

Welcome to Happy Valley: Exploring Translingual Spaces in a College Town

Su Yin Khor

As a big food enthusiast, language nerd, and voyager, your tour guide Su Yin Khor takes you on a journey to Happy Valley in Pennsylvania, the home of Penn State, to explore writing. The sightseeing tour will take you to different places that connect translingual practices and literate activities to ramen menus, Chinese dinner specials, campus buildings, and the new Amazon store in downtown State College. Bon voyage!

Readers: So, where are we going?

Su Yin: To Happy Valley! More specifically, State College. That's where Penn State is.

Readers: That's cool, but what does that have to do with space or trans- uhm, translingual spaces . . . ? And how is this connected to writing?

Su Yin: Well, it has nothing to do with planets and stars, but I'll answer your questions if you come with me. Vámonos!

For this journey, I will take you to Happy Valley. If you google Happy Valley, you will be shown a map of State College, PA, the home of Penn State University. It's a college town in the middle of Pennsylvania, surrounded by mountains, farms, and a number of small towns. It is said that the State College area was given the nickname Happy Valley during the Great Depression, as the economic crisis did not affect the area to the same extent as other parts of the country ("Happy Valley," n.d.). Before we begin our journey to Happy Valley and explore the area, let me introduce you to **translingualism**. This is a key term that you should know about, and it will help you prepare for our journey. So, what does it mean? Translingual literally means "across language"

(Khor, 2017, p. 155). This concept is often used to highlight people’s different linguistic and cultural resources that are used when composing a text, whether it’s a research paper for a class, an email to a professor, or a text to your friends. Instead of viewing different languages as separate and working in separate ways without interacting with each other, the translingual perspective goes beyond describing languages as separate units that never interact or mix with other languages. Initially, it was used to refer to multilingual individuals, but, over time, the concept of translingualism has been extended to include those who speak one language as well. Thus, translingualism does not only refer to multilinguals, but it’s also used to describe the types of resources that “monolingual” individuals have and their knowledge of different varieties that exist *within* the language that they speak. Simply put, languages are complicated. We change the way we speak and write based on who our audience is, whether we are aware of it or not. For example, when writing an email to a professor, you would probably not write this email:

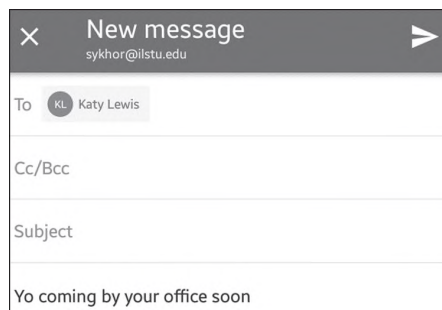


Figure 1: An email that doesn’t follow the appropriate conventions.

Instead, you would probably write the email a little differently, as seen in the following image:

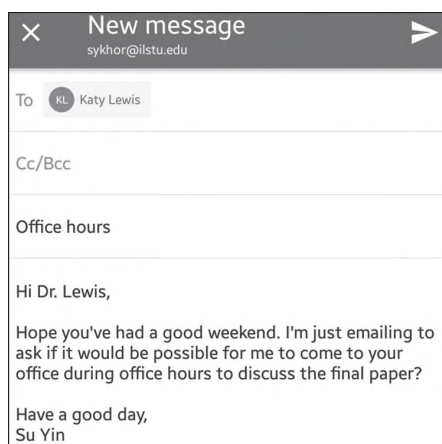


Figure 2: A more appropriately written email.

What kind of differences between the two emails can you identify? Go ahead—take a closer look at them. They’re very different, right? We know that both emails are written in English, but the language use, such as vocabulary and sentence structures, are very different. The first email doesn’t look very professional, and it looks like something you’d write to a friend, not a professor, whereas the second email looks more professional and like something that you wouldn’t write to a friend. Obviously, the language use is significantly different in those emails. Different types of language use, such as informal and formal, in different genres, such as emails and texts, can often tell us what kind of relationship the writer and the (intended) audience have. We know this because of our experience with language use in different contexts and situations, and, oftentimes, these “rules” are not always explicitly taught.

Moreover, there are other language differences that we can identify. For instance, there are regional varieties, too. We’ve all had this debate before: someone says that they want a *pop*, but you correct them and say that it’s *soda*, but then someone else interjects and says that it’s *coke*. Who is right? Actually, *y’all* are right. Or is it *yinz*? Either way, *you’re* all correct. These are regional varieties, and there are great differences in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation just within the United States. We can complicate matters further and look at language varieties by examining how people from different generations speak. It’s more common for younger generations to LOL at funny things or OMG at something surprising, whereas older generations might not (although my dad has started to use emojis, which makes me LMAO pretty often). Evidently, there are generational differences—note that these boundaries aren’t clear cut, and there are many exceptions—and there are also differences between social groups.

