explicitly postcolonial stance about language and the teaching of writing in our classrooms. A postcolonial approach requires consciously making space for all students' language affiliations (Rampton, 1990) in formal writing assignments, and teaching students and teachers a vocabulary of resistance to monolingualist writing pedagogies, practices, and policies. And, moreover, it requires an orientation towards history that contextualizes writing with respect to the linguistic legacy of colonization. A postcolonial approach to the teaching of writing is particularly appropriate in a Caribbean context, although the strategies that apply in the West Indies could be equally valuable in composition and academic English as taught in the "metropolitan centres" of the United Kingdom and the United States (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & and Tiffin, 2002; Canagarajah, 2006a), as well as countries in Kachru's (1985) "inner circle," such as Australia and New Zealand.

Postcolonial writing spaces strengthen students' academic Englishes because they foreground the context in which any language form is used. They are spaces where students can write their plural and pluralized Englishes, and where students consider their motivations behind how they write while they consider *what* they are writing, and where they practice writing for particular linguistic audiences. Teaching postcolonially,



however, does not necessarily require complete rejection of standardized American and standardized British English. For many tertiary students with creole language inheritances (Rampton, 1990), standardized (or acrolectal) forms are also among the varieties of English that they use and understand every day, alongside more mesolectal, creolized, or "local" forms. I, therefore, consider how to reorient writing instruction to a postcolonial perspective while incorporating the legacy of colonial linguistic markers in student speech and writing and recognizing the fact that speakers' language practices in the Caribbean move about on the creole continuum (Alleyne, 1980; DeCamp, 1971). Although it is important to maintain a skepticism about the ability of the Englishes of the colonial centers to effectively represent the lived experiences of postcolonial subjects, as Brathwaite (1984) and Glissant (cited in Britton, 1999, pp. 4–5) caution us, it is nonetheless important to teach students, through methods discussed by sociolinguists and composition specialists, how to include some forms from standardized English and globalized academic writing in their written academic discourse. I hope to extend the discussion by considering what students can do, at the level of the sentence, to engage more critically with the context(s) in which they are writing, and to incorporate a plural, postcolonial subject position into what they write, so as to bring together the many facets of the linguistic identities which, in a colonial space, are often split, by force.

The first step in taking a postcolonial approach to teaching writing is to have instructors recognize and express to their students the need to do so. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) describe the process of reshaping language to a postcolonial sensibility as one of taking the imperial language and making it "bear the burden of one's cultural experience" (p. 38). Academic writing spaces are often, however, portrayed as decontextualized from lived experiences and local communities, and instead are contextualized only in terms of a disciplinary community, and often not explicitly. Indeed, in academic spaces, the very "communicative efficiency" of "fairly local or substandard varieties of the language, and whose language is hardly intelligible for speakers of other varieties of English" (Moussu & Llurda, 2008, p. 318) is called into question, because of a perceived incompatibility between English as a global(ized) language and English as a language of local communities in real physical and social spaces. The stance described by Moussu and Llurda assumes that English is most efficient when it is decontextualized and standardized. This stance, moreover, puts the burden of assuring comprehension

squarely on the writer, rather than considering what the audience might be asked to do in understanding what they are reading or hearing. These assumptions are dangerous because they perpetuate unequal linguistic hierarchies, where metropolitan (Canagarajah, 2006a) speakers of a language are always those whose comprehension needs should be primary. It also places the maintenance of the standardized form of the language in a position of more importance than that of non-standardized varieties of English that do, indeed, "bear the burden of cultural experience."

At the heart of this postcolonial approach to teaching student writing, I propose, lies engagement with a linguistic tension best expressed through two specific terms offered by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002): "Abrogation, . . . the refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage and its assumption of a traditional or 'fixed' meaning 'inscribed' in the words" (p. 37) and "Appropriation, . . . the process by which the [imperial] language is made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience" (p. 38). These terms contextualize the language of speakers and writers in the West Indies—or any other postcolonial place—with respect to the languages of the colonial center and periphery, placing a writer's linguistic agency at the heart of this nexus. Importantly for student writers, *abrogation* and *appropriation* emphasize that speakers of World Englishes—even those who are assigned the identity of "student"—can (are capable of and should be allowed to) make choices whether to embrace, reject, or adapt the language of empire. Abrogation and appropriation take postcolonial resistance to the level of the sentence and the word.

