

# Laura Gonzales Interview

**Laura McCann:** [00:00:00] Thank you so much to Dr. Gonzales for joining us today. And, we are really excited to chat with you about digital rhetoric and what it means in your, research and in your scholarship. So to kind of get started, if you could introduce yourself and then give a little bit of a, description or explanation for kind of how you view digital rhetoric and how it functions in your own research and scholarship.

**Laura Gonzales:** Okay. yeah. Thank you so much for having me. I'm Laura Gonzales. I'm an assistant professor in the English department at the University of Florida currently. So my definition of digital rhetoric always goes back to Angela Haas definition of digital rhetoric, where she says in Wampum as Hypertext that digital starts with your digits, your fingers. Along she says it starts with your digits, your fingers, the tools that we use to see and engage with the world, including our eyes and ears. And I really like this definition because it [00:01:00] pushes us to consider the embodied nature of digital rhetoric. So when we think about digital rhetoric, yes, we might think about digital technologies and I do incorporate those definitions as well. But to me, Haas always reminds us to think about, our bodies as technologies and as our bodies, as part of digital rhetoric. And so my research and general focuses on the connections between digital composing and multilingualism. And I'm really interested in how people who move across language, people who translate information from one language to another use digital technologies. So including their bodies, but also including digital translation tools, also including different forms of storytelling to make information accessible for different audiences. So that's kind of how I orient to digital rhetoric is like a conscious understanding that our bodies are part of how we compose whether we're in print or digital environments. And, really thinking about how language [00:02:00] plays a role in how we engage with digital rhetoric.

**Laura McCann:** I love how you said our bodies are part of how we compose. Like, yeah, I completely agree with that.

**Laura Menard:** Yeah, definitely. How has the kinds of data that you collect and study, how has that influenced your methods that you use? And if so, how has it affected it?

**Laura Gonzales:** So, when I started doing research for my first book, Sites of Translation, which focuses on what are the tools and technologies that translators use to translate information? It completely changed my approach to doing research because initially I was focused on written translations. So how

people were translating written documents and I was using like screencast data and screencast recordings. To see how, translators would toggle between, let's say a Google translate and an online dictionary and some news articles about a topic and their translation. And I was trying to see how they translated using those digital tools.[00:03:00]

But what I didn't notice initially, was how translators were talking to each other while they were translating. So I eventually set up cameras in the, actual translation space so I could see how translators were talking to each other, how they were collaborating, how they were using gestures, how they were telling stories, you know, to talk about how to best translate a word or a phrase from one language to another.

So a lot of times, yes if a translator paused to decide how to translate a word or phrase, they might look something up, but they might also turn over and say, Hey, how have you heard this word be translated and then engage in a conversation or a story. So, focusing on multilingualism specifically, I think pushed me to think about what are the different methods that I could use.

So, you know, ethnography is something I knew that I was gonna use. I knew that I wanted to have a longitudinal study where I was looking at something over a long period of time. I also knew that I wanted some like digital methods, so like screencast [00:04:00] recordings and analysis and things like that. but I think the focus on language helped me. Incorporate more of the attunement to embodiment. that language is so. You know, language is so embodied language in our bodies are always together. And so seeing that translation in action helped me refine my research methods. I mean, I think I still think I was using like visual methods, digital methods.

I was still doing an ethnography, but the approach to it. Right. So not even just the, method, but the methodology. So the theories that I was using. Form how I was analyzing my data completely changed because I realized. There are LatinX, ChicanX, Black and Indigenous scholars who have been theorizing about the connections between language and the body.

And so I thought I was just approaching this as a TechComp, you know, digital [00:05:00] rhetoric project doing screencast recordings and visual analysis of text. And I still did that, but the methodology, how I grounded my analysis, how I was orienting to this work was very much influenced. Like I said by LatinX, ChicanX, Black, and Indigenous, feminist scholars who have always said that language in our bodies are connected.

And I think that's what allowed me to try to make interventions and expand on work in TechComp by saying, Hey, when we do studies, ethnographic studies focused on the transcription and translation of text, how to make text accessible for various audiences, which TechComp has always done. What if we did that through these different methodologies, through the work of these women of color theorists who have always pointed us to our bodies as a way to understand language.

