Teaching Music History in a Multilingual Environment: An Accommodationist Approach

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Despite widespread recognition that the contemporary educational environment is becoming more internationalized, teachers and administrators have not always acknowledged the extent of its impact. The effects of this trend, in fact, constitute some of the most poignant challenges confronting music history teachers today and for the foreseeable future. Inextricably bound to this trend of increasing internationalization is the multiplicity of linguistic backgrounds that students bring to the classroom. While music history teachers devote innumerable hours to planning and developing course content, the complexities involved in imparting this information to classes in which at least some of the students are not studying in their first language can derail even the best-laid plans. I will begin this essay by contextualizing the issue of teaching music history in a multilingual environment through outlining pertinent considerations regarding students' linguistic and cultural identities. In the remainder of the article, I will examine challenges that teaching in a multilingual environment can pose to activities most commonly employed in music history courses, and I will propose some practical teaching strategies for addressing these issues.

The pedagogical perspectives addressed in this article are principally derived from my experience teaching Western music history at a university in Thailand. A large majority of the students are Thai, and while fluency in English is a stated objective of the curricula, students' English proficiency (in both written and verbal communication) varies according to individual experiences and skills. The pedagogical approaches I will propose thus mainly grew out of efforts to adapt my teaching to this multilingual environment, one in which English is not the first language for a majority of the students. I hope that the issues discussed here will also be relevant for music history teachers in the United States, since student populations in American schools of music are becoming progressively more international. For example, the Eastman School of Music advertises that international students make up approximately 25% of its student body, while the Manhattan School of Music reports that over fifty

different countries have been represented in their student body.[1] With international students comprising such a significant portion of the student population, it is increasingly probable that music history instructors in the United States will also teach a number of students for whom English is not their first language.

Linguistic and Cultural Identity

Students' linguistic backgrounds affect the pedagogy of music history courses in profound ways. Matters of linguistic identity shape virtually every aspect of the teaching process, including evaluating students' writing; leading classroom discussions; and choosing appropriate writing, reading, and listening activities. Reflecting this deep connection between language and learning, Tamara Lucas notes that "[l]anguage is the medium through which students gain access to the curriculum and through which they display—and are assessed for—what they have learned."[2]

It is also important to recognize the close relationship between students' linguistic and cultural identities. Teachers working in multilingual environments should accordingly strive to treat students as individuals and recognize the dangers of imputing fixed or homogeneous cultural identities through the use of labels. Indeed, a major pitfall in categorizing students, even with labels such as ESL (English as Second Language) that are intended to provide pragmatic shorthand, is a failure to recognize the diversity within those groups. For example, the label ESL can become problematic when all students who do not speak English as their first language are put into the same category, regardless of English-language fluency or experience level. Deciding how to classify a student born in a non-English-speaking country but who has spent a portion of their childhood living in an English-speaking country is another example of the quandaries that categorizing students can present. Carol Severino argues that the process of classifying students can thus become "hairsplitting," declaring that "[w]hat should matter is not how teachers label fields and students, but how they teach them."[3]

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1. "International Applicants," Eastman School of Music, accessed 28 October 2016, http://www.esm.rochester.edu/admissions/international/; "International Applicants," Manhattan School of Music, accessed 28 October 2016, http://www.msmnyc.edu/Admissions/Apply-To-MSM/International-Applicants.

2. Tamara Lucas, "Language, Schooling, and the Preparation of Teachers for Linguistic Diversity," in *Teacher Preparation for Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: A Resource for Teacher Educators*, ed. Tamara Lucas (New York: Routledge, 2010), 5.

3. Carol Severino, "The Sociopolitical Implications of Response to Second Language and Second Dialect Writing," *Journal of Second Language Writing* 2 no. 3 (1993): 184.