In the West Indian context, the need for a shift in attitudes towards language, and specifically towards the relationship between standardized English and creole-influenced vernaculars, is urgent. For instance, Milson-Whyte (2015) describes the widespread assumption that students at The University of the West Indies (UWI), should be able to write in a standardized English that showed no "interference" at all from Jamaican Creole (p. 5). The fact that English comprehension and production issues arose for many students at UWI, she writes, should not be shocking (though, as she details, it is often perceived as such), due to the "imposed language problem that has plagued generations of Jamaicans" (p. 12); that is, the language of instruction and the language in which students are expected to be proficient as they enter university is not the language of the majority of the population. Nero (2014) explains the situation in Jamaica further: "given that [Standard Jamaican English] SJE is the



official language in Jamaica, the language of power, and education, the goal is to lessen the use of [Jamaican Creole] (JC) through educational structures—essentially an ideology of linguicism and an implicit policy of eradicationism" (p. 239). Here, Nero shows the legacy of colonialism in full play. My argument in this chapter stems from a contention that, if we do not make the classroom an explicitly postcolonial space, only this "ideology of linguicism and eradicationism" can prevail. My proposal, in terms of implementation, might have a lot in common with Milson-Whyte's proposals for a philosophy and pedagogy for composition for "creole-influenced" students in the West Indies (chapter 6), whereby she suggests that institutional attitudes must shift to embrace:

> a progressive way to view (1) the reach of transculturation, especially as it concerns how Creole-influenced students *do language*; (2) writing in disciplines as visible rhetoric, (3) writing instruction in the academy as developmental and necessary across the years of a student's degree programme; (4) the academy as plural, having many tongues in its many disciplines . . . ; and (5) the goal of writing development as social equity in an atmosphere of excellence. (p. 191)

What differentiates the present proposal, however, is that it asks students and instructors to locate themselves specifically within the historical context of colonialism, and from this location, to resist the discourses that have arisen due to colonialism. Without such a location, negative attitudes towards creole-influenced languages can be naturalized, in that, without a postcolonial approach, speakers can maintain an attitude that Creole and other non-standardized varieties of English are just "bad English," rather than separate language systems that have emerged out of a particular social and linguistic context that held—and still holds—racism and white supremacy at its core.

## Postcoloniality and Composition

This chapter builds on many years of work in composition studies drawing connections between that field and postcolonial theory. As Bahri (2004) writes, "the concept of the 'subaltern' has been well adapted to composition spaces . . . to identify marginal student populations, to describe resistive modes of agency, and to tackle the difficulty of locating agency in the subaltern" (p. 73). In fact, the entire volume in which

Bahri's abovementioned essay appears articulates the relationship between postcolonial theory and composition studies (Lunsford & Ouzgane, 2004). However, the essays included in the latter collection, while conducting important theoretical explorations, generally do not suggest classroom practices whereby students can learn to write postcolonially; they stop short of putting theory into practice and having students "write back" to postcolonial theory, as Lu (2004) suggests is a necessary step in the development of the relationship between literary theories and composition. Furthermore, there is only one essay in this anthology—David Dzaka's reflection on his own education in postcolonial Ghana—in which the author explores a postcolonial space like the Caribbean, situated in the global Anglophone "periphery" (Dzaka, 2004). Other texts (such as Huddart, 2015) reflect skeptical attitudes among people in the post-colonies to the broadening of what counts as acceptable academic English, reflecting the language attitudes in the West Indies that Milson-Whyte (2015) and Nero (2014) describe.

Postcolonial composition requires us, as Jarratt (2004) describes it, to "imagin[e] students capable of inscribing multiple selves" (p. 122), rather than restricting them to exploring only one side of their linguistic identity in the writing classroom. Teaching composition postcolonially means teaching students to take a postcolonial position when they write. For instructors, this will mean not just teaching students writing skills that function at the level of the sentence or the paragraph, but also helping students recognize and articulate the context(s) in which they are writing, and teaching student writers to theorize their own subject positions when they are writing.

The West Indies is a special postcolonial space, even as, as the essays in Lunsford and Ouzgane (2004) show, the concept of *postcolonial* has been embraced enthusiastically and appropriately as a framework in which to understand the experiences of minoritized students in "metropolitan" educational contexts. Bahri (2004) reminds her reader that the literal post-colonies—those nations that were colonized by the European imperial powers and are still impacted every day by the legacy of that colonization, such as white supremacy and slavery, must occupy an important place in any discussion and application of the ideas of postcolonial theory. Moreover, the Caribbean is special linguistically, too. Left out of Kachru's (1985) original formulation of the concentric "Inner," "Outer," and "Expanding" Circles because of the complexity of language affiliations, expertises, and histories in the West Indies, this



bi- or multi-lingual space offers the potential to be at the forefront of linguistic decolonization. Perhaps a focus on the agency and writing practice of students in writing classrooms can build an educational culture of resistance, rather than perpetuation of colonial attitudes.

## Colonial Composition

As Milson-Whyte (2015) details, higher education in the West Indies was initially created in the image of higher education in the United Kingdom, and the expectations for students' language and writing within this system were founded on linguistic elitism and racism. She writes, "for a long time, higher education was reserved for a few for whom proficiency in English was considered a mark of distinction. Students considered literate in English could write without interference from Jamaican Creole" (pp. 5–6). Nero (1997) reinforces this description of the relationship between proficiency in English and access to education:

> British colonization also left a legacy of socially stratified societies where one's public identity was marked, among other things, by the degree to which one's speech approximated or deviated from the acrolect. This phenomenon was reinforced by an educational system whose sole medium of instruction was standard English and that flatly denied any validity to Creoles. Colonial education, therefore, reflected and reinforced the rigid social stratification of Caribbean societies, and language was its most palpable manifestation. (p. 587)

