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# CHILEAN ENGLISH AS A MOTHER TONGUE

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# Chilean English as a Mother Tongue

Marco Katz Montiel[1] [2]

Ésta es tu patria, hijo mío,
un establo donde tu madre
ya duerme
de regreso a nuestra especie[3]

My story begins in New York City, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan before high rents forced us to leave. [As I extemporize this first paragraph, I play segments of the song "Misirlou" on a muted trombone between sentences.[4]] As a young musician, I spent many years performing with African American soul bands, Big Bands, Jazz Ensembles, Puerto Rican salsa bands, Cuban conjuntos, Colombian cumbia bands, Brass Quintets, Chamber Orchestras, Symphony Orchestras,

1 Marco Katz, PhD, teaches literature at The King's University in Edmonton, Canada. Palgrave Macmillan published his book, Music and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature from Our America: Noteworthy Protagonists. Marco publishes academic articles in English and Spanish, and has given talks on connections between music and literature at the Modern Language Association (MLA), Latin American Studies Association (LASA), and Jornadas Andinas de Literatura Latino Americana (JALLA).

2 Heartfelt thanks to Allison Ramay, who invited me to speak at this conference; Consuelo Gajardo, who made it all come together; the Pontificia Universidad Católica students who attended the workshops preceding this event and offered questions and observations that helped me develop these ideas; and Betsy Boone, who violated a surgeon's directive and spent her recovery traversing the American continent in order to accompany me. Namaste.

3 "This is your homeland, my son, / a stable where your mother / already sleeps / upon returning to our own kind" (my translation).

4 The trombone playing, which do not appear on these pages, formed part of an earlier version of this paper, delivered at the Auditorio de Letras, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Santiago de Chile on 9 August 2019.

theater pit orchestras, the Ringling Brothers Circus, and – once in a while – with an odd group of Chasids who played Heavy Metal songs in Hebrew for Jewish weddings. Among the traditional songs interspersed with the rock favored by young Chasids, was a theme called "Misirlou." This was well known in my father's Jewish family, and I had heard it often. I loved watching the women dance to this music. Unlike the fast and furious music played for the men, this one quietly evoked mental images of past splendors. Sometimes – seldom, but it did happen – we played for groups that allowed the men to come and join the women. On my way home one night, I stopped in a small store (what we call in New York *una bodega*) run by some men from Yemen. They asked me what kind of instrument I had in my case and if I would play it for them. This happens from time to time, and is usually meant as a joke, so I like to surprise them and say, sure, I'll play. This particular evening, having just played with the Chasidic band, I decided to treat my Yemeni friends to some Jewish music.

"What?" they exclaimed. "How do you know our music?"

"I just played this song, long known to my people, at a Jewish wedding," I replied. With that, everyone smiled, and we drank some coffee, shared cigarettes, and had a lively conversation. Basking in that success, I subsequently performed this song for Greeks and Italians and lots of other people who all instantly claimed it as their own.

I had the good fortune to grow up in a destination for people from all over the world, including members of my own family, made up of Jews on one side and Christians on the other, none of them considering me as part of their tribes. In keeping with the song that travels from culture to culture, New York City allowed me to take in the world and transform with fresh encounters. My ever-changing views on language and literature depend on these abilities to absorb attitudes and concepts that, at first blush, seem wrong. As Néstor García Canclini, the anthropologist who developed thoughts on cultural hybridity, writes, "No hay proceso evolucionista de sustitución de unas teorías por otras: el problema es averiguar cómo coexisten, chocan o se ignoran la cultura comunitaria, la cultura como distinción y la cultura.com"[5] (14). Coming from this

5 "No evolutionary process exists to substitute some theories with others; the problem is in figuring out how they coexist, bump up against, or ignore culture as part of communities, culture as something different, and culture.com." (My translation)

background, I bring five thoughts today for your consideration:

1. **Seek conflict.** Avoid agreeable topics. Preaching to the choir makes for dull reading, boring classes, and never gets us anywhere anyhow.
2. **Embrace accents.** Students should appreciate their own beauty, including the sounds of their voices.
3. **Avoid perfection.** Shakespeare: "Striving to better, oft we mar what's well."
4. **Be unexpected.** Well, I guess I won't tell you what to expect until we get there.
5. **Stop working.** Don't teach. Instead, create environments in which students can learn.

