Exclusive of Ourselves: Private Multilingualisms in the Writing Center

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Abstract

Drawing on a mixed methods study (IRB 03832e), this article investigates how undergraduate and graduate consultants in an English-dominant writing center conceptualize the benefits and potential limitations afforded by their own and their colleagues' multilingualism, and it explores the specific ways they understand such knowledge to apply—or not—to their work with the diversity of writers they support. Ultimately, I argue that WPAs can better confront minoritizing language ideologies of the culture-at-large through more explicitly encouraging English-proficient consultants' explorations of their own complex, and often invisible, linguistic identities and resources. Indeed, and as my findings suggest, failing to encourage such explorations can leave such ideologies under scrutinized, as well as leaving students' own diverse linguistic resources unrecognized and untapped.

For two decades, scholars have called for WPAs to actively combat monolingual and standard language ideologies, especially given the extent to which such ideologies maintain a status quo of "social inequality and inequity" (Weisser et al., 2020). Drawing on the work of Suresh Canagarajah (2006), who has long argued for "pluralizing academic writing" through pedagogies attending to students' varieties of "multilingual competence" (586), such calls frequently invoke the concept of translanguaging (e.g., Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Bou Ayash, 2019; Wang, 2019). As Allana Frost, Julia Kiernan, and Suzanne Blum Malley (2020) explain, a translingual approach seeks to help students understand "language as fluid and actional across social contexts" (p. 4): not as separable bundles of know-how but as a coherent, ever-evolving body of knowledge that can be leveraged for a variety of communicative tasks.

Yet calls for pluralization in scenes of writing instruction and support often exclude from their purview those students an institution has deemed English-proficient, regardless of many of these students' multilingual realities. This tendency is understandable; those considered lacking in proficiency are some of those most consistently harmed by the deficit narratives that standard and monolingual ideologies have naturalized. Nonetheless, to focus on second language learners alone runs counter to some of the

core principles attributed to a translanguaging construct: that linguistic proficiency is a far-from-stable construct; and that apparent proficiency in a dominant discourse does not justify the erasure of the linguistic heterogeneity often undergirding it (Matsuda, 2006; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011).

Nor does such an elision in the scholarship constitute only a theoretical gap. This elision also denies administrators, as well as the students and instructors they support, more inclusive frameworks for exploring linguistic heterogeneity, in its many complex manifestations. As Bruce Horner (2020) notes, cultivating "translingual dispositions" is beneficial not only for students deemed to lack proficiency in an institution's dominant language(s); the critical awareness such dispositions foster is crucial for all students, however they linguistically identify, or, often more to the point, however they have already been identified by an institutional sponsor.

This study responds to such an elision by exploring the varied multilinguistic conceptions and identities reported by a set of university students who, while themselves linguistically diverse, also hold, by dint of their position as writing center consultants, institutionally sanctioned positions as relative "experts" in academia's dominant discourses. Given this positionality, this study's participants reveal the complex tensions that often mark such students' views of their own varied forms of multilingualism and the value of these varied linguistic resources. My findings raise important questions about how writing center administrators—and WPAs more generally—might more substantively explore and challenge pervasive standard language ideologies, and might better foster, within and for the units and institutions they serve, genuinely expansive conceptions of linguistic heterogeneity and its benefit for all learners.

Conceptions of Multilingualism in the Writing Center

In the writing center literature, as in much of the writing studies literature, the term multilingual is often used interchangeably with second language learner—to describe students whom institutional standards have deemed not yet properly proficient in English (e.g., Rafoth, 2015; Weisser et al., 2020),[1] and whose challenges navigating U.S. higher education can be particularly steep. In many if not all college courses, after all, instructors will expect these students' writing to exhibit a level of English proficiency that often cannot be achieved without extra support. How exactly writing centers should provide this support has long been a central concern animating the scholarship (e.g., Thonus, 2014; Rafoth, 2015; Bruce & Rafoth, 2016; Condon & Olson, 2016; Cirillo, Del Russo, & Leahy, 2016).

Parallel to these pragmatic concerns is the growing conviction among writing center scholars that all writers, whatever their assigned level of so-called proficiency in English, would benefit from pedagogies that actively deconstruct standard language and monolingual ideologies (Blazer & Fallon, 2020; Elabdali, 2022). These calls for change join a growing chorus in the writing and literacy studies scholarship that promotes critical language awareness (CLA) as a core pillar of anti-racist, linguistically just reading-writing instruction and support across the K-16 spectrum (e.g., Baker-Bell, *Linguistic Justice*, 2020; Gere et al, 2021; Shapiro, 2022), an awareness that, Sarah Summers (2020) argues, writing centers can also help to cultivate.