The structures and attitudes that govern academic writing in the Caribbean, which Milson-Whyte (2015) describes in detail, can be seen clearly as a legacy of British colonialism, especially in the sense that writing courses are not always adapted to specific local linguistic and cultural contexts, but instead show "universalist" tendencies—i.e., a focus on formalism, and generic writing topics. They can also be seen as part of the "soft colonialism" (Oenbring, 2017, p. 538) of the United States, specifically via the impact of research in composition studies coming out of that country. These pedagogies and attitudes have the following results in terms of expectations of students' language use:

- Maintaining and perpetuating a single language goal: standardized British/American English. Standardized English is the language of instruction and the expectation for all written work.
- Many writing instructors in the Caribbean tend to prefer "traditional," product-focused pedagogies over more process-based ones (Oenbring, 2017).
- Writers as people with connections to various and diverse language communities are invisible; writers are permitted only a singular linguistic subjectivity. Language is decontextualized; or, rather, the standardized form is seen as appropriate for all contexts; or, rather, contexts where the standardized form is seen as appropriate are the only important ones.
- Non-standardized voices are relegated to works of fiction or poetry; analysis and discussion of such texts must be in standardized English (see Nero, 2014).
- Other varieties of English are embraced outside the classroom, and fetishized and marginalized within (See Soliday, 1994).
- There is a mono-directional trajectory of "improvement," away from vernaculars, towards standardized forms.

These facets of composition have been discussed in various other locations, under other names—Matsuda (2006); Horner and Trimbur (2002); Horner, Lu, Trimbur, and Royster (2011); and many more, within the context of the composition classroom in the United States. Even the most apparently progressive scholars in composition, in their pedagogical approaches to linguistic variation in the composition classroom, reinforce such colonial attitudes. We find such reinforcement in, for instance, Elbow (2012). Elbow, a long-time advocate for the inclusion of students' spoken vernaculars in the composition classroom, still limits their role in students' formal writing. His advocacy focuses on the use of spoken vernaculars for drafting and free-writing; his advice to students for their final work, however, is that they limit the presence of vernacular formations to those that are "invisible" and that do not challenge the linguistic expectations borne out of colonialism and white supremacy.

Elbow (2012) argues, for example, that "Young [2009] and Canagarajah [2011] are right to pursue the value and importance of what might be called 'in your face' code-meshing, but writers at this very cultural moment will have a much easier time writing for conventional readers . . . if they learn how to 'fix' the few features of their vernacular that set off error alarms" (p. 332). By conventional readers, he means white, middle-class readers who hold the linguistic capital in US society. Green (2016) problematizes this approach effectively in the following quotation:



> If part of the purpose of code-meshing, as Young [2009] puts it, is to present "an alternative vision of language to teachers, one that offers the 'disempowered' a more egalitarian path into Standard English, a route that integrates academic English with their own dialects and that simultaneously seeks to end discrimination," then if we instruct students to use their vernaculars only for free writing or brainstorming aren't we still upholding that some languages are equal but separate? If I tell them to code-mesh only with some of the words in their vocabulary, the words I know are right but others will see as wrong, am I not upholding linguistic racism still? Aren't we still saying to them that only some parts of them have merit?—especially if the rationale is that they should do it so others don't think that they're wrong or so that they aren't judged? Doing that unfairly places the responsibility that educators should carry directly onto students. (p. 79)

In other words, even such seemingly progressive approaches as Elbow's do nothing to challenge or change the status quo of linguistic racism in the college classroom; they still place the responsibility for making audiences "comfortable" squarely on the students, rather than implicating the linguistic attitudes of their teachers and their broader audiences and asking them to reconsider their own stances with respect to non-standardized forms.

Whether or not creole-influenced students are in the West Indies or in the United States, they are afflicted by these colonial attitudes to language, or colonial pedagogies. But in a context, such as the West Indies, where the majority of the population is very much influenced by English-based creoles, the imperative to decolonize composition is even more acute. As Milson-Whyte (2015) and Oenbring (2017) show, the tertiary education system in the West Indies is a doubly-colonized space, still recovering from the legacy of British linguistic and social imperialism and the influence of the United States in terms of cultural and educational effects. Oenbring writes, "while the former British colonies of the Anglophone Caribbean have received the bulk of their political and educational structures from Britain, we must, nevertheless,

take into account the ever increasing 'soft colonial' influence of American media, language, and educational culture" (p. 538). The influence, too, of the large transnational Caribbean populations in the major cities of the United States, who maintain close ties with the West Indies even over multiple generations of immigration within families, must have a significant impact on language use in the Caribbean, as does the embrace—and sometimes adaptation—at The University of the West Indies of the US models of college composition, either current, or more traditional ones.

