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MEDIATION IN LITERACY: LANGUAGE, TECHNOLOGY, AND MODALITY

By

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A Dissertation

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 28, 2015

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## ABSTRACT

### MEDIATION IN LITERACY: LANGUAGE, TECHNOLOGY, AND MODALITY

Hem Paudel

July 28, 2015

The issue of difference in writing, both in terms of language diversity and modalities, has received increasing attention in the context of new developments in technologies, increasing global migration, and intensified intersections of cultural and linguistic practices accompanying these changes. Theories of language and modality are trying separately to develop ways to best respond to the challenges and opportunities brought about by these changes. Responding to scholars' recent calls for bridging the gap between studies of multilingualism and those of multimodality, this dissertation offers an approach that, instead of separating the study of modality and languages, questions such a tendency to not only create dichotomies between these two, but also to assume the stability and discrete character of various modes and languages. I argue that dominant, additive models of multimodality and multilingualism deemphasize understandings of languages, modalities, and technologies as material social practices in a complex communicative ecology, thereby implying what Brian Street calls "an autonomous" model of multimodality and multilingualism. Going beyond the abstract notions of language and modality as stable and discrete, this dissertation urges us to see the material-social practice of language as always already multimodal, while also being part of the ecology of multimodal semiotic practices.

This dissertation has been divided into five chapters. *Chapter One* introduces issues of multilingualism and multimodality and provides a brief theoretical background to analyze dominant assumptions about language and modality. *Chapter Two* interrogates social theories of agency and mediation, both humanist and anti-humanist and develops an alternative understanding of mediation based on cultural materialist theories of practice and new materialism. I discuss how theories of Bourdieu, Giddens, and Pennycook help us see seemingly isolated acts as parts of a nexus of sedimented practices, whereas Latour's call to pay attention to non-human agents and mediation as translation makes us see how durability and change in practices do not depend only on human agents and social structures, but equally on the "missing masses." *Chapter Three* and *Chapter Four* take up the theoretical insights from the previous chapters, arguing that major theories of multilingualism and multimodality retain some residues of monolingualism and monomodality either in assuming the discrete and stable character of languages and modes or in assuming individual users as stable and free-floating agents. In an attempt to overcome these monolingualist and monomodalist tendencies, these two chapters call for paying attention to the full panoply of (f)actors affecting semiotic negotiations of our students rather than romanticizing the agency of users in an attempt to debunk monolingualist/monomodalist ideology. *Chapter Five* develops an alternative, integrated way of viewing translingual and transmodal relations. This chapter ends with a demonstration of how shifting our theoretical orientation challenges not only the norm of existing pedagogical practices of segregating codes (linguistic or other semiotic), but also revises some of the multilingual and multimodal pedagogies advocated in recent studies.

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## CHAPTER 1

### STUDIES OF LANGUAGE RELATIONS AND MODALITY: AN INTRODUCTION

*Even though the word “composition” is a bit too long and windy, what is nice is that it underlines that things have to be put together (Latin componere) while retaining their heterogeneity. Also, it is connected with composure; it has clear roots in art, painting, music, theatre, dance, and thus is associated with choreography and scenography; it is not too far from “compromise” and “compromising,” retaining a certain diplomatic and prudential flavor. Speaking of flavor, it carries with it the pungent but ecologically correct smell of “compost,” itself due to the active “de-composition” of many invisible agents. (Latour, “Attempts” 473-74)*

We are witnessing an increasingly diverse landscape of writing with the developments of new forms of communication technologies, intersections of people across cultural and geo-political borders, and increasing exchanges of ideas, symbols, and linguistic practices. As a result, the world, as Arjun Appadurai, Walter Mignolo, and Immanuel Wallerstein argue, does not remain as pockets of discrete, homogeneous cultures and values. Rather, every aspect of our culture is becoming more and more unstable, fluid, and interdependent. Such cultural changes and the new developments in media technologies have made a significant impact on how we communicate within and across cultures, and what resources are available for transmodal, transcultural, and translingual practices and how those resources mediate and are mediated by existing practices. Writing theories and pedagogical approaches have started responding to such existing and emerging situations, semiotic practices, and their representations, especially in terms of two major phenomena: the effects and roles of the rise of digital technologies

and the increasing traffic of languages and semiotic practices accompanying and contributed by those new developments in technologies. In this emerging context, several writing and communication scholars such as Kathleen Blake Yancey, Gunther Kress, and Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis have called us to rethink about what writing/communication is and how we can “develop new models of writing” (Yancey 1). The possibility and ease with which large number of people can produce, distribute, and use writings, tapping into multisemiotic and multilingual resources, makes us rethink how we view the notion of writing, technology and its relation to writing, and what role language relations play into that web of interactions.

However, the dominant conception of composition and pedagogical approaches to it are still limited to what Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge call SL/MN ideology (Single/Standard Language and Modality). In other words, despite various attempts at exposing the problematic assumptions about language and modality, composition teaching largely remains dictated by monolingual and monomodal ideologies, considering “Standard Edited English” as the only language appropriate for formal, academic writing and writing as the only mode appropriate for serious thought in composition (see Diana George, “Visual” and Selfe, “Aurality”). Such narrow conceptualizations of language and modality have severely affected many students, especially those from linguistic, racial, ethnic, and cultural minority backgrounds. Actually, these limited and often problematic conceptualizations about language and modality also affect mainstream students as they need to navigate through diverse linguistic practices in everyday practice.

As a response to the dominance of SL/MN ideology and the massive diversity in

writing practices, both inside the academy and beyond, in recent times, our discipline has paid a lot of attention to the potential effects of these new developments on writing and communication. In fields like applied linguistics and writing studies, scholars like Alastair Pennycook, Claire Kramsch, Suresh Canagarajah, Bruce Horner, and Christiane Donahue, among many others, have called for a multilingual (plurilingual/translingual) approach to language difference in this new context. Similarly, in new media studies, scholars like Gunther Kress, Cynthia Selfe, and Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, have called for a multimodal/multiliteracies approach to writing and communication to better understand how the nature of communication has changed due to the emergence of new forms of writing in digital spaces, leading to changed roles of writers, readers, and texts. However, as Bruce Horner, Cynthia Selfe, and Timothy Lockridge rightly claim, “despite their common points of origination, discussions of modality have remained largely separate from discussions of translinguality, to the impoverishment of both.” In other words, the major concern of multimodal and multilingual studies have been largely similar, calling for the recognition and promotion of language practices and modalities different from ‘Standard’ Edited American English (or British English) and the mode of writing in theorizing and teaching of composition. But, as they claim, there have been very few attempts at bridging that gap and exploring intersections, overlaps, and divergences between the two so that they can interanimate and enrich each other. In composition and literacy scholarship, only a few studies have started looking at these two phenomena together, examining the intersections of translingual and multimodal practices (See Michael Apple and Steven Fraiberg). Furthermore, this area still needs to be explored more as most of the existing studies are often limited in their interpretation

and understanding of language practices and modalities due to their assumptions about languages and modalities as discrete and stable and the mediation of such practices theorized largely in terms of broader abstracted notions associated with economy, culture, or ideologies, rather than looking at what practice theory<sup>1</sup> scholars and new materialists like Anthony Giddens, Alastair Pennycook, and Bruno Latour would call the “practices” themselves in their material social ecology.

In other words, while offering alternative perspectives or advocating for alternative modalities and language practices, we tend to leave the problematic conceptualizations uninterrogated, often unwittingly accepting the terms of value of modes and languages that dominant understanding assigns them. Similarly, in most of the theorizations of language and modality, the theory of mediation remains largely limited, often understood in terms of determination, whether it is by what we call the “social,” “human” agency, or the materiality of the technologies, or taken in various combinations, including the notion of overdetermination. It is important to see people’s use of technologies (including languages) as being shaped by and also shaping not only the larger social contexts like geopolitical relations, but also the seemingly insignificant material ecology beyond the “social,” taking mediation as such as translation and transformation of the assumed affordances and goals of such technologies, thereby transforming the users themselves. Therefore, in this project, I’ll particularly focus on 1) how mediation works in the intersection between new forms of technologies and translingual practices, 2) what a user’s communicative practices tell us about material

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Alastair Pennycook self-identify themselves as theorists of practice whereas Raymond Williams and Anthony Giddens do not. Following Theodore R. Schatzki’s definition of practices as “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity,” mediating agency and structure, I include social theorists like Williams and Giddens under practice theory for their rejection of agency/structure dualism and their focus on human activities and processes as units of social analysis.

social resources and constraints enabling or/and restricting translingual and transmodal potentials, and 3) what implication our understanding of such practices can have on how we teach composition inside our college classrooms.

#### A Brief Literature Review: Language Relations and Multimodality

We have seen two major approaches in analyzing texts in this newly emerging context: multimodal and multilingual/translingual<sup>2</sup>. A typical multimodal approach would often focus on the increased agency of the writer due to the affordances of multiple modes and the participatory nature of digital tools (see Cope and Kalantzis; Kress). Similarly, a typical multilingual approach highlights the metalinguistic awareness of the writer and her multilingual competence in “shuttling” across discourses (see Jessner; Moore and Gajo; Canagarajah and other plurilingual theorists). Some recent writings that have started blending multimodal and multilingual scholarship (see Freiberg; Apple; Athon) often emphasize the affordances of new technologies and multimodality to promote multilingual activities. These scholars have examined the issue of difference both in language and modality studies. They have shown how allowing languages other than “standard” English and modes other than print in writing practices can empower not only minority students of different types but also those from dominant cultures (see Canagarajah; Selfe; Wysocki; etc.). These scholars have cautioned us towards the possible consequences of myopic notions of language standards and marginalization of modes of expression and representations other than print/writing. As a result, we now see

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<sup>2</sup> There definitely are several others that talk about technology and writing. But, I’m particularly focusing on those that analyze composing practices in terms of differences pertaining to language variety and modalities.

an increased focus on these issues in scholarship (journal publications, scholarly books, awards, conferences, etc) and pedagogical theories and practices.

### Studies of Language Relations

Despite continuous transformations of languages, including English(es) due to the intersections of language practices, English monolinguality is still dominant within the academy and beyond, not only in the US, but all across the world. It is the tendency to abstract languages from their lived practices and their history and to assign them fixed and stable character. In the context of the increasing diversity in language practices and the persistence of monolingual beliefs, the issue of language difference has been extensively discussed in sociolinguistics and in composition studies.

Most of the early language theories in Applied Linguistics, from which Composition has drawn several insights, ignore how individual language activities are often mediated by, and therefore transformed by, the micro-macro contexts, while, simultaneously also transforming those contexts. As Alastair Pennycook says in his article “English as a Language Always in Translation” and his recent book *Language as a Local Practice*, many language approaches, such as, World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca, and Language Fortification, retain the tendency of taking languages as discrete and stable entities, highlighting how new forms and structures have emerged in localized varieties (see Braj Kachru’s *Asian Englishes*; Yamuna Kachru and Cecil Nelson’s *World Englishes*), or proposing to develop a common core of English language across all varieties (see Jennifer Jenkins’ *Phonology of Language*; Andy Kirkpatrick’s “Which Model of English”; Barbara Seidlhofer’s “English as Lingua Franca”), or defending national language against the hegemonic influence of English (see Phillipson’s

*English Only Europe* and “English for Globalization”, and Joseph and Ramani’s “English in the World.”)<sup>3</sup>. As Suresh Canagarajah, in “Plurilingual Tradition,” Pennycook in “Translation,” and Kramsch in “Privilege” argue, they seem to ignore the fact that languages and cultures transform and are transformed by their interactions with other language practices due to various factors associated with language, including rhetorical and epistemological diversities. Similarly, while focusing on structural differences, they also ignore the role of individual practices in transforming language structures. Thus, they retain the traditional tendency of viewing languages as primarily governed by preexisting system or structures, thereby retaining the assumption about language fixity even when talking about language diversity.

Even the dominant notion of multilingualism suffers from the same problem. Though the dominant model of multilingualism, unlike monolingualism, does acknowledge the importance of different languages and cultures, in many cases, the general understanding of multilingualism is used to refer to separate competencies in two or more languages, as Canagarajah, Monica Heller, Pennycook, and Claire Kramsch, along with many other French, European and Asian plurilingual scholars, such as Moore and Gajo and Lachman Khubchandani, have said. In other words, languages are taken as discrete systems where the “the ultimate goal for language learning was to become, feel, and speak like an idealized native speaker” (Moore and Gajo 139). Hence, bilingualism and multilingualism become nothing more than the pluralization of monolingualism (Pennycook, *LLP 10*). Thus, the dominant notion of multilingualism, ignoring mediations

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<sup>3</sup> Similar critique can be found in Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu’s “Resisting monolingualism in ‘English’: reading and writing the politics of language.” Here, they argue that in all the three existing models—eradicationist, accommodationist, and SLA—they retain monolingual tradition of taking languages as separate and fixed.



across languages, adopts the same logic of instrumentalism as monolingualism, taking language as a set of decontextualized skills to fulfill certain ends. Therefore, this numerical version of multilingualism/bilingualism retains the dominant tendency to view languages as discrete and formal systems. In other words, additive multilingualism ignores the inevitability of “traffic” within, amongst, and between the artificial ideological boundaries separating languages, cultures and peoples.

In order to avoid monolingual assumptions of the traditional version of multilingualism, many linguistics such as Daniel Coste and Diana-Lee Simon, and Danièle Moore replace multilingualism with the notion of plurilingualism, where they argue that “the language competence of bilinguals should not be regarded as the simple sum of two monolingual competences, but should rather be appreciated in conjunction with the user’s repertoire of total linguistic resources” (Moore and Gajo 139). In contrast to an additive model of multilingualism where multilingualism merely means two or more separate monolingualisms, plurilingualism “allows for the interaction and mutual influence of the language in a more dynamic way (Canagarajah “Multilingual Strategies”, 7). The plurilinguals take the difference built into the linguistic habitus as resources. However, with its overemphasis on resources, in an attempt to counter monolingual hegemony, this approach “concentrates on the individual rather than the community as its angle of vision” (Moore and Gajo 141) and places more emphasis on the individual as a “social actor, with agency and choice” (150).

Their static view of resources, their focus on individual choice and purpose, and their emphasis on metalinguistic awareness go quite well with their human-centric view of agency where agency is taken as the capacity to employ resources with deliberate

intention and an understanding of kairotic moment (static notion of context). Such a tendency of locating competence in individuals and identifying some individuals as specifically “translinguals” illustrates the tendency of taking language away from practice as understood in a broader perspective of material ecology. The tendency to advocate code-meshing as a special ability of some multilinguals/translinguals, that is, the tendency of fetishizing specific strategies, abstracts language from everyday practice. It seems that plurilingual theorists’ concern to debunk monolingualist ideology risks making code-meshing/shuttling between languages a specific competence for multilingual speakers, a competence that multilingual speakers need and want to transform and hone all the time.<sup>4</sup>

#### Technology, Writing, and Multimodality

English composition started discussing the role of digital technology in writing practices since the 1980s. With the developments in communication technologies and the need for people to communicate across cultures and geopolitical locations, increasing number of people have started producing texts combining a variety of modes. As a result, composing practices are becoming increasingly transmodal/multimodal. However, the dominant ideology within the academy and beyond is still monomodal. Similarly, an instrumentalist understanding is equally dominant, downplaying human aspects of technology: “Although institutions are investing in technology infrastructure and support at an astonishing rate... these investments are often driven by logics that fail to make

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<sup>4</sup> Even as Canagarajah critiques the Chomskian model of natural competence, he seems to have fallen victim to a similar model by assuming the expertise of multilingual speakers as a natural competence to be “honed by actual interaction.” It is quite different to think of a language repertoire as resources for multilingual speakers to tap into in confronting difficult communicative situations and to think of it as part of a natural competence applicable to all situations.

humanistic perspectives a central concern” (Selber 1). Monomodal ideology and instrumental views in a way go together with an ahistorical and asocial view of technology and modes.

To counter an instrumental view of technology and monomodal belief of literacy, scholars have developed critical (postcritical) and multimodal/multiliteracies approaches to composing practices. As Selfe and Selfe and Stuart Selber contend, an instrumentalist perspective, while eulogizing the “democratic” potential of technology, which Hawisher and Selfe call “rhetoric of technology,” ignores how it is embedded in social and ideological belief systems and can perpetuate and support “monoculturalism, capitalism, and pathologic thinking” (Selfe and Selfe 486). Instead, these scholars take technologies as “cultural artifacts embodying society’s values” (Hawisher and Selfe, “Rhetoric of Technology” 55).

Similar to Selfe and Selfe, and Hawisher and Selfe, Christina Haas, in her book *Writing Technology* and many other articles, also critiques instrumentalist and deterministic views of technology and contends: “An instrumentalist view of technology carries with it all the dangers of an autonomous theory of language” (21). Haas equates autonomous/apolitical views of language with instrumentalist views of technology.

To question and go beyond instrumentalist views of technology, these cultural critics of technology often emphasize the role of a “critical perspective” or “critical reflection” (see Hawisher and Selfe, and Selfe and Selfe) or “metacognition” (see Cope and Kalantzis) in order to demystify the ideological nature of computer interfaces and technological designs.

The problems of instrumental view of technology raised by critical literacy theorists are very real and significant. That taking technology merely as a neutral tool that in itself can liberate us can, as Cynthia Selfe says, “actually contribute to the ongoing problems of racism, sexism, poverty, and illiteracy” (referenced in Selber 12). However, taking technology as cultural artifacts embodying dominant ideological values without attending to how those dominant values are produced and reproduced, thereby transforming them, both by human and non-human agents, falls into the trap of another form of determinism, as practice theorists and Latour point out.

There is another, perhaps equally influential, and in many ways quite similar, tendency in computer and composition scholarship that critiques the ideology of monomodality and advocates the promotion of multimodal literacy/multiliteracies (see The New London Group; Kress and Van Leeuwen; Kress; Selfe; etc.). Gunther Kress, whose ideas have massive influence in discussions of digital literacy practices in composition, has developed a sophisticated theory of multimodality and calls for a “turn to the visual” (see “English in the Crossroad”). His major focus on multimodal literacy lies in his notion of distinct affordances of different modes depending on their internal materialities:

One of the present tasks of a social semiotic approach to multimodality is to describe the potentials and limitations for meaning which *inhere* [italics mine] in different modes. For that, it is essential to consider the *materiality* of modes. Speech uses the material of (human) sound; writing uses the material of graphic substance. There are things you can do with sound that you cannot do with graphic substance, either easily or at all; not even imitate all that successfully graphically. (“Reading Images” 112)

In other words, according to Kress, writing and image have their own unique affordances, and since our culture is becoming more and more visually dominated due to the rise of

digital technologies, it is necessary for us to think about what specific goals these different modes can accomplish better than the dominant mode of writing. In distinguishing print literacy from visual literacy, Kress and Theo van Leeuwen even go as far as developing a “grammar of visual design,” echoing the structuralist notion of language.

Similar to Kress, many other scholars like Diana George, Cynthia Selfe, and Bill Cope and Kalantzis emphasize encouraging and allowing students to use various modes in addition to writing. We can find a similar additive logic in Cope and Kalantzis’s notion that multimodality gives more agency and freedom to users as more modes offer greater potentials.

Despite greater potential of helping many students who practice alternative literacies, this dominant understanding of modality (and multimodality) risks iterating what Brian Street calls “autonomous model of multimodality,” taking modes as fixed and stable and assigning specific affordances to specific modes (“Future of ‘Social Literacies’” 32). Such a perspective abstracts one feature from a mode, for instance, spoken language, leaving out the ways in which, e.g., facial expressions and gestures, and the social positioning of the speakers/listeners, contribute to the meaning of the speech.

Both in critical literacy and multimodal literacies, mode is taken as discrete and stable. When we argue for an addition to or replacement of one mode by the other, we tend to accept the value attached to the mode by dominant beliefs, e.g., writing with linear argument or with verbal mode, while, in reality, it does have many dimensions and possibilities depending on the dispositions of the users and the material ecology. While a materialist focus on multimodal theory reifies modes from practices, critical literacy

reifies technology from practices by taking them as the by-product of dominant ideologies.

Both the theories of modality and that of language relations show some fundamental problems that are closely linked with mediation and agency. This dissertation will develop an alternative understanding of mediation based on cultural materialist theories and new materialist understandings of mediation. The insights from these theories will help us address the problems in theories of language relations and multimodality.

### Theoretical Background

The notion of mediation, as it is defined in recent philosophical accounts and social theories, undercuts the idea of reflection, the correspondence theory of language, or instrumentalist notions of technology/techniques. Among the theories that question functionalist, structuralist, and positivist notions of language, technology, and reality, I find practice theory(ies) particularly useful in describing the nature of mediation of human actions, including our writing practices. Therefore, I'll here briefly discuss some important ideas from practice theory scholars like Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Alastair Pennycook. I will also discuss Bruno Latour's actor network theory and ecopsychological theories of affordances to expand a practice theory notion of mediation and to incorporate material ecology into the equation. In other words, the new materialism of Latour and ecological theories of affordances can complement the theorization of micro-macro relations in practice theory. This theorization of mediation will help me offer an alternative way to rethink the relationships between language and technology in our current situation, which will redirect our attention to various social-

materiality of translingual and transmodal practices and linguistic and technological aspects of our writing practices.

### Cultural Materialist Theory of Practice

Raymond Williams both extends and critiques the materialist<sup>5</sup> understanding of orthodox Marxism. His major contribution lies in his rejection of abstraction and reductionism in both vulgar Marxism and other positivist theories of language and reality. He replaces the notion of reflection (whether used in Marxism or in realist/naturalist accounts) with mediation, drawing our attention from a static notion of reality to the dynamic relationship between human actions and socio-material processes. For him, mediation is an “active and substantial process,” and therefore, less abstracted than the idea of “reflection” (*Marxism and Literature* 99). Mediation, as such, transforms both social conditions and human actors. Another important concept that Williams complicates regarding mediation is determination, in a line similar to his critique of the notion of reflection.

He critiques the reductionism of orthodox Marxist ideas of determination where every human activity is a “direct or indirect expression of some preceding and controlling economic content” (*Marxism and Literature* 83) by redefining determination as “setting of limits” and “the exertion of pressures” (87). In other words, he takes determination also as enabling actions, thereby taking human “act of will and purpose” into account. However, such acts and purposes are limited by the existing and emerging socio-material conditions.

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<sup>5</sup> Here, I’m using the term materialist to refer to the Marxist focus on economic aspects of reality and their reversal of the relationship between mind and matter, ideas and socio-economic reality.

Social theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens expand Raymond Williams' critique of positivist theories of language and reality and his focus on "the material life processes as human activity," as well as Williams' rejection of reductionist orthodox Marxist notion of determination (96). In their case, their theories come as a response to the humanist notions of agency and the structuralist and poststructuralist emphasis on structural and discursive power. They focus on the dynamic interplay between agency and structure, where individual actions and social structures mutually presuppose, form, and transform each other.

Bourdieu questions the binary between subjectivism and objectivism, both the theories that "treat practice as mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions" and those that characterize practice as the product of "the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors" (OTP 73) by redefining the relations between agency and structure through his notion of habitus: "The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment . . . produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures. . . ." (OTP 72). His definition shows that *habitus* is largely stable or durable; it is structured by and, at the same time, structures the social practices. Furthermore, it does not presuppose deliberate intention of the actors.

Bourdieu introduces his notion of capital and field to further connect the individual with the social and to characterize the nature of social practices. These practices, in Bourdieu, are reproduced (and transformed) through the interplay between habitus, objective social structures of the fields, and individuals' access to the various



kinds of capital. What I found important in his practice theory is his emphasis on the embodied nature of beliefs and his consideration of spatial and temporal dimensions of practices. Similarly, his notion of habitus provides some insight into understanding the durability of dispositions about linguistic and other semiotic practices.

Anthony Giddens, similar to Bourdieu, critiques functionalists and structuralists for their overemphasis on objective structures at the cost of individual agents. His replacement of structure with the notion of *structuration*, which proposes the notion of “duality of structure,” helps him counter structuralist determinism: “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (*Constitution of Society* 25). Similar to Williams, he emphasizes process rather than stable state and views individuals as knowledgeable actors, though such knowledge and reflexivity largely remain within the structural properties of a system, thereby taking part in the reproduction of the system.

As in Bourdieu, in Giddens too, the possibilities for transformations are shown to be minimal, only, during special circumstances such as conflict or breakdown or the incompatibilities between interdependent systems of practices. At the micro level, Giddens sees possible transformations due to the unexpected effects of material conditions. Similarly, the tensions between interconnected practices can produce disjuncture and fissures in structural principles, with a potential to bring about large systemic changes.

Both Bourdieu and Giddens seem to have developed their theories with reference to more or less closed societies. Therefore, critics like Michel de Certeau and Arjun

Appadurai critique Bourdieu's habitus and Giddens' structuration. For de Certeau, the practice theories of Bourdieu and Giddens, similar to Foucault's theory of discourse, fail to see the possibilities of micro tactics of resistance. Arjun Appadurai also found theories of habitus and structuration problematic, especially in the context of the flow of semiotic resources, cultural texts, symbols, and people in a globalized context that "move[s] the glacial forces of habitus into the quickened beat of improvisations for large groups of people" (Appadurai 6). However, we should be very aware that diversifications in practices and improvisations in human activities do not necessarily mean equally diversifying and transforming experiences in one's habituses. Therefore, despite being partly problematic, Bourdieu and Giddens' notions of habitus and structuration still provide us important insights into the durability of beliefs despite transformations in practices.