Also relevant to such writing center pedagogies is the scholarship unpacking the institutionalized assumptions about multilingualism that underlay many of these minoritizing tendencies. Here, Paul Kei Matsuda (2006) offers particular insight. Matsuda's "Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity" calls out U.S. higher education's propensity to position English-only monolingualism not only as superior to linguistic heterogeneity, but as comprising all U.S. college writers' default status, unless otherwise and explicitly marked. His "Lure of Translingual Writing" (2014) expands this argument by observing that students' mixed language backgrounds are not always as visible, in writing or otherwise, as the scholarship often presumes. As Matsuda (2014) argues, multilingual writers will not always present as such—or, in some cases, choose to present as such—across the varied contexts in which they speak and write. Barbara George and Ana Marie Wetzl's (2020) study offers a case in point. Investigating mixed-language rustbelt college students' literacy practices, these researchers reveal the "self-silencing" (para. 7) that many students perform in their efforts to conform to the monolingual ideology they perceive to have thoroughly pervaded higher education.

While not the focus of this article's investigation, also worth noting are recent critiques of English-only monolingualism as a category descriptor that can uphold undeniably racialized language ideologies. As Vivian Presiado and Brittany Frieson (2021) observe, much of the translanguaging research K-12 U.S. classrooms risks contributing to the "erasure of Black language" by failing to recognize the complexity of the multilinguistic repertoires that Black language makes available to students whom researchers might otherwise classify as "English-only" (p. 390) (see also Do and Rowan). April Baker-Bell (2020, "Dismantling") relatedly argues for a pedagogy of linguistic justice that recognizes the rich stores of multilingual knowledge developed by students conversant in both Black English and what she calls "White Mainstream English" after Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman (2012). As these scholars show, a myth of linguistic

homogeneity and monolingual ideology contributes not only to the marginalization of L2 students, but to an instructional and scholarly failure to recognize the multilinguistic diversity of Englishes that many students already use.[2]

Altogether, such research suggests that designing more inclusive pedagogies requires that WPAs and students together develop newly expansive ways of defining and discussing multilingualism and linguistic heterogeneity. As Jonathan Hall (2018) notes, at stake is not only the field's increasing recognition that institutionally marked second language students require support. Also relevant is the insufficiency of the very categories traditionally used to sort students' language backgrounds, identities, and levels of proficiency (e.g., L1, L2, gen 1.5, "target" and "home" languages). Students' linguistic realities are far more fluid and complex, in ways both marked and unmarked, than these designations always indicate. Encouraging students' visibly mixed language performances as literate agents is crucial, to be sure. But equally important are students' explorations of the language identities and ideologies that undergird these practices and forms of self-presentation (Bou Ayash, 2019).

As contributors to the recent *Out in the Center* edited collection argue, investigations of identity can be fraught in sites of peer-centered writing support (Denny, Mundy, Naydan, Sévère & Sicari, 2019). Especially significant to such investigations, these scholars argue, is research entailing "writing center administrators listening to and learning from their tutors and their private experiences in the writing center" (p. 9). Of course, no study centered on identity should promote involuntary disclosure, much less the imposition of essentializing identity categories. Yet, as this collection underscores, exploring the complexities of writers' and consultants' identities can help reveal where and how, even in the best-intentioned environments, dominant ideologies can maintain their power by a kind of default: an untested presumption of consensus and homogeneity.

In this same edited collection, Tammy S. Conard-Salvo (2018) observes that writing centers' purported commitments to pluralism are not always extended to the multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual realities of their own practitioners—realities that, due to the positions these practitioners hold, may be particularly subject to varied forms of "self-silencing." And the extent to which writing center practitioners recognize—or elide—these diverse identities matters. Writing center theorists have long posited that the most productive and ethical forms of peer writing support emerge from reflection and collaborative, reciprocal learning—a project wherein peer consultants engage with the complexities of literacy learning just as much as the writers they support. An ethos of empathy and inclusivity,

however, will ring somewhat hollow if consultants, and the administrators who lead them, hold themselves apart from the linguistically heterogenous identities and ecosystems they otherwise work to help students recognize and navigate. For when the reality and benefits of one's own diversities remain invisible, a standard language ideology will easily remain ascendent. Such an ideology can only be fully challenged through candid explorations of the linguistic diversity at the core of our own community members' work—an exploration that this study begins to undertake.

Research Study

This study was designed to help writing center practitioners—peers and administrators alike—"listen and learn" (as Denny, Mundy, Naydan, Sévère & Sicari, 2019, put it) from one set of writing center consultants' "private experiences" and attendant conceptions of their own and their writing center colleagues' multilingualisms. It aimed to explore the nature of consultants' multilingualism and its visibility to other members of the writing center community, how consultants understood such multilingualism to shape their conceptions of language and writing, and how consultants understood such multilingualism to impact their support of student writers.

