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Bruce Horner

University of Louisville, horner.bruce@gmail.com

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Introduction: Cross-Language Relations in Composition

Bruce Horner

The essays gathered in this special issue of *College English* participate in an emerging movement within composition studies representing, and responding to, changes in, and changing perceptions of, language(s), English(es), students, and the relations of all these to one another. This movement critiques the tacit policy of "English Only" dominating composition scholarship and pursues teaching and research that resist that policy. It draws attention to the fact that within much composition teaching and scholarship, both the context of writing and writing itself are imaged to be monolingual: the "norm" assumed, in other words, is a monolingual, native-English-speaking writer writing only in English to an audience of English-only readers (Horner and Trimbur). This tacit policy of monolingualism manifests itself in other ways as well: the institutional divides separating most composition programs and courses from ESL programs and courses, including courses in "ESL composition," and separating composition courses from courses that involve students in writing in any language other than English; the nearly complete absence in composition textbook "readers" of writings by anyone other than North American and British writers whose first language is English (even translations of texts written in languages other than English are rare); the insistence in composition textbooks on standardizing students' English, and their neglect of competing standards and definitions of English; and the neglect in histories of composition of writing in languages other than English. Such practices define composition as composing in, and only in, an English that has a fixed standard that students

Bruce Horner teaches courses in composition, composition pedagogy and theory, and literacy studies. His essays have appeared in *JAC*, *College Composition and Communication*, *Rhetoric Review*, and *English Education*. His most recent book is *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique* (2000), winner of the 2001 W. Ross Winterowd Award for the Most Outstanding Book in Composition Theory. "English Only and U.S. College Composition," an essay he coauthored with John Trimbur, was winner of the 2002 Richard Braddock Award. He has recently accepted a position as Endowed Chair of Rhetoric and Composition at the Universtiy of Louisville.

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are told they must learn to produce to participate fully in the civic life of the nation (as full citizens). Language, literacy, and citizenship are viewed as interdependent: to be literate is to know the language, and to know the language is requisite to citizenship. To the history and ongoing project of composition, so understood, and to literacy and citizenship, writing in other languages, or in other forms of English, is entirely irrelevant.

The essays in this special issue contest this state of affairs. Multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, is taken as both the historical and the ideal norm. The context of writing and the writing itself are defined as multilingual: not only is the monolingual writer writing only in English to an audience of speakers only of English viewed as an aberration; even in the case of such aberrations, the "English" being written and the English of the audience is understood to be plural—Englishes—and hence even that situation is in a certain sense multilingual. Moreover, even the monolingual writers writing only in English to an audience of speakers only of English are viewed as operating in the context of—both responding to and provoking responses in turn from—other languages, including other Englishes and other tongues—and thus themselves engaging in cross-language relations, albeit of a peculiar kind. The essays gathered here argue that students need to learn to work within and among and across a variety of Englishes and languages, not simply to (re)produce and write within the conventions of a particular, standardized variety of English. As Gail Hawisher, Cynthia Selfe, Yi-Huey Guo, and Lu Liu observe in their contribution, ideologies, technologies, languages, and literacies form a complex, interdependent, cultural ecology of literacy both shaping and shaped by writers' literacy practices at the macro, medial, and micro levels. Rather than assuming the composition classroom as a site of simple, homogeneous language use among linguistically homogeneous students, these essays call on us to recognize the fact of this complex ecology operating in the composition classroom as the actual and cultural norm. The essays in this special issue thus call for a radical shift from composition's tacit policy of monolingualism to an explicit policy that embraces multilingual, cross-language writing as the norm for our teaching and research. Some, of course, may understandably be tempted to dismiss calls for such a radical revision of composition as an impractical, futile dream for reversing accidents of the past, and to accept the monolingualism of composition as a real, if regrettable, fait accompli. But as the essays in this issue make clear, such a response in fact evades ongoing history, and is, in many ways, less practical than an approach that engages composition's multilingual nature.

In one sense this movement toward multilingualism and cross-language relations in composition can be understood as, and takes the form of, a response to changes in the language backgrounds of the students in our classes, or at least changes in our perceptions of our students' language backgrounds. Perhaps most obviously,

there are increasing numbers of students taking composition courses for whom English is not their first language (Harklau, Losey, and Siegal, "Linguistically"). This is a consequence of not only changes in patterns of immigration to the United States but also changes in who among U.S.-born students apply and are admitted to colleges and universities, the increasing tendency of instructors to recognize differences in the language backgrounds of their students, and the increasing permeability of cultural and institutional boundaries separating "native" speakers of English from others. It has been increasingly difficult to sustain what Paul Kei Matsuda, in his essay in this issue, describes as the myth of linguistic homogeneity, and the methods for "containing" linguistic differences that he describes—admissions policies, entrance exams, placement procedures, the creation of HBCUs, separate tracks for ESL students—have become increasingly ineffective in preventing a "critical mass" of language differences from becoming apparent in composition courses. Schools' strategies for identifying and segregating ESL students have proven to be unreliable (Matsuda, "Basic").