Alastair Pennycook can be taken as an extension of the practice theories of Bourdieu and Giddens to the field of sociolinguistics with special attention to the processes of globalization. For him, language is a local practice where practice means the "meso-political space" "between the local and the global" (*Language as a Local Practice* 23). His major contribution lies in his theorization of agency in terms of relocalization of language use by individual agents where language becomes a "sedimented discourse" (46). His idea of language as a sedimented discourse and his notion that every repetition is different, or, in his words, "repetition is an act of difference" (36) helps us redefine creativity not merely in terms of deliberate acts of deviation from norms, but as a result of everyday acts of relocalization of language practices. Therefore, Pennycook helps us see language practices not as micro acts or the

results of macro forces, but as an activity mediating these two on a mesopolitical level. Similarly, it also helps us see creative language acts beyond abstracted notions of code-meshing or code mixing, in everyday language practice.

### New Materialist Theory of Bruno Latour

Bourdieu, Giddens, and Pennycook challenge humanism and structuralism, questioning the idea that either one of them determines the other. Bruno Latour can be taken as extending this trend by adding in the role of things/techniques/technology, or what he calls “missing masses,” in shaping our actions (see “Missing Masses), thereby redefining the notion of the social. Second, he contributes to practice theory by replacing determination with translation (see “Technical Mediation”).

Latour rejects the notion of the social as stable and homogeneous and redefines it as an assembly, collective, or a network of associations, thereby urging us to recognize the heterogeneities within what we often call social, whether in sociolinguistic, socio-economics, socio-cultural, etc:

In the alternative view, ‘social’ is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues cannot fix; it is *what* is glued together by many other type of connectors. Whereas sociologists (or socio-economists, socio-linguistists, social psychologists, etc.) take social aggregates as the given that could send some light on residual aspects of economics, linguistics, psychology, management, and so on, these other scholars, on the contrary, consider social aggregates as what should be explained by the specific *associations* provided by economics, linguistics, psychology, law, management, etc. (*Reassembling 5*)

So, despite Latour rejecting practice theory, he does extend and complement the practice theory notion of the social as the interplay between the individual and structure, but by

showing that structure actually is just an assembly of a heterogeneous mix of humans and non-human agents, contributing to the mediation of what we call social practices.

Similarly, in his accounts of mediation, he rejects materialist<sup>6</sup>, humanist, and social determinisms, and takes mediation as translation, that is, transformation of the goals of our actions in a complex ecology of human and non-human mediators. The full force of his theory comes with the combination of these two tenets, his redefinition of the social and his replacement of determination with translation. This can be seen in his description of his new materialist theory with what he calls ANT, but which, for him, suggests, not so much actor network theory, but more as an ant, ant in its slow, laborious, muddy walk, exploring the every traces of the agents, both obvious and missing, rather than a “bird’s eye view” of the social where we take account of larger social aspects like political history or economic condition.

#### Eco-Psychological Theory of Affordances

While talking about technology and languages, many multimodal theorists as well as some language researchers have used the notion of affordances. But as I’ll show later, almost all of them use it in what Latour calls a materialist way, i.e., taking affordances as properties of the objects/environment (in our case, modes/technologies/languages). I find it useful to draw from eco-psychological theories that have extensively discussed the notion of affordances to relate the notion of affordances to technologies, including languages.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, materialist refers to the tendency of assigning the agency behind any change solely to the materiality of technique or tool. It is different from cultural materialism where material expands to include socio-economic conditions shaping cultural practices.

Gibson was the first theorist who defined affordances. He defined affordances of an environment as “what it offers the animal, what it provides or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. . . . I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment” (127). Gibson’s definition accounts for the animal-relative nature of the affordances of the environment. With a slight revision, later eco-psychologists such as T. Stoffregen regard affordances as “emergent” dispositional properties of an animal-environment system: “I argue that affordances are properties of the animal-environment system, that is, that they are emergent properties that do not inhere in either the environment or the animal” (Stoffregen 115).

Anthony Chemero slightly advances Stoffregen’s definition of affordances by rejecting his notion of affordances as property. Chemero asserts: “I argue that affordances are not properties of the environment; indeed, they are not even properties. Affordances, I argue, are relations between particular aspects of animals and particular aspects of situations” (184). He further says that “affordances are features of the whole situations” (185). Though Stoffregen’s and Chemero’s definitions seem quite similar in that both assume affordances as emergent and both reject it to be a property of any single component in animal-environment unit. However, Chemero’s use of the term “features,” rather than “properties,” his notion of affordances as relations, and his use of the term “situations” in place of a “system” mark a clear break from Stoffregen’s view. Though Chemero does not clearly state that he includes factors other than animal and environment in what he calls situations, we can extend it to mean not only the perceiver

and the object or the environment, but also their relationships with other things both physically present and absent in the situations.

Here, the point that I'm trying to highlight is that affordances are not the *inherent* properties of an object or the environment. First, it is relative to the perceiver, especially in terms of what Bourdieu would call habitus that tells her to take the object/environment as something, not something else, thereby also co-constituting the individual observer herself. Second, it depends on the whole situation, where it includes not only the object (mode, medium, etc.) and the perceiver (readers/viewers), but also the overall situation where the action or the perception takes place. From this point of view, affordances of images or words depend not only on the features of them, but also on the relations of them with other objects/things around them and the viewer/reader. As it is relative to the audience/readers/viewers, the affordance of something can be quite different at various situations. It often depends on the dispositions of the perceiver, his/her *habitus* that comes from the sedimentation of his reading and writing patterns.

### Problem Area

From the brief review of literature on multimodal literacies and multilingual/plurilingual approaches, we can see that literacy studies is also moving in a direction quite similar to language studies, whether in applied linguistics or in composition: they both question hierarchization of languages or modes and highlight the importance of seeing our students as “designers” and critics of meaning making rather than mere imitators of conventions. However, while critiquing the dominant ideologies, many multimodal and multilingual studies often ignore the constructed nature of modes and languages. Similarly, in both multilingual and multimodal accounts, we still seem to

adopt an additive model, focusing on “multiple” rather than exploring the transactions across various modes, as we have started seeing in translingual studies. Such additive models, as Yasemin Yildiz contends about the postmonolingual condition, unwittingly perpetuate monolingual and monomodal beliefs despite their attempts to resist such ideologies. The central question then is: how can we overcome such problematic characterizations of linguistic and other semiotic practices?

Similarly, as composition is and has become more and more interdisciplinary, we may need to explore more what we can learn from the insights from both multimodal/transmodal studies and multilingual/translingual studies. The exigency of such research and practice is becoming more prominent in the context of the rising interactions across languages not only in writing and speech but also in various modes. Similarly, the WPA outcome statement’s focus on encouraging use of different modes and the Council of Europe’s explicit policy of plurilingualism also mark the importance of this kind of research in our field. In exploring the issues of multimodality and multilingualism, instead of separating the study of language from that of modality, or vice versa, it is important to study them as aspects of the same writing/communication ecology, examining the transactions across various modes and/or languages and translations of meanings. Similarly, it is also equally important to examine why certain modes/languages are associated with specific functions/purposes (writing with verbal or visual or temporal; images as visual as opposed to verbal, etc) and how we could also encourage alternative potentials of those modalities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I’m using modality and language as separate only as they have been used that way. But in reality, language has several modal dimensions, while, at the same time, it is part of the multimodal communication practices.

Towards that direction, I attempt to bridge the gap between discussions of multimodality and multilingualism/translingualism in composition scholarship by examining multilingual and multimodal relations and theorizing them in terms of mediation in general and socio-technical mediation in particular. The project involves a selective study and critique of the ways in which multimodality and language relations have been discussed and theorized in composition and other allied fields. Based on my reading of the literature, I argue that the current body of literature on multimodality rests on a few problematic assumptions: a) modes/technologies/languages have some inherent affordances, b) they are separate, stable, and fixed with discrete potentials, c) users have a control over what they want to do with multimodal or multilingual resources (thus their focus on metacognition, metadiscursive or metalinguistic awareness). Similarly, there are a few assumptions that require careful scrutiny in theories of language relations: a) it often abstracts language from practices and makes generalizations without paying sufficient attention to micro-macro agents of mediation, b) it romanticizes the agency of multilingual users, ignoring the constraints they often have to struggle against, c) its notion of resources is static.

Responding to the calls by Horner, Lockridge, and Selfe and by many other language and literacy theorists for exploring ways to bridge the gap between multimodal and translingual scholarship, I will try to show that reconceptualizing mediation from the perspectives of a cultural materialist theory of practice and new materialist theory, where mediation is not limited to human agents and social structure, but is understood in terms of the complex material ecology of practice, can help us go beyond narrow divisions between different modalities and between language and modality.



## An Outline of the Chapters

*Chapter One:* This chapter introduces my topic and the discussions around issues of multilingualism and multimodality. It provides a brief overview of the literature on both studies of language relations and that of multimodality. Then, it summarizes the major theoretical approaches on mediation, especially from cultural materialist and new materialist perspectives that I will be using throughout the dissertation, including the practice theories of Bourdieu, Giddens, and Pennycook, and new materialism of Bruno Latour. The chapter will end with a brief overview of the problem statement.

*Chapter Two:* This chapter reviews theories of mediation in detail, which will be used for the analysis of language practices in Chapter Three and multimodality in Chapter Four. Here, I present cultural materialist theories of materialism and phenomenological theories of materialism, moving at the end to the possible ways to bring them together for the better understanding of communicative practices.

*Chapter Three:* This chapter examines theories of language relations and offers an alternative approach to understand negotiation of language difference. In examining different language models, it particularly focuses on how monolingual tenets persist even in theories that came as a reaction to and call for resisting monolingual ideology. After critiquing models such as ELF, World Englishes, multilingualism, and plurilingualism, this chapter offers what I call a mesodiscursive approach to language difference.

*Chapter Four:* I examine and critique theories of multimodality and technology in composition and other related fields and offer alternative ways of viewing multimodality. After providing a background to the discussions of technological mediation and

multimodality, this chapter examines some important views on multimodal composition and their problematic assumptions about various modes and their affordances.

*Chapter Five:* I'll develop an alternative way of viewing translingual and transmodal relations in an integrated way. After exploring overlaps and divergences, I will develop a perspective for better understanding of such overlaps. This chapter ends with the discussion of some pedagogical implications of rethinking linguistic and other semiotic practices from a new materialist theory of practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRACTICE THEORIES OF MEDIATION: OVERCOMING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN CULTURAL MATERIALISM AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL MATERIALISM

*No place dominates enough to be global and no place is self-contained enough to be local. As long as we try to use either local interaction or structure, or some compromise between the two, there is no chance to trace social connections—and the cleverer the compromise, the worse it would be, since we would simply extend the lease of two non-existing sites. On the contrary, I am trying here to be as dumb as possible and multiply the clamps to make sure we resist the temptation to cut away in two boxes—global and local—what actors are doing, interrupting at once the deployment of their many fragile and sometimes bizarre itineraries. (Latour, Reassembling 204)*

The nature of writing is changing as a result of a variety of factors including new developments in digital technologies and cross-linguistic practices. How do we understand those differences in writing practices and continuation of what Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge call SL/MN ideology in the way writing is understood in the academy and outside? Many of us and our students today participate in writing practices, either as writers or readers, that go beyond traditional notion of writing as print-based and monolingual. Scholars in composition have developed theories of multimodality and multilingualism separately, but there have been very few attempts at studying the recent changes in writing comprehensively and learning from each other. One fundamental reason behind that could be a limited theorization of the notion of mediation. Therefore,

in this chapter, I look into how materialist theories of mediation, both old and new, can provide us some ways to rethink our writing practices and pedagogical methods, especially in abstracting languages and modalities, treating them as stable categories, and ignoring material social factors affecting their use. I am using the theoretical lens of mediation to approach both the obvious differences and underlying intersections between studies of multimodality and those of multilingualism because I see that the long-standing gap between these two fields and their characterization of languages and modalities as discrete and stable seem to have their basis in their limited and problematic theoretical assumptions about agency and mediation.

The word mediation has come to mean several things, from an act of reconciling two opposite sides, acting as a tool for transfer of meaning or message, dividing things into two equal halves, to an act of reflection (Williams, *Key Words* 204). It has been problematic ever since we started deliberating on human actions and the factors shaping such actions, far before philosophers we have come to know discussed the relationships between language, authorship, work of art, and the world (Plato, Aristotle, and Panini). In our modern history, we see variations of two major trends that have remained in place in different forms: a) assuming human actions as solely shaped or determined by the intention and will of the actor and b) seeing social systems (taken as stable and homogeneous) as the determiner of all human actions, turning individuals to mere pawns. Despite these two trends being two completely opposed perspectives, they do share a fundamental problem, i.e., taking mediation as a linear phenomenon. And various manifestations of such tendencies are dominant in our field of rhetoric and composition even today. In most of these, the major problem is that of abstraction, either separating

composition as a product and composition as an activity from everything else, or separating the context from the messy relationships within and outside, thereby reducing the inherent heterogeneities and disjunctions into a homogeneous entity. Such tendencies can be seen in studies of language relation in their treatment of one language from its material social practice, thereby taking languages as discrete systems, free from the individual language acts. A similar tendency can be found in the studies of multimodality; that is the tendency not only to separate and reify modalities, but also to separate various modes from the complex interrelationships with what we traditionally call mode of writing or speech. To avoid such problems, we need to expand our notion of mediation to develop a more nuanced alternative, especially the one that tries to explore any act, of writing or communication, in its complex ecology of relations and material social practices. Here, I will discuss notion of mediation from materialist perspectives, the refinement of which can offer us productive ways to address differences in writing practices. I will particularly focus on expanding materialist theories of practice, both Marxist and phenomenological, with special attention to theorists like Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Alastair Pennycook on the one hand, and Martin Heidegger and Bruno Latour, on the other.

Though the roots of practice theory go at least as far back as to Aristotle's discussion of *praxis* and *techne*, in modern times, it is often referenced back to Karl Marx's overturning of idealist metaphysics, especially as he challenged "centuries of Western rationalist and mentalist tradition" and established the legitimacy of "real activity, what 'sensuous' people actually do in their everyday life, as an object of consideration and as an explanatory category in social sciences" (Nicolini 29). It was the

materialist trajectory that Marx gave to intellectualist traditions of the West that set up a ground for understanding human actions based on their life in the world, not in their mind alone: “[the various aspects of law] assert themselves without entering the consciousness of the participants and can themselves be abstracted from daily practice only through laborious, theoretical investigation” (qtd. in Nicolini 32). Similar to the Marxist line of thought, phenomenological tradition, beginning with Martin Heidegger (or some say Friedrich Nietzsche), also challenged idealist notions of language and reality and focused on the role of embodiment and the embeddedness of human work. So, in this chapter, I will trace these two trajectories in terms of their focus on practice and material processes and see if we could find productive ways to utilize the strengths of both.

#### Cultural Materialism and Practice Theory

Despite initiating the materialist understanding of human actions, orthodox Marxism remained largely reductive. As Raymond Williams claims in *Marxism and Literature*, “the usual consequence of the base-superstructure formula, with its specialized and limited interpretations of productive forces and of the process of determination, is a description—even at times a theory—of art and thought as ‘reflection’” (95). Therefore, what is problematic in orthodox Marxism (what Williams calls mechanical materialism), similar to the intellectual tradition it came to counter, is its tendency to characterize art/literature/language/writing/work as reflection, truthful or distorted, echoing idealist theory of mimesis (Platonic tradition/Romantic tradition, etc.) and the nineteenth and twentieth century positivist theories of language and reality. To avoid that problem, Williams replaces the term reflection with mediation, thereby replacing the tendency of seeing the “world as object” and “excluding activity, with that

of “seeing the material life process as human activity” (96). Mediation here was intended to describe an active process:

To the extent that it indicates an active and substantial process, ‘mediation’ is always the less alienated concept. In its modern development it approaches the sense of inherent constitutive consciousness, and is in any case important as an alternative to simple reductionism, in which every real act or work is methodically reduced back to an assumed primary category, usually specified (self-specified) as ‘concrete reality’. (*Marxism and Literature* 99)

In other words, replacement of reflection with mediation might help us overcome the reductive tendency in orthodox Marxism and recognize the co-constitutive role of the act of mediation and the processes and conditions it mediates. However, he is also aware about the possible complication in using the term mediation:

But when the process of mediation is seen as positive and substantial, as a necessary process of the making of meanings and values, in the necessary form of the general social process of signification and communication, it is really only a hindrance to describe it as ‘mediation’ at all. For the metaphor takes us back to the very concept of the ‘intermediacy’, which, at its best, this constitutive and constituting sense rejects. (*Marxism and Literature* 99-100)

Williams is complicating the term *mediation* so that it overcomes the problematic meaning it tends to suggest despite it replacing the term reflection. Mediation, by its very name, seems to suggest the very duality it wanted to avoid. But its positive and constitutive sense, as Williams claims, largely rejects that customary meaning by reminding us how such mediating activity not only transforms the possible consequences, but also what it intended to mediate, thereby blurring the boundaries between the activity of mediation, objective reality and its processes, and the product of mediation.

Williams extends his discussion of mediation with his reconceptualization of the Marxist notion of determination. Orthodox Marxism is generally reductive, seeing every

cultural activity as “a direct or indirect expression of some preceding and controlling economic content, or of a political content determined by an economic position or situation” (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 83). In other words, they took determination to mean “setting of limits,” the limits of a particular mode of production, with a clear suggestion that social change is possible only through a complete overhaul of the existing economic and social structures. Williams expands the notion of determination to include not only “setting of limits” but also “the exertion of pressures,” where to determine also means “to do something [as] an act of will and purpose” (87). Here, what individuals do are, however, “always social acts” (87). Therefore, for Williams,

‘society’ is then never only the dead husk which limits social and individual fulfillment. It is always also a constitutive process with very powerful pressures which are both expressed in political, economic, and cultural formations and, to take the full weight of ‘constitutive’, are internalized and become ‘individual wills’. Determination of this whole kind—a complex and interrelated process of limits and pressures—is in the whole social process itself and nowhere else: not in an abstracted ‘mode of production’ nor in an abstracted ‘psychology’. Any abstraction of determinism, based on the isolation of autonomous categories, which are seen as controlling or which can be used for prediction, is then a mystification of the specific and always related determinants which are the real social process—an active and conscious as well as, by default, a passive and objectified historical experience. (88)

Though Williams does not elaborate his constitutive notion of determination that much, it somewhat resembles a more systematic discussion of the dynamic relationship between agency and structure in Bourdieu and Giddens’s practice theory. In Williams, society no more remains a static, “dead” structure, but is rather a dynamic and complex process, both setting limits and enabling actions. Furthermore, his notion of determination, as with his notion of mediation, rejects abstraction and isolation whether of human action (art/



writing/language) or social reality. What orthodox Marxists call “objective social structures,” for Williams, therefore, shape and are shaped by social processes, which presuppose individual actions. The tendency of creating autonomous categories, with fixed self-governing internal rules, is nothing but mystification.

In the same vein, Williams also counters structural Marxist ideas of overdetermination despite its complication of the notion of determination by acknowledging the role of multiple factors determining human actions. He does agree that overdetermination avoids the Marxist tendency of reducing everything to base and superstructure where base structure is again reduced to relations and means of production. But at the same time, it maintains relatively autonomous character of practices: “As with ‘determination’, so ‘overdetermination’ can be abstracted to a structure (symptom), which then, in complex ways, ‘develops’ ... by the laws of its internal structural relations. As a form of analysis this is often effective, but in its isolation of the structure it can shift attention from the real location of all practice and practical consciousness: ‘the practical activity ... the practical process of development of men’” (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 88). Their continued focus on internal structures and their isolation of such structures from fluid and ever changing practices make them fall victim to the same economism that they tried to avoid. As he hints at, we often tend to sacrifice complexity for the sake of analytical effectiveness and efficiency.

What we find most useful in Williams is his opposition to the tendency of abstraction: abstracting structures from practices, taking categories in their isolation, and therefore, failing to see the continuous processes of change despite durability of social formations in some forms. This focus on practices and his challenge to the tendency of

creating a dichotomy between structures and human actions is similar to Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens' critique of functionalism and structuralism in their dissolution of such binaries.

Practice theory, in its initial phase, is often associated primarily with Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu. Their social theory is often called social praxeology, which assumes social life as contingent and ever changing. Their study of social phenomena centers around the dynamic relationship between social structures and practices. Similar to Raymond Williams, Bourdieu and Giddens make everyday human actions and social and economic pressures that shape such actions their main subject of study.

Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu respond to humanist notions of agency and the structuralist and poststructuralist emphasis on structural and discursive power subjecting individuals to its norms by emphasizing the dynamic interplay between agency and structure. In their accounts, human activities, including our language practices, are mediated by the dynamic relationship between individual agency and social structure, where individual actions and social structures mutually presuppose, form, and transform each other, as interdependent and co-constitutive.

Bourdieu's materialist theory of praxis combines a phenomenological understanding of human actions with social and economic considerations from Marxist thought. In his attempt to counter existing dualisms, between agency and structure/individual and society, he develops a robust theory of praxis where his notions of habitus, capital, and fields<sup>8</sup> play central roles.

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<sup>8</sup> While Bourdieu's connection of habitus with the field is very important to show how seemingly individual is inherently social. But his notion of field itself is abstracted in its obliteration of the concrete materiality of the field and the heterogeneities within it.

He rejects all theories that “treat practice as mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of pre-established assemblies, ‘models’ or ‘roles’” and also those theories that characterize practice as the product of “the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors” (OTP 73). He does so by redefining structure not as a set of preexisting “rules,” or “system,” or all-encompassing Discourse governing every human activity, but as patterns or regularities emerging out of constant interaction between objective social structures and habitus. He defines habitus thus:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment . . . produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (OTP 72)

Here are a few things from his definition of *habitus*: that it is largely stable or durable; it is structured by and structures the social practices; it regulates and is regulated by the regular patterns of actions and behaviors; and it does not presuppose conscious intention of the actors or the conductors. He thus humanizes and historicizes structure while also socializing agency. Similarly, his concept of habitus is “capable of connecting recursively the individual/subjective and intuitional/objective dimensions” (Nicolini 55).

With the habitus, Bourdieu dissolves mind/body dichotomy as, for him, habitus refers to “a set of mental dispositions, bodily schemas, and know-how operating at a pre-conscious level, that once activated by events, fields generate practice” (Nicolini 55). In

other words, habitus is a form of knowing in practice, something like a feel of the game. The development of habitus occurs through our daily repetitive activities without our conscious thought. In this sense, Bourdieu's conception of habitus is similar to what Polanyi calls tacit knowledge or Merleau Ponty calls embodied knowledge.

However, Bourdieu's theory is different from Merleau-Ponty's, Polanyi's, and other phenomenological theories of tacit knowledge because of his strong focus on social and material dimensions. Bourdieu's notion of habitus, unlike otherwise similar phenomenological constructs, is in a co-constitutive relationship with the social structure representing specific material conditions of existence that characterize a class or social group. This way, the habitus links individual conduct with a particular milieu, making seemingly individual activity inherently social. Individuals engage in the practices that continuously reproduce social conditions. This focus on material condition and specific social class is what clearly distinguishes him from phenomenological theorists.

In connecting the social to the individual, Bourdieu, as stated earlier, introduces two other forces—capital and field. And habitus produces practice through its interaction with various types of capital and field. With his focus on these forces, he becomes able to account for the role of power relations and structural properties of specific fields in generating practice and affecting the habitus of the individuals in recursive manner. It is therefore important to see the interactions between these three forces (habitus, capital, and field) to understand the nature of actual practice.

For Bourdieu, fields are partially autonomous and are governed by their own internal norms, values, and recognitions. But it works in recursive relation with the habitus. That means, individuals' participation in a field shapes the habitus, which, after

being activated, reproduces the field. It is also equally important to consider how individual's actions are shaped by habitus, which "only operates in relation with the state of the field and on the basis of the possibilities of action granted by the capital associated with the position" (Nicolini 60). And capital for Bourdieu goes beyond mere economic resources: "A general science of the economy of practices that does not artificially limit itself to those practices that are socially recognized as economic must endeavor to grasp capital, that 'energy of social physics' ... in all of its different forms...I have shown that capital presents itself under three fundamental species (each with its own subtypes), namely, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital" (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Wacquant 118-119). Because of the interaction of these three forces, actions of individuals are mostly similar to, while also being different, from the members of the same class.

Such an understanding of habitus means that it is a group or class phenomenon that in some way harmonizes the practices of those in the same class or group without their conscious awareness:

The practice of the members of the same group or, in a differentiated society, the same class, is always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish because, as Leibniz says, following only (his) own laws, each nonetheless agrees with each other. The habitus...inscribed in bodies by identical histories...is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination. (Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique* 59, qtd. in Nicolini 60)

However, due to the variations in the accumulation of capital and its value, habitus never produces the exact same practice; each individual develops a recognizably different trajectory. In Wittgenstein's words, their habituses have family resemblance.

The dynamics between variation and conformity leads to whether individuals act consciously and deliberately, making their own choices out of various options available or creating their own trajectory. For Bourdieu, people are both conscious and not so conscious, making “moves and acting strategically,” but “unaware that their motives, goals and aspirations are not spontaneous or natural, but are given to them through habitus” (Webb and Schirato 58). In other words, what they think as their conscious choice is but their “misrecognition” (Bourdieu, *Logic* 106). However, Bourdieu does see some possibility of conscious actions that can go beyond the strong boundaries set by their own habitus, but only during times of crisis and social breakdown.

Bourdieu does offer a systematic theory of the relationship between social practices that people participate in and the objective structures of the field(s), theorizing the persistence of traditional values and systems of domination. However, his theory, as De Certeau and Arjun Appadurai claim, seems to find it hard to overcome the charge of determinism for its overemphasis on the powerful constraints habitus poses on the possibilities of conscious and strategic human actions. He does see some space for conscious choice, but only during times of “exceptional crisis ...when rules are in flux” (Burawoy 201). As Burawoy claims, ground reality can often contradict with “palpable transparency of exploitation” (201). In other words, a perfect match between habitus and material reality in the field might be a little unrealistic.