Over 18 million Chilean citizens live in a setting remarkably suited to the learning of English. At one time, those coming from families with sufficient resources could begin in preschool programs and continue to use it as a primary language of education through high school and into university programs. Thanks to a state-mandate, a new program was implemented at this very university that provides students with opportunities to study English and be trained to work with primary-aged schoolchildren. Among their professors, they will find Consuelo Gajardo, who regularly employs English outside of her classrooms, making it into her own native tongue. To complete written assignments, students can process words in Australian, Canadian, UK, or US English, all provided by the global giant Microsoft Word. Now that the same corporation offers a US Spanish option, can Chilean English remain far behind? "English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language," writes David Crystal, "and in most of these countries it is emerging as the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools, often displacing another language in the process." In fact, most who speak English do not employ it as their first language, and Crystal estimates that the number of so-called second-language speakers exceeds the billion who communicate in Mandarin.

Outside of the classroom, young learners can hone their English-language skills by watching Hollywood movies, listening to popular songs recorded in Nashville, reading books and magazines published in New York, looking at billboards and storefronts throughout Santiago, and speaking

with clerks in malls dotting wealthier areas of the capital. Whether employing English as a first, second, or subsequent language, they can choose to regard it as a foreign language – or begin to consider it a commonly-used mother tongue of their own country. Understand, please, that choosing English as a native language does not involve the rejection of other languages. En mi caso, por ejemplo, hablo español, no como una lengua del extranjero, sino como un idioma útil e importante de mi país natal, donde han vivido hispanohablantes desde el siglo XVI, pero no descarto los empleos del inglés, el primer idioma que aprendí.[6] My BA, MA, and PhD diplomas all scream English.

**Seek conflict**

Allison Ramay, a colleague who teaches at the Pontificia Universidad Católica, shares my interest in employments of languages considered foreign as native forms of speech. The United States, our home country, has more Spanish speakers than does Chile, Spain, or any other country except for the parts of Mexico not currently occupied by the United States. As M. Elizabeth Boone points out in *The Spanish Element in Our Nationality*, far more of the land making up the United States came from former Spanish territories than from erstwhile British colonies. Her monograph takes its title from a speech given by Walt Whitman in 1883. "Clearly, the Anglo-American conquest of Latin America began in New York," I write in *Music and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature from Our America*.

> First by means of military incursions and later through economic appropriations and cultural hegemony, descendants of British subjects converted the United States into their most successfully dominated Latin American nation. British subjugation has worked so well that, in the present day, autochthonous peoples as well as African, Asian, and European immigrants, including speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, unquestionably accept—and often even applaud—the domination of English language, law, and customs. (23)

And the subsequent hegemonic force of English, which can turn people against their own cultures, has traveled around the globe. Here in Santiago, English often functions as a stratifying force,

6 In my case, for example, I speak Spanish, not as a foreign tongue but as a useful and important language of my native land, where Spanish-speakers have lived since the sixteenth century. Even so, I do not reject employments of English, the first language I learned.

marking out winners and losers. And remember, Spanish was also not the first language spoken in this conquered territory. Our question should not be whether or not language hegemony exists, but how do we plan to deal with its existence. Fashioning language into a true expression of our own voices offers one method for confronting this reality.

Finding our way to employing English as a native language presents difficulties not seen at first sight. To begin, languages are not acquired easily; it took me years to learn English and many more to learn Spanish, and I have been working on French, an official language of Canada, for longer than I would care to admit. US President Barack Obama, considered a brilliant man by opponents as well as supporters, lauded multilingualism without ever providing evidence of his own abilities to speak anything other than excellent English. And even though many university degrees require coursework in an additional language or two, most of my classmates in the United States and Canada able to seriously function in anything other than English were from other countries. In fact, in North America I rarely meet a native English-speaking professor conversant in another tongue.

Moving on from language learning, those passionate enough to take on a second native language should prepare for confrontation. Not everyone wishes to get on board for this. Where I live these days, many English-speaking Canadians resent sharing official language status with their French-speaking compatriots, and nationalists on both sides insist that every newcomer – and for them this includes native speakers of autochthonous languages such as Cree and Dene – must adhere to one or the other. Even ardent proponents of multiculturalism get stuck in these swamps: how many Chilean educators, for example, would favor schools with immersion programs in Haitian Kreyol? Or Mapuche?