So I think for me, that's where the shift happened, was in watching translation in action [00:06:00] and in thinking about the methodologies and the women of color researchers who, like I said, have always known this and always done this, but it wasn't something that was necessarily like presented to me in my classes as part of TechComp whereas part of digital rhetoric, if that makes sense,

**Laura McCann:** It's interesting to think about like the movement or the blurring between. Subdisciplines or approaches. So thinking about like rhetoric in the body, as, you know, having its own distinct methods and methodologies and TechComp, but the ways that, you know, moving between informs each or informs each other.

So I'm wondering then as a follow up, do you feel like you have contained methodologies or methods that you would name and define in a particular way or when you talk about methods and methodologies. Are those usually kind of constructed or co-constructed as you are approaching a project?

**Laura Gonzales:** Hmm, that's a great question.

I think in terms of [00:07:00] methodologies, Latinx ChicanX connects Black and Indigenous, Asian and Asian American feminist scholarship is always the foreground for my methodologies, is always where I go to figure out how I'm going to approach a project. Now, the specific methods that I use for that project, I think those change and those are based on, you know, the context that I'm working in the situation.

Am I able to be there in person? Am I doing this remotely? Am I. what kind of community am I working with? What are the constraints and the affordances of the context that we're working in? So I would say the meth, the methods themselves change, and also there's so many new methods that are coming up all the time and I'm kind of a methods geek.

Like I love learning about new methods and I really love learning like how people approach, their methods and what methodologies inform those

approaches. So like, in my teaching, for example, I taught a social media and rhetoric class last semester, and I [00:08:00] had several guest speakers come talk about social media methods and methodologies. And I learned so much, you know, I learned about data scraping and social network analysis and all of these different methods that I may or may not actually incorporate into my project, but I know they're out there and I could add them to my toolkit if I wanted to. So, I'm not sure that I'm super answering your question, but I think, I think the methodologies, you know, keeping my reading, like keeping up with the reading in the methodologies, the areas that I'm interested in is always really important.

And then figuring out what is the context that I'm doing this research in, what methods am I gonna be able to use? How do I approach these methods in a way that also honors the methodologies that, that are important to.

**Laura Menard:** You kind of answered my next question as far as like your motivation with these. So I'm gonna ask, have you noticed any limitations or considerations or anything like that when applying these methodologies?

**Laura Gonzales:** The methodology or the methods or both?

**Laura Menard:** The methods. Sorry. [00:09:00]

**Laura Gonzales:** No, that's fine. Yeah. I mean, there's so many limitations to each method, right. But so many affordances too, for example, just getting the data to be in a place that allows you to start analyzing it is so hard. So with video methods, for example, which I use for my book projects, You know, knowing how to set up a camera, knowing how to set it up so the sound actually comes through, knowing if you need more than one camera, knowing how to store your video data, figuring out how to parse through hours and hours of video to find the areas that you need to analyze. There's so many limitations to that. And there's so many intricacies that we don't think about when we just say, oh, just bring a camera and record everything. Right. And I know there's researchers, you know, like Crystal VanKooten and others who have, theorized this and talked about it. and so for me, I'm kind of a learned on the grounds person and I don't always do the prep work that I need to do for lots of things. So with video recording, that was [00:10:00] a big challenge for me before I did the research for my book project.

I hadn't even turned on a camera before, so I needed to really figure out how I was gonna do that. And I really learned along the way. And if I were to do this again, I would do it differently. same thing with any sort of visual methods and

visualizations, you know, getting the data to a place where you can create a visualization is actually really difficult and it's, it's a learned skill. And if you don't get the data to that place, then the visualizations aren't really gonna make sense. So it's learning those things and learning that at the end of the day, we, as, as researchers are the ones who are inputting the information into any tool that helps us with our data analysis.

So we have to be mindful of like what we're valuing, what we're, including, what we're excluding. So for example, In my work on translation so much actually ended up being focused on the silences, right? Not on what people were saying or what they were doing, but the moments where they weren't doing or saying anything. And I, and I came to find like, [00:11:00] The silences and the pauses to be really interesting, cuz I was wondering like what's going on in those pauses, right? What's going on? I know what's going on when somebody's saying something or somebody's doing something, but if they're not, if they're just quiet, they're thinking about something and that actually led to the whole, like I would say the major theoretical contribution of my book, which is, you know, this idea of translation moments of what are those instances where translators pause in the translation to make a rhetorical decision about how to translate information from one language to another. So what happens in those pauses? Right? Not, not what happens throughout the translation process, but when we pause. And so I think different methods allow us to pay attention to different things. And the challenge is to be mindful. How your values are shaping what you pay attention to and seeing if there's a way you can look at the same data, set through another angle. And I think that's what methods, let us. Yeah, that's super helpful to think about the affordances of methods. And then there are limitations or [00:12:00] drawbacks as like lenses that let you ask a particular set of questions or see silences when you would've been looking for, you know, responses.