Bourdieu theorizes practices primarily in terms of a class-based and relatively more closed society than ours today; and therefore, his theory still looks somewhat deterministic in a certain sense. However, he does talk about overlapping fields and the resultant recognitions and misrecognitions, leading to social transformations. We can

extend his theory in our context to try to match it with the more fractured and disjunctive societies today, going beyond his notion of class to include other issues including geopolitical difference, gender, race, nationality etc.

Similar to Bourdieu, the major contribution of Anthony Giddens lies in his theory of structuration, through which he sought to overcome the binary of structure and agency. He maintains that functionalists like Parsons and structuralists like Saussure and Levi-Strauss had put overemphasis on objective structures at the cost of individual agents, whereas the humanists did the opposite, undermining the role of structure and overestimating the place of individual agents. In order to counter structuralist determinism, Giddens proposes the notion of “duality of structure,” by which he means that “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (*Constitution of Society* 25). Here structure and agency presuppose and constitute each other rather than being opposed to each other. In other words, he combines “two traditionally opposed sensitivities: the attention for the intentional and meaningful conduct of human actors, and a consideration of the constraints that limit the possibility of action” (Nicolini 44). Similar to Williams, Giddens is also both drawing on, expanding, and problematizing Marx’s famous dictum that human beings make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing (Giddens, *Constitution of Society* 7).

Giddens tries to overcome the traditional boundaries between subjectivist and objectivist tendencies by developing a social theory of structuration, “a theory of recursive production and reproduction of society as *praxis*, in which the question of what comes first becomes meaningless and dissolves” (Nicolini 45). His use of a neologism,

“structuration,” implying the use of an intransitive verb in place of a noun, suggests that, in his account, structure is not a stable *state* but a continuous *process*.

By emphasizing process, with his replacement of structure with structuration, and by making knowledgeable actors necessary part of perpetuating and transforming structures that organize practices, Giddens tries to avoid possibility of being seen as deterministic, turning agents into structural dupes. However, at the same time, agents’ reflexivity is part of their practical consciousness, the knowledge with which they draw resources from the structural properties of a system and contribute towards its reproduction.

Therefore, structures for him are not dead husks, they have both a virtual and actual existence; that it is both non-temporal and non-spatial: “According to the theory of structuration, an understanding of social systems as situated in time-space can be effected by regarding structure as non-temporal and non-spatial, as *a virtual order of differences* produced and reproduced in social interaction as its medium and outcome” (Giddens, *Central Problems* 3). Here, structure is not something that is out there existing at a particular time and space; rather it is a memory trace that develops through sedimentation across time and in relation to different spaces. Giddens says, “Structures do not exist in time-space, except in the moments of the constitution of social systems. But we can analyze how ‘*deeply-layered*’ structures are in terms of the historical duration of practices they recursively organize, and the spatial ‘breadth’ of those practices: how widespread they are across a range of interactions. The most deeply layered practices constitutive of social systems in each of these senses are *institutions*” (65).



Referring to a common practice of talking about structure in terms of the rules of chess as isolated from context, Giddens says, “Nowhere in the philosophical literature, to my knowledge, are either the history of chess (which has its origin in warfare), or actual games of chess, made the focus of study” (*Central Problems* 65). The most important thing that we can draw from his discussion of structure is that we can never talk about rules isolated from layers of history and their real practices. So, structure is an emergent property of action as much as action presupposes structure. The actuality of structure lies only in its instantiation in action. Like what Bourdieu says about the transposability of habitus, for Giddens, structures can be conceived as generalizable and transposable to other situations.

In Giddens, one important aspect of structure is that it involves not only rules but also resources, both human and non-human (authoritative and allocative, resembling Bourdieu’s division of capital). And it is because of the combination of rules and resources that individuals can “make a difference” or “intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention” (*The Constitution of Society* 14).

Giddens brings the issue of power through his notion of resources. For him, practices are “regularized types of acts” (*Constitution of Society* 75), where they are “produced by knowledgeable actors who draw on rules (codes and norms) and resources (material and symbolic)” (Nicolini 46). Here “resources are the main medium through which power manifests itself and is exercised. Paying tribute to his Weberian legacy, Giddens interprets power as the capacity of mobilizing people and things in the efforts of producing some effect in the world: power is the capacity to make a difference” (Nicolini 46). Resources include both authoritative and allocative, the former akin to Bourdieu’s

notion of social capital whereas the latter aligns with economic capital. In his non-orthodox use of the notion of power, he takes into account the capacity of individuals accorded to them by material and symbolic resources. However, these resources are mobilized in conjunction with the rules of the game. In other words, while rules and resources make certain kinds of actions and practices possible, and certain others remotely so, Giddens does see plenty of space for agents to act strategically in accordance with their desires and interests. However, such actions are also limited in some ways by the possibilities and alternatives afforded by the system (Giddens, *Central Problems* 166).

In Giddens' account of social practices, to some extent similar to Bourdieu, agents' discursive understanding of their material and social condition and the possibility of acting beyond the limitations of the system or against them seem very hard. There are two possible conditions: one, during special circumstances such as conflict or breakdown; two incompatibilities between interdependent systems of practices often working in tandem. As Nicolini says,

The interconnection among practices thus becomes the source of both stability and change, so that practices are at the same time the locus of ordering and reproduction and the locus of disordering and mis-production. Conceiving human beings as knowledgeable actors who draw on rules and resources for the carrying out of their activity and achievement of their aims implies that necessary feature of action is its partial indeterminacy. (48)

Thus, Giddens sees the sources of changes in the micro level, i.e., in the context in which practices are reproduced, with a possible transformation due to the unexpected effects of materials conditions. Similarly, the tensions between interconnected practices can

produce disjuncture and fissures in structural principles, with a potential to bring about large systemic changes.

In theorizing agency and structure to understand social practices, Giddens is slightly different from Bourdieu. Giddens says, “every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member” (5).

He also distinguishes this practical consciousness from discursive consciousness:

More significant for the arguments developed in this book are differences between practical consciousness, as tacit stocks of knowledge which actors draw upon in the constitution of social activity, and what I call ‘discursive consciousness’, involving knowledge which actors are able to express on the level of discourse. All actors have some degree of *discursive penetration* of the social systems to whose constitution they contribute. (*Central Problems* 5)

But he believes that actors can have such discursive consciousness only at some critical moments. However, it is for the same reason, several critics like Callinicos find Giddens, in an attempt to challenge structuralist and functionalist reduction of human agents into structural dupes, moving more towards “the pole of agency” (144).

However, it is for the reason almost contrary to the one used to critique Giddens, that some critics find Bourdieu’s theory still largely deterministic. Though it seems that Giddens’s and Bourdieu’s redefinition of structure as made up of both rules (for Bourdieu, strategies) and resources avoids both material and ideal determinisms, Bourdieu’s habitus, for many, tends to (Giddens’ structure is less so) “retain[s] precisely the agent-proof quality that the concept of the duality of structure is supposed to overcome” (Swell 15). As Bourdieu says, “As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those

conditions and no others (*OTP* 95). In Bourdieu's scheme, social transformation seems quite remote. Giddens, due to the different levels of access to and different amount of the accumulation of resources by agents, theorizes recursive repetition of structure as transformation. However, he also does not envision a society as more fractured and consisting of complexly intersecting and conflicting layers of ideologies and practices. In other words, both of them seem to have developed their theories with reference to more or less closed societies (even in seemingly closed societies there are different sets of discourses).

It is for a similar reason that Michel de Certeau finds Bourdieu's habitus and Giddens' structuration problematic. For him, the practice theories of Bourdieu and Giddens, similar to Foucault's theory of discourse, fail to see the possibilities of micro tactics of resistance. For Bourdieu, practices are largely driven by habitus, whereas for Certeau, human beings are conscious agents who can "navigate among the rules, play with all the possibilities offered by traditions, make use of one tradition rather than another, compensate for one by means of another." They are capable of "taking advantage of the flexible surface which covers up the hard core, they create their own relevance in this network" (Certeau 54). The societies that Bourdieu studied did go through serious upheavals, where Certeau could see many instances of conscious and tactical practices of resistances that local people were engaged in, where as Bourdieu, perhaps due to the habitus he developed through his own theory and research, and partly due to the overwhelming presence of colonial ideology influencing the local people in Algerian society, did not see those acts as displaying inventiveness and strategic awareness beyond what their habitus allowed them.

In a similar line, Arjun Appadurai also questioned theories of habitus and tacit knowledge, especially in the context of the effects of globalization on individual habituses. Appadurai thinks that the flow of semiotic resources, cultural texts, symbols, and people in a globalized context works to “move the glacial forces of habitus into the quickened beat of improvisations for large groups of people” (Appadurai 6). Appadurai analyzes the global circulation of texts and discourses to argue that people mix and mesh available resources to produce hybrid texts and identities. The possibility of instantly sharing knowledge, information, and resources in the world today perhaps supports what Appadurai says about the process of glocalization. However, we should be very aware that diversifications in practices and improvisations in human activities do not necessarily mean equally diversifying and transforming experiences in one’s habituses. In other words, one problem that Arjun Appadurai and many language theorists as well make is to see a synergy between practices and habituses/perceptions<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, despite being partly problematic, Bourdieu and Giddens’ notions of habitus and structurations have not lost their relevance and importance even in the present context.

Alastair Pennycook extends the practice theories of Bourdieu and Giddens in light of recent developments. In other words, Pennycook tries to develop a practice theory of language considering what Appadurai calls glocalization. His *Language as a Local Practice* comes out of the application of the theory of practice to language. In other words, he develops a linguistic theory of practice where he defines language not as a system but as a practice. By practice he means “bundles of activities that are organized into coherent ways of doing things” (25). In this view structure emerges as a coherent

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<sup>9</sup> I will elaborate this in the discussions of language theories and theories of modalities in the following chapters.

ways of acting through repeated activities. This view of language echoes what Bourdieu and Giddens say about structure, which is nothing but the product of the continual interplay between habitus and social practices. The central tenet in Pennycook, similar to what Bourdieu and Giddens think, is that language/social structure is a dynamic thing that perpetuates through repetitive activities of language users. Then the question is how does he account for agency in this repetitive nature of language practice?

For Pennycook, human agents are neither completely determined nor fully free. It is these individuals who give continuity to language practices mediating between the macro space of, in Bourdieu's terms, "objective structures," and the micro space of individual actions. Language practices that individuals engage in are "in a sense, the new discourse, the new way of describing that level of mediating social activity where we do things both because we want to and along lines laid down by habit, propriety, cultural norms or political dictates. It is therefore useful to explore the *meso-political* space of practice that lies between the local and the global" (emphasis added, 23). In other words, he is using practice as a middle term between big-D Discourse (invoking J. P. Gee's distinction), meaning "abstraction of world view," and little-d discourse, implying "everyday language use" and "asks how they connect, how this meso-political level organizes local activity in relation to broader social, cultural or historical organization" (123). In this meso level, individual language practices are both similar and different; their repetition involves newness despite it iterating the past usage. In this sense, Pennycook theorizes agency in terms of relocalization of language use by individual agents where language becomes a "sedimented discourse" (46).

Pennycook's notion of relocalization and sedimentation with regards to language practices are central to his revision of past theories of practice. His conceptualization of language retains the temporal and geographical sense of context that Giddens and Bourdieu use. In other words, every language use should be seen in terms of the history of its use (movement for Pennycook) and the spatial contexts it is used in. Every language use occurs in a different time and place, repeating the same activity but in a different spatio-temporal locality. This idea of repeating an activity in a new context echoes Bourdieu's notion of transposability of (linguistic) habitus or generalizability of structure in Giddens. Though Bourdieu sees little scope for change in such regular practices, Pennycook believes that every repetition is different, or, in his words, "repetition is an act of difference" (36).

This is where Pennycook extends practice theory to, in a sense, its logical end. In other words, it is a logical extension of Bourdieu's idea that "habitus never produces the same practices twice and, in fact, each individual develops a personal trajectory" (Nicolini 61). The difference between the two is that Pennycook sees such repetition as new and different whereas Bourdieu sees it as a variation of the same practices within the limits posed by the habitus.

So, Pennycook proposes a new way of defining creativity, not as "newness, difference, divergence from what has gone before" (35). Here, every local use of language is "as much about change as it is about staying the same" (36). In this way Pennycook overcomes the tension in language studies, especially in structuralism, between the individual and language as system. In structuralist accounts, newness can be a break or deviation from grammar or structure. But Pennycook, drawing on Giddens'

theory of structuration and Calvet's theory of language ecology, regards grammar not as a preexisting set of norms but as an emergent set of patterns that are restructured by their interaction with individual practices. In other words, Pennycook views structure as the effect of sedimented repetition.

In this process of sedimentation, Pennycook sees individuals as having agency, though limited:

How does difference happen? In two ways: humans are, of course, capable of changing things, though often much less than we like to think. By and large, we go on doing more or less the same thing over and over. But we can make intentional changes to what we do, and these changes may become sedimented over time. There are also small, unintentional slippages, changes to the ways we do and say things, and these too may start to be repeated and become sedimented practices. And, as I have argued in this chapter, what appears to be the same may in fact also be already different. (49)

This notion of sedimentation offers a new dimension to the understanding of practice as repetitive activity. Every contribution to sedimentation constitutes change: that is, reiterating sedimented practices contributes to their sedimentation, making them more sedimented while also recontextualizing those practices. In this sense iteration of the same contributes to difference and is different. Thus Pennycook sees linguistic activities in terms of both individual choice and unintended consequences.

While Pennycook adds an important dimension to practice theory that can be very useful in understanding students' writing practices, his theorization of language as a local practice, despite its use of Bourdieu, Giddens, and similar other theorists who view social practices as situated in relations of power, does not seriously consider power differentials in the relationships between various language practices. Similarly, his theory is focused more on what happens than on how we think of language practices. In other words, his



focus is more on practices than on perceptions even though these two are, as Louis-Jean Calvet contends, always in some sort of co-constitutive relations (8).

#### Phenomenological Tradition and New Materialism: Heidegger and Latour

These practice-based, materialist theories with Marxist orientation in some form complicate and explicate the relationships between agency, objective social structures, and practices very well. However, as Bruno Latour claims, they leave out important components of social practices: that is, the things in the material world around us that in some way play significant roles in the mediation of our actions and practices. In other words, we also need to consider what Latour calls the “missing masses” or the “mundane artifacts” (“Missing Masses” 225).

Another tradition that will be useful in understanding writing as a socio-material practice is phenomenological materialism, especially the strand that begins roughly with Heidegger and continues in various forms in the present in works of new materialists like Bruno Latour and Thomas Rickert. While Marxist/socialist materialism challenged the relationship between structure (social) and agency (human), phenomenological materialism challenged the relationship between human agents and the material world, trying to understand the structure of human consciousness in its initial phase, but to develop into a more nuanced theory of the relationship between our subjective experience and objective reality (understood very differently from Bourdieu and Giddens’ understanding of objective structures). In a way these two materialisms highlight the embeddedness of our experience and embodiment of our understandings. And if we can recover the Marxist ethos, embeddedness goes beyond considering simple connectedness

to consider issues of power and how it circulates and is exercised. Similarly, by bringing power into the understanding of materials, we start seeing how materials themselves also exercise power, though in a very different way, making us reconsider how we define and understand agency and mediation.

Phenomenology, in its early years, especially in Husserl, focused on the “structure of consciousness” and human perception of things. Intentionality and subjective experience were central to the investigation into the nature of phenomena. As Taylor Carman claims, “Husserl wanted phenomenology to be a pure presuppositionless, systematic scientific description of consciousness...Husserlian phenomenology is thus a description of subjectivity, not of the objective world, but it is emphatically *not* empirical psychology...” (XVII). Husserl is highly reductive, advocating bracketing the actual existence of ourselves and that of things. His phenomenology is “the systematic scientific description of the ideal essences belonging to pure, transcendental subjectivity” (Carman XVII).

Heidegger, on the other hand, takes phenomenology away from the subject-object dichotomy and concentrates more not on the “things-in-themselves” but on things as they are in everyday practice. Heidegger, in his classic work, *Being and Time*, puts forward a strong critique of the subjectivist phenomenological tradition and offers his own theory of phenomena as things in the world or being in the world. The following description of Heidegger’s theory clarifies his distinction from Husserl and many others who see the world in terms of abstracted categories or essences:

So, for instance, whereas traditional ontology regarded all entities as objects, or substances with properties, Heidegger points out that ordinary things in our daily environment—tables and chairs, hammers and nails, doors and doorknobs, automobiles and street signs—do not show up in

which we first see as an object with properties and then interpret or judge to be useful for hammering; it is first of all, and above all, something *to grab*, something *for hammering*. So, too, a doorway is not just a rectangular aperture in a wall but something *to go through*. Such things are not occurrent or “present-at-hand” ... but available or “ready-to-hand”.... Even less is a human being a mere object with mental properties added on, but a doer and a sufferer, an agent and a patient, not a what but a who, not something with extra psychological features in addition but someone living a life, emerging from a history and plunging into a future. (XV)

Here, Heidegger’s attention to objects (actually things) is not an attention to the essence/substance of them or to their objective features. It also is not a focus on objects in terms of what they can do *for* us. Rather, his focus is not on the hammer as an object or hammer in terms of its features, nor on how we conceive of the hammer or how we make sense of it in terms of its use to us, but on *hammering*, the thing in use or process rather than the thing in itself. Similar to Raymond Williams, Anthony Giddens, and Pierre Bourdieu, in some sense, Heidegger is trying to walk a fine line between objectivism and subjectivism, or to avoid both altogether. Similarly, his focus on objects in use or action, in what we might call practice, in the act of hammering, makes him do what the other theorists in practice theory did in terms of social structure and agency.

For Heidegger, being in the world is always being with the others, but not with what Giddens and Bourdieu would call the “social.” Rather, being is considered always in *relation* to the environment, taken as a differentiated state of relationships and existence among a variety of beings. This is what relates Heidegger to social theorists and what also at the same time distinguishes him from them.

The example of hammering also connects Heidegger with practice theorists in his emphasis on human acts as preconscious:

The carpenter does not need to 'think a hammer' in order to drive a nail. His or her capacity to act depends upon the familiarity with the act of hammering. His/her use of the practical item 'hammer' is its significance to him/her in the setting 'hammering' and 'carpentry'. When the carpenter is unimpeded in his/her hammering, the hammer with its properties does not exist as an entity: in the usable environment, the understanding of situations is pre-reflexive, and the world of objects thus becomes 'simply present.' (Nicolini 34)

The hammer acquires a separate existence only when it stops working or when it breaks down. Our conscious understanding, which is not the understanding of hammer as such, comes into play only when there is a breakdown. Again, in a different way, this is what Bourdieu and Giddens said about the possibility of having discursive awareness/conscious in the times of conflict and social breakdown. The act of coming to consciousness makes the object unusable in Heidegger whereas, such coming to a discursive consciousness in Bourdieu and Giddens makes it possible to see the workings of ideology and make strategic decisions about resistance or change. What Heidegger is contributing to our understanding of our acts is the need to consider things in their actual use, not in the sense of resources, but in their own right.

Heidegger's later insistence on the primacy of discursive practice, practice in language, and his hint that the possibility of thinking differently lies only in our ability to question our own language practice draws him closer to practice theorists:

Later in his career Heidegger affirmed that language is the 'house of being', arguing that although we have language at our disposal in a way we are also at the disposal of our language. Language and language practices are therefore a critical aspect of everydayness, and only by questioning our language practices can we open a clearing through which we can experience potentially different ways of experiencing and acting in the world. (Nicolini 38)

Heidegger's emphasis on practice and his treatment of things in relation to other aspects in the environment have set a good ground for later new materialist theorists to develop their robust theories of materialism.

However, it's not clear from Heidegger what role things play in our social life. In other words, since he is concerned more with being than with human actions and consequences, it is not clear how he would think of the role of objects/things in mediating our actions in the world.

Heidegger's focus on everyday practice, specifically in his rejection of the division between subject and object, has been extended in certain ways in works of new materialists such as Bruno Latour in their treatment of objects as agents and their consideration of the ecology of mediators. Though Heidegger did not consider things and technologies in terms of their agency, his rejection of instrumental and humanistic understanding of things and technologies offers some new grounds for new materialists to develop their nuanced understanding of the role of things and technologies in social practices.

Bruno Latour critiques humanists, materialists, and critical theorists for their tendency of ignoring how what they normally take as tools/objects change or transform the goals of action or programs that human actors try to accomplish. He claims that the whole history of the Western social and philosophical theories has left "objects" or techniques, the "missing masses," out of its accounts. He thus focuses his attention on those missing masses and how recovering them from their silence makes us rethink our customary notions of agency, structure, and practices.

Latour is also dealing with the same issue that has bogged down many theorists we discussed so far: agency and determinism. His is an attempt to resolve the “technological determinism/social constructivism dichotomy” (“Missing Masses” 225). The answer to the question of determinism for Latour is not how much we are free or whether we are free, it is rather to acknowledge how we are not the only actors:

To balance our accounts of society, we simply have to turn our exclusive attention away from humans and look also at nonhumans. Here they are, the hidden and despised social masses who make up our morality. They knock at the door of sociology, requesting a place in the accounts of society as stubbornly as the human masses did in the nineteenth century. What our ancestors, the founders of sociology, did a century ago to house the human masses in the fabric of social theory, we should do now to find a place in a new social theory for the non-human masses that beg us for understanding. (227)

Latour agrees with the social theorists that social systems are developed and maintained through interactions and negotiations between people, institutions, and organizations. But he claims that artifacts are also part of such negotiations. He does not mean that machines and things also have conscious awareness and intention. But he does mean that they play an important part in retaining or transforming social order.

Latour’s treatment of objects is similar to practice theorists’ treatment of structure in terms of how objects/structures limit and at the same time enable certain actions while making other actions difficult. Latour neither falls victim to social constructivism nor to instrumentalism or materialism<sup>10</sup>. But he takes the role of artifacts/things differently, taking them as one of the mediators in the assembly of mediators, thus playing an agentive role as do other mediators like human actors.

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<sup>10</sup> Here I’m using it in Latourian sense in which materialism means the tendency to explain the consequences of human actions solely in terms of the essence of the material technology used.

In terms of discussing the role of artifacts or technologies, his notion of mediation as translation is central to distinguish him from other social theorists. To illustrate the difference between how he takes artifacts and how their role is understood by other traditions, I found two examples Latour uses to discuss very appropriate. In his essay “On Technical Mediation,” he uses the Dedaelian analogy to relate technical mediation to the strategies Dedaelus used to outwit others. What I find useful is his notion that technical mediation is not a “straight line”; it is circuitous, curved, or contrived. And this is so because he introduces “objects” or “techniques” between “actor” and “goals,” which distorts the straight line between the actors and their intended goals, changing the nature and/or the course of intended outcomes:

In the myth of Dedalus, all things deviate from the straight line. The direct path of reason and scientific knowledge—episteme—is not the path of every Greek. The clever technical know-how of Dedalus is an instance of *metis*, of strategy, of the sort of intelligence for which Odysseus (of whom the *Illiad* says that he is *polymetis*, a bag of tricks) is most famed. No unmediated action is possible once we enter the realm of engineers and craftsmen. A Daedalion, in Greek, is something curved, veering from the straight line, artful but fake, beautiful and contrived. (29)

Latour critiques materialist,<sup>11</sup> humanist,<sup>12</sup> and social constructivist notions of technology, all of which tend to be determinist in some ways, and therefore assume a straight line between the doer and the done, thereby developing a linear theory of mediation. He uses the example of the gun debate in the US to make his point. An extreme position of the supporters of gun control is that “guns kill people,” whereas, on the contrary, the NRA

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<sup>11</sup> Latour is using this term not in a Marxist sense. By materialist perspective, he means to refer to the tendency to assign every responsibility to the object or technology for whatever the result or the end is.

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger uses the term “anthropological” to refer to what Latour calls “humanist.” Heidegger uses this term to mean technology as human activity. What Heidegger is doing is critiquing the tendency to think of technology in terms of things external to technology itself rather than in terms of its “essence” or “being.”

claims that “People kill people, not guns” (30, 31). Latour calls these two positions “materialist” and sociological/moralist respectively:

In the materialist account, everything: an innocent citizen becomes a criminal by virtue of the gun in her hand. The gun enables of course, but also instructs, directs, even pulls the trigger.... Each artifact has its script, its ‘affordance,’ its potential to take hold of passerby and force them to play roles in its story. By contrast, the sociological version of the NRA renders the gun a neutral carrier of will that adds nothing to the action, playing the role of an electrical conductor, good and evil flowing through it effortlessly. (31)

For materialists, “we are what we have—what we have in our hands, at least” (31), whereas, for what Latour calls sociologists or moralists, “the Neutral Tool” is “under complete human control” (32). Latour sees a third, more common, possibility: “the creation of a new goal that corresponds to neither agent’s program of action.... I call this uncertainty about goals *translation*” (32). By translation, Latour means “displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies two elements or agents” (32). For him, “the twin mistake of the materialists and the sociologists is to start with essences, those of subjects or those of objects. That starting point renders impossible our measurement of the mediating role of techniques. Neither subject nor object (nor their goals) is fixed” (33). In other words, the tendency to being either with individual intention or with social ideology/context clouds possible understanding of events and practices.

For Latour, it is through use that both humans and nonhumans display their agency and engage in what he calls the “swapping of properties” (46). He believes that the responsibility of actions should be shared by/distributed not solely to human agents, but also to nonhuman participants: “Purposeful action and intentionality may not be properties of objects, but they are not properties of humans either. They are the properties



of institutions, *dispositifs*. Only corporate bodies are able to absorb the proliferation of mediators, to regulate their expression, to redistribute skills, to require boxes to blacken and close. Boeing-747s do not fly, airlines fly” (46). He believes that when humans engage in any practice, they engage with nonhumans in what he calls “the swapping of properties” (46).