Given these questions, it was methodologically important to design a study that acknowledged the delicacy of exploring consultants' "private experiences" and conceptions, especially regarding the good reasons some might have for wanting to maintain such privacy. Linguistic identity often intersects, and/or is presumed to intersect, with varied other identity affiliations, including those related to race, nationality, or educational background, and which themselves are often subject to further assumptions, associations, and forms of marginalization. Because surveys can glean participants' perceptions on issues they might prefer to discuss anonymously (Salem, 2019)—particularly for research conducted by a scholar who is also the participants' employer and supervisor—this study (IRB 03832e) employed a voluntary, anonymous survey, using open- and close-ended questions, and brief, voluntary follow-up interviews. I then analyzed this data using grounded coding, identifying patterns in how consultants described and appeared to conceptualize their own and their fellow consultants' multilingualism; and their perceptions of multilingualism's particular affordances for their work as writing consultants.[3]

In an effort, moreover, to capture the complexity of these consultants' linguistic experiences and conceptions, my instruments used a deliberately capacious definition of multilingualism: the ability to use more than one

language on a semi-regular basis. When asking about participants' linguistic backgrounds, I avoided the terms L1, L2, native, and non-native. My protocols instead focused on where (at home, in school, through friends, or social situations) and at what age (before age 5, age 5–10, age 11–16, age 17–21, age 21 and beyond) participants learned either English or their other language(s), as well as, if applicable, the contexts in which they continue to use their other language(s). That said, I followed the general trend of the writing center literature in defining multilingualism as knowledge of English and at least one other non-English language; after all, this is the framework with which most U.S. educational institutions describe students' language competencies, and I suspected that some participants would feel unsure answering questions that were not aligned with this definition.

Site and Participants

The writing center where this study took place—and that I direct—employs 30–40 undergraduate and graduate consultants each year and devotes significant energy to grounding consultants' practices in both contemporary writing center scholarship and the research-based principles about writing and learning foundational to the larger Center for Writing Excellence of which we are a part. In training courses and professional development seminars, consultants consider, among other issues, the varied ways that literacy is social, rhetorical, and requires the consistent negotiation of language differences. On the topic of language differences, consultants read scholarship by Frankie Condon and Bobbi Olson (2016), Vershawn Ashanti Young (2010), and Paul Matsuda and Michelle Cox (2011).

As to our larger context: the writing center serves a mid-sized, R2 university comprised of a main residential campus and three regional campuses. Anecdotally, students tend to describe this main campus as demographically homogenous; it is located in a small, somewhat expensive and mainly white midwestern town whose nearest (and more demographically diverse) cities are between twenty and fifty minutes away by car, and with a limited public transportation infrastructure. The student body is relatively affluent (2021-22 institutional data shows 13% reporting from low-income households), predominantly white (75%) and predominantly domestic (9% reporting as international). As to the linguistic backgrounds of the writers the center supports, 10% of writers making appointments in the 2021–2022 academic year identified as multilingual (though the number may well be higher: 15% declined to answer this question); 9% identified as international (with 20% declining to answer).[4]

I invited all writing center consultants to participate in this study, whatever their linguistic background. Of thirty-five invitations sent, twenty-three completed the anonymous survey, and four further participated in a follow-up interview. Of survey participants, sixteen were undergraduates and seven were graduate students. Of interview participants, two were undergraduates and two were graduate students. I refer to interview participants by pseudonyms: Harper, Ren, Nicole, and Peter. To maintain survey participants' anonymity, I did not ask about disciplinary backgrounds; I can, however, attest that our consultants in general hail from a wide range of majors. Details regarding participants' linguistic profiles will be provided below.

My own positionality should also be acknowledged. Since I am a monolingual,[5] white, cisgender woman, I do not bring to this research any lived experience of feeling subjected to the minoritizing presumptions sometimes attached to multilingualism, especially in academic contexts. No one, throughout my education and career, has questioned my proficiency either in English in general or in the dominant forms of English valued in the contexts where I have worked as a student and faculty member. That said, at both my current and previous institution, I have spent more than twenty years teaching and consulting with undergraduate and graduate writers from a range of linguistic backgrounds, where I observed both the stores of critical awareness these students brought to their academic work as well as the performances of monolingualism that they often also strove and/or seemed to feel compelled to enact. This project emerged from my growing suspicion that students' linguistic resources might be more complex and heterogenous than our traditional intuitional categories recognize, and that this might be especially true for students institutionally positioned as particularly accomplished in writing. If so, I reasoned, more focused effort might be needed in helping such students to recognize both the reality of this heterogeneity and its benefit for their work as writers and writing center practitioners.

Finding One: The Presence and Invisibility of Consultant Multilingualism

One aim of this research was to better understand consultants' understanding of their own and others' linguistic diversity, by gleaning both the scope of these consultants' own multilingualism and their awareness of their colleagues' multilingualism. As to scope, only three survey participants identified as international students, but almost half (43%, or ten out of 23) identified as multilingual. Put in the context of the writing center more broadly,

these numbers revealed that, of all consultants, including those who did not take the survey, 29% at the very least (or 10 out of 35) would self-identify as multilingual.