**Laura McCann:** I wonder, one of our goals with the podcast is for it to be really practical. So thinking about like, how do you go about gaining some expertise or comfort with methods or methodologies that are unfamiliar to you or unknown to you. So I really appreciated that. You said, you hadn't had experience with kind of video work before you started that method, because I think they can feel, it can just feel really overwhelming or really like this huge new skill set that you have to take on in order to ask the kind of question that you want to. So I'm wondering in a lot of the methods and methodologies that you're taking on, how much of it have you felt like is all self taught or are there, working groups really interesting or useful resources or like reading lists that you [00:13:00] find yourself going back to frequently that help you kind of either teach yourself or, you know, find a group of scholars that are working through or leading workshops on particular approaches.

**Laura Gonzales:** Yeah, I don't think any of the methods I know were self taught. Like it took an entire group of people to help me learn any any method. Of course, like I learned my own approach to it, based on doing the method, but really I spent most of my grad career, I would say learning new methods. I was really interested in how different fields or subfields approach, similar questions. So for example, I came into. My PhD program, really interested in questions of transfer and the transfer of knowledge. But I wanted to know like how has TechComp approached transfer research? Because for me, it was such a rhet comp conversation, or I had been introduced to the re comp part of it. And I learned from my mentor, Stuart Blythe that a lot of the research on transfer actually started in TechCom and that there were [00:14:00] so many studies done on how professional writers coordinate different resources to, as they compose. So like how they move from, you know, one online resource to another, how they move across different platforms as they're writing. So the whole screencast method, for example, definitely came from TechCom and definitely came from, you know, those conversations. So I think a curiosity about methods is always helpful. reading different articles. What I ask my grad students now to do, for instance is to read articles and talk about and try to figure out what the methodology is because a lot of people are very explicit about their methodology and a lot of people are not explicit at all about their methodology. They can be very explicit about their method and talk about how many surveys they sent out, how they analyze their interview data. But the methodology is not always so clear and that's always tied to positionality in my perspective. So we have to think about. Not just what the method is, but what's the methodology. What's the positionality of the researcher, cuz all those things are tied [00:15:00] together. I know I'm not quite answering your question, but in terms of workshops and things that were beneficial to me, I remember taking a, cross-cultural technology design workshop with Dr. Wilkinson at one of the ACT-W conferences. I think it was in 2014. It totally blew my mind. Like we spent a whole day just working through data and she was sharing some of her approaches to cross-cultural technology design and user localization. And I was just like, oh my gosh, honestly, any chance I got to sign to take a workshop with somebody just about their method. I would take it. I went to like the digital humanities summer institute focused on methodology. I totally loved that. And again, I'm not an expert in any of these things, but I love learning like how people process data, like how they process information. So, yeah, the ACT-W workshops, I went to several workshops at CPTSC focused on methods. That's the Council for Programs and Technical and Scientific Communication. Yeah. I, I try to always focus on [00:16:00] method because also I found that it, through the peer review process, people always ask you about your method. Like, it's the one thing that everyone goes to and they're like, oh, you're not as clear here about how you analyze the data. So I wanted my articles to not get that critique.

Right. So I wanted it to be like super clear and explicit about every step of what I was doing. And, I think that pushed me to seek all of these different resources.

**Laura McCann:** I appreciate because that's kind of a new, you know, a new scholar. I often find, I go to articles that have projects that I'm interested. And that's what I wanna know. Like, how did you look at what you looked at? How did you, what framework. How did you and I even like logistical questions, like how did you code it by what, you know, did you use team units? Did you use a preexisting coding structure and depending on the journal or the scholar, you know, you may or may not get into details on that. So I appreciate your emphasis on methods as well. And I also did the summer Institute, [00:17:00] which overwhelmed me, but was super interesting.

