

Cultivating “Translationships” through Multilingual Community-Engaged Digital Storytelling
Pedagogies

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Abstract

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This dissertation study examines translational relationships / “translationships” between people and across cultures, languages, and world views and how these are built, made sense of, and sustained in, through, and across collaborative, multilingual/translingual, multimodal storytelling spaces in adult language learning. The Multilingual Storytelling Translationships project is an ongoing partnership between myself and English faculty member Cristina Sánchez-Martín with local community based organizations and adult English language learners which includes storytelling workshops and classes, a website repository for multilingual stories, and a podcast where storytellers engage in conversations contextualizing their knowledge and

reflect on the experiences of telling and translating stories in community. The qualitative approach I take in this dissertation looks to critical and participatory ethnography, humanizing research and the storytelling methodologies of Indigenous research, how they overlap and intersect in ways that highlight the potential of research to open up spaces of collaborative knowledge making and prioritize relationships in the process. I also engage podcasting as a core method and means of analysis in conversation with my own individual analysis of the ethnographic data. I incorporate the origami crane as a personally meaningful heuristic metaphor throughout the dissertation that helps me to both envision and explain the underlying theories and methodologies that guided both the research design, the analysis and the findings.

The reflections in this dissertation show how we found options for multilingual and transnational identity construction and opportunities to engage in “loving perception and ‘world’-travel” (Lugones, 1987) through storytelling and dialogue. A combination of collective and individual storying layered with contextualization, translation, writing, conversation, interpretation, interviews, and digital modalities allowed us to shape our practices towards *transnational identity-in-story*, using stories and storytelling for different modes of identity construction, and *transnational identity-in-relation*, contextual, mutually constitutive processes of co-constructing new expressions of identity based on relationships. This work demonstrates how, by imagining and enacting forms of practice that are not in themselves epistemically violent, i.e. storytelling, translanguaging, and relationality, we were able to interrupt, to some extent, linguistically mediated cycles of coloniality within the context of the project.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, multilingual, translanguaging, community-engaged adult learning, podcasting, relationality

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One thing I have observed: When we are engaged in acts of love, we humans are at our best and most resilient. The love in romance that makes us want to be better people, the love of children that makes us change our whole lives to meet their needs, the love of family that makes us drop everything to take care of them, the love of community that makes us work tirelessly with broken hearts (brown, 2017, p.10).

This dissertation and my acknowledgements are a love story, dedicated to all of the humans and more-than-humans who make me want to be a better person and who generously help me keep trying.

The Coast Salish Peoples, and the Coast Salish lands and waters that sustain me as an uninvited guest.

My ancestors.

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Prologue

The word "origami" consists of oru (to fold) and kami (paper.) So, origami is paper folding. However, those who emphasize the aspect of origami as the puzzle tend to dismiss that. They reduce the paper to mere geometrical shapes such as the square or the rectangle, and the folds to mere geometrical manipulations.

If we reflect on Japanese classical origami, we cannot say that origami consists in only geometry. Many models of Edo era are based on the characteristics of washi. For example, we cannot fold Catfish, Water Lilly, or Sembazuru with Western paper without tearing it, whereas we easily can with washi. Moreover, the point of ceremonial origami is not to make the shapes but to express the folders sincerity (Hatori, n.d.)

Figure 1

Sembazuru Outside of a Temple



In Japanese tradition, sembazuru, the folding of one thousand origami cranes, is often undertaken as a prayer for someone who is sick. Sembazuru is also a wish granting practice. Folding one thousand cranes can grant an individual wish when folded for yourself, or a collective wish for another, if they are a gift. When I was 5 or 6 years old my parents and I folded a sembazuru for my second grade teacher's wife who had cancer. For months we spent every evening after dinner around the table folding. My hands learned the crane by heart.

Because of this childhood experience, the crane reminds me of my father. My father who, in the middle of the "data collection" phase of this dissertation, was diagnosed with brain cancer, a "misfolding" of his DNA. Another reason the origami crane reminds me of him.

The diagnosis was a huge shock. He had been working and apparently healthy right up until he experienced an episode of aphasia which sent him to the ER. There, an MRI revealed the glioblastoma growing in the left frontal lobe of his brain. Less than two weeks later he went in for surgery to excise as much of the tumor as possible before beginning radiation treatments.

On the day of his surgery I checked him in early in the morning. As we waited for the techs to come take him to pre-op he told me a story, but I was worried and afraid so I forgot to listen carefully. It was an African story he knew about a young boy and a man walking through the countryside. I've scoured the internet since that day to see if I could find the story somewhere, but I haven't yet encountered it. What I can remember about the story is the boy had to continue walking while the man stayed behind and rested under a shady baobab tree. We sat together for a while and then he was whisked off and I went to do one of the storytelling classes, returning later that day to be there as he came out of surgery and into the ICU.

I'm not sure how much he knew or understood about what the results and consequences of this surgery were going to be before it happened, and whatever he knew he shared little of it

with me. I know he thought he was protecting me but it was devastating and we were both completely unprepared. The location of the tumor meant that the surgery severely impacted his language center and right side mobility. My father, who had been fiercely independent his whole life, required 24 hour care. Over the next eight months at the same time that I was engaging in this dissertation project I was his primary caregiver as he went through radiation treatments and physical therapy. It was also during this period that I started to connect my research reflections to the creative practice of folding origami 折り紙, specifically the orizuru 折鶴 (folded crane).

I began to consider how many characteristics of origami align with a critical, qualitative research orientation like the one I take in this dissertation. For example, it begins with something both theoretical and material, it is not invented or created from nothing. Each design has a long history that comes before it but each form that is folded is unique. The analytic process is much like folding and unfolding. It involves immersion in the data, reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, returning. Starting from a broad idea, the topic, the research questions, that is like the piece of square paper. Then you set out to engage and wonder more deeply, reading, gathering data, reflecting. As it begins to take shape you must stop and open up or undo the folds you have made, it is as if you are going backwards. But, the initial folds of origami are not permanent, they are made to leave creases in the paper so that the more complicated folds are able to take shape later without ripping or distorting. It requires both precision and flexibility and above all patience

A few months after my dad passed away, in the winter of 2024, at Cristina's invitation I attended a storytelling and painting workshop which was designed to provide a community space for Spanish-speaking women living in the Seattle area, and create opportunities for connection and self-expression. The session was divided into steps which involved shifting back and forth

between writing, painting, and sharing, making sure these aspects stayed in conversation and built on each other in order to create cohesive and multilayered stories. I painted and wrote my memories about learning to fold the crane and in the process I was able to use art and storytelling to further develop my ideas about incorporating origami as an overarching heuristic.

Figure 2

Taiko's Origami Crane Painting



The origami crane is a symbol of hope and healing, but not a naive one. It was made famous by the true story of Sadako, a little girl who had leukemia because of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While she was sick in the hospital she undertook folding 1,000 cranes in the hopes of regaining her health. The popular version of her story, written by Canadian children's book writer Eleanor Coerr tells that she was unable to finish and her friends and family finished for her after she passed away. But her friends and family have said that she folded well over 1,000 before dying. In either case, the cranes did not save her from the

consequences of war. And yet, the crane remains a symbol of hope and healing. In this way the crane, and my dad's illness both help me to understand what it is to continue hopefully, in spite of the overwhelming sense of futility that can arise when confronted with the violence and brutality of the world.

So origami, and the crane specifically give structure to this dissertation as a material, embodied way of understanding the research and the research process. But, it is also a broader metaphor that expresses the tension of doing relational research in this world and maintaining hope.

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places-and there are so many-where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory

-Howard Zinn (2004)

Origami Prelude: 基本形 (Kihon-kei) Base Shapes

I am using the concept of origami base models in this introduction and literature review to ground my descriptions of the “fundamental shapes” that give structure to this dissertation and show spaces and opportunities for moving towards new models.

Early on I learned that every origami shape, no matter how complicated, has a base shape as an initial step. These foundational structures from which many different models can be folded are called kihon-kei (基本形) in Japanese, which translates to "basic forms" or "fundamental shapes."

Figure 3

Four origami base shapes



There are only four bases that are considered "traditional" bases and all traditional origami models are derived from them. From simplest to complex these shapes are, kite base, fish base, bird base, and frog base (Figure 3).

Most origami books assume knowledge of these base shapes, so starting instructions might read “begin with a bird base.” From a bird base any number of models can be constructed, the tsuru (crane) is the most recognizable but a bird base is the foundation for eagles, butterflies, dragons, twisted stars, and many others. Designed by origami masters Akira Yoshizawa and Satoshi Kamiya respectively, the crab and the phoenix (Figures 4 and 5) both have versions of the bird base as a foundation. These are examples of how distinct and wildly complex models can start from the same foundation.

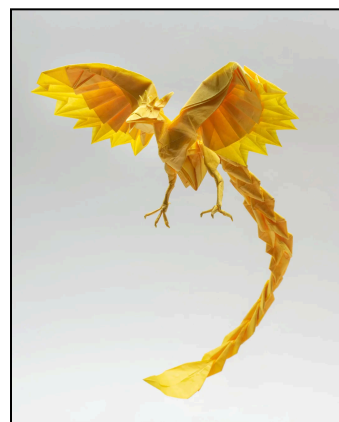
Figure 4

Origami Crab



Figure 5

Origami Phoenix



Bases are pretty simple to fold, the complexity comes from moving from a base shape to a final model as many different approaches are possible. In this way I use them to represent how I move from my personal experiences and understanding of the literature, the base shapes, which help me to pose research questions about what models of teaching and learning English I am seeking to create in my project and make decisions about the kinds of theoretical frameworks, pedagogies, methodologies, and analyses that can guide me toward that direction.

Chapter One: Introduction, Research Questions and Situation in Literature

relief

from this tongue this slab of limestone

or reinforced concrete

fanatics and traders

dumped on this coast wildgreen clayred

that breathed once

in signals of smoke

sweep of the wind

knowledge of the oppressor

this is the oppressor's language

yet I need it to talk to you

From "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children"

(Adrienne Rich, 1968)

むかし むかし (**mukashi mukashi**)

¹むかし むかし (mukashi mukashi), English spread across the world, accompanying “colonial endeavors, as colonists sought to acquire territory that didn’t belong to them and to kill, displace, or control the people who lived on that land” (Motha, 2014, p. 27). When you listen, that history echoes and “it is difficult not to hear in standard English always the sound of slaughter and conquest” (hooks, 1994, p. 169). From the outset the goal of “education” in colonial North America was a genocidal one, to “eliminate all of the cultures which Anglos collapsed into one single ethnic category ‘Indian’” (Romero & Margolis, 2023, p.19). And, the reverberations of coloniality in our language practices are not simply historical considerations. The current administration’s recent executive order establishing English as the “one – and only official language” is framed both in economic and cultural terms stating that “speaking English not only opens doors economically, but it helps newcomers engage in their communities, participate in national traditions, and give back to our society” (The US Govt., 2025). In this world of market driven discourses of “progress” the construction of the “Other” continues through language and language instruction and by positioning ways of being and knowing otherwise in opposition to both “progress” and the idealized “individualism and critical thinking of the West” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p.viii). My work is part of this colonial story and these discourses, so, how can we imagine a decolonial English? Or is the coloniality of English so deeply written into the discipline that we may arrive at something else, not English as we know it, but an anti- or counter-English? This dissertation is an attempt to grapple with these questions and imagine what forms a refusal to replicate and legitimize colonial systems might take. Black feminist, anti-colonial and raciolinguistic theories teach us that English language education and

¹ This is how many stories in Japanese begin. Mukashi means a long time ago or some time in the past, so mukashi mukashi is similar to saying “A long long time ago”

ideology perpetuate existing structures of power and inequity, carrying within themselves the very systems I hope to shift. I hear Lorde telling me “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (1984, p.107) and I wonder, does this mean there is no role for English or English language learning in moving us towards a version of the world that is more equitable, just and loving? I am not sure but I would like to try and find out.

As so many others have, I benefited greatly from the “globalizing force of economic regimes which has sustained and reinvigorated the symbolic capital of the English language, creating an expanding EFL job market for the unemployable of the ‘inner circle’ countries” (Haque & Morgan, 2009, p. 273). From my privileged position as an American born “native speaker” of English I was an active participant in what Motha and other authors she cites identify as the “English frenzy”, “overconsumption” and “the dark side of TESOL” (Motha, 2014). The four-week intensive ESOL teaching certificate I received at the beginning of my teaching trajectory was granted to me by International House, the same organization whose promotional materials at one time included the statement, “Once we used to send gunboats and diplomats abroad; now we are sending English teachers” (International House brochure, 1979 as cited in Phillipson, 1992 p. 8). With a CELTA in hand, I quickly found employment as a language teacher in Spain. I was inducted and fully immersed in the “English Only” ideology and practice of EFL, where policies and structures to control language use in the classroom were not much more than a generation removed from corporal punishment. Garcia et. al. write that, “our work emerges from heridas which we have both observed and experienced as learners and teachers” (2021, p. 222). To this I should add, wounds that I may have also “inflicted” and the resulting “intellectual debts” (Behar, 1996, Chapter 6, para.2) I carry with me. The majority of my 8 year

EFL teaching experiences prior to returning to Seattle in 2016 were woefully lacking in teacher development and/or critical reflection on my part with regards to my positionality in the -classroom, as well as missing any type of inclusive (much less sustaining or anti-racist) pedagogy or issues of coloniality. I spent a total of 6 years teaching in Spain, another 2 years with The British Council in Thailand (an institution central to the definition and critiques of linguistic imperialism in the work of Phillipson and Pennycook), and a short contract at a women's university in Tokyo before returning to Seattle and beginning to work with adult immigrant and refugee learners in the non-profit context. I was, and continue to be, an outsider in many communities where I research and teach. But, our histories are intertwined in generations of migration, language loss and racism.

My mom grew up in Hawaii in a majority Japanese community of sugarcane plantation workers. My grandmother's first language was Japanese and my mom was surrounded by Japanese language and culture throughout her life. However, the prevailing social and academic pressure of English as the language of success and social mobility led to her to lose much of her Japanese ability as she entered public school. My father immigrated with my grandmother as an infant from England to New York to join my grandfather living in Spanish Harlem after WWII. My grandparents' marriage was short-lived and due to family circumstances and racial prejudice, my father's Puerto Rican heritage was hidden from him for much of his life. Only as an adult did he meet and get to know my grandfather. My family, myself included, has experienced the effects of racial and linguistic marginalization in ways that impacted our connections to our linguistic and cultural heritages. This dissertation is rooted in these ancestral experiences and encounters with coloniality.

This is the Oppressor's Language

I began this chapter with an excerpt from a poem by Adrienne Rich that bell hooks also found compelling and connected to the history of coloniality through language. She wrote that it makes her “think now of the grief of displaced ‘homeless’ Africans, forced to inhabit a world where they saw folks like themselves, inhabiting the same skin, the same condition, but who had no shared language to talk with one another, who needed ‘the oppressor’s language’” (1994, p. 169). I also see the lines of this poem woven into the history and scholarship on empire and colonialism that identifies how “by hiding the location of the subject of enunciation, European/Euro-American colonial expansion and domination was able to construct a hierarchy of superior and inferior knowledge and, thus, of superior and inferior people around the world” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p.214). This justification fed what Franz Fanon called the “scandal of European opulence”, a scandal which owed, “its very existence to the soil and subsoil of the underdeveloped world” [wildgreen clayred...] built with the sweat and corpses of Blacks, Arabs, Indians, and Asians. This we are determined never to forget” [knowledge of the oppressor...] (1961, p. 95). Imperialism and colonialism were historically associated with occupation, enslavement and forced relocation of people, extraction of resources, and political/military control [Fanatics and traders, dumped on this coast...]. But, “whilst imperialism is often thought of as a system which drew everything back into the center, it was also a system which distributed materials and ideas outwards” (Smith, 2021, p. 67) [This is the oppressor’s language...].

While the material and political consequences of historic colonial economic exploitation are a vital area of study and activism, “the cultural effects of colonialism need to be given equal weight, not as mere rationalizations or products of social and economic relations but rather as a

significant site of colonialism in their own right” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 16). English is one of these sites [This is the oppressor’s language yet I need it to talk to you].

Today, upbeat articles from corporate language learning platforms tout the “exciting signs of steady growth with projections for increasing expansion” in post-Covid online learning “markets” (Maguire, 2023) and headlines blare in bold type things like “English Language Learning Market Boom: Forecast to Exceed Revenues of \$70 Billion by 2030 with Globalization and Increasing Cross-border Communication Fueling Demand” (Globe Newswire, 2025).

However, the story is different in communities of marginalized adult learners in the US. National statistics show a 65% decline in adult enrollments in federally funded adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English Language (EL) programs since the year 2000 (Heller & Slungaard Mumma, 2024, p. 1). Education specialists have theorized various causes for this dramatic decline including policy, funding and access, learner interest, and technology (Pickard, 2022, p. 40). These trends play out against a backdrop of concern for how literacy levels in the population of adult immigrant and refugee language learners makes it “difficult for them to access jobs that can support a family, obtain the training or skills they need for employment and make informed choices about the education of their children” (Condelli, et al. 2008, p.1). The nearly universal discourse of English and it is that it is the “key to success”, and it is “widely believed that the user of English can, through effort and hard work, be transformed into a better form of human capital through increasing [their] formal or measurable competence in English”, a discourse which also “circulates in public portrayals of what kinds of skills, competencies, and trajectories immigrants need, want and should develop for themselves” (Wariner, 2015 p. 495). According to Kramsch (2019) this language ideology is created and held up by key assumptions about “real world needs” where the English dominant global economy is

the only world that exists (p. 62). In this world, English is indispensable to any person, organization or government that aspires to economic security, “governments want citizens to have competency in English because they want to boost the national economy; workers learn English in order to get good jobs; parents seek English language education for their children so that they can live a successful life; communities promote their ties with English as a way of securing economic wealth” (Park, 2020 p.3). These valorizations of English as an economic resource and tool of social mobility widely disregard conditions of social and economic inequity that impact and constrain who can actually benefit by acquiring English (Kubota, 2015; Park, 2021; Macedo, et al., 2003; Mayo, 1999; Chun, 2008; Jordan & Kapoor, 2016; et al). However, attributing and critiquing the pursuit of English as motivated solely by economic considerations is incomplete,

Neoliberalism is not simply an economic doctrine. Its impulse to maximize the reach of the market necessarily means it has implications for the way we see and understand ourselves as subjects. In this sense, neoliberalism is also about the formation and transformation of subjectivities. This means that people’s choice to pursue English in the context of neoliberalism cannot be understood as a result of some rational calculation of material benefits, but as action that is grounded in emotionally charged and politically intense qualities of subjecthood. (Park, 2021, p. 2)

Thus, the affective dimensions of the field (Park, 2021; Motha & Lin, 2014) are key to understanding the relationship between English and neoliberalism, more broadly between language and the political economy and ultimately the liberatory possibilities of approaching English language learning from a relational perspective.

Research Questions

The intersection of decoloniality, critical applied linguistics and digital public humanities presents an opportunity to explore how translingual storytelling pedagogy and practice can create meaningful, culturally sustaining and mutually reinforcing translational relationships between people and across cultures, languages, modalities and world views, what we refer to as “translationships.” In alignment with my aspirations toward prioritizing this integration of research, teaching, and public scholarship, this dissertation study focuses on the collaborative and relational aspects of an ongoing community based storytelling project I am working on with faculty member Cristina Sánchez-Martín. This larger project, “Multilingual ‘translationships’ and digital storytelling with local communities”, is a sustained effort towards community-driven, participatory-based, pedagogical and public scholarship.

In the summer of 2023 we received funding from the Simpson Center for the Humanities to support the development of a series of workshops around the retelling of cultural and community stories with adult immigrant and refugee language learners in the Seattle area and the creation of a multilingual digital storytelling space to complement and sustain this learning experience online through a website and podcast. With further funding from Humanities Washington and a grant from the Community Literacies Collaborative, we revised and expanded our initial work. The project as a whole draws inspiration from different examples of community archives which show how the digital context can transcend temporal, spatial, situational, and technical boundaries (Browne, 2021, p. 38) and serve to decouple storytelling “from conventional symbolisms that have served as delimiting discourses” and “enhance the epistemic potential of the archive, potentially freeing them (and, perhaps, the archivists themselves) from the fetters of mainstream codification” (Browne, 2021, p.42). For example, crowdsourced

archives such as the searchable Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, are places where the public composes and shares stories of personal experience. Activist cultural archival projects like the South Asian Digital Archive, SAADA, both document and advocate for their communities. And projects in language reclamation like 68 Voces - 68 Corazones demonstrate how multiple languages can interact in the process of online storytelling. In our pedagogy and in the development of our public facing project we attempt to enact some of these complementary aspects in order to build an ongoing and sustainable set of multilingual resources and artifacts created in collaboration with adult immigrant and refugee language learners.

In grappling with the tension between the collaborative and collective aspect of this project and my own individual need to write a dissertation, the practice of origami, and more specifically the folding and unfolding it entails, emerged both as a heuristic for understanding my relationship to the project and as theory which helps me think through the patterns of relationships that exist and are created in the practice of multilingual storytelling. In the following chapters I describe in more detail the ways in which origami makes connections between my own lived experiences and value system and the relevant theoretical, methodological and pedagogical practices that I hope to bring forward.

My dissertation study focuses in from our larger project to concentrate on examining translational relationships / “translationships” between people and across cultures, languages, and world views and how these are built, made sense of, and sustained in, through, and across collaborative, multilingual/translingual, multimodal storytelling spaces in adult language learning. In doing this the central questions I ask are:

- What are features and characteristics of relationships that develop in the practice of collaborative multilingual/translingual storytelling,

- between multilingual communities and the dominant language (English)?
- among members of the classroom community? I.e. students, teachers, TAs, volunteers.
- What conditions give rise to dialogic and co-learning spaces in the practice of collaborative, multilingual/translingual, multimodal storytelling?

Significance of the Study

I am interested in teaching and doing research that is concerned not only with what, but with *how* we are producing knowledge and is invested in “educational processes that are not meant to consolidate ‘what is’ but are driven by a vision of ‘what should and can be’” (Mayo, 1999, p. 5). In this project as a researcher practitioner, alongside co-storytellers, graduate student assistants, classroom volunteers and partner organizations I believe we are working together to build a contextual, contingent, and relational understanding of what storytelling is and how storytelling, pedagogy and translation intertwine and support translational relationships across languages, cultures and ways of knowing. In these spaces of co-learning and co-creation (both physical and digital) the goal is to demonstrate through research and practice how public facing pedagogical projects in the digital humanities can create accessible, sustaining, collaborative spaces for mutual learning.

Critical and collaborative ethnographically oriented research on anti-colonial, translingual, and culturally sustaining multimodal pedagogies, like that presented in this study, can offer more asset based avenues for teachers to approach language and literacy learning in the classroom with a wide range of students from distinct cultural and educational backgrounds by interrogating and expanding what counts as knowledge. This is especially relevant to adult immigrant and refugee language education programs which seek to center the experiences,

cultures and languages of their students. That being said, the implications are by no means confined to adult immigrant and refugee learning contexts and could inform a range of research and practices on integrating public and digital humanities into language learning in meaningful, creative, and culturally sustaining ways that not only acknowledges students' own linguistic competencies and cultures but foregrounds them as central to making meaning. Language programs, curriculum developers and instructors constantly make choices about the focus and content of classes; when decisions are made with "an explicit consciousness about the effect of [these] choices, [teachers] are better equipped to teach in a way that reflects their pedagogical goals surrounding language variation" (Motha, 2014, p.111).

This work has the potential to add to the scholarship on how both storytelling and multilingualism are navigated, practiced and theorized in the classroom as well as in informal community settings. Additionally, this study and the broader project it describes could contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of anti-colonial pedagogy and practice that moves between and across applied linguistics, English, ethnic studies, education, Native studies and other fields committed to approaching language and education in ways that work towards justice and liberation. Finally, it could be a jumping off point for considering how storytelling might better engage immigrant and refugee settler communities with actual land-based decolonization and other social justice movements.

Literature Review

As described in this chapter's prelude, base models in origami are called *kihon-kei* (基本形) in Japanese, which translates to "basic forms" or "fundamental shapes." These are the foundational structures from which many different models can be folded. I look at the following scholarly interventions (among many others) as examples that provide a starting point, base

shapes that offer a foundation for my own work to expand upon. These base shapes are drawn from the fields of critical applied linguistics, translingualism and translanguaging, culturally sustaining pedagogy and digital humanities with a focus on how participation and relationships are essential in telling these stories. Finally, in theorizing the mutually constitutive relationship between the field of English language teaching and learning and neoliberalism, scholars challenge the inevitability or natural state of the neoliberal condition, “neoliberalism is not an enduring, inescapable hegemony but instead a reversible set of political-economic practices [which can] be continually contested in part by engaging in the transformational processes of accompanying sets of counter-hegemonies and discourses” (Chun, 2008). These counter hegemonies will contrast and contest the neoliberal, colonial and subtractive discourses and practices of acculturation and “integration”, which promote assimilation into the dominant culture at the expense of one’s linguistic and cultural roots.

Critical Applied Linguistics

As potentially counter hegemonic bodies of scholarship, critical (Kayi-Aydar, 2025; Makoni & Makoni, 2013; Pennycook, 2001; 2022; et al.) and decolonial (Da Fina, et al., 2023; Deumert, et al., 2020; Motha, 2014; 2020; Mufwene, 2020; et al.) applied linguistics point to the inseparable nature of English in relationship to both colonial and postcolonial history, the central role of colonialism as a site of cultural production regarding language, and as a an ongoing site of ideologies, discourses and histories (Pennycook, 1998). The longstanding tradition of “English Only” in ESOL contexts is just one example of how these ideologies and discourses have been reproduced in teaching contexts. Advocates of these approaches argue that English language teachers are simply teaching a subject and that language curricula is value neutral or “inherently good” (Hattam & Prosser, 2008, p. 91). However, “English only” and other long accepted

approaches to teaching, including many progressive ones, are shaped by historical processes of colonization and inequity. According to Auerbach, these practices rely “on unexamined assumptions about immersion, efficacy, error and standardization which originate in the political agenda of the dominant groups, and serve to reinforce existing relations of power” (1993, p. 23). Critical researchers in the field of applied linguistics have examined how linguistic practices are impacted by neoliberal capitalist ideologies (Bernstein et al., 2015), and the ways in which neoliberalism is also about the formation and transformation of subjectivities meaning that “people’s choice to pursue English in the context of neoliberalism cannot be understood as a result of some rational calculation of material benefits, but as action that is grounded in emotionally charged and politically intense qualities of subjecthood” (Park, 2021, p. 2). Other critical linguists have looked at the ways in which fidelity to linguistic standards is a form of systemic violence rooted in colonialism, ableism, and racism, subsequently promoting and enforcing these ideologies through linguistic policing (Irvine et al., 2009). Lippi-Green’s expansive work across linguistic contexts identifies how, “the process of language subordination targets not all variation, not all language varieties, but only those which are emblematic of differences in race, ethnicity, homeland, or other social allegiances which have been found to be less than good enough” (2012, p. 332). Building on this work, the body of critical scholarship known as raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015) interrogates the systematic stigmatization of racialized populations which occurs regardless of how closely their language practices correspond to standardized forms.

In identifying these areas of analysis critical applied linguistics scholars point to the mutually constitutive nature of language and colonialism and the many cultural constructs that “still operate in the contemporary world [and] are products of colonial contexts” (Pennycook,

1998, p. 68). These persistent “unmarked monolingual assumptions of numerous academic disciplines and non-academic sectors” (Forsdick, 2017 p.2) include the “monolingual norm of speakerhood” (Hill, 2003, p. 128), which Sinfree, Makoni, and Pennycook cite as “shaping our world in multilingual contexts” and deriving from “the colonial imagery” (2005, p. 144). These assumptions extend further though, and touch on the nature of language itself, where the, “‘metadiscursive regimes’ used to describe languages are firmly located in western linguistic and cultural suppositions [and] do not describe any real state of affairs in the world” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, p. 146). Language ideology, language planning, and language instruction are all a function of these “metadiscursive regimes.” Even some liberal or progressive traditions of thought around language such as, “language rights,” “mother tongues,” “multilingualism,” or “codeswitching” are based on the notion of discrete languages, and while clearly preferably to monolingual ideologies, they “operate within the same paradigm” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, p. 147). Decolonial and anti-racist work in critical applied linguistics approaches these paradoxes, asking how “the creative tension between languages can also bring forth new discourses” (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 1).

Studies have looked at how minoritized individuals experience and resist different forms of linguistic discrimination in and out of educational contexts (Baker-Bell, 2020; Choi, 2016; Lippi-Green, 1997; Et al.) and how people understand the workings of meaning-making and their own identity repertoires (Shin, 2019). Guerra’s work with multilingual college writing students shows that context and relationships are key to a critical translingual practice (2016) suggesting that by “demystifying the various approaches to language difference” (p. 232) we can help our students understand and articulate how these impact the language choices that they make. Similarly, Lu and Horner (2013) argue for a pedagogical approach to multilingualism that asks

students to consider “what kind of difference to attempt to make through their work with and on conventions” (p. 597) in a way that aligns with their own sense of language. Researchers responding to Garcia and Otheguy’s 2020 call for more studies of the embodied cultural nature of people’s communicative processes across modalities and sociopolitical and racialized contexts have engaged translanguaging in studies that reposition linguistic negotiation, through creative practices such as multilingual poetry writing (Kim & Park, 2020). Additionally, language narratives that interrogate colonialist agendas, translation narratives, and culturally localized textual modalities, demonstrate how creative and arts-based narrative forms are “generative sites for translanguaging practice and working toward social justice for immigrant families” (Arango & Link, 2021, p. 82). These approaches show, in practice, “a broadened understanding of semiotic resources, student repertoire expansion, and critical awareness development” (De Costa, et al., 2017 p. 465). Projects centering the everyday expressive practices of youth such as those of Mexican balladeers or corridistas, have called for “a shift in analysis toward the rich alternative worlds that are abundant beyond the white Western colonial gaze and logic” (de los Ríos, 2023, p. 309). Makalela and da Silva’s work (2023) demonstrates how “grounding translingual practice as indigenous to Brazil and South Africa” offers a situated understanding of “interdependent multilingualism under the model of ubuntu translanguaging” based on incompleteness, interdependency, and the vertical and horizontal flow of information which “epitomise complex multilingual encounters found in many complex sociolinguistic spaces” (p. 94). Research like this shifts the “locus of enunciation” (Grosfoguel, 2011) beyond the white Western colonial gaze and logic, prioritizing relevance to Global South discourses and epistemologies.

While these examples are transformative and hopeful it is important to acknowledge that, “the neoliberal TESOL industry reaps the benefits of critical scholarship and diversity and subsumes it like everything else” (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p.71). Rosa’s 2013 research tells a “cautionary tale” about the “unexamined relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism” through his textual analysis. In this study he identified how the popular discourses around language use shift according to the needs of the corporate culture of neoliberalism. The current systems demand workers who will autonomously act in the interest of corporate profits across global contexts and so a specific type of linguistic fluidity is now positioned as ideal (p. 509). The consequence of this, pointed out by Rosa’s work, is the potential for translanguaging, translingualism and plurilingualism to “become a new, institutionalized form of colonization as mobile plurilingual elites take advantage of the commodification of language to position themselves as ideal neoliberal subjects (p. 516).” This is why the work of scholars from the Global South is especially important in counteracting the exploitative and neoliberal uptake of translanguaging, calling into question “the validity of using Global North’s worldviews to describe local ways of sense-making” (Makalela & de Silva, 2023, p. 85) proposing instead ways of understanding multilingualism based on local cultural competencies. According to Canagarajah, the sense of vulnerability stemming from a history of oppression in the Global South can help us to “theorize competence, meanings, and learning in terms of vulnerability [and] take the field in directions away from control, instrumentality, and imposition to relationality, ethics, and co-existence valued by indigenous communities” (Canagarajah, 2022, p. 52). For example, in their Ubuntu translanguaging model and attendant Ubuntu pedagogy (p. 94) Makalela and da Silva draw on Indigenous cultural repertoires, “[countering] colonial and

unquestioned assumptions pertaining to multilingual education” (p. 84) by considering African and Brazilian sociolinguistic contexts predating colonialism.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

There is extensive scholarly work both practical and theoretical on providing curriculum and instruction that is culturally sustaining, and inclusive of home languages, cultures, countries of origin, and non-academic, non-Western and non-print based literacies (Bal & Arzubaga, 2014; García & Wei, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; et al.). The development and research of pedagogy in this area contributes to the decolonization of curricula and the “anti-racist struggle over whose knowledge and experiences should be included in the curriculum” (Au as cited in Motha, 2014, p.70) by using pedagogies through which students investigate and analyze community knowledge and sustain and extend this knowledge in the process. More specifically, culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017; 2014) is an approach that imagines educational settings in which the goal of teaching would be, “not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend and at times problematize their cultural practices and investments” (2017, p. 2). Building on scholarship and work in culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and other asset based approaches to education, CSP “embodies some of the best past and present research and practice in the resource pedagogy tradition and as term that supports the value of our multi-ethnic and multilingual present and future” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). In their work on tribal and educational sovereignty McCarty and Lee (2014) add the concept of revitalization to CSP, proposing culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP) stemming from their ethnographic work with Native American-serving schools in the U.S. Southwest, demonstrating ways in which educators can “destabilize dominant policy discourses” (p. 103). In

another addition to CSP, Kuttner's (2016) empirical work on the potential of artistic practice and hip-hop culture proposes "youth cultural organizing (YCO) as a form of culturally sustaining civic engagement pedagogy which engages communities through cultural and artistic expression" (p. 530). The dynamism and flexibility of CSP oriented research and pedagogy is reflected in how practitioners have been able to take it up and build on it for their own specific contexts.

