USING POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE IN THE FIELD OF
COMPOSITION: A CROSS-DISCIPLINE DIALOGUE

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USING POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE IN THE FIELD OF COMPOSITION: A CROSS-DISCIPLINE DIALOGUE

A Thesis

by

Erica A. Spangler

Spring 2011

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DEDICATION

For my loving and amazing family
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes, discusses, and extends the cross-discipline dialogue between the fields of composition and postcolonial studies. Both fields of study examine how power relations shape and construct identity. Composition scholars examine how the academy shapes composition student identity, and postcolonial scholars examine how colonization shapes identity. This thesis extends the cross-discipline dialogue to suggest uses for postcolonial novels to both train composition instructors and to teach composition courses. This suggested approach incorporates composition pedagogy and identity theories; such an approach raises relevant questions about how power relations within the academy shape student identity. This thesis also suggests how using postcolonial novels in a composition course can help students to form a language to discuss identity. Such a discussion, then, should help students to begin their own inquiry projects.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

As both a student and a composition instructor, I witness, alongside other professors, the pedagogical struggles to foster student success. Professors encourage and work towards helping students successfully pass composition courses; however, as the student population grows and diversifies, then changes in pedagogical theory and practice must parallel such a shift. This thesis aims to describe the current dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies; it furthers the dialogue by proposing a pedagogical approach to teaching composition.

As a composition instructor, I believe student success in composition is dependent upon the curriculum taught, the institutional demands, and the needs of an individual student. I will examine all three of these components to further address why this thesis’ proposed change matters. Composition curriculum, as I will define it, aims at teaching students practices around research and writing. The composition pedagogy that I seek to examine is based upon the inquiry model. This model requires, of students, to read common theory based upon an instructor-chosen ‘umbrella topic’ or theme. Then, students pose their own inquiry question and begin researching, eventually producing a claim-driven research essay. The inquiry model trajectory supports student growth and success to build upon earlier assignments. The inquiry model uses the pedagogical theory of scaffolding to support student learning and development. Scaffolding, as defined by
cognitive psychologist Jerome S. Bruner, is a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult ‘controlling’ those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. (Wood, Bruner & Ross 90)

Pedagogically, scaffolding and the inquiry model support individual student growth in order to help the student succeed to the institutional demands of the composition course. The institutional demands assume that students who pass composition will be successful writers in other university courses.

This thesis proposes pedagogical practices for composition courses, but I first address my assumptions about the students entering the composition classroom. I assume that all students entering the composition classroom completed and passed high school Language Arts/English courses. These high school courses usually use novels as the common text for each course. Students, therefore, have experience reading and writing about novels. These experiences with novels, however, have been examined and discussed through a literary lens or approach. Students have read novels and discussed the literary style, structure or plot elements—i.e. foreshadowing, symbolism and themes. If students have developed practices around reading and writing about literature, then, can we incorporate novels into a composition classroom that uses the inquiry model?

By extending the inquiry-based model to incorporate novels, as the common texts read, such activity will help students make the transition from high school writing into college writing. This thesis provides an approach to scaffold students from high school writing about novels into college research essays. Meaning that composition
students will read novels to discuss the concepts such as identity in order to understand how factors shape or change a character’s identity. These discussions will lead the students to formulate a language and a vocabulary to discuss how their own identity is shaped or changed due to their social and cultural experiences. Composition students, then, will raise their own questions to begin forming their own inquiry based research project. This thesis, then in theory, extends the dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies because it suggests a pedagogical approach using postcolonial literature. This requirement, though it is developed further in chapter two, ensures that the novels read in the composition classroom raise similar issues that many composition teachers tend to raise issues of identity, language and culture. In other words, both composition and postcolonial studies approach identity, language and culture similarly, at least in theory.

This thesis both extends the dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies and provides the corresponding pedagogical approach. This extension, then, forms a hybrid between the two subfields of English studies—composition and postcolonial studies—and, also, requires knowledge and basic background in each corresponding field. In the remaining chapters, I review the current dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies, where I examine examples from each field. These examples, then, raise questions about the creation of the literary canon, which will provide further reasoning for using postcolonial literature, specifically, in a composition classroom. Following the current dialogue, I suggest a pedagogical approach of using novels to extend the dialogue. I provide two pedagogical approaches for using novels: 1) when training composition instructors and 2) in a composition course. These approaches
aim at extending the cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—and to providing an easier transition—from High School to College—in student reading and writing practices.

Chapter two examines the current dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. It provides reasons as to why a productive dialogue between the two disciplines had not occurred, until the last 15 years, despite the fact that their theoretical interests overlap. This chapter examines examples of how each field of study—composition and postcolonial studies—extends the cross-discipline dialogue. The overlap is on each field’s discussion about language power relations—one language privileged over another language. This chapter provides an example of the implications of language power relations within the discipline of English studies: the literary canon. The cross-discipline dialogue provides the foundation as to why I suggest only using postcolonial literature in a composition classroom.

Chapter three extends the cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—by providing both a theory and practice. In theory, this chapter aims to present why a postcolonial novel used with composition pedagogy may raise new questions or issues such as student identity. This chapter provides an illustration of the suggested method of composition pedagogy. This method incorporates both composition theory and postcolonial literature when training composition instructors. The chapter continues to explain the theory of using postcolonial literature in a composition course. The novel’s use—both in the instructor method and the student method—demonstrates fictional representations of ambiguous concepts. For example, the novel provides students with a concrete example of how a character’s identity shifts due to cultural
changes, instead of their merely reading a theory about possible identity shifts. Students, therefore, would not write analytical literature papers that examine novels through a literary lens—i.e. feminist or Marxist. I suggest students discussing ambiguous concepts—i.e. identity—and how they change throughout the novel. The discussions would prompt inquiries about concepts like identity. The student driven inquiries would raise issues on what about a student’s society and culture shapes their identity. The inquiry would also ask students to question to what extent these societal pressures should be complicated or challenged. This chapter, specifically, uses Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* as a fictional example to examine composition student’s identity issues by examining the characters’ identity shifts. Rushdie’s novel raises issues of identity—from language to culture—which parallel many student experiences within a composition course. Rushdie’s novel, I suggest, provides a case study for instructors to examine the implications and complications of student identity.

Chapter four explains the theory and practice to using postcolonial novels in a composition course. It suggests that novels catalyze student inquiry and provide fictional examples of concepts like identity. This chapter, specifically, uses American ethnic novels—i.e. Chinese American, African American and American Indian—because they tend to address cross-cultural issues of the characters who must negotiate between their American identity and their other labeled identity. This chapter uses Chinese American author Jamie Ford’s *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* to discuss student identity and educational ideologies. Students, then, will research questions that the novel has raised on either student identity or educational ideologies. This chapter, also, attempts to direct the composition instructor when to ask questions *and* when to introduce other
readings.

Chapter five suggests uses of a postcolonial novel in a composition course to examine broader cultural implications. If the American ethnic novels raise American cultural issues, then the postcolonial novels aim to raise issues about cultural issues between cultures outside of America. This chapter, specifically, uses Nigerian author Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to discuss cultural identity and cultural ideologies suggesting that students could discuss how cultural changes affect the main character’s identity shifts. These discussions would raise inquiry questions that the student would further research. This chapter, also, attempts to direct the composition instructor when to ask questions and when to introduce other reading.

This thesis extends the conversation between composition and postcolonial studies. It offers an approach to incorporate both disciplines in both theory and practice. By expanding the uses of literature—from literary analysis to fictional examples of ambiguous concepts—these methods scaffold composition pedagogy for students transitioning from high school writers to college writers. This thesis suggests keeping the subfields of English studies in conversation.
CHAPTER II

CONSTRUCTING A CROSS-DISCIPLINE DIALOGUE BETWEEN COMPOSITION AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

The dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies has traditionally been limited; however, within the last fifteen years, both fields of study—composition and postcolonial studies—have begun to form a dialogue. The current cross-discipline dialogue emphasizes how power relations affect either students or cultures, respectively. What follows is an attempt to outline the current dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies and, while providing examples of the dialogue’s overlap. These overlaps raise questions and concerns with the literary canon. Given that I am extending the cross-discipline dialogue to use postcolonial novels in the classroom, these literary canon questions and concerns are central to this discussion.

The Cross-Discipline Dialogue Formation

The common interests of both composition and postcolonial studies have resulted in a cross-discipline dialogue recently anthologized in compositionist Andrea Lunsford and postcolonialist Lahoucine Ouzgane’s theoretical collection *Crossing Borderlands*. The collection aims to examine the newer discussions in both composition and postcolonial studies. The newer cross-discipline discussions, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, acknowledge, “a growing awareness of the importance of minority and
subjugated voices to histories and narratives that have previously excluded them has led to widespread interest in postcolonial theory” (1). Lunsford and Ouzgane argue that the field of composition has helped “to understand the ways in which students (and student writings) are variously constructed, subjugated, and turned into obedient subjects, both within and outside the academy, and to find ways of enabling resistance to such forces” (1). Both composition and postcolonial studies, they emphasize, promote the awareness of minority and subjugated voices either in history or the academy, respectively.

Composition as a field aims to discuss the ramifications of student writing within the academy. Composition as a field, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, “reject[s] the role traditionally assigned writing programs to ‘wash out’ a goodly proportion of those admitted to college” (2). They argue that composition places a high priority on “advocating for students and for student agency” (2). Some composition scholars, then, emphasize a student’s linguistic background—understanding all language dialects the student practices. These composition scholars, also, discuss how students and their writing may be controlled or assessed within a course. These scholars ask teachers to take into account a student’s individual background and needs before fully developing their composition pedagogical curriculum.

While composition studies examines the student’s placement within an educational institution, the field of postcolonial studies examines the power dynamics between different cultural groups. Postcolonial studies, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, “coheres around an exploration of power relations between Western and Third World countries” (1). They argue that “postcolonial studies has sought to expose the mechanisms of oppression through which ‘Others’—aboriginal, native, or simply
preexisting cultures and groups—are displaced, eradicated, enslaved, or transformed into obedient subjects” (1). Thus, postcolonial studies aims to examine or to reveal key power structures in particular cultural institutional communities. Lunsford and Ouzgane note Richard C. King’s critique that postcolonial studies has limited its scope to European power relations with European colonies—particularly between the British Empire and their power relations with India (2). Postcolonial studies, according to King, “largely ignores the ways in which America can be postcolonial,” which is especially the case when examining a composition classroom (2). In response to such limitations, a recent trend in composition attempts to expand the theoretical uses of postcolonial studies by incorporating postcolonial studies into an on-going composition conversation about student agency.

Why the Lack of Dialogue?

Why have the composition and postcolonial studies conversations rarely formed a dialogue together? Both, obviously, examine institutional power dynamics—either over a student or over a colony—but rarely form a common dialogue. Lunsford and Ouzgane pose potential explanations as to why this dialogue hasn’t occurred until the last fifteen years or so. They note that “[d]uring the 1970s and much of the 1980s, composition/rhetoric struggled to achieve disciplinary status and recognition within the academy, a struggle that distracted composition scholars from larger goals of access and equity” (2). Initially during the 1970s and 1980s, composition needed to assert a separation from other fields of study, in order to fully become a new discipline. This explanation does not account for the 1980s and 1990s when composition studies had begun to be recognized as a discipline, but the cross-discipline dialogue still didn’t
explicitly exist. The continual lack of dialogue seems to originate in the priorities of both composition and postcolonial studies.