As already noted, my survey used a capacious definition of multilingual—as an identifier not limited only to so-called international or second language learners. Still, the number of consultants who self-identified as multilingual surprised me. Based on my experience with these students—having taught them in a small training course, where they frequently reflected on their literacy experiences and practices, and continuing to interact with them as supervisor and mentor—I would have estimated a far smaller number. Yet, as one of the survey participants noted, linguistic diversity can be hard to discern: "You cannot tell if someone is multilingual based on looking at them or hearing them speak."

My ignorance of consultant multilingualism was matched by participating consultants' perceptions of their fellow consultants' multilingualism. When asked how many of their fellow consultants they *knew* to be multilingual, most (19 of 23) reported between 1–3; the remaining 4 reported between 4–6 (see figure 1). Yet, these survey results also showed a significant disparity between what consultants felt they could confidently verify of their colleagues' multilingualism and what they suspected: when asked how many of their fellow consultants they would *guess* were multilingual, the numbers rose, with most (17) guessing between 4–6 and 7–9 (again, see figure 1).

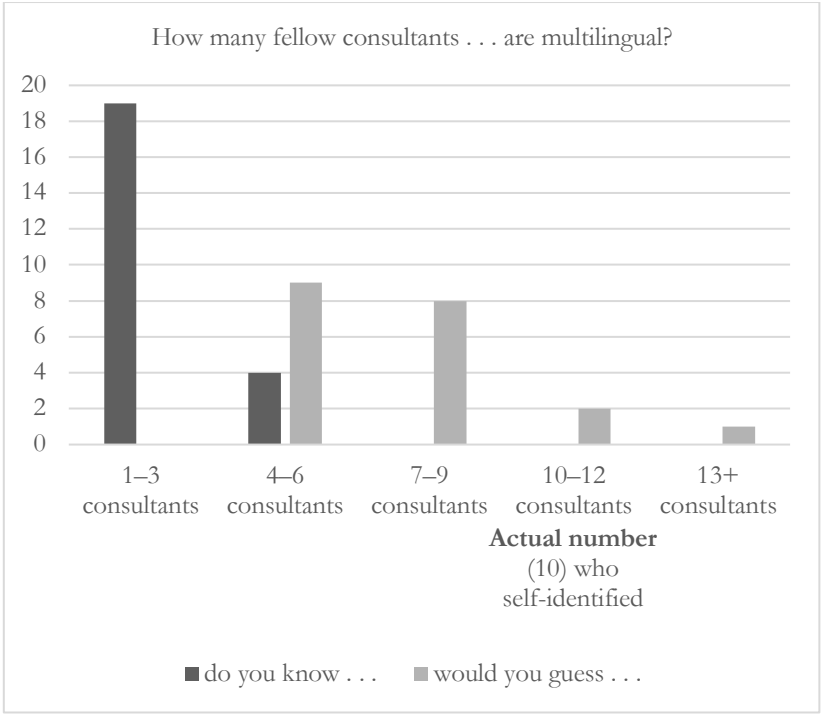

Figure 1. Consultants' (n = 23) Knowledge of and Speculation about Fellow Consultants' Multilingualism.

Comparing these results to the number of participants who identified as multilingual pushes these findings into sharper relief. Even though most consultants suspected their writing center peers were more multilingual than they knew for sure, almost all underestimated the number who would indeed identify this way. While 43% of study participants (which was at least 29% of all consultants), identified as multilingual, most participants (74%) guessed this number to be closer to 12% (6 of 35) or 20% (9 of 35).

At the least, this shows the extent to which these students' multilingualism remains, if not entirely invisible, then shrouded in uncertainty, even for peers with whom these consultants had worked closely for one to three years. More generally, too, these results confirm why Matsuda's (2006) "myth of linguistic homogeneity" remains so durable on college campuses (p. 638). After all, and except in the case of students, others can confidently identify as non-native (often because of the non-dominant accent with which they speak and write in English), college students frequently remain ignorant of any multilingual knowledge their peers hold. Even if

participants suspected that the truth might be more complicated, the illusion of homogeneity remained for them unchallenged by any hard knowledge to the contrary.

Finding Two: The Complex Nature of Consultant Multilingualism

Survey responses also showed the complex nature of these consultants' multilingualism and how resistant such multilingualism can be to traditional categories, whether L1 and L2 or native or non-native. Of the consultants who identified as multilingual, eight of ten reported that they learned English at home before the age of five, and seven of these same ten also learned at least one other language at home before the age of five. Only two of ten, therefore, might be traditionally categorized as "second language learners," learning English outside of the home and at an older age; likewise, only three of these ten learned their other language(s) outside the home and at an older age. The majority, then, did not begin their language learning with one language holding clear prominence, as a construct of nativism implies; for many, their so-called "home languages," from the beginning, were plural. Moreover, the majority (6 of 10) of these multilingual consultants reported knowing and using on a semi-regular basis two or more languages other than English, including Vietnamese, Bulgarian, Arabic, French, Japanese, German, Persian, Turkish, and ASL, further complicating the notion that multilingualism most often involves one "home" language and another single "target" language.