Latour’s focus on materials is not only an addition of one more mediator in social relations. That addition destabilizes the notion of social formation based on the dichotomy between an individual and the social. Therefore, Latour questions the notion of the social or structure as theorized in structuralist account and critical sociology. He replaces the social with the term collective or assembly, actually recovering the original meaning of the “thing,” which comes from “ding,” designating not an object but a “certain type of archaic assembly” (“Dingpolitik” 12).

He is actually against the tendency of explaining away differences in our practices by invoking the “social” or “ideology” or “discourse” as if they are the root causes where everything else are mere instruments. In his view,

‘social’ is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues cannot fix; it is what is glued together by many other types of connectors. Whereas sociologists (or socio-economists, socio-linguists, social psychologists, etc ) take social aggregates as the given that could shed some light on residual aspects of economics, on the contrary, consider social aggregates as what should be explained by the specific *associations* provided by economics, linguistics, psychology, law, management, etc. (*Reassembling* 5)

For what Latour calls sociology of translation or association, social is not something homogeneous. Rather, it is a site of mobile associations and connections. That is why he critiques not only orthodox Marxism and structural theories of culture and language, he

also questions the notion of habitus/structuration//field in practice theory as all of these assume a uniformity of norms:

It is a commonplace, in critical theory, to say that techniques are social because they have been socially constructed. But this pronouncement is vacuous if the meanings of *mediation* and *social* are not made precise. To say that social relations are “inscribed” in technology, such that when we are confronted with an artifact, we are confronted, in effect, with social relations, is to assert a tautology, a very implausible one. If artifacts are social relations, then why must society work through them to inscribe itself in something else? Why not inscribe itself directly, since artifacts count for nothing? By working through the medium of artefacts, domination and exclusion hide themselves under the guise of natural and objective forces: critical theory thus deploys tautology—social relations are nothing but social relations—then it adds to it a conspiracy theory—society is hiding behind the fetish of techniques. But techniques are not fetishes, they are unpredictable, not means but mediators, means and ends at the same time; and that is why they bear on the social fabric. (51)

Thus, for Latour, treating artifacts merely as embodiments of cultural values is ignoring both human and nonhuman agency.

Similarly, despite their claim of materialism, their version of materialism falls short because everything material becomes nothing more than either resources or values (field): “To be sure, the distinction between material infrastructure and symbolic superstructure has been useful to remind social theory of the importance of non-humans, but it is very inaccurate portrayal of their mobilization and engagement inside social links” (Latour, “Durable” 103). Their reduction of material agents to resources and capital takes materialism away from the consideration of materials in their concrete forms to things in the possession of humans. Thus things lose their agency and the social loses its heterogeneity.

Now, if the social is an assemblage, associations and displacements of an array of mediators, both what we call local and global or micro and macro, how do we account for

them? How do we study and understand social phenomena like writing (which is itself a mediator) if we do not take resort to “Context,” ideology, or discourse? Latour wants us to discard such all-encompassing and stabilizing notions and just retrace the connections by following the actors/mediators:

The aim of this second part is to practice a sort of corrective calisthenics. I will proceed in three steps: we will first *relocate* the global so as to break down the automatism that leads from interaction to ‘Context’; we will then *redistribute* the local so as to understand why interaction is such an abstraction; and finally, we will *connect* the sites revealed by the two former moves, highlighting various *vehicles* that make up the definition of the social understood as association. (*Reassembling* 172)

In other words, he suggests we “render the social world as flat as possible” so that we can view every new link. This flattening rescues social theory from the tendency of mystification. He wants us to open the mysterious package called “the social” for inspection. Instead of looking at reality from a macro view (traditional sociology, sociolinguistics, ...), or micro perspective (ethnomethodology); global or local; we should see them as local/micro that have their tentacles stretching wide and far as much as they are situated in the here and now. As Latour says, “An action in the distant past, in a faraway place, by actors now absent, can still be present, on condition that it be shifted, translated, delegated, or displaced to other types of actants, those I have been calling nonhumans. My Word Processor, your copy of *Common Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, the International Postal Union, all of them organize, shape, and limit our interactions” (50). Both the tendencies of forgetting micro by focusing on the macro or considering every event or activity as purely local are problematic. When we consider every thing or event as in itself a part of an assembly and linked with other mediators (institutions, objects,

humans, perceptions, languages, etc.), potentially both “local” and “global,” through translation and delegation, creating a micro and macro does not hold strong.

In short, Bruno Latour can also be taken as extending the practice theory trend of challenging humanism and structuralism by adding in the role of artifacts/technology in shaping our actions. He, like Giddens and Bourdieu, questions the binary between subjectivism and objectivism, but by highlighting the need to consider the role of “objects” in mediating actions, which, however, destabilizes practice theory notions of the “social,” “habitus,” or “field” as these were largely considered stable despite their criticism of humanist or structuralist determinisms.

Though practices are not the primary units of analysis in Latourian sociology of associations, his theory does enrich the notion of practice by extending both cultural materialist notions of practice and phenomenological materialist ideas of practice. The active and full participation of mundane artifacts makes us rethink not only the things, but also the sources of durability and change of social systems. With Latour the notion of mediation becomes diversified.

## Conclusion

Two materialist theories of mediation and practice I’ve reviewed here provide some important insights into the nature of human actions and their relations to the socio-material world, not reduced to abstracted categories, but in their concrete material forms. I see the cultural materialist theory of practice and the phenomenological materialist theory of practice complementing each other, drawing our attention to both the relationship between agency and structure on the one hand, and agency and the material world on the other. While Bourdieu, Giddens, and Pennycook’s focus on practice helps

us see seemingly isolated acts as part of a nexus of sedimented practices, Latour's call to pay attention to the agency of missing masses makes us see how durability and change in practices do not merely depend on human agents and social structures, but equally on a network of actors, both human and non-human, both present and present in their seeming absence. In reality, practice theory can show how discussion of human and non-human agents in the absence of the nexus of practices can look as abstracted as practice theory itself theorizing practice without paying attention to the agency of artefacts and technologies. For instance, Bourdieu's notion of field lacks the materiality of field in its abstraction as values or norms whereas Latour's guns become abstracted from the practices of gun use in the US.

New materialist notions of agency as distributed and mediation as translation makes us rethink the linear theories of mediation we have been accustomed to, whether it is unidirectional or bidirectional. Practice theory (both cultural materialist and phenomenological) challenged humanist and structural unidirectional theories of mediation by viewing agency and structure as co-constitutive through recursive relations between practices, agency, and structure. But models of that co-constitutive relation remained largely limited to social structure and human agents, thereby making it hard to account for the agentive roles of things excluded in that economy of mediation. More ecological perspectives, like that of Thomas Rickert (ambient rhetoric) and Latour (actor-network) provide us ways to account for agents of mediation beyond stable and abstracted notions of the social and the individual. In other words, we talk about relationship between technology and culture (ideology) or individual and technology, but

do not often consider how our abstracted notions of technology, language, and modality can be construed as part of a wider network of agents and practices.

Another important insight these theories offer is that practices and habitus shape each other. Though new materialism rejects the notion of habitus the way it is used in practice theory, it does not ignore the role of ideologies as one among the various mediators, often disassembling the notion of ideology into various agents partaking in its operation. Though practices and perceptions (representations) shape each other, we should not understand that to mean a complete harmony between the two. It is possible, and often realistic, to see the discrepancy between practices and perceptions/thinking/ideologies. And this is very important when we analyze people's linguistic and multimodal practices because conflating the two gives us a mistaken understanding of the linguistic situation and the potential of interventions.

Similarly, as human agents' understanding and awareness changes depending on their relationships with other actors in the ecology of mediation, the distinction between discursive (in later theories, metadiscursive) vs. practical consciousness becomes problematic. Going beyond thinking of human consciousness in relation to habitus and doxa, new understanding of agency as distributed across networks of mediators and a nexus of practices makes it hard to think of "reflexive", "discursive" or "metadiscursive" consciousness independent of such connections. However, no situation, whether those of social breakdown or conflict, or constant intersections of cultural and linguistic practices due to globalization, can make us free-floating agents capable of going beyond the links we participate in. It is only a matter of delinking (from a set of network, often due to an introduction of a new agent) and relinking (to a transformed network). And complete

delinking often does not happen. That is why we see a discrepancy between practices and dispositions.

In our current context, the nature of writing and its relation to writers and readers have gone through some significant changes. In that context, it is important to understand those changes not only in terms of variations in modalities and languages, or by connecting them with larger forces alone like ideology or culture; but, rather, in a more comprehensive way, trying to follow all the potential agents affecting our communicative practices. Similarly, this rethinking of mediation also requires us to go beyond the tendencies of abstracting practices and stabilizing discrete categories.

We can do so if we attend to the original meaning of the word composition from its Latin root "*composicion*," which meant an act of "putting together, connecting, arranging" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Besides the two things this definition suggests, composition as an "act" and an action of assembling things together, Latour also reminds us to see the word "composition's" close affinity with the word "compost," suggesting the explicit and implicit flavor a work of composition carries, often "due to the active 'de-composition' of many invisible agents" ("Attempts" 474). Therefore, when we think about composition/writing, we should pay attention to the panoply of (f)actors that affect the act and the product of composition, rather than theorizing and analyzing composition abstracted from these connections/invisible agents.

There are a few implications of thinking of composition this way. First, similar to the implicit argument this whole chapter is making, this notion of composition reminds us to discard the tendency of abstracting composition, whether it is from the materiality of the text in a broader sense (technologies, languages in their material forms, and material

conditions shaping and being shaped by such texts) or the history and network of practices they participate in. Therefore, the dictum “follow the things<sup>13</sup>,” or follow the traces of the actors captures the spirit of an ecological approach this chapter is advocating.

The next two chapters show how dominant theories and studies of language relations and composition and those of modality and technologies adopt problematic tendencies of abstracting composition from practices due to the underlying linear theories of mediation that they uphold. In the third chapter, I will critique additive models of language ecology where languages are taken as fixed and stable, rather than viewing them as material social practice always in translation due to the constant processes of sedimentations. After the review of such tendencies, I will develop what I call a mesodiscursive theory of language relations where I focus on relations and intersections across language practices and their material social conditions, rather than the customary focus on language structures or creative innovations in language use. In other words, I’ll examine theories of language relations in terms of distributed mediation and demonstrate how the tendencies of taking languages as discrete entities reifies language practices and ignores the material social constraints affecting language use.

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<sup>13</sup> The term “things” is understood here as an “assembly.” So, things do not mean only the material objects, but their histories, their role in specific practices they participate, and their material potentials and limitations.



## CHAPTER 3

### MEDIATION OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE AND COMPOSITION

Schools and workplaces in the US and all around the world are facing a tremendous pressure to address the issue of language difference (see David Martins' *Transnational Writing Program Administration*, Darin Payne and Daphne Desser's *Teaching Writing in Globalization, etc.*). Our classrooms are becoming more and more multilingual and multidiscoursal (Matsuda; Canagarajah) with the constantly expanding trend of globalization facilitated by the advancements in digital technologies, rapidly increasing trend of immigration, and the rise in global commerce and trade. In the United States, as Paul K. Matsuda and A. M. Preto-Bay and Kristine Hansen have said, the number of multilingual students has grown exponentially in recent times. Data released by the United States Department of Education shows that "while the population of five to twenty-four-years-olds grew by 6% between 1979 and 1999, the number who spoke a language other than English at home increased in the same period by 111%" (referenced in Preto-Bay and Hansen 38). The report predicts that "by 2015, 30% of the school-aged children will be children of immigrants, either first or second generation" (Preto-Bay and Hansen 39). This data does not even include international students. In the global context,

‘non-native’ speakers of English far outnumber its ‘native’ speakers (Crystal; Leung).<sup>14</sup>

As English is used in different discursive and material contexts, here in the U.S. and beyond, it has been widely diversified by its interaction with various other language practices. Then the central question that many of us are asking today is how can we address the differences in language use in writing inside and outside classrooms? This chapter tries to briefly assess some of the existing trends in language theories and offer an alternative way to address the issue raised above.

Let me present an anecdote before moving to a discussion of the theories of language difference and some inherent problems in them. In my recent conversation, a colleague from my program recounted her experience working with a student in her composition class. When she found several grammatical errors in his writing, e.g., wrong use of article, clumsy and long sentences, she immediately thought of sending him to writing center so that a ‘multilingual’ TA could *solve* his problem. She assumed that he must have been an ESL student with a distinct kind of language. But the next day when she met the student after her class and inquired about his background, she realized that he actually was from what we normally call the mainstream community. She was genuine in trying to understand his problem and helping him solve it. However, it is this tendency of abstracting language from its use and making handy generalizations that indirectly does a disservice to teachers’ genuine attempts at helping out students who desire and are also forced to struggle to adapt to the abstract notion of standard language. Somewhat similar to what Walter Mignolo says, it is important to question the tendency to link a particular

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<sup>14</sup> The notion of native speaker norm has come under challenge, as several linguists such as Paikeday contend that the native speaker is “merely an ideal or a convenient linguistic fiction - myth, shibboleth, sacred cow - an etherlike concept with no objective reality to it, albeit embodied in a quasi-privileged class of speakers of each language” (p.21). Therefore, I am using the terms like “native” and “non-native” just for convenience.

group with a specific kind of language and culture, e.g., in this case, assuming that all multilingual TAs can handle the issue of language diversity better than ‘monolingual’ TAs and that all ESL students have similar problems:

In other words, what the current stage of globalization is enacting is (unconsciously) the uncoupling of the ‘natural’ link between languages and nations, languages and national memories, languages and national literatures. Thus it is creating the condition for and enacting the relocation of languages and the fracture of cultures. Indeed, the very concept of culture (and civilization in Huntington’s perspective) is difficult to sustain as homogeneous spaces for people of common interests, goals, memories, languages, and beliefs. (42)

As Mignolo contends, there lies a serious problem in such conceptions of language (or culture or place): that certain kind of people use a certain kind of language, associating language with place or people, with an assumption that languages and cultures are separate and stable categories. As Louis-Jean Calvet says, the notion of language as such is a mere abstraction from practices, especially in moving from the actual language use to a handy notion of language as a stable category: “From these practices, which are very concrete, linguists have extracted an abstraction, *language ...*” (6). And he further contends that language as such does not exist in practice though it does exist in our belief: “Here we come up against a paradox: there is something which does not exist, which nobody can point to ..., and which yet does exist in the eyes of everyone” (6). In other words, when we think of language use inside or outside our classrooms, we need to think of it not as mere abstraction, e.g., standard English or standard Indian English (suggesting the uniformity of language use based on stable forms/norms), but as a material practice, shaped by and shaping our dominant perception (representation) of it (abstract notion of language), actual language use, and the accompanying modes, media, and artifacts affecting the goals of language users. However, when we analyze notions of language or

linguistic models often used in composition scholarship and outside this field, and also in our teaching practices, we find an explicit or implicit presence of monolingual assumptions.

In general, monolingualism refers to the tendency of taking only one language as the norm. However, more specifically, it is, as Yasemin Yildiz defines, “much more than a simple quantitative term designating the presence of just one language. Instead, it constitutes a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectivities such as cultures and nations” (2). In her analysis, the present condition, which she calls the postmonolingual condition, marks the “field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge” (5). So, she urges us to understand the present language practices and politics in the West as multilingual attempts to resist the monolingual paradigm, though with the persistence of monolingual assumptions even in many multilingual works. Her example of the conceptual artwork *Wordsearch*, in which the artist uses one word each from 250 languages spoken in New York, and translates them in all these languages shows how seemingly multilingual work can uphold the monolingual paradigm. Despite it being multilingual in the sense that it uses multiple languages, it “fits within a monolingual framework by identifying the contributing individuals in terms of one language only” (Horner, “Review of *The Postmonolingual Condition* 355).

This monolingual tendency of identifying one language with one ethnicity, nation, culture, and writing tradition assumes “languages as discrete, stable, internally uniform,

and linked indelibly to what is held to be each writer's likewise stable and uniform location and social identity" (Lu and Horner, "Matters of Agency" 583). This belief appears in several forms. As Yildiz contends, even in our own attempt to resist monolingualism and its consequences, as in her example of *Wordsearch*, we end up retaining some of the assumptions of monolingualism, sometimes pluralizing monolingualism in an attempt to promote multilingualism, whereas sometimes overemphasizing the agency of the users of certain linguistic background, thereby locating agency in individuals than in the interplay between a variety of (f)actors and nexus of practices.

In this chapter, I will analyze some of the dominant language models that, despite their attempt at resisting monolingualism, retain some of its assumptions, and offer an alternative approach to language use and language relations in an attempt to go beyond such assumptions and limited theorization of language mediation. The problematic nature of these language models has become increasingly apparent as a consequence of recent demographic and other social changes—e.g., global immigration patterns, increasing intersections of language practices, and facilitations of such intersections by new forms of technologies.

I will develop a theory of language relations that, first, seeks to go beyond the paradigms of the dominant language theories that regard languages as discrete and stable entities and, second, also critiques the romanticized version of multilingual agency where multilinguals are represented as naturally capable of shuttling across languages. Therefore, I argue that we need to go beyond the focus either on stable language structures or on the free-floating agency of individual language users, and locate

language use in specific practice in its spatio-temporal contexts. In doing so, we need to pay attention to the mesodiscursive relations where language practices, their representations, and the network of actors shape, interact, and co-construct each other. When we consider language structurations and agency in this mesodiscursive way, the focus shifts from limited considerations of agency and ideology to account for (f)actors that contribute to the production of difference/sameness in communicative acts.

### Major Language Models

English monolingualism is still dominant in our teaching practices even if it has been challenged in recent scholarship on language both within writing studies and beyond. It is the tendency to take languages in their abstraction, removing them from their lived practices and their history. It “fails to recognize the actual heterogeneities of language practices” in specific situations (Horner and Lu, “Resisting” 141). Many alternative models such as World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Defense of National Language (DNL), Multilingualism, and Plurilingualism<sup>15</sup> have been developed to counter and to go beyond monolingual assumptions. However, despite these models’ appreciation of the value of diversity in languages and cultures, they still retain some of the fundamental assumptions of monolingual ideology, especially in their reification of language practices. In other words, all these language models end up being different permutations of the same monolingualist ideology in assuming language competence as stable or in locating language ability in individual language users. Even if some accounts, e.g., the recently developed translingual approach, do overcome

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<sup>15</sup> These terms have been used with a variety of meanings. I’m here considering the dominant understandings of these models and how they are problematic.

monolingual tendency, as Juan Guerra contends, they fall short in treating language as practice in its entirety, often limiting themselves to the interplay between individual language users and language ideologies. In the next section, I present how language theories, both in applied linguistics and composition, fail to treat language as a lived practice mediating and mediated by an array of (f)actors both present and present in their absence in any semiotic activity. I contend, following Latour, Calvet, and Pennycook that any analyses and assessment of language use should observe the complex network of mediations affecting and shaping language activities, including student writing. I argue that this approach to language differences, which I call mesodiscursive, may help some teachers avoid not only the tendency to take languages as stable and discrete systems and contrarily the tendency to romanticize the competence of multilingual users, but also that of limiting discussions of language difference to broad categories like language ideology, social context or to abstracted language strategies like code-meshing or code-switching, thereby ignoring the heterogeneities and complexities immanent in any communicative situations.

In applied linguistics, as Alastair Pennycook says in his article “English as a Language Always in Translation,” approaches like WE, ELF<sup>16</sup>, and DNL give more focus to “form” rather than practice by either highlighting how new forms and structures have

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<sup>16</sup> Some writers also use the term EIL (English as an International Language) somewhat similarly and with similar larger logic. As Barbara Seidlhofer states, “ELF is part of the more general phenomenon of ‘English as an International Language’ (‘English Lingua Franca,’ 339). The basic assumption of EIL that English is a global language where as other languages are local is deeply flawed and also serves the hegemonic interest by ignoring how many other languages are also used in international contexts. Similarly, the general EIL tendency to equate English with opportunity and upward mobility also marks abstraction of language from its complex roles and uses.

emerged in localized varieties,<sup>17</sup> or by proposing to develop a common core of English language across all varieties,<sup>18</sup> or defending national language against the hegemonic influence of English.<sup>19</sup> In all these models, Pennycook maintains, despite variations in their focuses, languages are taken in terms of abstract rules and forms, ignoring how languages actually work and develop through practice.

There are some linguists even within ELF studies who question the tendency of taking ELF as a stable variety. They rather view ELF as function. For instance, Patricia Friedrich and Aya Matsuda, drawing on others who view ELF as function and critiquing those who view it as a variety, contend:

We use the expression ELF as an umbrella term to describe functions of English within the broadest spectrum and context of English use possible.... We posit that in contexts where English is used as a lingua franca, each speaker uses a linguistic variety that he or she happens to know and then employs various communicative strategies to carry out successful interactions .... Using a framework that conceptualizes ELF as a function, rather than a linguistic variety, captures the dynamic nature of situation-based linguistic choices, recognizes the importance of nonlinguistic factors ... in communication, and allows us to study the ELF phenomenon multidimensionally and holistically. (22).

Friedrich and Matsuda, similar to Canagarajah in many of his publications<sup>20</sup>, do question dominant ELF theory in their focus on fluidity of English use in specific lingua franca contexts. However, they still do assume that speakers in such contexts do *bring* their language variety, while employing a variety of linguistic and extra-linguistic strategies to successfully communicate. Their approach, while focusing on the function of English

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<sup>17</sup> Braj Kachru's (2005) *Asian Englishes* and Yamuna Kachru and Cecil Nelson's (2006) *World Englishes* are good examples of the World Englishes model.

<sup>18</sup> See Jennifer Jenkins' *Phonology of Language* and Andy Kirkpatrick's "Which Model of English"; Barbara Seidlhofer's "English as Lingua Franca" as examples of the English as Lingua Franca approach.

<sup>19</sup> Phillipson's *English Only Europe* and his "English for Globalization", and Michael Joseph and Esther Ramani's "English in the World" represent the DNL approach to the hegemony of English language in global scale.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Canagarajah's "Lingua Franca English."



language in ELF situations, does retain a monolingual tendency present in dominant ELF and WE approaches in their inability to see how even the varieties that such users use are never stable in non-ELF situations too.

In short, all these approaches assume languages as having separate and stable cores and seem to ignore the fact that languages transform and are transformed by their interactions with other language practices due to various factors associated with language, including diverse rhetorical and epistemological differences, shifts in the demography of language users, and changing roles and positions of them in constantly changing language ecologies. In other words, they don't locate language in practice, as a "local practice," in Pennycook's phrase, but as something that exists prior to and separate from practice, which is then put into practice.

Similarly, while focusing on structural differences, they also ignore the role of individual practices in transforming language structures. In other words, these approaches do acknowledge transformations in the nature of English language due to various broader socio-historical changes. However, they tend to fall victim to the same logic of stability of language norms that they critique in advocating for or believing in the new set of norms as standards. They thereby not only gloss over the role of individual agency in negotiating and transforming both local and global, micro and macro structures, but also homogenize the heterogeneities in every local use of language and discount the agentive role of several non-human actants. Thus, they retain the traditional tendency of viewing languages as primarily governed by preexisting systems or structures, thereby retaining the assumption about language fixity even when talking about language diversity.

Another permutation of the monolingual ideology appears in the monolingual version of bilingualism/multilingualism. The dominant model of multilingualism, unlike general notions of monolingualism, does acknowledge the value of different languages and cultures. However, in many cases, the general and dominant understanding of multilingualism suffers from the same problem that the other approaches such as WE, ELF, and DNL suffer. In this additive model of multilingualism, multilingualism is used to refer to separate competencies in two or more languages. In other words, languages are taken as discrete systems where “the ultimate goal for language learning was to become, feel, and speak like an idealized native speaker” (Moore and Gajo 139). In such cases, bilingualism becomes “double monolingualism” (Heller 48) and multilingualism “little more than pluralization of monolingualism” (Pennycook, *Language as a Local Practice* 10). As in the monolingual tradition, language competence is measured in terms of native speaker norms of separate languages. Such an additive model of multilingualism is based on the assumptions of the discreteness and internal uniformity of all languages. In this version, what counts is monolingual representation of multilingualism rather than questioning such representation based on the complexity of language practices on the ground. They completely negate translingual mediations and resultant transformations. In other words, though this form of multilingualism goes beyond an “English Only” form of monolingualism in terms of recognizing the importance of appreciating the value of different languages, it fails to see languages as mediated by material social practices while themselves shaping them in turn. In this model, the sole focus is on generalized formalistic notions of language and language competence. Thus multilingualism does not serve the broader purposes of enhancing understanding and critical awareness about

different discourse practices and fighting the monolingual tendency of demanding perfect use of a language, free from any traces of the influence of other language. Rather, as Pennycook says, “the struggle over diversity as numerical plurality . . . this focus on glossodiversity at the expense of semiodiversity . . . obscures the potential role of language education in the production of diversity” (“Translation” 34). And additive multilingualism ignores the inevitability of “traffic” within, amongst, and between the artificial ideological boundaries separating languages, cultures, and peoples.

In order to avoid monolingual assumptions of the traditional version of multilingualism, many language theorists have offered alternative ways of rethinking about multilingualism. European linguists, such as Daniel Coste and Diana-Lee Simon, and Danièle Moore, have put forward their notion of plurilingualism and suggest that “the language competence of bilinguals should not be regarded as the simple sum of two monolingual competences, but should rather be appreciated in conjunction with the user’s repertoire of total linguistic resources” (Moore and Gajo 139). In contrast to additive model of multilingualism where multilingualism merely means two or more separate monolingualisms (Canagarajah; Heller; Pennycook), plurilingualism “allows for the interaction and mutual influence of the language in a more dynamic way” (Canagarajah, “Multilingual Strategies” 7). In short, a plurilingual approach considers linguistic differences that multilinguals bring with them in language negotiations not as a problem or a deficit but as a resource, thereby rejecting the major tendency of monolingual policy to keep languages separate and advocate mastery in one, idealized form of dominant language. I will extend this notion, however, with an equal emphasis that the differences in linguistic traditions and cultural values, and the dominance of the monolingual

ideology even in multilingual individuals, can work as constraint in working across cultures and languages. Thinking of language competence in terms of resources and repertoires, first, goes against the notion of language as practice; second, it places competence in individuals' ability to collect such resources and use them critically as they desire. In other words, I will also problematize the notion of resources as used in plurilingualism where it suggests language features as entities that users can pick and choose, rather than viewing them as language potentials that users can utilize based on their history of that language use in specific situations, however, with an awareness that they may not acquire the result they desire.