Ruth Spack argues that in addition to the demonstrable diversity within cultural groups, cultural identities are not static.[4] Individuals' cultural identities should instead be viewed as undergoing a constant process of change, as fixed representations of cultural identity "inevitably lead to stereotypical representations of students."[5] Spack eloquently outlines the potential dangers of applying cultural labels to students in general:

> [E]ven if our reasons are well intentioned, we need to consider that, in the process of labeling students, we put ourselves in the powerful position of rhetorically constructing their identities, a potentially hazardous enterprise. At worst, a label may imply that we sanction an ethnocentric stance. At the very least, it can lead us to stigmatize, to generalize, and to make inaccurate predictions about what students are likely to do as a result of their language or cultural background. Even if we cannot eliminate all problematic terms, we can interrogate the casual and seemingly innocent ways in which we use them.[6]

In summary, acknowledging both the heterogeneity and fluidity of students' linguistic and cultural identities promotes greater focus on the ultimate goal of designing teaching practices that best meet the needs of all students. It will therefore be helpful to keep these concerns in mind as we consider pedagogical approaches that address the challenges of teaching music history in a multilingual environment. In the following sections, I will examine some of these challenges and propose practical teaching strategies with respect to a few of the activities most commonly employed in music history courses.

Writing Assignments

For multiple reasons—ranging from the practical to the noble—writing has long been a cornerstone of music history courses. Writing assignments can be very useful in gauging how deeply music history students have engaged with the material they have studied. They can provide valuable practice in doing research and teach students how to coherently structure an argument. Carol Hess therefore notes that in spite of growing pessimism among educators about students' writing abilities, "a music history survey course is as good a place as any to instill an idea of what coherent, even elegant, writing involves."[7] In a multilingual environment, there are two major considerations in achieving

4. Ruth Spack, "The Rhetorical Construction of Multilingual Students," *TESOL Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 772.
5. Spack, "The Rhetorical Construction of Multilingual Students," 773.
6. Spack, "The Rhetorical Construction of Multilingual Students," 765.
7. Carol A. Hess, "Score and Word: Writing About Music," in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 193.

these goals: how should students' writing be evaluated and what scope of writing assignments (in terms of length and depth) should be expected?

Evaluating multilingual students' writing

Sensitivity and awareness are paramount concerns for native English-speaking teachers when evaluating the English writing of students for whom English is not their first language. Not only does the manner in which teachers evaluate second-language students' writing pose a practical challenge for how to assign grades accurately and equitably, but, as Severino argues, teachers' responses to second-language learners' writing are also laden with sociopolitical implications.[8] Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox also highlight another important concern in developing strategies for reading and evaluating second-language students' writing, cautioning that "ESL writers and their texts vary widely from individual to individual and from situation to situation, and overgeneralization should be avoided."[9]

Following Severino, Matsuda and Cox outline three stances that teachers can take when responding to ESL students' writing: assimilationist, accommodationist, and separatist.[10] The assimilationist position interprets differences from idiomatic English writing as deficiencies, or errors to be corrected. The accommodationist position interprets differences as simply differences, with the goal of helping the writer learn new patterns of discourse without completely abandoning the old ones. Finally, the separatist position aims to overlook and therefore preserve differences.

Matsuda and Cox warn that instructors who take the assimilationist stance may do so with good intentions, but inadvertently read difference as deficiency. They therefore recommend that instructors resist the assimilationist position because the goal of making ESL students' writing indistinguishable from that of native speakers is not only unrealistic in many cases, but can even lead "to the imposition of the norms of dominant U.S. academic discourse as well as various cultural values that comes with it."[11] Though it may help acclimatize students to the demands of academic English writing, adopting the assimilationist stance does not align with the previously-discussed goal of acknowledging the heterogeneity and fluidity of students' linguistic and cultural identities.

My experience in learning the Thai language has convinced me that the separatist position, though providing a means of largely sidestepping the thorny cultural implications of the assimilationist position, can also be problematic.

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8. Severino, "The Sociopolitical Implications of Response," 181-201.

9. Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox, "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* 2, no. 1 (March 2011): 6.