Composition scholars acknowledge the lack of cross-discipline dialogue, but remain critical of postcolonial studies scholars’ attempts to form a dialogue. Lunsford and Ouzgane critique postcolonial studies, while defending composition for this lack of cross-discipline dialogue. They critique postcolonial studies as “mov[ing] fairly quickly from examining material practices related to oppression to theorizin... about those practices, thus dealing with such constructs almost exclusively in the abstract’” (3). Postcolonial studies, in other words, examines power dynamics and quickly asserts a theory to explain the relations observed; however, such a theory is limited in truly understanding the particular practices observed. I would go as far as to say that Lunsford and Ouzgane believe the theory of postcolonial studies, at times, ignores the particulars of the specific contexts. Postcolonial studies, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, “has also tended to erase or leave out student voices, to ignore the positioning of students, and to speak for students” (2).

Postcolonial scholars, however, do examine the implications of the student. Such scholars examine the classroom as a space where work is done; then, they ask to what extent does such work move beyond the classroom. Gayatri Spivak in Death of a Discipline, for example, examines the role of the classroom when asking, “Who are ‘we?’” (26). Real answers, Spivak says, “come in the classroom and are specific to that changeful site…[and] read[s] some texts that stage the question of collectivity” (26). For real texts—something that can be read or interpreted (a book, a place or a culture)—“you must enter the classroom, put yourself to school, as a preview of the formation of
collectives” (28). In this example, postcolonial studies does focus on the cultural implications of school and of students and suggests that by changing the institutional dynamics in school these changes have the potential to extend into the world outside. Postcolonial scholars, then, continue to raise important issues that affect students in addition to the work composition scholars have done.

The lack of cross-discipline dialogue, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, occurs due to both composition and postcolonial studies. They question the first composition scholar, Gary Olson, to form the dialogue, in the late 1990s. Olson asserted that composition “[is] consistently privileging practice over theory (Olson);” however, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, many compositionists balance both the use of practice and theory (3). The disconnect—between composition and postcolonial studies—occurs, according to Lunsford and Ouzgane, when theory is separate from practice. The separation, then, forms “a dichotomy that has also functioned to separate the two fields” (3). It is important to move beyond this original separation to examine and, then, extend the cross-discipline dialogue the currently exists.

The Current Cross-Discipline Dialogue

The current cross-discipline dialogue, I suggest, creates discussions about how to better support composition students. It is important that composition scholar Lunsford and postcolonial scholar Ouzgane place the two fields of study—composition and postcolonial studies—into a dialogue. Their dialogue, generally, aims at improving composition courses that support students’ individual needs. By improve, I suggest that composition courses aim at supporting student agency for all diverse students, and that composition continues to push against ‘washing out’ students. I suggest, such as Lunsford
and Ouzgane’s *Crossing Borderlands*, “build[ing] on composition’s traditional concerns—for access, agency, and material conditions of student writers and their teachers—by situating these concerns in the context of postcolonial theory and in richly situated pedagogical practice” (4). The cross-discipline dialogue, then, forms a richer understanding to develop composition pedagogy.

The cross-discipline dialogue places the needs of the individual composition student before the academy’s demands. According to Lunsford and Ouzgane, the dialogue aims to “insist on valuing the voices of students, of engaging those voices directly, and examining how students can come to voice” and to “[move] beyond a Eurocentric view of postcolonialism” such as expanding postcolonial definitions of novels to include American ethnic novels (4). By expanding both the dialogue between disciplines and the definitions of such dialogue, the composition pedagogy expands in order to better support the composition student. The student, then, develops a stronger writer identity from the beginning of the course to the end because the student can understand and articulate complicated ideas in writing. The novels provide the student with examples of abstractions, while the composition curriculum supports the student’s growth in writing and research practices.

While Lunsford and Ouzgane foster a cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—their *Crossing Borderlands* collaborators draw clearer connections between the conversations of composition and postcolonial studies. According to the *Crossing Borderlands* collections, composition scholars tend to be more hesitant in general connections due to composition’s political placement within English Studies; however, postcolonial scholars seem to accept and acknowledge the connections
between composition and postcolonial studies. Such a dialogue suggests that both fields collaborate together when appropriate for their field’s political and theoretical betterment.

Composition scholars tend to assert their field of study before extending the cross-discipline dialogue. Composition scholar Min-Zhan Lu’s “Composing Postcolonial Studies” from Crossing Borderlands extends the cross-discipline dialogue but provides restrictions to such dialogue. Composition, according to Lu, “has much to learn from postcolonial theory if we are to further our research on processes of reading, writing, and teaching that push against the rules of English Studies and its global and internal ruling over differences in literacy practices” (16). Composition and postcolonial studies, according to Lu, discuss how the academy controls reading, writing, and teaching forming intellectual power relations. These power relations, as Lu notes, are asymmetrical. Postcolonial theory, according to Lu, dominates the academy much more than composition theory. Composition scholars, then, have ideas and theories to offer postcolonial scholars for pedagogical purposes (9).

Postcolonial scholars, on the other hand, tend to explicitly state the connections between both composition and postcolonial studies. Postcolonial scholar Deepika Bahri’s “Terms of Engagement” from Crossing Borderlands accepts and provides support for the cross-discipline dialogue. Bahri critiques the sweeping generalizations that postcolonial studies may make by only suggesting theories rather than suggested practices that extend their theories. Bahri, for example, explains that “the dangers of the decontextualized, desituated use of concepts” do not account for practical uses (73). Bahri suggests ways to begin such cross-discipline dialogue.

Bahri explains that overlap between composition and postcolonial studies
occurs before forming the cross-disciplinary dialogue.

[Postcolonialism enters the world of rhetoric and composition in the very person of the third world postcolonial, the authentically ethnic teacher who bears, wittingly or otherwise, the welcome flag of visible diversity…along with that of a more diverse student body at a time in a growing interest in diversity, is at least partly responsible for coloring the rhetoric and composition field in new ways. (68)

In other words, Bahri provides the overlap that Lu asks for, which is that composition should offer ideas to postcolonial studies and vice versa. Composition and postcolonial studies overlap occurs within the classroom, according to Bahri, where diverse students and teachers work within the institutional academy. Bahri also notes overlaps in publishers’ sending multicultural texts to professors’ mailboxes daily and the desire for “more inclusive curriculum” of multicultural ideas within the academy (68-69). These multicultural textbooks show the increase in publishers attempting to acknowledge the need to diversify their materials.

These cross-discipline overlaps, according to Bahri, do not form the dialogue because where the fields overlap is too generalized theoretically. The theories that both fields raise tend to not take into account specific places or issues discussed. Bahri explains that the overlap between composition and postcolonial studies dialogue needs to be rather specific to education and power.

An interest in the larger question of the goals and effects of schooling might also lead the composition teacher to ponder the connections between the project of education and structures of power, between formal schooling and the cultivation of compliant subjectivity—issues dealt with extensively in postcolonial literature and theory. Increasingly, postcolonial theory deals not only with the impact of colonial education on individual and collective postcolonial identity, but also addresses the politics of education in the Anglo-American academy where many postcolonial critics now find themselves. (69)
Both composition and postcolonial studies, according to Bahri, focus on asymmetrical power relations between two bodies—i.e. educational institution versus student and colonizer versus colonized, respectively.

Bahri fosters a cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—to create new approaches to discussing composition. Postcolonial studies, as Bahri suggests, has begun to expand their examination of power relations from colonizer versus colonized to how education affects both a community and an individual student. These concerns Bahri raises about education are similar to composition studies’ “interest in rhetoric, discourse, and power; in the recovery of hitherto silenced voices; in the liberatory possibilities of advanced technologies; and in the relation of the text to the social finds echoes, and often counterparts, in the debates dominant in [postcolonial studies]” (70). These overlaps about education between composition and postcolonial scholarship, then, allow the cross-discipline dialogue to continue.

Examples of the Cross-Discipline Dialogue

The cross-discipline dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies explicitly centers on discussions about language and linguistics. Both fields of study assess how language or particular languages are privileged over other languages and the impact of language power relations in institutional settings, such as, a classroom or a colony. The discussions about language power relations are relevant to composition pedagogy because a composition course implicitly forms language power relations and privileges academic language over an individual student’s colloquial language. I suggest that postcolonial scholars tend to examine the role of colonization over language power relations, while composition scholars tend to examine the role of language power
relations in a composition course.

Postcolonial scholars show how language affects one’s power within a cultural institution. Bill Ashcroft’s works, *The Empire Writes Back* and *Caliban’s Voice*, for example, show how postcolonial scholars discuss language power relations. Language, according to Ashcroft, affects one’s power and position within a cultural institution:

The very fact of writing in the language of the dominant culture that [postcolonial writers] have temporarily or permanently entered a specific and privileged class endowed with the language, education, and leisure necessary to produce such works. (Ashcroft et. al *Empire*, 5)

Postcolonial writers of English, according to Ashcroft and his colleagues, will have more power or privilege than authors choosing to write in their native language. Language, according to Ashcroft and his colleagues, then, “becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established” (7). Language power relations, according to Ashcroft, provide an individual access to ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality.’ Particular languages, then, can place an individual in a hierarchialized order.

Ashcroft recognizes how particular institutions can control language, which relates to composition studies’ traditional aims to ‘wash out’ (or improve the language of) students. If institutions privilege one language over another, then a composition course can tend to ‘wash out’ or privilege academic language over a student’s language.

I will extend this claim made by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* by providing an example of how writing in a privileged language can lead to more power. Postcolonial author, Chinua Achebe, famously chooses to write in the ‘colonizer’s
language,’ English, which places his works—particularly *Things Fall Apart*—as a ‘canonical’ postcolonial reading. Just the very fact that Achebe writes in English provides him with a largened audience than if he were to write in his native Nigerian language. If Achebe wrote in his Nigerian language, for *Things Fall Apart*, his audience may have been much more limited to only those who spoke that language or at least may have lost meaning in its translation *into* English.

Ashcroft’s claim—language mediates power and privilege—isn’t fully developed until two decades later. In his book, *Caliban’s Voice*, Ashcroft discusses how “[t]he unspeakable link between ‘our’ language and *us* has made language not only the most emotional site for cultural identity but also one of the most critical techniques of colonization and of the subsequent transformation of colonial influence by postcolonial societies” (Ashcroft *Caliban’s*, 1). His direct link—between language and identity—shows how language power relations develop and affect individuals’ identities.

Again extending Ashcroft’s link between language and identity, I will provide an example of such a link using Achebe and his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe writing in English forces him to publically identify with being an ‘English’ writer rather than a ‘Nigerian’ writer when he writes *Things Fall Apart*. Such a public move is not without a high cost for Achebe; this forces him to place his native cultural identity second to his colonizer’s culture. This example supports Ashcroft’s claim that any change in language parallels a change in one’s identity. This identity shift is what composition asks of its students—to change their identity from college novice writer to successful college writers. However, compositionists with postcolonial studies backgrounds, for this chapter’s purposes A. Suresh Canagarajah, have begun to challenge these drastic identity
shifts—re-identifying with a new language or language practice.

Composition scholars extend the cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—by showing how language affects a student’s power or success by passing a composition course. A. Suresh Canagarajah’s “The Place of World Englishes in Composition,” for example, extends the cross-discipline dialogue by examining language power relations within a composition classroom by applying a postcolonial lens. He explicitly molds a dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies to provide better pedagogical approaches to composition courses.

Specifically, Canagarajah is interested in the ways students can incorporate their own native language into their assignments. He examines two types of Englishes—Metropolitan Englishes (ME) versus World Englishes (WE)—and looks at how these two different types may be incorporated into the composition classroom. He notes that “every time teachers insist on a uniform variety of language or discourse, we are helping reproduce monolingustic ideologies and linguistic hierarchies,” similar to the language power relations in colonization (587). Distinguishing between ME and WE languages by privileging ME over WE, according to Canagarajah “demonstrate[s] how these varieties evolve from ways in which local communities appropriate the language according to their social practices to resist the colonizing thrust of English” (Canagarajah 588). He encourages composition instructors to find moments and places where WE languages—local dialects of English—can co-exist alongside ME languages—American Academic English. He raises questions about using Ebonics and using non-English words in academic essays. As an extension to Canagarajah’s claim to use both ME and WE languages in a composition course, I provide an example of how a novel incorporates
both Metropolitan English and their native language into their novel in chapter five.
Many postcolonial authors, in fact, frequently incorporate non-English terms into the
narrative, implying that not everything can be translated or communicated into an English
culture or even a World English culture.