## Postcolonial Composition

In opposition to a colonial approach to composition, a postcolonial approach to language considers linguistic plurality as a resource. Further, the composition classroom is a place where we can encourage students to develop a plural linguistic subjectivity, rather than a split one; that is, complete code-switching does not have to be necessary in academic contexts. Juhasz (2003) argues, for example, that "writing can form connections between subject positions, including those which have been split off or denied because of culturally induced ambivalence, to establish a subjectivity that is multiple rather than split" (p. 395). My argument here, following Juhasz, is that, not only is the composition classroom an appropriate place to help students find a plural, postcolonial subjectivity, but that the act(s) and process(es) of writing are mechanisms by which students can approach such a subjectivity. According to the perspective described by Juhasz above, writing can be used not only to *reflect* a postcolonial perspective but is also vital in *constructing* a postcolonial student subjectivity, where students integrate their multiple linguistic identities while building strategies of resistance towards white supremacy and the privileging of standardized metropolitan Englishes over the English-based creoles that the students speak, often alongside a standardized form of their national or regional variety of English (e.g., Standard Jamaican English).

I suggest that this split linguistic subjectivity is even more prevalent among students in tertiary institutions, because successful university students have often achieved this success at least in part by keeping their creole or creolized language forms out of the classroom. But even though it has been fruitful for some students, there is still a need to create strategies that help more students to achieve their academic goals, as well as create a space where using creole-influenced forms is part of their success. Thus, I am arguing that postcolonial composition is a necessary part of creating these strategies, and part of the process must be, as Jarratt (2004) puts it, "enabling our students to write multiple versions of themselves informed by a knowledge of rhetoric in its political and figurative functions, [so] we may give them access to their own experiences of conjunction and disjunction, of association and substitution" (p. 128).



Persistent "colonial" attitudes to Caribbean Englishes can also be seen in the linguistic affiliations claimed by students from the West Indies. For example, at least one student in my World Englishes class claimed a linguistic affiliation with British English. Such a claim is, I suggest, a claim of the privilege associated with high levels of literacy in the literature of the metropolis, of knowing the "mother tongue" as a good colonial does. We colonials—and I as an Australian share this perspective—know, the language, the forms, the spaces of England; those of us with educational capital will claim them, too. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) describe this connection as follows, with respect to writers in the (former) British colonies: "a mimicry of the center proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed. It caused those from the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become 'more English than the English'" (p. 4). In taking a postcolonial stance in the composition classroom, we try to move away from this "desire . . . to be adopted and absorbed" towards establishing a new linguistic center that reflects the current space, as well as its history.

From my experience, claiming a position as an outsider can help in the establishment of a new linguistic center. For me, it has meant embracing, highlighting, and using my own linguistic difference as a teaching tool. My racial and educational privilege—I am white and highly educated and stand at the front of the classroom—helps my audience to see my language use as "different," rather than as "incorrect," and my language itself helps me to form a bridge with my students from the Caribbean. We share a vocabulary and discourse that is foreign in the United States; we live and speak on the same linguistic continuum. At York, this continuum is a space that most students in the classroom can place themselves upon somewhere: as I have mentioned above, they have strong, multigenerational ties to the Caribbean, even if they themselves identify as being from New York City, and as speakers of that city's varieties of English. So, it is my responsibility to shift these colonial sim-

ilarities into a feeling of postcolonial solidarity in my classroom; I do it by working with my students to examine the contexts and the ways in which our languages have been and continue to be marginalized in the US college context and by writing about and in our vernaculars.

Of course, beyond arguing for an attitudinal shift among instructors in postcolonial contexts of writing instruction, there are specific pedagogical strategies that have been shown to be effective for students whose dominant language is a minoritized one in the context in which they are being educated, whether it is minoritized because it is creole-influenced, because it is not the local "national" language, or because it is a vernacular that does not have social prestige. Successful approaches with students who are speakers of minoritized languages and varieties make a positive space for vernaculars in the classroom. Siegel (2007), basing his discussion on a review of scholarship concerning pedagogies that are effective for students whose dominant languages or varieties are marginalized, writes of the importance of contrastive approaches, where the linguistic properties of vernaculars and dominant community languages are contrasted with standardized English(es), and where instructors contextualize all languages not only linguistically, but also socially and ethnically, even when recognizing that a goal of education might and probably will be at some level training students to use the standardized variety of English effectively.

The Language Identity Awareness and Development (*LIAD*) approach, articulated in Nero (2005), proposes a set of strategies for teaching students with West Indian language inheritances in New York City classrooms and affirms the importance of the contrastive approach to incorporating non-standardized varieties of English, and other national languages, in the classroom. Nero encourages instructors to "validate the multiplicity of Englishes" by reading many varieties of English in class texts and "allowing" them in class discussions; and by conducting repeated contrastive analyses at levels of grammar and of rhetorical style (p. 509). She also suggests a number of action points for instructors, in terms of how they engage with creole-influenced and minority-dialect-influenced students, such as having the instructors ask the students to clarify meaning when it is unclear, rather than assuming that students have made errors in the way that they have tried to express a concept or idea, and discussing the features of various dialects and their appropriateness for various genres of writing and speech.



Nero's (2005) approach is of particular interest here because it foregrounds writing in the classroom as a way to help students and instructors attain their language goals. Having students produce a lot of writing, as well as asking students to read and analyze writing in different varieties and languages with respect to these texts' linguistic features, their audience, and the authors' apparent purposes in writing in vernaculars, reinforces the social and context-driven nature of all language use. Importantly for the present project, Nero also places reading and writing at the center of building a more equal and affirming pedagogical practice for multilingual and multidialectal students: providing more opportunities to write, and treating writing as a process, offers students opportunities to make rhetorical choices about their language use, and to change their usage according to guided feedback from instructors and peers, in a negotiation with a real rather than an imagined audience, so allowing them to see writing as a process of negotiation with an audience, in which the student can, too, exert power.