**Laura Gonzales:** Yeah, same. And I wanna say too, there's a difference. So we have this tendency to want, and when I say we researchers in writing studies, some researchers in writing studies, to want this sort of social sciencey, you know, discussion of method and, while I do that often and I, and I think we've come to expect that when I say like, I want the method to be clear, sometimes the method is, you know, drawing on your embodied knowledge as a feminist or as a person from a specific community. And I take that at face value and I say that is expertise, and that is fine. And so I think we need to have more method conversations, not to make things more aligned with social science, approaches necessarily, but also to increase the visibility of that embodied practice as oftentimes erased and oftentimes sidelined as like, oh, that's not important or that's just your [00:18:00] feelings. but to have that positioned as expertise, I think we need to have more conversations about method and about the fact that methods and methodologies from non-white non-Western context. Are really, really important and could actually shed light on a lot of issues, in our field.

So, yeah, I love having method conversations for that reason, cuz I wanna learn, you know, it's not like I'm trying to gate keep, but it's more like I wanna learn how you process this information for this article. Because to me that's where so much of the brilliance of research lies. And it's often so invisible, you know, cuz we just get told the results or something, but going through that process of how you're reasoning through data to me is really, really interesting

**Laura Menard:** On that note, have you noticed, especially like with that own, like your own embodied knowledge as being expertise, have you noticed any new projects, new methods emerging out of anything like that? Or have you. or do you plan to maybe have new projects based on that?

**Laura Gonzales:** Yeah, that's a great question, when I wrote [00:19:00] my first book *Sites of Translation*, I focused on English and Spanish translators, and that was important to me because of that embodied knowledge. I, bilingual, Spanish and English. So for me, I wanted to have that connection to my participants and be able to understand both the source language and the target language. So what they were translating from and what they were translating into. And when I was on the job market, actually, this was funny. I got a lot of questions with people who were like, oh, you know, that's so nice that you do Spanish English, translation stuff. Have you ever thought of doing research in languages that you don't speak? And in that moment I was like, no, you know, how could I do research into a language? That I don't have any knowledge of, you know, I would, I would just make so many assumptions and I think all that's still true, but in my, second book that's coming out, hopefully later this year, I actually talk about the positionality of language across different contexts. And I bring in [00:20:00] case studies of projects that I did with communities across multiple different languages that I don't speak. some indigenous languages, currently spoken in Mexico, some south Asian languages spoken in Nepal, where I did some work as a Fulbright researcher. And tracing, not just my positionality across those contexts, but the positionality of the language that we're using to do research in those contexts.

So for example, in Mexico, the research conversations we were having were in Spanish, but Spanish was not the first language of the participants who, were in that group. They spoke multiple indigenous languages and Spanish was the colonial language we used to colonize and oppress those indigenous languages. So the fact that we were doing the research in Spanish actually totally influenced what people said, what they didn't say their relations between me and their research participants, their relations between the [00:21:00] participants and each other, because they spoke different indigenous languages. So we use Spanish as a quote unquote neutral language, but it's not neutral at all. Right. So to me that's that experience has pushed me to really think about the positionality of language across different contexts and how that shifts our research methods and how that shifts what we see and don't see here and don't hear in the different context. And I think I lost sight of your question at this point, but yeah, definitely has, different experiences have changed my approach to research for.

**Laura McCann:** Super interesting to me when you were talking about colonialization and the way that Spanish, you know, you might have assumed it was kind of a neutral language and the ways in which it very much isn't. This has me really thinking about why a rhetorical view of methods and methodologies is so generative because it moves beyond method as, always maybe similar [00:22:00] or able to be repeated across researcher to thinking about the way that it probes, how the body is impacted, how the language right

influences those silences or the language that people use. So I'm wondering, are there other aspects of kind of this rhetorical view of method and methodology that you would prompt humanity, adjacent fields to think about? Because now I'm really thinking about the ways in which rhetoric's approach to methods is, is unique in that sense we can be looking at something like a TechCom research space and be kind of indexing the ways that rhetoric in the body colonialization biopolitics is very much present. And, depending on the method that you're thinking about, the methodology you're applying can become present are kind of hidden. So I'm wondering, would you you know, would you say something else to, or would you, recommend maybe kind of some of our adjacent fields think about rhetorical methods as a way to illuminate some of [00:23:00] their methodologies as well?

**Laura Gonzales:** Sure. And I think for sure, vice versa, right. I think about, you know, ethnic studies classes and how they could influence our rhetorical methods and vice versa. if you all have not planned this, I really recommend speaking with, Victor Del Hierro and Crystal VanKooten, their they have a collection on digital methods coming out soon where they kind of talk about this rhetorical approach. And, so I think it'd be really interesting for y'all to talk with them as well and ask them these questions, cuz they've, they've had more of a bird's eye view across the field, editing this collection, but I think, yeah, the rhetorical aspect, a lot of times we think about. Oh, this is a method that's valid or not valid that helps us validate information. Or this is, you know, again, going back to that sort of assumption of neutrality in methods, like you can just pick up a method and apply it anywhere and you're gonna get the results. Right. So I think rhetoric helps us understand context and helps us understand that you can't just pick up a method and throw it on any [00:24:00] research study and it's gonna work out well, especially when you're working with people, because, you know, I think about things like participatory methods, for example, participatory methods sounds like a great thing, right? You bring in other people's perspectives to influence the design of something or the approach of something and multiple perspectives participatory. That sounds great. and it is, or it can be, but throw participatory methods and the approaches that we take in the west to do participatory design. And put it in a non Western context, ideas of participation, completely change, throw participatory methods in a study, being conducted in English with people who identify English as a second or third language. They're not necessarily gonna feel empowered to participate and to share, right, or to critique an existing design or to give their perspective on something. If they're very anxious about, is there English? Good enough? So, I think that rhetorical approaches to methods and methodologies can help us [00:25:00] understand that context and see. Okay, who are we doing this research with? What are the histories of these people? So it's not just let me get six people for a focus group, but like what's the background of the people that

I'm bringing together. Where am I doing this research? Am I asking them to drive to my campus and park to do this research? If so, how is that gonna influence who volunteers from my. And who doesn't volunteer and therefore who's represented and not represented. So I think that rhetorical aspect, and this is something all research should do and know, right. And I think many do, but I think many also ignore the rhetorical context, of the methods they use. And so you end up seeing results sections where people are like, well, you know, I only was able to get white men to contribute to this study. So I only have white male perspectives on this topic, but everybody was welcome and so I hope in future [00:26:00] studies, other people can be included. And so, yes, everyone was welcome, but were they really? And how did you set up the context and the method of this study so that different perspectives were included? What did you actually do to limit or to encourage multiple perspectives from being incorporated into this project? I think we need to take up more responsibility as researchers, about how our methods function rhetorically. And I think that's a, that's a great way to put it. your question. So thank.

**Laura Menard:** Well with that. Do you have any advice or recommendations that you would have for someone who's just entering the digital rhetoric space?

**Laura Gonzales:** Yeah. I mean, my advice is to be curious, right. Be curious about how people came up with their results or how they approach their project. Even if it's a project that like the topic itself is not interested to interesting to you. I recommend looking at their methods, you know? I remember looking at, for [00:27:00] example, Stacy Pigg's work when I was in grad school and seeing the visualization she had made of like writing coordination and being like, oh my God, this is so fascinating. You know how professional writers are coordinating different resources, working at coffee shops. And I'm like, wow. So I spoke with her and I read, you know, her paper that wasn't a topic of interest to me, you know, writing coordination. Wasn't. Something I was interested in, but then I started thinking like, how does this work across multiple languages? How does this work in different contexts? You know, so questions emerge. If you pay attention to methods and you put your own spin on them, I think really interesting questions emerge. And I think you can have really great conversations with people. So my advice is definitely be curious. Be willing to try new methods. I mean, some things just seem so overwhelming. Like I had a couple of guest speakers come talk to us about like web scraping, and social network analysis with me and my students. And at the end of it, I was like, y'all, I'm just as overwhelmed as you [00:28:00] are, but like, we're gonna try some of this stuff. We're gonna download some of this software. We're gonna put it on your computers. We're gonna sit here for a little while. We're gonna try to figure this out because you never know. Right. And like also if we become professors, we're teaching methods classes, and I don't teach students to do the methods I

do. I want them to figure out what's best for their project. So I think trying new methods is always a good idea, especially in grad school, because just because a method seems the most logical or comfortable to you doesn't mean there's not other options out there. So yeah, I think those would be my, that would be my advice.

**Laura McCann:** That's awesome advice. And just thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us about digital rhetoric and methods and methodologies. We definitely learned a lot.

**Laura Gonzales:** Oh, good. No, thank you all so much. This was really fun. And yeah, like I said, I'm, I'm excited to see what other people have to say and how they're approaching their work.

**Laura McCann:** So thank you for doing this. All right. Well, thank you guys so much. The three Lauras will disperse. Bye.[00:29:00]