Follow-up interviews confirmed these complexities. One undergraduate, Harper, a U.S. citizen, was raised from a young age in various domestic and international contexts because of her English-speaking parents' work, whereby she acquired a pragmatic familiarity with many European languages, as well as a more focused background in French. The other undergraduate, Peter, had been raised in a dual-language household by parents who had been raised in non-English speaking countries, yet, while he might be understood to possess two "home" languages, he differed from many students typically categorized as "generation 1.5" by identifying English, and not his parents' native Bulgarian, as their main shared home language.

Nor did the two graduate interviewees' linguistic profiles fit tidily into L1 or L2 categories. Nicole was raised fully bilingual in Central Africa, learning and using two languages—French and English—both at home with her parents and later at school. The other graduate student, Ren, like Peter, had been raised in the United States speaking two languages at

home—English and Vietnamese—but unlike Peter, Ren spoke of herself as confidently fluent in both.

Moreover, and despite these four students' range of multilingual backgrounds, only Nicole would be considered "international" by our institution's definitions, even if her specific relationship to English was hardly "L2" or "non-native." Further, the sheer variety of Nicole's multilingualism would, I suspect, have surprised many of her writing center colleagues: in her interview, she revealed she was fully fluent not only in English and French, but also in German and Arabic, which she studied intensively in high school and college. Nicole's experience thus challenges the many L2 stereotypes so frequently applied to non-U.S. university students, just as the linguistic backgrounds of Harper, Ren, and Peter expose how linguistically heterogenous some apparently homogenous U.S. university students will show themselves to be, at least when asked.

These findings substantiate the scholarship showing the actual prevalence of multilingualism on university campuses, as well the complexities of identity and experience that blur the categories typically used to describe college students' multilingualism (see also Hall, 2018). But these findings also reveal the subsumed nature of much of this multilingualism, and the extent to which English-proficient students—even in the context of a writing center devoted to inclusivity—tend to keep such multilingualism to themselves.

Finding Three: Multilingualism and Critical Awareness of Linguistic Diversity

Despite the invisibility of many consultants' multilingualism, almost all multilingual participants spoke passionately about how firsthand experiences with multilingualism afforded them considerable insight into how language functions. In survey responses, a number discussed how their multilingualism impacted their thinking about the power of language norms and engendered a relativistic understanding of language standards. One wrote that, because of their multilingualism, "I recognize that English isn't the only language in existence, and there are also multiple Englishes at that." Another explained multilingualism as enabling a kind of critical consciousness about the politics of English language use: "being multilingual has allowed me to appreciate different types of writing as effective instead of aspiring for some prescriptivist notion of American English exceptionalism." A third argued that "I feel more open to different rhetorical or style strategies" since multilingualism "reminds me that effectiveness can be . . . culturally informed." A fourth consultant further framed their

multilingualism as enabling processual and communicative "transgressions": "My second language allowed me to understand the exciting and transgressive variety in the writing process while also helping me understand how my language conventions shaped my viewpoints of writing."

These insights into the language ideologies baked into higher education—and a frequently avowed resistance to "prescriptivist American exceptionalism"—also helped many of these consultants appreciate the complexities of language learning and the relative nature of proficiency itself. In her interview, Ren mused about how her multilingualism helped her recognize—and encouraged her to help other students to recognize—that one never really masters a language: as she explained, "language learning is a continuum . . . It's an ongoing process . . . not even native English speakers will know everything there is to know about the English language." As Ren thus explains, "I think extending the same grace to people who speak more than one language is important." Nicole echoed this idea when, in her interview, she spoke of her own multilingualism as inspiring an ethos of "tolerance" of the varied linguistic profiles, backgrounds, and kinds of knowledge that writers may bring to the writing center.

Similarly, when asked about how consultant multilingualism might shape writers' experiences in the writing center, many participants saw consultant multilingualism as having the potential to foster an "inclusive" atmosphere. More publicly acknowledging consultants' multilingualism, one argued, would show that the writing center community is "respectful of language differences" and can offer "all students" language support that not bound to a single construct of "standard English." Another explained that knowing about consultant multilingualism could help students recognize that "just like there's no one 'right' way to be an academic, there's no one 'right' way to be a writer." Recognizing writing center consultants' own linguistic heterogeneity, a third posited, would help writers "feel" the writing center as a "supportive diverse environment."