Storytelling

One area that teachers have approached culture and language in the classroom is through storytelling. However, while much has been written on the use of folktales and myths in language education as a teaching tool (Lwin, 2016; Lwin & Marlina, 2018; Nagy, 2015) or on their implications for a "multicultural" approach to learning (Egan, 1983; Ramirez, 1999; Zabel, 1991), there is significantly less written about the potential of *student* generated stories or the multilingual and translingual potential of these stories for adult immigrant and refugee learners. It is clear that, "students are more able to tell their stories in the language that they speak, that they know, that gave life to those experiences, and that has the potential to convey their meaning" (Rivera, 1999, p. 489) and research has consistently shown how pedagogies which welcome students' home languages into the educational process create access points to the existing multigenerational family and community knowledge sources available to them (Guerra, 2015; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll, et al., 1992; Rivera, 1999), resources like stories and storytelling practices. However, simply asking students to utilize their home languages does not automatically create the conditions for reflective translingual engagement. Storytelling is increasingly being adopted as a pedagogical tool for incorporating student knowledge and language into the classroom (Chen Hsieh, 2021; Hinkel, 2006; Samuelson et al., 2018) but, as

Zhang-Wu points out, “students are often invited to produce their stories monolingually to enhance their English learning, instead of translingually to facilitate authentic multilingual meaning making and identity development” (2023, p. 2). Zhang-Wu’s work addresses this by encouraging students to take storytelling as an opportunity for multilingual and translingual meaning making. Her research focuses on demonstrating how storytelling can function “as a form of restoration and peace” (p. 3) which helps students to embrace their multilingual and multicultural identities in ways that extend students’ agency and uptake of translingualism beyond the multilingual classroom environment (p. 14).

Multilingual storytelling can also extend in digital spaces and projects. The recent questioning of what it means to “decolonize” digital humanities has been brought to the fore by decolonial and postcolonial scholarship pushing for “methods that foreground intersectional engagement with race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, disability, and other axes of identity that shape knowledge production” (Risam, 2018, p. 78) like language for instance. In her ethnographic classroom work with young Latine learners, de los Rios calls for serious and thoughtful preparation, highlighting how translanguaging design is essential to creating a classroom ecology where students can “begin to break out of the monoglossic confines of school writing in urgent sociopolitical times” (2022, p. 390). Her work demonstrates how participation in multilingual podcasting projects can not only “[mobilize] bilingualism for literacy instruction” but also contest racist narratives, reclaim identities and create new opportunities for solidarity (2022, p. 378). Additionally, the Indigenous language and cultural reclamation work done by the 68 Voces - 68 Corazones shows how multiple languages can interact in the process of online storytelling.

It is however, important to keep in mind that, while digital media offers ever greater numbers of people across the world the ability to share and access information in real time, scholars have cautioned that “they can also result in inappropriate diffusion of culturally sensitive content” (Stanton, et al., 2017, p. 248). The focus on decision making, ongoing relationships as well as ongoing informed consent and alignment with community should remain at the center as technology creates new possibilities and new challenges to the telling and sharing of stories.

Dissertation Structure Overview

I am not making generalizable assertions or claims as such in this dissertation. It is not intended to be a critique of language teaching and learning—or even a new pedagogy—but a contribution to the understanding of the ways in which our relationships with language, with stories and with each other can be sites of care and resistance. The chapters that follow are intended to both raise questions about the nature of relationships that are built in the process of sharing stories and to support thinking about how to navigate the tensions of decolonial commitments while teaching a language of empire. The storytelling translationships project and my analysis of it in this dissertation suggest various ways that multilingual digital storytelling in community can be an act of resistance to instrumentalist approaches to English which persist in presenting students with an idealized white speaking and listening subject.

In this chapter I have positioned myself in relationship language and language teaching and reviewed some of the scholarship that situates this project. The following chapters are structured as follows. In Chapter 2 I grapple with an approach to theory that attempts to fold together overlapping strands of knowledge and practice in ways that center the interrelatedness of theory and practice. Chapter 3 describes the dual approach to methodology that I undertook in

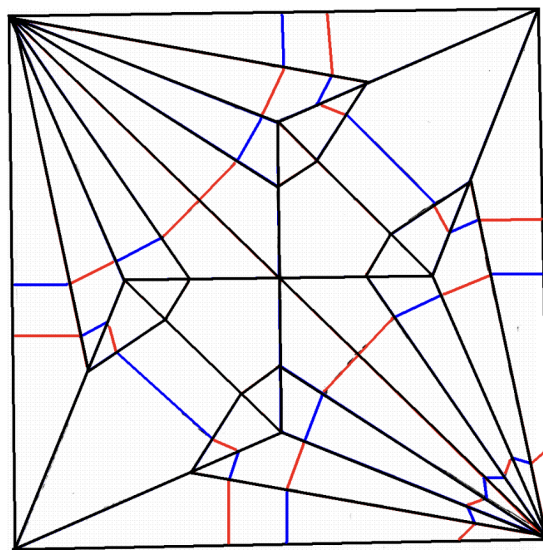
this project, elaborating on how the overarching origami heuristic helped me in my efforts to align the methods and analysis as much as possible with collaborative and participatory values while at the same time accounting for the individual nature of a dissertation. I also discuss my project's public facing scholarship, the context and the design of the study and how I approached issues of authorship vs. anonymity. Both chapters 4 and 5 combine "results," "analysis," and "findings." I do this intentionally to resist distancing myself from my observations and interpretation. In this way I hope not only to enhance the narrative writing process but to enhance the research by embedding it within the broader story, providing immediate context and grounding the themes in a coherent way. In Chapter 4 I orient my analysis with 山折 (yama ori), the mountain fold and 谷折り (Tani ori) the valley fold, as a way of representing how connecting our experiences of land and place to our experiences of storytelling created a crease, an initial pathway towards a dialogic understanding of Indigenous sovereignty in the Northwest. In Chapter 5 the petal fold, 花弁折り (Hanabira ori), illustrates how multilingual storytelling expanded opportunities for relational identity construction and offer a conceptualization of *transnational identity-in-story* and *identity-in-relation* as potential examples of what Lugones called 'world'-traveling and loving perception (1987). Chapter 6 departs from an analysis which centers my own interpretations and instead presents two complete podcast episodes from the translationship.net project as collaborative knowledge building. By inviting the reader to listen as opposed to reading this chapter I attempt to present the collaborative, multimodal part of this project in a format that reflects that collaboration and multimodal nature. Finally, in Chapter 7 I offer some concluding reflections on my own methodological and pedagogical learnings emerging from the project.

Origami Prelude 展開図 (Tenkaizu) Crease pattern

In origami 展開図 (tenkaizu), the “crease pattern,” refers to the underlying design of a figure. Every origami model “hides” a crease pattern and it has become a popular way of sharing complex folding designs. For some origami designers the crease pattern is “a form of external memory: a way of recording one’s ideas and the relationships among those ideas in a level of detail too great to carry around all at once in one’s mind” (Lang, n.d.). The image below shows the crease pattern for perhaps the most recognizable origami model, the crane. The lines in the diagram represent how to transform information into form.

Figure 6

Orizuru (crane) Crease Pattern



Conventional origami instructions describe how to create a model with a sequence of linear step-by-step instructions. Crease patterns however, instead of functioning directly as an instruction or tutorial, are more like open-ended puzzles, with no single way of reading any pattern. For me, this embodied metaphor makes the abstraction of theory tangible, it counteracts the separation of the medium, from the process, from the message as they are all intertwined.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Challenges and Orientations

"Theory's cool, but theory with no practice ain't shit. You got to have both of them—the two go together" (Fred Hampton, 1968).

As the tenkaizu metaphor might suggest, I have an uncertainty about my relationship to theory. I feel a close connection and a deep gratitude to various critical frameworks and scholars who have contributed so much to my ability to name and describe the construction of the world around me. At the same time Shepherd points to how and why decolonial scholars might refuse the label of theory, arguing that “in the world of the professionalized disciplines in the neoliberal academy, theory becomes a specialist language that marks off techno-scientific and critical elites” which, “follows trends in fashion” and “becomes a kind of chore” (2020, p. 315). Or, as hooks challenges, theory is used, “to set up unnecessary and competing hierarchies of thought which reinscribe the politics of domination by designating work as either inferior, superior, or more or less worthy of attention” (hooks, 1994, p. 64). In this dissertation I want to approach theory in a way that distinguishes it from these competing hierarchies and the definitions which disconnect it from practice, as disembodied thought separate from life. This leads me to flexible “theorizing” which resists orthodoxy and “the neoliberal impulse of the academy to be entrepreneurial and devise theories and labels to brand scholarship” (Canagarajah, 2022, p. 42). hooks tells us, “theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end” (1994, p. 61). In order to contribute to adult language learning research and communities in ways that align with these feelings and commitments to healing and liberation I ground myself and this project in

decoloniality (Deumert et al., 2020; Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Quijano, 2000; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walsh & Mignolo, 2018; et al.), feminist (Downie & Llewellyn, 2012; Keller, 1997; Koggel, et al., 2022; 2025) and Indigenous (Donald, 2016; Tynan, 2021; Wildcat & Voth, 2023; Wilson, 2008) understandings of relationality and their intersections (Koukkanen, 2025; Starblanket & Stark, 2018), paying close attention to the theory building role of storytelling, storywork, and critical storying (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) and ultimately how dialogic (Freire, 1970) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Paris, 2017) bring theory and practice together . This theoretical resistance/orientation is informed by work in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Charmaz, 2005; 2006; Denzin, 2010) and Indigenous Research (Wilson, 2008; Smith 1999; 2021; et al.).

Synergies with Grounded Theory

The introduction of grounded theory in social research proposed that theory can be developed from research grounded in data as opposed to proposing testable hypotheses from existing theories and that ultimately, “generating a theory involves a *process* of research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1968/1999, p. 6) [emphasis added]. However, it has been pointed out the “discovery” of grounded theory (the literal the title of Glaser and Strauss’ seminal book), implies a positivistic stance which assumes the capacity of the researcher “to grasp what is going on in a social setting” based on “the independent existence of something from the mind” (Coşkun, 2020, p. 2). In contrast, constructivist approaches which build on grounded theory principles (Charmaz, 2006) open up the possibility for the co-construction of theory and knowledge and a critical analysis of the context in which the research is occurring. This understanding of grounded theory lends itself to the development of integrated theoretical concepts based on practice, relationships and interconnectedness.

In his qualitative work on moral inquiry for social justice, Denzin suggested a need “for a dialog between grounded, critical, pragmatic, and indigenous theories of social structure” (2010, p. 296). Tuck and McKenzie also acknowledged how grounded theory and Indigenous approaches have areas of synergy, however, at the same time they point out that much still “remains unresponsive to the critiques raised by Indigenous scholars” (2014, p. 42). I hope that the folding together, merging and focus on reciprocity that comes from a relational analysis based on storytelling responds to some of these critiques and the sometimes apolitical and/or positivistic stance that persists, even in grounded theory, which prioritizes “data, basic underlying social processes, and causal narratives” (Denzin, 2010, p. 298).

While there are important distinctions and tensions to consider, both grounded theory and Indigenous research, hold theory, method and analysis as interwoven, emergent, and potentially collective endeavors, where the assumption is “that neither data nor theories are discovered [since] we are a part of the world we study and the data we collect” (Wilson, 2008, p. 10). Taking this plural approach to theory speaks to “a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions” (Mbembe, 2016, p. 37) and a decolonial resistance to positioning theory in any way that constitutes a new hegemonic paradigm or school (Shepherd, 2020). Instead, theoretical synergy acknowledges theory as a “multi-stranded project, existing among many other schools, strands of thinking and projects, in a world characterized by ‘pluri-versality as a universal project’” (Walsh, 2020, p. 316). Pluriversality involves different theories “meeting” one another to reach a common goal of critical knowledge production which is manifested in the practice of theoretical synergy (Meghji, 2022). Below I outline the multi-stranded theoretical and sensitizing concepts that give structure to the story I am trying to tell in this research.

Theoretical Encounters with Coloniality and its Prefixes

The challenges posed by Tuck and Yang's seminal 2012 article "Decolonization is not a metaphor" are unflinching in detailing the ways that the theorizing decolonization simply as a metaphor for social justice "kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (p. 3). I am rightly "unsettled," absorbed, and disturbed by this challenge, made very conscious of my own ambiguous positionality, as benefiting from and advancing the settler colonial enterprise of English language teaching and academic research. I am disturbed further by it as I consider the implications both for myself and for others who at one time or another in history were forcibly displaced by violence whether that violence be centuries of enslavement, wars, or economic insecurity and climate change caused by global capitalism. In these emotional responses I recognize the "pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches" that hooks writes about (1994, p. 43) and the anxiety that Behar draws attention to in "feelings of loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it" (Behar, 1996, p. 3). This "longing" though, is also opportunity, as marie brown suggests, of "having the will to imagine and implement something else [because] we are living in the ancestral imagination of others, with their longing for safety and abundance, a longing that didn't include us, or included us as enemy, fright, other" (2017, p. 17). I am still learning how to imagine in these ways and to be in relationship with decolonization and with Indigenous epistemologies in an authentic and respectful way. While I am clearly not able to speak and research "from Indigenous struggles and postulates of knowledge", my approach to theory in this dissertation attempts, as Walsh suggests, "to work with Indigenous frameworks in conversation with other forms of critical thought and

liberation-based theory and praxis” (2018, p. 73). These include decoloniality and its contradictions.

The traditions of thought associated with both postcolonialism and decoloniality are long-standing and diverse, developed from “politics of knowledge production [that] emerge out of political developments contesting the colonial world order established by European empires” (Bhabra, 2014, p. 119). These fields of study challenge the “insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe” and suggested the “necessity of considering the emergence of the modern world in the broader histories of colonialism, empire, and enslavement” (Bahmbra, 2014, p. 115). But, as distinguished by Maldonado-Torres, “while the emergence of postcolonial studies is connected to theories of literature and culture in the secular humanities, what is typically recognized as decolonial theorizing came into being in largely inter- and trans-disciplinary contexts that included scholars, artists, activists, and community organizers who were critical of modern western secular ideologies” (2022). These decolonial scholars examine how the “epistemic colonial differences projected to a universal scale disguise the locality of their enunciation” (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p. 188). In other words, how colonial practices and discourses of superiority distorted and continue to distort the production of knowledge through the colonial matrix of power, economy, authority, gender/sexuality and knowledge (Quijano, 2000), working to, “classify the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 13). Central to decoloniality is a challenge to the inextricable link between the rhetoric of modernity and the corresponding logics of coloniality. Modernity “is said to have provided the stimulus for the industrial revolution, the philosophy of liberalism, the development of disciplines in the sciences and the development of

public education” but it was not the end of empire, decoloniality maintains that “imperialism underpinned and was critical to these developments” (Smith, 2021, p. 68). The story of modernity told by Europe gave birth to the belief and the discourses of progress in which modernity is the universal goal, one that has been achieved in “the West”, and for which the rest of the world must logically and necessarily strive. Epistemologically speaking this resulted in “European local knowledge and histories projected to global designs” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 17). But, as Anibal Quijano points out, “nothing is less rational, finally than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular *ethnie* should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an *ethnie* is called Western Europe because this is actually to pretend to impose a provincialism as universalism” (2007, p. 177). The “*ethnie*” of Western Europe alluding to the compulsion of Western scholarship to position European enlightenment thinking and western understandings of rationality not only as emerging from a particular ethnic and geographic origin, but also, as the only means of understanding the truth and the meaning of existence. However, through forms of epistemic disobedience like storytelling, “decolonial scholars research local efforts to encroach upon coloniality, reflecting epistemological, political, and ethical projects unwilling to concede to ‘domination’ or a ‘crooked rhetoric’ of modernity” (Garcia & Baca, 2019, p. 20). A decolonial lens for research in the teaching and learning of a language of empire interrogates the geohistorical, sociopolitical, and neoliberal location of the abstract universals that English language education and research has entailed and attempts to imagine alternatives.

While the decolonial turn in critical studies has undoubtedly generated a wealth of significant scholarship, decolonial scholarship and theorizing has retained aspects of elitism and exclusivity regarding what constitutes decoloniality. Ahmad identifies three sources that contribute to this situation,

the prioritisation of internal disciplinary concerns at the expense of attending to questions that emerge out of political struggles against colonialism; a set of inherited assumptions about acceptable forms of social theory that exclude [certain] texts as sources of intellection; and a reliance on overly schematic understandings of what constitutes southern thought in ways that flatten the plural and contradictory anti-colonial networks and ideas (Ahmad, 2023, p. 55).

Within decolonial studies there is a need for ongoing critical reflection, reevaluation and caution against neoliberal compulsion that inevitably “turns radical ideas into profitable enterprises, if not appropriating them to the status quo” (Canagarajah, 2022, p. 26). By reconsidering the prefix de- in decoloniality, Motha (2020; 2025) suggests a position that labors against colonialism with the prefix anti-. *Anti-coloniality* works “to restore Indigenous epistemologies, practices, languages, and relationality” (Kubota & Motha, 2025, p. 688). Moving towards anti-coloniality requires that we look beyond logocentrism and challenge binary hierarchies including between teacher/student, researcher/participant, writer/audience, etc. One important way to do this is to center relationships and relationality in research.

Relationality Centering Indigenous Feminist Understandings

Relationality is an important framework for decolonial research and is fundamental to Indigenous and feminist approaches to research and knowledge making as well as to challenging neoliberal capitalism’s obsession with and isolation of the individual consumer and/or producer of knowledge. A relational research stance centers our inherent connectivity with the world and those around, as “both a theoretical framework and an ontological assumption” (Cruz, 2024, p. 121) it can be antithetical to a divisive and isolating world.

While Western sociology looks to Georg Simmel as a “father” or “philosophical inspirator” of relational thinking and relationality in social theory (Cruz, 2024; Christodoulou, 2022; Ruggieri, 2017) it is important to note that this kind of understanding has existed in complex and nuanced ways across many cultures since time immemorial. For me, feminist (Downie & Llewellyn, 2012; Keller, 1997; Koggel, et al., 2022; 2025) and Indigenous (Donald, 2016; Tynan, 2021; Wildcat & Voth, 2023; Wilson, 2008) understandings of relationality and their intersection (Arvin, 2019; Koukkanen, 2025; Starblanket & Stark, 2018; TallBear, 2015), provide important theoretical guideposts that align with counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist practices, centering community building, collective action, human and more-than-human connection, and resistance to market driven understandings of relationships while at the same time remembering and imagining alternative ways of being and doing.

Emerging from the understanding that, the “capacity to form and maintain relationships, which has received little attention in the Western philosophical tradition, is just as much of an achievement as autonomy, and just as important for moral maturity” (Keller, 1997, p. 155), feminist relational theoretical perspectives consider the self as deeply connected to, as well as comprised by, its relations with others. Recent scholarship on contemporary feminist relational theory identifies eight distinguishing characteristics: 1) an examination of and opposition to oppression; 2) a focus on interpersonal relationships and care ethics as situated in structural relations; 3) an approach to individualism that looks to “uncover the role of norms, structures, and power and draw out the implications of these for how we understand individuals and their effects on what individuals can be and do”; 4) interdisciplinary empirical investigation; 5) emancipatory aims which not only attempt to represent and theorize but to transform; 6) non-ideal theory which pays attention to the current conditions, context, and circumstances of

relationships; 7) epistemological accounting for relationships of power at all levels which have implications for accounts of knowledge; 8) a plural approach to frameworks and methods (Koggel, et al., 2022, pp. 4-7). Additionally, any discussion of feminist theory, relational or otherwise, must acknowledge and take into account the significance of Black feminist thought (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Hill Collins, 2000; et al.) which foregrounds the “intersection of racism, sexism and capitalism as structures that both constrain black women’s lives and generate resistance” (Hamilton, 2021, p. 198). The work of Black feminist scholars helps us to see that social relations are structured by racism, in addition to sexism, heteronormativity, neoliberal capitalism, and other colonial systems of domination and control.

I know that a relational framework informed by Indigenous perspectives is apposite to the goals and values of my study but I am cautious when drawing on Indigenous theories. I wonder about my limitations and responsibilities in relating these to work with communities of multilingual, transnational learners which may or may not include Indigenous members. At the same time, I am compelled to recognize and acknowledge how I have been influenced and transformed by the work of Indigenous scholars, both theoretically and materially, and how this directly impacts my work as a researcher and as an educator. Ultimately, theorizing relationality informed by Indigenous thought is a way to continue unlearning colonial logics within myself and to pursue a more holistic understanding of how our distinct stories, memories and experiences position us in relation to one another.

Indigeneity and Indigenous epistemology are not monoliths, "Indigenous thinking practices are fluid, place-based and keenly responding to dynamic conditions" (Gould, et al., 2023, pp. 1-2). In education research, Indigenous educators have articulated how Indigenous relationality accounts for the way that “pasts, presents, and futures involve living and being in

reciprocal, consensual, and sustainable relations with the natural world, which includes human relationships to each other as well as with lands, waters, landscapes, atmospheres, and plant and animal nations” (McCoy, et al., 2020). In his work on research as ceremony, Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson expresses ways that relationships both shape reality and are reality themselves and how this apprehension of reality is critical to knowledge creation which maintains accountability to all our relations (2008). However, this does not mean all our relations are the same. Ethical relationality, according to Papaschase Cree scholar and educator Dwayne Donald, perceives relationality in a way that “does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (2012, p. 535).

This concern for the other is central to a feminist Indigenous understanding of relationality. An extensive genealogy of thinkers, artists, writers, scholars, activists, etc. have contributed to understandings of relationality from an Indigenous feminist perspective. Kim Tallbear of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate identifies, “care for the subject” and “standing with” as core concepts for theorizing Indigenous feminism (2015, p. 4). She notes that while the concept of “giving back” emphasizes a binary relationship, the practice of “standing with” works towards co-constitution of multidimensional claims and a way to connect with other intellectual projects. Similarly, Kanaka Maoli scholar Maile Arvin, writes that building alliances grounded in “Indigenous feminist world building, in concert with other forms of intersectional feminism, holds the promise to bring forth not only new methods of combatting settler colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, but also new relationships that could make such fights more sustainable for all of us” (2019, p. 314).

Rather than one isolated theory, Indigenous feminist relationality, and relationality more broadly, is fittingly better understood as a network of theoretical assumptions that place relationships at the center not only of analysis, but of practice and method, offering “us an ontological way to understand existence as necessarily built upon relationships” (Cruz, 2024, p. 121). As these complex and layered dimensions make clear, relationality as a framework goes beyond simply having good relationships with research participants, “placing the highest value on relationships as a research principle is a necessary part of relational research, but it is not sufficient. We must also articulate how relationality informs our critical thinking” (Wildcat & Voth, 2023 p. 479). For me, the critical thread that runs through, or between or maybe outwards from this web of relational theory and relational theory in connection to practice is storytelling, “stories are born of connections within the world, and are thus recounted relationally” (Kovach, 2009, p. 94). In the context of this educational study based on storytelling, the cultivation of meaningful relationships between story and learners and between storytellers and listeners is foundational across all stages. Storytelling emphasizes both intersubjectivity and relationality and is in contrast to modernist and Western liberal understandings of the individual as the primary unit of analysis.

Storytelling and Critical Storying as Theory Building

The underlying patterns and creases that guide the thinking in this dissertation understand theory as inseparable from storytelling, relationships and lived experiences. More specifically, as a process through which we relate, study, learn, and practice, storytelling constitutes an epistemic, theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological lens. Work in this area has proposed that “storytelling is an experience in dialectic theory-building wherein interlocutors jointly construct, critique, and reconstruct theories” (Ochs, et al., 1992, p. 8). In the case of this project, this

process is based on relationships with one another, with language, and with the stories told. This type of narrative learning and theory building through relationships and stories is “learning while storytelling” (Hakanurmi, 2017, p. 152). The act of sharing stories possesses an explanatory power that gives insight into what is meaningful in diverse communities and for individual community members. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that hearing and “obtaining” stories has cultural, institutional and political implications,

It is not just scholars who want to obtain stories; police officers, medical and psychiatric diagnosticians, journalists, refugee agents, shamans, social workers, state and corporate bureaucrats, courts, and human rights workers want stories too. Interview narratives have been put to use not just by anthropologists and folklorists, but also by colonizers seeking to comprehend “the native mind,” by nationalists wanting to mobilize support around an imagined “spirit of the people,” and by those promoting regional and state articulations of identity. (Narayan & George, 2003 pp. 137-138)

Considering this, how do we engage responsibly with storytelling? In this project it is by learning from diverse power laden storytelling forms. Some ancestral, like the traditional Japanese rakugo, a comedic form of storytelling performance in which “one rakugo-ka plays all characters, distinguishing gender, age, and social position through voice, posture, and gaze” (Shores, 2021), an apt metaphor for how language constructs meaning and identity. Or the Douen epistemology of Caribbean memory and digital archives proposed by Browne (2021) which explores how stories of haunting aid, “in the navigation of temporal, spatial, and existential factors that shape meaning in our lives, including the practice of archiving (p. 41). Other forms are based on activist work and scholarship in counterstory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Martinez, 2020; et al.) which takes seriously the ways that people of color

have, “been telling stories all along, but some stories are elevated to the status of theory, scholarship, and literature, while, too often, minoritized perspectives are relegated to marginalized or overlooked ‘cultural rhetorics’ methods or genres” (Martinez, 2020 p. 1).

Whether ancestral or critical, we also engage responsibly by returning to relationships, understanding that meaningful investigative, theory-building storytelling is co-constructed. That the more continuous and authentic personal encounters can be, the less likely it will be that these encounters will be extractive or harmful.

Like relationality, my understanding and application of storytelling is informed in large part by shared threads across definitions offered by Indigenous scholars and storytellers (Brayboy [Lumbee], 2005; Kimmerer [Potawatomi], 2013; Simpson [Mississauga Nishnaabeg], 2017; Archibald [Sto:lo], 2008; Silko [Laguna Pueblo], 1981; et al.) whose work shows us how storytelling is contingent and connected across social, historical, cultural, familial, personal, ecological, spiritual, and material strands. However, I am also similarly cautious here, especially as a non-Indigenous person, about overstepping or conflating what I see as the broader theory building potential of storytelling with Indigenous storytelling which is something else requiring additional layers of consideration. In this sense, I am concerned with how to account for the more consequential/elemental nature of Indigenous storytelling which is explicitly “not fairy tales or entertaining stories for children [but] lived values that form the basis for Indigenous governance and regeneration” and “experiential knowledge and living histories [which] comprise part of the core teachings that Indigenous families transmit to future generations” (Cornassel, et al. 2009 pp. 137-138). I hope that responsibly and respectfully attending to these histories and teachings, theoretically, pedagogically, and methodologically, is an opportunity to situate learning experiences in relation to the Indigenous peoples and lands that we all occupy. As a

teacher and researcher I feel a commitment to positioning my research and my work with students in such a way that we are not only learning about, but learning from Indigenous stories, knowledges, and scholarship. Thus attempting to disrupt some of the hegemonic practices of English language teaching and learning and making room for broadened ontologies and epistemologies.

Storytelling as theory building is necessary because Western theoretical models are fundamentally inappropriate for application to Indigenous stories, and I would argue, to other forms of cultural and personal storytelling. In fact, the insistence on reading stories through Western theoretical lenses “violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest” (Blaeser, 1993, p. 55). Instead, approaching storytelling as “storywork” (Archibald, 2008; McCarty, et al., 2018), “provides both a theory and a guide for praxis” (McCarty, et al., 2018, p.168) as a combined inquiry and learning process. Within this process, “the questions of the researchers, now learners, may change depending on the context and what they need to know and can understand [and] the skills, knowledge, understanding, and perhaps insight gained over a lengthy period must be shared with others in a manner that incorporates cultural respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence” (Archibald, 2008, p. 38). In her work with Coast Salish elders learning from and about storytelling Archibald articulated seven principles of Indigenous storywork, 1) Respect, 2) Responsibility, 3) Reciprocity, 4) Reverence, 5) Holism, 6) Interrelatedness, and 7) Synergy (2008, p. ix). Since then she has gone on to focus specifically on how four of these, respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity can help a person to become “story ready.” Acting with respect means acquiring knowledge of the purpose of stories, their frameworks and any protocols, it combines learning, doing and listening. Responsibility with stories is shown by learning and practicing protocols, such as acknowledging the source of the

story whether that is a person, a culture or a geographical area. Reverence has a subjectivity to it that makes it difficult to describe, but it calls for “a story environment that lets the spiritual nature of the story breathe and facilitates the development and use of spirituality within the storytelling or meaning-making experiences” (Archibald, 2020, p. 48). Finally, reciprocity involves the continuation of Indigenous stories, both the teller and the listener keep the story alive, the teacher/teller through the telling and the work related to the story, the listener by making meaning (2020, p. 47-49).

Reciprocity is also central to critical storying (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), alongside these epistemological traditions and theoretical orientations in scholarship on storytelling and Indigenous storywork, “is the convergence of theory and practice, theory and method” taken up among participants, researchers, students, colleagues, and friends. (pp. 377-378). This approach looks to an “interweaving and merging” process via the inclusion of conversations around the interpretations, a dialogic spiral which “supports the construction of an emergent story as a humanizing research process co-created by the sharing of stories” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 381). Critical storying as theory and research method is guided by relationships of respect and reciprocity, “as we exchange stories, we engage in a process of storying – of being/becoming in relation to those who impact us” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 379). Critical storying seeks to bring new theoretical perspectives and voices into academic spaces through storytelling, personal narratives and experiences and the co-construction of knowledge/theory. Connecting back to the principles outlined by Archibald, critical storying involves sharing not only our “participants” stories but our own as well, respecting and reciprocating each other in the process.

Dialogic and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, Connecting Theory and Practice

Ultimately, my research does not find its base in theory, instead it starts with pedagogy, how it is implicated in the production and reproduction of forms of oppression but also in actional practices that imagine and work towards different worlds. Dialogic theories in pedagogy and research (Freire & Shor, 1987; Hall et al., 2005; Hones, 2014; Morrell, 2004; Schleppegrell, 1997; Wong, 2006) have antecedents, beyond the traditional Western focus on Greek rhetoric and discourse, in Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas. The genealogy of dialogic scholarship also spans movements from “20th century pedagogies of liberation such as those of Paolo Freire and Mao Zedong, and the cultural historical psychology of Lev Vygotsky and dialogic translinguistic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin” (Wong, 2006, pp. xvii-xviii). Dialogic orientations to research and education respond to Freire’s critique of the banking model of education promoting “a form of pedagogy that encourages socially constructed meaning, the explicit affirmation of the social worlds of students, explicit critique, and the creation of authentic work products” (Morrell, 2004, p.91).

By conceiving of dialogue as an epistemological relationship, “the object to be known in one place links the two [or more] cognitive subjects, leading them to reflect together on the object” (Wong, 2006, p.3). This approach to research encompasses “methods that are at once ethnographic, participatory, and narrative [and] seeks to engage researchers and participants in dialogues that shed light on economic, political, social, and cultural relationships” (Hones, 2014, p. 23) in context. Adding to this, Ibrahim eloquently calls for research to be “an act of love” (2014). In his work he develops an “I-Thou research ethic” stemming in part from philosophies of Buber and proposes research as love and dialogue as methodology, emphasizing relationships between researcher and “participant.” For Ibrahim, genuine dialogue can occur even in contexts

of intellectual, social and historical differences if approached with humility and critical reflexivity, “but for dialogue to take place, especially ‘genuine dialogue,’ it requires a quality of communion, a sense of time, place, and above all love” (2014, p. 13). In this sense, it is this mutually transformative dialogic relationship, not theory, data or results, that is the ultimate aim of this type of research, “the process is ongoing, an endeavor aimed not at a final and transparent understanding of the Other or of the self, but at continued communication, at an ever-widening understanding of both” (Sarris, 1993, qtd. In Hones, 2014, p. 34).

Dialogic inquiry relates closely to culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) as a theoretical and practical approach to teaching and learning which interrogates the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society and imagines educational settings in which the goal of teaching would be, “not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend and at times problematize their cultural practices and investments” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 2). Building on scholarship and work in culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and other asset based approaches to education, CSP “embodies some of the best past and present research and practice in the resource pedagogy tradition and as term that supports the value of our multi-ethnic and multilingual present and future (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Projects of teaching and learning that are culturally sustaining take on different forms in different contexts but certain key features are “a critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices and knowledges, student and community agency and input, historicized content and instruction, a capacity to contend with internalized oppressions, and an ability to curricularize all of this in learning settings” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 14). By practicing and researching CSP through storytelling with adult learners I

engage with these key features and produce something which I hope will be ongoing and collective.

Figure 7

Folded Orizuru (crane)

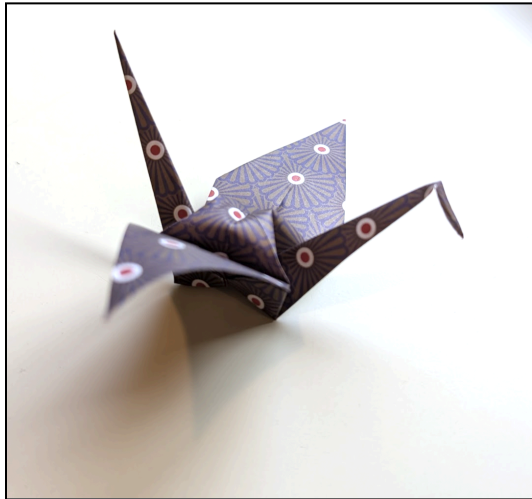


Figure 8

Unfolded Orizuru with Visible Crease Pattern



I wished to fold the laws of nature, the dignity of life, and the expression of affection into my work.

(Attributed to origami master, Akira Yoshizawa)

Origami Prelude: 折鶴 (Orizuru) Folded Crane and 連鶴 (Renzuru) Linked Cranes

The paper crane is perhaps the most famous and recognizable example of origami worldwide. The crane is known as orizuru 折鶴 (Figure 9) when an individual crane is made and renzuru 連鶴 (Figure 10) when many cranes are folded from a single sheet of paper in ways that connect them all in different complex formations.

The orizuru is technically relatively simple, requiring approximately 20 precise folds to create. Traditionally it represents longevity and prosperity as it was said in Japan that the crane lived for 1,000 years but, it has taken on broader and more significant political and cultural meaning since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the internment of Japanese in the US during WWII. Today it functions as a symbol of peace, healing, and in some cases solidarity and liberation (“Never Again,” 2025). Its critical function resides in how it is used and for what purposes.