In the current discussion, we must also consider which Englishes we care to adopt as an exemplar of Chilean English. Consider the war of words waged by Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. As students of literature in English know, Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart*, writes and publishes in English, a language he considers Africanized due to colonial influences and the creative efforts of language practitioners and the speech of everyday people. Thiong'o, a writer from Kenya once known as James Thiong'o Ngugi, began his career with *A Grain of Wheat* and other publications in English and then turned to Kikuyu, his ancestral idiom. While I find compelling wa

Thiong'o's arguments for jettisoning hegemonic culture and cutting off the tongues of colonial masters, Achebe's view of adapting European languages for non-European purposes serves for the moment in our enterprise of making English a language of the Americas – and anywhere else that people decide to adopt it. Acknowledging the imposition of English around the world, those of us interested in the future of the language can admire the efforts of Noah Webster and, even more so, of Joseph Worcester, who fashioned it into a distinctive idiom of the United States (Benfey). Since then, generations of scholars, writers, and Bollywood filmmakers have turned it into the languages of Pakistan and India, the latter containing a population greater than those of the US and UK combined. Other large groups of English speakers thrive in Ghana, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, Kenya, and Nigeria, all places that have fashioned their own ways of speaking, writing, and making movies in this tongue. In New York City, I regularly conversed in Puerto Rican Spanish with a friend from Guyana because our Englishes were not mutually intelligible.

In spite of the many advances in non-European English, Microsoft represents only one of the hurdles that lie between today and a future perfect moment in which English will have been recognized as a Chilean tongue. Getting listed on a computer program will mark only one step for Chilean English. The more difficult part will require an adjustment of mental attitudes among Chilean speakers – and by Chilean I mean those born and raised in Chile *and* those who come here to study. Chinese students studying at the Pontificia Universidad Católica are also Chilean students just as are those who also identify as Mapuche, Argentinian, Jewish, Italian, Lesbian, and Trans. In a world in which everyone has an "accent," these speakers need to accept themselves in the totality of their multiple identities.

Self-acceptance does not come easily. While working on doctoral studies at the University of Alberta, several of my classmates sought employment at the campus writing center. Although all spoke English fluently, and were indeed graduate students in an English department, their accents caused them difficulties. Olumide, a friend from Nigeria, told me that a student looking for help rejected his assistance because she wanted "a native speaker." Now Olumide not only came from a country that includes English among its official languages, English was, in fact, the only language he spoke. I did not like it that he and other students accepted these bigoted rejections, and only hope

that some of those who were seeking help end up working for people with even thicker accents. What will they do then? Perhaps they can say, "Hey Boss, I can't unnerstan ya cause ya speak funny."

The same university offers graduate students and other teachers from foreign countries workshops to help them deal with their "pathology."[7] As a New Yorker with an accent noticeable to people around the world, I decided to attend one of these sessions, much to the surprise of the organizers, who obviously had not expected attendees with skin as light as mine. In contrast, they were delighted to see my classmate Katayoun Toosi, a brilliant scholar from Iran with darker features, who speaks every bit as clearly as I do and much more beautifully. With a great deal of care, Katayoun took pains to teach well, and the university flyers for the accent workshop had frightened her into submission. Her fears were greatly augmented when a candidate won election as student body president on a platform that called for *making* graduate teaching assistants "speak English properly." Amazingly, none of our professors – including the self-proclaimed Marxists who loudly espoused diversity and multiculturalism in their classrooms – found any problem with that election campaign. The dangers of these attitudes have consequences. I will point out here that the University of Alberta withdrew a job offer to me after those same professors adamantly attacked me for my work on behalf of international students and foreign workers on campus. When I mention difficulties, I mean it.

The prestigious Conference on College Composition and Communication, known as the four Cs, has taken notice of these issues. "Yes," declares the organization's president, Asao B. Inoue, "the ways we judge language form some of the steel bars around our students and ourselves – we too maintain White supremacy, even as we fight against it in other ways." In a series of controversial statements and articles, Profesor Inoue argues that present modes of teaching standard English denigrate students and authorize the most vile and violent forms of racism.