For these consultants, then, inclusivity and diversity were not mere theoretical commitments. This ethos emerged from these students' acknowledgement that the heterogeneity that already defined their own linguistic resources had also expanded their understanding of how language norms work. A number of them argued, moreover, that making such identities and insights known to a larger population of writers would demonstrate the values that so many writing centers, in principle, seek to espouse: showing writers the many faces of diversity, and thus helping to actively combat the minoritizing presumption that, again, there is only "one 'right' way to be a writer." The question that remained, however, was whether consultants recognized and leveraged such heterogeneity in their everyday writing center

interactions if so many of these consultants' linguistically diverse resources and backgrounds still remained, among their peers, largely invisible.

Finding Four: The Perceived Limitations of Linguistic Heterogeneity

Overall, many participants showed genuine critical awareness of how language ideologies affect all writers, whatever their backgrounds. At the same time, however, many also reported uncertainty about the broader relevance of this identity marker and the knowledge it enables. Especially when asked whether and why they might divulge their multilingual status with others in classrooms, with faculty, or with students at the writing center, a good deal of ambivalence emerged. Of course, students who write and/or speak with a non-dominant accent lack the privilege to choose whether to disclose their multilingualism. But for those who could keep such identity private, reflections about disclosure revealed that many felt their multilingual knowledge to have only limited application to writing center work.

First, as one participant explained, not all writing consultants would "feel comfortable sharing" their multilingualism. For some, the decision to keep this facet of their identity private emerged from a kind of stereotype threat: the worry that identifying as multilingual could invite other unwanted associations. Another participant explained that, as a writing center consultant, admitting to multilingualism could undermine their authority: it "might take away my credibility in the eyes of writers." This confirms Matsuda's (2006) observations, whereby—at least in the U.S. context of writing instruction—linguistic expertise is most often associated with monolingualism and multilingualism with linguistic inadequacy. As some of these consultants thus knew, their own critical awareness of language ideologies could not negate the real power that these ideologies yet maintain.

Even more notable are the number of consultants who appeared to have internalized these ideologies, at least concerning their own multilingualism, thus applying an unwitting double standard to themselves and to the writers they supported. For despite their expressed commitments to an "open" and "tolerant" view of others' linguistic diversity, many participants still understood their own command of other languages through the lens of deficiency. One survey respondent—who yet explained that they used their multilingual knowledge for a local job—evinced significant tension between, on the one hand, a pragmatic view of the multilingualism they often used, and, on the other, a more affective reluctance to lay claim to such skills. Asked about whether they identify as multilingual in their

current school setting, they wrote "I do not speak/sign the languages often enough/fluently enough for me to believe that I can identify in that way. Though I am very capable of understanding and holding conversations, I have a lot of doubts as to my execution of the language." Harper echoed this consultant's self-deprecation, explaining that she didn't feel "confident enough to put [multilingualism] on the resume . . . I have this weird smattering of, like, Spanish, French, Romanian . . . and I suck at all of them." Peter expressed a similar inadequacy, explaining, unprompted, and more than once, that, while he spoke his second language often with family, still, he couldn't "read above a fourth-grade level." For these consultants, then, private multilingual identities did not always "count" as a form of knowledge legitimate enough to claim in more public forums.

The consultants I interviewed also espoused a subtractive rather than an additive view of how multilingualism impacted their linguistic resources. Both Nicole and Harper frequently, and regretfully, spoke of the many mistakes they saw peppering their uses of multiple languages, largely because of what Nicole called the "linguistic influence" of another language system. Peter meditated on the ways he saw his multilingualism to have negatively affected his ready command of English: when asked how his multilingualism had shaped his writing practice, his first response was to describe it as "setting him back." Asked to elaborate, Peter revised this statement, but maintained its negative connotation, explaining that "maybe setting back isn't the right way to say it, but [multilingualism] can be confusing. You have an idea you want to express in a certain way, and then you have to spend a couple seconds to translate it the best you can." Ren similarly offered that, because of her multilingualism, "I forget words a lot . . . I have three languages running through my head . . . so sometimes when I'm thinking of a list of examples, I'm stuck at two because . . . I forget words." Significantly, no participants framed this multidimensional complexity in the positive terms it might connote: that multilingualism had expanded their linguistic repertoires, even if this expansion also sometimes slowed down the speed at which they could determine the right word for a given task. These consultants might have understood multilingualism as making them more productively mindful of the meaning-making processes that remain, for many monolinguals, more mindlessly automatic. Instead, all consistently framed their linguistic heterogeneity as presenting a challenge, not a gain, to their linguistic competency.

Most strikingly, such deficit narratives also shaped the narrow way many participants understood multilingualism to apply to their work as writing consultants, with almost all framing their linguistic knowledge as valuable only when supporting second language learners: those the

university deemed not yet fully proficient in English. For these consultants, then, multilingualism was not understood to expand their consulting repertoire in any holistic way; such knowledge instead offered an "extra" resource useful only for the special circumstances of the L2 learner. Nicole made this plain when she explained that, as a consultant, her multilingualism "is like an instrument to use when necessary. I don't come in with . . . let's say the 'bilingual mind' with every paper that I see." As such, while many spoke devotedly about fostering inclusive views of linguistic heterogeneity, not one mentioned the specific relevance of these lessons for the many English-proficient students the writing center supports (which, again, make up about 90% of the writers we work with). Instead, and despite the complexities of their own linguistic heterogeneity, these consultants' commitment to inclusion and diversity was more narrowly understood as applying only to those whose diversity was visibly marked, and by traditional L2 criteria.