## Resistance To → Resistance From

There are several sites of resistance to postcolonial approaches to writing in English, coming from both students and instructors, whose attitudes reflect those of the larger society. Huddart (2015), writing about students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, describes resistance coming from the students, who expect that being university students will entail being taught, and being expected to use standardized, British-like English in their university writing. In the multilingual society of Hong Kong, there is a local variety of English that is, according to Huddart, strongly inflected by the linguistic influence of the Chinese languages to which most of the population have primary affiliations; Huddart argues that his students see the university space as one from which hybridized varieties of English should be banned—sometimes in contrast to the approach to English language and writing instruction that the teachers prefer to take. He writes, "postcolonial linguists ought to be rather disconcerted if and when (some of) the people their teachings have (in theory) empowered to use their own Englishes demand (in practice) what they perceive as the native speaker standard" (p. 71). While authors such as Rampton (1990); Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997); Moussu and Llurda (2008); Faez (2011); and many others have effectively problematized the definition of, and reliance upon, the idea of the native speaker

in English-language classrooms, and researchers in the TESOL community have suggested that so-called native speakers of English may not be the most effective English instructors to students with other primary language affiliations (e.g., the essays in Braine, 1999), the "native-speaker standard" is still a powerful force, especially in "Expanding Circle" contexts such as Huddart describes.

Attitudes in which the native-speaker standard is held as being more valuable than hybridized or creole-influenced forms in educational contexts are prevalent in the West Indies, where standardized English is associated with success, both academic and professional. Nero (2014) writes, "many teachers' experiences, attitudes, and practices are strongly influenced by the aforementioned classism, which ultimately reinforces social stratification and outcomes in the classroom. Thus, there appears to be a strong link among socioeconomic class, language, education, and academic achievement" (p. 225). Such attitudes, residues of colonization, demonstrate a very limited imagining of what students can and should do. They are based on a presumption of deficit—that students' non-standardized, or non-acrolectal, languages are a problem, rather than a resource—and, to paraphrase Lu (2004), thus limit what students are *allowed* to do by their instructors, based on the assumption that students are not *able* to write in ways that are acceptable in an educational context (p. 21).

A postcolonial stance challenges these attitudes: it admits a desire for hybridity, for linguistic difference in educational contexts. As Nero (2014) and Milson-Whyte (2015) show, the acceptance of creole-influenced language forms in the classroom—especially classrooms in which students are expected to show high academic achievement—will be exceptionally slow to come down from the top in the West Indies. As Milson-Whyte (2015) writes, "[the] focus on 'grammatical English' [at UWI] is an unfortunate colonial legacy that reflects a language policy that many stakeholders have uncritically accepted" (p. 17). My position in this chapter is, thus, change might instead come from the "bottom," that is, from the students whose linguistic identities have been forcibly split for so long. But making the embrace of linguistic variation in the classroom desirable for students must come with rewards designed by instructors. The postcolonial pedagogy and stance that I am describing shifts language practice in the post-colonies from a "resistance to" creole, hybridity, and the stigma associated with the meso- and basilect, to "resistance from" the students, and to a different kind of imagining



from instructors, of what all students can do. A postcolonial approach to academic writing, I suggest, helps students integrate their linguistic identities—and helps instructors support such integration in classroom practices and evaluation measures. To define what a postcolonial classroom philosophy might involve, we turn to postcolonial literary scholars, who have described the work that carving out spaces for local vernaculars in the literary canon entails.

## Postcolonialism in the Writing Classroom

Bahri (2004) writes, "a post-colonial inquiry is built upon the premise that *difference and marginality are produced in particular contexts rather than being inherent by virtue of category*" (p. 77). For students in composition classes in the West Indies and other postcolonial spaces, this postcolonial inquiry would take place in their active investigation of where their attitudes to creolized languages and standardized languages come from, in a consideration of the contexts in which the margins of creole and of standard might be blurred, and in a deliberate extension of the margins of where creole "should" be in their academic writing. As I suggested in the introduction to this essay, postcolonial composition describes a stance that students and instructors take towards the learning and teaching of writing in the composition classroom. What this stance looks like, in implementation, depends on the instructor, and the students. It might include code-meshing and other explorations of marginalized language varieties, including creoles and creole-influenced varieties of English, in formal writing (Young, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011, and contra Elbow, 2012); it might include adopting a translingual positioning towards students' language identities and language practices (Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur, 2011; Canagarajah, 2006b), even as an instructor explicitly teaches the forms of standardized English in contrast to creole-influenced forms (e.g., Nero, 2005; Siegel, 2007); it might involve a historical analysis of how English came to be what it is, in its many iterations, in the Caribbean. It would certainly involve overt discussion of and play with language and language variation, alongside discussion of rhetorical context, in class.