7 Looking up this program in preparation for my talk, I found that these workshops now cost students $950 Canadian dollars for six sessions "with a certified speech-language pathologist. These workshops are designed for participants who have an accent or are English as a second language learners and who wish to increase their intelligibility through modification of reduction of their accent." This poorly written announcement, which appears on the website of the University of Alberta, points out that the program "is not designed to be a workshop to learn the English language." Those concerned about the cost might be interested in knowing that this is "considered speech therapy, and as such may qualify for reimbursement from insurance providers or health spending accounts." Clearly, potential students can see that, according to this campus, they have a pathology, a language illness that requires correction (University of Alberta).

**Embrace accents**

Here's an obvious statement of fact that most people ignore: everyone has an accent. The only people who think that they do not have accents are those who only travel to tourist destinations and otherwise live in endogamic communities. Alejo Carpentier, a cherished founder of Latin American boom literature, spoke with a French accent during his entire life. Cuban exiles in Miami opposed to Carpentier's participation in the Revolution, make much of this and call the author, who was born in Havana, a foreigner. Joseph Conrad, whose *Heart of Darkness* survives as one of the sturdiest remnants of the English literature canon, reputedly spoke with an accent so profound that his British friends had difficulty understanding him.

Students should appreciate their own beauty, including that heard in the sounds of their voices. Also, in a tightening world, they will need to comprehend the way others speak. "One of the paradoxes of American culture," writes Cathy N. Davidson, "is that elites prize being able to speak more than one language, multilingualism. Yet, for immigrants, accents and other traces of an original language are marks of shame. Translingual learning methods attempt to remove that stigma" (57). I cannot do much to encourage my students to learn entire languages, but I make sure that they hear and begin to comprehend English spoken with a variety of accents.

I love to learn from the literature I read. In *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*,[8] Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado eloquently refutes those who continue to insist on the importance of an extra-American birthplace for Carpentier, Barack Obama, or any other citizen of an American nation. The parents of Nacib Saad, one of the lovers in Amado's story bring him from Syria to Brazil as a three-year-old toddler. "He remembered nothing at all about Syria," writes Amado, "so thoroughly had he blended into his new environment and so completely had he become both a Brazilian and an Ilhéan. It was as if he had been born at the moment of the arrival of the ship in Bahia when he was being kissed by his weeping father" (36-37). With surprisingly little difficulty, Nacib's parents manage to register their children almost immediately as citizens. Sometime later, the children become something more than naturalized Brazilians when

8 Unable to read *Gabriela, cravo e canela* in Portuguese, I turned to a beautifully rendered Spanish translation by Rosa Corgatelli and Cristina Barros. The citations for this talk come from the English version by James L. Taylor and William L. Grossman.

> some men burned down the registry office in order to destroy certain deeds and records. All the registry books of birth and deaths were consumed in the flames. Accordingly, hundreds of Ilhéans had to be re-registered. Fortunately, there were qualified witnesses ready to swear that little Nacib and the timid Salma, the children of Aziz and Zoraia, had been born in the village of Ferradas and had been previously registered in the office, before the fire. (37)

The Brazilian notary involved in these transactions acts more out of practical concerns than any incipient multi-cultural tendency. In a frontier territory where forgeries and other fraudulent documents as well as violent confrontations serve to construct realities of land ownership, observes Amado's narrator, the notary Segismundo

> cheerfully registered all the children that appeared before him as having been born in the County of Ilhéus, State of Bahia, Brazil…How could one be bothered with such miserable legal details as the exact place and date of a child's birth when one was living dangerously in the midst of gunfights, armed bandits, and deadly ambushes? … What did it matter, really, where the little Brazilian about to be registered was born — whether in Syria or Ferradas, the south of Italy or Pirangi, Portugal or Rio do Braço? (37-38)

In the end, Segismundo "believed, with the majority of the people, that what made a man a native was not his place of birth but his courage in entering the jungle and braving death, the cacao seedlings he planted, the shops and warehouses he opened — in short, his contribution to the development of the region" (38). In these cases, I agree, Americans create themselves.