10. Matsuda and Cox, "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," 7-8.

11. Matsuda and Cox, "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," 9.

Thai and English conventions of grammar, verb tense, and word order are often quite different. Simply mapping Thai vocabulary onto a sentence otherwise constructed following English grammatical conventions (or vice versa) thus creates confusion of meaning: a fact which demonstrates that a degree of syntactic competence is beneficial in negotiating the linguistic divide. If the purpose of language is to achieve mutual understanding, the separatist stance may not be the best path toward attaining this goal because it does not encourage students to explore common patterns of discourse in their second language.

The accommodationist position offers a valuable middle ground in which teachers can help students gain experience with new modes of discourse without necessarily asking them to abandon the linguistic and cultural identities formed by their native language. The accommodationist approach to evaluating second-language students' writing thus provides an opportunity to recognize and acknowledge differences while still encouraging students to strive for the clearest possible communication of meaning. Matsuda and Cox recommend that one way to achieve these goals is to focus more attention on *global errors*—those that affect the comprehension of meaning—rather than focusing too much on *local errors*, such as misspellings or misuse of articles, prepositions, or pronouns—in other words, errors that do not necessarily interfere with our comprehension of meaning.[12]

As an illustration of how the aforementioned global/local dichotomy can inform an accommodationist approach to evaluating writing, consider the following excerpt from a Thai student's paper about Charles Ives:

> The general thing which made Charles Ives who became to an important composer for American symphonic music is the identity of his music from a lot of his experimental in music, the polytonality, polyrhythms or tone clusters. Kamien (2011) state to Ives that he has an influence when he was a boyhood about Ives heard two bands playing different music passed each other as they marched by him in different directions. Their dissonant crash to the young boy's Ives. In later works Ives used this ideas to presents a musical that look unrelated like two bands play in different keys, consonant chords against dissonant chords, or conflict meter and the intertwined of rhythm.

While there are a few issues with verb agreement and tense in this excerpt, the student's ideas are generally quite clear in spite of these local errors; only in the third sentence does the meaning become somewhat obscured. The instructor could therefore focus on the third sentence by asking the student whether the intended meaning was that the dissonant clash intrigued the young Ives (as the fourth sentence seems to indicate) and then suggesting ways to communicate this idea as clearly as possible. By focusing on global rather than local

12. Matsuda and Cox, "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," 10.

errors, an accommodationist approach to evaluating students' writing primarily emphasizes the communication of meaning.

Scope of writing assignments

It is always important that music history teachers pay close attention to the scope of writing assignments required of students, and this is especially true when teaching in a multilingual environment. By providing the opportunity to do some writing in which the stakes are initially lower, instructors can help to reduce student anxiety by providing necessary writing practice before tackling more involved assignments. As Hess succinctly puts it, "To learn writing, students must write."[13] Furthermore, giving multiple smaller-scale writing assignments helps instructors avoid the trap of thinking that longer is necessarily better. In fact, requiring students to write long papers can arguably encourage "padding," while shorter assignments reward conciseness, a valued aspect of academic English writing.[14] Finally, offering more frequent, smaller-portioned grading opportunities allows instructors more chances to give students feedback on their writing and reduces the risk that a student will earn a low grade in the course as a result of performing poorly on one assignment—a strategy that may seem obvious, but one that can alleviate second-language students' concerns about writing and can help them to develop their writing skills.[15]

Scott Warfield notes that although research papers (or term papers) have long been considered a ubiquitous part of students' educational experience, for various reasons fewer and fewer music historians are emphasizing extended writing assignments in their courses.[16] He suggests that one possible alternative is to shift the emphasis of research from the result to the process of gathering information, meaning that "all sorts of assignments, including multiple inter-related ones, become possible, the sum total of which can be more productive than a single large research paper."[17] Hess also advocates a strategy of giving writing assignments of differing length and level of formality, "each requiring a different level of refinement and intensity of professorial intervention."[18]

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13. Hess, "Score and Word: Writing About Music," 194.