Milson-Whyte (2015) puts forward a detailed proposal of what effective writing courses might look like in the Caribbean, the "transcultural rhetorical perspective on writing," which builds on the types of approaches discussed by Siegel (2007) and Nero (2005), which I de-

scribe above. But in this essay, I am perhaps less interested in the specific curriculum of our writing courses, and more interested in thinking through how to create a context in which students approach their own writing differently because of a new/re-articulation of their subject position with respect to their languages and also with respect to the history of the places in which they speak them—and where students can write their own lived experience in an academic context. Doing so acknowledges and engages with the intense linguistic stigma and personal trauma (as relayed by Jones and by Dyer Spiegel in this volume) that has prevailed in the West Indies since the beginning of the colonial period. A postcolonial approach to composition is, most accurately, considered as a strategy to "legitimize Creole varieties, . . . help Creole-influenced students develop metacognitive awareness of their linguistic resources, and encourage educators to engage in the attendant reflective teaching for these students' academic writing development," the terms in which Milson-Whyte describes the purposes of her own proposed "transcultural approach" (p. 204). Whatever the many specific implementations of this strategy might look like, taking a postcolonial stance requires that instructors actively interrogate their own positionality with respect to colonialism, either historical or present-day, and center the facets of students' linguistic identity that have traditionally been marginalized in the composition classroom.

In this discussion also, I want to foreground the potentialities for postcolonialism that student writing holds, to carefully consider what we are asking students to produce affords us and them, and to ask how students in the West Indies can create their own postcolonialism in their writing classes. Thus, we turn to the two terms that I introduced at the beginning of this essay, which I place at the heart of postcolonial composition: ***appropriation*** and ***abrogation***, both as a means of resisting historically-imposed prejudices against creole-influenced forms of English, and of resisting pressures from the neoliberal language economy to decontextualize language in order to accommodate the imagined language needs of a supposed globalized audience.

Abrogation, again, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) describe it, is "the refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage and its assumption of a traditional or 'fixed' meaning inscribed in the words" (p. 37). In specifically linguistic terms, it amounts to a refusal to translate or to otherwise accommodate audiences who expect standardized, decontextualized English; in fact, it challenges the category of "standard" language as a construct of the colonizers' culture. Appropriation, on the other hand, is "the process by which the [imperial] language is made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience" (p. 38); it is a remaking or an adaptation of the language of empire so that it will express ideas that are particular to the local environment. Crucially, both abrogation and appropriation require not just an awareness of, but a negotiation with, an audience: a decision on the part of the writer about when to work to help the reader understand and when to put the burden of doing that work onto the reader.



To show what a student text written from a postcolonial subject position might look like, I turn to a paper written by a student in the World Englishes class that I mentioned earlier. This student, V, is an immigrant from Jamaica to New York City. They completed their secondary education in Jamaica and worked as a primary school teacher there. Upon moving to New York, they enrolled in a Childhood Teacher Education program at my institution. The paper from which I will share an excerpt is V's exploration of how Louise Bennett-Coverley resisted linguistic imperialism in her poetry and also in her public persona as Jamaican poet. V interweaves postcolonial theories; theories of translingualism; and stories of Louise Bennett's life, poetry, and performances with descriptions of and reflections on their own experiences, as a teacher and as an immigrant. In the passage below, we see V mixing genres and languages as they tell and analyze "Ms. Lou's" story:

> Now back to de story, a who tell de heroine fi go tell de story in which har Aunt guh compare de origin of Jamaica Patois and "standard" English, a yah so she mek wan a har biggest mistake. Because little afta de story pap, Miss Lou, get international attention—yuh hear dat, yes mi dear: INTERNATIONAL attention, Suddenly!!! X 2. As har fame grow, har vice became stronga and stronga—nuh pla pla, fenky fenky vice mi a chat bout no maasa mi a chat bout the real deal. Miss Lou—one woman against de nation begging de people of Jamaica to dethrone the language of the Empire, and to accept *the nation language* (Brathwaite 459) as de language of POWER. Yuh think people woulda listen rite; eh-eh poopa Jesus. Mi dear, instead a listen, all H*** bruk loose, and just like dat, de heroine suddenly fall from grace and was given a new social title—piawk-ka by the handful of "highly educated" people who controlled de

> education system and a portion of de media. Nevatheless, Ms. Lou neva mek dat frighten har sah nor stop har from publicly denouncing English as superior to de good ole Jamaican Patois.