Language Power Relations in Practice

These examples of a cross-discipline dialogue have raised questions about
how language power relations privilege one language over another. The questions raised
by both fields of study—how languages are privileged—raise other pedagogical issues
within English studies. These other pedagogical issues are important to acknowledge for
this thesis’ purpose because it aims to extend the cross-discipline dialogue by suggesting
uses for novels in a composition course. The literary canon, I suggest, raises issues of
privileging one language over another or even one author from a particular culture over
an author from that same culture. Because I, myself, choose particular authors and novels
over others, the pedagogical issues that the literary canon tends to raise are important to
address.

The literary canon debate stems from ideologies rooted in Western education,
particularly situated within the discipline of English. The debate over the literary canon
questions the canon’s uses, its process for inclusion, and whether or not there should be
canonical categories—i.e. Western literary canon and Non-Western literary canon. The
literary canon as a whole, I suggest, is more important than the more popular canon
debate and raises different questions. How does the literary canon form language power
relations, and how does the literary canon control ‘cultural capital?’ ‘Cultural capital,’ as
defined by Ashcroft in *Caliban’s Voice*, is “not acquired formally, but [as] acquired
during the socialization associated with, but not limited to, formal education,” which I discussed earlier in this chapter as language power relations (50). I will first examine how postcolonial scholars discuss the literary canon and, then, look at the literary canon’s pedagogical implications as a whole.

Many postcolonial scholars raise critical debate and question to what extend is the literary canon representative. For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “The Making of Americans, the Teaching of English, and the Future of Cultural Studies” focuses her discussion on issues related to the literary canon. The discipline of English, according to Spivak, is a space from where the literary canon’s educational cues were created. The discipline of English, Spivak continues, “is the medium and the message through which, in education, Americans are most intimately made” (784). To extend Spivak’s claim that the discipline of English helps create a version of the American identity, I will provide Bill Ashcroft and his collaborators’ book, *The Empire Writes Back*, as an example of such extension. The introduction explains why certain postcolonial writers are more likely to be recognized in the literary canon. An example, I suggest, is how Salman Rushdie has been accepted into the literary canon as a British author for several reasons: 1) Rushdie writes in English, 2) he renounces Indian languages and 3) he blatantly critiques Non-Western religions. Privileging a language or author over another causes concern, I suggest, about how curriculum for both literature and composition courses are created.

Education and pedagogy form standards of practice—what should be taught and how it should be taught—which limits other possible practices to be taught. For example, postcolonial scholars suggest that strictly using the literary canon can limit an
instructor to one pedagogical practice. Education, according to Ashcroft’s introduction, forms an “Imperial education system [that] installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities” (7).

Using the dominant metropolitan language provides authors with a greater chance that the literary canon would incorporate their work. Ashcroft and his collaborators also recognize the English language variations between varieties of English versus British Imperial English, which is reminiscent of Canagarajah’s WE versus ME (Ashcroft Empire, 8). These language hierarchies become concerns when examining the literary canon. It is important to ask how the canon marginalizes all ‘variants’ of Englishes, as The Empire Writes Back claims.

Both The Empire Writes Back and Spivak’s “The Making of Americans” show how culture and language are inherently and explicitly connected in education; however, the literary canon debate raises prevalent concerns for English studies instructors. A connection between language and culture is linked within the literary canon, which is important to address. Those who created the canon only incorporated representative texts that were originally written in English or that they could attempt to translate into the English language and culture. Translation, according to Timothy Brennan’s At Home in the World, raises issues of complexity and “as problematic [in the] ‘translating’ the culture itself—its sense of history, its source materials, its literary allusions and assumptions” into the power language and culture, English (43). The native English texts and the texts that are easily translated into English words are incorporated into the literary canon; however, the texts translated into English cannot always translate the original cultural context. The use of literary canon, therefore, continues to raise
necessary complications of how languages or texts are privileged within a pedagogical framework.

Postcolonial texts—originally written in English—also challenge the literary canon’s ability to provide a cultural context that isn’t westernized posing another complication. Postcolonial texts may not specifically examine the ‘English’ cultural context, but they are written in the English language. Postcolonial texts and the debate over colonialism, according to Brennan in *At Home in the World*, continue through “the present as a ‘colonial’ era and to colonization as that which has not ended” (6). The United States, according to Brennan, “continues to invade other countries, but the invasion is not now supposed to be an invasion: rather, the nation extends its shadow, becomes the elsewhere, decenters itself” (6). Brennan’s perspective challenges the scholarly suggestion to have a World Literature canon because Brennan asserts that the essence of the canon is imperialistic. If countries like the United States still colonize other countries or cultures, then the literary canon reasserts how those in the canon are privileged over those who are not.

**My Cross-Discipline Dialogue Contribution**

Literary canon issues, therefore, require an instructor to be conscientious in their reasoning when choosing novels to teach in their course. The instructor’s reasoning, I suggest, should not place one text as more privileged over another. Since my project aims to extend the cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—by suggesting uses for novels in a composition course, I attempt to use the novels based on the themes and issues related to identity.

I propose to incorporate a marginalized population—postcolonial authors—
into an institutionalized composition course. I attempt to question the hierarchy favoring Western authors in order to extend the dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. This questioning of the hierarchy helps to push against the language power relations—situated within English studies—that were determined decades, if not, centuries ago.

Since the literary canon gives priority to the English language and the English culture, a critique of its use in the classroom seems only reasonable and important. Spivak applies the pedagogic practice to the literary canon because she says they are “the condition of institutions and the effect of institutions…[and canons] secure institutions as institutions secure canons” (784). The literary curriculum, Spivak argues, tends to harbor the ideology of the institution and the root of where the ideology develops in education. The literary canon, she continues, is “a political matter: securing authority” (784). When complicating these language power relations, questions inevitably arise: whose texts, what texts, and how are these texts supposed to be taught in the classroom?

While I am suggesting using literary texts in a composition course, I also believe it is important to be clear why and how the instructor uses such texts. I suggest avoiding the use of literary texts as nationalizing tools. I say nationalizing tools, using Spivak’s claim, that education shapes students into understanding a version of what the American identity means. I, therefore, want to examine how literary texts can be taught in the classroom. The literary canon pedagogy, according to Spivak’s observation, allows Brennan to still question, over a decade after Spivak, how the literary cannon privileges authors over others. Brennan questions the inclusion of English language writer, Salman Rushdie, versus the exclusion of Urdu language writer, Hasan Manto (57). Critiquing the
privileging of English over Urdu, Brennan implies that the incorporation of a culturally Indian author into the canon does not fundamentally complicate the power of the literary canon. The canon, here, privileges English writers over non-English writers and also ignores that translating culture, according to Brennan, is just as hard if not harder than translating into the English language. These pedagogical decisions to privilege one language or culture over another, then, apply to the texts chosen for a composition course.

The pedagogical ideology of instructors, I suggest, should complicate the ways the English language provides composition students power in a composition course. In order to complicate the ways pedagogy privileges language, I will draw upon Brennan’s and Spivak’s critiques of literary canon pedagogy. Both scholars question the literary canon through a self-critical perspective that aims to examine the canon’s cultural and political implications. Scholars, according to Brennan, should question and be ‘self-critical’ of the ways in which theories or terms are defined or constructed, such as, cosmopolitanism (11). Spivak extends Brennan’s suggestion by providing a method of self-critique. Scholars, according to Spivak, “must both anthropologize the West, and study the various cultural systems of Africa, Asia, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas as if peopled by historical agents” in order for pedagogic practices to be less hegemonic (792). The self-critique and the method to anthropologize the West complicate the ways the English language tends to be privileged over other languages within English studies.

Composition pedagogy, I suggest, should replicate the suggestions that postcolonial scholars, such as Brennan and Spivak, provide in theory and method about self-critique. The remainder of this thesis, then, extends this self-critique by examining
my pedagogical choices to ensure that I am aware of their ideological implications. In
doing so, I aim to contribute to and extend the current cross-discipline dialogue between
composition and postcolonial studies. My extension suggests uses for novels in both the
training of and the teaching of composition.
CHAPTER III

USING THE SATANIC VERSES & COMPOSITION THEORY FOR COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

The typical pedagogical uses for novels are to raise metaphorical ways of understanding particular issues or practices—from how to examine history to how to talk about writing. Using postcolonial novels with composition pedagogy extends the current dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. This chapter proposes uses for postcolonial novels to enhance composition professional development and training. My methodology assumes that a novel may stand as an extension of or as a fictionalized example of abstract concepts that composition instructors discuss, particularly student identity. My particular example uses English-Indian author Salman Rushdie’s novel The Satanic Verses with composition pedagogy to examine how culture and societies shape identity. This methodology provides clearer examples of the issues composition instructors face. The novel aims to fictionally model these issues through the characters’ changes. Specifically, reading Rushdie’s novel alongside composition pedagogy provides fictionalized answers to how ideologies, culture and language shape both a character’s identity and a composition student’s identity.

Many scholars of Rushdie and The Satanic Verses tend to examine the novel’s controversy surrounding the fatwa imposed on Rushdie or analyze the novel’s
postmodern and postcolonial roots. If *The Satanic Verses* is considered when read with composition pedagogy, however, Rushdie’s novel reveals new insights about character identity and student identity. *The Satanic Verses* illustrates the themes and issues that are important to students receiving a Western education. A Western education raises interesting power relations over language, culture, and politics—particularly for non-white and ESL student populations. *The Satanic Verses* reveals language power relations that are pertinent to students. The characters in *The Satanic Verses*, for example, go through identity shifts that are parallel to the identity shifts of composition students, particularly the tension between individual identity and institutional identity.

Though the novel is difficult at times, due to its magical realism and its length, *The Satanic Verses* provides examples of the complexity of character identity through the juxtaposed characters, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta. Rushdie links character identity to the novel’s setting, ranging from cosmopolitan England to India during the late twentieth-century. By discussing identity through the two characters’ ideologies, cultural adherence, and language use, I will be able to address the same issues that composition instructors face. I suggest that composition instructors must acknowledge these issues in both the creation of their syllabus and their approach to teaching the course. Reading Rushdie’s novel with composition pedagogy allows composition instructors to unpack the issues *The Satanic Verses* raises.

Before I continue to extend the cross-discipline dialogue—between composition and postcolonial studies—I will divert my discussion to self-critique my methodology. I am only suggesting uses for Rushdie’s novel in composition instructor
training and \textit{not} for a composition course. My reasoning in choosing \textit{The Satanic Verses} rather than other postcolonial novels extends postcolonial scholar Harveen Sachdeva Mann’s pedagogical approach to \textit{The Satanic Verses} from his article, “U.S. Multiculturalism, Postcolonialism, and Indo-Anglican Literature.” Sachdeva Mann’s approach studies the multi-faceted cultural implications of \textit{The Satanic Verses}. Sachdeva Mann sees the importance in teaching \textit{The Satanic Verses} because, he claims, the novel is:

\begin{quote}
 a many-cultured text marked by both compromise with a resistance to Western (as well as Eastern) epistemologies and ontologies—agitates against assimilation in the Western academy, simultaneously enabling the latter to comprehend the true global meaning of multiculturalism. (66)
\end{quote}

The self-critique, according to Sachdeva Mann, allows the pedagogical practices for \textit{The Satanic Verses} to complicate and extend the uses for novels. These new uses help develop composition pedagogy to incorporate other postcolonial novels into a composition course, such as Jamie Ford’s \textit{Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet} and Chinua Achebe’s \textit{Things Fall Apart}.