14. See "Tips for Writing in North American Colleges: Conciseness," Purdue Online Writing Lab, accessed 28 October 2016, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/683/05/.

15. Colleen Conway and Thomas Hodgman similarly advocate assigning multiple shorter papers as an effective way of giving students more feedback on their writing. See Colleen M. Conway and Thomas M. Hodgman, *Teaching Music in Higher Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 120.

16. Scott Warfield, "The Research Paper," in *The Music History Classroom*, ed. James A. Davis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 125-126.

17. Warfield, "The Research Paper," 130.

18. Hess, "Score and Word: Writing About Music," 193.

For an illustration of how the aforementioned strategies can work in a multilingual teaching environment, imagine a situation in which students had traditionally been asked to write a ten-page term paper on the significance of Beethoven's late works. As an alternative to this large-scale term paper, students could be asked instead to complete a series of shorter writing assignments as follows: 1) Imagine you are Beethoven at age 31 and you can feel your hearing loss accelerating—write one page on how this would affect your approach to composing; 2) Write two to three pages describing the personal struggles and other noteworthy events in Beethoven's life after 1817; 3) Write two to three pages summarizing two prominent European philosophical currents in the early nineteenth century and discuss how these philosophies can be reflected in one piece Beethoven wrote after 1817; 4) Write two to three pages comparing stylistic differences between the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57 in F Minor ("Appassionata") and the first movement of his Piano Sonata Op. 109 in E Major; 5) Choose one movement of a symphony by Schumann or Brahms and write two to three pages discussing how it reflects the influence of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Through these shorter assignments (spaced over a few weeks), students could grapple with the human elements of Beethoven's life experience, begin to place his music in a sociocultural context, and engage in style analysis by tracing Beethoven's own evolution and his influence on later composers. The sum total of the assignments would still be roughly ten pages, would be just as rich in content as a term paper, and would stimulate a variety of thought processes, yet none of the assignments would be overwhelming in and of themselves. Furthermore, students would receive five opportunities for instructor feedback on their writing.

Reading Assignments

Pursuant to the goals of developing students' knowledge about a variety of musical styles, composers, and historical currents, music history courses tend to be reading-intensive out of necessity. In undergraduate survey courses, for example, there are often centuries of music to cover and only a few short weeks in which to cover it. Although music history instructors increasingly acknowledge that comprehensive coverage is not realistic even in a multi-semester music history sequence, reading assignments provide an indispensable means of filling in some of the gaps.[19] As with writing assignments, however, music

19. For stimulating discussions about the struggles of fitting so much music into such a short period of instruction in music history sequences, see J. Peter Burkholder, "Curricular Ideas for Music History and Literature," in *The College Music Society Newsletter* (September 2001): 7-8; Kenneth Nott, "Teaching Baroque Music to the Bright and Interested and Ignorant," in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company,

history instructors must be sensitive to the scope of the readings assigned when teaching in a multilingual environment. Two major issues must be considered in this regard: determining an appropriate length for assigned readings and finding a suitable level of difficulty.

Length of reading assignments

In his book *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice*, William Grabe discusses some of the main differences between first-language and second-language readers. Grabe notes that readers fluent in their first language have the ability to read most texts at a rate of between 250 to 300 words per minute without undue effort or exertion.[20] Such fluency occurs because first-language readers are able to instantly recognize virtually every word that they read. Grabe explains that in the case of second-language readers, a high level of comprehension may be achieved; however, fluency commonly lags behind, meaning that even students whose second-language abilities are well developed will tend to read at a much slower pace than their first-language colleagues—a rate of 80 to 120 words per minute.[21] Teachers should therefore expect that even in a best-case scenario, second-language students may read two to three times slower than their first-language classmates.

The aforementioned positions instructors can take in evaluating second-language students' writing are also relevant in the case of reading assignments. The assimilationist position would assert that second-language students must conform to the same standards of length and difficulty in reading assignments as would be expected of a native speaker. In other words, it would be the second-language learner's responsibility to adapt to the language in which they are studying. On the other extreme, the separatist position would proclaim that it is unfair for second-language learners to be measured against the same standards as native speakers, so the reading requirements for first- and second-language students should therefore be different. There are merits to the arguments on both ends of the spectrum. Advocates of the assimilationist position may see it as a firm preservation of the rigors that studying music history ought to entail, believing that any exceptions or allowances made would constitute an erosion of academic standards. A separatist could legitimately object to the inequity inherent in this position, however, because if even skilled second-language readers read at a pace two to three times slower than first-language readers,

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2002), 16; and Melanie Lowe, "Teaching Music History Today: Making Tangible Connections to Here and Now," this *Journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 45-47.

20. William Grabe, *Reading in a Second Language: Moving From Theory to Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 289.

21. Grabe, *Reading in a Second Language*, 290.

second-language students would arguably be forced to work much harder in order to meet the same standards.

The accommodationist approach once again offers a beneficial compromise between the two extremes. With this approach, instructors can accommodate the needs of second-language learners while still striving to maintain a high level of academic rigor for all students. Since second-language readers face an uphill battle in terms of reading speed, one advisable practice is to constrain the length of readings by assigning selected excerpts instead of entire chapters or articles. Providing a paraphrased version of what an author has written is another option, though this is admittedly time consuming for the instructor. Restricting the length of reading assignments need not result in lower academic standards, however. If instructors carefully select excerpts that are as focused as possible on a particular topic, shorter examples can be just as effective as longer ones.[22] An additionally pragmatic practice advocated by Paul Colbert is to distribute reading assignments well in advance, so that students "may process the content in a more manageable and timely fashion."[23]

Level of difficulty for reading assignments

Determining a fitting level of difficulty for reading assignments can be a challenge for instructors as well. Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell note that selecting texts of an appropriate level of difficulty depends on considerations of vocabulary, syntax, and semantics. All three of these factors do not necessarily carry equal weight, however. Krashen and Terrell cite evidence that readers do not need to understand every word in order to derive meaning from what they read, and that familiarity with a topic allows readers to use semantic knowledge to overcome syntactical obstacles, provided they comprehend enough of the vocabulary used.[24] They therefore advocate assigning readings "focusing on a single topic or author to take advantage of natural repetition of vocabulary and syntax as well as familiar context."[25] This idea seems especially well suited to graduate musicology seminars, whose more focused topics allow for multiple readings on the same theme or by the same author.

Another teaching strategy that is quite helpful with regard to reading assignments—one that has consistently generated positive student feedback

22. A notable benefit of shorter reading assignments is that they can encourage rereading, a practice that has been shown to improve second-language readers' fluency. See Grabe, *Reading in a Second Language*, 336.

23. Paul J. Colbert, "Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom Collaborative of Faculty, Students, and Institution," *Contemporary Issues in Education Research* 3, no. 9 (Sept. 2010), 24.

24. Stephen D. Krashen and Tracy D. Terrell, *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom* (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 132-133.

25. Krashen and Terrell, *The Natural Approach*, 137.

in my own courses—is to spend roughly ten to fifteen minutes of class time skimming through an assigned reading on the day it is distributed, providing translations for potentially challenging vocabulary and allowing students to ask about any additional terms for whose meaning they are unsure.[26] Along with skimming the assigned reading, it is worthwhile to read the assignment instructions aloud to the class. Though these strategies consume valuable class time, the benefits derived are well worth the time spent. Second-language students receive support in approaching potentially demanding readings, the likelihood of students misunderstanding the readings or the assignment instructions is greatly reduced, and by reading aloud, teachers have the chance to assess just how clearly we have written our instructions and can then clarify as needed.

Listening Exercises

Listening activities are a mainstay in many music history courses and in some respects are much less reliant on language than writing or reading activities. Since helping students become more engaged, critical listeners is a central goal of music history teaching in any event, the aforementioned pedagogical challenges that multilingual classroom environments present with regard to writing and reading would seem to encourage devoting even greater focus to listening. Instructors should nevertheless take care to design listening activities in ways that help put students from diverse linguistic backgrounds on equal footing.

Melanie Lowe contends that active listening is the most desirable mode of learning to promote in our classrooms, which in turn requires consideration of how to achieve this goal. One especially important general recommendation she offers is to "set clearly defined tasks for students to do *during* the listening example and communicate them clearly *before* playing the music."[27] She further advocates presenting these instructions visually as well to help students focus on what they should be doing while a listening excerpt is played, which is an especially significant consideration in a multilingual classroom.[28]

Lowe offers the example of a "single sheet" composer identification debate as a useful way to encourage active style listening. In this exercise, students are given one page of two similar unidentified score excerpts by two different composers. After listening to both excerpts, students are asked to match each

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26. Krashen and Terrell also advocate skimming as a useful reading skill for second-language learners; see Krashen and Terrell, *The Natural Approach*, 134-135.

27. Melanie Lowe, "Listening in the Classroom," in *The Music History Classroom*, ed. James A. Davis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 47 [italics in the original].

28. Sharon Peters and William Davis similarly advocate using visual aids to assist second-language speakers' comprehension by reinforcing aural cues. See Sharon K. Peters and William E. Davis, "Help Non-Native English Speakers Understand Your Lectures," *College Teaching* 46 (1998), 139.

excerpt with its composer, and then provide reasons for their choices.[29] This exercise is well-suited to a multilingual classroom in that the required responses from students are simple, yet the process of arriving at those answers stimulates critical thinking.

A similar activity that I have found quite effective is to prepare a variety of unidentified listening excerpts and ask students to guess approximately when each piece was written. Again, the initial requirements for this task are very simple—to provide a date or range of dates—yet the students are also encouraged to describe what style characteristics made them conclude that a given piece was composed in a certain year. This type of exercise can not only strengthen students' knowledge about what style traits prominently feature in various time periods, but can also encourage them to question the notion of a straight-line historical progression from simple to more complex music.

Although in-class listening exercises are often most effective when kept short and simple, there are of course occasions in music history courses when it is also advantageous to ask students to engage with longer, more complex listening excerpts. Assigning listening exercises for homework is a highly useful approach in this regard, as the extra time and potential repeated hearings can facilitate attention to analysis of musical structure and/or matters of interpretation. For example, one effective listening assignment that I have used is to ask students to listen to Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, then watch a YouTube clip of Leonard Bernstein discussing the piece (from his Harvard lectures), and finally write responses to the following three questions: 1) What characteristics of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* does Bernstein say are *not* typical of traditional tonal music? 2) In what ways does Bernstein say the piece *is* still tonal, however? 3) When you listen to the piece, do you think it sounds mostly traditional, mostly modern, or does it include a mix of traditional and modern characteristics? (Please provide specific reasons for your answer.) Although multilingual students must negotiate the challenge of summarizing what an English speaker has said, they are able to view the clip as many times as necessary, allowing them to work at their own pace. An additional benefit is that prepared assignments can stimulate in-class discussions, a topic examined in more detail in the following section.

Class Discussions

Discussion is another pillar of music history courses—one that not only supplements writing, reading, and listening exercises, but intersects with those

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29. Lowe, "Listening in the Classroom," 55.

activities in important ways.[30] James Davis maintains that the community of music majors has unique characteristics that can affect the ways that music students participate in class discussions, especially noting students' reluctance to risk putting their musicianship—and thus their identity within the community—into doubt.[31] Such apprehensions about participating in discussions can then become amplified for students who are not studying in their first language. Many of my Thai students have told me that in-class discussions were not typical elements of their previous education: an example of how cultural mores must sometimes be negotiated as well.[32] Recognizing the potential barriers to generating discussion in a multilingual music history classroom, what can teachers do to alleviate these concerns and encourage students to participate?