In this passage, V does two important things. Firstly, they give their narrator a voice and an accent, making the writer into a person with a linguistic history. The narrator can be "heard" telling a story. Secondly, they construct an ideal reader who exists within a *local*—rather than a decontextualized—linguistic community: someone who can draw all the levels of meaning from this text. In doing so, V appropriates the forms and structures of academic discourse, as we see in their reference to Kamau Brathwaite's *nation language*, cited in MLA format; however, they also abrogate the imperialist forms of academic discourse, as in the passage in the first paragraph: "As har fame grow, har vice became stronga and stronga—nuh pla pla, fenky fenky vice mi a chat bout no maasa mi a chat bout the real deal." This moment in the passage is in eye dialect Jamaican Creole (a.k.a., *patwa*) and is perhaps untranslatable into standardized English, and as such is inaccessible to a reader from outside a Jamaican linguistic community. I suggest that using language that is inaccessible to a "globalized" audience is very important in student writing, because it helps students learn to position themselves as writers, rather than as students: they control the discourse. While V is using all the possibilities of code-meshing, as described in Canagarajah (2011), in this portion of their essay—typographical embellishments, phonetic spelling, conversational asides (*Mi dear*)—they also show control of academic discourse, using MLA citation format, coordinating adverbs (*Nevatheless*), and academically-appropriate vocabulary (*publicly denouncing*). This passage, in short, shows V navigating the space between appropriation, mimicry, and abrogation in their writing.

We see V take a turn towards a stronger form of appropriation two paragraphs later. Much of this excerpt seems to be standardized Jamaican English rendered with a Jamaican accent, rather than a rendering in the eye-dialect Jamaican Creole we saw earlier: it uses more academic vocabulary and argumentative forms, but still with a fully voiced narrator, as we see below:

> Dis was a big blow to Ms. Lou because she really used to enjoy both seeing and hearing Jamaican children reciting fi har as well as other local poems or retelling Brer Anansi stories especially since it provided opportunities for de children to synchronously learn about their *linguistic inheritance* (Leung, Harris, and Rampton 557) as well as to develop a positive attitude towards other languages dubbed vernaculars/ dialects because these languages are dubbed inferior because their rhythm of speech, intonation, and flow of words differs from "propa" English. Ms. Lou attempt to develop a *culturally relevant* (Gabriel Okara 41) language failed miserably and so did har spirit, but soon after our heroine had har second epiphany. Abruptly, she memba wey ole tyme people use to sey: "a butcha is neva recognized inna him own parish." Dis put a big smile pan har face and de next ting yuh know, Ms. Lou "flyout."



In this passage, V "follows the rules" of academic discourse: they use (mostly) correct citation format as they quote from scholarly and literary sources; they take an example and summarize it in such a way as to highlight its significance to their own larger point, and they also use technical vocabulary to explain specialized linguistic content, for example: "since it provided opportunities for de children to synchronously learn about their *linguistic inheritance* (Leung, Harris, and Rampton 557)." But V also gestures towards Jamaican Creole, particularly in their use of eye-dialect, a representation of Patwa vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax through strategic but not comprehensive inclusions of creole markers, for example, "'propa' English," "Ms. Lou attempt," "Dis put a big smile pan her face." We note that the syntax in this passage mostly belongs to standardized, rather than creole, English, reinforcing the idea that V is working *with* the standardized form rather than rejecting it. Additionally, in their rendering of this primarily spoken language into its written form, V seems to be approaching the task of writing down Jamaican Creole from a stance similar to that which other writers-down-of-creoles take, as described in Sebba (cited in Deuber & Hinrichs, 2007). That is, the spelling that V chooses renders their language as an "anti-standard," constructed to be visibly in opposition to the local standardized variety.

V wrote the paper from which these excerpts are taken in a course at a four-year college in New York City. As such, V is not necessarily typical of students in tertiary education contexts in the Caribbean, in that V has been linguistically othered not by whether they are creole- or English-dominant, but because V is "foreign" in a US educational context. Therefore, because of their "foreignness," V has had to build a subjectivity that is multiple: student, Jamaican, immigrant, teacher-in-training—all of which have specific linguistic manifestations. V was the only student

in this course who wrote a completely code-meshed essay: many students who wrote in the vernacular also used their standardized English extensively, either as the voice of the narrator or as the voice in which they conducted metacognitive reflection on their use of their own "nation languages" in their classroom writing. But rather than representing the vernacular, as these other students did, using it as a symbol of their cultures, V wrote from the vernacular, placing themselves in the culture of the Englishes of Jamaica. V's refusal to detach themselves from Jamaican English and Jamaican creole in this academic context suggests a way forward, where, in the composition classroom, we make space for students to find out what their creole-influenced academic voices are, so they can write themselves into multiple subject positions, rather than split ones. Once students can reflect on the set of choices and responses to context that helped them craft their creole-influenced academic writing, in the context of other writers who discuss or use creole-influenced and other vernacular languages in academic contexts, they might be on their way to their own contrastive analyses of their language competences.