Moreover, these consultants' descriptions of supporting L2 learners often employed a lexicon of error, frustration, and self-deprecation. Of course, such a lexicon may reflect the concerns L2 learners are apt to bring to their writing center consultations. As Harper noted, many of the L2 students she worked with "tend to be very insecure about their English." Nonetheless, Harper's consideration of how her multilingualism shapes her consulting practice remained centered on her ability to empathize with the sheer difficulty of second language learning in higher education, as when she remembers "a very, very nervous [L2] student . . . who kept stopping to apologize. And I told her that I had failed my last French test, because, I was like, *learning languages is so hard*." These consultants' overall conceptions of multilingualism thus exemplify the same contradiction that Bou Ayash (2016) describes as a "condition of (im)possibility" wherein students are caught between "the apparent promise of an emergent translingual take on the dynamism of language" and "the enduring force of dominant monolingualism" and its "premium on the fluent mastery and presentation of standardized conventions" (p. 559).

Altogether, these interviews reveal how powerfully institutional cultures can enforce monolingual ideologies. Peter described his multilingualism isolating him from communities he perceived as uninterested in the kind of linguistic diversity he quietly understood as so central to his identity. Referencing a few friends on campus who were also multilingual, though not in the same languages, he told me it was "fun" and gratifying to "hear each other talk"; even so, Peter also admitted that, in both coursework and the writing center, "I can't think of a good context or to what ends [my multilingualism] would come up, where discussing it would be worth it." As he went on to say, "In that way [my multilingualism] is pretty private, and

probably not for the better." Another survey participant similarly observed that, "At my previous institution, it was a very diverse environment where we spoke frequently about our other language identities, but I've noticed here . . . writers don't discuss this."

In her interview, Ren elaborated on the tension many consultants expressed between their own critical awareness of language ideologies and the sense that there was little they could do to combat them. As she explained, academia too often upholds an ethos of "perfectionism," or "this expectation to be perfect in using English, especially in certain . . . levels and positions." So even while Ren understood the nature of linguistic diversity—arguing, as she put it, that "there are many Englishes; there's not just one type of English"—she still did not understand this insight as actionable or acknowledged in her current academic settings. Instead, she saw the academic context is one in which "if there's a discrepancy" in someone's language use, "then their ethos as an English user . . . is brought into question, and they're not seen as . . . knowledgeable, or as quote unquote intelligent or well-spoken or as articulate." So as much as a student like Ren might personally embrace a relativistic construct of multilingualism, she still found it difficult, at a more systemic level, to understand such a construct as broadly applicable, much less acceptable.

Indeed, and as attuned as Ren was to the nuances of what might be considered a translanguaging approach—recognizing the benefits of her own multilingualism and continued language learning, particularly in shaping her critical language awareness—still she remained tellingly at a loss to describe how these lessons might impact her work as a consultant supporting writers who in the main were entirely English proficient. "I don't really know," she said when asked about how her multilingualism had benefitted her consulting work. "I don't feel like I've had a specific encounter or consultation . . . that made me like aware of any benefits . . . to me being multilingual." As another survey participant put it, even more succinctly: "I'm not sure how to . . . incorporate my multilingualism into my work as a consultant."

Conclusion

As a writing center administrator, I understand these study results as both heartening and sobering. Overall, these findings suggest that participants—who made up the majority of a cohort of consultants I trained and supervised over two years—understood quite well how monolingual and standard language ideologies not only minoritize writers but also forward a fundamentally inaccurate conception of how languages work. Nonetheless,

few understood these insights as relevant to their general consulting practices. Instead, many tended to frame multilingual identities, experiences, and knowledge as only relevant to their work with students not yet proficient in the university's linguistic standards—standards, it is worth underscoring, that these consultants otherwise critiqued. Few framed their own multilingual resources with the same inclusive terms they used to discuss linguistic diversity more abstractly. Few, moreover, knew much, if anything, about the sheer scope of their colleagues' multilingualism, much less the complexity of this multilingualism and its resistance to traditional taxonomies.

Indeed, these findings reveal a vicious circle in which a default presumption of linguistic homogeneity—as perpetuated by the largely invisible nature of these consultants' multilingualism—only reinforces consultants' hesitation to share and explore other ways of applying the insights afforded by their linguistic diversity. The private nature of such heterogeneity may thus be the prime culprit in their tendency to understand consultant multilingualism as an identity feature only relevant for their work with L2 leaners.