In addition to understanding accents, my students need to communicate with the sounds they make. An early student, Maité, with a Caribbean father and Central Asian mother, spoke in my class with an accent that managed to bring in both sides of her family. This accent could not be heard in her written work, and she won a prestigious writing award for an essay composed in my class. In subsequent courses, Maité managed to impress professors in literature courses in both languages. She has just completed doctoral studies in philosophy at Boston University and plans to take up a post-doctoral position at the University of Iowa.[9]

9 Someday, in that future perfect moment in which she will have become a prestigious scholar, I hope to appear in a footnote published by Maité Cruz Tleugabulova.

Initially, I had more trouble understanding Asian accents than I did those from the Americas. I had to work hard to understand a young man named Chun, who struggled with speaking and writing English, but had interesting ideas that jumped off the page as he learned. Several years later, he found me on campus and told me about a science scholarship he had received to go on to graduate studies. If someday, Chun goes on to cure cancer or make some other major breakthrough, I'll be glad that I was not the one to hold him back in first-year English.

An old story – possibly apocryphal as are many good tales – bears repeating here. V. K. Wellington Koo, once Prime Minister of the Republic of China and a distinguished diplomat who held a PhD in international law and diplomacy from Columbia University, helped found both the League of Nations and the United Nations. Once, Dr. Koo was invited to give an after-dinner speech at Princeton University and found himself seated next to a burly football player who hadn't the faintest idea of who he was. During the first course of the dinner, the football player, in an effort to make conversation turned to Dr. Koo and asked, "Likee soup?" Dr. Koo smiled and said nothing. In due course, Dr. Koo was invited to mount the rostrum. He then delivered a speech in flawless English that was learned, elegant, witty, and diverting. Amid the thunderous applause that followed, Dr. Koo returned to his table, smiled indulgently at the by now thoroughly abashed football player and inquired, "Likee speech?"

Now when I say "flawless English," I know that some might disagree. A private student in Madrid, from a time when I gave English lessons for cash because I was an undocumented worker in Spain, excused his poor, I should say non-existent, efforts at learning English by claiming that I couldn't teach him properly. I need a British teacher, he insisted, who can teach me real English. I responded with some terms commonly employed in Madrid that wouldn't sound polite in Santiago. In contrast, another Spanish student gladly studied with me because he wanted to go into business and figured that the US version would prove useful in that career. Neither had any interest in Canadian English and even less in the English of Southern Asia, which, given the worldwide popularity of Bollywood songs and movies and the enormous output of Indian novels and distinguished literature professors, might well be the English of the future.

For some guidance on this topic of flawless English, let's return to that very prestigious Four Cs – the premier organization of composition in North America – to look at this welcoming message from Vershawn Ashanti Young, printed in the 2019 Conference Program:

> Yay! We is here. We is here!
>
> And I for one ain't goin home til we done—til it's ova. Whaboutchu?
>
> As I welcome you to Pittsburgh and to 4C19, let me be real wit y'all right from jump. I hope y'all can tell from my call for papers last year, the visuality right here at the conference, from the black feminist program cover, the artist inserts in the program, and much mo'—some of which I highlight below—that dis here C's, dis here conference, is bout honorin, explorin, researchin, and advocatin wit diverse peoples/voices. Yes, yes, y'all, we bout social justice dis here time.

Young's entire three-page welcome appears in this version of US English.

**Avoid perfection**

Lately, I hear people in all walks of life quote Voltaire, translated into English as "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good," and, as Allison Ramay recently reminded me, in Spanish as "Lo perfecto es el enemigo de lo Bueno." This goes back to Shakespeare's "Striving to better, oft we mar what's well" and much further back to Confucius's "Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without." Although the various versions change meaning, each reminds us of an important point about working with students.

As a way of not ruining the good by demanding the perfect, teachers need to provide multiple pathways to success. As a latecomer to academia, I found that my class participation greatly overshadowed the work on my written assignments, and as a teacher I still have to make sure that I do not pay too much attention to the smooth talker while ignoring the timid young person who hands in great papers. Great ideas, the most difficult part of crafting worthwhile essays, should not cede ground to beautiful writing that conveys little meaning. Individual students will prove more or less proficient in reading, writing, research methodologies, class discussions, group assignments, and – as we'll soon see – other abilities that they can bring to the classroom. Knowing that I will

not impart more than an introduction to academic writing in one semester or even an entire year, I endeavor a teaching practice that lets them shine and earn good grades in what they do well while making sure – and this remains crucial – that they keep pushing themselves to do better work in areas that need improvement.