Renzuru refers to origami cranes which are folded from a single sheet of paper, joined together at the corners without glue. These configurations are created using a square or rectangular sheet of paper with small squares inside partially cutting the edges. The squares are kept joined at the corner to avoid separation. Renzuru are folded using washi paper which is made by hand from the inner bark of native Japanese mulberry trees. The fibers of industrially made western paper all run in the same direction making it weaker and easy to tear. In contrast, the fibers of washi paper run in all different directions, overlapping and creating a flexible, yet much stronger paper, capable of withstanding repeated folding and unfolding. Washi paper makes the delicate connections possible.

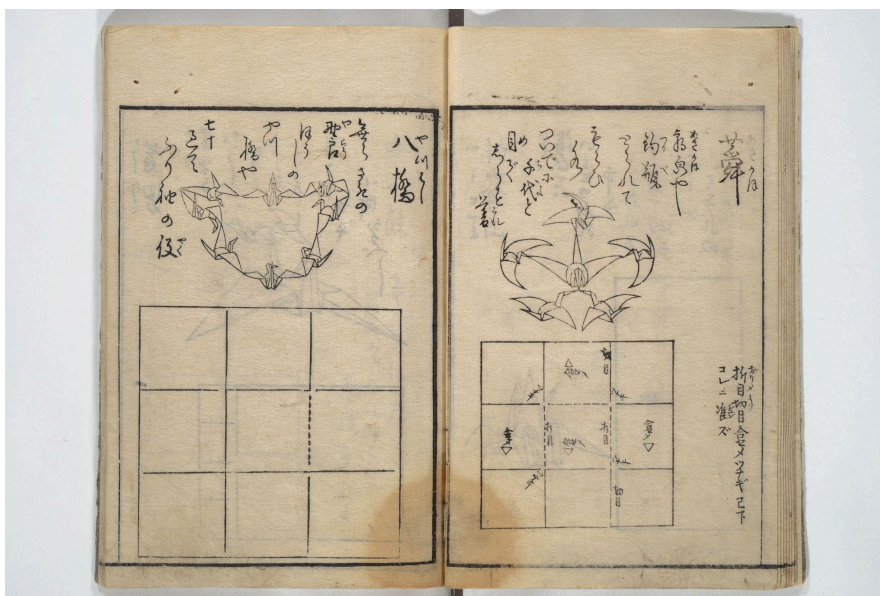
Figure 9

(Orizuru) “Young Girls Making Paper Cranes”. Terazaki, 1905. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 10

(Renzuru) Attributed to Shimokōbe Shūsui 下河辺 拾水, 1797. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Chapter 3: Methodology

As stated in Chapter 1, a key component of my research and the questions that drive it is centering our care for each other and the relationships as the most important work of the research, not the product, the language practices or the data generated. My research questions ask, “how are relationships / ‘translationships’ between people and across cultures, languages, and world views built, made sense of, and sustained in, through, and across collaborative multilingual/translingual, multimodal storytelling spaces in adult language learning?” This chapter outlines the ways in which I attempted to respond.

The methodology of my project is orientated by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015) as discussed partially in Chapter 2, critical and participatory ethnography, humanizing research (Fredricks, 2019; Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014; Paris & Winn, 2014; et al.) and storytelling pedagogy/methodology informed by Indigenous Research Methods (IRM) (Archibald, 2008; Archibald, et al., 2019; Chilisa, 2012; Kerr & Adamov Ferguson, 2021; Kovach, 2009; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999; 2021; Wilson, 2008; et al.). In this chapter I outline these underpinnings and I discuss my project’s public facing scholarship. I then describe the context and the design of the study. In the discussion of my study design I elaborate on how I approached issues of authorship vs. anonymity and the choice to use the term “co-storyteller” instead of “participant,” both decisions intentionally made to highlight transparency and the network of relationships between myself, my collaborators and the project. I go on to describe how the origami heuristic helped me with my methodological struggles between the individual nature of the dissertation and the collaborative aspirations of the project by providing a dual approach to the data and analysis. Finally, I consider the consent and security aspects of the project, alluding to complexities that will be articulated in greater detail in chapter seven.

The qualitative approach that I take in this study looks to critical and participatory ethnography, humanizing research and the storytelling methodologies of Indigenous research, how they overlap and intersect in ways that highlight the potential of research to open up spaces of collaborative knowledge making and prioritize relationships in the process. They provide the kind of foundation I needed to think about what it might look like to do multilingual, multimodal and collaborative research. Critical ethnography examines dominant discourses, addressing “processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (Madison, 2020, p. 4), while participatory approaches engage community members as co-researchers to create a more inclusive and democratic approach to knowledge making (Pine, 2009). Humanizing research is a participatory method which moves towards work “that is predicated on the nurturing of relationships of care and dignity among researchers and participants” (Paris, 2011 quoted in Savage, et al., 2021 p. 2). Relationships also define Indigenous research methods, “Indigenous research methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). Unlike traditional research where data is collected from participants by a researcher for their own research goals, these combined methodologies require the researcher to critically engage with the research process, situate themselves within it and consider whose interests are served by that process. They also prioritize where possible the engagement of participants in the process, including brainstorming ideas, providing feedback and making decisions about the outcomes. The emphasis is on collaborative creation, on working together to develop ideas and knowledge, in the case of this project in order to shape the language learning experience and contribute to meaningful change. At the same time I recognize that my interests in this project and in teaching the class are distinct from those of the co-storytellers who joined me and that these interests are

embedded in specific institutional contexts, the University, my dissertation, etc. which direct my gaze. .

Critical and Participatory Ethnography

Broadly speaking, critical ethnography offers certain pathways that are “apposite for exploring the diversity, complexity, contradictions, contest, and (dis)continuities inherent within the actual language practices of students, along with the varied – often discriminatory, sometimes emancipatory – institutionalized educational responses to them” (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022, p. 133). As a qualitative research methodology critical ethnography aims to investigate power structures and social inequities, exploring human experiences, going beyond the ahistorical perspective of traditional ethnography. By focusing on the ways in which power and inequity are reproduced and challenged in social contexts it attempts to disrupt “the status quo, and unsettle both neutrality and taken for granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

Through this project I explored collaborative approaches to critical ethnography with the goal of creating caring/humanizing research environments for a community of co-learners/co-researchers in order to find ways to critically examine the world together by sharing stories. We did this through a combination of collective and individual storying layered with translation, interpretation, dialogue, interviews, writing, and digital modalities. In doing this I want to show how multilingual, multimodal storytelling research impacts not only the type of data collected but also the relationships that are formed in the process between those involved (“researcher”, “participant”, “storyteller” “translator” “audience” etc.).

Collaborative approaches and relationships in research necessarily blur the separations between and across various constructed binaries, pedagogy/research, teacher/student,

participant/researcher, academia/community etc. Participation in research is a paradigm and encompasses a wide range of research traditions and methods including, participatory action research (PAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Pine, 2009; et al.). The origins of PAR are traditionally located in the work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and 1950s. These approaches involve the people affected by both the research topic and the research process. By acknowledging and centering the expertise of community members, this approach to research attempts to address power imbalances, ensure that research outcomes are meaningful to those who are impacted, and support long-term community engagement. The roots of the participatory paradigm are politically radical stemming from “various projects intended to provide an alternative to the traditionally hierarchical forms of capitalist production” (Mayo, 1999, p. 2) and “shaped by several other intellectual traditions including Marxism, feminism, post positivism, and Freirian adult education” (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016, p. 134). Freire’s problem posing approach specifically has long been used as a way to challenge the narrow scope of adult programs offered to minoritized, immigrant and refugee learners (Auerbach, 1992; Freire, 1970; Frye, 1999; Wallerstein, 1983). In this way the paradigm of participation crosses the research/practice divide and is consequential in both education research and in adult education which seeks to be liberatory.

While the concept of participation in adult education and research sprang from progressive and even revolutionary ideals that challenged established structures of power in research and education, “it has always been a strength of capitalism, a reflection of its dynamism, to appropriate a once oppositional concept and gradually dilute it in such a way as to make it an integral feature of the dominant discourse” (Mayo, 1999, p. 3). Critical scholars and educators draw attention to the appropriating machinery of neoliberal ideology and capitalism of which

participatory paradigms are no exception. It is worth quoting extensively here from Jordan and Kapoor as they point to,

the way in which PAR (as well as action research and related methodologies) has been increasingly appropriated by the neoliberal project of what David Harvey (2003) has referred to as ‘accumulation by dispossession’. It is against this landscape of dispossession on a global scale that we will argue the following: the past three decades of neoliberal globalization have produced homogenizing and assimilationist tendencies in social and educational research that have profoundly affected the character of PAR; these colonizing tendencies have led to professionalization that continues to reconstitute PAR as a scientific/technical endeavor divorced from its antecedents of radical and emancipatory politics originating in the Global South and parallel or preceding developments in Indigenous research in settler colonies; participatory approaches to research are being co-opted by academic researchers, the professions and managerial consultants (e.g. programme evaluators) as a means to enhance forms of social regulation that support and sustain the social relations of neoliberal accumulation and the colonality of power (2015, pp. 135-136).

As dominant discourses have taken up the mantle of participation it is important to recognize PAR as “contested terrain” (Jordan & Kapoor, 2015) and identify ways in which to push that terrain towards critical and activist functions.

Researchers and practitioners have also noted areas of alignment between Indigenous and participatory methodologies that can perhaps push against the encroachment of capitalist logics in participatory research. For instance, building on the work of Alfred and Corntassel (2005) and Hingangaroan Smith (2000), Tuck describes balance as a key tenet of Indigenous epistemology

in her participatory action work with youth. When applied to participatory methods balance, “can serve as a counter to latent dogmatism, market logic, or even ‘democratic’ practices such as one person, one vote” and “is not only necessary for distribution of knowledge and responsibility within a collective, but also for a process of decolonization” (2008, p. 60). This synergy with Indigenous approaches to research (which predate PAR by centuries in most cases) is also pointed to by Tahiwai Smith (1999; 2021) who connects “Kaupapa Māori research, oral histories, critical race theory and testimonio” as related methodologies that “facilitate the expression of marginalized voices, and that attempt to represent the experience of marginalization in genuine and authentic ways” (2021, p. 261). Critically engaging and learning from Indigenous research methodologies and examining the “underlying assumptions of PAR from an Indigenous standpoint” (Jordan & Kapoor, 2015, p. 144) is an important decolonial option for reclaiming and repoliticizing the participatory research paradigm, bearing in mind that Indigeneity may also be impacted by neoliberal structures and processes.

Humanizing Research and Storytelling Informed by Indigenous Research Methodologies

Humanizing perspectives are another way for researchers to work towards unlearning colonial practices which treat participants as sites of exploitation and, instead, consider ways to give to and learn from participants. Projects in humanizing research (Fredricks, 2019; Paris & Winn, 2014; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) center dialogic and reciprocal relationships seeking to highlight them “in ways that, on the one hand, emphasize our shared desires for racial, linguistic, educational, political, and social justice in schools and communities, and on the other hand, emphasize those same desires in our professional and personal lives” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 374). Humanizing research requires us to abandon unidirectional deficit oriented

questions and damage-centered approaches and to address/redress, through action, these dehumanizing research ideologies and practices. It requires,

a commitment to learning, unlearning, and cultural humility. It means framing and conceptualizing research with the communities one studies; centering their experiential knowledge; resisting archaic theories of change that are predicated on illustrating one's brokenness and pain; practicing critical reflexivity; prioritizing the needs and well-being of participants over those of the researcher and the academy; and anchoring one's work in critical and transformative epistemologies that focus on changing and dismantling oppressive structures and systems (Savage, et al., 2021).

While there is no one way to practice humanizing research, methods within this paradigm look to many of the traditional data sources of qualitative ethnographic research such as interviews, observations, journals, documents, field notes etc. but also focuses on being flexible and modifying approaches in ways that contribute to the building of relationships of mutual respect, dignity and care (Fredricks, 2019). There are some core tenets of humanizing research, according to Savage et al., it: 1) Centralizes and celebrates participants as complex and as sources of knowledge and pride, 2) debunks negative perceptions about racially/ethnically minoritized communities and populations, 3) Recognizes human agency and reveals the strengths of communities and populations, 4) Engages participants in its research design, implementation, and analyses, 5) Engenders feelings of celebration, affirmation, beingness and belongingness, that can lead to positive mental, emotional, and physical well-being (2021, p. 5).

Humanizing research intersects and weaves together with Indigenous research methodologies in forwarding “daily experiences—such as storytelling, relationship-building, and reciprocal engagements—we have with people (our interrelationships)” (San Pedro, 2021, p. 4).

Taking guidance from Indigenous methodology means prioritizing relationality and relational accountability, as a researcher you “are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgements about better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship?” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177, emphasis in original). This is not to say that these methodologies are somehow less valid, reliable or “rigorous” but that these things are conceptualized and measured in terms of responsibility, accountability, and reciprocity.

Within this paradigm storytelling is a methodology guided by relationships of respect and reciprocity, “as we exchange stories, we engage in a process of storying – of being/becoming in relation to those who impact us” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 379). Indigenous storywork (ISW) and the seven principles of “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy” proposed by Archibald “pay serious attention to how stories can be used in research and education and more” (Archibald, & Parent, 2019, pp. 3-4) and is a, “transformative learning [and research] experience” (Archibald, 2008). In my study I do not presume to research or teach Indigenous storywork or storytelling as part of the project of teaching English, I think that would be antithetical at best and epistemologically violent at worst. At the same time the works of Indigenous scholars, storytellers, and friends have had a profound impact on the methodology of this project and on me as a person, as a teacher and as a scholar.

With this in mind, inspired and informed by Kovach’s framing of Indigenous methodologies, my methodology includes: a) grounding the analytical work in the teachings and relational actions that are generated in collaboration with participants; b) contextualizing the

re-storying socially and historically; c) contextualizing the re-storying within my own story; d) valuing multiplicity and holism in the interpretation and representation meaning representations may be visual, performative, narrative, oral and include metaphor and allegory as conceptual framing; e) allowing for the reader to take meaning and interpret for themselves; f) while at the same time being responsible for offering my own understanding; g) offering representations which account for reciprocity and accessibility, what Kovach calls the “Uncle Paul or Auntie Doris” principle (Kovach, 2017 pp. 229-230), which asks whether the research is relevant and makes sense to the community.

I also take inspiration from Caswell’s approach to critical archival studies, and the following key points she outlines,

- shared stewardship in which custody of materials is not created or transferred in a discrete transaction from one party to another and which entails an ongoing mutual relationship;
- a multiplicity of viewpoints and record formats, from written documents, to multimedia materials, to immaterial and intangible records;
- an explicitly activist orientation;
- reflexivity, in which participants actively engage in self-critique with the goal of improvement;
- value placed on the affective or emotional impact of the pedagogical and research areas of a project, taking into consideration how the storytelling makes people feel; and
- value placed on people over the stuff which gets collected/recorded/produced, which means seeing these as only as important in that they enable connections

between people who use the stuff to share stories, transmit memory and build relationships (Caswell, 2021, pp. 17-18)

This orientation towards stories, as opposed to viewing them as “data” can help respectfully navigate culturally sustaining critical storytelling projects in which the community of learners being represented and served actively participates in the pedagogical and documentary/storytelling practices.

Study Design

Having worked with immigrant and refugee communities in the Northwest for over a decade with multiple local organizations serving adult learners I have many long-term emotional attachments to former students, students who became close friends of mine and to the organizations where we developed these connections. One of these is Literacy Source, a non-profit based in Seattle where I worked as a language teacher, student advisor and curriculum developer since 2016. I have maintained close relationships with Literacy Source since entering the PhD program in 2020 and continue to work for them off and on depending on their needs and my availability. Based on this relationship Literacy Source was welcoming to us and our project and served as the main site for my study. Here, as part of the larger storytelling translationships project, I helped plan and facilitate an eight week elective storytelling class offered in person during the winter of 2024 with English department faculty member Cristina Sanchez-Martín. A total of seven multilingual student storytellers joined the class and six completed all eight sessions. Hereafter I describe the students who participated in the study as “co-storytellers” rather than using the traditional terms of “research subjects”, “participants,” or even “collaborators.” This language indicates their central role in the project and the relationship to research that I hope to highlight with this work. It also signals that their participation extends

beyond responding to questions in semi-structured interviews and involves an active and creative engagement with the project development, knowledge processing and knowledge sharing.

The co-storytellers represented seven different countries (The Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Pakistan) and more than seven unique languages (Bisaya and Tagalog, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Tigrinya, Amharic, and Urdu). We were also supported by one multilingual graduate student research assistant. Co-storytellers were invited to add work they developed in the classes to [the project website/archive](#) and to be guests on the [Storytelling Translationships podcast](#) to discuss their experiences and reflections. This research community developed as a construct unique to the situated goals of Cristina and I's larger project, emerging from our partnership with Literacy Source, the learning community there, and our commitments as researcher practitioners.

As I developed and planned for how my dissertation would draw from this larger project I struggled to identify and articulate methods that would reflect the participatory values of the project as well as the humanizing/storytelling methodology. I wanted to approach methods in a way that would not seek to extract stories and data from participants, but instead provide a collective space for reciprocal sharing, a space for creating relationships and knowledge together but I worried that if I veered too far from the path of recognized qualitative methods I would fail. My work would not be recognizable, not legitimate. Thankfully, I am supported by an incredible chair and mentor, Dr. Suhanthie Motha, who encouraged me to think deeply not only about how the data might inform my methods but why established qualitative methods did not provide what I felt I needed. I was also fortunate to attend a timely summer lecture series with Dr. Jonathan Rosa, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, who pointed to the ways in which dreaming is imagined as impractical within many "White listening

entities or institutions” and how suffocating that can be. These conversations intertwine with abolitionist frameworks that highlight the challenge of being experimental in the face the pressures of academia, “because it means acknowledging that the strategies we are more familiar with, even skilled in, are not enough to get us where we need to be: free, able to practice authentic accountability, in communities of care” (Ritchie, 2023). Dr. Rosa suggested that instead of apologizing or justifying our approaches we should point to how the normative methodologies and methods are insufficient and instead ask how we can make us all, including our audiences, accountable to the research or the experiences of the research. With all this in mind my research methods intentionally blur the lines between research and pedagogy, teacher and student, researcher and participant, storyteller and audience.

Initially I had been drawn to the idea of doing dialogic interviews (Oakley, 1981; 2016; San Pedro, 2021; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017; Way et al., 2015) with focal participant collaborators, after their involvement in both the classes and the podcast, as the central method of my study. However, I came to realize that we had really already done the relational research *together* over the course of the classes and were subsequently analyzing it collectively in each podcast episode. Additional interviews would not only be redundant, they would imply a distrust or a devaluing of what people had already shared with me during our previous conversations, as if I needed them to give me their ideas once more, this time only for me, in order to analyze and legitimize them by myself through the dissertation. I was also persuaded by San Pedro’s argument that keeping peoples’ stories as whole and intact as possible centers their power while coding and qualitative software may make the dialogic interviews and stories they generate feel as though they are “ripped and stripped of their context, set of in some unfamiliar location, only to be grouped back together in a new way, a new story that I, as a researcher and analyst, [feel] is

important” (2021, p.17). It was in resistance to this type of approach that I envisioned a process that would account for my role and responsibilities, honor the fullness of the student storytellers’ contributions, and align more closely with a storytelling praxis. In this way podcasting became a core method and means of analysis of the project in conversation with my own individual analysis of the additional ethnographic data.

With the tsuru origami heuristic in mind the stories (data) in my project are separated into two categories: 1) orizuru 折鶴 (Figure 11), the individual paper cranes folded from one sheet of paper, as the background stories, 2) renzuru 連鶴 (Figure 12), linked cranes folded from one piece of washi paper using specific cuts to keep the connections between each crane, as the podcast. I have treated each category differently in the dissertation.

Figure 11

Orizuru Crane



Figure 12

Renzuru Linked Cranes



The first includes participant observation notes, research journal entries, field notes, workshop plans and materials, co-storyteller artifacts, and personal communication. The second consists of raw and edited podcast recordings of public facing conversational interviews done with student storytellers and their transcriptions. Below I outline each category in more detail.

Orizuru 折鶴

Participant Observation

I was both a storyteller and an observer in the broader multilingual digital storytelling project where I actively participated in the pedagogical and social setting and tried to adopt a critical and reflexive stance throughout the research process. I did this by engaging in self-reflection, and considering how I impacted the dynamics of the study. I observed the interactions in the storytelling classes, personal communications, informal interactions, and any other events that were relevant to the understanding and construction of relationships to language and to one another. I also recorded audio during each class session, after the first session where I asked for permission, with small recording devices. I approached recording audio as a tool for equity that would keep me honest in terms of listening back not only to the student storytellers but to myself. In addition, it was a way for me to be in the moment during our classes more as opposed to feeling the need to constantly make notes or remember interactions. In total there are 10.5 hours of audio recording, the transcriptions of these audio recordings consist of 216 pages with 47,761 words total.

While I did keep some field notes during and after classes, I found that it was far more important for me to be fully present with those around me. Because of this I focused on detailed note taking later while I engaged with the class audio recordings paying close attention to the memories and the feelings that arose as I listened. I also engaged in reflective listening and journaling while editing each podcast episode².

Collaborative Journal

Since beginning this project Cristina and I have kept a collaborative teaching/research journal where we engage in personal, reflective writing about the project. Here we record events

² I elaborate in more detail on this practice in the section describing renzuru 連鶴 the podcast as method.

and ideas as told from each of our perspectives and respond to each other. Teaching and research journals can call attention to important reflections on events, beliefs, emotions, concerns, questions, problems, future plans and more. In addition, a collaborative teaching/research journal expands beyond self-study making private inner thoughts about teaching and learning visible for another person to see, question, and understand. Collaborative journal writing can broaden the scope of researcher reflexivity containing critical and unfolding analysis of the contexts in which the research action is taking place and how the researchers' knowledges, skills, values, assumptions, and emotions are evoked. It is a tool for observing, questioning, critiquing, synthesizing, and acting. Taking guidance from Altrichter and Holly's work on research diaries specific elements that our collaborative journal contained include: 1) data obtained by observation, interviews, and informal conversations; 2) paratextual items such as photographs, drawings, emojis; 3) contextual information and marginal commentary; 4) reflections; and 5) ideas and plans for continuing pedagogical and/or research steps (2005). There are a total of 53 individual entries over 44 pages (20,662 words) with an additional 17 entries made as marginal comments. The entries begin in January 2023 and end in June 2024.

Personal Research Journal/Field Notes

In addition to the collaborative journal that Cristina and I kept throughout the project, I maintained a practice of individual written reflection in a physical notebook. I would characterize this as a combination of personal research journal and field notes since I often used it to write a quick note during classes or to document my thoughts afterwards but I also used it to reflect more broadly on the research process and other connections I was making whether those were from meeting with Su, readings, conversations with others, attending events like Sacred Breath or the San Pedro and Rosa summer workshops, anything that sparked my thinking with

regards to the project. These journal entries/notes are roughly 106 handwritten pages spread across two physical notebooks.

Project Documents and Artifacts

Key documents and artifacts were generated during the study, understanding artifacts as “tools for supporting communication and intersubjective knowledge building” and for “continuing the learning [and research] activities in which they were constructed” (Trausan-Matu & Slotta, 2021, p.552). This includes a “wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical materials relevant to the study... that represent some form of communication that is meaningful to participants and/or the setting” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). Documents and artifacts that I include in my analysis are, the curriculum materials we developed for the multilingual community and digital storytelling elective class, this includes the Google Slides presentations for seven classes and 21 pages of accompanying worksheet activities; 91 pages of co-storyteller generated materials produced during the course of the class (ie. notes and worksheet responses) from the six people who attended all classes; basic survey responses from four out of six people who attended; and the multilingual versions of their stories (some audio ,some text format and some both) shared on the translationships website.

Figure 13

Data Identification Table

Type	Identifier
Class audio recordings	CAR (+ date of recording) Example: CAR020124
Collaborative journal entries	CJE (+initials of writer + date of entry) Example: CJECSM010224

Personal research journal entries	PRE (+date of entry) Example: PRE111623
Participant observation notes	PON (+ date of note) Example: PON020824
Course materials	CM (+ date of class where materials were used) Example: CM020124
Co-storyteller classwork	CC (+initials of co-storyteller + page number or range) Example: CCCY3-5
Co-storyteller stories	CS (+initials of co-storyteller + first unique word in story title) Example: CSSSBAI
Survey Responses	SR (+initials of co-storyteller) Example: SRWG

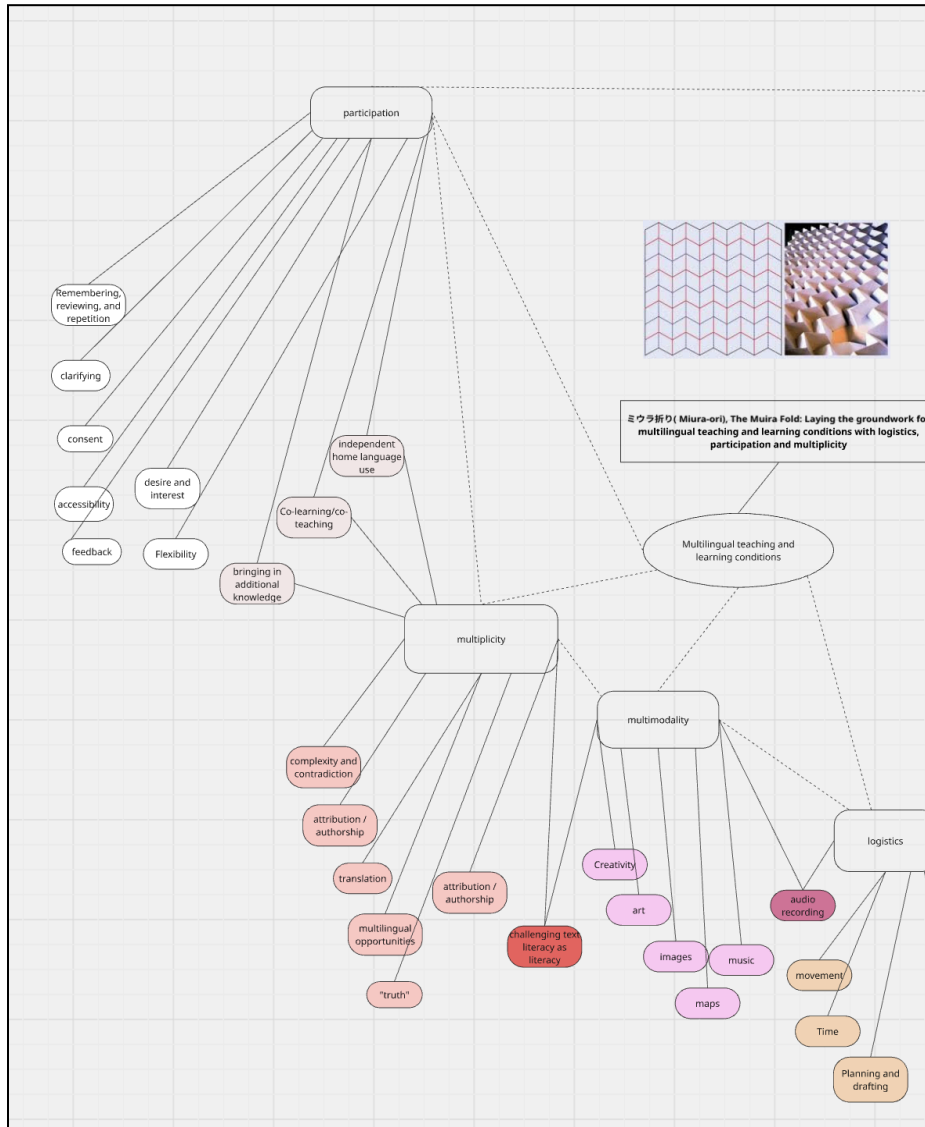
Analyzing Our Story

Grounded theory, Indigenous research methods and reflexive thematic analysis intersect in understanding both data collection and analysis as cyclical and potentially collective endeavors, where the assumption is “that neither data nor theories are discovered [since] we are a part of the world we study and the data we collect” (Wilson, 2008, p. 10). Reflexive thematic analysis “emphasises the importance of the researcher’s subjectivity as an analytic resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 330). With Braun and Clarke's six-phase process for data engagement, coding and theme development (2021, p. 331) in mind, my first step towards analysis was to take time to familiarize myself with the classroom stories. As a co-storyteller in this project I had already developed a relationship to the classroom stories through my own participation, but I deepened this connection in the

complex transcription process for each classroom recording and in reading and re-reading journal entries, field notes and co-storyteller artifacts. I then began the initial coding phase using Dedoose software to assist with the organization of themes, codes and patterns across different sources. Using both semantic and latent codes without prioritizing either I began to identify how the themes and codes were relating to the research questions. Information could be multiply coded, the semantic meaning expressed by the co-storyteller and the latent meaning that I interpreted is reflective of the underlying theoretical assumptions of the analysis. Ultimately, because classroom stories were made up of recordings and artifacts I found that latent codes were both more numerous and more adequate to represent the stories, I addressed the constructive and interpretive nature by giving careful consideration to both the meaning constructed and communicated by the co-storyteller and my own interpretation of this meaning as the researcher. Throughout this process I reflected on my contribution to the coding process through memos and journaling. After multiple rounds of coding I began to note themes and sub-themes, focussing on how knowledge was being co-constructed across codes and data sets. The next step was to create thematic maps diagramming these connections. I did this by considering how the relationships between codes and themes were coming together and then bringing them together physically using origami. Using an online whiteboard I could visualize, move things around and add multimodal elements like drawings and images that helped me as I reflexively edited and refined the themes and codes. The image below shows a subsection of the thematic map (Figure 14).

Figure 14

Cross Section of Thematic Map



Once I started writing this also acted as a “crucial phase of the analytic process” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 154) in which, through the writing and rewriting of drafts, I attempted to trace connections, contextualize the words and experiences of co-storytellers, at the same time making links with existing scholarship and presenting possible interpretations from my perspective. This process has continued throughout the writing process across the development and revision of each chapter.

Renzuru 連鶴

This approach to methodology draws parallels between the folding of the renzuru with washi paper, as described in the prelude to this chapter, and an understanding of communication informed by Indigenous storytelling, as Silko describes, which “resembles a spider’s web—with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made” (1981, p. 54). My goal was to integrate humanizing “storying” practices, which build on the work of Indigenous scholars Archibald (2008), Kovach (2009), and Wilson (2008), into the analysis and write up of the data by way of the podcast. I did this with the understanding that “by critically listening to others and considering how to publicly share what we have learned, we become part of a shared story” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017 p. 379). In this way I have tried to conceive of ways in which the narratives of both researcher and storyteller can be included in respectful relationship and take into consideration imbalances, not only in power, but in time, energy and material resources. I left the conversations predominantly whole, using the edited podcast transcripts to represent our collective analysis and providing framing where necessary.

The Podcast as Method

As I developed my lines of inquiry I kept critically examining what I intended to write, how authorship is implicated in unequal power relationships, and what the potential consequences could be for the storytellers. I tried to imagine how a collaborative process might reflect on and address these tensions and ways that storytellers might narrate their own accounts in their own words and retain both authorship and control of these narratives. For the processes of knowledge making, representation and distribution, humanizing research must necessarily

challenge the traditional unidirectional flow of knowledge making that emerges from the academy, to the academy. I have intentionally not written a formal (narrative or otherwise) analysis of the interviews we did in the podcast, instead I hope that readers will hear and experience the language and knowledge in a way that creates relationality across spaces.

Podcasting as a way of talking about *and conducting* research is relatively new but, taken as a collaborative research method itself, podcasting can center relationships and resistance (Tiffe & Hoffmann, 2017) storytelling and multilingualism in ways that disrupt the structures of the epistemic community of scholarship. A community whose language alienates those who supposedly benefit from research and whose concepts and theories reside behind the paywalls of academic publications and scholarly databases (Gonzalez & Lincoln, 2006). Digital devices and internet access have made the ability to record and share information more widely available and while equal access continues to be a real concern, it is no longer just official broadcasters who can record and tell stories. This change extends to academia where podcasting has gained significant traction as a tool for knowledge dissemination and mobilization across academic and scientific fields. However, podcasting can not only be a platform for knowledge mobilization it can also be a research method in and of itself which engages with “a long tradition of story-as-research in the social sciences [and] represents an important opportunity – and perhaps vehicle – to connect with communities, collect data, and maintain the intimacy and authenticity that makes human social research so impactful” (Harrison et al, n.d.). There should be multidirectional means of knowledge making and distributing where the outcomes of research materialize as community resources.

Adult immigrant and refugee learners are rarely asked to reflect on their language learning in complex ways (Knowles, 2019, p. 88) that include their beliefs, strategies, attitudes,

experiences, struggles, successes and other ways of learning and knowing language. Through the podcast I have tried to use public scholarship and public digital humanities as a tangible part of a humanizing research framework whereby I help create space for storytellers to reflect on their experiences as multilingual knowledge carriers, language students, and community members. In addition to a forum for a more complex reflection, the podcast as method can also engage publics outside of the university, “you can't take stuff that's published according to the logics of the university, and try to make people engage with it, you have to actually go where people are engaging with ideas and share your ideas there, which is the opposite logic from what I think we sometimes do in the university” (Smith & Johal, 2020). In this sense it fosters the equity of community engaged scholarship and methods in research.

Because the goal of this work is to both build, sustain, and interrogate relationships and relationality the podcast as method fosters reciprocal dialogue and support insights gained not only into the storytellers’ perspectives but also into those of myself (and Cristina), incorporating a process of mutual reflection on the nature of the different stories, social systems and structures across which we all operate, “if we believe reality is socially, specifically communicatively, constructed, it makes sense to treat interviews as opportunities for meaning making and transformation’ (Way, et al., 2015, p. 721). The podcast is structured around conversations with one or more storyteller participants and myself and Cristina as co-hosts. We reached out to each of the people who joined us for the storytelling class and invited them to join us for a recorded conversation and provided them with context and examples of what the podcast would sound like and where it would be published and available. The podcast is formatted in an interview style where the one or two co-hosts (sometimes just myself and sometimes Cristina and I together) introduce and facilitate interviews from between one to three guests who have participated in the

storytelling project. In certain episodes language support is provided, the type of support depends on the context of the episode and the storytellers who join us. In this dissertation two complete podcast episodes are included as part of the research. They represent what I hope is a challenge to the separation of theory, method, analysis and dissemination where learning, making, knowing and doing integrate in the research process.

The Podcast as Analysis

As we put together each episode the process of finding themes and storylines in the conversations with storytellers I began to notice parallels to the open and thematic coding common to formal qualitative data analysis methods. Sharing the recordings and subsequently editing based on feedback also paralleled the practice of member checking. This led to the decision to include the podcast as a significant part of the analysis section of the project, as seen in Chapter 6. The podcast serves as a public, outward-facing platform for collective action and reflection and “as a sonic elicitation technique during interviews and focus groups to elicit rich; detailed; embodied and affective responses from participants” (Eringfeld, 2021). In my approach including the podcast as analysis I was inspired by Indigenous methods which prioritize “relational accountability as a style of analysis [where] the researcher must ask how the analysis of these ideas will help to further build relationships” (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). I was also guided by the dialogic spiral which “supports the construction of an emergent story as a humanizing research process co-created by the sharing of stories” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 381). With these central grounding concepts analysis is presented through the podcast as a collective endeavor where “conversation as a genre allows ideas to be sort of pulled apart and unpacked over time” (Smith & Johal, 2020). In this research format the transcripts serve as a textual representation of the collective oral analysis.

In total Cristina and I, along with our guests and some language and technical support, developed four episodes of the podcast with co-storytellers from Literacy Source. For the purposes of this dissertation two episodes are included. These are episodes in which I took the main responsibility for editing the recordings, because of this I felt they were the most appropriate to include as part of my dissertation study.

Technical and Security Considerations Regarding Data

Engaging in this work raised a lot of questions for me about how the IRB impacts the outcomes of research and authorship within collaborative research contexts. Scholars working in participatory research have pointed out that, “the limitations posed by the IRB process are without doubt useful for the protection of subjects and the regulation of research so that it maintains ethical integrity, but to an extent it limits knowledge production to the academy” (Mohr, 2021, p. 2). Who writes, how something is written, what is attended to, and what is said, matters but so does mitigating potential harm. Here, in addition to obtaining IRB approval for the broader translationships project I took inspiration from scholarship on humanizing and liberatory qualitative research which urges researchers to “adopt their own internal protocols for assessing and addressing the various forms of harm that one might inflict on participants during the research process” (Savage, et al., 2021). To do this I engaged in ongoing self-reflection about my personal and professional responsibility to the storytellers, the ways in which I could center and engage the storytellers in the research process beyond data collection, how I could honor and respect the stories and other forms of data that were shared with me through the research process, and finally, how what is generated from the research process will be used to improve the material conditions of the community.

The public nature of the recordings changed the way in which I thought about and made decisions, really highlighting relationships of responsibility and accountability. Critical questions arose related to the ethical representation of storytellers and the proper handling of what they shared with me. Deciding on how to approach identification protocols such as anonymity was complicated by the nature of both public and digital scholarship as well as storytelling authorship. I had to ask myself what is the role of anonymity in a participatory project and when collecting and presenting audio not simply as data gathered but as a collective and public analysis of both shared and individual experiences and reflections. I also had to consider how identifying factors might be heard such as a person's gender, race, accent, or dialect which become more evident in a research context where audio data is collected and used publicly.

These additional factors led to an extended informed consent process in which the people were made aware of the research objectives and public nature of the format before being invited on to the podcast. They were consulted again about participating before we began recording and again when the recording was stopped. Storytellers were also informed that the audio would be edited for length and clarity and that any data that they wished to keep unpublished would remain confidential. Once the raw recording was edited the audio file was shared with the storytellers for feedback. Again when the final edits were made and the introduction, music and closing credits were all complete the file was shared with the storyteller before being broadcast publicly. Findings related to this part of the project that go beyond the methodological planning design aspects of consent, anonymity and authorship, exploring the impact and significance of "micro-ethics" are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Origami Prelude: 山折 (Yama ori) Mountain Fold and 谷折り(Tani ori) Valley Fold

The mountain fold and the valley fold are the most fundamental folds in origami. In fact all folds, no matter how complex, are in essence mountain or valley folds of some kind. By bringing the sides of the paper together you create a crease that bends the paper down resembling a mountain (Figure 15), or upwards like a valley (Figure 16). The crease and the form of the mountain or valley is visible when you open up the paper. Laying down that crease is an important first step as both a graphic reference point from which to measure and a physical one that will help guide any subsequent and more complex folds.

Using these fundamental folds as a way to describe and visualize how we initiated Indigenous connections forwards the processes involved in creating new pathways and reference points. This chapter describes ways in which acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty and presence through stories and bringing our own ideas and experiences of land to meet these acknowledgements opened up possibilities for understanding.

Figure 15

Mountain Fold

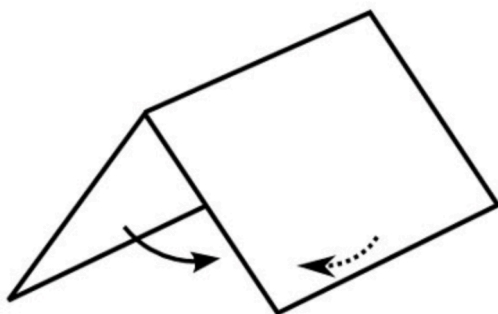
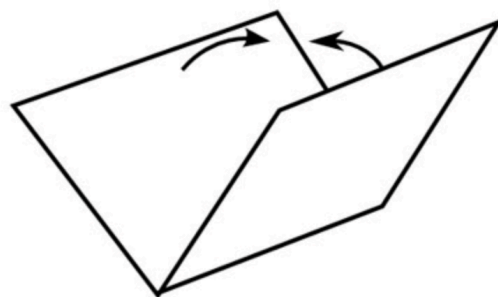


Figure 16

Valley Fold



In her work with Black feminist geographies McKittrick describes how, “the poetics of landscape” include theories, poems, plays and narratives that have been erased, dismissed or rendered invisible can disclose new spaces and “creatively influence and undermine existing

spatial arrangements” and should be understood as “real responses to spatial inequalities” (McKittrick 2006, xxiii). My “poetics of landscape” is the mountain fold, a metaphor for both what is described in this chapter but also for the ongoing process and the more complex folds of anti-colonial work that come next.

Chapter 4: Addressing Indigenous connections

Even as I sit in her still shadow, my thoughts are all tangled. Like my elders before me, I want to envision a way that an immigrant society could become Indigenous to place, but I'm stumbling on the words. Immigrants cannot by definition be Indigenous. Indigenous is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring changes history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land...But if people do not feel "indigenous," can they nevertheless enter into the deep reciprocity that renews the world? Is this something that can be learned? (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 213)

A Sitka Spruce casts the shadow that Kimmerer describes in the quote above, but in this story it is a mountain.

Figure 17

Tahoma on a Clear Day



The Mountain is Out

It is early February 2024, our second meeting as a group. We spent our first session getting to know each other, reading and responding to stories from previous storytellers on the project website and discussing consent and participation. Cristina and I are hoping to engage our community of co-storytellers in a meaningful dialogue about the land that we are all on and connect to language, story and storytelling through this discussion. This morning on the ferry I passed a bald eagle perched majestically (is there any other way for an eagle to perch?) on a piling in the water. From the ferry I write to Cristina in our shared journal about the eagle and about how glad I am that we have found ways to connect our work in the class to discussions about land and people in ways that feel much more authentic than a simple land acknowledgement. I tell her that I am excited about the class which also makes me a little bit nervous, I describe it to her as “a teacherly anxiety you get when you get really excited and invested in a lesson plan or a topic and you hope that students will as well” (CJETAM020124). Lately, I have been grappling with an ambivalence or discomfort with land acknowledgements and a deep uneasiness about the disconnect between my understanding of decoloniality as intrinsically tied to land and what I feel like I am actually doing.

In class, we start off by sharing our own connections, what we love, the language we use and what we think about when we think about Northwest Coast Salish lands. I go first, showing the group a picture of the mountain in the sunset. “When I think of Seattle, I think of this mountain and I know this mountain is called Mount Rainier, but this mountain also has an Indigenous name. So the people from the Northwest, they call it Tahoma” (CAR020124).

Growing up in the Central District of Seattle, the vision of the mountain on a clear day seen looking south from where Rainier Ave starts is what comes to me when I close my eyes and

think of home. The mountain also makes me think of my dad who always called her Tahoma in spite of 200 years of systematic erasure and the ongoing political opposition to official use of her real name. Opposition which is justified in terms of “emotional attachments” (to the colonial language) or concerns about the commercial consequences of having to change signs, brochures and other promotional materials.

Tahoma is a new word for most everyone there. They repeat the word softly. Wellesh makes a connection, “Tacoma?” she asks. I chime in with more information, “the city is near Mount Rainier, right? Is in the shadow. And that's where the name Tacoma comes from, the Indigenous name for the mountain.” This is the kind of holistic opportunity I had hoped for and I go on to briefly explain that Tahoma is a Lushootseed word and that Lushootseed is part of a group of languages spoken across the Pacific Northwest. “Tahoma means the mother of waters cause so many rivers and lakes come down from the mountain” I say (CAR020124). I feel a pang, knowing that she has many names and I am flattening both the language and her story. In fact, there are at least 20 different names for the mountain from seven different local Tribal languages³ (Zahir, 2025) and “mother of waters” is a gross oversimplification of the many meanings, metaphors and beliefs associated with the mountain. It crosses my mind that this whole thing should be about the mountain and her names.

“So, where is this teacher?” Sumaira’s question snaps me out of my contemplation. I add details about direction, height, width, year-round snow, and her importance to the area. “So, Tahoma is Mount Rainier’s native name?” asks Claire. “Yeah. The native name, the Indigenous name is Tahoma” I reply. “Oh!” She sounds both surprised and delighted (CAR020124). In her notebook she writes,

³ “Mount Rainier is surrounded by several native languages. Lushootseed, Klallam and Twana lie to the north and west; Upper Chehalis and Cowlitz lie to the southwest; and Ichishkiin is to the east and south. Chinook (Chinuk) Wawa is a language that is native to all these tribes and beyond” (Zahir, 2025, p. 128).

What do we think about Washington?

Native American

Indigenous

Tribes

*Mt Ranier = Tahoma = means mother of waters is ranier first name, is mean coast Salish
(group of language)*

Seattle speak Lushotseed

(CCC02012024)

We Are Not From Here

With the narrative story I share to open this chapter I hope to illustrate the mountain and valley folds as relational learning processes, connecting our experiences of the land to what I am here conceptualizing as Indigenous sovereignty, although we didn't use the term explicitly in our discussions, and to an expanded understanding of storytelling as both multilingual and multimodal. The origami metaphor brings together land based learning and storytelling which created a crease, or an initial reference point or pathway *towards* a dialogic understanding of Indigenous sovereignty, but, as I will discuss below and in more detail below and in Chapter 7, a pathway in many ways yet untaken.

According to Fanon, "the effort to demean history prior to colonization has dialectical significance" (1961/2021, p. 149). So, how did our focus on land open up this dialectic in the storytelling context and create the pathways for a community of immigrant and refugee English language learners to take the first steps towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty? Looking back at the course materials, course planning notes), collaborative journal entries, and listening to the class audio recordings suggests that we were able to fold together our

own transnational relationships and understandings of land with storytelling and that this folding together informed preliminary, yet meaningful understandings of local Indigenous connections to land.

One of the major tensions or contradictions I have felt throughout my PhD research trajectory is how, and if it is possible to approach the research and teaching of English decolonially, not simply with a decolonial analytical lens, but in practice. My concern stems in part from what Tuck and Yang (2012) have identified as the problematic use of "decolonization" as a metaphor for social justice instead of actual Indigenous sovereignty over land,

The absorption of decolonization by settler social justice frameworks is one way the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self. The desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore. (p. 9)

In this project I was absorbed and disturbed by this understanding of decolonization. It made me very conscious of my own ambiguous positionality as well as that of the co-storytellers in the project, both of us participating to different extents in the colonial enterprise of English language teaching and academic research. I have tried to remain conscious of this discomfort and to let it guide the decisions that I made in the planning and design of the research and the pedagogy of this project.

One of the main ways that I have done this is by connecting to the land wherever possible. This is important because how we come to know and understand the land from our location within "an empire born out of settler colonialism is predicated upon discourses of indigenous displacements that remain within the present everydayness of settler colonialism,

even if its constellations have been naturalized by hegemony and even as its oppressive logics are expanded to contain more and more historical experiences” (Byrd, 2011, p. xviii). Settler colonial logics and discourses of time, space, ownership and the binary understanding of humans and nature are ubiquitous, imposed and embedded in education, culture, and social environments marked by Western imperialism.

For this project and in the analysis that follows I take as axiomatic that those of us residing in the US are all marked by these settler colonial logics and discourse to different extents. In the following pages I consider how we meet each other where we are and take each other and each others’ experiences seriously while at the same time working to undermine and dismantle these colonial logics. To do this, I focus closely on the activities and discussions that occurred during our second meeting as a group because it represents our starting point and as such, holds much significance for the broader analysis, contextualizing it and illustrating changes in understanding.

“A Nation Built by Immigrants”

A foundational narrative of the US constructs the country as a “nation of immigrants”, and “nationalist discourses use refugee journeys to demonstrate the West’s benevolence and the success of liberal humanist frameworks of justice and freedom” (Ma, 2021, p. 9). In 1951, prominent historian Oscar Handlin began his book saying that, in the course of writing about the history of immigrants in America he “discovered that immigrants *were* American history” (p. 3). This “seminal” work, and the work of many of those who came, after neglect to varying extents considerations of Indigenous presence or sovereignty, “central here is the uncritical regurgitation of the mythologies of European settlement, the origin stories of the nation that are institutionalised at all levels of local, state and federal history and cultural memory” (Carby,

2022). While much critical scholarship in American Indian and Indigenous studies as well as post-colonial and decolonial studies, among other fields, has addressed Indigenous dispossession, genocide and slavery as the bedrocks of US nation building, the popular narrative of the US as a country built by immigrants remains deeply entrenched.

Contrary the liberal notion that the US is defined by the diversity of immigrants it has “welcomed” since independence, the landscape of Seattle reflects the efforts of white settlers to restrict and segregate Indigenous, Asian and Black populations since inception. Redlining was institutionalized as a practice in the second decade of the 20th century after the Supreme Court’s 1917 ruling in *Buchanan v. Warly*, which made segregation by city ordinance illegal (Jagana, 2021) moving real estate developers to institute racial restrictions which prohibited the sale or rental of property to Asian Americans and Jews as well as Black people in certain neighborhoods. But the history of segregation in Seattle began much earlier with the first white settlers when they “removed the Duwamish people and segregated them in the southern fringes of the city, eager to take their lands but also to make them available as workers” and blocked federal efforts to create a reservation to ensure access their labor (Asaka, 2022, p. 19). The region remained true to those white supremacist beginnings as immigrant laborers from China in the 1850s and Japan in the 1880s and 90s came to the area, “Euro-American settlers posited themselves as the ‘true’ inhabitants of North America [and] they made Asian settlers incongruous to the land,” treating them as “both as an internally colonized people to be controlled and an alien people to be expelled” (Cheng, 2023, p. 148). On a national scale, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first time the federal government made race the basis of exclusionary immigration policy. Decades later Executive Order 9066 saw approximately 122,000 Japanese incarcerated, over half of whom were US citizens. This is the background that

I take into consideration when interpreting how co-storytellers describe the relationship between people, migration and land.

The story I began this chapter with is a narrative account of what occurred when we introduced and discussed the Coast Salish lineage of the Northwest during the second session of the storytelling class. We started off with a discussion of Washington, asking what came to mind when people thought about the Northwest and what they knew about the area. On listening to the recording I was struck by the fact that the name Tahoma was unknown to all of the co-storytellers in the group, some of whom have lived in the area for many years. It gestured to a manufactured absence I had not previously considered. As I re-listened and read the transcript I noticed this “unknowing” manifesting in other instances and extending to various aspects of Indigenous presence in the Northwest. For example below, Sun had commented that Washington State has 39 counties and I tried to steer the conversation towards thinking about who the original people of the area are:

*Taiko: ...Sun and I were talking about Washington state **but also Washington state, besides the counties has a lot of different people that are from. I'm not from Washington.***

*Well, I was born in Washington but my family is from Hawaii, and is originally from Japan, but there are people who are from Washington originally. **Do you know anything about the people of Washington state like the original people of Washington State?***

*Claire: **I only know maybe a 100? One or, yeah one or 200 years ago. There are a lot of Asian people came here like from Japan and Chinese and Vietnam.***

Taiko: Yeah, a lot of people immigrated from Asia 100 years ago.

Claire: And Vietnam

Taiko: And Vietnam. Yeah, More recently, maybe from Vietnam as well (CAR020124).

In this excerpt Claire appears to situate Northwest history in relationship to the arrival of settlers and immigrants within the last 100 to 200 years. I believe the way that I framed the questions with my own personal background, which includes Japanese migration, as well as Claire's experience as an immigrant from Taiwan, contributed to how she understood and responded. Even so, this exchange highlights an emphasis on the frequently promoted Asian immigration story, and the silences around Indigenous peoples' presence on the land prior to settlement. Claire is calling attention to (at least) two epistemological absences, the critical context of Asian immigration in Washington and the dispossession of the Indigenous Peoples of the area.

The immigrant story is true for many people living in the US, including myself. It is also especially urgent in these moments of racist anti-immigrant rhetoric and violence, even more so for anyone working with and committed to immigrant and refugee communities. But a critique limited to exclusion, "fails to note how the nation-state in which an immigrant seeks membership relies tacitly on the dispossession of already existing populations. This then is the willing amnesia of settler colonialism" (Volpp, 2015, p. 292).

"America's Best Idea"

We can also see clear examples of the settler colonial logic and "amnesia" at play in rhetorics of conservation which construct nature as uninhabited wilderness. In fact, "the fallacy of 'unpeopled wilderness' is codified in two of America's most prominent pieces of conservation legislation, the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 and the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Kantor, 2007, p. 43). For the Tahoma area the 1899 legislation which designated Mount Rainier a National Park also declared that those who settled or occupied park land would be considered trespassers and removed. Despite existing treaty rights this act codified into law the removal of

Indigenous people from the area. The politically and culturally constructed vision of these areas omits millennia of Indigenous lived history, stewardship of the lands, forcible removal, and the later denial of treaty rights to traditional hunting and fishing grounds.

White supremacy and the erasure of Indigenous presence was a central feature in the establishment of the National Parks system of environmental stewardship and public access that has been called “America’s best idea.” The men who championed the conservation of wilderness were people like Gifford Pinchot, a delegate to the first and second international Eugenics Congress and member of the advisory council of the American Eugenics Society, appointed by Roosevelt as head of the new Forest Service and put in charge of the National Conservation Commission (Purdy, 2015). Or romantic naturalist John Muir, whose romanticism and awe of the landscapes did not extend to its first peoples. Muir advocated for establishing Mount Rainier as a national park after ascending to the summit in 1888 and today his name appears on what was once known as “Cloud Camp” located at 10,062 feet, renamed “Camp Muir” as well as the Muir snowfield (Reese, 2009, p. 15, p. 78). While Muir championed the preservation of “pristine wilderness” in his writings he demeaned Indigenous peoples as “ugly”, “unknightly”, and “hideous” and perhaps most telling, as unworthy of inhabiting their traditional lands (Powell, 2022, pp. 457-458). Even so, “John of the mountains” remains known today as “the father of the national parks” (U.S. National Parks Service, 2025).

Figure 18

National Parks Service Promotional Material



Tahoma and the National Parks system are examples of how “parks and reserves, by nature, are tools of colonialism that provided the means to dispossess and exclude traditional owners from their land and resources” (Russell, et al., 2025, p .8) and how these exclusions have been justified in political and popular discourse. At the local level in Seattle, a few settler families (the Denny party) and wealthy city planners (the Olmsted brothers) are credited everywhere with the creation and preservation of the “Emerald” nature of the Emerald city. However, in much the same way that the history of the national parks erases the forced removal and genocide that enabled them, Seattle and its parks are on land that has been home to Indigenous populations for millenia. Starting with the Treaty of Medicine Creek (1854) and the Treaty of Point Elliott (1855), the rights of these communities were taken along with most of their lands. A decade on from these treaties the very first Seattle Board of Trustees adopted Ordinance No. 5, which called for the forced removal of any Indigenous people not employed by

settlers from the newly incorporated city (Seattle Weekly Gazette, 1865, p. 1). Seattle's first and oldest park, Denny Park, is named for one of these original board members, David Denny. It was Denny who established the park when he gave a portion of the Indigenous lands he had "acquired" through the 1850 Donation Land Claim Act to the town for the purposes of a cemetery in 1864. This piece of land was later rededicated by Denny as a park in 1887 and the bodies buried there were moved at the expense of the City of Seattle (Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.). All except the unidentified Indigenous bodies, left unmarked until the regrade project in 1903 which saw nearly 5.5 million cubic yards of dirt and rock, and these bodies, dumped into Elliott Bay (Kling, 2006, p.210). Everywhere in the Northwest our landscape has been constructed both literally and discursively by white settler colonialism but the perfunctory land acknowledgements that sometimes appear on interpretative park plaques or neighborhood websites do little to bring this history and its consequences forward. I provide this contextualization of parks and reserves as a way to frame the comments and the analysis I offer in the following section and as an acknowledgement of my own colonial unknowing about the lands I live on.

As we continued our discussion of the Northwest Claire brought up the topic of parks and green spaces:

*Claire: Yeah. And there were **some rich people who were very smart to create the whole of Seattle city park.** So **that's why we have seen a lot of green color***

Taiko: A lot of green color.

*Claire: Yes, **because of one or 200 years ago** some an...an...? People?*

Taiko: Ancestors?

Claire: Ancestors, who are very smart to think about future which is pretty smart and so yeah that's make Seattle very beautiful (CAR020124).

Speaking to an appreciation of Seattle's green spaces Claire credits wealthy early settlers with having foresight in how they planned the development of the city to include many parks. One interpretation of this could be that she is speaking from a position that echoes "sanctioned ignorance" (Spivak, 1988, p. 272) created in part through core public discourses on land and conservation, like those outlined earlier, which are structured by persistent myths that depoliticize, dehistoricize, and decontextualize the colonial roots of urban planning. But the unknowing does not reside solely in Claire's response. In working to understand and explain this interpretation through the research I shared above, I found evidence of my own sanctioned ignorance. As I shared these stories about land and questions that my dissertation writing was bringing up, the sanctioned ignorance of my curious and knowledgeable colleagues and friends also came to the fore. I was alarmed by how much of the history of land dispossession in the Northwest was still new to me and some of those around me, in spite of existing critical, anti-colonial commitments. Both Claire's comments and my own lack of knowledge are evidence of how diligent, purposeful and ongoing silencing functions to foreclose particular considerations. White supremacy is not something that lives only in extremist spaces, it is ubiquitous. It does not necessarily come out of individual malice but instead, "operates in the most mundane aspects of daily life; in the economic order that decides who has what and how they get it; in the historical amnesia that makes some stories disappear; in the language we use to speak and name the past" (Carby, 2022). Language is one way that coloniality is made invisible, but it can also function in other directions. If, as Garcia, et al., write, "the decolonial turn is about making visible what is felt but not necessarily observable: coloniality and modernity/

coloniality” (2024, p. 6) then language *and stories* can help us to articulate what is felt and learn to name it.

Getting “Story Ready”

As an Indigenous educator who uses Indigenous stories in the classroom, Archibald emphasizes the importance of becoming “story ready” when bringing storytelling into teaching and learning. To do this there are some important actions that need to be taken which include, building relationships with Indigenous storytelling, listening to people tell stories, working to understand the protocols and purposes of different stories, acknowledging the source of the storyteller which includes the tribal nation and background contextual information important to understanding (Archibald, n.d.). The intention of this ongoing process is for people to listen to Indigenous Peoples’ stories with respect, develop responsible relationships with stories, treat story knowledge with reverence, and strengthen the impact of stories reciprocity (Archibald, 2019, p. 2). Part of my own efforts to become story ready was to learn and engage as much as possible with Indigenous storytelling. The Sacred Breath literary and storytelling series hosted by the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Washington was one place where I was able to do this. These events feature Indigenous writers and storytellers sharing stories that “offer a spiritual connection, a sharing of sacred breath” (University of Washington, n.d.). In November of 2023, during the planning stage of the storytelling classes I attended a Sacred Breath event that featured Tami Hohn (Puyallup) and Cristopher Teuton (Cherokee). They shared stories and discussions that centered Indigenous knowledge and language revitalization work. Below is an excerpt from the notes I took in my research journal during that experience:

Context/background of the storyteller and the place where the story is from is as important as the story.

Stories remind people of what they (already) know and introduce new people to that knowledge.

You start decolonial work by learning the names and the stories of people and places.

Why do we strive for an enstoried world? (PRE111623)

These became some of the ideas and questions that helped us get ready and make choices to explicitly center Indigeneity and design course materials that we hoped would invite co-storytellers in the project to share their knowledge and experience while also opening up space for dialogue around the original peoples of the Northwest. Our collaborative journal entries and our curriculum planning notes show an ongoing concern for tying the stories and storytelling to land in meaningful ways. I think these intentions come through in the classroom excerpt below as I asked once more about the people originally from the area, prompting co-storytellers to think farther into the past:

Taiko: Yeah, yeah, to keep it green. So that's great. So you're talking about 100 years ago, maybe 200 years ago, people came here. But what about before that? Does anybody know about the people who were originally from here? Their names or...

Sal: Like tribes?

Taiko: Like tribes, thank you.

Sun: Indians? Indians yeah.

Taiko: We sometimes called Indians, often called Native American or Indigenous.

Unintelligible

*Taiko: Yeah. Because sometimes it can be confusing. If you say Indian, because there are people from India, right. And they are from India, so they're called Indian. Yeah. So we often say Indigenous. **Indigenous means you're from a place right? From here.** So you can use it with plants too, like a plant that is indigenous grows here, but maybe you bring plants from other places that is not indigenous, like that. **Do you know the names of any of the Native American, any of the tribes? Sometimes some of the cities. Do you know Puyallup, Puyallup?***

*Sun: **Puyallup is a tribe?***

*Taiko: **Puyallup is a tribe. Some of the names of the counties like Snohomish is a tribe as well.** So there are many you can see.*

Sun: Many area (CAR020124).

Naming conventions and traditions are not static, in many cases place names are “part of an ongoing process of legitimizing access to land and resources” (Murphyao & Black, 2015, p. 317). Discussions around the topic of terminology and how to refer to Indigenous people and nations are ongoing, “the issue of how to talk about and categorize the multiplicity of Indigenous peoples of North America remains a critical issue in both historical scholarship and contemporary political and social conversations” (Baur & Ellis, 2023, p. 61). Indigenous scholars have identified the perennial nature of this question as well as the complexity of the “answer” (Baur & Ellis, 2023; Peters & Mika, 2017; Yellow Bird, M., 1999). I can hear my own trepidation in this excerpt as I attempted to clarify some of this terminology for the group, as I am aware “that many of the labels that are used to refer to Indigenous peoples can be loaded and oppressive in one way or another [and that] what may seem like respectful labels to one person could be regarded as disrespectful to others” (Yellow Bird, 1999, p. 17). But once again I found

myself glossing over the complexities of the language and looking back, I worry that my indigenous plant analogy was reductive. Even so, I see the mountain fold happening. We are bringing the ideas together,

Names can be at once explanatory and indistinct—it is not likely that we consider the origins of a street name when we give directions. Knowing the narratives that underlie street names may not be an anticolonial act in itself, but considering the possessive implications of naming practices may help Settlers to confront their banal, quotidian territorial claim-making (Murphyao & Black, 2015, p. 317).

I am glad we engaged on some level with the concepts, particularly in connecting places that co-storytellers were familiar with the names of specific tribal nations. If there is one thing in common across discussions about terminology it is that wherever possible this is the preferred way of naming.

As one way to show the variation and extent of the Indigenous populations of the area we projected the Coast Salish people and languages map developed by the Burke Museum which overlays tribal areas, language groups and major modern city names. There were a lot of questions, “they are kind of people are part of tribe?”, “what language they use?”, “how is the Seattle tribe?” I pointed out different areas and the names of the tribal nations trying to emphasize that, the “people they still live here today” (CAR020124). I explained that the reason we are starting with this discussion is to consider the importance of peoples’ relationships to land when we listen to their stories. After this, we engaged in a brainstorming activity that asked co-storytellers to think about words, concepts, and images that they associated with 4 different categories related to the land in the Northwest, 1) places/nature, 2) animals/plants/people, 3) feelings/sensations/emotions, and 4) activities/things that we do here. With pencils or markers in

hand we all walked around the room and added different ideas to posters Cristina and I had hung up in advance. Looking back I see an attempt at creating the conditions for co-storytellers to become “story ready.” First, through naming the people of the land and then in taking time to consider our experiences of the land we were more able to listen to stories with respect and treat that story knowledge with reverence.

Another aspect of becoming “story ready” that Archibald suggests is using the teaching resources that Indigenous people themselves have produced and published as a way to ensure that protocols are being respected and followed. This factored into our choice to center the storytelling of Roger Fernandes, a member of the Lower Elwha Band of the S’Klallam peoples. We did this across two sessions, first incorporating a YouTube video of Fernandez telling the story of Salmon Boy and then another video in which he narrates a guided creative activity based on drawing salmon in the Coast Salish artistic style.

“The Most Important Being in the World is not us People”

The story of Salmon Boy tells of a bad, lazy, selfish child who is transformed by his encounter with the Salmon People and returns to his village with an important message. In his retelling on YouTube, Fernandes first introduces and contextualizes the story for listeners by describing salmon as “the most important being in the world” giving life to everyone in the Northwest from the eagles, to the bears, to the people. He also talks about the necessity of honoring the Salmon People and the different ways this is done through songs, dances, ceremonies, and art. Also, by returning the salmon bones to the river so that the Salmon People can use them to be born again. This important contextualization is followed by the story of the little boy who refused to return the bones to the water, his near drowning, his life living with the Salmon People in their village under the water, how he saw the consequences of his actions, and

how he returned to tell his people that “the things we do on the land affect the things that live in the water, we must respect and protect the house of the Salmon People” (CM020124).

As we listened, co-storytellers could respond to the story in writing, making notes on the worksheet provided or in their notebooks. Sun’s notes showed a more literal concern with understanding the story, emphasizing the importance in the story of salmon in feeding people as well as the animals (in her notes she specifically names the bears, whales, seals, and otters) (CCSH020124). In contrast, Sal focused on more “abstract” takeaways, in his notes he wrote that the story “reminds us”, that it is “sometimes good for the people today” and that he liked the way the story showed a “concern for other people’s needs” (CCSS020124). To me, the relationship between these two types of responses is an example of the “psychological energy that illuminates and contextualizes the acts of both individual and community” (Cajete, 2017, p. 115) through storytelling. We can see that stories are open to multiple interpretations while at the same time affirming certain relations like human interdependence with the natural world and what it means to live in community with one another.

Similar themes came up as we engaged in a class discussion asking co-storytellers to share their reactions and what they heard and understood from the story,

Cristina: How was that?

*Sal: **Good.***

*Claire: **Impressive.***

Cristina: Did you like the story? What?

Claire: It's very impressive story.

Cristina: Impressive story. Wow.

Claire: Tells nature teach people. Nature teach human how you are, how you best to the nature. How you deal with nature. You cannot be bad, otherwise everything will return to you.

Cristina: Nature changes people. Right? That's what you said Claire?

Claire: Yeah.

Cristina: I love that. If we pay attention. Right? If we listen (CAR020124).

Claire's learning from the story, expressed in this excerpt, centers on the interconnectedness of people and nature. She responds to Cristina's question but she is also responding to the questions posed by Fernandes at the conclusion of the video, "when you hear a story you should be thinking some things at the end. What did that story teach me? What did I learn? What happened in that story? Would I do that? Would I do something different?" (CM020124). One important convention of Indigenous storytelling is the role that the listener/reader has in developing their own understanding of a story. In Teuton's discussion of story during Sacred Breath he said that telling the moral of the story is not allowed, that everybody is expected to figure it out for themselves (PRE111623) and we can see that happening in the co-storyteller notes as well as in the classroom discussion.

Understanding and interpretations also developed with time and reflection. When we came back to the story in the next class a week later we started off by asking co-storytellers to retell the story for Aziza, who had been unable to attend the previous session. Sun, always eager to speak, gave a comprehensive retelling from start to finish that impressed us all. "You remember a lot!" Aziza exclaimed when she had finished. "This story five times reading" Sun replied (CAR020824).

When Claire expanded on her understanding she connected it to the Covid 19 pandemic:

*Claire:...For me I think **this story is teach people need to respect nature. You can use them, you can eat them, but you also need to respect them.** Otherwise nature will, I don't know the English thing is. **Nature will humble human.** Yeah, like I don't that it's a good example or not, **for example Covid 19. People eat a lot of different animals, but some kind of animal you cannot eat because it's just, you need to let them live in nature, but people eat and people got a bacteria or a virus from them. That might be the god or some natural want to warn people you cannot do these kind of things otherwise nature will come back** (CAR020824).*

The first thing I want to highlight is how Claire is understanding respect for nature as a way of being and doing, not only a disposition or attitude. In her interpretation the story tells how nature teaches people how they *are*. Respect for nature does not mean you do not “use” or “eat” animals but that respect means knowing that some animals “need to live in nature.” To me, this could represent a shift or an expansion in understanding from the earlier discussion associating nature with parks. Here, nature is not a separate space for humans to enjoy natural beauty and wildness, confined to leisure purposes like tourism or recreation, it is something intrinsically connected to how we live our lives, “where interaction with natural spaces is part of an ever-evolving ecosystem” (Russell, et al., 2025, p. 7), or as the story of Salmon boy suggests, “the things we do on the land affect the things that live in the water” (CM020124).

The second thing that seems important here is how Claire connected what she saw as the central teaching of the story to a major contemporary issue. According to Archibald, et al., one of the ways that the meaning making process continues after the story is in “seeking an interrelated understanding of historical, political, cultural, social, or other contextual impacts upon Indigenous Peoples, their stories, and their communities” (Archibald, et al., 2019, p. 4). Claire

uses the story to help explain how nature “came back” during the pandemic because people did not respect animals. While this demonstrates “an interrelated understanding of historical, political, cultural, social, or other contextual impacts” as described above, If I had more fully engaged with the principles of Indigenous storytelling I would have found ways to extend that connection into a more explicit consideration of the impact on “Indigenous Peoples, their stories, and their communities” as Archibald calls for. I explore these opportunities and possibilities in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Multimodality, Language and Creative Expression

Alongside our listening and reading of Fernandes’ version of Salmon Boy we also looked at a selection of different retellings and modalities of the same story. We discussed how there can be many renditions and showed examples of Tlingit, Haida, Shíshálh and Squaxin Island versions of Salmon Boy. We listened to a portion of one version told orally in Tlingit and then looked at a dual language version book. In the excerpt below I try to connect these resources with the multilingual stories on the translationships website that we had looked at during our first session:

*Taiko: ...So you can see the salmon. But **the story is a little different right?** It’s about a boy and his mother and **the language is Tlingit....The book has both languages, the book here has the Tlingit language on top and then English on the bottom like that....So some of our stories on the website that you looked at the first day have two languages as well, right? So some of them were like Spanish and English or Mandarin and English. And if you want, you can write, or speak your stories in two languages as well, like, like in this book. But we just wanted to show that there are many different ways to tell one story, right? You could tell it in a video, in a book, you could speak it, you can***

write it. You can tell it in many different ways, and one of those ways is also ...telling a story sometimes with art right (CAR020824)?

For co-storytellers to engage storytelling with the cultural and intertextual knowledge needed for a deeper understanding was not only a matter of engaging the multilingual but also the multimodal and the artistic. After discussing the different text based versions of the story we looked at artwork from Tlingit artist Robert Davis Hoffman (Figure 19). His Salmon Boy painting done with acrylic and gold paint on birch board tells yet another version of the story. The painting depicts two salmon shaped figures. The top figure still has a human-like hand and face while the bottom has a fin and circles representing salmon roe are spilling out of the belly.

Figure 19

Salmon Boy, Robert Davis Hoffman



Art as Resistance to Neoliberal Commodification of Progressive Practice

Engaging with these retellings and naming the storytellers and communities they come from presented distinct multilingual, multimodal opportunities for us as co-storytellers to become story ready in a "translanguaging space" (Garcia & Wei, 2015) which embraces multi-modality and creativity. According to Garcia and Wei, the transformative power of a translanguaging space is “generated by the ongoing combining and generating of new identities, values and practices” (p. 23). Centering the multilingual values and practices of Indigenous storytelling communities and artistic expression and practicing these in the ESOL context is an opportunity to push against emerging “pragmatic”/neoliberal conceptions of translanguaging which are expressed in economic terms and echo “the commodification of multilingualism that positions knowledge of fluid language practices as desirable for the ideal neoliberal subject” (Flores, 2013, p. 515), but it is important to note that it is not in itself a solution. However, by slowing down and creating space to develop new relationships with knowledge we can also slow down the narrative of productivity. These narratives of productivity and efficiency, much like those of an immigrant nation and a protected wilderness, are deeply ingrained. Often, when I consider artistic activities in language learning contexts there is a colonizing voice in my head that whispers, “this is a childish waste of time, they are going to hate this.” I grappled with this in our collaborative journal as we were planning these classes:

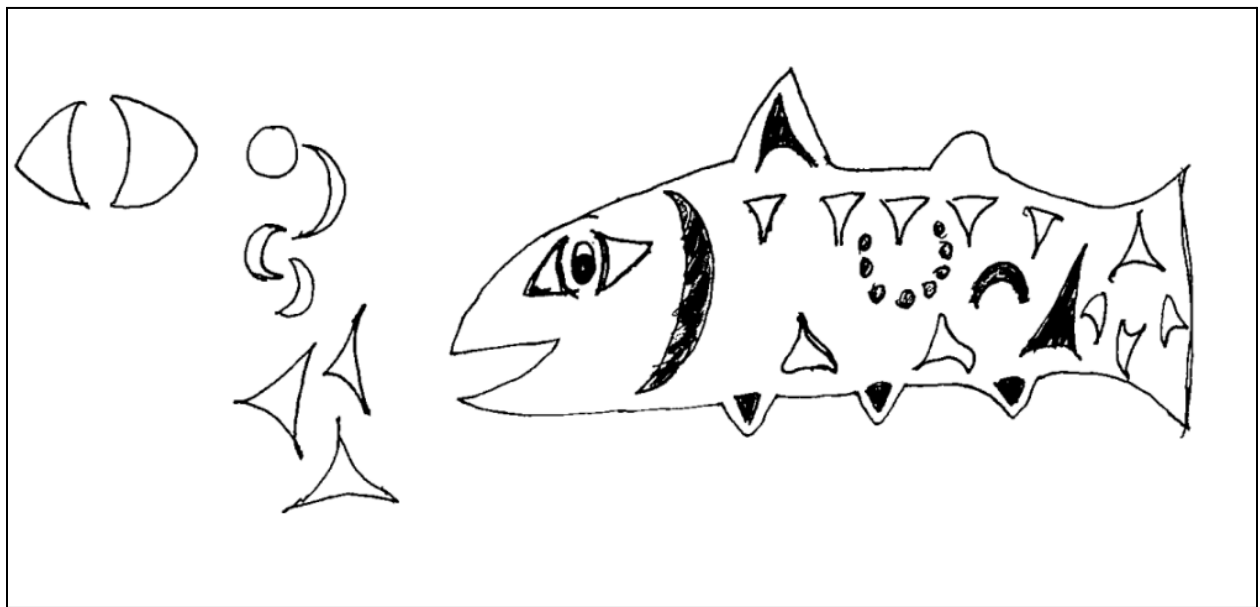
*Another thing I'm noticing is **a conflicting feeling about time and productivity**. Like **I can feel the time flying by already but I don't want to rush through things**. And, along the same lines **I feel a tension about respecting peoples' time vs. the capitalist urge towards productivity and efficiency**. Like **what is my own internally conditioned***

capitalist anxiety and what is a healthy concern for making sure people feel like their time is well spent with us (CJETAM012624).

This time we looked to Fernandes' expertise as a visual artist and used a video resource he created for teaching about Coast Salish art forms and a guided activity drawing a salmon. In this video Fernandes shows how to draw the three main shapes that make up Coast Salish art, the circle, the crescent, and the trigon. He also describes how art "art is not just based on shapes but also what's between the shapes" (CM020824). As we watched we paused the video periodically so all of us could draw along.

Figure 20

Co-storyteller Coast Salish Salmon Drawing Activity



Re-listening to this part of the classroom recording is a joy. Moments of concentrated silence are punctuated by laughter. There are audible "oohs" and "aahs" as people look at each others' drawings. "Can I see your salmon?" "This is mine." "I love it." "Ah, cute." "It's nice." "The eye is kind of small." "Oh, wow!" (CAR020824). I remember clearly feeling a mixture of happiness, relief and self-reproach as I saw how the drawing activity was being taken up and experienced.

Not as a waste of time, but as meaningful and connected, with co-storytellers learning about, discussing and engaging actively with Coast Salish stories through art.

You Can't Understand (the World without Telling a Story)

As folks finished their drawings and the giggles and compliments died down we shifted gears, projecting a slide with a quote from Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are, you can’t understand the world without telling a story” and asked the co-storytellers what they thought it meant. In the classroom recording there is a long silence after I ask what people understand about this idea. I remember seeing folks shaking their heads slightly in confusion and kicking myself internally, feeling like we had taken a wrong turn at the intersection of theory and practice. Cristina finally broke the silence, ***“some saying no? Or yes? Or maybe, do you agree? Do you see it that way? What do you think about these things?”*** (CAR020824). After another long pause Claire tentatively spoke up saying that to her the quote meant something like culture and sharing culture so others understand ***“your country or your, or your race or your hometown or yourself”*** (CAR020824). More silence, then I barrelled forwards, ***“other thoughts? Or is it clear? Do you have any questions? Is it confusing?”*** (CAR020824). In the recording it feels like I’m grasping. Sun chimes in with connections to the Salmon People, her comments are difficult for me to understand but she ends up by talking about respecting the ocean, river, and the clear water. In my anxiety about the quote I am reverting to “teacher mode” and I cold call on Wellesh,

Taiko: What do you think Wellesh?

Wellesh: This me?

Taiko: Yeah.

Wellesh: I misunderstand. About this question. About who is.

*Taiko: Yeah, well I guess **is it like true? Is it important?** I mean, this quote here. **What do you think he means.** I guess those are the questions. Or **what is true about it?***

Welles: Anything is possible?

Taiko: Yeah.

*Welles: **I think truthful, I think true story** (CAR020824).*

Our intention had been to think together as co-storytellers about the role of storytelling in constructing the world around us but it feels like we fell into the epistemological trap of “disembodied abstract discourse” (Escobar, 2007, p. 192).

After the class, in the collaborative journal I reflected on my feelings and concerns,

*The conversation around **the quote felt confusing for folks.** It reminded me of a lot of my **questions and misgivings in general about how theory/practice/pedagogy connect or not and what that means in participatory/collaborative context like ours.** I mean in the sense that often **the more theoretical or abstract ideas are the ones that supposedly guide the work but are also the ones that are challenging to convey or discuss in multilingual settings** where languages are not shared by all. I felt bad that **I kind of persisted in asking folks what they thought it meant when it clearly wasn't resonating with them.** But then the question becomes, **if we are not sharing and discussing these ideas with students how can we center these ideas as part of the collaborative project?** ...it's something that **has plagued me in different ways forever about the separation of theory and method/practice in multilingual collaborative/participatory settings** (CJETAM020925).*

I was perturbed by the confusion I perceived in students and even more so by my insistence in asking them about it. This brought up a larger tension that I still experience in trying to do

participatory pedagogical work in language learning settings where my own linguistic limitations and the mixed levels of the classroom community make delving into more complex theoretical discussions challenging. And although I feel a connection and an intuitive apprehension of the Vizenor quote, looking back I'm not even clear how *I* understand or could articulate what the words mean to me.

This incident is also significant because it illustrates the need to reflect on and articulate more clearly what the project goals are and for who. In collaborative projects it is natural that different people will have different goals for participation. For instance, in this case my goals were shaped by the dissertation and my interest and investment in both the practical and theoretical implications of multilingual storytelling with adult learners. I was also motivated by a concern for connecting our discussions and understanding of story and storytelling with Indigenous epistemologies in critical and thoughtful ways. The other co-storytellers were not motivated by the same concerns or obligations. With this in mind now, I perceive missed opportunities, not only to be more transparent with my own goals but to consider more thoughtfully and explicitly the goals that co-storytellers had for their participation.

As the conversation moved away from the quote and then slowly away from Indigeneity as well, we segwayed into asking co-storytellers to begin thinking about the stories they might want to tell. Reflecting on these experiences and discussions, I regret that we never explicitly came back to the presence of local Indigenous peoples or of the significance of their stories in understanding the histories of the land and the sovereignty of its peoples. Going forward my intention is to learn from this and consider new practices that are more attuned to the contextual relationships that impact what language we use to introduce and discuss the complexity of storytelling in all its forms and, at the same time to be more explicit in connecting to Indigenous

sovereignty, especially in discussions of land and story. These ideas and implications for practice are also described in greater detail in Chapter 7.

We are ləli?a?k^wbix^w here

In this project, as immigrants and descendents of immigrants, we are ləli?a?k^wbix^w here, and I continue to wonder, how do we strive to be connected? What is the genealogy of diverse global communities like the ones that make up the language classrooms of immigrant and refugee students? What place is associated with the convergence of multiple diasporas? How do we make decisions about what stories to prioritize in the spaces where we have influence? I want to reiterate again my hesitance and uncertainty as I look to Indigenous epistemologies and stories for guidance on these questions as a non-Indigenous person. At the same time, I am also emboldened by the idea that non-Indigenous researchers and communities have a responsibility to engage in “decolonizing, anticolonial self-reflection and reorientation” and that recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems may in fact, “hold the possibilities for collective human survival on Iethi'nihstenha Onhwentsia (Our Mother the Earth)” (Holmes & Gonzalez, 2017, p. 218). In this chapter I have shared some of what I see as shortcomings or absences and my anxieties about the relevance or impact of this work. But, returning to the words that Claire wrote in her notebook, she helps me remember that naming is not static and neither is colonialism. We start decolonial work by learning the names and stories of people and places. That we started that work together.

*What do **we** think about Washington?*

Native American

Indigenous

⁴ Different people, 'Foreigner' (Puyallup Tribal Language Basics, n.d.)

Tribes

Mt Ranier = Tahoma = means mother of waters is ranier first name, is mean coast

Salish (group of language)

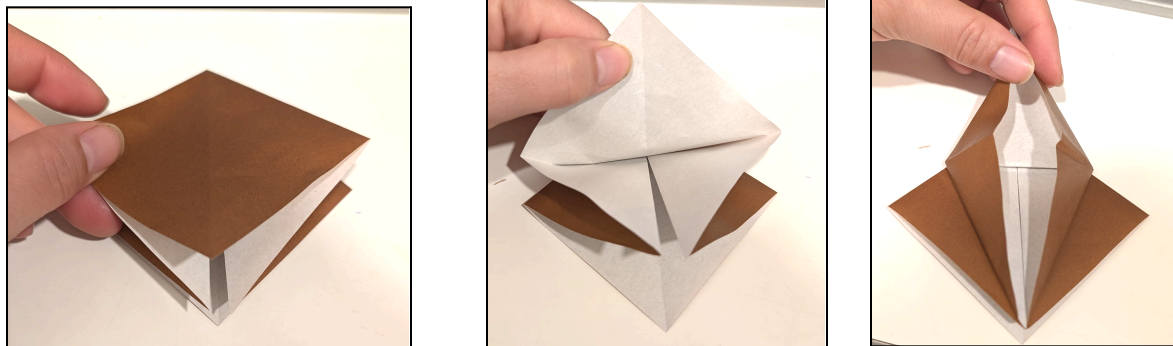
Seattle speak Lushotseed

Origami Prelude: 花弁折り 花弁折り (Hanabira ori) Petal Fold

A petal fold is actually a series of moderately complex folds used to create a flower or petal-like shape commonly used in models like the iris or crane. Generally, it transforms flat, pre-creased paper into a three-dimensional form with curved edges that resemble petals. More complex applications of the petal fold require folding without pre-creases, a more difficult and delicate process. The complexity of the fold comes from the multidimensional nature, it cannot be described as a fold along a single line. To accomplish the petal fold you start with a square base and then take a corner of the paper and gently lift it up which compels the sides inwards (Figure 21). In this way one “fold” or movement of the paper generates all the other subsequent folds. In this interconnected, multidimensional way the petal fold represents what I am referring to as *transnational identity-in story* and *identity-in-relation*, where a focus on multilingual storytelling is the petal fold that leads to a range of complex and co-constructed identity options.

Figure 21

Petal Fold in Process



Chapter 5: *Transnational Identity-in-story and Identity-in-relation* as “loving world travel”

There are “worlds” we enter at our own risk, “worlds” that have agon, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are “worlds” that we enter out of necessity and that would be foolish to enter playfully in either the agonistic sense or in my sense. In such “worlds,” we are not playful. To be in those “worlds” in resistance to their construction of ourselves as passive, servile, and inferior is to inhabit those selves ambiguously, through our first-person memories of lively subjectivity. But there are “worlds” that we can travel to lovingly, and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason I think that traveling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them is that by traveling to their “world” we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have traveled to each other’s “worlds” are we fully subjects to each other (Lugones, 1987, p.17).

As discussed in previous chapters, within the neoliberal capitalist ESOL context, students have historically been offered “limited and deficit subject positions (identities), primarily as immigrants, skills trainees and prospective employees in low-paid work” (Simpson & Gresswell, 2012, p. 193). But, as Bucholtz and Hall have outlined, identities are not unitary and enduring psychological states or social categories and, “as the product of situated social action, identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances” (2005, p. 376). In this chapter I discuss how engaging multilingual digital storytelling in the context of this project activated the folding together of storybased identities, transnational identities, and relational identities created subsequent space for us to reflect on and share both our stories and our lived experiences,

helping to reconfigure and reframe what type and whose knowledge was valued in the classroom. As a way to conceptualize this folding together I am referring to the process as *transnational identity-in-story* and *identity-in-relation* as “loving world travel.” The vignettes below will focus on how co-storytellers, including myself, used their stories as platforms for different modes of identity construction. I include my own identity construction as part of this for the same reason that I included a story of my own re-telling in the online repository of this project, to place my “self,” as much as possible, alongside others who have contributed to this work. Because the goals of this project are not directed at establishing generalizable “truths” but instead focus on understanding how meaning is produced through storytelling relationships I felt that it was important to account for my own co-storyteller/researcher participant experience. This is an extension of a methodology that attempts to move beyond subscribing to a particularly modernist set of assumptions informing conceptions of what it means to know, to be known, and to know others. Rather than examining the details of the stories, the following vignettes will look at how each story functioned as a vehicle for what Lugones called “playful world-traveling” (1987). My chief aim is to explore how remembering and retellings stories and turning them into multimodal artifacts gave co-storytellers identity options by drawing on our diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and relationships.

Vignette 1: “That little girl, that’s you?”

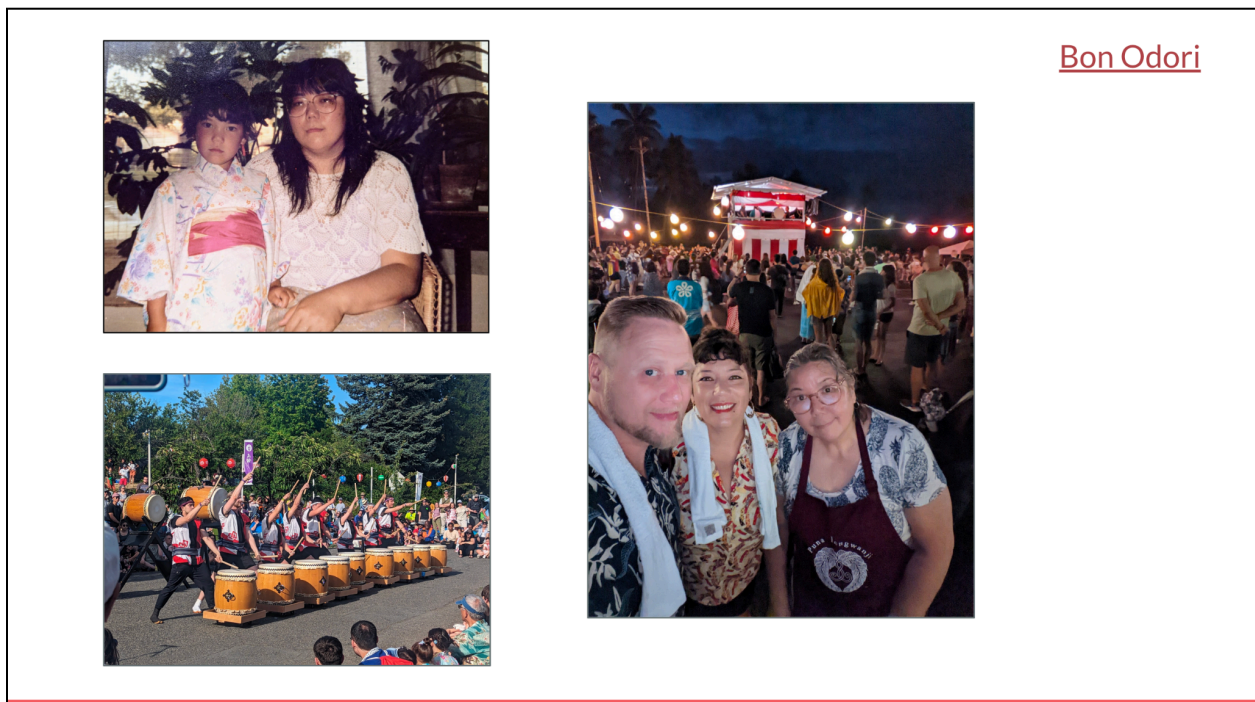
During our first class sessions co-storytellers were invited to engage with the different stories that former contributors had shared on the translationships.net website including the stories that both Cristina and I had shared. My story is a Buddhist legend about the origins of the summer Bon Odori festivals, also called Obon or Bone Dance, that take place in Japanese communities throughout the world. Like many stories it has multiple versions. In the version my

mom told me a disciple of Buddha had a dream where he saw his mother suffering in the afterlife. She was stuck in the world of hungry ghosts because she had been a mean and cruel woman in this world. But, the disciple loved her anyway and asked Buddha how he could ease her suffering. He was told that he should visit her grave with offerings and dance and celebrate. When he did this she was released and he was able to see past her cruelty and witness all the small sacrifices and kindnesses she had shown him as her son in this life. During Bon Dance we are dancing with gratitude and to lure the spirits of our ancestors home.

Various co-storytellers had already engaged with my story by the time we reached our fifth session when we began to conceive of how each person would present their stories, what languages, what modalities, what images etc. And I turned to this story as an example of how they might consider using images to illustrate their stories.

Figure 22

Class Slides Contextualizing Taiko's Story



My Own Hesitant *Transnational Identity-in-story*

In the classroom transcript excerpt below I am showing everyone a slide with three different pictures (see Figure 22). One is the picture from the translationships.net website which shows a drumming performance from the previous year's Obon festival in Seattle. Another is of my mom and I when I was around five, I am wearing a kimono made by my grandmother and we are on our way to Bon Odori, again in Seattle. The third picture shows my mom, Charlie and I at my mom's Buddhist temple in Hilo, Hawaii during their yearly Bon Dance celebration. Looking back, I believe I chose to retell this story because Bon Odori was not only my favorite yearly event growing up, it has been one of the only times I feel truly connected to something resembling a transnational Japanese identity, a Japanese American identity closely intertwined with Seattle and Hilo. Like the story, the images I chose highlight these aspects of my identity.

*Taiko: My story was this one, which was **about a Buddhist tradition from Japan**, a summer festival, **my mom told me the story**. So, these pictures that I have, these pictures that I have on my phone remind me of my story. If you can see, **that's in Seattle**. That's the festival last year **in Seattle, downtown Seattle in the Central District**. That's the same festival, **this is in Hawaii where my mom is from**. So we went, my mom is wearing the apron because **she was helping cook you know, at the church she was helping get everything ready and we're wearing these towels because it's very hot in Hawaii, and you're dancing but it's very hot**. And you can see all the people behind, this thing has like the music and **it's night time in Hawaii** (CAR022924).*

As a multiracial second, third, fourth, and fifth generation descendent of immigrants, the close ties to any countries of origin were mostly lost in generations before mine and I am hesitant to call my experiences or my identity "transnational." However, in the text in bold of this short

passage above I hear myself performing a certain transnational identity through the story which foregrounds both my connections to Japanese Buddhist culture and my connections to place. One way of understanding this is that calling on this story, the cultural modalities of the festival, and its locations represents transitionalism in the way Robinson, et al. (2020), building on the definitions of Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) and West (1992), describe as both a set of connections between people and between geographical spaces. Within this conceptualization of transnationalism “people affiliate themselves with social groups through ‘acts of identity,’ driven by desire for these affiliations, these connections. We can see translingual and transnational identities emerge by what people do—how they use language, how they describe and claim their national affiliations” (Robinson, et al., 2020, p. 10). Identifying with this story and these cultural practices allows for my transnational identity to emerge, for me to describe and claim these relationships and affiliations and for others to see them as well. Lugones writes that, “those of us who are ‘world’ travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different ‘worlds’ and of having the capacity to remember other ‘worlds’ and ourselves in them. We can say ‘That is me there, and I am happy in that ‘world’” (1987, p. 11), to me this is a way to understand identity performance in terms of agency and co-construction. By choosing what aspects of my identity I highlighted I chose what world to remember and what world to invite others into. These choices are shaped not only by who I am but who I am in relationship with.

Identity-in-Relation and “Appropriateness”

“That little girl, that’s you?” and “your mom?” Lisa asked me as the conversation about the images in the slide continued (CAR022924). This prompted me to share additional details and explain the origin and significance of the kimono. More questions and connections began to emerge as we talked. Aziza asked if it was a traditional Chinese dress, Sun clarified that it was

Japanese, then she connected it to a similar style of dress in Korea called hanbok. Cristina inquired if Sun wore one. We continued discussing the particulars of traditional clothing for a few minutes but then the conversation took a decidedly more personal tone when Sun began peppering me with questions about my family situation:

Sun: No brothers?

Taiko: No brothers no sisters.

Sun: You have children?

Taiko: I have no children no. I have cats. not quite the same.

Cristina: And dog.

Taiko: And a dog.

Sun: Not getting married, not yet?

Taiko: I am married. I am married but yeah I know, we like cats and dogs better than children.

Aziza: Your mom, she is here in Seattle?

Taiko: My mom lives here, yeah. My mom and my dad live here, they're not together, they're separated.

Wellesch: No, I know.

Taiko: But they're good friends, you know.

Aziza: But you look like the, same your mom.

Taiko: My mom, my grandma, my aunt we all have the same face (CAR022924).

The passage above shows how interpersonal relationships are nested in broader social relationships that shape identity as well as within the communicative context in which they are constructed. In her theorizing of Indigenous feminist relational freedom Deatnu River Samí

scholar Rauna Kuokkanen argues that relationality is an active process that sustains and nurtures a complex network of relationships in motion and “the wider cultural or philosophical frameworks that regard relationships as foundational...to how identity, community, and well-being are understood in specific cultural contexts” (2025, p. 4). Both Sun and Aziza are seeking to know more about me, and I in turn am identifying myself, through the contextual constellation of my relationships. Research on relational identity construction has explored how referring to personal and cultural experiences can help people feel more important and more mutually included in each other’s life, “obtaining a better sense of each others’ backgrounds contributes to the construction of relational identity... we learn about each other in a more complete sense” (Lee, 2006, p. 7). It is interesting that Sun had clear expectations that connected to gender and family in her initial assumption that since I do not have children I would not be married “yet.” Sun’s idea of the different family and gender categories that she expects from her own lived experiences – sister, mother, wife– did not map directly onto my identity. However, in addition to, or in spite of, shared values which draw people together, relationships also grow in difference. A diversity of viewpoints and experiences “push the relationship beyond the comfort of redundant shared values” (Collins & Ting, 2014, p. 11). To me this also speaks to the “possibility and complexity of a pluralistic feminism” which, Lugones writes, “affirms the plurality in each of us and among us as richness and as central to feminist ontology and epistemology” (1987, p. 3). *Identity-in-relation* accounts for the way in which we mutually co-construct new expressions of identity relationally with those around us, as well as the fundamental ways we conceive of ourselves and think about the world in terms of the relationships in which we are involved.

This interaction also brings to the fore considerations about what is allowable and questionable within classroom relationships which in this case is influenced by both the transnational and pedagogical context of the situation, “in different cultures, the boundaries between property and proprietary, individual and communal ownership, self and other are differently drawn and so are perceptions of appropriateness” (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996, p. 210). This is true also of perceptions of appropriate levels of intimacy and care in the classroom. In addition to the transnational context in this example, there are also gendered and generational aspects, another illustration of the multifaceted, “in process” nature of *identity-in-relation*.

While there have been important challenges to the ideas of “appropriateness” of language use in terms of how “the white speaking and listening subject” (Flores & Rosa, 2015) positions idealized, monolingualism as the standard language to which all should aspire (Flores, 2013) the above excerpt might also encourage a discussion of ways in which this same racialized, neoliberal conception of appropriateness impacts our relational expectations as well. In this case for example, in the context of an adult language learning classroom, direct personal or intimate questions like “are you married yet?” and “no children?” are often considered “inappropriate.” But, as both Phillipson (1993) and Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) have pointed out, the materials, methodologies, and ideological views of communication and communicative teaching associated with ELT “impose on learners of English around the world discourse forms that are typical of Anglo-Saxon commercial practices” (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996, p. 200). These are discourses which also dictate who gets to ask and about what, and who is required to answer. In opposition to this, if we approach “appropriateness” as both relational and contextual, we can choose how and when to model openness and respectful dialogue in order to set the stage for more equitable and interdependent relationships in the classroom.

For me, the following dialogue is an example of the way in which allowing for closeness and intimacy gives others space to share. This conversation took place during the same session but later on in the class,

*Sun: I have **four older sister then three older brother. Total seven, seven kids.***

Cristina: Oh wow. Wow.

*Sun: Seven children. **I am last. Youngest, then this is 81 years old.***

Taiko: 81?

*Sun: Yes, **my older sister. She's living in Japan, yeah, Japan. Then, one years ago is picture send to me from my daughter.***

*Cristina: **This is your daughter?***

*Sun: Yeah, **my daughter. She one years ago visit to my sister because I don't go, all the time stay, then I said I can't go, please visit auntie, my sister then she live there here.***

Cristina: Oh wow!

*Sun: Yeah, here is **my favorite son. My mother 85. My mother 92 years old. She is passed away, then they are all passed away, all the people, my mother, my sister in law, yeah my mom, my aunt, my sister, this is my mother before die. Then this is Korea, yeah, Korea, my mother, my sister in law, another, my sister. Yeah (CAR022924).***

In this excerpt Sun was showing Cristina and I pictures of her family. Listening to the recording I hear nostalgia and sadness in her voice as she talks about how she couldn't travel to see her sister and as she describes how so many of her close relatives have died. I remember feeling my chest constrict as the conversation made me think about my dad in the hospital. While literature on trauma informed teaching (Wilson, et al., 2024) and critical listening (Dutro, 2009) addresses ways in which trauma and posttraumatic stress can affect learning and

engagement, here I am concerned with more mundane or conversational expressions intimacy that may include loss and grief and how they are implicated in caring classroom relationships and autonomy. There is a long history of feminist scholarship examining the ways in which women generally both take on and are tasked with care work in education (Morley & Walsh, 1995; Hughes, et al., 2007). In their description of gendered care work as "monstrous" Hughes et al. write that,

This work is generally held to be of very low regard. Undertaking the necessary support, counselling and listening work that is part of everyday teaching and administration is not only time consuming but also emotionally demanding. The work of care is also largely invisible. Yet, caring and pastoral work are significant sites of feminist ethics in action where one is creating an alternative environment to that of competitive individualism (2007, p. 131)

Taking into account these contradictions and complexities, how we can hold the tensions of our own, socially constructed, but sometimes very necessary personal boundaries without submitting to ways of being that devalue intimacy and care and allow “the reality of our embodied vulnerabilities and interdependence [to] stand in stark relief against the cruel indifference of corporations, neoliberal nation-states, and global superpowers, with great gulfs in whose needs for care, whose caring labor, and whose fragility we value” (Blum & Musser, 2023, p. 1). Lugones suggests that, “in recommending “world”-travelling and identification through “world”-travelling as part of loving other women” we can be disloyal to “arrogant perceivers, including the arrogant perceiver in ourselves and their constructions of women” (1987, p. 18). From my perspective, the interpersonal examples in this section show the necessity of engaging in an ongoing reflection and consideration of how our own dispositions and possibly “arrogant

perceptions” towards what is “appropriate” in our interactions with students are in fact products of our own backgrounds and personal experiences.

Vignette 2: “Are you worried there may be some contention?”

Difference is political and there are dangers in depoliticizing that difference. Difference calls for both affirmation and response. Thus, there is the importance of moving beyond a mere acknowledgement of difference to concretely respond to difference. The interstices of social difference (eg. ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, disability) complicate human subjectivities and identities and help subvert naturalized/totalizing discourses. Difference pushes us to learn from that which is not familiar. Difference is not the flip of sameness. Difference is an acknowledgement of voice, positionality, place, context, and history.
(Dei, 2019, p. 16)

In this section I extend the consideration of “appropriateness” and its applications to political topics and content introduced by co-storytellers. Because the inspirations and ideas for what stories to tell were developed independently by co-storytellers the stories they chose to tell went in quite a few different ways but there were also interesting areas of convergence, one of these was telling stories that were political in nature.

During later classes we broke into smaller groups for part of the session, each group working with either Cristina, Shar or I to develop the stories, the translations, the recordings and the texts according to their preferences and goals. It was in these smaller, more intimate settings that a lot of the reflective discussion and contextualization of the stories occurred. Because Aziza and Wellesh shared a language it was natural to have them work together.

Interestingly, both Wellesh and Aziza decided to focus on telling the stories of politically important historical figures. Woldeab Woldemariam, who Wellesh spoke and wrote about, was an

Eritrean revolutionary and a key political figure in the movement for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia. King Yohannes IV, who Aziza described in her story, was Emperor of Ethiopia in the late 19th century, defending Ethiopia from Egyptian and Italian invasion attempts. Reading back through the transcripts it is unclear to me if either of them were influenced by the other to take a historical approach. What is clear from conversations, emails and our collaborative journal entries is that both Cristina and I felt some trepidation or concern due to the potentially political nature of these stories and our own lack of knowledge and experience with the current and historical context of a region in conflict. At the same time, we felt that it was important for people to tell whatever kind of stories were meaningful to them and not to act as gatekeepers for what was an “appropriate” story to share. Freire has said that the mark of origin of the oppressor class is “a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think” (1970, p. 46). In many ways my position of openness, in spite of concerns which I know are rooted in my own ignorance, is inspired by Freire’s emphasis on trust in the people as “the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change” and his understanding that without this trust “there is no reason for liberation” (1970, p. 46, p. 124).

Transnational Identity-in-story in Complex Political Contexts

Black women’s geographies push up against the seemingly natural spaces and places of subjugation, disclosing, sometimes radically, how geography is socially produced and therefore an available site through which various forms of blackness can be understood and asserted. I do not seek to devalue the ongoing unjustness of racism and sexism by privileging geography; rather I want to stress that if practices of subjugation are also spatial acts, then the ways in which black women think, write, and negotiate their

surroundings are intermingled with placebased critiques, or, respatializations
(McKittrick, 2006, p. xvii)

Not only is the political and historical complexity of Ethiopian and Eritrean nationalism beyond the scope of this project, as an outsider it is beyond my ability to fully understand or responsibly interpret, especially without extensive study. Instead, what is of significance is how the sharing of these stories created space for transnational identity construction through storytelling, discussion, and contextualization that was multilingual and complex and more importantly, driven by the co-storytellers' own choices and interpretations of their meanings.

As we had “feared,” it did end up that the stories Wellesh and Aziza shared were strongly political in nature. Aziza's story consisted mainly of biographical details about King Yohannes IV, a 19th century Ethiopian ruler who repelled “military trips from Egypt, Italian and Mahadist of Sudan.” She finished her retelling by emphasizing how “the outside power they come, they need to colonize. But he fighting with them and then he protect his country” (CSAKING). Wellesh told how Woldeab Woldemariam was part of the Eritrean Independence movement and that as an “uncompromising advocate of freedom” he is considered a “father of Eritrean nationalism” (CSWWOLDEAB). Instead of conflict, this mutual emphasis on national independence and struggling against invasion in different historical contexts created connections between the stories the women told subsequently leading to a more targeted critique of power.

During class when we were orally developing the language and ideas for telling the stories Aziza, as a higher level English speaker, provided extensive support to both Wellesh and I. As the three of us worked in a group together the conversation went back and forth between English and Amharic, Aziza helping Wellesh articulate and me to understand. According to Robinson et, al., (2020) transnationality is not only a claim or performance of identity it is also

an “unconscious immersion in cultural traces, connections, and memories, often mediated by the ongoing use of a minoritized language in a particular displaced setting” (p. 7). In this case it is also important to note that minoritized language use is layered with complexity. Wellesh and Aziza share fluency in Amharic, the language of power in Ethiopia but a minoritized language in the US. However, Wellesh also speaks Tigrigna as a first language, which is in turn a minoritized language in Ethiopia where “authorities have implemented a variety of measures, including bans, restrictions, penalties, enforcement, forced relocation, and even heinous acts” (Welesilassie & Gerencheal, 2025, p. 619). Thus, when linguistic identity is considered here in a transnational frame it is not simply a matter of the language hierarchies of Amharic and Tigringna with regards to English but also in relationship to each other and across generations, regions and national borders.

Interestingly, despite the strongly Eritrean nationalist nature of Wellesh’s story, she chose to tell it first in Amharic and then in English:

*Wellesh: Yeah, **In Amharic? In Tigrinya, in Amharic?***

Taiko: Uh huh. .

*Wellesh: Okay, **this is together no problem for me. Same Amharic same Tigrinya. You tell me .***

*Taiko: Oh, **you tell it how you want, in whichever.***

*Wellesh: Yeah it's okay...**In Amharic in Tigringa. In Amharic it's ok** (CAR021524).*

In this interaction Wellesh and I are focused on deciding what language to record the first version of her story in. The excerpt is meaningful because it involves a co-constructed decision making process and, as Blackledge and Pavlenko write, “the ongoing construction, negotiation and renegotiation of identities in multilingual settings are about beliefs about, and practices of

language use” (2001, p. 244). As stated above, the most salient feature of this brief dialogue is Wellesh’s choice to use Amharic instead of Tigrigna. In this choice she emphasizes her ability to produce either language to tell the story. First, she asked me what language she should use but with the choice given over to her in this context, she chose to record in the dominant languages (English and Amharic). At the same time, she constructs herself as a kind of linguistic expert, positioning herself as proficient across the languages “same Amharic, same Tigrigna,” and others as having a clear language preference, “you tell me.” I want to suggest here that instead of “negotiation” with the utilitarian self-interest and competitive connotations that it entails, we might also understand this process in terms of relationality as the co-construction of multilingual identity, as further illustrated below.

The full transcript shows the extent to which Amharic had been used previously between Wellesh and Aziza both for clarification and support as well as for personal conversation. While language choices may be tied to pre-existing identity categories such as ethnicity and nationality they are also “frequently used to construct identities in which gender, friendship ties, and classroom roles are focal aspects” (Fuller, 2007, p. 105). In this case, Wellesh and Aziza spoke English to each other during English instruction and for my benefit but most of the non-”academic” interactions were carried out in Amharic suggesting that the social ties in their relationship have Amharic proficiency as a basis while English plays a lesser role. Language choice functioned as an expression of identity but also as an expression of the different relationships we share, an example of how *identity-in-storytelling* created possibilities as the salient transnational aspects of our identities changed across interactions.

In addition to the language choices I also want to consider the connections between national and transnational identity construction that are apparent in both Aziza and Wellesh’s

stories and discussions. While transnationalism opens up multiple spaces, often the identities of migrants are still based on nationalities and/or countries of origin (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Kelly, 2012). According to Kastoryano what defines, “transnational” is the construction of belonging around “a ‘deterritorialized nation’ with identity claims that are nourished by new expressions of nationalism” (2025, p. 9). From a sociolinguistics perspective, a focus on national identity is associated with an interest in “top-down” constructions of identity originating in institutional and/or policy decisions and discourses while a transnational focus “tries to capture the ambiguity and plurality of synergies between different scales of identity formation at various levels” (de Fina, 2016, p. 170). So, on the one hand we might understand these storytelling choices, without judgement, as a kind of “new expression of nationalism” and at the same time we can consider what transnational and relational identities they are nourishing.

When contextualizing her story Wellesh moved back and forth between English and Amharic. She emphasized the difficult struggles, strength and independence of the Eritrean people and the role Woldeab Woldemariam played in fighting for them. During the parts of the conversation Wellesh changes to Amharic I think it is safe to assume she is providing Aziza additional details about the Eritrean independence movement that she feels unable to express in English. When I asked Aziza if she was familiar with the story of Woldeab Woldemariam, both her and Wellesh pointed out to me that they were from different countries with different histories. But, Aziza also added that while she had been born in Ethiopia, her mother and her mother’s family were originally from Eritrea.

This prompted Wellesh to discuss her own family’s history and experiences moving between Eritrea and Ethiopia during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie and how her originally high opinion of him as a child in elementary school changed drastically over time as she saw the

dispossession of the Eritrean people that occurred when he annexed the country. This particular history was familiar to Aziza, and she and Wellesh collaborated during the discussion to help me understand. Aziza described how her dad told her that when Selassie went to Eritrea he said, ***“I need the land but I don't need the people of Eritrea”***(CAR021524). This quote laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the story Wellesh had shared about Woldemariam. Connecting to this idea of the appropriation of land over people, Aziza told us that she had learned from the story, not only about Woldemariam but about some of the larger political and territorial issues that the story entails,

Aziza: I don't know this history. Now I know, for that the fight for the Eritrean people Woldeab Woldemariam... before, I don't know why they need for the independence from Ethiopia. Before they, I don't know, you know the maps, they come Ethiopia and Eritrea the same before, before Haile Selassie. Yeah, and then, why do we need for independence? I don't know that, today she teach me for that, the way I am before (CAR021524).

Here Aziza explains a shift in her understanding of the historical forces and power structures that shaped the events that Wellesh described. Her openness to new knowledge or to “unlearning” what she had previously been told or taught by dominant political and cultural structures suggests that in this context, the *identity-in-storytelling* process of sharing the story of Woldemariam and the *identity-in-relation* process that occurred in discussing the story enabled the type of praxis and orientation to knowledge that Cushman et al., have called “pluriversal” in the sense that “diverse and historically grounded intellectual exchanges [were] possible” (2021, p. 25). Which is not to say that the exchanges were uncomplicated.

As the discussion continued Wellesh described how she felt coming back to Eritrea from Ethiopia after many of her family members were killed in the fighting,

Wellesh: I come back Eritrea, I hate Ethiopia, I'm serious yeah, because.

Aziza: Yeah, I know the feeling, I know. But I like Ethiopian, I love the people. But the government, the kingdom, you know most of the kingdom they are not for the...

Wellesh: Yes, the peoples is not the problem.

Aziza: The people, they don't have problem. It's the government.

Taiko: People are trying to take land and water?

Wellesh: Oh Yeah. I know.

Aziza: I swear. This time too is not good, my country in Ethiopia force the people, the government they say you know, it's different for the people. People they need help, they still they have war other places.

Taiko: Yeah.

Aziza: Still, they don't have too much because if you have the war place, they don't have food you know? The farmer area they do fight, so, people the now still they need more money, they need for helping, everything but they don't think for the people.

Wellesh: No. Yes.

Aziza: So that's, that's the problem. I know, I know. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Wellesh: No, no, no. It's ok. It's history, it's history. Yeah (CAR021524).

The hostility of Wellesh's sentiment of "hate" for Ethiopia at the start of this conversation provoked some anxiety within me at the time, to which I had no response. As can be heard in the recording, I remained silent and apprehensive for most of the conversation. Aziza however, made a notable and thoughtful contrast between the people of Ethiopia and the government of Ethiopia

making it clear that while she loved the people, she did not condone the government oppression or violence. This theme carries through the excerpt and it strikes me as an important point of agreement when Wellesch also says that the people of Ethiopia are not the problem. Then, Aziza appears to take on some responsibility as she apologizes, presumably for the political situation, with Wellesch reassuring her that it is ok, that this is “history.” hooks (1987) suggests that “working through hostility” is necessary “in order to arrive at understanding and solidarity, if only to free ourselves from the sexist socialization that tells us to avoid confrontation” (p. 66) and here I see Aziza and Wellesch engaging in this process of building solidarity with one another, based not shared experiences or values, but on co-constructed knowledge relating to power and oppression.

Vignette 3: “In my country it’s kind of culture”

Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained (Rushdie, 1991, p. 17)

Because the language and the cultural identity of a speaker are so enmeshed, translation poses a unique challenge, especially in situations of “untranslatability.” In the following section I consider how discussing and enacting translation and grappling with untranslatability in relationship with others contributed to the dynamic process of *transnational identity-in-storytelling*.

As part of our ongoing reflections on the design and focus of the classes Cristina and I spoke and wrote to each other extensively about approaches, theories, protocols, and concerns regarding the role of translation across different aspects of the project. We both felt some significant ambivalence around making translation to English central to the project. We had

learned from our pilot workshops the previous year that co-storytellers experienced the translation aspect in ways could potentially reproduce some of the very discourses or structures that we were trying to challenge in the project, as reflected in this journal entry from Cristina,

Hearing conversations about how the “English version” had to be shorter, simplified, with less details, etc. made me feel super uncomfortable. I could sense the “deficit” lens shaping these conversations. Why do the stories in English have to be like that? Was it a matter of not having enough time? Of skills? Of untranslatability? Of not needing to actually tell the stories to those audiences? (this does not seem the case, since they expressed an interest in learning more about the stories from others) (CJECSM071723).

Because of these shared concerns we wanted to make sure that we approached translation from “a translingual lens that does not expect a ‘one on one’ literal translation” (CJECSM101323).

Untranslatability, Repositioning Identity-in-relation

Engaging in explicit conversations about translation and untranslatability in the class before doing any story translation was one way we attempted to address this challenge. According to Lalpékhluah Blah, “untranslatability/incomparability can serve as a means to challenge hegemonic power structures and promote linguistic diversity” (2024, p. 1). During our third class session we watched a short documentary created by graduate students at Michigan State University called “untranslatable” in which different people share and discuss words that exist without equivalence in other languages. After watching we talked about what we heard and understood and, because some of the co-storytellers shared a language with speakers in the video, they were able to add even more context. This context was constructed dialogically between us in a way that centered the linguistic and cultural knowledge of the co-storytellers and

at times rearranging our relational identities. For example, both Sal and Aziza were able to elaborate on specific “untranslatable” terms from the video: *gigil*, which in Tagalog describes a feeling of wanting to squeeze something you love, and the Amharic word, *gursha* which is the practice of feeding another person with your hand. These untranslatable words are examples of what Janssen (2012) referred to as translational lexical gaps, although both *gigil* and *gursha* can be explained using a combination of other words in English, there is no single word that can fully express the meaning.

In the first instance, Sal describes this specific feeling or sensation,

Sal: ...It's like you want to squish somebody with love.

(laughter)

Taiko: Ah, something that you want to squeeze with love.

Sal: Not to kill them, but to hug them, gigil.

Taiko: I understand, we don't have a word, we don't have a word but I understand the feeling right?

Sal: Yeah.

Taiko: So I recognize the word, but I just don't have one in English.

Sal: Yeah, that's what it is.

Taiko: It's called cute aggression, there's like a clinical term, in medicine.

Sal: And then they say “you're hurting me” but it's like that.

Taiko: Yeah, yeah. That's a great word. So you recognize that word?

Sal: Uh huh.

Cristina: I have a question, is it just for people? Or, like, can I say that about a puppy?

Sal: For pets, yeah you can do that.

Cristina: Ok.

Sal: But, you don't do that with pet, because you know it's going to bite you. Your loved ones, you're going to squeeze them, "mom, dad, your hurting me." But, "I'm sorry, miss you."

(laughter)

Taiko: That's a great word, that's a great word (CAR022224).

What I want to point out here is actually my own assertions that I recognize and know the underlying meaning of the word that he is explaining. When I first began to write about this excerpt I had written something suggesting that we all immediately recognized the feeling that Sal was describing. But, as I read over the transcript and relistened I became more and more uncomfortable with that interpretation and began to try and pinpoint the source of this discomfort. Now, looking back and listening I think I was too quick to assume an immediate understanding and superimpose a Western “clinical term” onto what Sal was explaining. Borrowing from literary scholarship on the decolonial politics of untranslatability and how it relates to expressions of affect and embodiment I see in this exchange my effort to make a non-Western affect legible in English, a move that de Chavez has gestured to as responding to “a misalignment between non-Western affects and the emotional signifiers provided by the colonizer’s language” and the monolingual assumptions that wear the “ill-fitting suit of basic emotions” (2025, p. 234). My uncritical suggestion of “cute aggression” discounts the untranslatability of culturally specific emotions.

When Aziza provided more context for the Amharic word *gursha* that appeared in the video she explicitly connected the term to a cultural practice, not just a word describing an action.

Aziza: Yes. Yeah, like, *in my country kind of culture, and then when you do the big meals and then somebody make it for other person, so it's just like the culture. Gursha, you feed for other person, kind of.*

Taiko: *That's so beautiful. I, do you feed people, adults feed each other?*

Aziza: Yeah. *Of course.*

Taiko: *But, like usually you think, I mean here you feed, you know, children.*

Aziza: Yeah, *but then when I go in my friend's house and then my family, neighbors, and then when we eat like separately and then we do feed for other, kind of culture.*

Taiko: *That's so interesting, I always, whenever my partner, my husband tries to give me some food I just don't*

Aziza: Yeah. *I know yeah.*

Taiko: *But, I should be more, I should accept his, his care.*

Cristina: *Is it for people you know already or can it just be with strangers?*

Aziza: *Can you repeat for me?*

Cristina: Yeah, like feeding each other but *do you know the people you are feeding or can it be like strangers? People from outside?*

Aziza: Ah. *If you want, like, You know people they give to the like, homeless people or something. Even they do people they like it, they feed for each other. But specifically in a holiday. Even the family member they come to the house and then you have to eat and then they feed you, just like that yeah (CAR022224).*

Aziza helps the group to understand the meaning and the specific practices associated with the word emphasizing that this is an intrinsic part of the culture. She answers mine and Cristina's questions regarding the kind of relationships this practice invokes. In her sharing there are shifts

in the teacher-learner and cultural expert-cultural novice relationships. To elaborate on this I want to point out how after telling her how beautiful the idea is I kind of press her about the specifics of feeding adults versus children, sharing my aversion to having my partner feed me and exposing my cultural assumptions. She patiently explains to me that feeding friends, family and neighbors is a cultural practice in opposition to eating “*separately*.” Her explanation then makes me reflect on the way I react when Charlie wants to share food with me and offers it to feed me directly. In this way she enables me to reflect on my own cultural values in ways that help me resist my own internalized colonial relations of thought and practice. I learn from her cultural and linguistic knowledge beyond just learning a new word.

By “exploring translational gaps, learners are able to pay closer attention to indexicality and recognize how words in a language can point to culturally specific ideas and ways of thinking” (Darvin & Zhang, 2023, p. 657). In the case of stories we must consider more carefully what is “lost” when asking people to translate and share them in English, Cristina reflected on this potential loss in a journal entry writing,

These aspects were lost or diffused at least when they were asked to tell the story in English. It is almost as if the stories are “sacred” and lose their essence in English. Would it be anticolonial pedagogy to choose to not write the stories in English, but only explain the “story scenes” and a summary (as Oliverio told me) for people to “access the ideas” but not “colonize them?” (CJECSM071924).

With this in mind, we made an effort to encourage co-storytellers to decide on what languages and modalities to share their stories in, but I think it was more by introducing and discussing the role of translation and untranslatability that we were then able to extend a shift in perspectives to the storytelling activities. This is apparent in Sal’s retelling and discussion of,

“The legend of Bai and Santelmo” and Claire’s,”The legend of the Nian Beast.” Both of these stories involve central concepts that resist direct translation. In his story, Sal tells of a young boy during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and his encounter with Santelmo, a fireball spirit, emerging from the bloodshed of war, that provoked fear in everyone from the people “including the invaders and also the natives” to “even the insects and animals [who] went into hiding” (CSSSBAI). Perhaps because of the timing of the classes in late winter, which coincided with Lunar New Year, Claire retold a Chinese New Year story involving the Nian beast that came out of the ocean each year to terrorize villages on the first day of the Lunar Year until a mysterious old man came and showed the people how to scare the creature away using firecrackers and adorning their doors with red (CSCYNIAN). The stories and the central concepts presented a rich genealogy that we, as listeners with distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds, can only partially understand and in this way untranslatability is also resistance towards Anglo and Eurocentrism. But, at the same time, as listeners in relationship with each other and our stories we are sometimes able to co-construct meaning and knowledge in place of “translation.”

During the conversation about untranslatable words Sal made connections to his story explaining how the main “character” of his story, Santelmo was untranslatable in a way that is tied to place, “*you can never translate is, are like strange things that happen in their place that never happen in another country...I bet it never happened to other countries so it’s hard to translate it. Like a dragon, no, not dragon, fireball*” (CAR022224). This aspect of Sal’s example is especially interesting to me, it shows clearly ways in which untranslatability has to do with much more than language. I originally associated the character of Santelmo with the meteorological phenomena of Saint Elmo’s Fire and Cristina asked if it was like a ghost but Sal

made it clear that Santelmo was neither of these things explaining, *“no, it’s like a fireball, created by just, like killing fields. It becomes, because of the hate it becomes a fireball, chases you...Fireballs, known to be in the lake because of the massacre. It comes from the tiny particle but it’s going to touch you, your skin, gonna cause you to burn”* (CAR022224). In this case Sal asserts that you can “never translate” certain things because they just don’t happen the same way in other countries or contexts. So, it is from the perspective of Filipino cultural knowledge and experience that Western or English language knowledge is differentiated rather than the other way around. Additionally, he emphasizes that understanding Santelmo requires an understanding of the land where it comes from.

Similarly, the untranslatability in Claire’s story emerges not from the words themselves but from a broader cultural trajectory that gives meaning to the words in relationship to the story. In the following excerpt Claire is showing us some pictures she took at her local temple during their Lunar New Year celebration and explaining connections to the Nian monster,

Claire: You can see this one actually they dancing and singing to congratulations to everyone 恭喜发财 (Gōngxǐ fācái) gōngxǐ meaning is, I think why they do like that because they learn the story after Chinese New Year's New Year's Eve and the other next day is the first day in the calendar right? If you can see your friends and your family are alive then we say 恭喜 (Gōngxǐ) gōngxǐ means congratulations.

Cristina: Wow

Claire: Means you didn't, you didn't.

Sun: Gōngxǐ means congratulations?

Claire: Yes yes. Congratulations meaning is, you didn't you didn't be hurt by Nian, Nian monster. This is a local type story, ancient story, yeah so that's why people wear

red color because red color is Nian monster he or she afraid of this color and also Nian monster afraid the fireworks the sound of fireworks. And also yeah red color and the light from a red candle so, reason why people from China, Korea or Taiwan they love to wear red color in this.

Shar: In that time.

Claire: Yeah, in that time. Yeah they said have a good fortune it means have a good fortune good fortune. Yeah, so other thing you can see everything you can see is all red. And people always say 恭喜 (Gōngxǐ) 恭喜发财 (Gōngxǐ fācái).

Lisa: You are alive.

Taiko: You are alive.

Claire: You are alive. But that is a long time ago, right now most of people say 恭喜 (Gōngxǐ) mean is, you have the good fortune and maybe you can earn more money or you have good health you can win the lottery money or... (CAR022924)

Claire traces the evolution of these expressions contrasting the words 恭喜发财 (gōngxǐ fācái) themselves, which do translate pretty directly, 恭喜 meaning congratulations, and 发财 prosperity or wealth, with the more complex genealogy of the meaning behind the words and how it relates to the local story and cultural practices. She tells us that in the past, 恭喜 meant congratulations on your survival but that over time it has come to mean a more general wish for others' good fortune and prosperity. Without this contextualization the direct translation of "congratulations" seems incongruent as a New Year's greeting, congratulations for what?

These two examples from Sal and Claire show that in many ways the act of storytelling itself was also an act of translating something that was not fully translatable. But the storytelling and collaborative knowledge building still happened in multiple directions, between home

languages and English, between orality and text, between cultures. Most importantly it happened across different ways of understanding and practicing relationships with each other, rearranging our transnational identities-in-relation. In this way, the untranslatability of stories and language is made significant through our relationships offering us “portals through which people from other cultures might gain a glimpse, however partial or obscured, into ways of being and thinking in that culture” (Lomas, 2025, p. 42), another way of “world”-travelling.

One way to understand the conversations around untranslatability is as rearranging the deficit position, at least momentarily, in the language practices of co-storytellers. In these instances the lack of ability of a multilingual speaker to express something in English shifts and instead English is positioned as lacking the sufficient linguistic range or cultural context to express the concept.

Bringing it all together: *Transnational Identity-in-story and Identity-in-relation* as “loving world travel”

If we seek to cocreate learning spaces where wholeness is normalized for our students and ourselves, we can collectively reject and refuse the violent cis-hetero patriarchal, ableist, racist, monolingual White-gaze normed performances that are too often required in the writing, reading, speaking, and ways of interacting centered in ELA classroom practices that require that BIPOC students deny their whole selves to be deemed “good” students and worthy people (Moore & Paris, 2021, p. 24)

Stories shape identity at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, the individual and the collective, the translatable and untranslatable. They reflect cultural values, beliefs, and norms, providing frameworks for understanding ourselves and our place in the world. In this chapter I have looked at some of the choices that we as co-storytellers made in what stories to

tell and the reflections we shared about them. After sharing reflections on my own “hesitant” *transnational identity-in-story* I have described three main themes/areas of analysis and discussion: “appropriateness,” *transnational identity-in-story* in complex political contexts, and untranslatability. These themes illustrate how *transnational identity-in-story*, and *transnational identity-in-relation* arise and are expressed. Circling back to the origami concept of the petal fold, I want to suggest that one fold (translingual storytelling) necessarily compels a series of others folds bound up in relational and transnational identity construction. These are contingent practices based not only upon our pre-existing relationship to our interlocutor or reader, but on wider constellations of overlapping social relationships and connections that we are always contending with, consciously or subconsciously, in how we construct ourselves for others, and also in how we construct the relationship itself.

If Norton defines identity as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (2013, p. 4) then *transnational identity-in-story* and *identity-in-relation* describe the ways in which transnational storytelling and relationships can play important parts in that construction especially when they are intentionally invited into spaces of learning. As discussed throughout this dissertation, policy and institutional discourses and practices shaped by neoliberal, capitalist understandings of language and learning, often limit adult language learners’ identity options. The vignettes and examples in this chapter have shown that storytelling can provide a broader range of identity positions, extending at the same time their scope for language development, identity construction and ultimately our collective ability to lovingly travel to each others’ worlds, if only for a moment.

Origami Prelude: 連鶴 (Renzuru) Linked Cranes

As described in Chapter 3, renzuru 連鶴, linked cranes is an origami practice where multiple cranes are folded from one sheet of paper. In contrast to conventional origami, renzuru employs small strategic cuts in order to achieve tiny semi-detached connections between the smaller squares. The complexity of this technique comes from the delicacy of folding all the cranes without breaking the small links that attach them to one another. For this reason natural washi paper, which is made from the Japanese paper mulberry, is the best material to use as it is more flexible and stronger than industrial western paper. There are countless combinations of renzuru models that can be folded.

As a methodological heuristic this aligns with the translationships podcast as a method more suited to collaborative goals, and the planning, recording and editing as a form of collaborative analyses that maintains connections across speakers, ideas, languages

Figure 23

Renzuru, Four Cranes Connected at the Wingtips

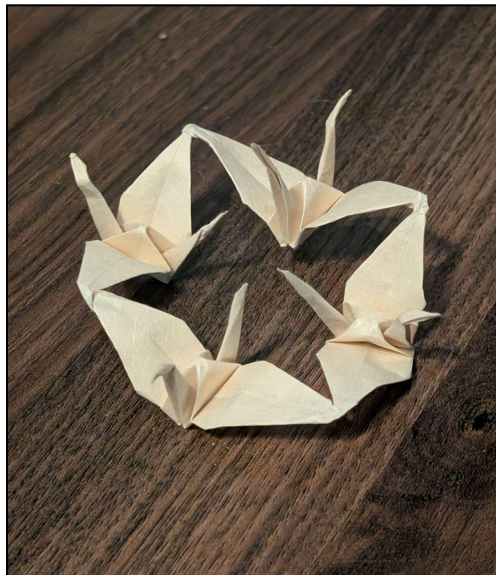


Figure 24

Renzuru, Two Cranes Connected at the Wing



Chapter 6: The Podcast as Collaborative Analysis

Haven't been on our collab journal in a couple months! I came back here to reflect on how the new episodes are developing. The conversation yesterday with Wellesh and Aziza was really great, I loved how they were also really engaged with each other in Amharic at times both on the recording and before/after. At one point I had to step away for a few minutes to take care of my dad and when I came back they were chatting away and laughing together. I think the recording will require significant editing, not only because there are two main speakers but there are a few situations like we had with Claire where it's just really difficult to follow. That being said, they both had a lot of wonderful reflections to share (CJETAM060624).

Two complete podcast episodes appear in this chapter as collaborative knowledge building in relationship to the stories, storytelling experience, translation and collective reflection on a diverse range of topics. In the first episode, “Spread your good mind to others / 把你的好心传给别人”, Cristina and I talk with storyteller Claire, covering topics that connect family, tradition, language difference, translating chaos, and the Chinese concept of Tao. The second episode, “People together like bees / ሰዎች እንደ ላይ እንደ ንብ ይወዳሉ” brings Aziza, Wellesh, and I together, discussing family, colonial histories, education, community engagement and language confidence.

The structure of this chapter is also a reflection of Renzuru in my attempt at presenting the collaborative, multimodal part of this project in a format that reflects that collaboration and multimodal nature. I use “guide quotes” to frame the development of each episode in the hopes

that the reader/listener will keep them in mind while engaging with the ideas shared in the subsequent dialogues. I follow that with a brief statement that situates the episode. The body of each section is then made up of the podcast transcript in its entirety. In presenting each section like this, my intention is to encourage readers to pause and listen, thus engaging with the broader conversational praxis. A reader can engage with these sections in order, out of order, separately, or all together. Research audiences (readers, listeners, story-receivers) can and should also be accountable in their interactions with storytellers and texts, here the goal is for readers to consider and enact their own relationships and roles as collaborators to this research. The end notes of each section provide a brief explanation of the editing choices that I made and some reflections about my role in the dialogue. A more detailed discussion and consideration of the “micro-ethics” that were involved in creating and editing these podcasts is presented in chapter 7 as part of the concluding thoughts and the learning that came out of this process. Finally, I conclude with an open ended question pulled from the discussion which is meant to encourage further reflection on the knowledge shared and built in each conversation. With this structure my purpose is to connect back to the idea of audience accountability in storytelling and research.

Spread your Good Mind to Others / 把你的好心传给别人 (Claire)

Language learning must also provide space to recognize emotional, spiritual , and psychological healing in order to get to a place of deep learning (San Pedro, 2021, p. 27).

Black studies and anticolonial thought offer methodological practices wherein we read, live, hear, groove, create, and write across a range of temporalities, places, texts, and ideas that build on existing liberatory practices and pursue ways of living the world

that are uncomfortably generous and provisional and practical and, as well, imprecise and unrealized (McKittrick, 2021, p.11).

So when one is telling a story, and one is using words to tell the story, each word that one is speaking has a story of its own too. Often the speakers or tellers go into the stories of the words they are using to tell one story so that you get stories within stories, so to speak. (Silko, 1981, p.56)

In what follows Claire describes the story she developed during the workshops about lunar new year and the origins of the Chinese traditions of wearing red and lighting fireworks. She guides us towards a way of living in a “virtuous circle”. I invite readers to pause in their reading here and [listen to the episode](#) instead or alongside the text if possible.

[Claire] Speaking in Mandarin

[Claire] The Legend of the Nian Beast: Once upon a time, according to legend, in ancient China, there was a monster called Nian who lived deep in the sea all year round...

(music)

[Cristina] Welcome to Storytelling Translationships. You were just listening to a clip from Claire's story, Lunar New Year, in Mandarin and in English. To hear the full version, please visit our website, translationships.net. I am Cristina Sanchez-Martín and my co-host Taiko Aoki-Marcial and I sat down with Claire who told us more about the story, the possibilities of connecting these by language differences, and fascinating concepts like Tao that can teach us more about living well with others.

[Taiko] All right, Claire, thank you so much for coming and speaking with us today. I think maybe we can start off by just, can you tell us a little bit about who you are, your name,

you know, where you're from, anything else that you think you want to share with people who are listening?

[Claire] Okay. Hi, my name is Claire. I'm from Taiwan. I have been to America for seven months, seven to eight months. I love to live in Seattle because this city is really beautiful.

[Cristina] Me too. Okay, so during the winter, we learned about storytelling and you told a story, Lunar New Year, right? Can you tell us a little bit more about it? Can you provide a short summary of what the story is about for those who haven't read it or listened to it yet?

[Claire] Yeah, no problem. I would like to ask everyone, do you know why Chinese people would like to decorate their home in red or why they always wear red color and display firework during Chinese New Year? There's a very good reason, because there's a legendary story that once upon a time, there is a Nian monster, always attacked people on every Chinese New Year's Eve. And one day, a wise man who visit a village and to beg for some food when the villager escaped from the monster. He told a woman who was the only person to help him that he can drive away the monster if let him stay her house for one night. And why the Nian monster went away because he afraid red color and firework sound. So, after that, people follows a wise man's suggestion and wear red clothes and display firework to keep all beasts away. And next day, they visit their friends and congratulate their friends in the first of New Year. That's why people, why Chinese people love to wear red color and display fireworks.

[Taiko] I learned, I always, I knew that red was really important for the new year in Chinese New Year and Lunar New Year, that red was like a really special color and really important. But I never knew kind of the story behind that until you told that story. So thank you.

[Claire] You're welcome. I'm happy to tell everyone this great story.

[Taiko] Can you also tell us maybe your memories around the story and the details of the story? Like when did you first hear it? Who did you hear it from? Like where were you? What is the context in which this story kind of came to you in the first place.

[Claire] I don't remember exactly, but I think I heard this story when I was elementary school. I think I knew this story from the book, which I borrowed from my neighbor. When I was young, my neighbor, my neighbor's parents always buy very, a lot of a book for my neighbor. And because I really love to read stories. So I borrow from them and then they have one story that is this story. So, and also, I think one day I have ever asked my grandma about why we display fireworks during Chinese New Year and why we need to wear red color, why we have a red envelope, something about the question I asked my grandpa and grandma. And then my grandma and grandpa taught me, we do that, they will give a good fortune. Yeah. It will bring good fortune to us. But maybe they don't know the reason. So after that, I read the story. So I just realized, oh, because there is a Nian monster story. So that's why people wear red color. Yeah.

[Taiko] Are there other are there other stories about, is the Nian monster is this like a character or you know like is this a figure that appears in other places in other stories or is it just in the story this monster?

[Claire] Only in this this story. It's interesting, right?

[Taiko] Yeah.

[Cristina] Yeah. There is a student in the program where I teach from Taiwan as well, who gave me a children's book about the red envelopes and about the red color too. And it's written in Mandarin and in English so that I could read it. Yeah, I want to show it to you at some point, because it's really beautiful.

But speaking about that, we wanted to ask what it meant to you to tell the story in Mandarin and in English, since you told the story in both languages. And was the retelling process similar or different? Did anything change when you were telling the story in English as opposed to Mandarin? And what would you tell the teachers that you work with about this process of retelling the story in different languages?

[Claire] I think most of the part are simple. When we describe a story, they will, the word describe a song or describe like a poetry. And it is hard to translate in English. So sometimes it's quite hard to describe. I only can use a similar. But actually, it is not 100% then in Chinese. Yeah. Yeah, but it happened because some of words, we cannot translate.

[Cristina] Do you remember any specific examples? It's okay if you don't. But just thinking back maybe.

[Claire] I didn't remember that. Maybe I can find it. Like, okay, letter sound like called Ping Ping Pam Pam. Ping Ping Pam Pam. This is a sound, sound word in Chinese. It describes firework, firework displaying. But it's hard to translate in English. Like ping ping pam pam, do you have a ping ping pam pam this sound in English? Yeah, that is one. Oh, and there is one word as Chinese called people shouting and horse also shouting. That actually is poetry. But this word, this sentence is also hard, hard to translate in English. If I translate each of words, there will be people shouting, horse shouting, but it's not correct to translate each of words, right? So like this sentence, I don't know how to describe in English. I only can say I describe like chaos. People run around and the situation like chaos, something like that.

[Taiko] That's so interesting. I want to, what is the word? How do you say the word that is people shouting and horses shouting?

[Claire] In Chinese we call 人 (rén), 喊 (hǎn), 马 (mǎ).

[Taiko] Four words.

[Claire] Yeah, four words 人 (rén) mean is people. 喊 (hǎn) mean is shouting, screaming. 马 (mǎ) horse. 是 (shì) mean is horse is shouting. So these words are hard. How can I describe horse shouting in English?

[Taiko] I think you did. I mean, the idea of chaos, you know, when I think about like people, you know, like people shouting and horse shouting, I think the way you described it makes a lot of sense, like that idea of, you know, like chaos and...

[Claire] Yeah, it's the one there's one example. It's not a good example, but it's similar. Can you imagine 9/11? When 9/11 happened, it is chaos, right? And you can imagine so many people and even animal run away and shouting for help. And maybe dog barking or yeah, because it's very chaos. This has just come to my mind.

[Taiko] Yeah, that is a good example of chaos for sure.

[Claire] Some of Chinese words are hard to exactly translate in English. Yeah, I only just can, only can use a similar meaning.

[Taiko] Going back to what Christina was asking just a little bit, like, keeping that in mind, like how difficult it is, you know, to translate certain ideas or certain words. What do you think your, your teachers or like English teachers that you work with should know or how should they keep this in mind when, when you're talking about stories or talking about language or talking about translation?

[Claire] I think, in this case, I would ask my teacher, does it have a similar story or similar meaning in Western country that I can refer to or use to explain my story? So people can, when people read my story in English version, if they have a reference, they may more understanding what I'm talking about. Yeah, because they have a story from their country and

which they be familiar. Oh, that's what you want to describe. Your culture, your story. Yeah, but maybe, yeah, maybe there's no exactly the same story in Western, but if if have that will be that would be great.

[Taiko] I like that idea of just like seeing if there's connections that people can make to, you know, like to the to what they already know to like understand a new story better, even if it's not always possible, you know, I like that idea a lot.

[Cristina] Okay, moving on to the next question. We see that in the story, community and relationships seem to be important themes. For example, at first, everyone in the community except for one old woman ignores the old man who comes asking for food and shelter, but this old man is the only one who ends up knowing how to keep the village safe. So does this story help us to understand how people can be in relationship to others, both strangers as well as friends and family, and how so?

[Claire] I would say people, because people, most, some of people, they don't have enough wisdom to solve the problem, even though no matter connect with people. That's why you can see more and more people, they have a less and less true heart, less and less considerate other people's feelings, yeah. So in this story, people only care about whether they're sad, care about their life. That's not wrong thing, but if you can also consider others and our society, our country, or our neighborhood, will be, will be better, right? So there is one word we call the virtuous, virtuous cycle, right? So this story also teach people, need to care not only yourself, but also others, right? So like the wise man, in this story, there's a one wise man, actually he saved everyone's life, right? People no need to escape every Chinese New Year's Eve after finding a solution. So

[Cristina] That makes sense.

[Claire] Yeah, so I think in this story lens, I found that there also have not only, not only tell everyone about Chinese culture, but also teach people you need to be very kind and and see the right to your, to others.

[Taiko] That's a great thing. I guess that goes kind of to, that goes kind of to our last question or the question that we're gonna think about next, which is, what do you think is important about sharing the story? Or what do you think, what do you want people who listen to it or to read it, what do you want them to take away from it?

[Claire] Yeah, this great story to teach people. Most people, most of people choose to escape mentally when they make difficulties. In fact, the correct attitude is to find a solution or correct method to fundamentally solve it, right? Otherwise, you cannot always just, always to escape or hide the problem, right? You need to face it and look at it and solve it. So in Chinese, we call this is Tao. The Tao is from nature. When you see someone need to help and just help because that is from your nature of heart. So we call Tao. Yeah.

And how to inspire people? I think people need to learn, to find a way, to find a class, to learn. Then spread to others, spread your good mind to others. So that's why I also study something about Tao, something about how to, what is the correct way to be a right person. Yeah.

[Cristina] That's so beautiful. I love those takeaways. It's giving me a lot to think about and to try to do better as well.

[Taiko] Yeah, it makes me also want to explore more about that idea. I know I've heard the, you know, like the concept of Tao before. It makes me want to explore and learn more about that concept and that idea, because it seems so important.

[Claire] Yes.

[Taiko] Well, that's a great-- I think that's a great final idea or message to leave it on.

[Cristina] Yeah.

[Claire] Yes.

(music)

“Episode Notes”

In this episode, we started off our discussion with Claire asking her to share a little bit about herself. She began by talking about coming from Taiwan and how much she loved Seattle commenting on how beautiful it is and how nice the people are. Throughout the recording the majority of the editing choices were made in an effort to cut out filler words, long pauses and vocal disfluencies like “uh” and “um” from all three of us in order to create a more seamless recording. We tried to make sure Claire was comfortable in these moments during the initial recording. At one point Claire asked us to wait for her, it was an opportunity I was grateful for because it allowed me to reiterate to her in the moment that it really was no problem and that we could always cut out silences or confusions. I believe with this assurance she felt more comfortable knowing that she could take as much time to formulate her ideas and that if she didn't like the way something came out we could go back after and adjust things.

When writing I listened to the initial recording alongside the edited transcript to highlight, for myself, the editing choices. One area of regret or concern for me was the very end of the initial recording when I wrapped up the conversation on the last idea of learning and spreading knowledge and stopped the recording shortly after. It seemed like such a good way to complete the discussion but on listening to the initial recording I believe I cut the conversation too short. I wish I had continued recording and encouraged Claire when she said “I'm sorry, I think I can explain more about it”. At the time I took her apology as characteristic of English

learners' self-deprecating, and sometimes self-punishing attitude towards their language abilities and hurriedly cut her off saying "No! That was so great". Listening now it feels like she had more to share.

Takeaway Questions

During our conversation we asked Claire to think and talk about what she would want her teachers to know or keep in mind when it comes to stories and translation. She brought up the possibility of connecting similar stories or meanings from Western thought to her own story as a reference in order to help contextualize and explain. With this in mind I come away from the conversation with the following questions:

- As language teachers, how do we continue to decenter the Western experience as the reference point for language learning while also supporting cross-cultural and translingual understanding?
- What about the aspects of stories and storytelling that are not meant for "cross-cultural understanding"? How can we promote appreciation for stories and language that are outside of our understanding?

People Together Like Bees / ሰዎች አንድ ላይ እንደ ንብ ይወዳሉ (Wellesch and Aziza)

As outsiders to the mainstream, women of color in the United States practice "world"-traveling, mostly out of necessity. I affirm this practice as a skillful, creative, rich, enriching, and, given certain circumstances, loving way of being and living. I recognize that much of our travel is done unwillingly to hostile white/ Anglo "worlds." The hostility of these "worlds" and the compulsory nature of the "traveling" have obscured for us the enormous value of this aspect of our living and its connection to loving. Racism has a vested interest in obscuring and devaluing the complex skills

involved in it. I recommend that we affirm this traveling across “worlds” as partly constitutive of cross-cultural and cross-racial loving. Thus, I recommend to women of color in the United States that we learn to love each other by learning to travel to each other’s “worlds. (Lugones, 1987 p. 3)

Below is the transcript of the edited episode “People together like bees / ሰዎች እንደ ላይ እንደ ንብ ይወዳሉ”. Once again, I invite readers to pause in their reading here and [listen to the episode](#) instead or alongside the text if possible.

[Aziza] Speaking in Amharic

[Aziza] King of Yohannes was born in 1831 and he died March 10th, 1889, Metemmam Sudan. Emperor of Ethiopia...

[Taiko] Welcome to Storytelling Translationships. You were just listening to a clip of Aziza telling us about King Yohannes IV in Amharic and in English. You can find the full versions of this story in both languages on our website, translationships.net. I'm Taiko Aoki Marcial, and in today's episode of the Storytelling Translationships Podcast, I'm talking to our guests, Aziza and Wellesh, about their lives and about important historical figures that have impacted their countries.

(music)

[Taiko] Wellesh, you want to start?

[Wellesh] Aziza start.

[Taiko] Aziza can start.

[Aziza] Okay. Okay. My name is Aziza Mohammed. I was from in Ethiopia. My dad, his name is Masood Mohammed. And then my mom, her name is Herkmu Mohammed Berhan. My dad, he come from Ethiopia. My mom, she was to Eritrea. So, I have six brother and one sister.

So my mom, when I was six years old, my mom, she was died that time. I don't know her, but my dad, he told me, she's very nice mom. And then she take care of the kids nicely. And then she's so smart too. And then he loved her so much. And then after my mom, she was died that time, my dad, he's not married another woman. But that time, all of my brothers, they are so young. So everybody, they depend of my dad. So life is so hard for him because he didn't marry, nobody's not helping him, just he worked, and then he come back, he take care of us. So my dad, he's my teacher too, because he told me every day, for his life and my mom's life. So he's so nice personality. And then I love my dad so much. Last year when he was died, it's for me, life is very struggle. I don't know, because he's my everything. If I'm sad, I will call him and then “Dad, just like happened” just like that or something. He advised me a lot. He just like my friend too. I didn't do for him nothing, you know, that's why I'm crying a lot. And then it's too much for me. Life is a struggle for me.

But Alhamdulillah, I'm okay now. But I love my brothers and then my sister. So we are now independent for other people. Like we do working, we do everybody, they do work like independent. So they do like work harder. And then I'm so happy right now in my life. And then I go to school. I did my duty. And then sometimes I work my friend's salon. If she have customers I'm working with her together. So, I'm so happy right now. Inshallah in the future. Right now I start my school of cooking because I have a future for like three or five years. I have to plan to open my own Ethiopian fusion restaurant. And then because most of the food is so nice and delicious. So like I make for like with other foods, with other cultures. So, like, maybe for other people, I will show them how make combination of with other foods. So, I will make a nice customer too, Inshallah. Next winter, I'll go to school to my accounting. I have to plan just like that. Thank you for you listening to me. Thank you, teacher. Thank you, Wellesh.

[Taiko] Yeah, of course.

[Wellesh] Thank you. It's very nice.

[Taiko] That's so, it's very nice. I think that there are many good Ethiopian restaurants, but it's interesting to think about a fusion, right? Because many good Ethiopian restaurants, but I don't think I know any Ethiopian fusion restaurants, you know, that have like different stuff. So that's a that's a good idea. Interesting idea, Aziza. Thank you.

[Aziza] Yeah. Thank you so much.

[Taiko] You're welcome. Hi, Wellesh.

[Wellesh] Okay, hi. Okay, thank you very much for this chance give me. My name is Wellesh Gebrekristos. I am an Eritrean. I am married and a mother of three children. I have in Seattle area with my husband and my two children. I have a happy family. I am working in the University House as a food worker. I love my co-workers. When I come, I came from my country to the USA. I wanted to improve my English. A friend told me about Literacy Source. There in Literacy Source, I improved my English. I improved my English it helped me to, to community with people and my co-worker. So I wanted to say thank you to Literacy Source and to all my teachers. Thank you for listening.

[Taiko] All right, so now going back, Aziza, maybe you could start and just kind of, you don't have to tell the whole story, but like a short summary of what you shared in the class? Like just a short version of your story so that people who haven't heard it yet can understand?

[Aziza] Okay. My history was as a Yohannes IV. I like, because he's a very nice king. And then he was born in Tigray. And then he's born on July 1937. And then he died in March 10, 1889. He fight with, you know, the Sudan Mahdist or, and then with Italian too, because the Italian, they come like the takeover Ethiopia, but they don't, they cannot take for like, they do

like warn something, but as Yohannes he's doing like they do military for the, he do train to military and then he's very, how can I do explain? Because I'm sorry.

[Taiko] No, that's okay.

[Aziza] Last time I knew a lot of things, but I forget right now.

[Taiko] No, that's no problem. I read a little bit more about the King Yohannes and I read that he was a very like skilled, he had a lot of military strategy so that he was able to kind of push away the people who were trying to come into the territory, like the Italians at the time and Egyptians, right?

[Aziza] Yeah, no, Mahdist Sudan, Mahdist yeah.

[Taiko] Okay, that's who. Yeah.

[Aziza] Yeah.

[Taiko] Oh, thank you. Thank you, Aziza.

[Aziza] Thank you so much.

[Taiko] And Wellesh, you also, you are also talking about a person from history. Can you say just like a short little bit about them as well?

[Wellesh] Woldeab Woldemariam. It is the first freedom, yeah, in the Eritrean independence.

[Taiko] Okay.

[Wellesh] Yeah.

[Taiko] All right.

[Wellesh] He's very struggled people, yeah.

[Taiko] All right. Well, going into a little bit more about how did you, your memories or details around the story, like how did you learn this story? Who did you hear it from? Where were you? Who told it to you?

[Wellesch and Aziza speaking in Amharic]

[Wellesch] Oh. I because is many Eritrean peoples and the any meeting any about talk about in Eritrean independence. Who is started it? Like that, is this guy, this guy, this is many. It is told me in my families and I yeah. It's that time I I living in in Ethiopia.

[Taiko] All right, so then I was going to ask Aziza kind of a similar question, you know, like when did you first hear this story? Who did you hear it from? Like where?

[Aziza] First, I hear my dad, he told me about of him. He's a very strong guy, and then he told me, nice things, like he protect for Ethiopia too. So after a while, when I go to school too, they teach us like history classes. And then my teacher, he told about of, he's very strong guy. I learned more in school too. My dad, he told me some history. And then after all, my teacher, he teach me a lot.

[Taiko] Well, then I was wondering, when we were doing our classes, you both told your stories in Amharic and in English, right? What was that like? Was it similar to tell the story in Amharic and English? Did something change? How did that process go?

[Aziza] Yeah, like maybe the words, you know, sometimes now I'm talk like easy way, like it's not formal, you know, about like I reading the about of his history and then it's formal and I change to translate in English. I think the last time was so, kind of a little bit different, I think.

[Taiko] So first in Amharic, it was like not so formal and just conversation. And then you looked up some information and made it more formal and then translated it as well?

[Aziza] Yes.

[Taiko] Wellesh, when we were in the class, you know, and you were telling the story in Amharic and then in English and then writing a little and explaining. How was that? Was it similar? Was it different? Did something change as you told the story in different languages?

[Wellesh] No, you send me in the translator, it's good.

[Taiko] Oh, right. The translated one, it was the same?

[Wellesh] The same, yeah.

[Taiko] How was it? But the first part, when you were translating for yourself from, in your mind, you know, like you had the story in Amharic and then you were saying it in English, writing it in English. How was that? Was there certain things that were easier or more difficult? Were there words that were difficult to translate? Like how did it feel to try and translate that story into English?

[Wellesh] It was good because I see and my husband too. My husband is translator, so it's a good translator like that, he told me. Yeah, it is. I understand that many people is understanding about that. Yeah, good, good understanding for English and come back in the Amharic. Yeah.

[Taiko] Did you talk about it with your husband, like during the class when you were when you were coming to class and stuff?

[Wellesh] Oh, yeah. Again, he is he is he in the translating you send me in the same. Yeah, it's good. It's good translator. Yeah, it's nice.

[Taiko] Okay, good. All right. More questions. So both of you, in your story, Aziza, you said he's important because he protected his country from outside powers like Egypt or Italy and Wellish. You said that he was one of the original kind of proponents of Eritrean independence.

Right? So can you say maybe something more about what these outside powers like Italy or Egypt or Britain or maybe even the US have done in the area in Ethiopia, in Eritrea?

[Aziza] That time as Yohannes, he live in Tigray, like out of the border of Ethiopia. So, of course they come that side. So he's a military too. So, he like, he, you know, he train of the people like military and then he like defended the country against extra, prepared to Egyptian and then Italian and Mahdist too. So, especially Italian, they need to colonize to Ethiopia. They need to colonize, but they didn't do colonize to Ethiopia because the inside force is very high. You know, the Italian force, like they fight war, like they were on the, you know, the gun or something. But inside of the King of Yohannes, they fight like, I don't know, what they call, you know, the, not the gun, (speaking Amharic to someone in the background) but sword, they fight with sword. They don't have like gun or something.

[Taiko] Yeah, I read a little bit about both of these people. Yeah. And I'd learned that they really wanted, they wanted to unify their people, right? In different ways so that the people would be strong and together. And there was a lot of difficulty, you know, for both of them.

[Wellesch] Very, very difficult. Yeah, yeah. It's very, the Eritrean's history is very, very, very, very, very hard passes because this before Ethiopia and Italian England in the like yeah after that Ethiopia again is in together is push after that he's in struggles with many peoples is die the the peoples like honey like what is honey the like bees, like bee and like, is out in the like the bee.

[Taiko] Like bees?

[Wellesch] Bees, yeah, bee. Yeah, bee is like honey stuff, bee.

[Taiko] Yeah, yeah, like bees. Bzzzzz.

[Wellesch] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's a people's, maybe Eritrea, any neighborhood thing like Ethiopia, maybe is touch in Eritrea and the peoples is together is like bees.

[Taiko] Like many bees coming?

[Wellesch] Yes. Yeah

[Taiko] I see.

[Wellesch] Oh, yeah. I don't know English word. Sorry. Yeah.

[Taiko] No, that's okay. That's very interesting.

[Wellesch] Yeah.

[Taiko] So the other question I had, these are both like really famous people. King Yohannes and Woldeab Woldemariam, but I was wondering, or Cristina and I are wondering, are there other maybe not so famous people or other people who you think are important in the history of your community and the history of your areas and the history of your language who aren't so famous or people that you know, people in your community that have protected or made people stronger, you know, something like that.

[Wellesch] Oh, yeah. It's my brothers too, and live in Seattle. He's living is a long time this place. So he is very, very, very struggle about community and especially in the church of the community in the Americas Church. The Americas is the Orthodox Church in the Eritrean Church. So is help in the old peoples and the childs. More important is for childs. He's the always Saturday, all day and he teach in the peoples in the her language, her culture, her, and family, fathers and mothers. How do you do, her fathers? You, where are you going? It's before, after class. And like that is teaching is. Maybe one day I show you because the Saturday is many people is very tight that class in the about the class.

[Taiko] In church?

[Wellesch] Participate. Yeah, yeah. I show you. Maybe one day is I visit you. I show you.

[Taiko] I would love that. What are your thoughts, Aziza? Somebody, maybe in the past or maybe right now, people who maybe aren't so famous but are doing, who are important, who are protected, maybe an artist, a musician, or like Wellesch said, somebody in the family, a volunteer, elders, people who share knowledge and experience so it's not forgotten?

[Aziza] Yeah, you know, I think that's why in education in Ethiopia, you know, they teach you like detail about of the king of the day, what they did, what they work in, and how they protect the country, they teach you a lot. We teach us, on the Wellesch, she say in a church, in a different area, they teach like how they come, how they protect the country. So, right now the technology is very high and then they in the Wikipedia, they know everything of the history. So people now they search and then they teach us more and you have to do listen and then watch and Google it, some idea of your country, kingdom, what they did. Especially me, I talk with the other people. So, they do like that, they do like that because I'm not forget for the history too. Because we do, we talk about a lot of things.

[Taiko] Yeah, so people, not just people can research, people can use technology like Google and Wikipedia to learn about their own history as well. Yeah?

[Aziza] Yeah.

[Taiko] Is there anything else that you, from the classes or from the stories or from the experience in the class that you remember that you think is important or that you have questions about?

[Wellesch] And last class in this class is, it's very good, very important thing because every history you see in anything, because before I didn't see, I listen anything in this past. So right now is it teach and together in this, like this, like me and Aziza, you in conversation is very

good. It's for me is very good because, I maybe the future development is like that is histories I see is any histories I read. I read. I read Yeah.

[Taiko] I love it.

[Wellesch] Yeah, it is good. Yeah, it is class is very nice because before I didn't see that. Right now is I see anything is see is I'm focused before I just past in I see in the past that like that.

[Taiko] I'm happy about that, Wellesch.

[Aziza] Yeah. Me too, teacher, the same of Wellesch. Because even here, you know now the history, what they did, more you learn about in Google, you search it and then you read it, more you gathering information. So me too, I'm not talk about too much to before, like people they ask me before, Where you from? I'm from Ethiopia, or OK. People, they don't ask me. I didn't talk about for the kingdom of the history, what they did, how they become now like, and it's not colonized to Africa, Libya and Ethiopia. So, we we talk we talk about for the information too I will I will talk them now, I give it to them now confidently. I talk about the history, yeah.

[Taiko] That's wonderful.

[Wellesch] Yeah. Right now is good confidence.

[Aziza] Yeah. After the class, I make a confidence still more.

[Wellesch] Yeah, yeah, yeah, me too. It's very nice.

[Taiko] That's wonderful.

(music)

“Episode Notes”

In this episode our two storytellers Aziza and Wellesch joined me (Cristina wasn't able to be there for this recording). A large factor in how I made editing decisions in this particular

episode was in an effort to create a cohesiveness around the stories and major themes that both storytellers shared during our almost hour long conversation. Because of our comfortable relationships and the informal and conversational nature of our discussion there were many sidebars and changes of subject. Part of podcasting as both a research method and a means of sharing that research is using the tools furnished by podcasting to help communicate the central themes and ideas that were developed in the conversation in a way that stays true to what was said but is also clear and relatively easy to follow for a listener who does not share the same relationship the speakers do. In this episode the editing process not only allowed me to cut out areas of repetition, long pauses, hesitations, and halting speech but also to make connections and bring together sections of the discussion around the central ideas that Aziza and Wellesh brought up.

At the time that we recorded I was taking care of my dad full time which meant the discussion was interrupted at various moments when I had to step away to attend to him. It makes listening to the raw recording and revisiting the discussion especially meaningful and a little challenging. In what feels like a serendipitous connection, Aziza introduces herself and begins the discussion by talking extensively about her relationship with her father, who had passed away the year before, and how much love and appreciation she has for him. Wellesh also introduced herself by centering where she's from and her family first. As I worked with this episode the absence of my own background stood out to me. I heard and felt connections to the conversation that I didn't express during the recording. This practice of identifying yourself by identifying your family is something that I wish I had engaged in alongside Aziza and Wellesh at the time.

Takeaway Questions

The stories and conversations that come up in this episode are both personal and political in nature. hooks tells us that “when women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity” (1984, p. 67). With these observations in mind some questions that arise for me are:

- As language teachers how can we be prepared to respond flexibly and “in truly supportive ways” to politically charged conversations or situations, especially in cases where we are unfamiliar with the histories and/or the current socio-political context?
- How might we extend the relationships of care that are created in classroom settings into relationships of political solidarity?

Reflections and Implications for Podcasting as Research Practice

Because the interrelatedness of theory, practice, pedagogy, and method was intrinsic to this project I consider reflections on research methods and ethics of including the podcast just as important as the “findings” that come from the analysis. There is an ethical impact to every interaction that happens in teaching and research contexts, in establishing goals, in sharing experiences, in documenting, in reflecting on both pedagogical and research outcomes and the community’s potential interest in them. This is true across the board but is especially relevant to collaborative podcasting as a research method in this project where “micro-ethics” became a key component for representing and analyzing the “data”.

Reflection on the ethical problems of “human subjects” research largely focuses on IRB protocols established by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research in the 1974 National Research Act. These are dominated by

a series of assumptions, conventions, and imperatives outlined in The Belmont Report regarding three core principles, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (2010). These pillars are clearly vital for understanding research ethics, however they are not the whole subject matter when it comes to collaborative research contexts. Often, the major concerns expressed in discussions about research ethics overlook important issues, especially when it comes to the complex and dynamic nature of the relationships and interaction between researchers and community members. They may also overlook the ways in which various possible courses of action are identified and the intricate and ongoing process of reflection and negotiation that goes on with regards to these relationships.

So far in this project we have recorded, edited and published seven episodes of this podcast, speaking with 11 co-storytellers guests. In four of these episodes we also had guests who provided language support. Across these episodes, a consideration of micro-ethics established the relationships we had with each as the center of concern, as opposed to the research product/podcast. The concept of micro-ethics originally proposed in the medical field by Komesaroff (1995) “seeks to reveal the structure and the dynamics of the clinical interaction and, in particular to explicate the actual processes involved in clinical decision making” (p. 73). Expanding on this in education (Schürer & Jensen, 2022) and applied linguistics (De Costa, et al., 2019), attention to micro-ethics helps to visualize how aspects of the research process consist of “an accumulation of infinitesimal ethical events” and as such, researchers must chart those events and the decisions taken as they exist in both their “concreteness, fluidity and temporal unpredictability” (Komesaroff, 1995, p. 73). Building on the larger ethical questions of consent, protection, agency and justice, in this project, micro-ethics helped us to be accountable to how

we dealt with specific situations as they arose in all their complex and unpredictable detail, revealing and framing the practical, contextual, local decision making.

Using the podcast as a research method wherein both the recorded conversation and the editing process required endless small decisions about what questions to ask or follow up on and how to arrange the episode, what to cut, what to add, where to start and end etc. That also meant asking questions like, how should or should we ask questions about ideas or opinions that arise which we find troubling? How should we address disclosures of personal or painful experiences? The accumulation of these “microethical” decisions together with the technical decisions with which they are linked contributed immensely to the final outcome of this part of the project. We had to consider carefully moments that co-storytellers in this project might have been comfortable sharing ideas and opinions with us on a recording without fully understanding how these ideas could be received by others. Podcasting is not a neutral technique but an “ethical orientation attentive to positionality, authorship, and the conditions under which voice is enabled or constrained” in a public forum (Hughes, et al., 2026, p.3). Because of this, we prioritized the relationships of trust built through collaboration in the decisions we made about what to make public.

By way of illustrating these choices I will describe a couple in detail. During the recording of one episode a guest appeared to express opposition to gender fluidity. The exact nature of what they were saying was not completely clear but it was apparent enough for me to feel uncomfortable in the conversation. In another episode the topic of “homelessness” arose in a way that felt problematic. These moments passed quickly, but they forced a series of ethical dilemmas for the research both in the moment as well as afterwards in editing the podcast recording. I was unprepared during these conversations to question our guests further on the

topics of gender identity or their views on the situation of unhoused people. In addition, I felt that the limitations of my language ability in the guests' home languages, coupled with the complexity of the issues would not have allowed us to engage in a meaningful dialogue. Even so, my responses in both of these situations left me feeling uncomfortable and while editing the recordings for the podcast episodes I again found myself worrying about these moments.

It became important to focus on both the micro-ethical considerations according to considerations of the guests' agency of expression and to the ethical guidelines overarching the research and to do this for each step of the process; the conversations in the moment, the editing of the podcast, and the writing of the dissertation. In the moment, the conversations required an immediate response from me. My choices were to either clarify what they were saying about gender identity or unhoused individuals and attempt to perhaps complicate their position or to let the moment pass and move on with the conversation. During the editing process I had to decide whether to include these parts of the conversations or cut them out. Finally, I had to choose whether or not to include a discussion of these moments here, in my write up of the dissertation. Engaging with micro-ethics meant considering each of these options critically as there are consequences for all routes.

If I had decided to question these co-storyteller guests further it would have required an engagement with cultural belief systems and values that I am not familiar with and do not understand, in the same way perhaps that our guests are not yet familiar with or understanding of a value system that approaches gender as a construct or the socioeconomic and historical factors that have created a crisis of housing insecurity across the country. There could have been repercussions on the relationship of trust and openness that we had built up over months. But, on the other hand, by moving on I failed to address some important issues of social justice. During

the editing process I again had ethical choices to make. Cristina and I reflected together on whether we should edit these potentially problematic sections of the conversation out of the published podcast recording. I was concerned with the potential unintended consequences of having an enduring public record of these conversations for which I felt responsible. However, I was also concerned about removing agency from speakers by choosing what parts of the conversation should be public. Ultimately, we made the decision to edit these parts of the conversation out of the published episodes, enacting micro-ethical decisions motivated by an ethics of care and accountability to the co-storytellers. In doing this we prioritized the relationality of the research above the research product. According to Haverkamp (2005), an “ethics of care [is] a duty to attend to people on their own terms, consider their needs, and recognize the interpersonal character of the research” (p. 149). Doing this relational research shows the complexity of engaging in ethical community based research practices in digital contexts. I believe that our research practice needs to acknowledge “the situated nature of research and hence the situated nature of ethical decision making” (Kubanyiova, 2008, p. 516) and be informed by ethics that impact and attend to the specific needs and relationships of each research context.

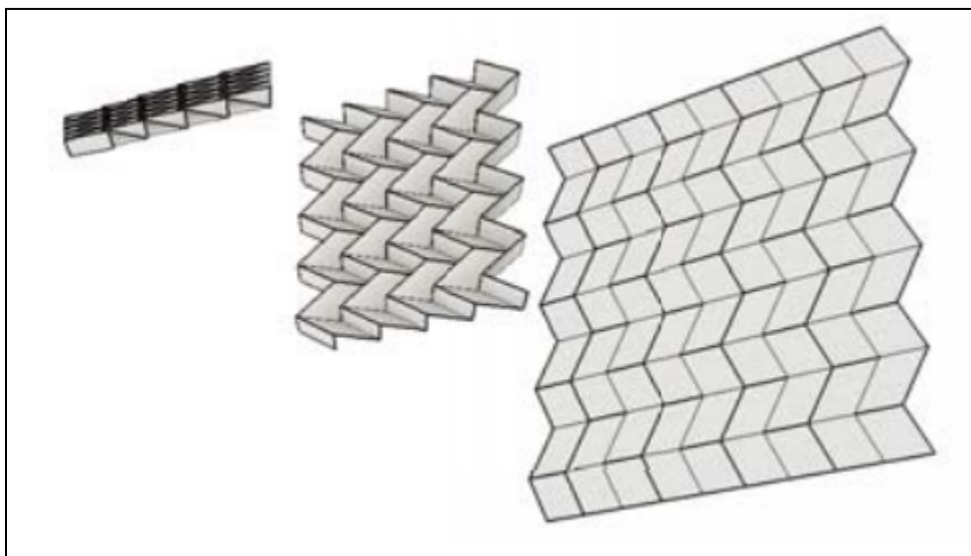
Origami Prelude: ミウラ折り (Miura ori) The Muira Fold

The ミウラ折り (Miura ori) is a well-known origami pattern named after Japanese astrophysicist Koryo Miura. It combines mountain and valley folds to create a pattern of alternating parallelograms or tessellations (Figure 25). The completed fold can be carried out by a continuous motion in which, at each step, each parallelogram is completely flat. This allows for a large sheet of paper to be folded down into a much smaller volume, and likewise for the compressed sheet to expand. It can be opened and closed because the pattern places less stress on the folds making them less likely to tear or wear out.

The Miura fold is a form of “rigid” origami, a way of folding that is both “kinetic and deployable” (Tachi, 2010, p. 1). This means that it can be applied to surfaces made of hard or immutable material, allowing these materials to contract and expand. For example, Miura originally proposed this design as a way to fold solar panels before launching into space and then spreading out once in orbit.

Figure 25

Miura-ori Fold Illustration



The Miura-ori presents a way of understanding how relationships and stories are themselves kinetic, folding down into smaller shapes and expanding outward on a web of interrelated connections. It is also a way to envision the type of “emergence” that marie brown suggests, in “the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions” (2017, p. 6).

In the following sections I share what I see looking back at the creases and tessellations of this project and reflect how it moves from smaller to larger formations and back again, folding up and unfolding.

Chapter 7: Folding Up, looking back to learn / Unfolding, implications looking forward

My goal in this study was to both enact and suggest ways of creating caring/humanizing pedagogical and research relationships through multilingual co-storytelling and in the process, consider the nature of these relationships and the conditions that create them. Overall, the reflections in this dissertation show how we found options for multilingual and transnational identity construction and opportunities to engage in “loving perception and ‘world’-travel” (Lugones, 1987) through storytelling and dialogue. We did this through a combination of collective and individual storying layered with contextualization, translation, writing, conversation, interpretation, interviews, and digital modalities. This shaped our practices towards *transnational identity-in-story* as the practice of using stories and storytelling for different modes of identity construction, and *transnational identity-in-relation* as the contextual, mutually constitutive process of co-constructing new expressions of identity based on the fundamental ways we conceive of ourselves and the world in terms of relationships. These activities and interconnected identities reflected a resistance to the delimiting relationships with language that “ESOL” and “adult basic education” have historically offered learners. By imagining and enacting forms of practice that are not in themselves epistemically violent, i.e. storytelling, translanguaging, and relationality, we were able to interrupt, to some extent, linguistically mediated cycles of coloniality within the context of the project. Now, these experiences can suggest continued ways to imagine and enact storytelling, relationships, pedagogy and research practice.

Inspired in both the kinetic tessellating expansion and contraction of the Miura-ori and maree brown’s (2017) conceptualization of emergence and fractals, the sections of this chapter are organized by the “folding up” and “unfolding” of the major themes that have contributed to

my learning and ability to respond to the research questions that asked; what are features and characteristics of relationships that develop in the practice of collaborative multilingual/translingual storytelling, and what conditions give rise to dialogic and co-learning spaces in the practice of collaborative, multilingual/translingual, multimodal storytelling? In each “folding up” section I bring together my analysis and reflections on the themes with regards to these questions, “unfolding” then gestures to the future implications and possibilities of these themes.

Folding Up: “Decolonial” Land Based Storytelling Pedagogy

One of the major themes I identified is how storytelling can forward our understandings and relationships with the land and its peoples. Sharing our own experiences and understanding of land and place, learning the names of local tribal nations, and bringing the Indigenous names of familiar places into our discussions was a way of becoming “story ready” (Archibald, 2019) to engage with Indigenous stories. The mountain fold framed these observations and my analysis of how this approach created opportunities to acknowledge the land and its peoples in relational and meaningful, if not fully explicit, ways.

For co-storytellers these acknowledgements and connections can be seen from the learning and reflections that came out of engaging during the class with local Indigenous sovereignty through naming conventions (CAR020124; CAR020824), art (CAR020824), and stories like Salmon Boy (CM020824). The connections that each person made with these ideas and stories were complex and personal. This is evident in the extensive marginal translations to Korean and detailed notes that Sun made about the Salmon Boy story (CCSH10-17) or in commentary like Sal’s that position traditions and stories as something that “reminds us” and is “good for the people today” (CCSS6). It is also revealed through classroom discussions for

instance when Claire reflects on how the story teaches us that we “need to respect nature” or it will “humble humans” (CAR020824). More concretely, it can be seen in the noting down of the Indigenous names across co-storyteller artifacts. Learning the Coast Salish names for places helped resist “Settler practices of naming and mapping land [which] contribute to ongoing colonialism by encouraging the idea that Settlers originate from the land” a settling of belonging which “enables dispossession through names that signify Settler origins” (Murphyao & Black, 2015, p. 317). And exposure to some Coast Salish storytelling created an opening for co-storytellers to begin engaging with ideas of Indigenous sovereignty keeping in mind how, “stories are resurgent moments, which reclaim epistemic ground that was erased by colonialism and, in the process, these stories also lay a framework and foundation for the resurgence of Indigenous sovereignty and the reclamation of material ground” (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. 3).

At the same time this focus on land and place also revealed the colonial silences created by conditions of “sanctioned ignorance” (Spivak, 1988, p. 272) with regards to Indigenous presence and sovereignty in the Northwest. While co-storytellers appeared to have some awareness of “tribes” and “Indians” (CAR020124) it was limited and non-specific. Familiarity with the Indigenous names of certain cities or counties like, Sammamish, Puyallup, Kitsap did not indicate familiarity with those names as Coast Salish tribal nations and Coast Salish as a language group was also a new concept (CAR020124). This is unsurprising, as not only does “the imposition of colonial place names [reinforce] settlers’ claims to land and [help] to legitimize territorialization” (Williamson, 2023, p. 2), it also “worked to erase Indigenous peoples’ presence and strip away the character of the natural world” (Malloy, 2023, p. 56). While acknowledgement and storytelling created new knowledge and understanding, this by itself is not enough to displace deeply entrenched discourses of the US as “a nation of immigrants” or the

mythologies of a pristine American wilderness absent of inhabitants, preserved by the benevolence of white settlers. In identifying this I want to suggest that storytelling should be tied to land and place more directly and more extensively, for instance, by engaging more directly with local tribal nations through field trips or guest speakers. At the same time I want to acknowledge the complexity of this suggestion, which must involve careful consideration of the time, energy, and material resources involved in direct collaborations with organizations and individuals. This is not a recommendation to ask tribal organizations or Indigenous people to be responsible for teaching the importance of land and Indigenous sovereignty in language learning contexts, it is an encouragement to find ways of building reciprocal relationships with Indigenous organizations and people. A more reciprocal, ongoing, and explicit discussion of Indigenous sovereignty is needed to truly engage with land and storytelling in a way that is anti-colonial.

Unfolding: A More “Anticolonial” Land-Based Pedagogy

Kubota and Motha have indicated that we should “invite [students] to unlearn and relearn racial hierarchies in a different society and develop new understanding of racial privilege and oppression” (2024, p. 20) in relationship to Indigenous peoples. Looking back I see pathways in the crease patterns which open up into opportunities where this type of unlearning and relearning might be cultivated and connected back to land and sovereignty. For example, in conversation with Wellesh and Aziza about their politically and historically situated stories I started to make this type of connection. However, having initiated the connection I then let the opportunity fade,

Taiko: I think it’s important so that we can, you know like that we can learn here what is happening, what, or what happened, in the past. And same for, it reminds me, we were

talking the other day about the people in, the people that were here before, I think similar, like people came and said “we want America, but we don’t want the people”

Aziza: Yeah, I know. I know. You know, the one I told you, Yohannes, before the kingdom of, before Haile Selassie, they do nice, I know they have something problem, but most of the time they are nice because they survive for outside power, they help the people, and then they very strong, and then they think too much for the people, not outside.

Wellesh: Yeah.

Aziza: After Haile Selassie start until here, at this time, still they don’t think for the people, they, they.

Taiko: They want the power?

Aziza: They listen the power you know?

Wellesh: Oh yeah. (CAR021524).

What I wanted to do by bringing in this excerpt here in the last chapter is to illustrate more clearly how openings for connecting back to previous conversations about Coast Salish in Washington presented themselves vis a vis the stories the co-storytellers shared. Here was a chance to consider how these historical events might help us think about the issues raised about ethnicity, nationhood, outside power and oppression, and whose economic interests are ultimately served in struggles over territory. One way that these connections could be explored in more depth is through a lens of indigeneity, as Boateng suggests,

Black being and belonging through the lens of indigeneity rather than race...allows for the conception of a wider range of modes and practices and enables understandings of variations within race; for example, the variation among people in an African nation who

may be racially homogenous but belong to different indigeneities. Conceiving of Black peoples primarily in terms of their indigeneity rather than their race also facilitates an analysis of their structural relationship to self-identified Indigenous peoples (2023, p. 30)

Both Aziza and Wellesh were passionate during class, in informal conversation and on the podcast about the central concerns of their stories which dealt with control of land, resources and people, state violence against people and resisting outside forces a testament to how, “many learners have come from countries that have been colonized, or have experienced cultural oppression, or are presently in the process of decolonization [and] many learners have been waiting their whole lives to engage in these kinds of conversations” (Abe, 2017, p. 30).

Storytelling with an explicit focus on sovereignty opens up possibilities.

Each story that was shared held within it a complex network of possible relationships and associations, many of which could perhaps help return to and create more personal and meaningful connections with Coast Salish land, people, stories, and ultimately, sovereignty. In addition to the example I outlined above with Aziza and Wellesh’s historically situated stories linking ideas of national sovereignty to economic and political interests, I also think about the relational and epistemological potential in the other stories. Relationship of trust and care between the young man and the sheep in Lisa’s story (CSLWYOUNG). The role of elders in Sun’s story (CSSHPOOR). Meaning and ceremony in the story Claire shared (CSCYNIAN). The consequences of bloodshed and violence that Sal’s Santelmo spirit conveyed (CSSSBAI). I imagine the many pathways of connection that these stories offered and continue to offer us. The creases are there.

The unfolding of this theme highlights a need for explicit and intentional approaches to incorporating discussions of Indigenous sovereignty, alongside storytelling, in ways that are

contextual. When I first began thinking about writing these “implications” I considered creating a new course description or syllabus inspired by the lessons of this project grounded in the critical orientations for Indigenous studies curriculum developed by Leilani Sabzalian [Alutiiq/Sugpiaq] which centers six main areas of concern: 1) place– “you are always on Indigenous homelands,” 2) presence– “Indigenous peoples are still here,” 3) perspectives– “Indigenous perspectives challenge Eurocentrism and provide analyses to enrich curriculum more broadly,” 4) political nationhood– “Indigenous Peoples are nations, not minorities,” 5) power– “challenge power dynamics within curricula and create space to highlight examples of Indigenous creativity and collective power,” 6) partnerships– “cultivate and sustain partnerships with Indigenous peoples, organizations, and nations” (n.d). However, as I reflected on what that revised pedagogy might entail I came to the conclusion that a dialogic and relational practice is needed first in order to know what forms a focus on Indigenous sovereignty with these six principles might take with adult immigrant and refugee ESL learners. Curriculum development and discussion should attend to these areas but it also needs to happen at a linguistic and theoretical level that is accessible and meaningful within each specific teaching context and in relationship with those involved.

I propose that with relationality in mind, the explicitness comes first, a starting point in the way Motha and Lin (2014) suggest, as an articulation of desire that “can help us consciously evaluate whose interests are being privileged in the context of our ‘educational’ practice” (p. 337). This invites, on the one hand a teacher or researcher to be open, saying clearly “these are my desires and goals in this particular learning context, these are my commitments and this is where I locate these things” while at the same time inquiring honestly of others “what are your desires and goals in this particular learning context, what are your commitments and where do

you locate them?” And finally a collective effort to ask, “how can we find ways to bring these all together?” Ultimately, these are the conversations which might lead to “desire-led” (Zelada, 2025) research and/or curriculum design decisions that acknowledge the desires, motivations and interests of those involved in order to reflect on where they intersect and diverge. Desire-based and desire-led practice and method recognizes that we do not live in an anti-colonial world, so instead of claims to “anti-colonial research” or “anti-colonial pedagogy,” to me, these practices and methods creating the creases, initiating the tessellations “with an anti-colonial future in mind” (Zelada, 2025, p. 8) through the way we research and teach in the present.

Folding Up: Relational Translingual Pedagogy

Through their language practices, co-storytellers constructed dynamic speaker identities which both conformed to and challenged traditional classroom power relations. This occurred “through the claims they [made] to speaking authority (what they know things to mean; how this knowledge is valued; if/how they are heard by listeners) and belonging/difference (who they can be in relation to the world around them; how they identify with different groups)” (Taylor, 2006, p. 102). As co-storytellers in this project we engaged, co-constructed, and rearranged our complex multilingual/translingual and transnational identities in relational ways. More specifically, Cristina had pointed out in our collaborative journal how during our first round of storytelling workshops we, “‘*saw translingual’ English [use] in terms essential to the story in the language they exist in (I am thinking of the names of the “picos” for example and how we said “those do not need to translated in English... or “tinaja” or “bon odori” or “viejitas”* (CJECSM071923). And this type of translingual activity occurred throughout the second series of classes well. Cumulatively, this suggests that *transnational identity-in-story* and translingual practice can be co-constitutive. Unique histories, interpretations, and reinterpretations provided

multiple pathways for us to engage with our community funds of knowledge in ways that appreciated the dynamic nature of culture while at the same time acknowledging the “historically constituted reservoirs of knowledge from which communities draw” (Holmes & González, 2017 p. 221).

Co-storytellers responded positively to this sharing and learning. Wellesh noted she felt the storytelling was “good because different country people [were] together and communicated” (SRWG), Claire spoke about “sharing the story of mine, and listening to others” (SRCC) and Sal noted that his favorite aspect of the classes were “the stories around the world” (SRSS).

One of the ongoing considerations in this project has been in regards to decentering our own or other external examples of language or storytelling as examples to follow, instead we are seeking an “unbinding [of] genres from static forms and moving across languages and modes” (Gonzalez, 2017 p. 90). Learning from the experiences in our first workshops and reflecting together in our collaborative journal we recognized that while it was important to have stories to ground the conversations, we wanted these materials and stories to be in multiple languages and modalities and we wanted to focus on the conversation around the stories to situate meaning (CJECSM071923). Because in this iteration of the project we now had a variety of examples from former co-storytellers we were able to move even further away from “models” of storytelling and language use.

However, even as we were able to move away from “models” it was also clear that pressures to produce specific forms of language, particularly when translating and writing the English versions of the stories persisted. This can be seen for example in how two co-storytellers used text that was heavily influenced by Wikipedia when writing the English versions of their

stories (CSWGWOLDEAB; CSAMYOHANNES). By relying on “official” text and language I see these choices as representing both a sense of linguistic insecurity (Labov, 1996; Meyerhoff, 2006) which is socially constructed (Lippi-Green, 1997; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2016; et al.) and results in desires for a certain type of English. These desires, as referenced previously, are “intersubjectively constituted and shaped by our social, historical, political and economic histories and contexts” (Motha & Lin, 2014, p. 333). Considering their choices from this perspective highlights the operation of English as an object of desire for, “not simply competency in the language, but also a range of symbolic, material and affective alignments and possibilities that are perceived to come with or through the language” (Hight, 2024, p. 47).

On the one hand, the textual reliance on Wikipedia and the associated language could be read as students reaching out for digital literacy resources. On the other hand, in a context that values relationality, “the introduction of new tools can disrupt the relationship between different elements in an activity system” (Case, 2015, p. 4). The disruption here occurs in the interconnected relationship between storyteller, story, and audience. Ultimately, these co-storytellers did not find enough security in my invitation to tell their stories in their own words. This indicates to me the need to consider more carefully the pedagogical implications of linguistic insecurity and desire when it comes to storytelling, translation, and communication and to de-emphasize, in the future, the production of English versions of the stories, instead focussing more on the discussion and contextualization. Looking at reliance on the “official” text of digital tools indicates a complex interplay between the human, technological, material, and cultural factors and requires “renegotiating how these forces meet in potentially productive entanglements” (Smith, 2025, p. 296).

In relation to this, my analysis also suggests “untranslatability” as a potential area of renegotiation and mobilization of translingual practice within English language learning contexts which might offer additional forms of epistemic resistance and opportunities to rearrange our complex multilingual and transnational identities with each other and with language.

Unfolding: A More Critically Untranslatable Pedagogy

What is important is untranslatable. But being untranslatable does not mean it cannot exist in a different language or culture. It can. Not as a synonym but as a story, as a narrative (Rusine, 2021).

As discussed previously, one of our primary goals was to envision and create a “co-learning/co-creation/co-translation environment” (CJET011224). This focus led us to engage with untranslatable words (CAR022225) and broader untranslatable concepts drawn from the stories that were shared (CSSSBAI; CSCYNIAN). Translation and untranslatability speak to issues of representation, participation, and authority and, “what is at stake for speakers positioned as *ethnoracially and linguistically different* are their claims to know: what is at stake is the *integrity* of their frameworks of meaning” (Taylor, 2006, p. 105). I want to suggest here a more intentional focus on untranslatability as a potential for anticolonial pedagogy which resists the compulsion to translate cultural knowledge for Western consumption and understanding. According to prominent literary translator Lawrence Venuti (1995), if the goal of translation is to produce accessible and easily understood works then it can potentially reinforce colonial violence through the erasure of cultural difference or simplification of concepts that are not easily understood by the target culture. On the other hand, untranslatability opens up the possibility for the repositioning of knowledge claims and for co-storytellers to move between

knowing and speaking positions in the classroom, a dynamic process of arranging and rearranging *transnational identity-in-relation*.

Paying attention to translational gaps can give learners and teachers a critical opening to reflect on how words and concepts can point to culturally specific ideas and ways of thinking and being. This explicit awareness of how language operates can be accompanied by positive affective responses and “feelings of pride in the uniqueness of one’s language and sense of confidence in being able to speak knowledgeably about one’s own language and culture” (Darvin & Zhang, 2023 p. 657). But more importantly, untranslatability as decolonial practice reclaims meanings that are being stolen or forced into simplification and digestibility for Western consumption or understanding. But, that begs the question, how do we engage with other ways of using language, of knowing, doing, and being without upholding coloniality? In her work with decolonial epistemic translation, Izquierdo (2019) proposes “transexpression” as “a movement..from one language to another but without creating the text anew to fit within larger Epistemological projects” (p. 64). She suggests that language should be thought of as malleable and in this way be used “playfully,” distorting and transgressing “Western grammars in order to be more faithful to the non-Western epistemology in translation” (p. 65). This idea of playful distortion draws a wonderful connection with Lugones’ (1987) idea of “playfulness” as engaging in activities unbound by rules or concerns with competence, but at the same time understood in collaboration, as an “openness to the construction or reconstruction of the ‘worlds’ we inhabit” (p. 17). I propose these decolonial interpretations of “play” should inspire us to imagine ways to incorporate untranslatability that invites transgressive, creative, unexpected, and unfamiliar ways of telling stories and using language.

With this in mind, decolonial approaches to untranslatability will resist pedagogical attachment to writing as literacy, unsettling “Eurocentric literacy by refusing its location as the colonial center against which all other meaning making practices across the planet are to be compared” (Cushman & Baca, 2024, p. 12). Since Western knowledge is produced in and through text a Western understanding of translation is also largely text based, and “if decolonization is to occur, translation should not be viewed as just a lexical or grammatical exercise” (Castañeda-Peña, et al., 2023, p. 273). One way might be to consider in what other non-textual ways we might engage with untranslatable words. Creative activities like art, photography, and music could further disrupt hegemonic linguistic practices. Draw or paint a concept, play or share a song that conveys the significance of a word. What could a multimodal, story-based “dictionary” of untranslatables look like?

Another question to ask might be, how can untranslatability connect us back to the land? The example untranslatable word that I brought into our class discussion was お花見 (hanami), which is the practice of going out to celebrate and enjoy the cherry blossom flowers in community when they bloom in spring. Expressions such as this, describing specific land based cultural practice could open up possibilities for discussing different ways of relating to the land. How might untranslatability connect to a more nuanced and complex understanding of local Coast Salish languages in relation to the places they describe like Tahoma. How might concepts from the languages of other co-storytellers expand our understanding of land in different ways?

Ultimately, untranslatability is not an argument or an opportunity to “integrate” home language expressions and culture into ESOL frameworks, instead it is a potential lens through which expressions of *transnational identity-in-relation* and *transnational identity-in-story* can emerge and where critical discussions about language and power can take place.

Folding Up: “Appropriateness” and Context Based Relationality

Much of the learning I am describing in this chapter comes from reflecting on the way my own anxieties and discomfort at times during the project, indicate broader ideologically constructed social structures that are internalized, by myself and others, to varying extents. And, from there considering how a focus on relationships helps in the ongoing process of deconstructing these internalized systems of oppression. Below I rely heavily on the explanatory power of Flores and Rosa’s foundational work on undoing “appropriateness” (2015) and I return again to the illustrative power of Lugones’ text *Loving Perception* and “World”-Travel (1987) in summarizing and articulating these reflections and in suggesting implications.

Relational positionings are born from the educational and/or research context and at the same time they reflect historically accumulating meaning and tensions that are experienced in reality. In Chapters 4 and 5, I presented some examples of how I experienced this in relationship to questions and expectations around three main areas of tension: 1) issues of personal self-disclosure (CAR022924), 2) insecurity about incorporating creativity through storytelling and art in the classroom (CJETAM020124; CJETAM012624), and 3) fear of unpredictable political conversations (CJETAM020924). These three areas of concern are all closely associated with ideas about what is “appropriate” and/or “useful” in an adult ESL teaching context. With Flores and Rosa’s conceptualization of “appropriateness” and its potential undoing (2015) in mind, I suggest that, in addition to language, prescriptive racial and cultural ideologies have also dictated what is “correct” in terms of our activities and relationships with each other in learning contexts. And, while an appreciation for cultural competency and awareness in learning is a welcome improvement, approaches which attempt to reframe the issue of culture in terms of

“appropriateness” continue to conflate racialized, and otherwise marginalized bodies with cultural deficiency.

This is especially prevalent in adult language learning contexts which often focus on neoliberal constructions of “workplace readiness” and “survival skills,” employing a communicative approach to pedagogy which prioritizes, “the ability to use language appropriately [and] requires both verbal and non-verbal interaction with others based on social norms” (Nunan, 1989; 2013). These approaches to language learning continue to emphasize and promote American “work culture” and center both linguistic and cultural ways of understanding and adapting “appropriately” into this culture, oftentimes without connecting to the culture of learners or connecting comparatively in terms of “appropriacy and communicative goals” (York, 2025). Monolingual practice is also strengthened as “native English speakers” or American workers are seen as the appropriate conveyors of “work culture.” These discourses position “appropriateness” as a static and achievable goal when in fact judgements on social norms are dynamic, subjective appraisals made by people in the course of their interactions which can be reflected on and revised. Thus, practicing identity as a process of *transnational identity-in-relation* helped us to shift the focus away from the “appropriateness” of individual practices and instead attend to the way that these practices are understood and co-constructed in context.

To elaborate I want to suggest that I/we benefitted from an openness to vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty. Reciprocal and relational personal disclosure challenged hierarchies, creating opportunities for those involved to shift from identities conferred upon them by the interactional context, co-constructing new identities-in-relation which were less constrained by dominant discourses of “appropriateness” and “cultural competency.” Similarly, making time and

space in classes for the artistic practice of drawing was both a site of joy and a site of resistance to neoliberal norms that prioritize efficiency and outcomes over relationships. Finally, in recognizing my ignorance but also trusting that co-storytellers would, “take responsibility of their learning according to their own particularities and knowledge systems” (Wei, 2023, p. 208) political discussions became situations for co-learning based on the stories, knowledge, values and insights of those involved. The above points of tension and reflection on the construction and deconstruction of "appropriateness" clearly demonstrate that significant analysis arises where there is discomfort, fear and uncertainty. This encourages me to approach my pedagogical and research relationships as Lugones suggests, in a way that is “not self-important” or “fixed in [a] particular constructions of ourselves” but instead is “open to self-construction” (1987, p. 119) and in this case, co-construction as well.

Unfolding: Loving Perception and “World”-Travel

As opposed to the binary and oppositional teacher/student relationship, “world”-traveling through expressions of *transnational identity-in-relation* and *identity-in-story* can elevate the kind of relationality that grounds non-Western knowledges, worldviews, and practices and unfolds the potential for different modes of living, knowing across different “worlds.” Approaching the teaching and learning of English from a transnational orientation grounded in relationality may offer avenues for practice that do not measure “success” in terms of "appropriateness" or any of the other metaphors of “neoliberal globalese” that position “language as *resource and strategy*, language learners as *stakeholders and communities of practice*, language learning as *participation and investment*, language teaching as *effectiveness and accountability*, educational success as *measurable outcome and sustainable growth*” (Kramsch, 2020, pp. 60-61). It is with these conditions in mind that I am inspired by Lugones to think about

"world"-travelling as pedagogy and as potential for disrupting or rearranging the entanglements of English, coloniality, and neoliberal capitalism.

Many people engage in "world"-traveling into contexts where English is dominant out of necessity, this includes adult language learning contexts. In these worlds, the "hostility and the compulsory nature of the 'travelling' have obscured for us the enormous value of this aspect of our living and its connection to loving" (Lugones, 1987, p. 3). But, the definition of "world" in Lugones' "world"-traveling metaphor is plural. There are worlds that are particular constructions of reality defined by dominant norms and discourses, i.e., "appropriateness" but they can also be "worlds" of non-dominant construction. Most importantly, "one can travel between these 'worlds' and one can inhabit more than one of these 'worlds' at the very same time" (1987, p. 10) and one can move in and out wilfully, with intention.

Transnationalism, understood as "relational and enacted in the process of creating and maintaining relationships between people [in the] spaces where migration occurs" (Robinson, et al., 2020, p. 10) in connection to "world"-traveling, opens us up to the (sometimes uncomfortable) process of transformative co-construction of relationships by inviting the type of care we know is possible into teaching and learning spaces otherwise dominated by relationships of hierarchy and separation. We know this is possible because non-violent, non-coercive relationships occur in other places and in other aspects of our multifaceted lives. For example, in our mentoring relationships, our friendships, our families, our kinships and other similar relationships of care, which is not to say that these relationships cannot also be violent and coercive at times. By way of illustration, Lugones' "world"-traveling, emerged from considerations about her relationship with her mother. Framing her understanding of relationships in this way led to an expansive understanding of relationality that has echoed

throughout feminist decolonial scholarship for decades. By allowing these relationships of care, in all their complexity, to inform us more explicitly and guide us across multiple encounters, we can learn to recognize one another lovingly on the other's terms instead of our own, or instead of those imposed upon us by dominant systems. In this way we can challenge those dominant views of what it is to teach and learn English and the space to explore what it means to teach and to know in relationship with others.

Epilogue: 折り紙 無限くるくる(Mugen Kurukururu), Infinite Spinning Origami

In concluding, I want to briefly and loosely bring these ideas together considering the future directions and suggestions for multilingual digital storytelling projects with adult learners that center relationships. Based on the experiences and ideas outlined in these chapters, these main future areas of focus for me are: A) Connecting and returning to the land, specifically centering Indigenous sovereignty, B) De-emphasizing text based literacy, C) Collective and individual articulation of insecurities, desires and reflecting on where these originate, D) Engaging in ongoing self-construction, re-construction and co-construction with others, E) Trusting the people, F) Listening with love/loving perception.

The in-process and unfinished nature of these ideas is best represented by the movement of this model known as infinite turning or infinite spinning origami.

Figure 28

Infinite Spinning Origami Diagram

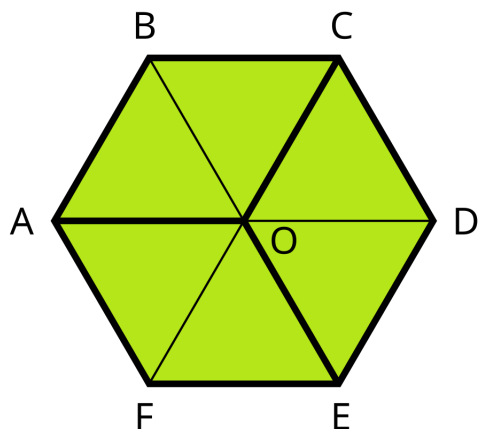
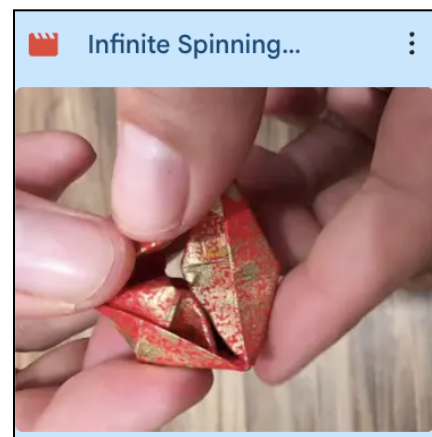


Figure 29

Video Thumbnail Infinite Spinning Origami



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Appendix A: Outreach Materials

Community storytelling and digital storytelling

Elective class Thursdays 1:15 pm - 2:45 pm

Class begins January 25th and ends March 14th

Teachers: Taiko Aoki-Marcial and Cristina Sánchez-Martín from the University of Washington

In this class you will:

- Share your language and ideas
- Share stories from your community and learn from other people's stories
- Practice English (speaking, listening, writing, and translation)
- Do some cultural research
- Practice using the computer to share your story

The teachers of this class, Taiko and Cristina, are working on a research project about community storytelling and language. As students and storytellers in this class you will be helping them with their work. For participating in this class you will be paid \$20.00 per hour (up to \$240.00).

If you have questions about the class you can ask your teacher or fill out [this form](#) and someone will call you to talk about the class.

Winter community and digital storytelling class

...

Share stories, share language, share ideas,
practice writing and computers

What is the community and digital storytelling class?

In person elective class Thursdays 1:15 pm - 2:45 pm (we will have some snacks for everyone)

Class begins January 25th and ends March 14th

Teachers: Taiko Aoki-Marcial and Cristina Sánchez-Martín from the University of Washington

In this class we will tell stories in different languages, we will practice speaking, writing and translating our stories. We will also work together to create digital versions of your stories on the computer.

What is the community and digital storytelling class?

As teachers of this class we (Taiko and Cristina) are working on a research project about community storytelling and language.

As students and storytellers in this class you will be helping us with our work.

For participating in this class you will be paid \$20.00 per hour (up to \$240.00).

At the end of the class you will have the choice to share your work on a website and talk about your work on a podcast if you want to.

To register for the class

If you are interested in the class you can:

- Talk to your regular Literacy Source teacher
- Fill out [this form](#)
- Email Taiko at taikoa@uw.edu or Cristina at csanch2@uw.edu
- Call or text Taiko 206-280-6466 or Cristina 309-550-3632

Appendix B: Co-storyteller Contractor Agreement

Multilingual and digital storytelling project

Winter 2023

Facilitators: Taiko Aoki-Marcial
taikoa@uw.edu
206-280-6466

Cristina Sánchez-Martín
csanch2@uw.edu

Class time: Thursdays 1:15-2:45

Class dates: January 25th - March 14th

In this project you will:

- Remember, research, translate and share a story or stories
- Create oral recordings and written versions of your story or stories. These recordings and texts will be used for research purposes
- Help Taiko and Cristina understand multilingual storytelling

- Help Taiko and Cristina create more classes and online material about multilingual storytelling
- Be paid \$20/hour (up to \$240) for your work

Agreement Between _____ and Literacy Source

This agreement starts January 25th, 2024 between _____ (Contractor) and Literacy Source (Organization). The contractor will be a **research participant and contributor**. Contractor will coordinate all activities under this agreement with facilitators, Taiko Aoki-Marcial and Cristina Sánchez-Martín.

Scope of Work:

Required activities:

1. Participate in class sessions.
2. Remember, research, translate and share a story or stories
3. Create oral recordings and written narratives. The recordings and texts produced by the contractor will be used for research purposes

Optional activities:

1. Publish your story on the project website
2. Be a guest on the project podcast to talk more about your story
3. Participate in a research interview with Taiko

Time of work: January 25th - March 14th, 2024

Payment:

The contractor will participate during 8 scheduled sessions up to a maximum of 12 hours total at a rate of \$20 per hour. The specific amount of payment will depend on the actual number of hours worked. Payment will be made after the timesheet is submitted.

Independent Contractor Relationship and Taxes:

An independent contractor-organization relationship will be created by this Agreement. Literacy Source is interested only in results obtained under this Agreement and the conduct and control of the work will lie solely with the Contractor.

Contractor is not to be considered an agent or employee of Literacy Source for any purpose and is not entitled to the benefits provided by Literacy Source to its employees. Contractor is free to contract for similar services to be performed for others while under contract with Literacy Source. It is further understood that the Organization does not agree to use Contractor exclusively but is free to engage other independent contractors to perform the same work that Contractor.

Contractor shall be solely responsible for payment of all taxes owed as a result of work performed under this Agreement, including estimated federal income tax liability, self-employment tax, and Social Security (FICA) tax. Organization shall not, under any circumstances deduct any taxes from Contractor's payments.

Termination:

This agreement can be ended by the contractor or organization, for any reason, by giving a 15-day notice.

We indicate our acceptance of this agreement with our signatures below:

Name:
Storyteller/translator

Cat Howell, Co Executive Director
Literacy Source

Appendix C: Consent Forms

Consent to Participate in a Study on Multilingual and Digital Storytelling

Please direct any questions to Cristina Sánchez-Martín (csanch2@uw.edu) or Taiko Aoki-Marcial (taikoa@uw.edu)

Research Goals

Hi! We have been doing a research project about digital storytelling in different languages, writing and translating stories, and what the stories mean to different communities. We created a website (translationships.net) with these stories, podcasts, and pictures taken during a series of workshops to promote the stories and conversations around them. As the project evolves, we host gatherings with community members and people interested in various aspects of the project to understand its impact and evolution. So that is what we'd be doing today!

Procedures

We will invite you to share thoughts on various aspects of the project, such as storytelling, pedagogy, language and literacy, access, and the digital materials on the website, and your general impressions. We plan to record conversations, collect some written impressions, and take photos during the sessions.

Uses of the Information

The stories in (audio and written formats), podcasts, and photos will be shared on a website. The rest of the information you provide during this study will be used for research purposes. We will analyze the stories, your translations, and recordings to improve community-driven English language and literacy learning and translation. We might publish pieces of writing such as academic articles or a book, and I may use this information in presentations at professional conferences. Resulting publications may be publicly available and may contain quotations from your interviews or interactions that we have.

We will use your information responsibly and carefully, so we will check in with you about our interpretations of the information you shared with us. We will represent your words and opinions respectfully.

You may choose to be named or remain anonymous at any point in this research process, and you may change your decision later in the research process. If you choose to participate in this study anonymously, we will make every effort to ensure that you cannot be identified from your words. At the time of written informed consent, you can choose a pseudonym and will link it to transcripts and notes associated with your participation. Your pseudonym will be kept in a separate digital file that contains your name and pseudonym. Recordings, transcripts, and any information you provide will be stored digitally, in a password-protected format to which only we have access. Please note that information sent by email is not completely secure.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, the records of your participation may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm. We will keep records of this research for the length of time required by my institution.

You may ask me at any time to refrain from using a particular quote or other piece of data; please contact us to let us know: Cristina Sánchez-Martín (csanch2@uw.edu) or Taiko Aoki-Marcial (taikoa@uw.edu)

4. Rights and Risks of participation

If you participate in this research, we will ask questions on topics that you may find sensitive or personal, such as your experiences as a migrant and language learner and your previous experiences in other contexts. We may also discuss topics related to identity (for example, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, etc.) that may cause you emotional discomfort. We will approach these topics with respectful curiosity and humility.

We do not intend to cause you personal or professional harm. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, at any time. You may also request that we do not include certain words of yours or certain information about you in the study. You also have the right to withdraw your participation in this research at any time.

To sum up, we invite you to participate in this research as a co-collaborator. As a result, we will always welcome your feedback and opinions on research procedures, including this process of informed consent. Please consider this research an open and ongoing conversation. We truly appreciate your willingness to join us – thank you!

Please direct any questions to Cristina Sánchez-Martín (csanch2@uw.edu) or Taiko Aoki-Marcial (taikoa@uw.edu)

I give you consent to be part of this research:

YES

NO

I give consent to the researchers to use photos where you might appear

YES

NO

Signature _____

Date _____

Name (printed) _____

If you'd like to use a pseudonym, please add it here _____

Appendix D: Simplified Consent Forms

WHAT WE ARE DOING:

1. Participating in a class about storytelling in different languages and English, writing, creating digital materials, etc.
2. Adding stories and recorded conversations about the stories to our website "translationships.net"
3. Supporting knowledge in multilingual communities and being a collaborator in the project

HOW:

1. Completing activities in class that include: listening, speaking, writing, researching online, recording audios, group-work, etc.
2. Sharing those activities with us

USE OF THE INFORMATION

1. On the website "translationships.net"
2. On our research articles, presentations, dissertation, book, etc.

WHAT WE PROMISE

1. Not misinterpreting what you say or create
2. Using the information responsibly and carefully
3. Answering questions at csanch2@uw.edu and taikoa@uw.edu
4. Giving you the option to choose a different name than your own (a pseudonym)
5. Removing information from the materials that you don't want to share
6. Removing you from the project at any time (if you want)

RISKS

Having conversations about sensitive topics and identities

I give you consent to be part of this research:

YES

NO

I give consent to the researchers to use photos where you might appear

YES

NO

Signature _____

Date _____

Name (printed) _____

If you'd like to use different name than your own (a pseudonym), please add it here