In addition to regional and generational differences, there are varieties that are spoken by different social groups that aren’t necessarily generational. For example, African American English (AAE) is a widespread variety that has its own grammatical features. What is interesting is that AAE is not necessarily spoken by only people of African American origin. What I’m getting at is that we’re not born to speak certain languages or varieties. It depends on where you live, who you interact with on a daily basis, and when you were born, so keep this in mind as you read.

Further, if we think about language varieties from a more global perspective, imagine all the varieties of English that exist in the world and how many vocabulary and pronunciation differences there are! Not only are there differences within the English that is used in the United States, but there are also many types of *Englishes* in the world that have their own specific vocabulary that is not found in other varieties of English. Which variety is correct? Answer: there is not one correct form of English. For

example, *prepone* is a fantastic word that is used by speakers of Indian English. The meaning of the word is basically the opposite of *postpone*—instead of having the meeting later in the week, the meeting is moved up earlier. This means that if the meeting was planned for a Wednesday, it was prepone to Monday. Isn't that great?

So, what conclusions can we draw about language use and English? Simply put, we can say that English is full of variations and that the variety that you speak is shaped by several factors, such as your age, where you grew up, and who you interact with daily. Now that you have some understanding of translingualism, pack your suitcase and let's travel to Happy Valley and explore it in real life!

Translingual Spaces in Happy Valley: Ramen, Anyone?

Welcome to Happy Valley! At first glance, the downtown area doesn't appear to be very translingual. I mean, what's so translingual and urban about a college town surrounded by farms? However, if you pay attention, you'll be surprised by the findings. For example, there are so many restaurants in downtown State College. When I first arrived, I got so excited because I was surrounded by all kinds of food from different countries: Turkish, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Indian, Mexican, and there are more restaurants in town that I haven't been to yet! But what's so translingual about food? It might not be the food itself that makes a place translingual, so have a look at this menu that I found at a local sushi and ramen place called Tadashi that is located in downtown State College:

ラーメン RAMEN	
Our Ramen Broth is Made of Chicken, Pork and Vegetables	
1. 醤油ラーメン Soy Sauce Flavor 11.00 Syo-yu Ramen BBQ pork, egg, seaweed, bamboo shoot, scallion, onion, bean sprouts, kitarage mushroom	R4. 激カラつけ麺 Geki Kara Tsukemen (Spicy) 12.00 BBQ pork, egg, bamboo shoot, scallion, onion, cabbage, bean sprouts
R2. 辛い味噌ラーメン Spicy Miso Ramen 12.00 BBQ pork, bean sprouts, bamboo shoot, egg, onion, scallion, & seaweed	R5. 白湯 ラーメン Tadashi Paitan Ramen (Spicy or Not Spicy) 12.00 BBQ pork, egg, bamboo shoot, onion, bean sprouts, seaweed, scallion
R3. 冷やし中華 Hiyashi Chuka (Cold Noodle without Broth) 10.00 BBQ pork, umeshu, cucumber, ginger, sesame seeds, seaweed, scallion	R6. ベジタブル ラーメン Vegetable Ramen 11.00 100% vegetable broth, broccoli, egg, bean sprouts, bamboo shoot, onion, seaweed, scallion
ADDITIONAL RAMEN TOPPINGS	
Extra Ramen 4.00	Extra Bean Sprouts 0.75
Extra Bamboo Shoot 1.50	Extra Soft Boiled Egg (pc) 1.00
Extra BBQ Pork (pc) 1.00	Extra Kitarage Mushroom 0.50

Figure 3: Ramen menu in Japanese and English.

What do you notice here? We can see that the menu is in English, but there are also plenty of words that are in Japanese. It should be noted that the rest of the menu at Tadashi is in English and not a mix of Japanese and English, which is seen in the section where they list extra toppings. I'm not sure why they chose to use Japanese for the Ramen menu, which makes it even more interesting.

Moreover, I noticed that it's not only menus that are translingual here in State College. I have come across several signs that combine Chinese and English:



Figure 4: A special that includes three entrees and a soup for \$6.99 at a Chinese restaurant.



Figure 5: A Chinese store sign using English and Chinese.

So, what do these pictures show us? They tell us that State College—although it's not a big city like Chicago—is quite an urban place. The people in State College come from different parts of the state, the country, and the world, and there are several reasons behind their trek to State College, whether it's for school, work, or family. In fact, some people might not stay here permanently, as their journey might take them somewhere else in the state, country, or world. Why does this matter? Let me ask you a few questions before I share my thoughts on why this matters.

