Translingual (Code-meshed) Approach to Writing [Student Guide]

By Stephanie Renée Payne

"My weapon has always been language, and I've always used it, but it has changed. Instead of shaping the words like knives now, I think they're flowers, or bridges."
—Sandra Cisneros

The goal in a translingual, or code-meshed approach to writing is to invite you to engage in a broader view of language while also engaging in college-level writing and within the world beyond academia. In this globalized 21st century, the issue of language diversity is more relevant than ever.

If you wish to experiment and develop your writer's voice in academic writing, when appropriate, there are steps to consider to evaluate the effectiveness of meshed writing (that is writing that may contain multiple languages and/or alternative uses of English).

To engage in this style of writing, we look at content, **content, style, audience, and the overall communicative value when implementing diverse uses of language into a text**. This exploration liberates you from the notion that there is only one "right" way to use written language, but you will also be challenged. You must establish that a translingual approach is rhetorically justified, critically relevant, and communicates ideas with clarity. If you choose to code-mesh engage in a four-point[1] heuristic, as follows:
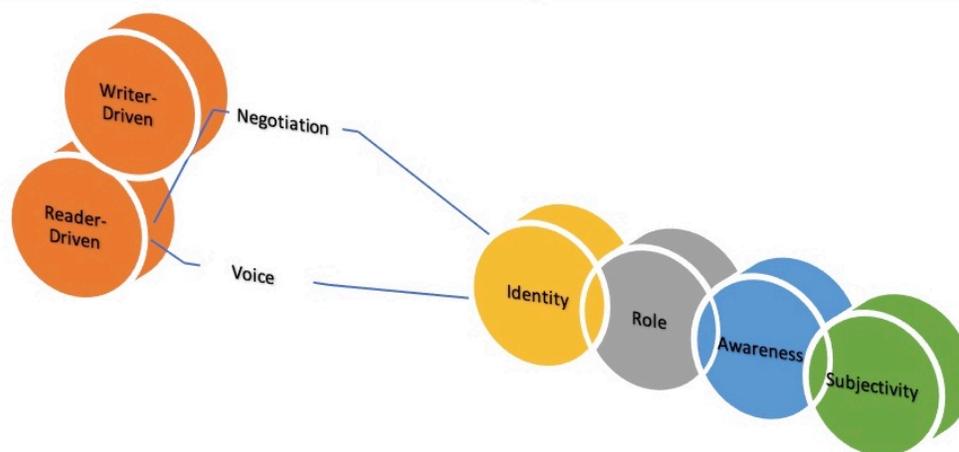

Figure 1.

In the above figure, the interplay between the writer and the reader is a critical consideration when using code-meshed language. The question for the writer is: *How do I consider my audience while authentically expressing my authoritative voice?* The four pillars—**identity, role, awareness, and subjectivity**—offer the writer criteria to evaluate code-meshed texts in its ability to provide the reader an enhanced understanding of ideas, while allowing the writer an authentic and authoritative voice as follows:

1. **Identity**—Considers your unique history and national affiliations. How do you use language within your heritage? Think about your use of language within your heritage to expand the understanding of ideas. Your unique identity may provide the space to positively draw from your heritage to cultivate authentic authorship and the authority of your voice as a writer. **The question for you to consider:** *How does identity better inform my reader?*
2. **Role**—Considers your social position as a writer in the renegotiation of power dynamics within systems, such as educational institutions, the workplace, and governmental institutions. As a student, you are encouraged to examine the expectations of your role while writing with authority. Within the renegotiation of the power differentials, you as the students are encouraged to take care with the renegotiation of roles to acknowledge the need for certain hierarchical structures, but to also maintain authorship and authority in your writing. This can be done by establishing knowledge. For example: *As someone who is fluent in three languages*; and/or: *As someone who has viewed perspectives from several countries*, etc. **The question for you to consider:** *What needs to be established to effectively renegotiate your role as a writer within the text, and how best can you meet this goal?*
3. **Awareness**—Considers the negotiation of sometimes conflicting approaches to language. Writers should negotiate myriad approaches to gain a measure of coherence. The chosen voice can provide a new construction that, while clear and comprehensive, may confront biases and impositions for the reader. A measure of awareness allows you to navigate through language using multiple components within voice. Ways to be aware of your reader to help that reader negotiation a new mode of engagement with your text are: 1) parenthetical aids; 2) italicized text; 3) footnoting; and 4) translation. Please note that it is your decision to translate directly, use context, or to simply invite the reader to engage with the text without aids. **The question for you to consider:** *How do you use language to guide your reader through potentially uncomfortable paths of language?*
4. **Subjectivity**—A subjective approach acknowledges established norms, even to the point of mastery, to shape your voice as a writer effectively for a diverse body of readers. **The question for you to consider:** *How can you use language authoritatively and with clarity to assert your position and push the boundaries of established norms while establishing that you recognize and understand those norms?*

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[1] Adapted from and inspired by *Codemeshing in Academic Writing: Identifying Teachable Strategies of Translanguaging by* SURESH CANAGARAJAH