As George and Wetzl (2020) have argued, WPAs, like the students they teach, can better combat language ideologies by "addressing erasure," not just by making space for writers who are explicitly minoritized for being institutionally marked as multilingual, but also by making visible the other forms of multilingualism and linguistic heterogeneity that may not be as clearly marked, and which can complicate and challenge both a monolingual ideology and the deficit narratives that often accompany institutional understandings of language difference.

So, while it is certainly important, as Ben Rafoth (2015) suggests, to recruit writing center consultants "who are themselves multilingual, or learning another language, or who have significant experience with non-English-speaking cultures" (p. 123), this study suggests that merely assembling linguistically diverse consultants is not enough—their existence alone cannot counteract the misconceptions fundamental to standard language and monolingual ideologies. Nor is it enough to explore only in the abstract the harm of such ideologies, and the benefits of more critical awareness, or just as these ideologies selectively apply to a tidily delineated portion of the writers' consultants' support. As these findings show, language ideologies are strong enough to encourage even the most critically sophisticated students to keep their linguistic diversity largely to themselves, and to maintain the illusion that multilingual experiences, insights, and identities have only limited relevance for writing center work.

To fully combat these ideologies, students need more expansive frameworks for thinking through their own and others' linguistic heterogeneity, for exploring the many forms linguistic diversity can take, and for openly circulating the insights such diversity enables. Indeed, it is my hope that this study can encourage more administrators and students to reconsider what exactly "counts" as linguistic diversity, how complex the linguistic diversity all around them may really be, and how more inclusive frameworks can benefit all writers, not only those who have been explicitly, institutionally siloed. Such reconsideration, ultimately, is the promise made by the concept of translanguaging, which, as Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur (2011) argue, "recogniz[es] the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within the United States and globally" (p. 305)—recognitions that should include, as Kevin Roozen (2020) further observes, even "the language and literacy of people who are presumed to be monolingual" (p. 135).

More specifically, training and professional development should, somewhat like this study itself, scaffold consultants into reflecting on the nuances of their linguistic knowledge, backgrounds and experiences; and administrators should share back with consultants—albeit in anonymous and aggregated form—some of the content of these reflections.[6] Consultants should be led to discuss, moreover, how they arrived at these forms of self-identification—even if they understand themselves as representative of a default monolingualism—and what effects they understand these identities having, both in and out of writing center settings. Doing so, administrators can help consultants re-evaluate some of the presumptions they might subconsciously bring to both the terms "multilingual" and "monolingual," whether involving educational background, nationality, race, class, language varieties, or "correctness." Finally, consultants should be asked to share the varied forms of critical insight that linguistic diversity enables, whether about technical, personal, or political aspects of language use. Doing this might not only alleviate the multilingual loneliness felt by consultants like Peter; it might also help Harper and Nicole reconsider their own deficit narratives, and prod Ren to recognize that her hard-won multilinguistic wisdom is well worth sharing with others, whatever their linguistic backgrounds. As a result of such sharing, consultants might feel more empowered to navigate more critically and purposefully the educational sector's many naturalized presumptions around linguistic diversity, whether concerning "error," "accented" English, the many standards by which proficiency is determined, or the illusory universalism often attributed to dominant language norms.

After all, one way writing center consultants define their expertise is through this kind of research-informed sensitivity to the many forms of difference that animate writing—differences among languages, discourses, genres, contexts, conventions, positions of privilege, or reader expectations. It is the reality of these differences that monolingual and standard language ideologies work so hard to efface. But administrators and students can help to counter such effacements through exploring linguistic diversity in all its complexity: as a construct that includes but is not reducible to second language learners and that expands the linguistic resources of consultants just as much as the writers they support.

Notes

1. This term is preferred—especially in place of "ESL" (English as a Second Language)—because it avoids implying deficits or hierarchies of knowledge (see Giaimo & Gooding, 2023).

2. Relatedly, Canagarajah (2011) questions whether "being monolingual" even constitutes "an ontological reality," since "so-called 'monolinguals' shuttle between codes, registers and discourses" (4).

3. To preserve participants' anonymity and comfort, I did not ask about other aspects of identity, including race. While I acknowledge that linguistic identity frequently intersects with other identity affiliations, such considerations were beyond this study's purview.

4. Note: our university also sponsors an English Language Learner Writing Center, designed expressly to support students' English language acquisition. While students may use whichever center they choose, the existence of the ELLWC considerably lowers the number of L2 learners our center supports. That said, because ELLWC consultants neither train nor work under my supervision, and approach consulting with pedagogical goals different from ours, I did not include ELLWC consultants in this study.

5. Monolingual by the definition used for the study: I grew up in an English-only household and never learned a language other than English well enough to use it outside the context of the classroom.

6. Since beginning this study, I have disseminated a truncated form of my survey to incoming consultants and shared the (anonymous) results with them in class, providing the basis for a discussion of the reality, effects, and benefits of our own multilingualisms.

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