With its overemphasis on resources and individual competence, plurilingualism often undermines constraints, leading towards romanticization of the agency of multilingual language users, which, by placing competence on individual users, retains a monolingual tendency in plurilingual guise. In an attempt to counter monolingual hegemony, this approach, as in the case of Moore and Gajo, “concentrates on the individual rather than the community as its angle of vision” (141) and places more emphasis on the individual as a “social actor, with agency and choice” (150). The idea of romanticization becomes further substantiated by the fact that plurilingual theorists try to highlight their idea that multilingual individuals, due to their multilingual resources, exercise metalinguistic and metadiscursive awareness (Jesner; Moore). As Moore and Gajo claim: “Heightened awareness has been described as one key asset available to bi/plurilinguals, which can be explained by a salient difference regarding the arbitrariness of signs, and is dependent on the number of languages involved” (147). It is true that multilingual practices can potentially enable multilingual language users to become more

conscious about their language use. However, these theorists' characterizations of multilingual people's experiences as a "'plurilingual strategic tool-box'—or 'plurilingual asset'" and their focus on individual competence rather than linguistic practice(s), push them towards what Latourians would probably call the humanistic fallacy (Moore and Gajo 147).

In emphasizing metadiscursive awareness, the plurilingualists tend to underestimate how social relations, material limitations, and the force of dominant belief can pose powerful constraints to individuals. Therefore, this trend of overemphasizing agency and metadiscursive awareness pushes multilingualism towards its potential romanticization. Suresh Canagarajah's notion of plurilingual competence and his theory of shuttling between languages offer us an apt example of such romanticization of multilingualism.

His account of shuttling between languages presents multilingual writers as if they can easily *hop on* and *hop off* languages due to their membership in local multilingual communities: "the LFE [Lingua Franca English] speakers come with the competence in many respects, more advanced than that of the child because of the multilingual practice enjoyed in their local communities—which is then honed through actual interaction" (2006, "Place of World Englishes" 928). It is perhaps true that some multilinguals develop a more open and tolerant attitude towards language difference due to their exposure to diverse linguistic and semiotic practices. But the problem with this plurilingual notion is that it tends to assume competence as already ingrained in individuals, whether multilingual or monolingual. Canagarajah does acknowledge that competence is emergent and that it needs to be sharpened through interaction. However,

he at the same time believes that LFE speakers “*come with*” or bring with them a more advanced level of competence than monolingual users as if it were something that they would carry with them and take out and use when necessary, thus suggesting the stability of multilingual expertise. This is similar to the “tool-box” notion of multilingual resources/experiences that we just saw in Moore and Gajo.

Similarly, in discussing multilingual competence, it is important to distinguish between users’ fluency in different languages and the kind of ideology they believe in. In other words, it is important to understand the relationship between orientation/disposition and practices and to distinguish between the two. For instance, a student may have some experiences of working across languages in particular settings and some fluency in many languages--say, Hindi, English, Nepali, and Newari--while at the same time believing in monolingual ideology that we should use or strive to use only one language, in its purest form, in writings (or speaking). It does not mean that they are not developing multilingual competence; it rather means that there sometimes is a big chasm between what such students practice and what they believe in. However, at the same time, it is equally necessary to see whether the discrepancy between practices and perceptions transform perceptions. And this discrepancy between lived practices and abstracted representations of such practices in policies and ideologies makes language negotiations of multilinguals even more difficult and frustrating. However, plurilingual theorists, in an effort to counter the debilitating effects of the dominance of monolingualism in the academy and outside, tend to ignore such difficulties and labor, and rather end up romanticizing multilingual competence.

Additionally, the habitus built through the multilingual experiences in local communities may also pose constraints in negotiating language difference in other situations due to the specific nature of the habitus. First, the nature of communication changes with the changes in the participants in new situations, transforming the same language user into a different individual due to the constant shifts she needs to make in her linguistic and extralinguistic strategies depending on who the other participants are and their language beliefs and practices. Second, this account will be incomplete, and therefore misleading, if we assume only the human participants as in control of communicative acts, deliberately and freely picking, discarding, and manipulating the other elements of a communicative ecology. For instance, when we assess or analyze any writing of a composition student only in terms of his/her language identity (multilingual/monolingual/ESL, etc) and the state of language ideology, we risk ignoring how that student's specific material condition, classroom infrastructure, her/his history of language learning, etc, have influenced her language beliefs and practices. Therefore, we need to try to take account of the other agents that in any way modify or mediate communicative acts and its results. In doing so, as Bruno Latour believes, it will be a mistake to simply lump everything that affects communication or any other semiotic act as multilingual or monolingual identity, 'social context' or language 'ideology' in blanket fashion. Rather, we should try to locate each and every potential agent or delegate that changes the nature and goals of communicative acts as much as possible. To think of any semiotic act, including writing, only in terms of the writer/language user and ideology (monolingual/multilingual/plurilingual) and assuming every other aspect as manifestations of the dominant ideology or the reflection of social context (taken as

homogeneous) as we find in many accounts of language negotiations, is to ignore how things other than humans and ideologies also mediate activities of writing and communication.

Let us take an example of Ramakanta Agnihotri's study of plurilingual practices in India, especially his description of taxi drivers' communicative practices toward the end of his essay. He presents his observation that "almost every auto-rickshaw and taxi driver in Bangalore is functionally competent in three or four languages" (8). He contends at the end of his article, based on his descriptions of multilingual practices similar to that of taxi drivers, that multilingualism should be practiced and promoted in classrooms. It is not clear, however, that first, they would do well outside their locale, though their prior experience might help them negotiate language practices as cab drivers elsewhere. This is because their language habitus is always shaped by the local context of their language use. Second, the plurilingual practices in informal and out-of-class situations may not appropriately capture the dynamic of language relations in formal academic situations where participants, their relations and roles, language beliefs of the participants, language policy as manifested in assignment prompts and course descriptions, etc. make the nature of language negotiation very different. The tendency of equating plurilingual experiences in one context, especially in out-of-class informal situations, with those in very different circumstances, e.g., classroom writing, succumbs to the tradition of abstracting language practices by arguing that the same thing happens in formal writings. In other words, it is important to note that despite their multilingual experiences, many students are governed by monolingual belief, and therefore, struggle to acquire an idealized monolingual competence. However, it will also be a big mistake



to think that all classroom situations are similar because most of the teachers and students are governed by monolingual ideology.

The example of the Malaysian student that Canagarajah uses from Min-Zhan Lu's study shows how he seems to have ignored the powerful presence of English monolingualism that shapes students in ways to make them avoid "error" as much as possible. In other words, this example shows how "functional competence" to shuttle across languages may not be enough in many classroom situations. This study clearly shows how difficult it is for the students to actually shuttle between languages when the classroom situation often makes them feel that they need to use perfect "standard" English. In other words, the expectations within and outside the academy, both actual and perceived, make them actually want to reproduce the dominant discourse. Even in such a highly encouraging situation, the Malaysian student in Lu's study chose to reiterate the "conventions" of "standard" English. So, appreciation of deliberate acts of code-meshing should be complemented by our close attention to implicit traces of difference, especially in the use of the same language structure/vocabulary for difference in meaning. It seems that plurilingual theorists' concern to debunk monolingualist ideology risks making code-meshing/shuttling between languages a natural competence for all multilingual speakers, a competence that multilingual speakers want to hone all the time.<sup>21</sup> When we focus on such code meshing practices, we may dismiss how a large number of people are not only forced to but also desire to imitate the norms of the "standard" language, which, however, results in the transformation of meaning even in their reiteration. My major concern is

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<sup>21</sup> Even if Canagarajah critiques the Chomskian model of natural competence, he seems to have fallen victim to a similar model by assuming expertise of multilingual speakers as natural competence to be "honed by actual interaction." It is quite different to think of language repertoire as resources for multilingual speakers to tap into in confronting difficult communicative situations and to think of it as part of natural competence applicable to all situations.

that, by focusing on some code-meshing practices of expert writers and not fully describing what explicit and implicit (f)actors that have made such language acts possible, we are dismissing the struggles that thousands of students are engaging in in their attempt to “master” standard English, thereby ignoring what Min-Zhan Lu calls “living-English” or what Calvet calls language practices.

After all, Canagarajah and other plurilingual theorists’ contention in favor of code-meshing (which actually looks like code-switching), with examples of established writers like Geneva Smitherman and K Sivatabi, or some students like Buthaina, serves as another instance of the tendency of reification of language use. As Juan C. Guerra contends in his recent article “From Code-Segregation to Code-Switching to Code-Meshing,” writers like Canagarajah and Vershawn Young ignore practice while focusing on policy (37). Guerra argues that Canagarajah and Young conflate code-switching with code-segregation, while I contend, they also create false sense of division between code-switching and code-meshing:

Despite his affinity for code-meshing, Canagarajah at times still sounds like an advocate for code-switching as progressive scholars conceptualize it: ‘Rather than developing mastery in a single ‘target language,’ he contends, students should strive for competence in a repertoire of codes and discourses. Rather than simply joining a speech community, students should learn to shuttle between communities in contextually relevant ways’. (8)

Guerra disagrees with most of the translingual scholars in composition, including Canagarajah, Young, Horner, and Lu due to their conflating of code-segregation with what he calls a progressive form of code switching. It is true that such a form of code-switching offers productive ways of countering the effects of monolingual hegemony. However, at the same time, by his own implicit division between progressive and what

we may infer as regressive forms of code-switching, it becomes clear that translingual scholars' critique of accommodationist (code-switching) approach as monolingualist appropriation of code-switching does have an important significance. In other words, while Guerra is right in pointing that theorizing language difference should not ignore practice, translingual scholars are right in pointing out the fundamental similarities between what Guerra would call a progressive form of code switching and regressive notions of code-switching (code-segregation). Though Guerra contends that he focuses on practice while others focus on policy, I contend that both do tend to partially focus on practice, while also interrogating language policies, however ignoring to account for the heterogeneities of factors affecting any communicative act, and therefore, limiting practice to either code-meshing (Canagarajah and Young) or code switching or both (Guerra). When we focus on practice, we should go beyond advocating code-meshing, code-switching, or any other strategy, to describe and analyze a complex ecology of semiotic practice where we do not limit ourselves to language users and language ideologies. The case of the highlighting deliberate and intentional instances of codemeshing as creating instances of language use similar to innovative uses of language in modernist writers like James Joyce or accomplished writers like Geneva Smitherman actually reproduces the same humanist logic of agency and creativity. The point here is not whether our students can or cannot do so, it is rather the tendency of taking such instances as isolated from practice. Even the often cited examples of linguistic inventiveness are part of practices. While the example of "can able to" and Buthaina's use of Arabic script in Canagarajah's study are explicit instances of codemeshing, the Malaysian student's seeming reiteration of the "norm" of the SWE, in her use of "may be

able to,” in place of “can able to” does create difference in meaning. However, these different instances should not be equated as intentional uses of creative code-meshing afforded to multilingual users due to their plurilingual “tool-box/assets.” Rather, different ecologies of mediation in these different cases shape the way English was used (with Arabic script or without any apparent difference). Our focus should be on what socio-material conditions and what nexus of linguistic and other social practices enables or constrains students’ varying uses of language.

In summing up the discussion of the romanticization of multilingualism, we can say that some plurilingual theorists regard multilinguals as “free-floating” individuals boosted by their history of language use and unrestrained by the actual contexts in which their negotiating expertise needs to be constantly relocalized through transformative meaning making. By highlighting individual competence or lack thereof, these plurilingual theorists contribute to the tendency of the false stabilization of such expertise, rather than seeing it as always emergent, shaped by and shaping specific local contexts. They seem to have ignored how changing configurations of the range of power relations and the power differential ratio in each relation, in addition to the varying degree of availability and the role of material artifacts, can affect communication. In the context of the still persisting monolingual tradition in US composition, we need to pay attention to how and whether students forge difference in meaning even in reproducing standard discourse conventions. The singular focus on code-meshing can risk encouraging teachers to only look for obvious differences and ignore the meaning potentials of seemingly repetitive, imitative acts. Unfortunately, such a tendency, as Theresa Lillis and Carolyn McKinney contend in their brief comment on current

language theories, disregards practice in favor of simplistic notions of rhetorical appropriateness and awareness (427).

### Mesodiscursive Approach and Language Use

As discussed so far, the three major tendencies that I find problematic in terms of theorization of language use are, first, reconstructing a stable linguistic core, thereby ignoring both local heterogeneities and historical changes (WE, ELF and DNL); second, pluralizing monolingualism (additive multilingualism); and third, romanticizing multilingual competence (plurilingualism). In essence, all three categories are manifestations of an underlying monolingualist ideology locating language ability in individuals and marking their identity as fixed and tied to language use, whether multilingual, plurilingual, or monolingual. All three also treat language use or practice as fixed, though in different ways. Going against the two former tendencies and complicating the third, this paper proposes, based on Pennycook's theory of language as a local practice, Calvet's notion of language ecology, and Latour's idea of sociology of translation, what I call a mesodiscursive approach to language diversity, which focuses on practice, however, without excluding policies and ideologies. In calling this practice theory approach to language difference "mesodiscursive," I am trying to go beyond a limited notion of practice in the social theories of Bourdieu, Giddens, and Pennycook to synthesize their notion of practice with Latour's notion of mediation in what is generally called actor-network theory. By using the term mesodiscursive, I intend to focus not on something between micro level activity and macro forces (e.g., ideology), but on the need to always observe and analyze how a specific way of language use mediates and is

mediated by a network of (f)actors, both human and non-human, both materially present and absent, in a particular moment of that language use.

Alastair Pennycook has developed a theory of language based on the practice theories of Bourdieu and Giddens, among many others. His theory highlights the always local nature of language use, however, with a recognition that it gets somewhat predictable due to the sedimented patterns emerging out of repetitive nature of language use. He conceives practice as a midway between little “d” discourse and big “D” discourse, thereby offering a way to avoid both the stability of language norms and a romanticized theory of multilingual agency implicated in other approaches discussed above. Here, language structure is conceived, unlike in structuralism, as the sedimented patterns emerging from its repetitive use in a particular local space (Pennycook, *Language as a Local Practice* 9). In defining language as a *local* practice, Pennycook first seeks to go beyond the traditional notion of “context” and takes local to mean the particular space as related to other terms like “regional, national, global, universal . . .,” where it is not opposed to what is global, but can also be constitutive of and constituted by such things as global (4). And he gets out of the tendencies of taking language as a mere instrument of a larger Discourse on one hand and taking it as always contingent and fluid. Therefore, he calls language a practice that goes midway between the little “d” discourse and the big “D” Discourse (as in Gee).

He derives his theory of practice from, among others, Bourdieu and Giddens, who use the term “practice” and “*habitus*” to “steer a course between the grand and seemingly deterministic theories of critical social science, where human action is a by-product of larger social structures, and the voluntaristic views of humanism” (Pennycook 27). In this sense, instead of focusing on abstract system and pre-existing standards, we need rather to highlight how structural patterns emerge and evolve over time through language users’ reiterations of patterns of language use in specific locations.

Pennycook’s adoption of *practice* from social theorists like Bourdieu and Giddens gives a richer dimension to the existing notion of language practice where practice is taken merely as an application, similar to the notion of a specific use. His sense of

historicity (the temporal dimension of language practice) in his use of the term practice and his sense of spatiality in his use of the term local offer us a way to view language neither merely in terms of its origin and development nor merely in terms of ahistorical structure or norms.

In his account, the interplay between the individual use and the shared *habitus* during a particular instance of exchange makes both the assumptions of radical contingency and stability unrealistic. Here, individual language use and social structurations of language are co-dependent and co-constitutive. Therefore, as Pennycook says, every individual language practice is a “mediating social activity where we do things both because we want to and along lines laid down by habit, propriety, cultural norms or political dictates. It is therefore useful to explore the *meso-political* space of practice that lies between the local and the global” (Emphasis mine; *LLP* 23).

It is important here to mark how Pennycook departs from language and literacy scholars like J P Gee who have adopted Foucault’s notion of discourse as all-encompassing system. Pennycook, on the contrary, views it as a mesopolitical space between the little ‘d’ discourse and big ‘D’ Discourse, suggesting his critique of the dual tendencies of taking language use apolitically as individual speech interaction and taking it as a part of larger system of discursive power. Pennycook, following Bourdieu and Giddens, brings social theory from its obsession with individual freedom and discursive interpellation to view these two phenomena as mutually co-constitutive.

In other words, we need to pay attention to the meso space of relations instead of an over attention to the micro at the cost of ignoring the macro as we saw in plurilingual accounts of language negotiation or an over attention to the macro while undermining the

role of the micro as we saw in the other three approaches just discussed above. What individuals do does not depend only on what they want; it is also guided by the structuring forces in global-local relations of power.

Hence, I intend to highlight the relation between language norms as perceived by the users and dictated by the dominant representation of such language, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, individual practices, especially the idea that they constitute and transform each other. Discarding the idea of language structure as preexisting system or individual language users as free-floating agents, I propose to view language structures as, in Giddens' sense, both the "medium and the outcome" of individual language practices (25). So, the focus here is not on "either/or" but on the interplay: how language shapes an individual and how an individual transforms it. Therefore, the meso, the in-between position, suggests the dynamic space that is characterized by the tensions between individual agency and social-historical constraints often represented by forms of various domains of representations. In thinking about the relationships between the dominant discourse and individual agency we need to attend to the role dominant belief plays, especially how it can pose constraints to individual agency. However, at the same time, as I'll discuss a little later, we also need to be careful not to think of ideology as affecting individuals homogeneously.

Louis-Jean Calvet's notion of language ecology where he emphasizes studying language not as abstraction but as a concrete material practice complements Pennycook's theory of language as a local practice. Calvet emphasizes two things: representations and practices, each shaping and affecting the other. While Pennycook's notion of practice adds a temporal dimension to Calvet's more spatial/horizontal notion of practices, the



equal focus of Calvet on representations adds the role of power relations and ideology on language use, but not as sole arbiter of meanings. Similarly, Calvet urges us to see language in relation to other aspects of the ecology, including various other modes.

While Pennycook and other practice theorists are right that the dichotomy between a singular focus on agency and/or structure is not productive and can not accurately describe the dynamics of social actions, including language use, it is also equally necessary to expand their practice theory from the interplay between individual agency and social structure to recognize the heterogeneities of factors in what they customarily call social structure and bring them as participants as much as we focus on individuals. In other words, we need to recognize not only individuals and social ideologies, but also objects and symbols, not as carriers of human motives or social ideologies, but as mediators in their own right in our actions and their consequences.

Pennycook replaces context with local to avoid the assumption of stability associated with context. However, similar to the social theorists he adopts, he still limits the scope of the mediators of any actions to individuals and the social (in the form of habitus, practice, etc.), thereby not exploring the full complexities of the relations of mediations across all potential (f)actors, both human and non-human alike. In what I see as an extension of practice theory, Bruno Latour problematizes the notion of social in fields like sociology (sociolinguistics too) and critical theory, especially to avoid the assumption of homogeneity and stability in the existing view of the social:

In the alternative view, 'social' is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues cannot fix; it is *what* is glued together by many other type of connectors. Whereas sociologists (or socio-economists, socio-linguists, social psychologists, etc.) take social aggregates as the given that could send some light on residual aspects of economics, linguistics, psychology, management, and so on, these other scholars, on

the contrary, consider social aggregates as what should be explained by the specific *associations* provided by economics, linguistics, psychology, law, management, etc. (*Reassembling 5*)

To avoid the sense of fixity, he uses terms like collective and associations. In his theory, what we often tend to understand as social context is but a collective, meaning associations and relations among various (f)actors in a given situation. By emphasizing associations in place of social context, he is pointing to local heterogeneities in what we call social context, and fluidity in the relationships between various (f)actors affecting what we call individual actions. In some sense Latour's notion of the collective is similar to Calvet's notion of ecology though they use different terminologies.

What I see all these three theorists as doing in terms of social theory (of language, technology, or any social action) is trying to focus on the relations and associations between and across various aspects of the 'social' situation. While Pennycook and other practice theorists focus on relations between individual agency and social structure through practice, Latour adds non-human actors affecting specific acts in communicative practices. Therefore, I'm using the term mesodiscourse and mesospace to capture these various notions of relations, not only *between* micro and macro (individual and social), but also across human and non-human actors.

It is important here to mark, as Bruno Latour contends in his book *Reassembling the Social*, the importance of seeing an individual as a part of a particular network of actors and their constantly shifting (or not so constantly) associations. It is those associations with which Latour replaces the stable notion of the "social" in sociology and critical theory. With this shift in terminology, what he is trying to do is not to ignore the "social" in the discussion of individual actions, but to point to the heterogeneities within

the “social,” often resulting from shifting associations, emergence/introduction of new participants, or/and the exit of old participants, or constant transformations of these participants. And his notion of actor/participant includes not only humans, but also non-humans. What I see Latour doing here is updating practice theory by reminding us that any practice, including that of language, involves not only an individual and the social (manifested in various forms, including dominant ideologies), but also artifacts or objects.

In using the term mesodiscursive relations, I am trying to expand Pennycook’s use of the term mesopolitical practice. His account of language as mesopolitical practice does help us avoid the binary between notions of discursive interpellation and individual freedom by making us aware that they constitute and transform each other. However, it is better to come out of the spatial sense of “meso” in the sense that it seems to take a midway between macro and micro factors. At the same time, I find the usefulness of the term meso in a different sense: as relations between actants in a network of complex mediation, rather than a midway between the micro and the macro. Similarly, I also don’t yet want to discard discourse here for a few reasons. First, I want to use it in one of the original senses: “a running to and fro” or “action” of “run[ning] about.” This sense of the term “discourse,” coupled with the term “meso,” does evoke the sense of network between a variety of actants affecting any individual act. Second, I don’t want to discard how ideology or discourse do partly shape our beliefs and language use. However, I don’t use discourse as an abstract system of norms, but as representations that operate through different material things, institutions, and individual practices, which in turn, transform discourse practices themselves. In not discarding Pennycook’s adaptation of language as

a discourse practice, the phrase “mesodiscursive approach” tries to acknowledge that it is important not to gloss over the role of dominant ideologies and power relations operating in our society and institutions in perpetuating dominant beliefs in certain ways. But at the same time, rethinking discourse from a materialist perspective offers us a way to see durability (or lack of) as a function not of internal workings of a system, but of material conditions and other (f)actors making durability or transformation possible. Viewing language use from a mesodiscursive perspective, therefore, helps us both to imagine possible ways for transforming dominant assumptions of monolingualism in terms of specific situations and for understanding the reasons behind the durability of monolingualism in different guises in our institutions. In other words, we pay attention not to mysterious notions of power, which have the potential to make us passive or desire to reproduce the idealized conventions of powerful discourse, but to the real possibilities of initiating change through disruptions in existing relations of mediations.

At the same time, the focus on relations across various mediators of actions in a mesodiscursive approach should not assume the prior existence of any participant or ideological system. Rather, the focus here is on moving from the traces of difference, e.g., “error” in student writing, to the possible factors contributing to that difference, without trying to reduce heterogeneities and avoid uncertainties by taking recourse to any sweeping notions, e.g., ESL, multilingual, or mainstream students.

In short, taking a mesodiscursive approach to language relations means analyzing language use as a material practice, which is constantly mediating and mediated by different other language practices, perceptions, writing technologies, artifacts, and

specific contexts and histories of language users. However, it is always possible that one or a few (f)actors might dominate others in various specific situations. For instance, in formal classroom situations, teachers' language beliefs, students' own perceptions of language norms, and institutional policies might play a greater role than writing technologies used (e.g., the use of blog or wiki or blackboard). Whereas, in informal and more open spaces like Facebook and blogs, the affordances of technologies and writers' history of the uses of those technologies might play a greater role, it will be a mistake to ignore seemingly minor mediators because incremental changes in our institutions are more realistic than radical.

This way of theorizing language relations and language use tends to avoid the tendencies of taking languages as discrete and multilinguals as free-floating agents. In a few examples below, I'll try to present how plurilingual and other accounts of language practice are problematic and how we can reinterpret these examples alternatively and perhaps more productively. In presenting and analyzing these cases, I will particularly focus on a) the difficulty of language negotiations, often resulting from the tendency of assuming discreteness of different language traditions and b) the problem of reifying language from its use, ignoring specific conditions and material (f)actors enabling or limiting translingual/multilingual practices.

