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TEXT TRANSLATIONS

For students, sometimes learning how to write for a variety of purposes and audiences can be daunting. In fact, in my work with teachers, one of the main complaints has to do with students' tendencies to write for one audience: the informal one. In fact, many lament that their students utilize text language and abbreviations in their writings that *should* be written using formal, academic language.

A fantastic book that illustrates this in the best, most humorous way is *Understand Rap: Explanations of Confusing Rap Lyrics You and Your Grandma Can Understand* by William Buckholz (2010). In this book, Buckholz takes rap lyrics from a variety of songs and then translates them into formal English. This hilarious book is a great example of how many of our students feel when we start using formal academic language in our instruction when many of them are well-versed in the informal version of language. (*Note:* Although this is a great resource to use in your classroom as a tangible example of informal and formal language in the real world, this is not a book I would recommend putting out in your classroom library simply due to the mature nature of some of the content. However, it is worthwhile to have in your personal library because specific sections can be used in teaching as examples of informal and formal written language.)

One way that students can practice bouncing in and out of formal and informal language is through text translations. With these strategies, students either translate portions of a text into more formal language or they translate it into informal language, based on the original sample. Either way, this is a great strategy for drawing attention to the levels of language that exist both in and outside of the classroom.

Quick Tip!

Here are some other text possibilities that can achieve the same goal:

- *Pop Sonnets: Shakespearean Spins on Your Favorite Songs* by Erik Didriksen
- *Darcy Swipes Left (OMG Classics)* by Jane Austen and Courtney Carbone
- *William Shakespeare's The Phantom Menace: Star Wars Part the First* by Ian Doescher

Putting It to Work

1. Show students an example from the book, *Understand Rap: Explanations of Confusing Rap Lyrics You and Your Grandma Can Understand* by William Buckholz (2010), or a selection from another book of your choice. I like to use the examples in *Understand Rap* that fall under the headings of Cars and Money.
2. Read students the lyrics from the rap song and ask them to tell you what it means.
3. Show students the formal translation included in the book.

4. Discuss how these versions differ. You might ask them questions like this:
 - Is the overall message the same?
 - What types of words are used in each sample?
 - How does the language change in the different versions?
5. Provide students with a quote, excerpt from a text, or other sample that students will translate.

Text Translations

- Translate these quotes. First, determine if they are informal or formal. Then, re-write them in either more formal language or informal language.
- Lovin' life rn
- We can meet up at 2 ig
- When do you anticipate an answer?

6. Have students first determine if the sample they are given is informal or formal. Once they have made this determination, they can proceed with translating the text.
7. Using the example discussed earlier as a guide, instruct students to either translate the sample into more formal text or translate it into informal text.
8. Share with the class.

Quick Tip!

A good resource for students to reference during this lesson are the leveled word charts in my book *Write Now & Write On* (2022). These can provide language options based on the formality of the text.

When to Use It

- Use this as a way to make especially dense text more manageable and easier to understand.
- When you want students to practice writing for formal and informal audiences and you want them to explain the distinctions between the two.

Why It Works

- It starts off with a real-world example of formal and informal language that many students are familiar with.
- It is a short, manageable task that students can complete in a short amount of time.
- Students are writing for a specific purpose—language formality—which can aid them in constructing effective writing responses.

Modifications

- Instead of using written examples of texts, use video clips of speeches or audio recordings.
- Provide the entire class with the same text to translate. Have half the class translate it into either formal or informal language. Have the other half of the class identify the language in the sample that classifies it as either formal or informal.
- Start with one quote that students translate instead of a longer piece of text.

Extensions

- Have students extend their translations by writing a justification sample that explains their changes.
- Get students to locate their own text samples for translation and have them lead the lesson.
- Connect this lesson to the Sounds Like strategy on page 22.
- Carry this over into research writing and channeling the academic voice.

Digital Direction

- Have students record their translations using VoiceThread or a movie maker program like iMovie to share.
- Use Padlet for students to record their translations and have their classmates respond digitally.
- Have students collaboratively draft their translations using an online program like Etherpad (<https://etherpad.org/>) or Draft (<https://draftin.com/>).

Lesson Lead-Ins

- Use this as a lead-in when students are focusing on writing engagements that are heavy on academic language and are highly formal.
- Connect this to lessons that focus on levels of words (Harper, 2022).