In *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux*, Davidson offers useful tools for promoting student excellence. One comes from Professor Joshua Belknap at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, who sometimes finds "himself in front of twenty-five students who each speak a different native language." In order to create an environment in which these students can feel comfortable and begin to learn,

> Belknap assigns his students a project: they must research two especially notable features of their native language, write up their research in a short, formal paper, and present their linguistic research to their classmates in English. Before anyone focuses on improving their English grammar and syntax, the students have been allowed to be the linguistic experts, authorities on the unique features of their language, and exemplary researchers who can communicate their ideas as a contribution to the group and relate perspectives on features of English that might prove tricky. (57)

This makes me think about ways of dealing with my classrooms, with their mix of Canadian-born and immigrant students who do not make much of an effort to get to know each other, in or out of the classroom, and learn about the world around them. I put them into mixed groups but find that few pursue these new friendships outside of the classroom. Those who do blossom more quickly than those who keep themselves sealed in homogenous hothouses. Students who form bonds outside of their comfort groups learn far more from their peers than I can ever teach.

One exercise that I have done at the end of the semester – although Davidson convinces me that I should bring in such work earlier – involves poetry recitals. In this electronic age, when memory often consists of grabbing a device, my students are at first aghast and later delighted (somewhat) by my insistence that they learn a poem and recite it off the top of their heads – or "by heart" as we used to say in more sentimental moments. The poem should be at least as long

as an Elizabethan sonnet; some students fudge this a bit with shorter works while others have happily recited "Kubla Khan" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge or "Holy Grail" by Jay-Z. In addition to reciting the work, I ask each student take a few minutes to explain his or her choice and tell us something about the piece of literature that he or she has selected. Students can recite a work in the language of their choice, but if they do so in anything other than English, they must either read a translation or summarize the meanings. After a beautiful reading in Mandarin, one young woman from China offered a spirited defense of her country's actions in Tibet, an unexpected point of view that challenged the rest of us to reconsider the news as presented by the Canadian press. In the background of these presentations, although I barely mention it, students must deal with memorization as one of the ancient elements of rhetoric and questions of what do we mean by the term *writing* as discussed by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*.

At some point, all English courses turn to issues of translation. Naturally, teachers who can read and write in other languages have an advantage here, with abilities that their monolingual colleagues might appreciate but do not really understand. Anthologies often include "Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche" by Pablo Neruda for these exercises, with lesson plans designed to help the English-only instructor navigate these complicated currents. Having some acquaintance with multilingualism, I rely on my own methods.

Here's one. The Alberta Province of Canada, where I teach most of the time, has some of the world's largest deposits of petroleum, more than the amount in Saudi Arabia, and people come from all over the world to help extract it or to work in ancillary industries. As a result, our universities, especially the smaller ones, enjoy a great diversity of cultures and languages, and I can usually find someone to read "Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche" as Neruda wrote it. Following this reading, one of the students then reads the poem in English, "Tonight, I Can Write the Saddest Lines," as it appears in the anthology. Even though English remains the official language of the province, I can usually find at least one student to read this in the other official language of Canada as "Je peux écrire les vers les plus tristes cette nuit." It did not take me long to find this world renowned poem translated in other languages around the world, and, depending on the class

makeup of a given semester, someone will recite "Posso scrivere i versi più tristi stanotte" others move on to several languages that I dare not try to pronounce in public.

After listening to the poetry and looking at it on a screen, students talk and write – in English – about the issues of translation revealed by the exercise: the sounds of language, the appearance of the language, distorted meanings, the difficulty – if not impossibility – of recreating precise meaning, and cultural dimension translations. Seeing and hearing the poem in various languages demonstrates so much more than I could simply tell them. I learn as well; the songs of Schumann, I have discovered, move people because of the words as well as the notes; poetry just sounds incredibly beautiful in German.