Students in this World Englishes class who chose to write in their vernaculars did so eagerly: they saw the assignment, and the course more generally, as an opportunity to express their multiple linguistic identities in a context in which they were usually limited to the performance of a singular one. Indeed, the course did important work in legitimizing linguistic identities that students had experienced as being marginalized in an academic context. One student, D, who wrote a story that included standardized English and Guyanese Creole, wrote, "my writing in both Standard English and Guyanese Creole was to represent my linguistic identity in the fullest and most prideful way I could—to say that I accept both Englishes as part of my identity and that one language is most certainly not more legitimate than another." Of course, several students in each of the semesters in which I have taught the World Englishes course have chosen to write a more traditional academic paper, responding in standardized English to prompts that I have assigned. So, the students who have written in their vernaculars so far are a self-selecting group. However, in teaching the course I have adopted a postcolonial stance, and I have found that even students who do not feel comfortable with or interested in writing in their vernaculars still embrace, in their final papers, a pluralistic attitude to language and to their own linguistic identities. Furthermore, it is possible that vernacular writing such as this might be particularly popular among students in composition classrooms in the West Indies, due to the direct connections that such writing makes with what Oenbring (2017) refers to as "the largely oral nature of Caribbean culture, and/or the Caribbean esteem for public oratory" (p. 541). While I would argue that the writing that I discuss above is planned and strongly connected with written modes of thought (in contrast with the unplanned, informal vernacular writing that Elbow [2012] advocates for), the assignment to which students were responding could be seen as drawing upon "Caribbean students' cultural proclivities to oratory and orality" (Oenbring, 2017, p. 542). I believe the students enjoyed the connection between speech and writing that the vernacular writing assignment created space for them to make.



## Conclusion

For there to be a postcolonial stance in the composition classroom, certain points must be brought to the fore as the standardized form of the language is interrogated. For instructors to take up a postcolonial pedagogical position, they first might acknowledge that language is never decontextualized. It is always for a community of speakers or readers, whether those communities are face-to-face, virtual, social, or disciplinary (for instance). This fundamental repositioning is a particularly difficult one in academic writing spaces, and not just those in the Caribbean, because we have come to consider standardized English—whether British or American-inflected—as being, in fact, decontextualized: the language that "everyone" can understand the most easily. But before starting on a consideration of standardized and other Englishes, instructors might stay within the academy and consider—and show their students—how academic discourse changes from discipline to discipline. Even the choice between passive and active voice in sentences is governed by disciplinary norms. Understanding context and how writers position themselves is at the core of writing in the disciplines, and, furthermore, Milson-Whyte (2015) argues that "Creole-influenced students—by their very linguistic/cultural experiences—are advantageously poised to manipulate" the "multiple tongues" of the university's many disciplines (p. 191). So, what if postcolonial composition, and teaching students to theorize their subject positions, is the first step in training students to write in their disciplines? That is, by exploring their multifaceted subjectivity with particular relation to language, and by having space to perform many parts of their linguistic identity depending on the con-

text, students are learning a sensitivity to what a context will bear, how language reflects the context of use, and how to engage in a two-way conversation with a reader, rather than the writer constructing themselves as an invisible deliverer-of-content.

In this chapter, I am advocating for a pedagogy of resistance—of teaching students that they, too, have linguistic agency, even in an education system stratified and bound by the legacy of British linguistic imperialism. A composition course does not have to be a Sociolinguistics course to teach the kind of linguistic resistance that I am advocating for here. Abrogation and appropriation, two terms of postcolonial literary theory, instead describe agentive decisions that a student writer can make about the language that they use, from the level of the word right up to the level of syntax; they reconstruct writing as a set of decisions that the author can make, rather than a response to a set of assumptions imposed from outside.

Teaching this kind of resistance, moreover, requires sharing with students the tools of theorizing one's subject position, and helping them discover an awareness of what they have to offer in academic discourse. It also recognizes what students have to contend with in the residually colonial classroom, in the West Indies, and also in the metropolitan centers of empire. Specifically, a postcolonial pedagogy would be based around reading of texts that use various varieties of English for a variety of purposes. It would include regular analysis of rhetorical use of variation, of structural qualities of English variants, and create many opportunities for students to explore their linguistic repertoire in writing, for different purposes, while imagining different audiences. For, while it is not necessarily difficult to get students to perform different language identities, or multiple language identities, in the classroom, the instructor needs to make the performance meaningful, to discuss how it might be connected to other kinds of academic writing, and to value the writing that these students produce as central to students' marks in a course.

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# Afterword: *Creole Composition?*

## A Start

This collection, with its alliterative title, accomplishes much. First, through its composition, it allowed academic writing teacher-researchers connected to the Anglophone Caribbean to engage in reflective inquiry and write about their practices (and the theories that inform them) as well as their aspirations for *liv(e)able* Caribbean situations. Second, it provides scholars in the Caribbean and elsewhere with knowledge about teaching academic writing in the Caribbean and an axis from which to build scholarship and professional engagement regarding (teaching) academic writing in the Caribbean. Third, it enables academic writing teacher-researchers in North America and the UK to contemplate the reach of their scholarship as well as areas of their work that could be strengthened when considered from transnational perspectives or in light of use with students of Caribbean origin or students with experiences similar to students in/from the Caribbean. However, as the preface acknowledges, the collection is but "part of the start" of discussions on what would constitute effective praxis regarding Anglophone Caribbean students' academic writing development. As practicing academic writing teacher-researchers in the Caribbean with experience teaching and studying composition in the US and Europe, we proffer here strands for expanding the discussion and reach of the scholarship in the Caribbean and other countries where academic writing is taught.

## Writing Our Way In

In her trenchant critique of narrow thinking and questionable operations in *a small place*—Antigua—in the Anglophone Caribbean, Kincaid (1988) asks readers to contemplate the mirror that natives and tourists are for each other: