6-2020

Pardon My Acento: Racioalphabetic Ideologies and Rhetorical Recovery through Alternative Writing Systems

Kelly Medina-López

Latinx Writing and Rhetoric Studies
Vol. 1, No. 1, June 2020, 57–79

LWRS

Pardon My Acento: Racioalphabetic Ideologies and Rhetorical Recovery through Alternative Writing Systems

Kelly Medina-López
California State University, Monterey Bay, on land of the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen people.[1]

Rosa, by Any Other Name

As a Latinx woman with an ambiguously White first name, Kelly, and a complicated, hyphenated Spanish language last name, Medina-López, I think about the words we use to name ourselves a lot.[2] I have secretly (and not so secretly) always been ashamed of my first name: the sharp "k" and double "ll" pronounced "l" and not the Spanish "y" causes the Spanish-speaking tongues of my friends and family to pause, to focus more on the word, to say it as if they hold something bitter in their mouths at the same time. My Abuelito Medina (QEPD) flat out refused to call me by my awkward White name, opting instead to twist the Ke - lly into "¿qué le?" short for "¿qué le importa?" (¿what does it matter?) as a playful joke or the universal "mija" when naming would fail. In middle school all of my friends had beautiful, strong Spanish names that rolled off the tongue: Gabriela, Yolanda, Mónica. I wanted one too, and I even begged my dad to change my name legally, "Please, apá, quiero ser Belén! o Magdalena!" But he never gave in, and I had a hard time understanding how my OG Latinx pops had double-crossed me in the name department. By the time I was old enough to legally change my name myself, "Kelly" was already far too embedded in my lived reality: we (my name and I) were stuck to each other, no matter how uncomfortable I felt about it.[3]

LWRS: Latinx Writing and Rhetoric Studies ISSN 2687-7198
https://latinxwritingandrhetoricstudies.com

My struggles with naming as a person of color are not new or unique. Latinx literature and pop culture highlight the impact of naming and disnaming, or, better yet, "to call someone out of their name" and to insult (see Bucholtz, 2016; Smitherman, 2000), on our community and has helped me understand my apá's choice to give me a White name a little better. For instance, in  *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984) Esperanza struggled with the difficulty in pronouncing "too many letters" in her name (p. 11). The film *La Bamba* featured an especially poignant scene where producer Bob Keane disnames Ricardo Valenzuela to Ritchie Valens, against the protest of both Valenzuela and his brother Bob. Finally, controversial author Richard Rodriguez (1982) discussed the roll that the educational system played in disnaming minoritized children and the impact his forced disnaming had on his identity formation. I can see my dad reflected in these stories. Pedro becomes Pete, Juan becomes Johnny—all of my tíos and tías from that generation Anglicized their names. Bobby, Sammy, Richie, Rosie, and Lucy hide beautiful and painful secrets: Roberto, Samuel, Ricardo Rosalinda, María de la Luz.[4] My White name reflects the cultural and rhetorical violence of settler-colonial, imperial, assimilationist schooling and educational practices of the 1950s and 1960s and the trauma that violence left on the lives and bodies of the Latinx community.

These examples speak to a larger Western imperial technology of forced assimilation through naming practices, a research thread covered at length in the context of the English-language learning classroom and in discussions of educational justice (Edwards, 2006; McPherron, 2009; Chien, 2012). Following this thread, and in the vein of the rhetorical violence and trauma of the naming practices of my elders, I examine another complicated and problematic piece of the naming puzzle: the erasure of Spanish-language diacritical marks (dieresis, acentos, and tildes) from our names and naming as an imperial technology of sustained raciolinguistic oppression. Using my own complicated name [Kelly Medina-López] and experience as example, I will trace erasures of Spanish acentos to surface racioalphabetic practices and argue for rhetorical recovery and linguistic sovereignty in reclaiming an alternative writing systems.[5] I then use this argument to suggest concrete strategies for leveraging linguistic sovereignty and recovering alternative writing systems in the writing classroom.

Imperial Alphabets

Like many U.S. born and educated Latinx people I learned to speak Spanish at home, but I never learned to write or spell in Spanish at home or in school. Actually, it wasn't

until I took Spanish for my language requirement in high school (easy A! or so I thought 😐) that I became more familiar with the Spanish alphabet and how and where to put those acentos. Even then, I struggled. While my heritage-speaking classmates and I rolled our rr's with the greatest of ease in our Pocho slang against the untrained tongues of our non-Spanish speaking classmates, the Spanish-language learners outmatched us where it counted: on the tests in written Spanish, quickly picking up on spelling and grammar conventions that felt weirdly out of reach to those of us who only knew Spanish by listening and speaking. My experience isn't unique. There is research in the teaching and learning of heritage language learners that validates my struggles (Beaudrie, 2012; Mikulski, 2006). Despite the challenges, I became determined to learn to read and write in Spanish, double majoring in Spanish as an undergrad and earning my master's degree (💪🏽📚👩🏾‍🎓) through a Spanish language and linguistics department.

In reclaiming my written, grammatical, and orthographic literacies in Spanish, I also began to notice how written Spanish is increasingly and consistently colonized in English-dominant settings within the U.S. So, when I married into the last name "López," a word that should be written with an acento over the ó but is rarely spelled that way in dominant U.S. discourses, I was determined to respect and honor the traditional spelling. Little did I know (though, I had my suspicions) that the decision to spell my new last name with an acento would become a site of constant struggle against rhetorical alphabetic violence and erasure in my fight for autonomy and survivance as a Latinx woman.[6]

In his foundational text *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, Walter Mignolo (1995) traced the history of colonization and the rise of dominant Western literacies through a critical study of language (linguistic and alphabetic violence) and the suppression of indigenous ways of writing and languaging. In the first chapter, Mignolo spoke to the systematic suppression of indigenous languages through the development of comparative alphabetic and grammar systems meant to indoctrinate indigenous peoples into the Spanish language, especially through the use and invention of alphabetic representations of indigenous speech. Surveying the alphabets and grammars introduced by Spanish friars, Mignolo identified how the friars codified the speech and writing systems of indigenous peoples into Western alphabets, describing them in linguistic terms as lacking specific (Western alphabetic) letters, or consisting of specific (Western) speech sounds (Mignolo, 1995, p. 46).

Tracing colonization from language to religion, the Westernization of indigenous writing systems paved the way for indoctrination into the Catholic faith through translations of the Bible and other religious texts. Thus, following Mignolo,

the colonization of writing systems is an entry point for imperial expansion and settler-colonial violence against indigenous peoples, cultures, and languages. As Mignolo's (1995) work revealed, the first colonization of our tongue happened in this long-ago context, and this colonization occurred in such a violent and traumatic way that it can never be fully recovered (Gutiérrez Chong, 1999; Menchaca, 2001; Baca and Villanueva, 2009). Using Mignolo to understand how alphabets have always operated as a foundational technology of colonization and oppression supports my current argument about the alphabetic violence of disnaming by excluding Spanish diacritics, like the accented "ó" in López. In other words, if, as Mignolo uncovered, early colonization began with a linguistic suppression of alphabetic inclusions and exclusions in the translations of indigenous speech to Western alphabets, then contemporary colonization also happens when the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet erases, or fails to account for, alternative writing systems, diacritical marks, and other alphabetic symbols and styles through Westernized spellings of our words, specifically in our names or naming.[7] This erasure, or failure to account for, other writing systems is what Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa (2015) called "indexical bleaching" and anchored in what they saw as "raciolingustic ideologies" (p. 150).

Raciolinguistic Ideologies

Flores and Rosa (2015) used the term "raciolinguistic ideologies" to expand the definition of a White gaze, or the recentering and normalizing of dominant White ideologies about bodies of color. While the White gaze (or ideological "eyes" 👀) sees certain racialized bodies as always language deficient, raciolinguistic ideologies extend to the "mouth" and "ears" or the way in which English is spoken and heard, according to Flores and Rosa (p. 150). They explained that uncovering raciolinguistic ideologies may reveal how the White gaze is attached to both speaking subjects who perform idealized White linguistics and White listeners who interpret language-minoritized populations as always language deficient. Racio-linguistic ideologies, like the White gaze, recenter a mythologized Dominant American English (DAE)[8] as an idealized form of communication. Thus, the White listening 👂 body will always hear deficiency, based not on how well the racialized speaking body performs DAE, but on their racial position in society.[9] At the same time that White gaze informs how White listeners might interpret language deficiency in certain racialized, language-minoritized speakers; it also encourages bodies of color to perform DAE for their listeners.

In their theorization of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2014) also pointed out how bodies of color are colonized through

a White gaze in schools, where these bodies constantly need to "measure up" to White middle-class norms (p. 86). In the critique over how a White gaze has influences over systems of education, Paris and Alim (2014) argued that contemporary curriculum and pedagogy continue to reinforce hegemonic literate, linguistic, and cultural practices. This practice meant that minoritized students learn to value White, Western ways of knowing, doing, and languaging over their own modes, even in assets-based classrooms where diverse modalities are acknowledged. While Paris and Alim (2014) were careful in their critique of assets-based pedagogy and recognized it as foundational to their theorization of CSP, they reminded readers that assets-based approaches still center the White gaze, and that educational scholarship on access and equity continued to focus on "how to get working-class students of color to speak and write more like middle-class White ones" (p. 87). Paris and Alim's argument reinforce how the White gaze recenters raciolinguistic ideologies through the standards and values of the U.S. educational system. But, bringing Paris and Alim together with Flores and Rosa exposes how recentering White Western values about language and languaging in school curriculums disciplines people of color and language-minoritized groups to understand DAE as a superior mode of communication. Thus, assumptions about accents, grammars, and whose bodies can and do speak DAE work both actively (through shifts in accent and grammar) and passively (by linking racialized bodies to "deficient" language) to influence listeners and speakers to norm themselves toward DAE.

For speaking and listening, as Flores and Rosa (2015) indicated, raciolinguistic ideologies reinforce monoglossic language ideologies, or the belief that an idealized monolingualism is a standard to which all subjects of the nation state should aspire. Monoglossic language ideologies are not concrete sets of rules about how language should be spoken or heard, but rather a systemic ideology, a "cultural emblem" whose circulation "perpetuates raciolingustic ideologies and thereby contributes to processes of social reproduction and social stratification" (Flores and Rosa, 2015, p. 152). Using spoken accents as an example, Flores and Rosa (2015) argued that monoglossic language ideologies allow White listening 👂 subjects to ignore certain (White) accents or to consider particular ways of accenting language as "accentless," while hearing (and attributing to certain bodies) other accents. In shifting the critique from how speakers perform language to how White listeners hear language,[10] Flores and Rosa discussed how appropriateness-based models for language education, like those that encourage students to use "academic language" or "disciplinary discourse," inherently support raciolinguistic ideologies (p. 152). Regardless of any objective language practices and/or how well a linguistically minoritized speaker performs the "appropriate"

language, the speaker can never control how a White listener will hear and interpret their speech. Monoglossic language ideologies feed the White listener's understanding of who and how a speaker should speak before they have even spoken. Thus, their speech will always be heard and interpreted through raciolinguistic ideologies that mark their language as deficient, even if they demonstrate the same language patterns and accents as those used by their White peers.

26 Letras / Letters

Now, let me move from speaking and listening to reading and writing to suggest that raciolinguistic ideologies can extend our understanding over the impact that a White gaze has on languaging subjects by an exploration of *racioalphabetic ideologies*. What I mean by that is, if raciolinguistic ideologies recenter DAE and mark certain bodies as always already language deficient by the White listener, then racioalphabetic ideologies recenter the standard 26-letter Western colonial alphabet and mark alternative spellings and writing systems, and those bodies attached to them, as also already deficient to a White reader. This thread of study has already gained substantial attention, particularly as it relates to writing classrooms. Rhetoric and composition scholars, that study translingual students and their writing, have done an excellent job to trace how accents emerge (or not) in student writing and how White readers understand and interpret "accented writing" (see Canagarajah, 1999; Horner and Trimbur, 2002; & Matsuda, 2006).

Nevertheless, the primary focus of this branch of scholarship is grammar and grammars versus spellings and writing systems, which is where a theorization of racioalphabetic ideologies can add nuance to an understanding of the interlocking discourses of language and power in a writing classroom. By ignoring writing systems as critical tools 🛠, scholarly discussions about grammar and grammars overlook alphabets as technologies of oppression and do little to challenge our notion of how students use writing systems to perform language. Racioalphabetic ideologies, then, operate from the assumption that there is always only one alphabet in the writing classroom. This assumption means that a White reader is always reading the standard 26-letter Western colonial alphabet (and othering or racializing any deviations) only, and a minoritized writer is disciplined not to perform other writing systems because they are, through a White gaze, excluded from DAE. As a result, words that might traditionally have alternative spellings, like Spanish language words and names, are coded into the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet so that they can be read, deracialized, by White readers. The process of deracializing words, either through

circulation or recoding, aligns with what Lauren Squires (2014) and Mary Bucholtz (2016) called *indexical bleaching*.

Squires (2014), the first to introduce the term, claimed that indexical bleaching was similar to semantic bleaching, whereby a word, through repetition, loses its semantic force while still maintaining its grammatical function (see Bybee and Thompson, 1997), but different in that the words that are "indexically bleached" are stripped not of their semantic force but of their social or cultural value. Using media as example, Squires (2014) showed how language that is linked, or indexed, to a particular media source was adopted and circulated through a community of consumers before spreading outside of that community to new users who may not understand the original indexical linkage. In this process of adoption, circulation, and diffusion, the original social and cultural understanding of the language may be weakened or forgotten, turning the language from "media language" (i.e. indexed to a particular media source) to just "language" (i.e. retaining its "semantic meaning and pragmatic force but [losing] its social meaning") (p. 43). While Squires did acknowledge the impact of indexical bleaching on particular cultural groups, she did not fully connect her theory to how language is racialized and deracialized and how that might affect minoritized populations.

In "On Being Called Out of One's Name," Mary Bucholtz (2016) complicated Squires' theorization on indexical bleaching by exploring practices of imperial naming and disnaming on students from linguistically or enthnoracially mar-ginalized backgrounds. This extended Squires' definition of indexical bleaching from the loss of social and cultural value to "a technique of deracialization, or the stripping of contextually marked ethnoracial meaning from an indexical form" (Bucholtz, 2016, p. 275). Using Jane Hill (1993), to support her argument, Bucholtz asserted that "hyperanglicized pronunciation of words seen as other-than-English is a fundamental strategy of White racial dominance through language," and "pronunciation strategies that trivialize nondominant languages indexically reproduce racial hegemony" (p. 278). Working with Latinx youth to interrogate naming practices, Bucholtz (2016) argued that the politics of naming, as deliberate mispronunciation, anglicization, and indexical bleaching, was a normative, dehu-manizing, and deracializing process that is still very much pervasive in contemporary educational settings.

While both Squires (2014) and Bucholtz (2016) are primarily focused on speaking and listening, like Flores and Rosa (2015), I extend their indexical bleaching definitions to include the coding and recoding of alternative writing systems into the dominant 26-letter Western colonial alphabet. Like hyperanglicized pronunciations, hyperanglicized spellings also indexically bleach words by removing their social,

cultural, and ethnoracial meanings. Often, these two forms of indexical bleaching work in tandem to further decontextualize language from cultural or social meaning. For example, normalizing the spelling of Los Ángeles as Los Angeles might encourage a hyperanglicized pronunciation, whereas accenting the Á might cause readers to pause and reflect on the histories of the word and the land it names. Indexical bleaching, then, reframed to include the systematic erasure of alternative writing systems, sustains and normalizes the practice of excluding or erasing acentos on Latinx names (among many other possible forms of racioalphabetic harm toward language-minoritized peoples and their alternative writing systems). Thus, as I return to my exploration of when and where the "ó" gets left out of López in my professional life, it is not just about spellings and misspellings, but rather an exploration of when, where, and by whom I am deracialized, and the impact that has on my scholarly and professional identity.

The complicated history between the early linguistic suppression of indigenous languages and letters, as Mignolo (1995) explored, and contemporary erasures of alternative writing systems through racioalphabetic ideologies are both patterns of White gaze normalizing the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet as an imperial technology for erasing other ways of knowing, languaging, and being. Before moving into a more detailed discussion of how and where erasures of the "ó" in López has happened, I'd like to take this space to point out that Spanish 🇪🇸, like English 🇬🇧, is a colonial language, and I want to make it clear that I recognize it as such. Colonial languages are necessarily messy, intersectional, and complicated, and I don't intend for this article to be read as forwarding some kind of pro-Spanish agenda. Removing the acentos from Spanish names can be an agented choice that reflect an individual's complex identity. For example, many indigenous peoples of New Mexico, where I am from, purposefully remove acentos and indigenize pronunciations of their colonial Spanish names as performances of rhetorical sovereignty. I don't see this as working against my argument, but supporting it: the move to indigenize colonial names through agented revisions of spellings and pronunciations is a move to reclaim linguistic sovereignty against the violence of naming and disnaming and another way of responding to the call I make in this article. However it might manifest, disrupting colonial alphabet systems, especially through agented choices related to names and naming, is one way to push back against what Asao Inoue (2019) called "White language supremacy," opening space for a pluriversal understanding of our alphabetic technologies, in his keynote address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

López-Lopez-LÃ³pez

To illustrate how racioalphabetic ideologies encourage critical disnamings, I share stories of being named and disnamed in professional and academic settings as examples. Above I said that I am careful to respect the proper spelling of López, and I am. No matter where I enter my name, I always take the time to spell it correctly. Despite my rhetorical caution, my name rarely appears correctly in professional documents and materials. Conference badges are my favorite example of this alteration. I'm always excited to pick up my conference badge at registration: did they spell it right? Usually the answer is no, and I'm left to draw the acento on myself, as the image on the right in Figure 1 shows. When I went through a collection of conference badges, I noticed that the badges that include the accented "ó" were from Cultural Rhetorics (CR CON), Feminisms and Rhetorics (FemRhets), Popular Culture Association (PCA), and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS).

Figure 1: Various conference badges (right) and 2019 CCCC conference badge with hand-drawn acento.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication,[11] the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA), and multiple badges from my home institute, California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) and the California State University (CSU) system were among those that left the accent off. While it might be easy to draw basic assumptions about why certain conferences and organizations accented my name and others did not, I would like to caution any readers against doing so and instead point our thinking in another direction. My disnaming from López to Lopez happens everywhere, not just on conference badges, and it is entirely more

complex than just the cultural politics of a particular group or conference. Pointing fingers at particular organizations makes it about individual habits rather than the structures of racialization that allow racioalphabetics to operate unchecked. In other words, it calls attention to the symptom but ignores the underlying disease 🤒🔄.

The way my name appears on conference badges from CSUMB and the CSM is most likely related to another place where the acento is missing from my name, my campus website, which correlates to how my name was entered into the system during my onboarding process. Thus, whichever human resources employee entered me into the system determined my entire institutional identity and visibility vis-à-vis my name and how my name appears on the web (Figure 2), something I'll speak to further in the following section. But, before I move there, I want to pause to assure the reader—and the fine organizations I list here—that my intention is not at all to put my university, university system, or any of the conferences, conference organizers, or professional organizations associated with these conferences on blast, that is to say, to publicly shame them, which is why I cautioned about drawing assumptions and pointing fingers above ⬆️.

Disnaming through the omission of diacritics may be entirely more complex than a simple question of whether my name appears correctly on a particular conference's badge or website. Rather, the issue is tied to U.S. political history of normative racioalphabetic ideologies, indexical bleaching, and the continued colonization of our public education system[12] as well as how our technologies process (or fail to process) alternative writing systems.

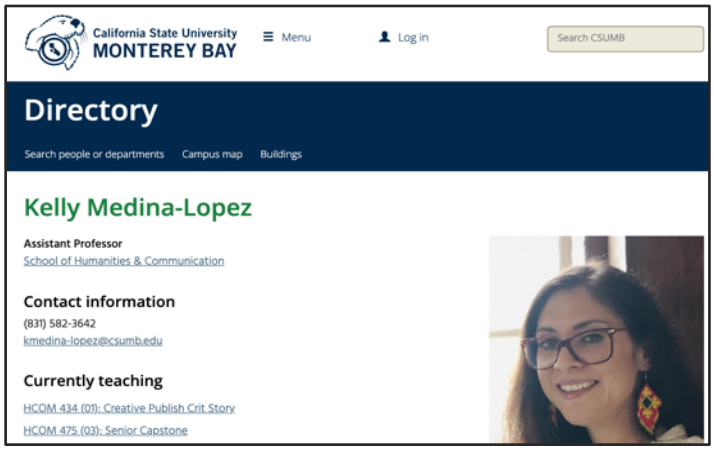
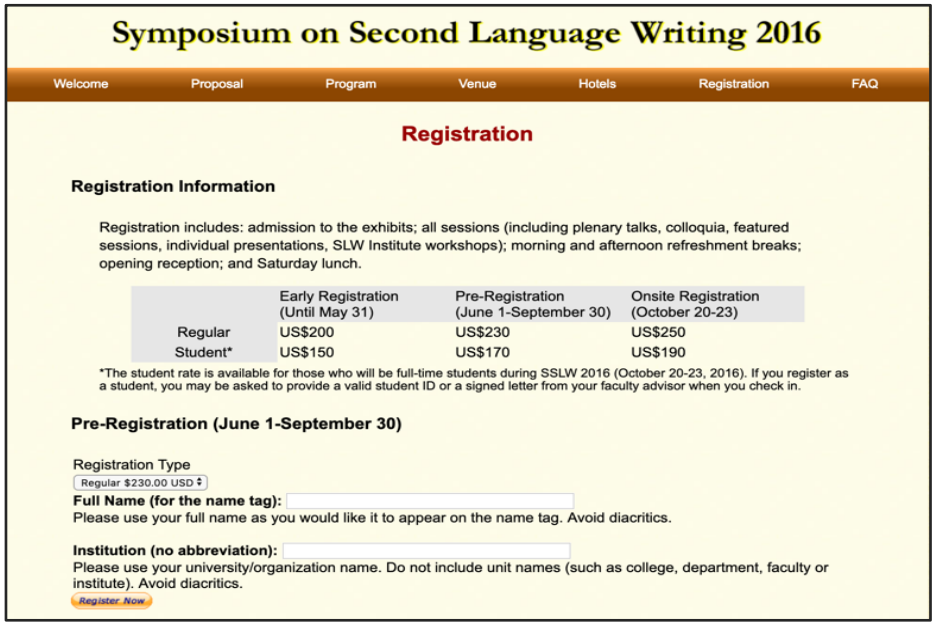


Figure 2: My profile on the CSUMB website (2019).

Speaking to this last point and thinking through what may contribute to when and how I am disnamed, one reason disnaming may occur is because our web platforms and applications can't process diacritic marks. For example, I remember feeling perplexed that the 2016 Symposium on Second Language Writing asked registrants to "avoid diacritics" when entering names for name tags (Figure 3). Why not? Was there a specific reason for those of us who use diacritics in our spellings to be asked not to? I wanted to ask these questions, but I also felt I had the answer. Actually, I'm confident that the volunteers (some of whom are friends and colleagues) who organized that conference recognized the beauty and diversity of all the languages and alphabets that came together in that space to discuss English language learning and that they didn't intentionally ask participants to "avoid diacritics" out of some intolerance, but rather because the registration software was unable to properly process diacritics. Actually, the acknowledgement that names with diacritical marks might be entered on badges may demonstrate this awareness, and I have never seen this restriction noted on any other online registration forms, before or after.

Technologies 💻 *do* get diacritics wrong, too—I can't tell you the number of times I've entered my name correctly into an internet form only to have my name come out as "LÃ³pez" on the other end. A recent example is the way my name appears in Blackboard, a learning management system, at the University of San Diego, where I am enrolled as a student in a professional development course (Figure 4).



Symposium on Second Language Writing 2016

Welcome | Proposal | Program | Venue | Hotels | Registration | FAQ

Registration

Registration Information

Registration includes: admission to the exhibits; all sessions (including plenary talks, colloquia, featured sessions, individual presentations, SLW Institute workshops); morning and afternoon refreshment breaks; opening reception; and Saturday lunch.

	Early Registration (Until May 31)	Pre-Registration (June 1-September 30)	Onsite Registration (October 20-23)
Regular	US$200	US$230	US$250
Student*	US$150	US$170	US$190

*The student rate is available for those who will be full-time students during SSLW 2016 (October 20-23, 2016). If you register as a student, you may be asked to provide a valid student ID or a signed letter from your faculty advisor when you check in.

Pre-Registration (June 1-September 30)

Registration Type

Regular $230.00 USD

Full Name (for the name tag):

Please use your full name as you would like it to appear on the name tag. Avoid diacritics.

Institution (no abbreviation):

Please use your university/organization name. Do not include unit names (such as college, department, faculty or institute). Avoid diacritics.

Register Now

Figure 3: A 2016 Symposium on Second Language Writing registration form.

The inability of technologies to process alphabetic diversity speaks to the pervasiveness of the racioalphabetic ideologies in coding and programming and the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet programmers ascribe to in our modern modes of communication. In her seminal text *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Noble (2018) looked at the implicit bias of internet search engine algorithms to expose programmer bias and dismantle the common myth that algorithms are neutral, unbiased, mathematical tools. I tie the inability of certain internet forms to process diacritics to this same paradigm: those who code the forms operate from racioalphabetic ideologies to recenter the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet and thus fail to create technologies capable of processing diacritics. Considering the role colonial systems of education have played in racializing and deracializing minoritized groups (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Ruiz and Sánchez, 2016; Smith, Tuck, & Yang, 2018), in tandem with the continued globalization of our colleges and universities, the inability of a learning management system like Blackboard to reproduce diacritics is especially alarming. The failure of technologies to understand and accommodate diacritics only reifies the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet as the technological advancement of indexical bleaching and perpetuating a racial and linguistic hegemony.[13] So, if we understand the 26-letter colonial alphabet as a move toward settler-colonialism, and alphabets writ large as resource, commodity, or capital, technologies that fail to account for alternative alphabets and spellings have already settled the terms through which one can and should name and be named. Any alternatives are already destroyed and disappeared. To think through how we might disrupt and delink from colonial alphabets, I will now move this discussion toward theories of visibility and accommodation, which may offer new ways to think about the rhetorical recovery and transformation of Latinx language systems and alphabets.

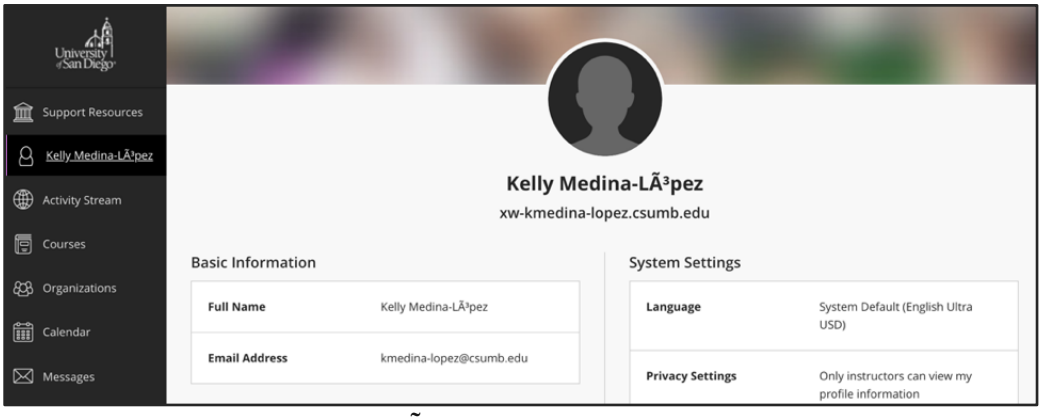


Figure 4: My name appears as LÃ³pez in Blackboard when entered as López (2019)

Recovering Alternative Writing Systems

The elefante 🐘 in the room is that racioalphabetic ideologies and indexical bleaching of names and spellings, specifically with the Spanish language–as the case for my name–is such a pervasive technology of oppression and normalization in contemporary U.S. linguistic and educational systems. As a result, many individuals with Spanish names may not know whether their name should have acentos or not. One reason for this is visibility. Erasing diacritics has become so commonplace to Western spellings that we are accustomed to seeing words that should have accents go without, and we have normalized and internalized the Western spellings of our names. The normalization of Western spellings of Spanish names and disnaming through the erasure of diacritics happens early and often and manifests through juridical deployments of state power. For example, in 1986, California passed Proposition 63, the "English as the Official Language Amendment," which made it illegal for hospitals to use diacritics in the spelling of names on birth certificates and other formal registration documents, like marriage and death certificates. This restriction meant that babies who may be named José, for example, are automatically disnamed Jose and family names like García, Rodríguez, or Martínez are also officially (dis)spelled or (re)spelled as Garcia, Rodriguez, and Martinez on official documents.[14] This law, still in effect as of 2019, normalizes the disnamings and misspellings of Spanish names and decreases the visibility of accented spellings, perpetuating the hegemony of the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet and its spellings.

In September 2017, California Assembly member Jose Medina[15] introduced Assembly Bill 82, proposing revisions to the legality of diacritics by requiring the State Registrar to recognize and include diacritics on all legal documents. According to the California Legislative Information website, AB-82 would also allow people with names recorded without diacritics on official documents to submit a written request to the Registrar to revise the spelling and reissue the documents, so long as "the payment of a specified fee" accompanied the request ("AB-82 vital records"). In October 2017, California Governor Edmund Brown Jr. vetoed AB-82, stating it was "a difficult and expensive proposition," and that AB-82 "would create inconsistencies in vital records and require significant state funds to replace or modify existing registration systems" ("AB-82 vital records). In vetoing AB-82, Governor Brown and other opposed politicians failed to recognize the state-sanctioned violence of indexical bleaching that refusing to accommodate diacritics on legal documents enables. Instead, they saw AB-82 as a costly burden to the state budget. Although AB-82 was a positive step in the right direction toward the rhetorical recovery of alternative writing systems, its failure

to pass signals the imperial legacies of racioalphabetic ideologies and their histories of expansion through state power.

Identifying and deploying appropriate accommodations is not a social and politically neutral task, and neither are the terms "diversity" and "inclusion" (Ahmed, 2012). Making spaces accessible for all bodies requires careful attention to intersectional abilities, identities, and experiences. Looking at inclusions and exclusions of diacritics as an accommodations issue sheds light on the rhetorical potential of recognizing alternative writing systems as tools for recovery and transformation. In the introduction to *Towards a New Rhetoric of Difference*, Stephanie Kerschbaum (2014) examined how teachers approach and accommodate difference in the writing classroom, arguing for pedagogies that both bring awareness to "differences that have received little attention" and provide "new insights on familiar differences" (p. 6). Central to her argument is a focus on "marking difference," which Kerschbaum (2014) defined as the places where "speakers and audiences alike display and respond to markers of difference, those rhetorical cues that signal the presence of difference between two or more participants" (p. 7). Kerschbaum (2014) recognized markers of difference as "a new set of tools for tracing and analyzing patterns in how we might understand one another" (p. 7). Thus, alternative writing systems, like diacritics on Spanish words, are tangible textual markers of difference, rhetorical cues that signify an alternative way of speaking, knowing, writing, languaging, and engaging with the world. They also correspond to both "differences that have received little attention," through technological and political erasures like those explored above, and "new insights on familiar differences," like the indexical bleaching of common Spanish words and names written without accents (e.g. Los Angeles vs Los Ángeles) (Kerschbaum, 2014, p. 6).

I find Kerschbaum's ideas 💡 particularly useful in thinking through how we might transform our writing classrooms by "marking difference" through careful attention to alternative writing systems. In "Decolonial Options and Writing Studies," Iris Ruiz and Damián Baca (2017) observed that "studies of written language still theorize and teach writing as an alphabetic technology that emerged in Western Europe and spread throughout the world from ancient Greece to imperial Rome to enlightenment Germany, to eighteenth-century Anglo-North America by way of Western global expansion" (p. 226). The hegemonic Western "alphabetic technology" still deployed through state-sanctioned rhetorical violence—like the legal prohibition of diacritics on registration documents through laws like California's Prop 63—continues to be one of the most pervasive forms of normative indexical bleaching in contemporary written discourse. To counter, I propose we delink through a careful

and critical reclaiming of our alternative writing systems to not only "mark difference," but also to recover our Latinx rhetorical modes and transform possible futures of writing and rhetoric for linguistically minoritized populations. Toward this goal, reclaiming our acentos offers one way to make visible our Latinx writing and rhetorical traditions, challenging deficit thinking paradigms that underline assumptions about whose bodies and languages fit in the rhetoric and composition classrooms, and whose bodies and languages need remediation. We can start this change by being careful and diligent with our own use of the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet in order to bring more visibility and awareness to alternative writing systems and by looking for ways to introduce our diverse students to alternative writing systems in our classrooms, in our mentoring, or in any other modes of contact.

Writing in Acentos

I return to Paris and Alim's (2017) theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) for my discussion on how writing instructors might engage alternative writing systems as tools for critical consciousness building, like Freire (1996) called for, in the classroom. In their theorization of CSP, Paris and Alim (2017) were careful to direct attention to the fluidity and dynamism of languages, identities, and cultures, among youth and, in particular, youth culture. They insisted that CSP must demand explicit pluralistic outcomes and not recenter White Western norms and educational values. At the same time, CSP should resist static or stereotypical reifying of cultural values and be flexible and responsive to change. Finally, CSP must also be willing to critically engage with reifications of contradictory or problematic cultural values. These are all practices that we can keep in mind as we shape our pedagogy to be more mindful of alphabetic difference

Thus, I ask that practitioners bear in mind how problematizing the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet with students in the writing classroom might accomplish those goals. If, for example, the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet is a tool of racioalphabetic ideologies and indexical bleaching, then how might encouraging the use of alternative writing systems in student writing yield more pluralistic outcomes? And, how might hosting conversations about critical erasures through indexical bleaching open a space for students to engage in dialogue about contradictory cultural values? I offer ideas here for beginning this work and encourage practitioners to carefully consider the goals of CSP and within their own classrooms, pedagogies, students, and ways of knowing and doing when imagining how best to engage CSP in

their own space. My recommendations center around three strategies: critical dialogues, visibility, and tools we might use to accomplish these goals.

One way we might counter racioalphabetic ideologies in the writing classroom is by engaging students in critical dialogues about the tension between the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet and alternative writing systems. I use first day introductions as a starting point because this timeframe is a place where negotiating names often occurs as commonplace in the classroom. When I introduce myself and my name, I like to write it out on the board, point to the "ó," and ask students about it: Why is it there? What does it represent? Of course, this suggestion assumes that an instructor has a name that can be used as example. That doesn't mean, however, that writing instructors cannot look for other opportunities that may open critical dialogues over examples that center on accenting or alternative writing systems. By calling attention to the use of alternative writing systems either through our own naming practices or through other course materials utilized in the classroom, we can raise critical awareness about naming, disnaming, and racioalphabetic ideologies, and we can invite students to consider the role alternative writing systems play on their own identity, identity formation, writing, and naming practices. Further, we can use these dialogues as a place to engage critical questioning on cultural stereotypes, reifications, and values that CSP calls for.

Another suggestion for "writing in acentos" in the writing classroom centers around visibility. In order to enable the critical dialogues that I call for above we need more examples, more visibility of alternative writing systems not as separate from the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet, but working with it, against it, and in it. In other words, we need to be more deliberate with our own spellings and namings, in our classrooms and in our critical scholarship, even if at times this becomes messy or inconvenient. A good place to start might be with (re)surfacing the acentos in the names of places, like Los Ángeles, San José, and México, that typically appear without accents. We can also be meticulous about respecting and reproducing alternative writing systems when we see them, like ensuring that we include acentos when spelling names and words that come to us accented. Please note, I am not suggesting that we (re)spell anybody's name, especially those of our students. Rather, I am suggesting that we direct attention toward the visibility of accents and to continue to make that visibility prominent, especially for alternative spellings that already exist. Through critical dialogues and increased visibility of alternative spellings and writing systems, we can equip students with resources to make agented decisions about their own spellings.

Finally, and key to ensuring the success of the previous two, we can teach students how to produce alternative writing systems in digital spaces. I have found that often one of the reasons the "ó" gets left out of "López" is because people simply do not know how to produce that accented letter on a keyboard or because the extra work of toggling between keyboards or making extra keystrokes leads some to believe the task in doing so is cumbersome and counterproductive. Earlier, in this essay, I use my university website as an example of how I am disnamed in professional spaces. While I can only speculate 🤔 as to the real reason my name appears incorrectly on my university website, an educated guess would be that whoever entered my name either did not know how to make the "ó" or did not want to invest the extra time to switch between keyboards and/or make the necessary keystrokes. I recognize that toggling between keyboards and/or making extra keystrokes does require more labor, but it is minimal in scale if the extra effort is part of a commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and visibility. There are plenty of online videos and tutorials that can be used to teach students how to accent or type in alternative writing systems. Introducing students to the tools for producing alternative writing system directly after critical dialogues about them is a good way to reinforce the discussion.

Critical dialogues, visibility, and an awareness of the tool available are the main ways that I approach teaching alternative writing systems in the classroom, and I humbly offer them as a starting point for anyone hailed to engage in this work. Further, while I speak from my truth in this article and use Spanish and English alphabetics, I do not mean to overlook or ignore all of the other beautiful writing systems that experience the same violence of indexical bleaching. Rather, I use my experiences and languages as example to invite similar work from across the pluriverse of writing systems, and I am particularly excited to see what might emerge from disruptions that use syllabaries and logographies.

¿Qué hay en un nombre? / What's in a name?

We *are* our names, and our names carry specific rhetorical weight and value. Names signify something about the bodies, lives, and experiences they are attached to. Names give us place, purpose, and identity. Names are not neutral. For many Latinx people, heredamos los nombres de nuestros antepasadxs. Our names are remembrance and survivance: through our names we acknowledge where we come from and continue the memory of our loved ones. We honor our past. Looking to that past, I start by recalling the colonial history of anglicizing Latinx names to introduce the complicated history of naming, disnaming, racioalphabetic ideologies, and indexical bleaching in

the United States. I then moved to a discussion of the systematic erasures of Spanish language diacritics through state-sanctioned rhetorical violence, like California's Prop 63. I use this discussion to support a call to decolonize the 26-letter Western colonial alphabet through "marking difference" and reclaiming our alternative writing systems.

Whether or not people take up my call, at the very least I hope I provided a new way of thinking about writing systems as colonial technologies and surfaced important questions about the neutral utilitarianism of words, letters, and spellings. This work runs parallel to scholarship by Iris Ruiz and Raúl Sánchez (2016), Damián Baca (2008), and Ellen Cushman (2012), who all introduce alternative writing systems as frameworks for approaching rhetoric and writing studies differently. Following that tradition, I encouraged us to stop looking at writing systems as something static and fixed, but rather as a place of potential revision, something we can change and challenge, something we can remediate to better meet the needs of our Latinx rhetorics. Circling back to Ruiz and Baca (2017), in "Decolonial Options and Writing Studies," I agreed with the notion that "our decolonial imperative, our contribution to WS, is to create and recreate the tools, perspectives, and practices most effective in helping to heal from the colonial wounds of Western history, and to create global realities no longer determined by imperial, Eurocentric horizons" (p. 228). If writing systems are tools, then I, like Ruiz and Baca, maintained that we must recreate our writing systems to recover from past traumas of misnaming, disnaming, racioalphabetic ideologies, and indexical bleaching. Further, and in solidarity, I invited allies and accomplices from across alternative writing systems to join in and consider how they might do similar work. In closing, let's stop thinking about writing systems as monoliths, but as sites of disruption: open to additions, subtractions, logograms, syllabograms, pictographs, symbols, characters, and whatever else we may include that helps us write and reimagine our Latinx rhetorics, to recover our past but also to transform our future. ✊🏽✌🏽

Endnotes

1. Land acknowledgement – Office of inclusive excellence. (2020). Retrieved March 17, 2002, from https:///csumb.edu/diversity
2. To my tocayas Kellie Sharp-Hoskins and Kelly Whitney: I am so blessed to be a part of the Kellies and to share my name with such amazing, smart women! Please don't read this as me quitting our club or our name!
3. A note on tone and style: I purposefully translanguage in this essay, not only across Spanish, Spanglish, and English, but also formal, informal, and oral codes. Translanguaging, as defined by Ofelia García and Li Wei (2013) is "an approach

to the use of language, bilingualism, and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages" (p. 2). Translanguaging upsets the myth of monolingualism and/or linguistic homogeneity (see, for example, Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Matsuda, 2006) and reminds us that language is a social construct. Academic language in particular, like the alphabets that carry it, has been neutralized and naturalized in education and academic discourse (García, 2017). Although there has been a turn towards understanding, unlocking, and leveraging the power of translanguaging as classroom praxis, particularly in the writing classroom (see, for example, Horner et al., 2011) academic discourse, as evidenced through how academics and scholars write for publication, has been slow to adopt translanguaging as liberatory social justice practice. If we continue to encourage our students to translanguage, but reinforce Standard Edited Academic English through our publications, what message are we really sending?

4. See also Lauren Mason Carris (2011), "La Voz Gringa."
5. I use *alternative writing systems* as a term that includes not only alternative versions of Latin script, but also syllabaries and logographies.
6. I want to point to my own privilege here: I was able to make this agented choice, through education and social status, when most vulnerable and minoritized people do not have the same power.
7. I am using the term "26-letter Western colonial alphabet" in favor of "26-letter English" alphabet to emphasize its role as an imperial technology of oppression and subjugation.
8. I'm following Django Paris' (2009) revision of Standard English to the more accurate Dominant American English.
9. Please note, I am using the terms like "listener" and "speaker" not to implicate particular bodies, but rather as ideological constructs that are symptomatic of the structures of racialization.
10. See M. Inoue, 2006.
11. I would like to note that on the CCCC Scholars for the Dream Travel Award Website my name is spelled correctly in the list of past winners.
12. See Calderon, 2014.
13. See Larsen, 1996.

14. I didn't randomly select these surnames names as example. 2010 US Census Bureau data (the last year for which data is available) lists García, Rodríguez, and Martínez among the 10 most popular last names in the U.S.
15. Although Medina's first name should have an accent, I couldn't find it spelled José anywhere, so I respect the common spelling.

References

AB-82 Vital records: Diacritical marks. (2017, September 16). Legislature.ca.gov, retrieved March 18, 2019, from http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB82.

Ahmed, S. (2012) *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Baca, D. (2008) *Mestiz@ scripts, digital migrations, and the territories of writing*. Springer.

Baca, D, & Villanueva, V. (Eds). (2009). *Rhetorics of the Americas: 3114 BCE to 2012 CE*. Springer.

Beaudrie, S. M. (2012). A corpus-based study on the misspellings of Spanish heritage learners and their implications for teaching. *Linguistics and Education, 23*(1), 135–144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2011.09.001

Bucholtz, M. (2016). On being called out of one's name: Indexical bleaching as a technique of deracialization. In H. S. Alim, J. Rickford, & A. Ball (Eds.) *Raciolinguistics: How language shapes our ideas about race* (pp. 273–289). Oxford University Press.

Bybee, J., & Thompson, S. (1997). Three frequency effects in syntax. *Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, 23*(1), 378–388. https://doi.org/10.3765/bls.v23i1.1293

Calderon, D. (2014). Uncovering settler grammars in curriculum. *Educational Studies, 50*(4), 313–338. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2014.926904

California Proposition 63, English is the Official Language Amendment (1986). (1986, November 4). Ballotpedia.org, retrieved March 18, 2019, from https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_63,_English_is_the_Official_Language_Amendment_(1986)

Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Carris, L. M. (2011). La voz gringa: Latino stylization of linguistic (in) authenticity as social critique. *Discourse & Society, 22*(4), 474–490. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926510395835

Chien, G. C. (2012). Elementary school EFL learners' adoption of English names and implications for classroom practice. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies, 2*(3), 469–474. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.3.469–474

Chong, N. G. (1999). *Nationalist myths and ethnic identities: Indigenous intellectuals and the Mexican State*. University of Nebraska Press.

Cisneros, S. (1984). *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage Contemporaries.

Cushman, E. (2012). *The Cherokee syllabary: Writing the people's perseverance*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Edwards, R. (2006). What's in a name? Chinese learners and the practice of adopting 'English' names. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 19*(1), 90–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310608668756

Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review, 85*(2), 149–171. http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Revised ed.). Continuum.

García, O. (2017). Translanguaging in schools: Subiendo y bajando, bajando y subiendo as afterword. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 16*(4), 256–263. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1329657

García, O., & Wei, L. (2013). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Springer.

Hill, J. H. (1993). Hasta la vista, baby: Anglo Spanish in the American southwest. *Critique of Anthropology, 13*(2),145–176. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0308275X9301300203

Horner, B., & Trimbur, J. (2002). English only and US college composition. *College Composition and Communication, 53*(4), 594–630. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1512118

Horner, B., et al. (2011). Language difference in writing: Toward a translingual approach. College English *73*(3), 303–321. http://www.ncte.org/journals/ce/issues/v73-3

Inoue, A. (2019, March 14). How do we stop killing each other, or what do we do about white language supremacy?. *Performance Rhetoric, Performance Composition, Conference on College Composition and Communication*, keynote address, David L. Lawrence Convention Center, Pittsburgh, PA. http://tinyurl.com/y374x2r6

Inoue, M. (2006). *Vicarious language: Gender and linguistic modernity in Japan*. University of California Press.

Kerschbaum, S. (2014) *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference*. CCCC/NCTE.

Larsen, M. D. (1996). Internet with an accent: Towards a standardization of diacritics. In M. Warschauer (Ed.). (1996). *Telecollaboration in Foreign Language Learning: Proceedings of the Hawaii Symposium (vol. 12)*. National Foreign Language Resource Center.

Matsuda, P. K. (2006). The myth of linguistic homogeneity in US college composition. *College English, 68*(6), 637–651. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/25472180

Makoni, S., & Pennycook, A. (2005). Disinventing and (re)constituting languages. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies: An International Journal, 2*(3), 137–156. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427595cils0203_1

McPherron, P. (2009). "My name is Money": Name choices and global identifications at a South-Chinese university. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 29*(4), 521–536. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188790903312706

Menchaca, M. (2001). *Recovering history, constructing race: The Indian, black, and white roots of Mexican Americans*. University of Texas Press.

Mignolo, W. (1995). *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*. University of Michigan Press.

Mikulski, A. M. (2006). Accent-uating rules and relationships: Motivations, attitudes, and goals in a Spanish for native speakers class. *Foreign Language Annals, 39*(4), 660–682.

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression*. New York University Press.

Paris, D. (2009). "They're in my culture, they speak the same way": African American language in multiethnic high schools. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 428–448. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.64j4678647mj7g35

Paris, D., & Alim, H.S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review 84*(1), 85–100. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.982l873k2ht16m77

Paris, D., & Alim, H.S., (Eds). (2017). *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*. Teachers College Press.

Rodriguez, R. (1982). *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. Dial Press.

Ruiz, I. & Baca, D. (2017). Decolonial options and writing studies. *Composition Studies*, *45*(2), 226–229. https://www.uc.edu/content/dam/uc/journals/composition-studies/docs/backissues/45-2/45.2%20Ruiz%20and%20Baca.pdf

Ruiz, I. & Sánchez, R. (Eds.), (2016). *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy*. Palgrave McMillan.

Smith, L. T., Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (Eds.). (2018). *Indigenous and decolonizing studies in education: Mapping the long view*. Routledge.

Smitherman, G. (2000). *Black talk: Words and phrases from the hood to the amen corner* (Updated Ed.). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Squires, L. (2014). From TV personality to fans and beyond: Indexical bleaching and the diffusion of a media innovation. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 24*(1), 42–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12036

Tuck, E. & Yang, K.W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: Indigeneity, *Education & Society, 1*(1), 1–40. https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554

Valdez, L. (Director). (1987). *La Bamba* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.

About the Author

Kelly Medina-López is an Assistant Professor of Composition Studies at California State University, Monterey Bay. She has a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Professional Communication from New Mexico State University. Her research interests include border rhetorics, Latinx rhetoric and writing studies, Latinx ghost stories and myths, critical making, and language politics. You can find her writing in *Constellations: A Cultural Rhetorics Publishing Space*, *Querencia: Essays on the New Mexico Homeland*, and the forthcoming *Decolonial Conversations in Posthuman and New Material Rhetoric*s. She is currently co-editing a collection tentatively titled *We are all Monsters/We are all Saints: Haunted Migrations and Latindigenous Ghost Story*.

LWRS: Latinx Writing and Rhetoric Studies ISSN 2687-7198
https://latinxwritingandrhetoricstudies.com