One year provided an unusually rich learning experience. Mi Tian, a student from a Uighur (Chinese Muslim) family who had gained acceptance into the incredibly difficult theater program at the University of Alberta, read a translation of "Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche" in Mandarin. The rest of us found the recital moving, partly because of the language and partly because of the passionate drama that Mi Tian wrung from the lines. Several Chinese students in the room smiled broadly; used to sitting quietly, afraid to speak up in class, they suddenly became the few insiders, the ones who could understand the words being uttered that day. After the applause ended, a student from Mexico asked the Chinese students to talk about the translation. Having read the poem in English, which they could understand, what did they think of the Mandarin version's accuracy? It was fine they responded, but this could never be mistaken for a Chinese poem. Not expecting that answer, a Canadian student asked why not? No poem in Mandarin, they told us, would ever deal with love in this manner. The emotional outpouring of Neruda did not resemble the restraint they would expect in a Chinese poem on the same topic.[10] This information gave me a new thought on translation to consider, and I felt gratified that my other students had an opportunity to learn something that I could never have taught them. The point is not that this view of love poetry applies to all circumstances; I would have to learn a great deal more about Chinese literature to make that assertion; instead, we could all see that for some readers, Mandarin functions differently than

10 This reminds me of José Watanabe's *Elogio del refrenamiento*, a wonderful essay on the passion as well as the power of restraint as practiced by an Asian parent raising children in Peru.

does Spanish. And for that matter, the commentary of those Chinese students made me go back and think specifically about the differences in emotional expression between my own two languages.

Although he struggled with his writing, and on occasion became angry with my many comments and suggestions on his essays, Mi Tian proved capable in many other ways, giving to and taking from the learning environment. After the last class, he serenaded me, standing outside of my office while he sang a song in Mandarin and then "Maria," with music by Leonard Bernstein and words by Stephen Sondheim. Colleagues in neighboring offices were sure jealous that day! The next year, a friend in the theater department told me that he had restyled himself as Tristan Mi and flourished as he received increasingly prominent roles on stage. I was glad that I had found ways to grade his work that wouldn't prevent him from pursuing his dreams, all the more so a few years later when he suddenly passed out at a rehearsal and never regained consciousness. In a short life, Mi Tian earned a great deal of love from audiences and made an impact on his department that has lasted a long time.

**Be unexpected**

[Another brief moment on the trombone here, playing a fragment of my own composition, "Casey Dog Blues."[11]] Do you have a fascinating accent? If so, you might be surprised at how often listeners will enjoy hearing their language in a different voice – and at how it can help them pay more attention. Do you paint pictures? Take photographs? Play sports? Take care of plants in your garden? Cook? My friend Katayoun delighted her students, and kept them from missing classes, by feeding them Persian dishes they had never before encountered. Many things that apparently have no connection to language and literature can forge connections and bring unexpected happiness to your classroom. Remember that *everything* connects to language and literature. And the surprise appearance of a trombone will certainly get the students' attention.

**Stop working**

Remember the old adage, "Show, don't tell." Susan Bennet, a pillar of 4Cs and a professor in the writing program at Humboldt State University, where I studied in California, put us through

11 Again, the presence of a trombone that fits uneasily on a printed page. Those who would like to hear me perform "Casey Dog Blues" can do so without cost at: https://youtu.be/mvWEjJnrMNk

a semester of hands-on writing activities much like the ones I forced on some of my Pontificia Universidad Católica students during the week before this talk. On the last day of class, she told us, "If you prepare your classes properly, your students will do all of the work in the classroom." Most importantly, keep in mind that people remember best what they come up with on their own.

Looking back over my years of playing music and more recent experiences as a student and then a teacher, I feel as though I have never worked since the days when, as a teenager, I packed boxes in a warehouse. "Do what you love, and you'll never work another day in your life," goes an old saying. Mind you, I get tired of people telling me how lucky I am to have summer vacations when I go to bed exhausted after writing all day. But most of the time I get a great deal of satisfaction from the way I spend my time. There's nothing wrong with you if reading, writing, and teaching do not make you happy, but in that case you should find something else to do with your life. My father, Sheldon F. Katz, a brilliant middle school English teacher who spent eighteen years of his old age living and imparting English in China, told me, "I don't teach. I create environments in which students can learn." In my best moments, I follow that advice, establishing a contagious presence in the classroom that infects students with a type of insanity that changes their minds. Imagine that phrase: change their minds – I have changed my mind. What can be more powerful than changing our minds? Every time I go into a classroom, I hope that some of the people there will, in whatever small way and at whatever later time, change their minds. Having done this more than once, I know only one thing for sure: I will change mine.

¡Gracias!

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