Mary Natvig advocates the use of "ice breakers" and other activities that help the instructor to know each student individually (and help students become more comfortable with each other) at the beginning of the term, noting that although these activities require an investment of time, the result is that "students are more apt to participate in class discussions and are more invested in learning."[33] Brief office-hour appointments can also raise second-language students' comfort level by providing an opportunity to interact with the instructor one-on-one and offering a chance to address specific questions or concerns the students may have. Krashen and Terrell note that a typical mode of discourse in the classroom, in which the teacher controls the conversation as a questioner while the student is tasked with answering, puts second-language learners at a disadvantage, but if second-language students "are encouraged to assume the initiative and to control the conversation to a certain extent (by asking questions, for example), they are in a better position […] to direct the flow of communication to areas they can deal with more easily."[34]

In the preceding paragraphs, I have argued that an accommodationist approach to both reading and writing assignments represents a compromise position that is both fair and pedagogically sound. I have also found this accommodationist approach to be an effective way to facilitate and encourage classroom discussion. At the beginning of the semester, I announce that reading materials and handouts for the course will be written in English, but

30. For general tips about discussion-based learning in music courses, see Conway and Hodgman, *Teaching Music in Higher Education*, 112-117.

31. James A. Davis, "Classroom Discussion and the Community of Music Majors," this *Journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2010), 14-16.

32. Though it can take time for students to feel accustomed to the practice, having regular in-class discussions has generated an overwhelmingly positive response among many of my Thai students. One doctoral student remarked to me that she had never previously taken a course in which she felt so free to express her opinions in class.

33. Mary Natvig, "Classroom Activities," in *The Music History Classroom*, ed. James A. Davis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 21.

34. Krashen and Terrell, *The Natural Approach*, 181.

that for the purposes of classroom discussion, students may feel free to speak whichever language is more comfortable to them.[35] This clear yet flexible approach encourages students to develop their second-language skills without forcing them to abandon first-language modes of discourse. Though it requires an instructor fluent in both English and in the predominant first language of his or her students, this approach allows students to explore concepts that may be difficult to directly translate and helps to make all students more willing to participate in class discussions.

Building upon the idea of putting students in a more comfortable conversational position, it is very useful to assign discussion questions as part of a homework assignment—for example, a reading or listening assignment—that will form the basis of the discussion in the next class meeting. Multiple benefits can be derived from employing this approach: 1) students have time to prepare their responses, reducing the apprehension that can come from feeling put on the spot in class; 2) student responses tend to be well-formed, which can lead discussions in stimulating directions; and 3) reading and listening assignments are then integrated with class discussions, mutually reinforcing the value of each activity.[36] It is of course not necessary that class discussions be *solely* based on prepared responses, since ideas that arise spontaneously in class often stimulate fruitful learning opportunities. Nevertheless, using prepared responses as a framework for discussion, or at least as a point of departure for initiating it, helps encourage all students to participate by putting everyone on equal footing, regardless of linguistic background.

Concluding Perspectives

Teaching in a multilingual environment affects the pedagogy of music history courses in profound ways. Matters of linguistic identity shape virtually every aspect of the teaching process, including evaluating students' writing; leading classroom discussions; and choosing appropriate writing, reading, and listening activities. Multilingual teaching environments present certain challenges in all of these areas, but they also encourage us to develop pedagogical approaches that can be useful in addressing these challenges. Such considerations can become counterproductive if they lead to ascribing fixed or homogeneous cultural identities to groups of students, as focusing undue attention on classifying or labeling distracts from the ultimate goal of designing teaching practices that

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35. In a recent doctoral seminar with three students in which I employed this approach, one student primarily spoke English in class, one student primarily spoke Thai, while the third student alternated between the two languages.

36. Conway and Hodgman also stress the value of incorporating readings into classroom discussions; see *Teaching Music in Higher Education*, 118.

best meet the needs of all students. By crafting practical teaching strategies that acknowledge and accommodate the wide variety of students' linguistic and cultural identities, however, linguistic multiplicity in the music history classroom can become less of an obstacle to be overcome and more of an opportunity to be embraced.