A cultural self-critique, Sachdeva Mann argues, aims to reveal new understandings about a particular culture. Reading Rushdie’s \textit{The Satanic Verses} for composition training, I suggest, extends this self-critique to composition pedagogy. Rushdie’s novel, specifically, delves into issues of identity, language, and literacy, which are issues composition teachers must acknowledge in their classroom. Rushdie’s novel, then, helps to form conversations about the power relations—between student, as novice writer, and the university, as powerfully all-knowing—that composition courses tend to create. Reading \textit{The Satanic Verses}, as Sachdeva Mann suggests, resists the novel’s
assimilation into the Western academy. Such a reading, instead, complicates the language power relations the privilege one language over another. Alternative readings of Rushdie’s novel, such as in a composition course, raise new issues about how categories shape individual identity. For my purposes, how can Rushdie’s novel raise issues about how a composition student identifies as a writer.

Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, I suggest, illustrates the issues composition instructors encounter on a daily basis—identity, institutional power relations and diversity. Composition instructors, then, can extend their conversations about the ways in which curriculum affects student identity as writers. A student writer is identity, as many composition instructors witness, shifts from the beginning of the composition course until the end based on the student’s need to succeed within the institution. Institutional success for composition students is passing the course, so the institution potentially rejects those that don’t pass the composition course. This need to pass the course raises many challenges for both composition instructors and students. For example, student diversity may challenge the composition instructor’s curriculum or pedagogical practices. Students from different linguistic or educational backgrounds require that the instructor scaffold the composition course to ensure that all students will succeed and pass the course.

Constructing the composition course to support student needs, as I suggest, can be improved after examining *The Satanic Verses* in composition pedagogical terms. The novel’s competing main characters, Chamcha and Farishta, illustrate the novel’s goal to complicate identity. Though scholars mainly examine Chamcha’s and Farishta’s identities in a moral sense, I suggest to examine: 1) What contributes to the shaping of their identities? and 2) To what extent do their identities shift due to different cultural
influences? By answering these questions, composition instructors can apply the outcomes to how they examine composition students. Composition instructors can, then, ask what cultural influences affect a composition student’s identity as a writer?

*The Satanic Verses* first raises the complication of Chamcha’s and Farishta’s identities ideologically. Rushdie translates the characters’ ideologies into their appearance. The novel introduces the characters through a plane high-jacking heading from India to England, which blows up and sends both Chamcha and Farishta back to Earth. Afterwards, both Chamcha and Farishta are initially discovered by an old woman, Rosa, and taken to her castle. Once they are escorted to the castle for help, Chamcha and Farishta are separated, which clearly marks their separate representations and/or identities. The authorities arrest Chamcha due to his animalistic appearance. Rushdie writes, “at his temples, growing longer by the moment, and sharp enough to draw blood, were two new, goaty, unarguable horns” (145). Farishta wearing another man’s clothes, however, avoids arrest due to his having “a pale, golden light…emanating from the direction of the man in the smoking jacket, was in fact streaming softly outwards from a point immediately behind his head…a halo, in the late twentieth century” (145-146). Thus, Chamcha is marked as a societal evil because he represents an outside immigrant. Though Farishta’s appearance mocks the insider Englishman, he avoids such arrest. The authorities base their powerful decisions on appearance rather than Chamcha’s and Farishta’s cultural identities as English Indians. The main characters’ separation via wrongful judgment of appearance declares their course for the remainder of the novel. Chamcha is physically marked as an animal, while Farishta is physically marked as an angel. These physical markings develop strong ideological statements about the cultural
authorities in the novel.

The question, then, for composition instructors to address is: how do institutional power relations respond ideologically to the appearance of a composition student’s identity? Do institutional power relations prefer the composition student to strip one’s identity and assume the institution’s defined identity? And does the institution mark composition students, who don’t fully assume the institution’s defined identity, as unworthy and illiterate? According to the previous discussions above—that the literary canon privileges one text over another and the implications of language power relations—then the answer to these questions is yes. The university institution wants its composition students to fully assume the institutionally defined identity or composition students are otherwise marked as ‘remedial.’ Institutional identity, I define, as a successful academic writer who successfully completes composition. Composition instructors, then, need to examine the shifting and separate identities that both Chamcha and Farishta employ throughout the remainder of the novel. Though many Rushdie scholars look at how the literary style—i.e. magical realism and nonlinear plot—affect the character’s identity, I suggest examining these characters without looking at these literary devices extensively because these overly fictional elements can, at times, detract from the purposes of this chapter—to look at how these character identities potentially parallel composition student identity either ideologically, culturally and/or linguistically.

As the novel progresses to the end, the changes in the characters’ physical appearances change the characters’ identities. Their transformations are due to several cultural implications imposed on both Chamcha and Farishta. Chamcha’s transformation forces him to question his ideology once “Chamcha himself, apparently restored his old
shape, mother-naked but entirely human aspect and proportions, *humanized*...” in a newly personal rebirth (304). Though Chamcha strips himself of the London authorities’ projected image, as a goat, Chamcha must begin his own negotiation between his ideologies about identity and culture to his society’s ideologies back home. Chamcha’s ideological negotiation mimics an example of what many composition students must do upon entering a composition course, which is to negotiate their student identity as a writer. An analysis of Chamcha’s experience, then, is rather important because it will help reveal the issues composition students face, particularly language power relations. Most notably, composition students must negotiate between the language power relations, as defined by Canagarajah, of Metropolitan Englishes privileged over World Englishes. Although not all composition students are coming from drastically different cultures, *all* composition students must adapt to their new environment’s demands. Thus, Chamcha’s experience provides discussion and insight into a negotiation of identity. Composition instructors, however, must note that Chamcha’s negotiation and new transformation comes at a high cost as the novel’s mantra suggests: “[t]o be born again, first you have to die” (418). This mantra is repeated again when Chamcha begins such change. This statement or mantra suggests that this identity change requires a death in one’s previous identity.

Chamcha’s negotiation pertains to the particular policies that define his identity culturally. Chamcha places high value in art, which younger generations tend to counter. As Chamcha learns of picketers who are against the raising of museum charges, he questions his society’s support of culture. Chamcha expresses that his fellow citizens are “demonstrating to the world...the low value they placed upon their cultural heritage;”
however, when his wife tells him otherwise, he breaks down (414). He arrives at a new conclusion, where he decides that the picketers were correct and that his comment is “an obscure and ill-defended position” (414). His negotiation requires a drastic change from his previously goat-like self, but “Chamcha, need certainly not permit himself the luxury of defeat. Resurrection it was, then…and to hell with the legal problems” (415).

Chamcha’s decision to begin his identity transformation, in order to live a life without constant reprimanding, provides us with an example that can be effectively applied to composition pedagogy.

Most of the composition students must decide whether or not to transform their identity in a composition course. All composition students must conform to the composition culture to be successful and avoid failure. Composition instructors, then, need to be aware of the identity transformations that composition students make. The composition instructor’s awareness, I suggest, should help design their composition courses to ensure that composition students are successful. Composition instructors, however, must still examine moments to incorporate individual student identity into their course. Chamcha’s negotiation, then, reveals how composition instructors must always acknowledge the educational institution’s requirement to resurrect a student identity. This consistent awareness keeps a composition course’s curriculum from taking advantage of composition students.

While Chamcha’s resurrected identity reveals how the university pressures students’ conformity, Farishta’s maddening identity changes and reveals implications that physical appearance deceives outsiders. God punishes Farishta due to his lack of faith and categorizes him as insane (195). Farishta’s marking of madness derives from his actions
to challenge his cultural ‘authority,’ which induces his actions to fight against such punishment. Farishta attempts to counteract the madness and changing the category “into an avatar of a chimerical archangel” (195). Therefore, Farishta’s battle of identity lends a hand to examining possible resistance to authorial identity categories. Farishta changes the verbal rhetoric of his new madness into a dichotomy: “‘It’s A, I’m off my head, or B, baba, somebody went and changed the rules’” (195). When examining Farishta’s move pedagogically, however, it is important to examine Farishta’s final act at the end of *The Satanic Verses*. Farishta attempts to change the rhetoric and the cultural policies that shape his identity. Farishta’s experience shows how instinctual it is to want to simply change the rhetoric and the policies. Farishta’s transformation into the Archangel Gibreel, however, comes with maddening consequences. The novel notes how “Gibreel [Farishta has] been somewhat soothed by these manifestations of law, and began to perk up and invent rationalizations,” which mark Farishta’s false perception of his identity (196). Farishta’s society has categorized and labeled him one way—insane—while his perception of himself has been merely renamed with the same delusions the madness category suggests. Though Farishta has changed the label, he finds comfort in the definition of this societal label. He falls victim to his category because he does not change his identity. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear how Farishta succumbs to his society’s lack of acceptance.

Farishta’s experiences parallel the experiences of composition students. Farishta’s experience is an example of how changing the rhetorical wording doesn’t eliminate harmful student identity categories—i.e. remedial writers. Remediation, for example, categorizes a sizable population of composition students, which marks their
writing identity as below average. CSU, Chico’s composition program attempted to eliminate their remedial writing prerequisite for those who didn’t pass their English Placement Test (EPT). The remedial requirement, however, didn’t completely disappear, but was substituted for a required adjunct workshop to be taken *simultaneously* with a composition course. CSU, Chico’s composition program, then, changed the rhetoric and category of remedial, but students who failed the EPT were forced to still do *extra* work. This program change, however, still rasies the question: What *can* composition instructors do to help those who fail a placement test without perpetuating the harmful categories?

Simply changing the rhetoric is insufficient, which Farishta’s final change exemplifies. Farishta succumbs to a loss of his identity because the pressure to complicate his category of madness places immense pressure. These pressures cause Farishta to “put the barrel of the gun into his mouth; and [pull] the trigger; and [is] free” (561). Farishta’s suicidal act, initially, seems cowardly to avoid his ‘madness;’ however, his suicide displays Farishta’s unacceptance to claim his true identity. Farishta’s experience, then, serves as a reminder to composition instructors of the potential hardships of institutionally formed identity.

Composition instructors, I suggest, should help composition students avoid succumbing to university marked categories, such as remediation. Farishta’s attempt, then, provides an example of the importance of personal support. In other words, composition students don’t need composition instructors to change the categories, but instead, composition students need composition instructors to change the support strategies. CSU, Chico’s composition program, for example, aims to help composition
students who failed the EPT succeed because the program changes both the verbal rhetoric and pedagogical practices. CSU, Chico’s adjunct workshops aim to support ten composition students at a time under the support of one workshop leader. These successful pedagogical support systems for composition students are necessary, otherwise, composition students’ identities as writers may jeopardize their success. Chamcha’s and Farishta’s experiences and identity shifts show how particular outcomes form based upon societal factors.

Another aspect that shapes identity seen in both *The Satanic Verses* and in composition students is how language shapes identity. Societal power, according to both Ashcroft and Canagarajah, is continuously negotiated through language. Colonialism, according to Ashcroft, manipulates power through language, while Canagarajah examines this same power manipulation through language in a composition course. I first examine how language attributes power in *The Satanic Verses*; then, I show how the media’s influence affects language identity. This reading will exemplify the rhetoric and cultural aspects that affect composition students’ linguistic identity, especially in a composition course.

Language identity—often defined by how it can help access power—is exemplified in Chamcha’s home society. Chamcha’s acquaintances, Hanif Johnson and Jumpy Joshi, exemplify how linguistics and particular practicing particular languages lead to societal acceptance and power. Jumpy’s jealousy of Hanif “[is] primarily—how to put it? Linguistic. Hanif [is] in perfect control of the languages that matter,” while Jumpy obviously feels his own are inferior (290). Jumpy’s language identity marks him as inferior to Hanif via his personal ideology, which happens to be based on his society’s
language ideology. This identity dilemma demonstrates much more than lack of personal confidence; instead, the dilemma raises possibilities of how the control over language manifests and effects individuals’ identities.