Arjuna Parakrama's *De-hegemonizing Language Standards*, as the title itself suggests, explores ways to resist the hegemony of standard English. He also critiques the World Englishes model of language use and language relations for its hierarchization of English varieties:

I aim, in this manner, to show that even the most liberal and sympathetic of linguists—of whom Kachru is an outstanding example—cannot do justice to these Other Englishes as long as they remain within the overarching structures that these Englishes bring to crisis. To take these new/other Englishes seriously would require a fundamental reevaluation of linguistic paradigms, and not merely a slight accommodation or adjustment. (16-17)

Besides his critique of World Englishes model, what I find interesting, perhaps more so, is his reflection on his own struggle to use a non-standard variety. His reflections in this book gives us a clear sense of how dominant ideology can restrain individuals in trying to negotiate across languages:

I had wanted to write the whole of this book in forms of non-standard English, but it became too difficult because I am very much a product of these standards I wish to problematize. This task to change the way we have looked at language, in concrete as opposed to abstract terms, is hard—*really* hard because it has much less to do with individual ability than structural and discursive hegemony. (vi)

What Parakrama's example shows is the idea that when one tries to "master" a language/discourse, one is also nearly mastered by that discourse so that it's difficult for her/him to get out of it and practice delegitimized discourses<sup>22</sup>. Parakrama's case also reveals a few other things. It clearly shows how being multilingual/multidiscoursal in Pennycook's sense of semiodiversity is so hard. Parakrama was a graduate student writing his dissertation on the issue of the standardization of English. He was clearly a bilingual, perhaps bilingual by birth. And he was also trying to deliberately subvert the dominant discourse. But he still finds it extremely difficult to shuttle between languages. The difficulty, however, results also from Parakrama's own sense that language varieties are discrete and stable, e.g., Sri Lankan English, standard English, etc. He seems to have understood subversion in terms that dominant language ideology has provided for him:

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<sup>22</sup> As I will discuss later, such a belief of Parakrama, however, is based on his false notion of discrete and stable varieties of any language and his belief in the Foucauldian notion of discourse as all-encompassing.

thus even in his attempts to subvert dominant practice, he reinforces the legitimacy and dominant position of that ideology.

When considering writing practices of our students, it is extremely important to pay attention to the kind of difficulty Parakrama mentions.<sup>23</sup> However, on the other hand, it does not mean, as he seems to suggest, that his and similar other attempts to problematize standardized discourse do not have any impact on language ecology. Moreover, his writing, with several obvious and not so obvious instances of both intentional and unintentional uses of what is normally considered non-standard English, and not only its acceptance by the university, but also its impact on himself and others show individuals, in the presence (or absence) of different other participants, do and can contribute to changing or transforming dominant conceptions of language. In other words, his attempt to problematize the ideology of English monolingualism, whether by using “non-standard” English or the “standard” one, does contribute to the changes we’ve seen over the years in our understanding of and thinking about language. However, to narrowly assign the role of making his writing successful to any single aspect, e.g., the attitude or the expertise of his supervisor, his multilingual background, or his use of this or that form of language, is to abstract his language practice and its effects from the ecology of its practice. His case is just an example: I cannot and should not claim that it is representative of any larger group of language users. I’m highlighting the difficulty and labor involved in such language negotiation to remind us that shuttling across language traditions is not as common as we tend to think based on a few instances of multilingual scholar’s language use. Similarly, I also want to caution us to not think of the hegemony

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<sup>23</sup> For a similar account of the difficulty and labour-intensive nature of language negotiation, see Guillaume Gentil’s (2005) “Commitments to academic biliteracy.”

of the dominant discourse of standard English as inescapable while understanding the potential difficulty and labor involved in negotiating such discourse. The issue here is not whether multilinguals can or cannot shuttle between discourses. It is rather more concerned with what (f)actors contribute to different responses of language users to the need of language negotiation. Here, following Latour, I'm pointing to the need to go beyond the anthropocentric logic of many plurilingual theorists, as evidenced in the following text from Canagarajah:

We would focus more on the changing contexts of communication, perhaps treating context as the main variable as writers switch their languages, discourses, and identities in response to this contextual change; rather than treating writers as passive, conditioned by their language and culture, we would treat them as agentive, shuttling creatively between discourses to achieve their communicative objectives. As a precondition for conducting this enquiry, we have to stop treating any textual difference as a unconscious error. We must consider it as a strategic and creative choice by the author to attain his or her rhetorical objectives. ("Shuttling" 591)

Here, I do agree with Canagarajah that equating individual identity and their writing with any culture or language is problematic. However, I also see a serious problem in his treatment of the agency of individuals, especially multilinguals, as independent of context though he considers context as the main variable. He does not see contextual (f)actors as modifying the objectives and consequences of individual actions; rather, he sees such individuals as capable of manipulating context to "attain his or her [their] rhetorical objectives." This is why Theresa Lillis and Carolyn McKinney contend that current translingual theories disregard practice when they focus on a simplistic notion of rhetorical awareness. Similarly, it is equally important to see context not as homogeneous, but as a heterogeneous mix of various agents. Therefore, individuals' language use should be understood and analyzed by disassembling the "context" as



relations across an array of mediators. For instance, Parakrama's difficulty to practice what he considers delegitimized linguistic tradition (separate from SWE) comes partly from his own perception of language systems as discrete, similar to the understanding in the academy where he was working, and many other potential factors not explored in his book due to his reduction of the heterogeneous factors to ideology or hegemony of standard English.

In other words, though, for Parakrama, the difficulty of breaking away from his language habitus built through years of language practice is real, part of the difficulty in such situations also arises from the fact that he, like many other multilingual students, imagines that there is a distinct alternative way of writing that he should master. In other words, he is caught up in what the dominant has defined as alternative to the dominant.

While Parakrama's example shows us the difficulty resulting from one's near-complete entanglements into the dominant language ideology and a false conception of languages as discrete and distinct varieties, there lies, in some cases, another kind of difficulty, the difficulty to switch from the home/local discourse to the dominant, and often due to similar underlying reasons.<sup>24</sup> For many students who do not have strong familiarity with and regular training in the dominant discourse practices, the problem would be, when they are asked to write in the idealized version of a dominant discursive tradition, that of transitioning from their familiar discourse practices to the dominant one both because they are not familiar with writing practices in, say, the university setting in the US and their own and their teachers' misconceptions about language and writing.

Think of students coming with experiences of different epistemological and discourse

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<sup>24</sup> I'm referring to such a division between home/non-dominant discourse and the dominant one just to highlight the fact that there are different practices, but not to say that such a division is water-tight. I do acknowledge that no discourse remains completely unaffected by others.

practices and now studying in the US academy. They often need to work hard to fulfill the expectations of or what they perceive as the expectations of the dominant academic discourse. Their past experiences that shape their habitus often tend to contradict with the dominant discourse practices in the present. To take one example, many students who come from different academic and cultural traditions may find the combative nature of academic writing in the West as very disorienting and challenging. At the same time, they may also think they need to be more combative than in fact they need to be. Or, they might get a sense that all Western Writing is combative—that is, that Western Academic Writing is a uniform and stable entity to which they need to completely submit. Furthermore, the problem here lies not only because such students hold wrong conceptions about the nature of Western Academic Writing, but also because most of the teachers also hold similar views though they would practice writing differently. As recent ethnographic explorations of teachers' perceptions and practices have shown, they often demand students to stick to rigid notion of standards while they themselves transform such standards in their own writings (see Andrea Olinger, "Instability of Disciplinary Style"; also Lea and Street; Monroe's edited collection on writing disciplinarity; Thaiss and Zawacki).

The case of a recent immigrant from India, Neha Shah, presented in Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy's study, can cast light on the difficulty of many students as discussed above. In the writing intensive Intro to Philosophy class, the instructor, though very sympathetic to the ESL student, thinks Neha is underprepared for his class. On the contrary, Neha thinks that she would easily pass the course. This mismatch between what the instructor and the ESL student think results not only from their

conflicting expectations, but also from the different assumptions and experiences that they had about academic writing. The instructor expects Neha to write and read in a way based on an ideal notion of Western argument-based writing tradition. He wants her to understand the argument in philosophical texts, critique the position, and take a unique position of her own on a particular topic. Neha first thinks that she will easily pass this course because she had already completed her Bachelor's degree from India. But the way she would write in India was vastly different from the instructor's expectations. She would not focus on producing argument-based text. Her writing, from the perspective of the instructor, would often meander, just making sketchy presentation of background information and her understanding of the assigned texts, without much thinking about offering an argument about the text. The other major problem for Neha is that she does not find the texts and the curriculum of this course exciting. And when she writes, she seems to blend her personal and cultural background into her interpretation of the text. The difficulty she goes through, as she herself says in an interview with the researcher, lies in the fact that her knowledge and education have not been recognized in the current university: "She explains that the disruption in her plans caused by this conflict between American and Indian systems made her feel 'sad and sorry' for herself. '[I am like] a traveler [who] does not know which way is correct road to get his or her place'" (Fishman and McCarthy 198). That is why she goes through a lot of ambivalence regarding the courses she is taking. This is also reflected in her apathy towards the philosophy course she is taking. Moreover, it's difficult for her to connect to many of the intellectual and cultural values she is supposed to analyze and appreciate in the philosophy class:

By contrast, Neha, as a "traveler" between two cultures, a newcomer to this one, entered Steve's class with different interests and background knowledge--different cultural capital--than her American classmates (Bourdieu, 1982). As a result, she found herself, once again, experiencing bicultural tension, saying that course content was confusing to her, sometimes even upsetting. For example, she was puzzled about her classmates' emotional involvement in discussions of racism after they read Fanon, Carmichael, and hooks. (Fishman and McCarthy 200)

Many of the things discussed in class did not make much sense to her. At the same time, her appropriations of course materials in her writing was not appreciated and encouraged. This is one major reason why the instructor finds Neha's writing incoherent and disorganized. Perhaps, Neha could have done much better had the instructor opened up ways for Neha, and also for other students, to tap into her own cultural and language potentials to enhance her writing and discussion.

Both the instructor and Neha hold similar belief about language, that writing traditions are stable and distinct, and therefore, they assume, Neha has to rigidly follow the idealized version of Western Academic Writing (or for Neha, the instructor should recognize her own distinct style). In reality, Neha is engaged in the construction of the knowledge of philosophy based on her cultural background, academic training, and her changing material-social conditions. Her interpretation of the issues of racism and individual freedom in different Western texts through her own individual experiences of casteism in India could have offered new avenues for understanding social and philosophical issues differently, both for Neha and the whole class.

Neha's case, while not completely representative of all 'non-native' students, also manifests some material and other challenges many minority students face. Besides taking two other courses, she was working as a teaching assistant and also working 45

hours a week outside campus on two jobs. As many other studies have also shown, students like Neha have several commitments while also passionately trying to succeed academically for better job prospects in an “alien” world. The pressure from the instructors and their own concern about possible challenges due to their linguistic difference make students like Neha try to imitate standard discourse where there actually is no “standard” standard discourse. There, students often go through strong sense of frustration and humiliation while trying very hard to adapt to the new situation. In such situations, it is important for us not only to encourage code-meshing, but also to pay attention to the difference such students create while trying to repeat the dominant discourse patterns.

What Neha’s and Parakrama’s examples show us is both the potential and risk, greater potential for transforming linguistic and cultural beliefs as a result of an apparent tension between practices and beliefs, but at the same time a great risk given the dominant belief about language norms in academic institutions and language users themselves. These two examples, in different ways, also demonstrate the labor and the challenges in language negotiations as a result of problematic assumptions of discreteness of language traditions, where they actually are always emergent, subject to continual reconstruction.

What a mesodiscursive approach reminds us is we as teachers of writing should focus on what material-social conditions enable or facilitate developing a disposition towards language use that recognizes the value of difference and works against false assumptions about the nature and uses of language and other communicative mode. Here,

it is important to mark that dispositions are more than mere attitude. Formations and transformations of dispositions are dependent on continual reinforcements of beliefs through individuals' involvement in practices and material-social conditions or changes or breaks in such relations between language use, practices, and material conditions. Therefore, our role as teachers of writing is to help develop conditions and recognize the value of differences to help students overcome problematic assumptions about language norms and to appreciate their own strength. What this mesodiscursive approach shows is the need to think beyond the agency/structure dichotomy in analyzing difference in writing and expanding our notion of practice to diversify the notion of the social and to include the role of agents other than humans.

For instance, in the case of Neha, she becomes barely “successful” and that success has been associated with her interaction with the teacher and her peers because of which she could better understand the expectations of her teacher and his idealized notion of argumentative writing in the discipline of philosophy. However, that success actually fails to recognize the meaning potential that her different understanding of the issues of philosophy and that of writing she could contribute to the class. Moreover, we also need to see what other factors contributed to both the possibility for her to pass the course and the silencing of her voice in indirect ways. Did the readings they did in class; the racial, gender, and other composition of the class; the way classroom was structured, the options they were allowed to use (writing/speaking/other audio-visual modes, etc.), her own socio-material conditions (TAship, her work outside the university, the need to support her family that recently migrated from India, etc.) and her writing practices outside the classroom, etc. contribute in any way to the nature of her participation in class and her

writing? That particular study does not provide much information on this because its focus is largely on how an “ESL” student struggles to adapt to the education system in the US, with specific attention to the discreteness of education systems and languages. Therefore, it does not follow the traces of differences and explore relations between Neha’s use of language, the language practices she has been participating in, and language beliefs. It rather ends up just recognizing the role of the interactions with teacher and with the peers as it assumes the only purpose of Neha’s learning to write is to adapt to the conventions of Standard Written English.

In other words, despite it being an excellent and systematically done case study, its assumptions about language use and language relations affect what it sees. It is the same in the case of Parakrama as he, despite questioning the ideology of English monolingualism, ends up being trapped in the same logic that he seeks to challenge. And one fundamental reason that lies behind problematic treatments of language is the limited notion of mediation: language use seen in terms just of ideology/hegemony rather than exploring how such ideologies work and what happens when ideologies become delegated through material social agents and practices. It is important not to reduce Neha’s difference in writing to a single thing like monolingual ideology, her cultural background, writing traditions, etc. All of these may play different roles, but they work differently in different situations. That is why Neha’s experience and expertise are very different from Buthaina’s or Parakrama’s. The tendency of labeling them as different manifestations of the same problem (monolingual ideology, cultural differences, etc.) does not take us any where than mystifying experiences of students like Neha.

Finally, it is also important to not abstract writing from other communicative practices and modes. While, as Theresa Lillis contends, sociolinguists take writing as completely separate from other communicative practices like speech, composition has customarily been relegating other modes to the margin while solely focusing on writing as alphabetic print composition. Similarly, development of new forms of technologies and the accompanying trends of globalization take us to a very different writing ecology. While new forms of technologies have made it easier to practice what has been called multimodal composition, they have also created a situation where interactions across linguistic practices have become more common. Therefore, there has been an increasing trend in composition to study the role of technology on writing. The next chapter addresses the issue of the relationship between writing and technology and how thinking of that relationship from a practice theory perspective (in a broader sense) can provide us more productive ways to understand the nature of writing in the present context.

## Conclusion

In short, the focus in many language theories on stable norms or on metalinguistic awareness of multilinguals not only marks the problem of reification of language acts from actual practices, but also of, indirectly, covering up the actual problems language users face in negotiating differences and the potentials of transforming their own writing and the dominant writing practices through such negotiations. Going beyond the focus on stable forms or special competence of multilinguals, it is important, as Calvet and Latour suggest, to see practices in concrete situations and consider the ecology of communicative acts in terms of relations and associations between diverse mediating (f)actors. In short, it is the focus on the mediations occurring in the meso space of



relations, that is, the network of mediators, in place of micro or macro forces, that marks the difference of this approach from other dominant models. It is more important to look for incremental ways of developing translingual/multilingual dispositions both in teachers and students than either advocating radical subversion through the use of non-standard academic traditions or highlighting the special competence of multilingual students to shuttle across different discourses.

## CHAPTER 4

### COMPOSITION, TECHNOLOGY, AND MULTIMODALITY<sup>25</sup>

As with language interactions, developments of digital technologies have also affected how we compose, think about composition, and teach composition. There have been several calls for rethinking composition curriculum and pedagogy in recent times (Yancey; Dobrin; Selfe; etc.), especially with a focus on multimodality and writing in a digital context. This chapter explores what it means to write in a digital age, examining dominant views in composition about the relationship between technology, modality, and writing; and suggests some alternative ways of thinking about and theorizing such relationships in the context of recent developments in writing ecology. In particular, this chapter urges us to resist the tendency to limit modality to fixed properties and functions and to focus on their fluid nature and the interactions across them, locating them in socio-technical practice. It argues that locating modality in practice helps us avoid exclusively materialist<sup>26</sup>, ideological, and humanist tendencies.

The development of different forms of technologies affects overall aspects of our life, including how we read, write, and teach. But the debate is on how or in what ways.

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<sup>25</sup> This chapter is limited in its scope to the analysis of dominant literature on the relationship between writing and multimodality. As I've developed a general theory of mediation for the study of language and technology in Chapter 2, in this chapter, I will limit myself to reviewing dominant understanding of multimodality and offering alternative reading of it.

<sup>26</sup> Here, I'm using the term materialist in the way Bruno Latour uses it. It refers to the tendency of taking technologies and their effects only in terms of the material features of those technologies. This use of the term materialism is completely different from a cultural materialist understanding of materialism.

The debate in this regard covers issues such as how we define technology, its role, and the relationship between technology and other aspects of material-social life, including the users/designers, ideologies, specific materialities of different forms of technologies, and what Rickert calls ambience. I see the present attempts at defining multimodality and the role of technology in our field in a way similar to what Yildiz contends about the multilingual authors' attempts to get beyond a monolingual paradigm, while at the same time retaining monolingualist assumptions in different forms. The dominant notion of multimodality in composition and literacy studies, despite focusing on *multimodality*, is still monomodal in nature. Similarly, the critique of what Raymond Williams calls technological determinism often takes, in some sophisticated ways, a form of ideological determinism. Critiquing both and expanding the cultural materialist notion of technology, this present chapter offers an ecological approach that urges us to avoid abstracting composing practices and to pay attention to both the salient and ambient aspects of mediation.

#### Background to Technological Mediation: McLuhan and Williams

Bruno Latour, very similar to Raymond Williams in many ways, divides technical mediation into three categories: instrumentalist, materialist, and ideological<sup>27</sup>.

Discussions of multimodality and technological mediation in composition display all these tendencies in various forms, while also trying to go beyond them. And the roots of

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<sup>27</sup> Both Williams and Latour critique social and materialist determinisms. But they depart in terms of how they define technology and how they take determination. Latour does not distinguish between technique and technology where as Williams makes a clear distinction, where technique suggests mere material or formalistic aspect of technology where as technology represents techniques in their practice, with social and cultural values associated with them. While Latour does not distinguish between the two, he does see technique not in its materiality alone, but in terms of its relation to the network of mediators in a dynamic ecology of human and non-human assembly.

such tendencies go at least to the monumental work of Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams' critique of McLuhan in the 1950s and 60s. Therefore, before discussing dominant notions of multimodality and technological mediation in composition, I will provide a brief background that will help us contextualize present discussions and look for alternative possibilities for better (of course a matter of contention) understandings of technological mediations and issues of multimodality in relation to composition.

Marshall McLuhan is similar in some ways to Martin Heidegger in his critique of instrumental and humanist theories of technology. Both take technology as a force shaping human life in profound ways. While Heidegger calls our attention to the "essence" of technology itself rather than how it is used or the ways it contributes towards "getting things done", Marshall McLuhan critiques what he calls the "narcissistic hypnosis" and advocates a materialist understanding of technology<sup>28</sup>:

In accepting an honorary degree from the University of Notre Dame a few years ago, General David Sarnoff made this statement: 'We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value.' That is the voice of the current somnambulism. Suppose we were to say, 'Apple pie is in itself neither good nor bad; it is the way it is used that determines their value.' .... Again. 'Firearms are in themselves neither good nor bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value.' ... There is simply nothing in the Sarnoff statement that will bear scrutiny, for it ignores the nature of the medium, of any and all media, in the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form.... It has never occurred to General Sarnoff that any technology could do anything but add itself on to what we already are. (*Understanding Media* 11)

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<sup>28</sup> As I've mentioned in the second chapter, McLuhan's understanding of materialism is very different from a cultural materialist understanding. I will discuss that when discussing Williams' critique of McLuhan. McLuhan was also responding to the theory of communication developed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in which the focus is completely on the transfer of information without any noise (of the materiality of the medium) in between the sender and receiver of the message. McLuhan, contrarily, contends that it's the medium that determines not only the message, but also the configurations of the whole social and individual world.

His emphasis on the specific material nature of different technologies or media and their effects on the overall social structure and human understanding marks a clear break from the tendency of taking technology merely as a tool or instrument for the fulfillment of human intentions. In other words, his theory of media charts a new territory for the study of communication media and their relation to the organization of social structure and human understanding by drawing our attention to the medium or technology itself rather than the “message/content” or its relation to human use. While instrumentalist theories do not see any meaning in considering the differences in various technologies, McLuhan and his followers reverse that understanding and think that it is the specific material nature of different technologies that shape social life differently. Therefore, he shifts his focus from the instrumentality of technologies/media to their materiality or their specific forms:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology. (*Understanding Media* 7)

For McLuhan, every new technology has a causal effect at the social and personal level. For instance, he talks about a light bulb, which many of us do not think of as a medium because it does not seem to have any message. However, McLuhan claims that a light bulb changes how we live and how we structure our life around light and darkness. Similarly, he contends that mechanical technology and automation create two different patterns of human association and work; e.g., automation leads to “depth of involvement in their work and human association that our mechanical technology had destroyed” (7)

where as mechanical technology created a fragmented world with alienated individuals because the “technique of fragmentation ... is the essence of machine technology” (8).

McLuhan also sees how specific media have certain specific effects and limitations due to their unique material qualities. For instance, he divides media into “cool” and “hot,” which shape our perceptions differently depending on their properties. Their coolness or hotness does not have anything to do with human use or the content they carry. Rather, they are determined by the level of participation of the audience/viewers/readers/users they ostensibly require because of their material characteristics:

There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in “high definition.” High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, high definition.” A cartoon is “low definition,” simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. (22)

Here, hot and cool media are distinguished in terms of how much information an audience needs to gather to get a complete picture. He thinks a “cool medium like hieroglyphic or ideogrammatic written characters has very different effects from the hot and explosive medium of the phonetic alphabet ... The printed word with its specialist intensity burst the bonds of medieval corporate guilds and monasteries, creating extreme individualist patterns of enterprise and monopoly” (23). Thus, McLuhan theorizes technologies and media in terms of their internal logic and clear distinctions depending on their ostensibly inherent properties. Therefore, he considers technology as a language with a distinct grammar of its own. And that grammar and internal logic of new

technologies radically shift social structure and human relationships. This goes closer to the linguistic determinism in Whorf and the similar technological determinism in Walter Ong's division between literacy and orality.

However, McLuhan does acknowledge that every medium contains the traces of another medium, e.g., internet containing the features of print. Therefore, he believes, quite similar to the later theory of remediation developed by David Bolter and Richard Grusin, that every new medium is a remediation of the old one. But, despite his critique of instrumentalist and humanist accounts of technology and his focus on the specificity of different media and their role in social relations and human understanding, his dismissal of social aspects of technology takes him towards technological determinism. And the traces of his deterministic thinking can be found in composition and literacy studies, from Walter Ong's distinction between oral and written cultures to Kress's distinctions between different modalities in terms of their inherent properties. McLuhan's critique of the instrumentalist notion of technology, his division of media into different kinds based on their material properties, and his materialist formalism provide a good background to contextualize and make sense of current theories of technology and modality.

Raymond Williams' social theory of technology and his critique of technological (McLuhan) and social determinisms (the economism of orthodox Marxism and similar tendencies in some later Marxist schools of thought) provide us another way to understand and to relate to the dominant understandings of technology and modality in composition. Williams, while being positive about the possibilities of technological innovations, contends that such developments and their uses are shaped by the social relations of the world where they are introduced. In other words, he theorizes technology

in terms of the complex relations and interactions between technical developments and the priorities and needs of the society, especially those of the powerful groups.

Williams tends to agree, in his early assessment, with McLuhan's study of media, especially with regard to McLuhan's attention to specificity: "Much of the initial appeal of McLuhan's work was his apparent attention to the specificity of the media: the differences in quality between speech, print, radio, television, and so on" (*Television* 127). McLuhan does not lump all "new" technologies or media into one category and valorize or condemn them. Williams finds, in his early understanding, McLuhan's attention to specificities of media as a move away from abstraction. Therefore, he appreciates him for taking into account unique material limitations and potentials of different media forms, which, if taken in their complexities, could have provided us with great insights about the complex issue of determination. However, with McLuhan's continual shift towards technicist and formalistic assumptions, Williams, in his later works like *Television*, strongly criticizes McLuhan for erasing all social and historical contexts from discussions of technology:

The work of McLuhan was a particular culmination of an aesthetic theory which became, negatively, a social theory [...] It is an apparently sophisticated technological determinism which has the significant effect of indicating a social and cultural determinism [...] If the medium—whether print or television—is the cause, of all other causes, all that men ordinarily see as history is at once reduced to effects. Similarly, what are elsewhere seen as effects, and as such subject to social, cultural, psychological and moral questioning, are excluded as irrelevant by comparison with the direct psychological and therefore 'psychic' effects of the media as such. The initial formulation—'the medium is the message'—was a simple formalism. The subsequent formulation—'the medium is the message'—is a direct and functioning ideology. (129-30)

Williams, as the above quotation shows, rejects two tendencies in the treatment of technology and its relation to society and culture: determinism and formalism. First, he



rejects determinist logics, both in terms of the emergence of technologies and in terms of their effects.

In determinist accounts, technological development is taken as an autonomous process whereby the inner logic of a particular technology unravels in a predictable, often inevitable, fashion and changes the world into which it is born. For instance, the discovery of the printing press is seen to have led to the Enlightenment or telegraphy leading to the Industrial Revolution or the Internet leading to an information age. One of the assumptions of deterministic thought is that “a new technology ... ‘emerges’ from technical study and experiment. It then changes the society or sector into which it has ‘emerged.’ ‘We’ adapt to it because it is the new modern way” (*Towards 2000* 129).

Such a tendency takes McLuhan’s theory towards formalism as he assumes that technology emerges independent of all social and political conditions and needs. Williams therefore dismisses materialist formalism in McLuhan in that he “fails to factor in the social and historical context (and content) of technological progress” (Banita 99). Such accounts ignore how social power and intentions play any role and assume that a technology or a series of technological developments impose their own order or pattern over the efforts of individuals to use such technologies for specific purposes. On the contrary, Williams tries to bring back social context to show how “technologies are called into being through the needs and desires of corporations, states, groups, or individuals” (Freedman 427).