First, when you travel, whether you visit a different city, state, or country, do you bring something with you when you return home? It doesn't have to be a keychain from the souvenir shop in the hotel lobby, but it could be other things, like photographs, a map, some other keepsake, or food, right? Besides physical objects, what else do we bring with us when we return home? Memories and experiences! If we extend this and think about people who move from one place to another for a longer period of time, then what

do they bring with them? For instance, when my grandparents were children, they migrated from China to Malaysia, where my parents grew up. Although my family is originally from China, they created a life, together with other Chinese people and other migrant populations, in Malaysia. The food, the languages, cultures, and traditions were brought with them to Malaysia, but they were also mixed with other cultures, languages, and traditions. In other words, when people move, it's not only physical objects that move with them. Other parts of who we are and our lives, such as language and traditions, are brought with us as well.

Similarly, when my parents got married, they moved to Sweden, and that's where I was born. My parents brought Malaysian spices with them and made our home in Sweden a little like a Malaysian home. When it was time for me to pursue my graduate degrees in the United States, my first stop was Normal, IL, and I brought more than clothes with me. In my suitcase, sandwiched between my winter coat and sweaters, I had Malaysian curry spices with me in addition to Swedish honey and cheese. I even brought a rice cooker with me, and some Swedish and Malaysian cookbooks. When it was time for me to pack my bags and move to Pennsylvania, I really wanted to bring with me a deep-dish from Chicago (I didn't). And this brings me to the question I asked you earlier: why does this matter? Now, imagine thousands of people, or even millions of people, moving to one place, and they all bring their languages, traditions, and cultures with them: what do you think would happen? The place would change, right? In short, it matters because migration changes the places that we're in. People have migrated since . . . well, since there have been people, which brings us to the next stop of our translingual journey: the influence of time. For this part of our journey, we will leave the downtown area and visit the Penn State campus, which is literally across the street:

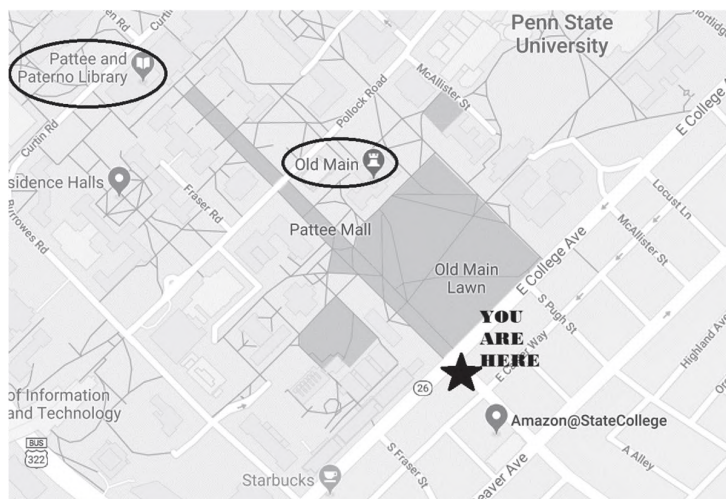


Figure 6: Map of downtown State College and Penn State campus (Google Maps, n.d.).

After our campus tour, we will return downtown to wrap up our journey before we head home, so let's go!

Translingual Layers: Going Beyond the Japanese-English Ramen Menu

By now, we know that translingualism is found in many places, if not everywhere. Now we can ask ourselves, is translingualism only about language? Could it be more than ramen? Yes, it can! Translingualism goes beyond language and food. In fact, our sightseeing tour will show you how different layers of time become part of the buildings and how the migration of people moving in and out of Happy Valley has shaped the campus, town, and buildings, making everything interconnected. The first stop of our campus tour will take us to the Pattee and Paterno Library.



Figure 7: Pattee and Paterno Library at University Park (main campus).

The university was founded in 1855, and over time, as the number of students that enrolled increased, so did the library's collection of books. Originally, the books were housed in other buildings, but they were moved to Pattee in the 1940s. The university and library continued to grow, and the new addition, the Paterno wing, was completed in 2000 ("History," n.d.). As we know, it's not uncommon for buildings to go through a series of renovations throughout time due to the natural damage that occurs as people use these spaces and because there might not be enough space to accommodate all the activity that takes place. With these changes, the buildings and other spaces where people engage in different activities also change. Another building

that has been affected by the shift in people's activities and other changes is Old Main. Let's leave the library and walk over to Old Main to explore it.

Old Main, which was one of the first buildings of the university, went through several renovations, and you can see the current construction of the building in the following image.