These same issues—power gained through language—occur for the students of diverse linguistic backgrounds in an English language dominant composition course. I suggest, then, that the discussion about Jumpy and Hanif provides an example to the dilemma many composition students face; therefore it leads composition instructors to extend the examination of how language identity forms or is challenged in a composition course. A possible compromise, according to Canagarajah, would be the attempt and the hope that World Englishes (WE) would be practiced in addition to limiting composition students to only practice Metropolitan English (ME). The academy, I assert, requires that composition students embody the ME language identity, but many composition students embody and practice their own version of WE. The question, then, is: when can students use WE and when can they only use ME? (Canagarjah). This question is the most crucial concern for my particular study because the novels used within a composition course may be used as examples of both WE and ME.

Other than access to power, language identity transforms through the use of media technology to manipulate linguistic stereotyping. Media, in *The Satanic Verses*, creates a construct that links Chamcha’s language identity to race when he auditions for a commercial. Chamcha’s agent explains how radio tends to manipulate language assumptions and perpetuate racial stereotypes. The recording company “‘re-recorded a building jingle because T’Chairman thought the singer sounded black, even though he was white as a sodding sheet’” (276). The re-recording exemplifies how the company
wants to be devoid of black language identity. It shows how Chamcha’s society prefers white language identity. The agent expresses, via an accent, how only the perceived language matters in radio because “the year before, we’d used a black boy who, luckily for him, didn’t suffer from an excess of soul…” (276). Radio, according to The Satanic Verses, masks physical definitions of racial identity, but can confuse linguistic definitions of racial language identity stereotypes. Chamcha’s discussion with his agent leads Chamcha to the conclusion that he feels he hasn’t belonged to a race, which ironically helps his media success (276). Chamcha believes that since his success on the radio he must not have a voice that depicts a particular race to be judged or excluded. Chamcha’s ideology, of a lack of race, allows him to manipulate ideologies concerning language through media technology.

Another pressing aspect that shapes composition students’ and Farishta’s family’s language identity is how it continuously changes generationally. This aspect has been contemplated and researched much further in many postcolonial novels and theories. While Chamcha’s experiences reveal how language helps access power and how media technology manipulates language identity, Farishta’s family experiences the challenges of language identity, generationally. Farishta’s daughters express their identity much differently than Farishta’s wife through their appearance and their language. These differences can be attributed to both the resistance of their father’s identity, but also as a product of the societal ideologies they work within. The narrator notes that “worst of all, the points of this devil-island had infected her baby girls, who were growing up refusing to speak their mother-tongue, even though they understood every word, they did it just to hurt” (258). It is important to recognize that identity ideologies differ from one
generation to the next generation when a culture moves from one demographic to another
demographic.

As is witnessed in *The Satanic Verses*, other particular works examine the
generational difference similarly, such as English Jamaican author, Zadie Smith, in her
In Smith’s *White Teeth*, the first diaspora generation strongly adheres to the original
culture’s ideology and language. The second generation, being a hybrid of the old and the
new cultures, must work within the power relations between each ideology. This tension
will be further demonstrated in Chapter Five as a moment of discussion for a composition
research inquiry using Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. This generational difference
of identity is an important discussion for composition instructors when examining *The
Satanic Verses*. The novel, then, will help to address these same power relations between
different ideologies of cultures as they pertain to the many composition students from
diverse cultural backgrounds. Composition instructors, I suggest, must understand these
power relations and must negotiate them for the composition students’ betterment.
Composition instructors, also, need to be sympathetic to all student identities.

Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, when read using both composition and
postcolonial theories, demonstrates the identity shifts and power relations that
composition students must negotiate during the composition course. When using
Rushdie’s novel with composition and postcolonial theories, examples of student
experiences surface in more concrete ways rather than mere abstract concepts. Though
the novel is a work of fiction, *The Satanic Verses* raises parallel issues of identity to
composition. Rushdie’s novel complicates and reveals how institutional structures define
and shape identity categories. My discussion of *The Satanic Verses*, then, has provided another way to read and incorporate the novel into a composition course; however, I have not addressed the controversy the novel has raised.

I will briefly address the current controversy surrounding Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* because it is more than a ‘banned’ book. Rushdie deconstructs and questions issues, of religious purity. Iran placed a fatwa, a call for Rushdie’s death, because he libeled the Qur’an leading to the murders of several publishers and translators. This controversy, according to Rob Burton in *Artists of the Floating World*, raises questions:

> How far should an artist be permitted to go in their use of words, particularly when these words are used to make fun of or cast into doubt the authenticity of the Logos (literally, the word of God or Allah)? Does freedom of expression (protected under the First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution) allow for unrestrained satire or mockery against ideals and ideals held to be sacred by a certain community? (103-104, my emphasis)

These questions—about freedom of expression and about the ideals held sacred by a certain community—catalyze new discussions about whether or not certain texts or ideas can be either commoditized or neatly categorized. Rushdie was practicing freedom of expression in an American context, but not necessarily in an Indian or a Muslim context. Does Rushdie, then, have the right to go beyond his community, discipline, or culture? Or, does Rushdie’s fatwa suggest that cultural and intellectual identities should be kept separate and within their own contexts? Rushdie, also, critiques a canonical-like text of another community, which raises another question: Did Rushdie receive a fatwa because he challenged the categorical label of ‘sacred?’ These questions, I suggest, should be at the back of composition instructors’ minds because choosing particular texts and
deconstructing particular institutional powers can have harmful consequences. I suggest, therefore, examining *The Satanic Verses* with composition pedagogy to raise questions about identity construction for both the characters and for composition students.

The natural step, now, is moving towards a specific composition curriculum that continues to extend the cross-discipline dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. The remaining chapters, then, provide my extension to the cross-discipline dialogue by suggesting uses for postcolonial novels in a composition course. The composition curriculum I am drawing from uses inquiry to catalyze research and writing practices. These inquiries, in theory, are supposed to catalyze composition students to examine societal or cultural issues either within the academy or across the world.
CHAPTER IV

A NOVEL INQUIRY: USING AN AMERICAN ETHNIC NOVEL IN COMPOSITION COURSE

In debates over uses of novels in a composition course, much has been written about why novels don’t belong and are solely for literature courses. And yet, these debates rarely attempt to suggest other uses for novels beyond using a literary analysis. Some composition scholars exclude novels from their curriculum, which suggests that such curriculum should, instead, follow inquiry research and writing practices. I suggest, however, that finding alternative uses for novels in a composition course is important to fully extending the cross-discipline dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. I suggest, then, that using postcolonial novels and American ethnic novels in a composition course can provide students with support completing their inquiry projects. These uses for novels would provide students to see fictionalized examples of the abstract issues that a composition instructor decides to raise. The novels, for example, may provide background behind why a character’s identity is shaped. Such a discussion provides the composition student with support to create a language about how to discuss the concept of identity beyond an abstract idea.

What follows tentatively attempts to suggest and to provide reasoning of how
to use a novel in a composition course. I provide an example framework of the types of
discussions and ideas that novels can raise in a composition course. My methodology
suggests the novel, when read with another theory, prompts discussions about how to
provide a language to talking about the theory. This chapter’s example uses Charles H.
Cooley’s theory of identity from the “Looking glass self.” Identity, according to
“Looking glass self,” has three main components: “1) we imagine how we must appear to
others; 2) we imagined a judgment of that appearance; and 3) we develop our self
through the judgments of others.” Composition students can use these specific
components of identity to apply to the novel they read. The students, then, will form a
dialogue and a language to talk about identity, which they can apply to their own inquiry
projects.

This chapter, specifically, uses Chinese American Jamie Ford’s Hotel on the
Corner of Bitter and Sweet to exemplify identity in its main character Henry. Ford’s
novel is set in Seattle, WA during 1942-45 and 1986. Through intertwining story lines of
Chinese American Henry Lee—as a child and as a widowed father—Ford raises ideas
about identity in terms of both ethnic identity and educational identity. These issues are
situated within an historical context during Japanese Interment, which are aimed to
question the socially defined ethnic differences between Japanese and Chinese
Americans. Ford’s novel, then, raises interesting questions that composition students can
begin to address: 1) why did Ford choose to write about historical issues in 2009? and 2)
how do these historical issues still manifest in our current society?

These questions prompt the composition course discussions in order to begin
the inquiry into identity that Ford’s novel raises. The inquiry, then, asks that composition
students read two articles—Cooley’s about identity and Daniel Schugurensky’s about education—in order to apply the theory to *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*. This reading provides composition students with a language to discuss identity based on the fictional example of what and how identity is shaped. The examples, I suggest, would prompt composition students to continue to formulate answers to the overall question that this particular composition course curriculum should raise: how does language identity and education control and/or contribute to American Ethnic experience? I suggest that examining both language identity and education in *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* will provide students with a language to discuss these concepts. These discussions, then, provide students with a theoretical background on identity before they begin their own inquiry projects.

The main character, Henry Lee, in Ford’s *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* develops the novel’s major ideas and themes—i.e. Henry’s identity as a Chinese American both in and outside of school. Henry’s experiences—both as a child and as an adult—form his Chinese American identity. Henry’s experiences will show that identity formation differs generationally. Analyzing Henry’s identity reveals the impending ideologies that both shape and constrain Henry’s position in the novel. Henry’s initial introduction shows a generation gap between him and his parents, especially, when he “stop[s] talking to his parents when he was twelve years old...because they [ask] him to” (12). His parents separate themselves from Henry through their literacy practices, which causes both distance and confusion for young Henry. Old Henry and his son, however, display other separations. During the introduction of Henry’s son Marty, for example, shows how Marty and old Henry have different values about funerals, education, and
gener priorities (8-11). After the death of Ethel—Henry’s wife and Marty’s mother—both old Henry and Marty attempt to push against their differences throughout the remainder of the novel. The generational differences between young Henry and his parents, however, provide the foundation of Henry’s identity.

Henry’s identity, shaped by family and society, ranges from Chinese to Chinese American to American. These multiple identities raise conflicts in defining ethnic identity, especially because young Henry is also misidentified as Japanese. Young Henry lives in Seattle, WA after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which perpetuates others to incorrectly categorize him as Japanese. Henry’s community, also, spatially separates their diverse population. The Chinese community tries to separate themselves from the Japanese for multiple historical and political reasons. These ethnic separations cause stereotypes and perpetuate hate towards Henry and the other characters of Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet. The relationship between young Henry and his Japanese American friend Keiko, for example, causes controversy for the character’s families.

Since young Henry lives during Japanese Internment, the communities ignorant ideology forces Henry to negotiate how to shape his identity. Henry’s white peers call him or, at times, mistake him for being Japanese. This torment exponentially increases with his father’s demand to wear the ‘I am Chinese’ button, which young Henry equates to more humiliation. Henry sarcastically thinks: “Thanks Dad, why not just put a sign on my back that says ‘Kick Me’ while you’re at it?” (13). Henry’s button additionally marks him different from his peers, especially once his parents place him in a white school. Henry, in school, is supposed to subsume an American and English literacy identity rather than a bilingual and Chinese American identity.
Before Henry’s father gives an ‘I am Chinese’ button, his father explains that Henry should “[o]nly speak American” (12). The physical label of ‘Chinese’ with a linguistic label of ‘American’ complicates ethnic identity constructs, which young Henry must identify. This confusion raises questions about why does Henry’s father decide to label Henry this way? Because ignorant people confuse or taunt young Henry as being Japanese? Japanese, at that time, were labeled as ‘enemies’ or as ‘spies,’ which perpetuates the shaping of ethnic identity. Henry’s father, also, has historically personal reasons to show his allegiance to China, who are also at war with Japan. This potentially adds to reasoning for such identifying. Regardless of Henry’s father’s reasoning, the more interesting is how these and other strong ideologies shape Henry’s different identities.

The ideological shaping of Henry’s identity is further revealed when examined with ethnic identity theory. These theories answer the following question: why would young Henry’s father require young Henry to only speak ‘American’ English, but also require the wearing of the ‘I am Chinese’ button? This question, for the purposes of composition curriculum, should catalyze the examples of composition student inquiry. Ethnic identity, according to David Li’s response to Eric Liu’s term the ‘Accidental Asian,’ changes the ways ethnic categories are formed. ‘Accidental Asian,’ according to Li’s article “On Ascriptive and Acquistional Americanness,” “dismisses his biological inheritance as ‘accidental’ while deliberately affirming his ‘nativity’ both to the English language and the geopolitical sphere of the United States” (106). This term correlates to how young Henry’s parents’ reaction shapes and labels their son’s identity. Though they make their son wear an “I am Chinese” button, young Henry can only speak ‘American’
English and can only go to an all white school. Henry’s childhood, then, becomes Liu’s example of being an ‘Accidental Asian.’ I mean that Henry is only biologically Chinese and has to dismiss his biology, which deliberately affirms his ‘native’ allegiance to America. Liu’s term ‘Accidental Asian’ attempts to remove race from identity and instead show that culture, language and politics shape one’s identity.

Composition instructors, I suggest, should thoroughly discuss how education ideologies shape identity, which Ford’s novel illustrates in Henry’s identity. Ford’s novel, read in this way, will prompt composition students to formulate a language to discuss education and identity, which lead to the inquiry projects. Young Henry, in Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet, forms his identities through his experiences in school. School, then, becomes the space students from their identity. Henry’s identity, when analyzed using Charles Horton Cooley’s “Looking glass self,” provides the language to talk about identity and helps to reveal how school requires young Henry to identify in several ways. Cooley’s theory is used by some composition courses to raise and explain the complexity of individual identity. Cooley’s theory with Ford’s novel, then, both will raise the concept of identity and provide a fictional example the theory may mean.

Henry’s identities in school, using Cooley’s “Looking glass self,” reveal three distinct aspects to how identity is constructed. These three distinct aspects, based on Cooley’s “Looking glass self” are “[w]e imagine how we must appear to others; [w]e imagine the judgment of that appearance; [and we] develop our self through the judgments of others.” The construction of Henry’s identity, based on Cooley’s theory, is shaped by Henry’s perception of how he thinks others judge him and how he imagines this judgment of his appearance. Henry, then, develops a ‘self’ identity in response to this
process. This self-identity, though, is further shaped by who Henry socializes with at a particular moment. Henry forms three distinct identities when he is placed in three specific social contexts—i.e. unknown bureaucratic source, the lunch lady or the bullying peer.

The identity young Henry develops due to the educational and unknown bureaucratic source forces Henry into an outsider position. He is marked as an inferior due to the categorical term ‘scholarshiping.’ The term ‘scholarship’ rhetorically suggests that young Henry is awarded the opportunity of attending the ‘White’ school; however, this ‘award’ required of young Henry that he work in the cafeteria at lunch and as a janitor after school. These jobs place young Henry outside of the general student population physically and ethnically. The bureaucracy divides the students via ethnicity, which is accentuated when the ‘Japanese’ student, Keiko, comes on a scholarship. Keiko, also, performs these extra duties as young Henry. Both Henry and Keiko are only two non-white students who endure such harassment, but why? Composition instructors, I suggest, should address this cultural tension between the White education system and the non-White students.

Both young Henry and Keiko, in the hopes for a better education and future, attend the English White schools. Chinese Americans, according to sociologist Min Zhou’s “Rethinking Assimilation,” place high importance in being educated and following the ‘American dream.’ Chinese Americans, according to Zhou, acknowledge “realizing the American dream is no small project. For average Americans, the normative means is via education” (223). If education helps obtain the American Dream, then, young Henry and Keiko attend school to realize the American dream. Young Henry and
Keiko, also, would not have necessarily realized the American dream in their respective Chinese and Japanese schools.

Young Henry’s identity, because of his parent’s and school influences, has transformed into a hard working and obedient hand in the kitchen. When young Henry goes to the interment camp, according to the narrator, “Henry was used to following orders in the kitchen” (155). Young Henry’s accepting of orders, using Cooley’s theory, suggests Henry’s obedience responds to his perception of his boss’ judgment. When young Henry receives orders from his boss Mrs. Beatty, then, young “Henry suspect[s] that she wasn’t joking and nod[s] politely, finishing his work” (157). Young Henry’s identity, as a school kitchen aide, prepares him for the same placement in society. Young Henry’s kitchen aide identity counteracts his parents aims for young Henry to realize the ‘American dream.’ If obtaining the ‘American dream’ leads to individual agency, then young Henry’s obedience and servicing higher people in power limits his individual agency. This conundrum, I suggest, should raise discussion questions in the composition course, such as, 1) what are the purposes of education? and 2) what sort of changes could improve the current bureaucratic education system.

These questions, I suggest, lead composition students to a use a language to discuss education and identity in school after reading a theoretical article about education systems. Higher education restructuring, according to Daniel Schugurensky’s “Syncretic Discourse, Hegemony Building, and Educational Reform,” has “achieved hegemony during the last two decades, not only in larger society but also among important sectors of the academic community” (25). Restructuring higher education, according to Schugurensky, emerges in “that the missions, agendas, and outcomes of universities are
increasingly defined by external actors (particularly the state and the market) rather than by their internal governing bodies” (26). If peers rather than educational insiders define education, then, Schugurensky provides an explanation as to why young Henry’s peers shape young Henry’s identity into a fearful person.

Examining young Henry’s identity, then, in response to his bullying peers—both in and outside of school—reveals how his peers are representative of the society’s ideologies. Young Henry responds, first, in anger and irritation when the bully Chaz taunts Keiko goes to the Internment Camp. Chaz taunts young Henry’s physical appearance being similar to the culturally ousted Japanese. Henry, in response, “scoop[s] up a helping spoonful of chicken and gravy, cocking his arm, eyeing Chaz’s bon, apelike forehead” (149). Henry perceives the taunt as an obvious insult to his appearance by attempting to self-define his identity; he is not an imprisoned ‘enemy’ as implied by Chaz, but a fight worthy ‘American.’ Young Henry’s resistance to institutional or oppositional forces is only verbal.

Young Henry’s boss, Mrs. Beatty, attempts to resist the bully’s assertions that shape young Henry’s social identity at school. Internal and governing powers, according to Schugurensky, have little power (26). Mrs. Beatty’s attempts support Schugurensky’s claim when young Henry “he felt thick, sausage fingers wrap around his forearm, holding him back. [She told Chaz] ‘Beat it. There’s not enough food left…’” (Ford 149). And yet, there was enough food. This moment exemplifies how an authoritative insider attempts to support the bullied student; the attempt, however, is unsuccessful because the ideologies are so deeply rooted beyond the educational system. I mean that Mrs. Beatty’s attempts
are not a systematic change. Chaz, therefore, further bullies young Henry outside of school in the community.

Young Henry endures bullying outside of the school, which further raises issue to young Henry’s outside community. Can governing powers outside of school protect young Henry from bullies? When young Henry searches for Keiko’s birthday gift, he encounters Chaz’s torments once again. Young Henry, first, responds physically to Chaz’s gang of boys in Japan Town: “Henry’s knees felt wobbly, but his jaw was clenched tighter than his fists. …Henry picked [an old broom handle] up…and swung it once, then twice for good measure” (170). Though young Henry responds nervously, he repeats his physical dominating threat—swinging the broom handle. Chaz’s gang responds and backs away as if feeling threatened. This response, then, raises new questions about the social dynamics between young Henry and Chaz’s gang. Why does young Henry’s identity change from victim to claiming a physical voice?

Young Henry’s identity is greatly influenced by Keiko; this question’s answer, then, derives from Keiko’s criticism of young Henry earlier in the novel. Young Henry and Keiko disagree over how each should respond to the racism at the jazz club. When authorities break up the club and interrogate a Japanese couple, Keiko criticizes young Henry’s silent response as un-American (60). Young Henry’s new attitude, then, responds to Keiko’s comment especially since Keiko has been interned at a camp. His threats, however, are physical rather than verbal; this seems to misinterpret Keiko’s suggestion to verbally not silently respond to social wrongs.

The societal authorities, soldiers, support Young Henry’s physical threats. Two MP soldiers witness the confrontation between young Henry and Chaz’s gang. The
MP soldiers enforce that “Chaz and his friends sitting on the sidewalk being questioned by a police officer who had a notepad out and was writing something down. It looked like the officer wasn’t buying whatever excuse Chaz was stringing along” (171). Although the soldier sees the broomstick in young Henry’s hand, he, instead, decides to verbally interrogate Chaz. This authorial moment raises interesting questions to raise in the composition course. Why does the societal authority support young Henry for the first time? Does soldier’s support imply that young Henry stand up for himself physically rather than Keiko’s suggestion to be vocal?

The soldier’s support for young Henry prompts a closer examination into the society’s ideology. Asking composition students questions, such as, how does young Henry’s experience suggest how societies limit or ostracize groups? How do societies support particular groups? Since this moment shows how societal power—i.e. the MP soldier—attempts to change ideologies or challenges ideologies that young Henry’s educational experience suggested otherwise. Why is young Henry supported, while Keiko is interned for being Japanese?

These questions and others, I suggest, should prompt composition students to start thinking about their own inquiry projects and questions. Composition students, then, would pose their own research question and conduct research to formulate possible answers. Ford’s Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet, I suggest, should prompt composition students to question the larger issues raised. Questions to catalyze composition student inquiry, I suggest, should seek to answer the following questions, as stated earlier: 1) Why would a Chinese American author write in 2009 a novel about
These questions, I suggest, prompt composition students to consider multiple approaches and methods in answering them. These questions afford composition students to even pursue multidisciplinary approaches. Ford’s *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, I suggest, prompt other discussions when situated within the composition course. This option to composition pedagogy, I suggest, can also show students that the composition course uses a multidisciplinary approach. This multidisciplinary approach, then, extends the cross-discipline dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. This approach, I suggest, also facilitates students with having to negotiate with their audiences’ expectations and their projects’ aims. This thesis attempts a similar negotiation between composition and postcolonial studies, which methodologically formed a hybrid between the two disciplines.

The negotiation between two fields of study to form a hybrid text, also, requires clearly defined terms. This chapter, for instance, uses the term ‘American ethnic.’ I define the term by extending postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak’s definition and by suggesting other contexts for the term’s use. American ethnic novels are institutionally defined within a category within Area Studies. Area studies, generally, is defined as studying cultures geographically or culturally—i.e. Asian American studies or Indian Studies. Area Studies raises important debate over how it categorizes and includes particular cultures into its curriculum. Area Studies, according to Spivak, “are tied to the politics of power, and their connection to the power elite in the countries studied are still strong” (7). Area Studies curriculum, then, forms categories and hierarchies, much like
the literary canon. These categories, I suggest, can expand rather than restrict the uses of novels in a composition course. I mean that an Area Studies novel in a composition course can extend the use for novels beyond being cultural artifacts and political tools; instead, the composition course expands the uses for novels to prompt discussion and self-critique of the composition course, student, and instructor.

I suggest such expansion of terms using both fields of study—composition and postcolonial studies—allows for other uses in curriculum. It forms a negotiation between two fields and suggests other approaches to institutional categories. The incorporation of postcolonial novels into a composition course also provides a clear and expanded dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. This particular chapter suggests uses for Ford’s *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* to examine American issues of language and cultural identity. The following chapter, instead, suggests uses for Chinua Achebe’s postcolonial novel *Things Fall Apart* in order to examine identity within a global context.
CHAPTER V

A NOVEL INQUIRY: USING A POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL IN COMPOSITION COURSE

I suggested, previously, how I believed a change in the use of novels within a composition course should be arranged. I also specified that American ethnic and postcolonial novels could serve students best in a composition course. In the previous chapter I provided an American Ethnic example, while this chapter uses a postcolonial example—defined as a novel written after a colony has obtained independence and is no longer a colony. I suggest the postcolonial novel should expand the issues discussed beyond the domestic issues of the United States and include global issues. I suggest uses for the seminal postcolonial novel, *Things Fall Apart*, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe because it provides students with inquiries and discussions that pertain to our world today. Achebe’s novel acts as a catalyst in a composition inquiry course to help discuss current affairs and issues. First I will address Achebe’s novel’s issues and themes, and, then, suggest uses for Achebe’s novel to prompt discussion towards inquiry.

Literary scholars usually analyze Achebe’s novel, like the other novels in this thesis. However, I suggest using identity theory—Cooley’s “Looking glass self”—in a composition course. Cooley’s identity, as explain in the previous chapter, has three
components. Again, Cooley’s identity suggests that “1) we imagine how we must appear to others; 2) we imagined a judgment of that appearance; and 3) we develop our self through the judgments of others.” Composition students, then, can apply Cooley’s theory to *Things Fall Apart* to examine how Okonkwo’s identity can be explained using Cooley’s approach. This discussion will help students to form a language to discuss identity of a character and later apply it to their own inquiry research. Cooley’s theory, then, should prompt different approaches to novels to catalyze research inquiries.

Since Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is a postcolonial novel, the initial discussion should inquire about the theme of communal identity. I use the term communal because it is important to recognize that the main character Okonkwo resides within a clan and not a nation. I suggest using communal identity rather than Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which suggests a universal approach to define communities as an imagined community. Imagined communities, according to Anderson, “[are] imagined political communit[ies]—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” which assumes that individuals identify as belonging to a national community due to their residential location (6). This definition also assumes that all individuals identify themselves in this way, which is not true for many tribal communities. Anderson’s theory assumes communities follow the Western revolutionary path—from oppressed to resisting the oppressor to independent community; therefore, I suggest expanding Anderson’s term. Okonkwo’s community and the white colonists’ communities, then, are imagined as a communal identity.

I suggest that examining Okonkwo’s different identities will prompt discussion for future composition inquiry projects. Okonkwo’s identities will catalyze
potential inquires about global issues and how identity is shaped between two imagined communities. The identities I suggest examining are Okonkwo’s identity as a tribal hero, as an exile, as a defender against the white colonist, and as a family leader. These four different identities that Okonkwo represents, then, catalyze the discussion of these identities and the ideologies that shape the identities. Besides the important unpacking of Okonkwo’s identity, I suggest it is also important to address ideological power relations—either those of Okonkwo’s clan, the white colonists, ours as a citizen of the United States, and those who we will be researching in our inquiry. Also, I examine the novel’s final passage to explore language power relations discussed in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Such analysis, then, will prompt a discussion about language, similarly addressed in chapter two.

By following Okonkwo’s identities in my suggested order—from hero to exile to defender to family leader—reveals interesting discussions that composition students can further research and reveals an interesting discussion about language power relations. In the beginning of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the reader is introduced to Okonkwo’s known public identity as a clan hero, which Cooley’s “Looking glass self” theory can help show the complexity of the hero identity. Okonkwo is recognized by his clan as “a man of action, a man of war [and] [u]nlke his father could stand the look of blood,” which marks him as a respectable leader and hero in the community (Achebe 10). From an early age, Okonkwo’s actions directly respond to his clan’s expectations of success and reveal his disrespect for his father who was known to be lazy. Okonkwo’s identity, as hero, is in direct response to Cooley’s three components. Okonkwo imagines that a successful man with a hearty yam crop and a good warrior will gain the respect and
approval from others in his clan and thus responds to such an identity. Okonkwo’s identity is created in response to the judgment of his father, as a weak and effeminate person. But Okonkwo’s hero identity runs much deeper than being a successful yam farmer and a man who reacts against his father. Okonkwo reaches success as a wrestler in his clan and neighborhood clans. This prized event he wins with glory enables his continual hero identity even when he breaks several important laws of the land. The clan overlooks laws that he broke in his household, but cannot overlook two of the bigger offenses he makes publically.

The hero identity Okonkwo takes on in the first half of *Things Fall Apart* is based upon the belief of others, but also a rather public identity that the clan fully supports and helps recreate. This formation of a public identity is a major discussion that should also happen in the composition course. While reading Achebe’s first section, composition students should read Cooley’s “Looking glass self” in order to provide composition students with the language to discuss how someone forms a public identity. The composition student reader, then, can begin to understand why Okonkwo makes rash decisions and why his arrogance *should* but *doesn’t* get him into trouble. Okonkwo can ‘privately’ break the laws within his household with minor repercussions; yet, if he publically doesn’t reaffirm his hero identity, then he is publically reprimanded. I question why Okonkwo becomes exiled because he accidently shoots and kills a man at a clan event, but receives a mere slap on the wrist for beating his wife? Why is Okonkwo’s hero identity so important to uphold more than his respect for his wife? A discussion on public identity and how our society justifies or shames leaders with particular amounts of power—president, senators or sports players—is based on whether or not they live up to
our expectations. Why does a community prefer a leader to live up to their public identity, but not necessarily to their private one? I will use Okonkwo’s identities to further unpack this question, which could be further developed in a composition student’s inquiry project.

The first offense Okonkwo makes, which removes his title of hero and exchanges it with his identity as exile, allows Okonkwo to re-identify himself and pay for his crime. Although many Achebe scholars may tend to examine the strong biblical reference of Okonkwo’s ‘fall’ into exile, I suggest a different reading. Okonkwo’s fall through the lens of identity, for example, suggests the implications regarding the fall. These implications are more important to a composition course rather than a biblical analysis. Okonkwo’s fall from power literally happens due to his “gun [exploding] and a piece of iron [piercing] the boy’s heart;” it is a mistake that removes his hero identity that both he and the clan developed and both will take it away (124). Okonkwo’s “only course open to [him is] to flee the clan [because it is] a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land” because it was a female crime (124). An accidental crime, marked as female, excuses the committer from death but forces them into exile. Though female is marked as inferior to male, this accident may force Okonkwo into exile, but it frees him and his family from death. Though it seems to be the inferior gender category, in general, it saves Okonkwo from his predicament. Okonkwo, including his entire family, are exiled to seven years outside of his clan where he will reside with his mother’s clan throughout this time. During exile, Okonkwo’s identity redevelops, but he struggles to define his identity due to the land’s laws, the clan’s expectations and Okonkwo’s loss of being a hero. Composition students,
I suggest, may begin to research gender power relations in different global communities; however, I suggest that for the overall composition course, to move beyond this potential inquiry to continue the analysis of Okonkwo’s identity.

Okonkwo’s public identity, as an exile, requires him to grapple with his predetermined judgments about the origins of his identity. Also, Okonkwo must understand what determines a hero’s identity. Due to Okonkwo’s necessary move from his father’s clan to his mother’s clan, he must negotiate and re-examine his identity. The narrator explains the new difficult change “like beginning life anew without the vigor and enthusiasm of youth, like learning to become left-handed in old age” (131). Okonkwo’s new adjustment—from hero in his father’s clan to exile in his mother’s clan—has completely reversed what Okonkwo understands as his identity. His change in identity has left him in “a silent half-sleep” without the power and success he had previously worked towards. His father’s clan, who helped re-affirm Okonkwo as hero, has now re-judged him as an exile and unworthy. This new perceived exile identity forces Okonkwo to re-examine his lifestyle and position. Okonkwo begins to feel despair, as his uncle observes, but causes him to self-loath as an exile. His fall must be read as a representation of old values needing to be assessed. This representation must be asserted because it aids the potential discussion on different power relations.

Okonkwo’s ideology is tested during exile, which occurs because he has to assess it in comparison to the ideology of his mother’s clan. This is a moment when Okonkwo must self-critique his own ideology and community through the assistance of his uncle. This self-critique catalyzes the important discussion to begin the composition course’ research inquiry process. The important research trajectory when using the
postcolonial novel, I suggest, is to reassess the ideologies students possess about their identity as citizens of America. How do identities form, and what ideologies induce the creation of such identity? This is the overall research question, I suggest, that should be addressed by all the composition students’ inquiry projects. Okonkwo’s reassessment of his exile identity, then, can be an example of such inquiry projects.

Okonkwo’s reassessment of his exile identity, first, requires his uncle, Uchendu, to both assess Okonkwo’s struggle and to advise Okonkwo of his misconceptions. Uchendu proceeds to call upon Okonkwo and his mother’s family clan to direct questions about Okonkwo’s current predicament. Uchendu wants to help Okonkwo reexamine the ideology and beliefs about the new ‘female’ prompted exile. Uchendu shows how Okonkwo was never in complete power like he had once assumed. Okonkwo, in fact, only knew the ideologies and possibilities from his father’s clan, but has mistaken his rejection as his motherland’s fault. Uchendu explains to Okonkwo that he has come to his motherland for protection to recreate a self made identity of strength in his own ideology rather than merely responding to the expectations of others. The power that the father and the mother possess is important when the reader understands the complete picture of any given situation as Uchendu explains to Okonkwo: “‘It’s true that a child belongs to his father. But when a father beats a child, it seeks sympathy with its mother’s hut. … Your mother is there to protect you. … And that is why we say that mother is supreme’” (134). Uchendu advises Okonkwo to reassess the ideology that Okonkwo has embraced, which places Okonkwo as inferior to his father’s people due to his previous mistake. Uchendu allows for Okonkwo to recreate a leadership identity after Okonkwo anthropologizes his clan’s ideology. This move to fully examine what creates
your identity during a time of sorrow helps develop a richer identity that renegotiates between your own ideologies and those of your surroundings.

In prompting the composition class to begin moving more directly into their inquiry research project, I suggest extending the move to self-critique the composition students’ ideologies and assumptions. A self-critique, according to Spivak’s “The Making of Americans, the Teaching of English, and the Future of Cultural Studies,” includes the West anthropologizing itself as it does other communities (792). I suggest, then, that a composition instructor prompt composition students to analyze Uchendu’s lecture to Okonkwo. Composition students should ask to what extent does this lecture transform Okonkwo’s identity from exile to the defender of his mother’s clan against the white colonists.

The narrator in Things Fall Apart, finally in the second section, explicitly reveals the arrival of the white colonists and the new power relations that form between the clan and the white colonists. Readers are initially introduced to white scouter and then to the mass murdering of a whole clan, Abame. Theses events lead to the concern for Okonkwo and his motherland. Upon Okonkwo hearing of the tragedy, he begins to reform his identity—from exile to defender against the white colonists. Once the white colonists come, Okonkwo reintroduces what he knows, as being a warrior, which aids in recreating his identity as a defender but not an immediate fighter. He becomes passive aggressive while in his mother’s clan and will not become active until he returns to his father’s clan. His passive aggressive behavior is exemplified when his son converts to the colonists’ largest manipulating aspect, Christianity; consequently, Okonkwo will not talk about his son, but curses him and disowns him from the family. Okonkwo sees
everything about the white colonists, as wrong and evil, and he greatly resents those from his clan who work with or convert to the white colonists’ ideologies. The differing and rather powerful ideologies form the great tension or power relations making it a typical postcolonial novel. The tension or power relations—between the colonist and those they are trying to colonize—are rather important to fully examine in the composition discussion. Colonial inquiry projects will be most common. Reasons for the colonial inquiry is due to the composition course being situated with the American Empire and the immense current affairs that still stem from British and French Imperialism.