It is here very important to see how Williams’s cultural materialist understanding of technological practices is different from McLuhan’s in terms of how they use the term technology and medium. The difference of Williams’ understanding of technology from

McLuhan's formalist understanding can be seen in McLuhan's conflation of medium (technical innovation, technique, or skills) with technology and Williams' clear distinction between the two. As McLuhan isolates technology from its connection with social values and usage by concentrating on its formal characteristics, he does not see any reason to distinguish technology as skills or tool from its realization in its use in specific socio-material contexts. On the contrary, Williams describes the latter as "first, the body of knowledge appropriate to the development of such skills and applications and, second, a body of knowledge and conditions for the practical use and application of a range of devices" (Williams *Towards 2000*, 227). He is more interested in how a technical invention becomes an "available technology" rather than McLuhan's version of a technique unraveling along its own internal logic. In other words, for Williams, technology is a relationship; it is "necessarily in complex and variable connection with other social relations and institutions" (qtd. in Freedman 429). He sees technology as the mediation between technique/medium/technical inventions and general social institutions.

Despite his focus on social aspect of technology, he also equally critiques sociological determinism of all kinds, including orthodox Marxism and the Frankfurt school view of technology/mass media as a form of mass deception. These theorists see technologies merely as tools for the dominant class to exploit the masses and the audience/users as cultural dupes. Williams calls this tendency of abstracting technology from practice a symptomatic view of technology:

The second class of opinion appears less determinist. Television, like any other technology, becomes available as an element or a medium in a process of change that is in any case occurring or about to occur. By contrast with pure technological determinism, this view emphasizes other causal factors in social change. It then considers particular technologies, or a complex of technologies, as symptoms of change of some other kind.

Any particular technology is then as it were a by-product of a social process that is otherwise determined. It only acquires effective status when it is used for purposes which are already contained in this known social process. (*Television* 13)

In this view, technological developments are just symptoms of other social or economic changes. In technological determinism, technological innovations are the sole agents where as in sociological determinism, technologies are mere by-products of some other changes and have no agency of their own. For instance, this sociological argument would believe that if certain technologies were not invented, e.g., the internet, neo-liberal capitalism would have found some other means to maintain its control over large portions of the population. In other words, what technologies are used and who uses them do not matter much compared to the role of ideologies and economic/social structures.

Williams does acknowledge that both these positions, sociological and technological determinisms, make some important points. But both sides are equally hugely problematic because they, “though in different ways, [have] abstracted technology from society” (13). They view it “either [as] a self-acting force which creates new ways of life, or ...[as] a self-acting force which provides materials for new ways of life” (13).

Williams walks a fine line between these two extremes. His approach differs from

technological determinism in that it would restore intention to the process of research and development. The technology would be seen, that is to say, as being looked for and developed with certain purposes and practices already in mind. At the same time the interpretation would differ from *symptomatic technology* in that these purposes and practices would be seen as direct; as known social needs, purposes and practices to which the technology is not marginal but central. (Italics in the original; Williams, *Television* 14)

In Williams’ account, the developments and effects of technologies are not independent of social needs and purposes and those needs often reflect the interests of the dominant

groups and institutions in a society. As his study of the development of broadcast television shows, he locates causality within “known social needs” arising within broader social relations of production, social institutions, and the reproduction of a specific social order. However, he does see reciprocal relations between social needs and the potentials of the technological uses: “Williams’ model of technological development appears to suggest that innovation is contingent on periods of social change—he writes that new systems of communication like photography, cinema and broadcasting were ‘incentives and responses within a phase of general social transformation’” (Freedman 430). This shows that Williams does not completely discard a Marxist theory of determination.

His general theory of determination as the “setting of limits and the exertion of pressures” was designed to counter what he saw as the essentialism of the vulgar Marxist model of base and superstructure, but keeping the important role of broader economic and social relations. That is why he thinks that television and radio “were the applied technology of a set of emphases and responses within the determining limits and pressures of industrial capitalist society” (27). In other words, the development of a particular technology is bound up with profound social changes that, in turn, would be affected by the performance of that technology. However, he at the same time thinks that there is always a moment of choice. That there is no pre-determined form or function to communication technologies. Eventual outcome depends on the selections and preferences of human actors, but definitely within the limits and pressures provided by existing economic and political systems. While he does believe that the choices of the most powerful groups in society determine the shape and the pattern of the uses of

technologies, he does see some possibility for individuals to put technologies to alternative uses.

In short, Williams believed that technologies were developed to fulfill social needs whereas social needs and purposes were transformed by the uses and further developments of technologies. In other words, in insisting on the social nature of technologies, he shows a dialectical relationship between the social and economic contexts and the effects of technologies on societies. His approach also points out the contingent nature of technological development, while also acknowledging how such a development largely reflects the interests of the hegemonic groups.

Williams' reading shows the difficulty of walking a fine line between technological and sociological determinism. His redefinition of determination as limits and pressures posed by the existing economic and social structures and his focus on the reciprocal influence of social needs and the impact of the uses of technologies goes closer to Bruno Latour's new materialist approach to technical mediation where he replaces determination with translation. Therefore, Latour's new materialism, which he calls a sociology of translation/associations, is an attempt to avoid social and materialist determinisms by taking into account agentive roles of not only humans and ideologies, but also that of non-human agents like technologies and other material artifacts. As discussed in Chapter Two, while not discounting the role of macro forces like ideologies, economic structures, culture, etc., he at the same time sees them not as homogeneous systems, but as an amalgam of a multitude of participants contributing to the durability or change of the existing system. In that sense, technologies are neither the sole determiners nor mere tools. They cannot be thought of as having fixed effects or meanings as their

meanings are the functions of a host of (f)actors working in complex relations with each other in varying situations. In all their complexities, Williams' critique of determinist thought and Latour's notion of translation help us better understand the issue of modality and technology in writing.

### Mediation and Modality in Composition: Materialist and (Post)Critical Perspectives

The discussion of the relationship between technology, multimodality, and composition began to appear increasingly since the late 1980s and early 90s, with a proliferation of works in this area after the turn of the century. The primary focus of this scholarship has been the idea that "new" technologies (new media) have completely changed the nature of writing and therefore, composition should shift its attention from the teaching of writing as a monomodal practice to multimodal composition/visual literacy/new genres of writing. Multimodal scholars challenge the dominance of the monomodal nature of writing and communication. Gunther Kress, Cynthia Selfe, Anne Wysocki, Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, and several others have shown us how dismissal of modes other than print writing is problematic as it excludes the potentials of meaning making using a whole range of available modes. However, even in our discussions of multimodality, we still tend to follow the logic of monomodality in some form, especially due to the tendency of reifying the notion of mode. Similarly, our discussion of technology, whether it is in terms of the uses of modes or media, whether talking about the technologies of speaking and writing, or in terms of the affordances of digital technologies like Facebook, Twitter, or Flickr, tends to either focus on the affordances based on the material/formal properties of those technologies or in terms of larger social forces like ideology, culture, or society. Both these tendencies show us the difficulty of

working against the paradigms from within those paradigms themselves. In other words, whether it is from what Latour calls materialist or critical perspectives, we tend to abstract technologies from the complex web of relations and meanings, thereby leaving dominant assumptions unchallenged. In what follows, I discuss the residual materialist tendencies in the discussion of multimodality in composition and literacy studies on the one hand and the reifying of multimodal practices by reducing technologies to mere symptoms of the dominant ideologies on the other.

There have been different kinds of arguments about the need to address the effects of diverse forms of digital technologies in writing practices. The two major tendencies that appear in different forms, sometimes overlapping each other or expressed in combined forms, often critiquing the instrumentalist notion, are materialist and critical. While being very different from each other, especially in terms of the need for promoting multimodality and the use of digital technologies for teaching learning practices, they do share one fundamental problem: that is, abstracting the notion of technology and modality from practices and assigning a fixed value or meaning to them. Despite the critique of the dominance of monomodal ideology, many multimodal theorists leave unchallenged existing notion of specific modes, especially in advocating additive models of multimodality. What Selber calls a postcritical approach goes beyond the critical approach's complete dismissal of the issue of technologies and modalities in composition and urges us to use technology and deal with it, but with critical reflection.

The questions we should begin with are how do we define modality or mode? How do we assign certain values to certain modes? Do modes and technologies have specific properties and functions/effects? What mode is writing? Is it a single mode or is

it always already multimodal? Why do we see or value only one modal aspect of what we call writing? The answers to these questions will determine how we think of multimodality as an alternative to writing or any other assumed modes like speech, moving images, still images, audio, etc.

### Materialist Approach

The materialist approach to multimodality shows some remnants of the theory of technology I discussed in relation to Marshall McLuhan. Whether it is in the notion of multiliteracies in the New London Group article or in Kress's notion of multimodality, literacies and modalities are often taken as separate and fixed, with some inherent properties of their own. And those material properties are often associated with fixed functions. Here, I'll focus specifically on Gunther Kress's theory of multimodality, especially because that notion has remained perhaps the most influential in the treatment of modality in composition.

Gunther Kress calls our attention to the effects of new media, especially the significance of visual representations, and the need to address the challenges and opportunities brought about by the shift in communication landscapes. He contends that "the semiotic changes are vast enough to warrant the term 'revolution', of two kinds: of the modes of representation on the one hand, from the centrality of writing to the increasing significance of image; and of the media of dissemination on the other, from the centrality of the medium of the book to the medium of the screen" ("Gains and Losses" 6). This is similar to what Kathleen Blake Yancey says about the transformations brought about by new media: "Literacy today is in the midst of a tectonic change" ("Made Not Only with Words" 298). Such claims about "revolution", "tectonic change"



etc. abound in the literature on the relationship between literacy and technology, in some way echoing McLuhan's claim about the effects of new technologies on every aspect of social and personal life. The changes in the semiotic practices they demonstrate are of course real and significant. But it is also equally important to interrogate the implications of such claims of "newness" and "revolution." The risk of such claims is to ignore not only the intersections and overlap between the "new" and the "old," but also to limit them to fixed and definite meanings. In other words, we need to be wary about, as Anne Wysocki and Paul Prior remind us, limiting or constraining the roles and meanings of technologies and modalities to certain fixed functions, which has led many in composition to forward an additive model of multimodality. Gunther Kress's theory of multimodality reflects that tendency.

Kress has developed a sophisticated theory of multimodality and the affordances of various modes. The major tenet of his theory, as he claims, is an attempt to go away from the traditional tendency of abstraction in linguistic representations and advocate image-based representations for their clarity and transparency: "In an attempt to gain new insight into possibilities for representing, multimodal descriptions—and multimodal semiotics in particular—have turned away from the enchantment of linguistics with abstraction that had dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century.... By contrast, the emphasis in multimodal work is very much on the materiality of the resources for representation" ("Gains and Losses" 12). He thus contrasts his social semiotic theory of multimodality with structuralist theories of linguistics where the focus is more on competence than on

performance, more on the abstracted conventions than on actual practices<sup>29</sup>. A

multimodal approach, on the other hand, as he claims, emphasizes the specificity of the material nature of different modes of communication/representation:

Central assumptions of multimodal approach to representation and communication are (a) that communication is always and inevitably multimodal; and (b) that each of the modes available for representation in a culture provides specific potentials and limitations for communication .... The first assumption requires us to attend to all modes that are active in an instance of communication; the second requires us to attend to the specific meanings carried by the different modes in communicational ensembles.... (“Gains and Losses” 5)

His emphasis on the multimodal nature of every communication and his focus on the specific materialities of the modes of communication do help us see the potentials and limitations of communicative practices. But, at the same time, his highly generalized notion of culture and society and his materialist or “modalist” approach to communication make him fall victim to another form of abstraction: abstracting the notion of the social and that of technology and modalities from practices (Lillis, *Sociolinguistics of Writing* 21). In particular, Kress’s notion of affordances of various semiotic modes and his association of materialities with fixed affordances pushes his theory towards what Lillis calls a modalist approach or what Brian Street calls the “autonomous model of multimodality” (32).

Kress theorizes new media and the potential transformation of the shift from the old forms of modes and media to the new ones in term of the materialities and affordances that new modes and media *have*. Kress’s major point is that different modes have their distinct materialities with vastly different affordances. He contends:

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<sup>29</sup> It is true that Chomskian grammar and structuralist theories ignore practices and promote abstraction (convention, structure, rules, grammar). However, despite Kress’s emphasis on specificity, he does not focus on practices.

One of the present tasks of a social semiotic approach to multimodality is to describe the potentials and limitations for meaning which *inhere* [italics mine] in different modes. For that, it is essential to consider the *materiality* of modes. Speech uses the material of (human) sound; writing uses the material of graphic substance. There are things you can do with sound that you cannot do with graphic substance, either easily or at all; not even imitate all that successfully graphically. (“Reading Images” 112)

In other words, what he says is that writing and image have their own unique affordances based on their materialities, however, by reducing the speech act to sound (for example, ignoring the role of gesture and facial expression), and of writing to only “graphic substance,” ignoring the full material process of writing. Therefore, it is necessary for us to think about what specific goals or functions these different modes can accomplish.

The primary difference, according to Kress, between speech and writing is that the former uses “sound” where as the latter uses “words.” However, both of these traditional modes have some fundamental similarities: that they happen in time, “one sound, one word, one sentence follows another. The logic of temporal sequence is the *major principle of ordering* of languages such as English” (“Reading Images”112). And this affordance of writing/speech, the organization through temporal sequence, often implies causality. So, traditional writing or speech makes us understand reality in terms of events and actions occurring in a certain temporal order. But visual representation, as it uses image in place of words, offers a distinct way of understanding. Kress says that image works by the logic of simultaneity rather than by that of temporal order:

The logic of space works differently: In the message entity (the image), all elements are simultaneously present—even though they were, of course, in many forms of image—in drawing or in painting, though not in photography—placed there in time and even though the viewer traverses the image-elements in time. So, it is the viewer’s action that orders the simultaneous present elements in relation to her or his interest. In spatially organized representation, the elements that are chosen for representation

are simultaneously present, and it is their spatial arrangement that is used to make (one kind of) meaning. (“Reading Images”13).

So, in visual representation, the affordances of the spatial are used, for instance, color, size, placement, and composition. In contrast to the dominance of narratives in writing/speech, the new culture of the visuals is dominated by the logic of “display” (Kress, “Gains and Losses” 14). In image-dominated representation, the most important factors are the simultaneous positions (saliency) and the relations between those things in different positions.

For Kress, another important aspect of the difference between writing and image-based representation is that “words are highly conventionalized entities, and only exist in that manner” whereas images are open. Therefore, Kress believes that words are “always general and, therefore, vague,” often empty of meaning, whereas images have “infinitely large potential of depictions—precise, specific, and full of meaning” (“Gains and Losses” 15). He further contends: “The former [words] tends to occur in the fixed order of syntax, line, page, text; the latter tend to occur in an open order fixed by the reader and/or viewer’s interest. This leads to the paradox of speech and writing as having a finite number of open, relatively vague elements in fixed order, and image or depiction having a possibility of infinitely many full, specific elements in an open order. (“Gains and Losses” (16). In these ways, writing and visual representations have distinct meaning potentials and different ways of representing the world, one focusing on causality and order and the other focusing on space and relations, often leading to very different understandings of the world.

Kress’s theory of affordances is very useful to think about what functions different texts can perform and how we can make better choices about representation and

construction of meaning. In this context, we need also to acknowledge, as Kress calls for, the ubiquitous nature of multimodality and rethink writing and representation in terms of the affordances of different modes used in them. However, there are a few problems in Kress's theorization of these different forms of representation in terms of their affordances. The major problem with Kress is that he operates through binary logic. As Paul Prior says, "he proposes a series of strong binaries of mutually exclusive affordances—each of which is associated with a particular mode" (24). While Kress views affordances as properties of the specific modes, determined by culture and history<sup>30</sup>, fixed and stable, many others believe that it is relational and emergent. James Gibson, while defining affordance originally, cautioned us that it was meant to "imply the complementarity of the animal and the environment" (127). Gibson also highlights, as Prior's analysis shows, the "fuzziness of categories, noting that objects such as hammers may afford—with relative ease or difficulty—a great many kinds of action. Kress, on the other hand, proposes a set of hard binary dictions between words and images. Words in his account are finite, sequential, vague, conventional, authored, narrative and/or causal, and open to critique. Images are infinite, spatial, specific, natural and transparent, viewed, and available only for design" (26). The point here is that Kress takes images and words as mutually exclusive and assumes that affordances are the properties of the modes (environment in the theory of ecological psychologists), and in so doing, neglects the idea that it is relative, relative to the user, context of use, and the practices of which it is a part. With a slight revision to Gibson's original definition, later psychologists such as A. Chemero and T. Stoffregen regard affordances as an "emergent" quality (Stoffregen 124). This is how Chemero defines it: "I argue that affordances are not properties of the

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<sup>30</sup> He mentions that only in mantra-like fashion and then goes on to describe modes in materialist way.

environment; indeed, they are not even properties. Affordances, I argue, are relations between particular aspects of animals and particular aspects of situations” (184). He further says that “affordances are features of the whole situation” (185).

Here, the point that I’m trying to highlight is that affordances are not the *inherent* properties of an object or the environment. First, an affordance is relative to the perceiver and the practices of the perceiver in an act of perceiving. Second, it depends on the whole situation, where it includes not only the object (mode, medium, etc.) and the perceiver (readers/viewers), but also the overall situation where the action or the perception takes place. From this point of view, affordances of images or words depend not only on the material features of them, but also on the relations of them with other objects/things around them and the viewer/reader. As it is relative to the audience/readers/viewers, the affordance of something can be quite different at various situations. Just think about a book. Yes, it is in general to be read, often in a sequential order. But it can be used as a weapon, as a pillow, a support while leaning on a wall, as a form of office or home decoration, or as I remember from my childhood days, a thing to be exchanged for *chatpate*<sup>31</sup> or ice-cream bar. Even when it is read, how it is read often depends on the disposition of the reader that has been developed through the sedimentation of his/her reading and writing practices, which, though, are likely to be diverse and fluid, even for individuals. We might read newspapers differently than academic journals, but sometimes we read each of these differently. Perhaps, this is why we often have the habit of reading images not only in spatial terms but also in sequence. And at the same time there are many images which are basically “sequential” in nature (Prior 27), for instance

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<sup>31</sup> A kind of spicy snack that consists of *bhuja*, boiled potato, lemon juice, red chillies, and some spices. We used to exchange pages of books or notebooks for *chatpate* and the seller would use those pages as containers for selling *chatpate*.

“film..., print comics and process diagrams” (27). Even if Kress makes a binary between images and words by making one “free and open-ended” and also “full of meaning” and “always specific” and the other always “vague” and “general,” we can find even the images being highly bound by long traditions and conventions on the one hand and the communicative practices of the users:

In fact, to accept Kress’ argument that images are inherently filled with precise meaning would require that we ignore most practice in visual arts and design.... Rather than accept the binary model that Kress proposes, particular the notion of visual precision, we propose a third way. We believe that images simultaneously occupy both nodes, and that this is, in fact, their great power. Symbolic images have the capacity to simultaneously be precise and ambiguous. What is represented may be specific, but meaning requires interpretation. Images merge visual conventions with individual vocabularies; they fuse public discourse with personal subjectivities. (McDonagh, Goggin, and Squier 85)

McDonagh, Goggin, and Squier show how fixing function with form is very problematic and how detaching technologies from their use gives a false notion of their affordances.

The binary logic also works in terms of Kress’s division between the medium of screen and that of print. He thinks of writing on a page and depiction on screen, words and images as operating by completely distinct logics. He ignores the fact that traditional modes of organization of meaning through words on pages affect how images and texts are organized and understood on screen. As Manovich says, the medium of screen, in many ways, follows the logic of the organization of text in books (66). In many respects, as Cope and Kalantzis also say, many of the texts in traditional mode could have been read in nonlinear ways, for instance, newspapers, magazines, dictionaries, encyclopedias, cook books, restaurant menus and so on. It would perhaps be better to see how these different modes have been affecting each other and producing in many case hybrid texts.

As P. Prior says, citing Bolter and Grusin, “computer screens borrow from texts and pages and texts borrow from computer screens,” in other words, “where Kress sees a one-way sequence of unique semiotic objects, Bolter and Grusin see blurred, complex, and mutual relations” (26).

Finally, Kress does say that modes are the “culturally and socially produced resources for representation” (“Gains and Losses” 7). He further claims,

The same is true for the ‘grammar of visual design.’ Like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction . . . . Meanings belong to culture, rather than to specific semiotic modes. And the way meanings are mapped across different semiotic modes, the way some things can, for instance, be said either visually or verbally, other only visually, again others only verbally, is also culturally and historically specific” (*Grammar of Visual Design 2*).

The above quotation demonstrates that Kress (and Leeuwen) clearly connects modes and their meanings with culture and society. But when he does so, first, he sees the relationship between culture and modes or technologies as unidirectional, culture determining meanings of modes. Second, he views cultures as stable, homogeneous things though they do acknowledge that semiotic practices and their meanings in different cultures are different. That is why he claims that the grammar of visual design he, in collaboration with Van Leeuwen, develop applies to the Western culture. Therefore, his argument goes like, different cultures shape modes differently and that is why, he claims that a universal grammar of visual design cannot be developed. But , he claims, in the West, visuals and organization follow a certain grammar. Thus, he treats “the West” as a stable and internally uniform culture despite the evidences that show the contrary (see Appadurai). This at best mistakes what might be dominant practices and meanings for specific modes at a given time for the full range of these and their vulnerability to



change. Therefore, his social semiotic theory reflects the tendency of what Latour calls the “sociology of the social” (“*Reassembling* 9) or what Williams would call social determinism, as much as his discussion of affordances shows his theory to be closer to the autonomous model of multimodality. His logic of separateness and fixity of modal affordances and his conception of multimodality as a collection of various distinct modes make his theory similar to an additive model of multilingualism.

Similar to McLuhan’s division between hot and cold media or Walter J Ong’s division between technologies of writing and orality, Gunther Kress’s division between speech and writing; book (print) and screen; or linguistics and multimodal representations in terms of their formal properties and specific functions or potentials places him closer to materialist determinism. However, he is also different from them in acknowledging the role of cultural and social contexts in the understanding of different modes. At the same time, his treatment of the social, similar to what Latour calls sociology of the social<sup>1</sup>, is itself also abstracted. Therefore, Kress displays the traces of both materialist and sociological determinisms though the former one is more pronounced. Overcoming these two problems, we should explore how other modal aspects have been silenced. Similarly, while it is true that materiality does matter, it does not necessarily determine its potential uses.

#### (Post)Critical Approach to Technology and Modality

I here need to make a distinction between what Stuart Selber calls critical and postcritical approaches. Critical theorists and scholars not only question instrumental views of technology but also completely dismiss technology as an important issue for discussion in writing classes. They take technologies merely as cultural or ideological

tools. Their dismissal of technology is understandable in the context of the dominance of instrumentalist views of technology in the academy and outside. But in their dismissal, they also uphold another determinist view, i.e., ideological determinism. Unlike materialist theorists like Kress and Van Leeuwen, whose focus was largely on developing a grammar of multimodal representations based on the unique affordances of specific modes and technologies for understanding the increasingly visual nature of communication, critical theorists' major focus is on exposing the "prevailing myths" about computers and the pervasively present uncritical celebration of the democratic potentials of digital technologies (Selber 4). Their major purpose is to debunk instrumentalist views of technology. Postcritical theorists do share with critical theorists a critique of the ideological nature of technology and interface designs. But they focus on cautious and reflective use of technologies and available multimodal resources for the benefits of teachers and students. However, they also retain one major problem, that is, taking ideologies as largely stable. Besides, despite their major focus on critiquing ideological aspects of technologies, they also retain some materialist traits like Kress and others.

First, a major target of postcritical theory is the instrumental view where any kind or form of technology is taken as an instrument to accomplish certain goals. As Hawisher and Selfe, and Selfe and Selfe say, such a perspective, while eulogizing the "democratic" potential of technology, ignores how it is embedded in social and ideological belief systems and can have the potential also to perpetuate oppressive beliefs (Selfe and Selfe 63). As Stuart Selber claims, the dominant tendency in the academy has been completely instrumentalist, ignoring its human aspects: "Although institutions are investing in

technology infrastructure and support at an astonishing rate—so astonishing, in fact, that it is futile to cite growth statistics, which increase dramatically from year to year—these investments are often driven by logics that fail to make humanistic perspectives a central concern” (1).

Multimodal theorists like Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher, Richard Selfe, Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, along with many others, have also emphasized the need to shift our attention from a singular focus on print literacy to multimodal literacy. Most of them do critique instrumentalist views of technology. In doing so, they do point to the humanistic and social aspects of technology. Selfe and Selfe, and Hawisher and Selfe, in “Rhetoric of Technology” and “The Politics of the Interface,” as in many other articles, have cautioned us about the potential consequences of uncritically eulogizing the democratic nature of digital technologies if we do not pay proper attention to the ideological influence of dominant culture on technology design.

Hawisher and Selfe critique a pervasive tendency that they call a “rhetoric of technology,” meaning the trend to “foreground positive benefits” of using computers “without acknowledging possible negative influences as well” (58). Selfe and Selfe also claim that the uncritical use of technology can perpetuate and support “monoculturalism, capitalism, and pathologic thinking” (486). In their discussion of technology, Selfe and Selfe, and Hawisher and Selfe take technologies as “cultural artifacts embodying society’s values” (“Rhetoric of Technology” 55). In this way, like many other scholars in new media studies, such as Stuart Selber and Adam Banks, Selfe and Selfe caution us about the potential dangers of using technology in our classrooms without situating it in broader socio-political contexts.