Figure 8: Old Main, the administrative center of Penn State.

The current structure of the Old Main was completed in 1930, but the original structure of the building was completed in the mid-1850s (Stevens, 2012). Despite going through a number of renovations, Old Main, just like the library, still has elements of its original structure, to which newer additions have been built on. These elements connect these buildings to the past, but are still important aspects of the university in the present and will probably remain a crucial part of the daily activities of the people who participate in activities in these buildings, whether these people are students, visitors, staff, or faculty. The same can be said about the remaining buildings of the university; however, we won't have time to explore all of them, as we are reaching the end of our journey. But before we head home, we have one more stop to make downtown.

Moving away from the university buildings, although they are just as much part of State College as the downtown area (some say that the university *is* the town), we will see that downtown State College, just like the campus, is a mix of old and new, the past and the present.



Figure 9: The newly opened Amazon store on Allen Street in downtown State College.

I'm sure that all of you know or recognize the Amazon logo. Amazon was founded in 1994, but the current location of the Amazon store in downtown State College opened up its doors in the fall of 2017 during my first semester at Penn State (Duigan, 2017). Not only is the company somewhat young, in comparison to some of the other companies in town, it's a new addition to the town itself, adding another layer of "time" to the town. We have already seen how the past is visible in State College, but we can also see how the present, or the future, is interconnected with the old and, at the same time, shaped by the people who live in this town.

As we can see in these images, the past is closely intertwined with the new and the present. The university buildings clearly show aging and connections to the past, which is contrasted with elements of modern times and globalization as new stores and restaurants open their doors. These images show that there are various translingual layers that, over time, have become part of State College and shaped the town. Different groups of people have migrated to Happy Valley—students, workers, or both, from different parts of the country and the world—and this migration has left its mark on the buildings that we can see in the images. This is not a new phenomenon at all. In fact, people have always migrated, and, thus, changed the new places that they have moved to (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). For example, Chicago is a place that has been shaped deeply by migration, just like any other city. Chinatown emerged because of the Chinese population, but we're able to identify the Greek presence in the city as well as the Polish neighborhoods.

Just like Chicago, as people come and go, State College will be changed by the people who settle there. While it might look a certain way right now, who knows what it will look like a few decades from now.

Reaching the End of Our Journey: Unpacking Our Suitcase

Readers: That was a fun trip, but I still don't get how this is connected to writing. Don't people just read and write stuff?

Su Yin: It's more than just reading and writing, so let's unpack our suitcase!

Now that we're back home, let's unpack some of the things that we learned. First, what our journey to Happy Valley has shown us is that translingualism is not something that is only related to language and our present: the cultural and historical aspects also shape the places that we're in. With migration, whether it's from Illinois to Pennsylvania, or from the United States to Sweden or Malaysia, people tend to bring a piece of the place where they are from to their new home. What I'm getting at is that people are not the only ones that move when it comes to migration—food, objects, and language travel with them to their new destination and become part of their new home, which adds a new layer to that particular place. Moreover, food, objects, and languages are not fixed to a specific place. Instead, they are just as mobile as people are. Especially in such a globalized era, we are now exposed to more translingual platforms and forums through various types of social media. With time, more people migrate, and, just like the people before them, they bring food, objects, and languages with them that add another translingual layer to the place that they are in, as the pictures of State College have shown us.

So, what is the connection to literate practices and writing? Just like places are shaped by the people who pass through or settle there, the types of **literate activities** that we engage in and the types of literate practices that we develop are shaped by the **genres** and languages around us across space and time. This creates an intricate relationship that we have with the world around us, creating a network of interconnected individuals, objects, and languages. Even though these networks might change over time, it is clear that our writing and the types of genres that we interact with are not fixed or only in (a specific variety of) English. Different variations of different languages merge and we interact with them on a daily basis.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we engage in translingual practices on a daily basis, as the audience when we read or as the writer when we compose a text. The translingual spaces that we're in shape our linguistic and

cultural resources, and, as you have seen, you do not have to speak multiple languages in order to engage in translingual practices. This knowledge that you have helps you with writing because your linguistic and cultural knowledge is something that you have acquired over a long period of time, and you will continue to expand this particular knowledge. So, I encourage you to investigate the place where you are right now, whether you're at home, your dorm, a different city, state, or country. What kind of translingual layers can *you* identify? Enjoy and bon voyage!

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Su Yin Khor is currently a PhD student at Penn State in the Department of Applied Linguistics. Although she has graduated from ISU and moved from Blo-*No*, she will always be a Redbird, and she misses the Garlic Press and their amazing pulled pork every day.