Upon the composition student’s introduction to the colonial tension, I suggest the importance of incorporating theories about the relationship between identity and territory. This relationship, according to geographer David B. Knight’s “Identity and Territory,” helps expose the complexities of power relations between powerful colonizers and their communities they are colonizing. Knight extends Anderson’s term ‘imagined community’—that defines how societies define their community. While Anderson assumes that all societies are nations that are a part of an international and global community, Knight examines the complexities of smaller and less powerful communities, such as Okonkwo’s. Defining communities, according to Knight, is more complicated than Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ because “there are still many people on earth whose world view rarely extends beyond the limits of their village or regional settlement system” that we see in Okonkwo’s Ibo society (Knight 515r). Okonkwo and his clansmen hardly acknowledge a world beyond their entire Ibo tribe until they are forced to do so when the White colonists arrive. The different ideologies—among the clansmen and the white colonists—define their territories differently, which causes a tension in power
relations. The difference in Western ideas of territory, according to Knight, are that
territory is “to be a commodity to be bought and sold, generally…[and] can have
powerful bonds to territory,” while others see it as “a close territorial identification by the
group, with land ownership and division also being closely related to group social
identity and organization” (515r). These different ideologies are exemplified in Achebe’s
novel when Okonkwo’s motherland personally encounters the white colonists and clash,
while Okonkwo’s fatherland encounters the colonists and become colonized. In other
words, Knight’s discussion of cultural geography shows reasoning behind the identity
that Okonkwo subsumes as defender of his territory.

Okonkwo’s identity transition—from fearless defender in his motherland to
fearful defender in his fatherland—reveals the geographical identity separation among the
clansmen and the white colonists. I continue to analyze the defender identity Okonkwo
portrays in his motherland and continue to show the developing tension between the
colonizers and the Ibo people as an example of colonial power relations. This
progression, I suggest, occurs when Okonkwo goes back to his fatherland. Upon
Okonkwo’s attempts to fight against the white colonizers’ preaching of Christianity, it
reveals Okonkwo’s ideology of what defines his territory. Territory, generally defined by
Knight, is “an area that is bounded, formally or informally;” therefore, Okonkwo’s
territory is what he and his clansman describe as the different areas of the Ibo tribe
(Knight 517l). Okonkwo’s people define their territory through laws of the land that
generations have passed down through markings and oral stories; however, Knight claims
that the West—white colonizers—see territory as a commodity and want the Ibo tribe’s
land. The white colonists, then, devise a manipulative rhetoric that shames and
heathenizes the Ibo people, but Okonkwo understands the rhetoric where he begins to defend his motherland.

I suggest that the composition instructor should understand that the white colonists’ rhetorical move is to shame and to heathenize. Such a rhetorical move mimics postcolonial scholar Edward W. Said’s term ‘Orientalizing.’ Orientalism, according to Said, “is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of the basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident)” (12). I suggest that showing composition students Said’s claim would help reveal the power relations that Achebe’s novel raises. Composition students, then, could unpack the quote and understand Said’s theoretical divide—between Orient and Occident—and that Orientalism is a conscious distribution of power. Though the composition course need not read Said, they do need to understand the concept of ‘Orientalism’ because it is a central means of understanding colonial power relations.

Upon Okonkwo’s change in identity—from exile to defender against the white colonists—he must vocalize and defend his and his clan’s territory ideology, as defined by Knight. The clan, initially, allows the white colonists to build on their haunted land, the Evil Forest; however, the clan’s belief that the forest would drive them away fails. Okonkwo, on the other hand, does not believe that the forest would be enough to drive them away. Okonkwo knows, from the beginning, that he must defend against them. Okonkwo reverts back to his warrior identity when “Okonkwo, who only stay[s] in the hope that it might come to chasing the men out of the village or whipping them” to assert his defender identity once again (Achebe 146). Okonkwo initially speaks against the
white colonists’ rhetoric by verbally revealing their hypocrisy: “‘You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife then’” (147). Okonkwo’s clan agrees with his question, which receives a generic answer. This convinces Okonkwo that the white colonists are mad (147). Okonkwo begins to see that his verbal pursuits against the white colonists are not working; thus, Okonkwo believes again that his mother’s clan’s land is not worth his respect and defending. This occurs at the perfect time for Okonkwo to go back to his father’s clan’s land that he assumes, incorrectly, that the white colonists wouldn’t be able to persuade or colonize.

When Okonkwo is back at his father’s clan, Okonkwo becomes the warrior defender against the white colonists. I suggest that it is interesting that Okonkwo verbally asserts his defense even as a previous warrior of blood. Even when Okonkwo and others call for a meeting with the white colonists, Okonkwo believes that he can speak against war “‘[b]ecuase I know he is a coward’” (Achebe 202). Okonkwo, however, decides to assert his defense, as a warrior, through his machete and kills the messenger (204-205). This act asserts Okonkwo and his clan’s defeat against the white colonists because Okonkwo does the ultimate act to undercut both him and his father’s clan: suicide. Under the ever-powerful constraints of the white colonists, Okonkwo is no longer able to assert his own identity, which forces his act of hanging. These power relations—between colonizer and colonized—requires a necessary discussion in the composition class because it poses an interesting question: how do new powerful rhetorical moves or groups affect or change those they are targeting? Do those with less power—either people or culture—need to ‘die’ or succumb to the new identity or ideology of the
particular group? This should be the leading question into the inquiry projects because it
directly implies that the novel, the course reads, can promote change.

The final discussion of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, I suggest, pertains to the
ways language works within the novel. Achebe uses both English and the Ibo languages
together throughout *Things Fall Apart*. This incorporation acknowledges and continues
the dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies. Achebe acknowledges that
the author’s languages should be incorporated together. This invokes Canagarajah’s
World Englishes versus Metropolitan Englishes debate and a current practice to
incorporate the two languages. Canagarajah charts ways composition instructors have
incorporated both WE and ME languages (587-88). Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, I
suggest is an illustration of Canagarajah’s ideas.

Achebe, for example, uses two languages and provides a glossary of the non-
English terms as a reference, which suggests one approach to using more than one
language (210-211). Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* discusses “the *ogene* of the town crier
piercing the still night air” and the glossary defines *ogene* as “a musical instrument; a
kind of gong” (9, 211). Achebe uses *ogene* instead of the description to show how the
*ogene* is particular to the Ibo culture and cannot be translated into English because it
would lose the cultural context. Such an incorporation of the Ibo language also
acknowledges Brennan’s discussion of language in the literary canon, which is discussed
earlier in chapter two.

Achebe is aware that the English language cannot provide the same contextual
meaning that the Ibo language provides in this culture. Not only does the use of both
languages—English and Ibo—acknowledge current discussions in both composition and
postcolonial studies—i.e. using non-English words for terms and that translation into English can lose context—but, also, Achebe’s choice to write *Things Fall Apart* in English rather than his native Nigerian language acknowledges the language power relations of Metropolitan Englishes over World Englishes or even non-English languages.

This language power relation is further noticed in the final passage of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The Commissioner provides the final statement. Why does the white Commissioner have the final opinion of the clan and Okonkwo? It ends with commentary about Okonkwo’s suicide:

> The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph…. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much though: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (208-209 my emphasis)

This final commentary judges Okonkwo’s actions as fantasy and minor, which also mimics a paragraph of an Orientalized history book. The white Commissioner providing the final comments marks the final acknowledgement that the power relations in *Things Fall Apart* are between the powerful white colonists over Okonkwo’s clansmen and the English language, more specifically Canagarajah’s Metropolitan Englishes over any other language. This final passage marks the final moment students must continue to self-anthropologize both their discussions and their analysis during their inquiry projects, as well as, avoid placing judgments on their research within the global sphere.

This thesis, so far, has suggested uses for postcolonial novels both in composition courses and for composition professional development. I have suggested uses for Achebe’s postcolonial novel *Things Fall Apart* to provide examples of global issues and power relations, and uses for Ford’s American ethnic novel *Hotel on the*
Corner of Bitter and Sweet to provide examples of localized and American national issues. Both postcolonial and American ethnic novels prompt composition student discussions on institutional power relations that the students endure when in the academy or as global citizens. Composition instructors based upon their personal preference or current events, I suggest, may teach both of these options.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The cross-discipline dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies has afforded rich rewards to both fields. Andrea Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane’s edited collection *Crossing Borderlands* furthers this dialogue and maps out a future for both fields. One contributor, Min-Zhan Lu, proposes that compositionists resist a collaborative conversation because composition is a new discipline, within the last four decades, and desires to strive for academic autonomy. A fear of many composition scholars, according to Lu, is that postcolonial scholars, such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, are more familiarized within the academy, while composition scholars are less familiarized.

I suggest, however, that both composition and postcolonial scholars extend and continue their cross-discipline dialogue because each discipline can and does develop one another’s goals in academia. Both fields of study—composition and postcolonial studies—examine the implications of power relations, either over students or over diverse cultures. Composition scholars attempt to assess and examine the ways in which the academy controls the power and agency composition students have in a composition course. Do composition students have any agency within the institutionalized course? How does a composition course shape a student’s identity? Postcolonial scholars, similarly, assess and examine the ways in which a colonial power controls the people
within a colony. Do those being colonized have any institutional power? How does colonialism shape identity? Both fields of study, also, examine how one language is privileged over another language, as a mark of distinct power relations. I suggest that composition courses form a tension between the language of the academy versus the language of the composition student. Postcolonial studies examines how the colonizer’s language is typically privileged over the native populations’ language. Each discipline examines how either the academic institution or an imperial institution control power using particular languages. These power relations, I suggest, can be further examined when both composition and postcolonial studies’ approaches come together to form a richer dialogue.

I believe that it is particularly important for the field of composition not to separate itself from other fields of study within the discipline of English, especially postcolonial studies. While the field of composition continues to be a subfield of English, it is important to continue collaborating among other disciplines. This collaboration, I suggest, encourages support for instructors and their peers and a theoretical voice to be heard by more in the academy. Many literature instructors, may at some point, teach composition. I suggest, then, uses for American ethnic and postcolonial novels in a composition course. These suggestions develop a methodology that uses novels in ways other than the typical literary analysis. My suggested methodology uses novels to catalyze composition course discussion. Composition students, after, would begin to research their own inquiry projects.

I believe that extending this dialogue—between composition and postcolonial
studies—benefits students. When composition instructors incorporate novels into a composition course, students learn that different disciplines and different ideologies *can* work together productively. Composition courses allow students to find agency in their writing practices and to begin to form a confident identity as a writer. Postcolonial studies, shows students how cultures create agency in forming their identities. My contribution to this dialogue suggests uses for postcolonial novels to provide composition students with examples of abstract concepts that composition students will discuss. This contribution, in addition, supplies composition instructors with fictional examples of the abstract concepts the composition instructors must grapple with when teaching. Novels provide a foundation for both composition students and instructors to apply to their experiences in learning or teaching.

My extension of the cross-discipline dialogue suggests uses for marginalized authors or novels in an institutionalized course to mimic how to challenge predetermined categories. Ford’s *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, for example, addresses the Chinese American experience similar to Amy Tan’s canonical text, *The Joy Luck Club*; however, Ford’s novel raises cross-cultural issues, such as the Japanese experience, that Tan’s novel does not. Ford’s novel, therefore, examines how both cultural communities interacted within larger societal entities. Tan’s novel, on the other hand, sticks to the Chinese American experience, so using her novel in a course limits the potential student discussion. This thesis, then, demonstrates approaches to challenge the privileging of texts that the literary canon tends to do, as seen in chapter two.

I believe that it is necessary to rethink the methods and the ideologies that place Metropolitan Englishes above World Englishes. I suggest continuing to question:
Why and how does the literary canon choose to distinguish between particular authors or texts? I believe that these categorical distinctions are restrictive, and that they only reinforce the categories placed on students within the academic institution. Using novels in a composition course, then, provides students with a richer understanding of their surrounding world, thereby helping students to understand abstract concepts, particularly identity. Such an approach imaginatively explores opportunities for identity development.

I believe that the cross-discipline dialogue between composition and postcolonial studies needs to continue, especially around the newer uses of technology in the classroom. Will technology change the way language power relations play out? How will power relations change?
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