Moreover, the permeability of the boundaries separating "native" English speakers from ESL speakers is increasing. There are growing numbers of bi- and multilingual students raised in the United States for whom traditional ESL programs and courses, often designed for international students (Harklau, Losey, and Siegal, "Linguistically" 2), are ill-suited. And these and other students may define themselves and their language affiliations in ways that defy ordinary attributions of these, claiming a language identity, for example, that "exists in their minds but not in their tongues" (Chiang and Schmida 87), or identifying themselves "as *in between* worlds" (Chiang and Schmida 85; emphasis added). For these students, as Yuet-Sim D. Chiang and Mary Schmida observe, standard ESL/native-English categories "force [students] to categorize their identity into an either-or sort of framework, when in fact they may not perceive it in such clear-cut distinctions" (90; see also Harklau, Losey, and Siegal, "Linguistically" 5; Frodesen and Starna 62). Thus, it is increasingly inappropriate to make simple identifications of students' languages and to categorize and place them in courses of instruction according to such identifications.

While it is, of course, possible for teachers and, more commonly, institutions to ignore students' complex self-identifications in favor of neat categories, scholars and teachers are increasingly questioning the validity of doing so, on both practical and theoretical grounds. If it is true, as Matsuda observes in his essay here, that second-language issues have remained peripheral to composition studies, there is a demonstrable increase in concern among compositionists with recognizing multilingual students, texts, and histories, and with the interdependent relations and interactions among different languages and varieties of language in writing (see, for example, Bruch and Marback; Lu, "Professing" and "An Essay"; Lunsford and Ouzgane; Severino, Guerra, and Butler). Post-Pratt, we might say, in their teaching

and scholarship, many compositionists have been heeding the call for a "linguistics of contact" focusing on "modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages, [. . .] on how such speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language" (Pratt 60).

The resituating of composition globally mandates pursuit of such a call. It now appears, for example, that most users of English are in fact non-native speakers of English (see Kachru 3–4). Not only is multilingualism statistically more common globally; the "globalization" of communication networks occasions far more contact among far more languages and distributes such contacts far more broadly. While the "globalization" of English might seem to be bringing about a more monolingual world, in practice it has meant more of a "dispersal" and fragmentation of English, leading to both more interlanguage contact and the establishment of more varieties of English. Under such conditions, attempting to teach students to reproduce a single standardized English in their writing is both futile and inappropriate. As Min-Zhan Lu puts it in her contribution to this issue, students faced with a plurality of "target" languages, each of which is subject to change, need to become adept at learning to *use* these languages (in James Baldwin's sense) rather than attempting to *imitate* a "target." And, as A. Suresh Canagarajah argues in his contribution, rather than locating students on a trajectory from a home or primary language toward competence in a target language, it is more appropriate to examine the process by which writers shuttle between texts, types of texts, and languages, and to work at assisting our students themselves to shuttle creatively among these in their writing, not simply to be sensitive to the contexts of their texts but to use their writing to transform those contexts. In doing so, we can look at the practices of established writers, as Canagarajah and Lu do, and at the histories of changes in individuals' literacy practices that incorporate movements between languages and technologies, as Hawisher and Selfe illustrate.

In pursuing such efforts, it will not be enough to simply recognize language difference. As John Trimbur notes in his essay, compositionists' recognition of the multilingual nature of students, though it combats the "ritualized forgetting" of North America's ongoing multilingual character, often goes hand in hand with a drive toward having students produce finished essays in English. In other words, instead of viewing students' command of languages other than English as a resource to promote biliteracy and multilingualism, we frequently examine their language for whether it hinders or helps their mastery of academic English. Difference is recognized, but, once again, only as something ultimately to be overcome—even, as Lu observes in her essay, at the cost of tongue surgery.

Trimbur's essay reminds us that despite the ongoing history of language diversity, contact, and change, and despite the commitment of our professional organiza-

tions to policies opposed to English Only legislation (see the NCTE position statements), dominant language ideology encourages a "systematic forgetting" of all these. That forgetting operates not only in laws but in the institutional structuring of our programs of language instruction, in our textbooks, in our curricula, and in our pedagogies. The essays in this issue combat such forgetting by resituating composition as material and social engagement in interchanges between, among, and across varieties of language practice. As Lu demonstrates, the writing practices of such various authors as Bill Gates's translators, Chinua Achebe, and Arundhati Roy show them to be pursuing a living English, one that rejuvenates the language by contesting standardized, dominant English terms, phrasings, and meanings in light of ongoing, and differing, lives, contexts, values. And, as Hawisher and Selfe observe, attention to the interrelationships between students' engagements in various literacy practices and the local and global "cultural ecologies" in which such engagements take place reveal not only how students' literacy practices are shaped by those "ecologies" but also how they in turn reshape those ecologies, resisting any English-only hegemony not only in their choice of languages in which to write but also in how they choose to use those languages in their writing. These essays remind us to ask of any composing how and why it engages languages in the ways it does, and to ask of ourselves as teachers of composition how and why we involve students in engaging language(s) in the ways we do, and how and why we might involve them, and ourselves, more productively in cross-language relations in writing.

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