Similar to Selfe and Selfe, and Hawisher and Selfe, Christina Haas, in her book *Writing Technology* and many other articles, also critiques instrumentalist and deterministic views of technology. She contends: “such an instrumentalist view sees technology as merely a tool—a natural and transparent means to produce written language, which is somehow imagined to exist independent of that means. The last decade of work in cultural studies of scientific and other discourses suggests that writing—also a technology—is not transparent, that it carries beliefs and value systems within it. . . . An instrumentalist view of technology carries with it all the dangers of an autonomous theory of language” (21). Haas equates autonomous/apolitical views of language with instrumentalist views of technology.

The problems of instrumentalist and materialist views of technology raised by critical literacy theorists are very real and significant. That taking technology merely as a neutral tool that in itself can liberate us can, as Cynthia Selfe says, “actually contribute to the ongoing problems of racism, sexism, poverty, and illiteracy” (referenced in Selber 12). And at the same time, the issue of access to up to date technologies and reliable social and pedagogical support for the disadvantaged population, as Stuart Selber, Cynthia Selfe, and several others have said, is of vital importance, which often is overlooked by the instrumentalist view of technology. Similarly, technologies do have potentials to perpetuate dominant cultural values, thereby silencing other voices. However, it can be problematic to think of technology merely as cultural tools.

To question and go beyond instrumentalist views of technology, these cultural critics of technology often emphasize the role of a “critical perspective” or “critical reflection” (see Hawisher and Selfe, and Selfe and Selfe) or “metacognition” (see Cope

and Kalantzis) in order to demystify the ideological nature of computer interfaces and technological designs. These are very important aspects of mediation that we need to pay attention to as our awareness and material conditions do partially shape how technology operates and what roles its users/producers can play. However, we also need to equally see how, despite ideological designs and unequal distributions, technology in its use may lead to many unintended consequences and how users can improvise and accomplish certain functions unthought-of by the designers of technologies. In other words, we need to take technology as agent, or not merely as tools to accomplish a priorly determined goals, but having potentials to change or transform those goals. Similarly, we need to take users not merely as pawns in the hands of dominant ideology, but as both being shaped by and also shaping those ideological values in their work as improvisers.

In other words, while analyzing uses of technologies, whether it is writing, a black board, a cell phone, or Facebook, we should be prepared to see beyond users, ideologies, and these technologies as mere neutral tools or cultural artifacts. Yes, their meanings and potentials are largely limited by dominant ideologies and the critical reflection of users, but it will be a mistake if we take them only in terms of how the dominant ideologies or discourses (or power) would want us to see in them. First, ideologies are not mysterious forces; they operate through, as Latour believes, observable materials (obvious and not so obvious), human and non-human. As Latour claims, “It is so important to maintain that power, like society, is the final result of a process and not a reservoir, a stock, or a capital that will automatically provide an explanation. Power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed” (64). And when power or ideology works through mediators, networks of technologies and human agents, it gets transformed in turn.

Hence, technologies, non-human aspects of mediation, do not simply carry and transfer dominant ideological values to the users. Not only that users work in different social contexts, but technologies also have other various dimensions (excess) that modify the intended meanings or messages. Therefore, when technologies go into the hands of users, based on the participation of users in a variety of networks of practices, both linguistic and others, some potentials of technologies unthought of and unrecognized become revealed. Just think about writing as a technology and how English writing from the British Empire was thought to create “civilized” middle men for them to be able to understand and control the colonized. That was one of the reasons why English literature was taught, especially to inculcate Western values. But, as Homi K. Bhabha says, even imitation/reiteration of those values produced mimicry, which actually transforms those values rather than creating passive followers. Many people did try to imitate Western style, e.g., wearing ties and suit, but, however, with other attire like a locally made cap (“topi”). Think how the meaning and value of a “tie” would change when it is used by a student in a local school in India or Bangladesh, coupled with indigenous dresses. It might perhaps show the economic status of his/her family, their knowledge of Western culture, etc. But, it also assumes several other meanings. The act of reiteration, using the tie, but in a different context, while being similar in the practice of wearing the tie in English culture, changes its meaning. That student can use the tie as a replacement for handkerchief to wipe his/her face or to clear his or her nose. It can sometimes potentially work as a way of resistance, knowingly or unknowingly.

An important aspect of a critical approach to technology is to see how US culture in general and teaching of composition (English) in particular has been dominated by

monomodal ideology. Similar to the multilingual/translingual approach's call for paying attention to linguistic practices other than English, most of the multimodal theorists often argue for bringing back to focus modes silenced and delegitimized by the dominant ideology. US composition's promotion of writing at the cost of other modes displays a deeply-seated belief that, as literacy theorists like Shirley Brice Heath have shown, privileges the literacies practiced by the dominant group.

Diana George critiques the tendency in composition to relegate visuals to low status. Even when they were incorporated, she argues, they were merely taken as a "prompt for writing" (18). She urges us to incorporate visuals in composition teaching, not only as objects of analysis, but also as a part of the design process. In her class, she had her students compose arguments through the uses of images/visuals. She draws on the notion of design from the New London Group, similar to Kress's claim about design in relation to new media, and contends that design, rather than analysis/critique, should be the focus of composition. Furthermore, critiquing Anthony Blair's dismissal of visuals for their inability to make an argument, George claims that visuals can and do argue: "Visual arguments make a claim or ascertain and attempt to sway an audience by offering reasons to accept that claim" (29). She also claims that "students have a much richer imagination for how visuals might enter composition than our composition journals have yet to address" (28).

Diana George's emphasis on incorporating visuals and challenging the dominant ideology of monomodality comes in the line of The New London Group (NLG). The NLG's influential piece "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies," as the group claims, develops a new approach to literacy pedagogy addressing the emerging globalized situation:

“Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language, literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project—restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (60-61).

The NLG, like critical literacy theorists such as Brian Street and Shirley Brice Heath, do see literacy as deeply embedded in the politics of power and ideologies. However, the lack of attention to modes other than print or alphabetic literacy in the early critical literacy theorists made them come forward with their idea of multiliteracies. The theory of multiliteracies differs from literacy as social practice in at least two ways: “The first argument engages with the multiplicity of communications channels and media; the second with the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Cope & Kalantzis 5). In other words, as Cope and Kalantzis state, this theory “focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone” (5) and makes its central focus multimodality:

We argue that literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. This includes understanding and competent control of representational forms that are becoming increasingly significant in the overall communications environment, such as visual design in desktop publishing or the interface of visual and linguistic meaning in multimedia. (NLG 61)

That means literacy should be expanded to more than words. Cynthia Selfe also emphasizes the need to pay critical attention and allow multiple modes for composing practices. Selfe, in her “Aurality and Multimodality” and “Students Who Teach Us,” is very much concerned about the potential of the existing monomodal focus in composition teaching to exclude socially, ethnically, and linguistically marginalized student



populations. She argues that we should empower such students by recognizing their multimodal literacy competencies often ignored by our singular focus on print literacy/writing.

For instance, in “Aurality and Multimodality,” she insists that “sound, although it remains of central importance both to students and to the population at large, is often undervalued as a compositional mode,” (617) and that, “the history of writing in US composition instruction ... functions to limit our professional understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity and deprive students of valuable semiotic resources for making meaning” (617). Selfe argues that such a tendency puts many marginalized communities, such as American Indians, African Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans at a disadvantage by not recognizing the long history of their use of aurality as a compositional mode for preserving their stories and working towards resistance towards racial and ethnic oppressions. Similarly, in “Students Who Teach Us,” Selfe urges composition teachers to appreciate literacy experiences and competencies students bring with them, especially their new media literacies, and use new media technologies “systematically in their classrooms to teach about new literacies” (45). She gives an example of an African American student, David John Damon, who had developed great competencies in digital literacies, but failed in his composition course, and eventually had to drop out:

Although his computer skills had improved by leaps and bounds, his skills in communicating in Standard English remained seriously underdeveloped—and his teachers in the English Department were very concerned about his ability to organize to write sentences that were grammatically correct according to conventional standards, and his problems with development and logical argumentation. (50)

This is a great example of not only how failure on the part of the teachers and the system as a whole to recognize the literacies that students have developed and are comparable to those legitimized by the academy ruins the lives of many historically underprivileged students, but also how false notions of language can block many from attaining higher education.

Selfe is not making an either/or argument about writing and aurality or writing and new media literacies. Rather, she urges composition teachers to “encourage students to deploy multiple modalities in skillful ways—written, aural, visual” and to “respect” and understand “various roles each modality can play in human expression” (“Aurality” 625). This is an ongoing problem not only in the US, but also all around the world.

The critical/cultural theorists’ critique of the binaries between writing and other modes (aurality, visual, etc.) is of paramount importance both to do justice to students who tend to struggle in mainstream literacy practices and to enrich the literacy experiences of other students and teachers. I agree that it is important to expand composition to a range of modes of composition, valuing modes like aurality and visuality that have historically been sidelined due to various social and ideological reasons. And it is true that such extension might offer greater potentials for meaning making for our students. However, I also think that we need to be careful in making such an argument not to actually validate dominant and ideological versions of composition, rather than looking at practices and problematizing such ideological versions.

First, when we see composition and communication practices, we find that modalities are not discrete entities. Here, my own experience making a website for the first time for a visual communication course will, I believe, show how a numerical or

additive model of modality and materialist/formalist notion of remediation can be problematic. The assignment was a very common one in a visual communication (multimodal composition) class. We were required to choose a topic and make an argument about it in “writing.” Then we were supposed to remediate that to a website and an avatar on the Second Life, besides making a video on the same topic. When I was making a website, I found it very hard. I was thinking of it in terms of making an argument and other textual strategies used to argue, e.g., juxtaposition, parallelism. But the focus on the class was on making the website “show” the information, not “tell” or “argue” in a linear way. It was extremely hard for me, very frustrating. It was definitely primarily because of my lack of familiarity with designing a website, making a “visual” argument. But I now also think that it was also because of my long experience in writing that shaped my composing habitus. I think both myself (more so) and the instructor failed to explore the main reason behind the problem, that the major reason behind the problem was we saw writing and website design as discrete. The assignment was based on the notion of remediation. But it was thought of in a very formalistic and materialistic sense. It was thought in terms of what happens when we remediate one medium through another medium. But we should think not in terms of remediation as mediation of one by another, but mediation of one kind of practice by another. Doing so keeps both the technical aspect and technological aspect of technology, both the social and technical aspects of mediation together. We are not like machines capable of separating the past from the present, social from the material, we’re rather remediated partly by practice. Therefore, it is important, as Selfe and George argue, to learn from students’ composing practices, but without using our truncated notion of writing or any other single mode.

Similarly, when we critique the dominant ideology of monomodality, we should not conflate the ideology of monomodality with the practice of an assumed mode, e.g., writing, taking it as monomodal. When we do so, we end up making an argument either for “either/or” or for “addition” to, thus speaking from the same framework that we try to challenge. It is true that privileging of writing has relegated other modes to the margin and cultural sideline. But it is also mainly because of unwittingly accepting a limited notion of writing, and similarly, that of other modes. The divisions are handy tools, generalized representations to reduce the complexities and messiness of practices. They are often useful for certain purposes. But the problem arises when such representations assume immutable reality, more real than what we actually see in practice. For instance, see how we generally understand “composition” in the academy. As many composition scholars point out, it is often understood only as academic writing. Based on such and similar understanding of writing, many have started arguing for abolishing composition because the skills taught in composition courses do not transfer to writing tasks in other disciplines. Furthermore, writing to be taught in a composition class is customarily assumed to be *academic arguments*, both by those who take composition as a skills or as a tool for an entry into the discourse of the academic community<sup>32</sup>: both asocial and social views of composing process. That tendency takes away from composition what other meanings users/composers make of it or what other forms they practice, both within and outside the academy.

The problem with, similar to what Wysocki says about mode, limiting writing with one or a few fixed qualities or features, e.g., making an argument (often opposed to

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<sup>32</sup> The tendency of taking teaching of composition as enculturation or as the tendency of advocating an alternative discourses fall victim to the same tendency.

displaying information in visual mode) is reflected in Diana George's defense of visual design as composition on the ground that it makes an argument like writing. I'm not here disagreeing at all with George's claim that visual design should be considered composing. Rather, I'm just showing the potential problem if we argue that something should be considered composing similar to writing because it does what writing is supposed to do in dominant understanding. We do not need to accept the truncated meaning and value of writing that it should make an argument, argument that is direct, linear, and "logical." And that visuals also make an argument, and therefore, it should be counted as legitimate form of composing. In other words, similar to Bruce Horner's argument about the literacy scholars' focus on promoting alternative literacies where those scholars tend to "buy into the ideological framework responsible for that denigration in the first place," George is defending visual design in terms that retain the notion of argument as inherently valuable—that is, visual design is deemed valuable insofar as it does work that composition is traditionally thought to do ("Ideologies of Literacy" 6). Therefore, George is accepting in advance the terms of value that had originally been used to dismiss visual design as lacking value. So if literacy is assumed to mean academic literacy, then visual design is defended as literacy insofar as it conforms to conventional notions of academic writing (.e.g., making an argument). What George calls the visual mode (though writing itself is visual in many ways and it does have several other modal dimensions) does much more than make an argument, just as writing does many more things than merely making one kind of argument.

Let me give an example outside of composition. It is like thinking of the value of gardening only in terms of how much money you save. For instance, I plant a few

vegetable plants like peppers and tomatoes in my patio. Sometimes I do not get more than a few chilies. But not only that they tend to taste (not only in the sense of simple taste) different, so better. Playing with them, with the squirrel that come to destroy them, watering them, looking at them every couple hours to check if they have new buds, all these values mean much more than whether I can save as much or more than I spend on growing these plants. There are countless other ways they influence me, sometimes relieving me of the stress of writing my dissertation or going through the terrible experience of a job search. In similar ways, there are values that we do not see in writing that students will take from it, sometimes predictable, sometimes unpredictable. So, we do not need to replace writing with something else or only add something to writing. Rather, it is also important to see writing and other modes in a much broader way and see how their meanings manifest through students' uses of them and appreciate the beauty in such variations. Thus, as James Slevin says, composition should be “about the encounter of different ways of reading and writing; our discipline arises in acts of interpretation and composing, different ways of reading and thinking and persuading brought into our classrooms by students. Our disciplinary work in all its forms, including research, arises from the need and the desirability of promoting and enriching the dialog, already underway” (44).

When we are following an additive logic, there is a danger of looking for monomodal or monolingual competence, competence in separate modes or languages. And that makes the job of students even harder, especially so because they are supposed to achieve the competence in designing a composition by fulfilling the norms that actually do not exist. This reminds us of Parakrama's example about language

distinctions and his entrapment into the same logic that he was trying to dismantle. Parakrama talks of the difficulty of writing his dissertation in non-standard English because he was raised and educated in the Western education system and therefore had internalized its rules. But the main problem with such an argument is that it assumes separate competencies in different varieties of English as if they are fixed and stable. When such competence is sought for, such an attempt is bound to fail. Similarly, in the case of David Damon in Selfe's study too, shifting from writing to "new media" literacy and judging his composing practices based on the discrete rules of the visual grammar can equally be challenging, as it is challenging to students who try to maintain the separateness of two linguistic practices. Yes, he is successful in the world outside his composition class, especially in designing websites and adapting to new media literacies pertinent to the student organizations he is involved in and other clients. But if his composition is judged in terms of the strict principles/grammar of visual design, he would again find it somewhat challenging because, despite separation of writing from other modes or technologies, issue of language conventions will pop up in academic settings. Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge David's literacy strength and encourage him to experiment and explore more possibilities, it is equally important to interrogate the assumptions about writing as merely argument (or monomodal) and language as "standard" English.

Finally, as with some translingual and plurilingual theories, multimodal studies also takes modes as "resources," whether in a materialist or in a critical/cultural approach, similar to Bourdieu's notion of capital. One fundamental problem in defining technologies (modes and media are technologies) as resources, as I argued in terms of

language theories in Chapter Three, and as Jay Jordan also contends in his recent article, drawing on Rickert and other new materialists, is to reinforce “exclusively human languaging agency” (366). First, it is true that human agents do use and utilize resources, but it is equally true that they are also used by the resources. Second, when resources are used, they are mediated by and mediate practices. For instance, when I made a website for a visual communication course, I tried to utilize resources from my writing experience and images and image manipulation based on my cultural imaginary. While I was able to make a website of a sort, those of the resources used did change what I wanted to show, very different from my original intention or purpose. That is partly so also because our acts of reading and writing are shaped not only by the obvious, salient aspects, but also things we often ignore, things taken for granted.

#### Conclusion: Modality in Practice

To sum up, it is important to locate modality and its meaning not in materiality or in ideology exclusively because doing so abstracts modes and media from the complex ecology of practice, which incorporates both the social and technical aspects of our social life, including our literacy practices. From this perspective, writing is and always has multimodal potentials even if one or only a few modal aspects of writing become manifest in specific uses. In other words, as Theresa Lillis argues, in specific instances of semiotic practice, “it is important to take account of the potential significance of different modal dimensions whilst at the same time avoiding adopting what we might describe as a ‘modalist’ analytical bias in our approach to writing, akin to the common ‘textualist’ bias evident in many approaches to writing” (38). As Anne Wysocki contends, while it is necessary to pay attention to all the available potentials and mediating factors (or what



NLG call available designs), it is equally or perhaps more important to keep our eyes, ears, and other senses open to seemingly “unavailable designs” (55), “rendered unavailable by naturalized, unquestioned practice” (57). In other words, in Rickert’s terms, we need to avoid taking the salient aspect of any communicative practice as necessarily significant to all situations. Our acts of writing and communication are mediated as much by the salient as by the ambient aspects.

Furthermore, there are several dimensions in any semiotic practice, not only more than writing and speech or verbal and visual or temporal and spatial. And all of these are nested in social practice. However, what we call social is, as Latour says, not a stable condition or homogeneous worldview, determining the nature and function of technologies we develop and use, especially in this age of globalization. Therefore, notions of multimodal affordances should be placed in everyday practice in its complex and heterogeneous ecology where the relationship across all mediators, human and non-human, mediate/translate goals and purposes behind our semiotic practices. When we take mediation of a complex act of composing practice as translation by both seemingly salient and ambient aspects of the specific situation, our humanist notions of modal or linguistic *resources* need to be interrogated. The consequences of our uses of technologies are not determined only by our careful (or careless) and deliberate utilization of a *stock* or *toolbox* of resources, but also by the agency of the items in the *toolbox*.

## CHAPTER 5

### RELATIONS BETWEEN MULTIMODALITY AND TRANSLINGUALITY: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In the previous two chapters, I tried to examine studies of language relations and those of multimodality and the potential alternative ways to deal with them, especially in terms of how language and modality have been conceived. I want to conclude by summarizing main points of overlaps and disjuncture, and suggest ways to integrate the issues of modality and language relations in some productive ways. In their recent publication, “Translinguality, Transmodality, and Difference,” Bruce Horner, Cynthia Selfe, and Timothy Lockridge have actually explored these issues in their complexities and offered some important ways to work across languages and modalities. I think the *new materialist theory of practice*<sup>33</sup> provides some grounds to further expand and complicate the issue of mediation and modality. After such exploration of convergences and divergences and ways to bridge the gap, I will end with a brief discussion of the implications to pedagogy. As Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge article demonstrates, there are many similarities between multimodal and translingual theories, but with some

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<sup>33</sup> I think new materialist theory of practice does represent the major theoretical ground that Horner and Selfe often utilize in their discussion of the issues of modality and language relations. When they come to a sort of a consensus, I feel like they are actually moving towards new materialist understanding, with a practice theory touch (and cultural materialism), despite some inconsistencies in their way towards resolving the seemingly conflicting perspectives.

significant differences, which, as the Horner and Selfe dialog shows, can be narrowed. Both these two fields attempt to challenge ideologies that delegitimize practices that are different from what are assumed to be appropriate, both within the academy and outside, that is, ideologies of monolingualism and of monomodality. They point out the rich multilingual and multimodal practices on the ground, especially in recent times, as a result of increasing intersections between cultures and semiotic (both linguistic and other semiotic) practices in a globalized context. Similarly, in most of the multimodal and translingual studies in composition, the major focus has remained on critique of gate-keeping practices in the academy that have barred many students from racially, culturally, and economically underprivileged backgrounds from entering the academy and achieving academic success and the potential contributions they could make to empower their communities and enrich our understandings of communicative practices.

On the other hand, the major similarities lie in their focus on additive models, both in dominant notions of multilingualism and multimodality. Despite these similarities, they have some difference, especially in terms of the later translingual theorists' emphasis on questioning such boundaries and focusing on intersections across linguistic practices and multimodal theorists' attention to the role materiality plays in communicative activities.

This shows that studies of language relations and that of modalities can learn from each other. From recent developments like translingualism, especially in its focus on the porous nature of linguistic practices (see Horner et al.'s "Towards a Translingual Approach; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue's "From English Only to Translingual Norm," Canagarajah's *Translingual Practice, etc.*), multimodal studies can rethink the divisions

between different modes in terms of their functions and focus on their fluid natures and unpredictable consequences. At the same time translingual studies can learn from multimodal studies in terms of how going beyond discursive aspects to consider material aspects of language negotiations can provide a more concrete picture of the challenges and opportunities facing language negotiations. However, such a material focus should avoid materialist or modalist perspective in understanding the role of materials in semiotic practices. What the materialities of technology allow is not completely limited by material nature; the dominant representations of technology tend to limit what is available and what is not. We should consider why other possibilities are not seen.

I think the following quotation from Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge's (HSL) recent piece helps me demonstrate both the points of tension and possibilities for bridging the gap:

Despite the different trajectories and limited perspectives of our own labors, we all sense a need for a more expansive view and practice of composition, whether in terms of modalities or languages of expression, and a sense that we can stimulate and support efforts towards that goal by identifying overlaps and parallels in work towards it from questions about both language and modality.

I completely agree with Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge's point that we need to adopt a "more expansive view and practice of composition." I here see both the tension and a route towards resolution of the tension between a cultural materialist and materialist position, between Horner and Selfe playing out in this quotation and throughout this text. Actually, in my perception, this dialogue shows the blindspots of both—Horner's acknowledgement of the role of materiality (not only in cultural materialist sense) and Selfe's acknowledgement of the need to see beyond dominant understandings of modality. In a sense, this dialog and the sort of consensus they arrive at points towards

the need to adopt a new materialist theory of practice to rethink about mediation. For that, we need to do a few things on theoretical fronts about techno-linguistic mediation.

### Reassembling the Notion of the Social

As discussed in the previous chapters, some of the major problems in our conceptualizations of languages and modalities are directly linked to the limited notion of mediation where the focus is largely on one or the other aspects below or a combination of them:

- a) Social as homogeneous: In many accounts, such as critical perspective on technology, social is taken not as a material social reality but as representation of the social as homogeneous and stable entity either in terms of economic, cultural, or other similar macro forces. This is manifested in the tendencies of taking semiotic acts as by-products of social/cultural/economic/linguistic structures/ideologies/hegemony.
- b) Technology as determining social relations and meanings: Reversing the social and humanist treatment of technologies, this materialist determinism considers the materiality of technologies as largely determining social relations and thought processes. As discussed in the fourth chapter, this tendency is prevalent in multimodal studies where modes are associated with certain functions or affordances.
- c) Individual as free-floating agent: In some multilingual/plurilingual/translingual theories, we find the pendulum tilt more towards individual agency, especially as a response to structural theories of language. A somewhat similar tendency can also be found in

multimodal scholarship in its emphasis on semiotic acts as “motivated” and their problematic notion of resources.

In all these three tendencies, the relationships between semiotic practices and society/culture/ideology/individual intention or agency are vertical, often suggesting the relationships in terms of determination rather than translation. Instead, it is necessary to see all of these, including semiotic practices like writing, as parts of the ecology of mediation, without reducing them to any single larger force. In order to do so, as Latour contends, the first thing we need to do is to disassemble the “social,” but to reassemble it to attend to the complexity and dynamism of the relationships in any given instance of semiotic activity:

In the alternative view, ‘social’ is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues cannot fix; it is *what* is glued together by many other type of connectors. Whereas sociologists (or socio-economists, socio-linguists, social psychologists, etc.) take social aggregates as the given that could send some light on residual aspects of economics, linguistics, psychology, management, and so on, these other scholars, on the contrary, consider social aggregates as what should be explained by the specific *associations* provided by economics, linguistics, psychology, law, management, etc. (*Reassembling 5*)

This gives a clear sense how the new materialism/ANT (Actor Network Theory) of Latour does not discard the notion of the social for emphasizing the role of the material. Rather, what we normally call social has to be redefined, not as a glue that can fix everything (context, often highly generalized, used to explain textual features), something to explain away regularities and/or peculiarities in language and other semiotic practices, but as a collective, a bundle of constantly shifting associations. In other words, he is trying to avoid the assumptions of homogeneity and stability in the existing view of the social. When we think of the social as a bundle of associations, not as a homogeneous

whole, we resist limiting “in advance the shape, size, heterogeneity, and combination of associations” (*Reassembling* 11). This focus on heterogeneities is important in today’s globalized world, especially because “in situations where innovations proliferate, where group boundaries are uncertain, when the range of entities to be taken into account fluctuates, the sociology of the social is no longer able to trace actors’ new associations” (*Reassembling* 11).

The reassembling of the social helps us move beyond linear and limited notions of mediation to a more expansive and ecological conceptualization of mediation as multilateral. In such an expansive view, we do not depend on only discursive notions of the social, we get an opportunity to consider the roles of things often reduced to mere effects of larger forces like the social or to mere tools or objects for use by human agents. When we consider any linguistic situation, we do not think of its mediation only in terms of a “socio”linguistic perspective, but in terms of all available connectors. When we do not depend on only a discursive notion of the social, we get an opportunity to consider the role of things often reduced to effects of larger forces or to mere objects/tools.

Second, while one implication of disassembling the social is to try to account for all possible connectors and see how they mediate our actions and their consequences, the other important implication is to pay attention to the “missing masses” and their roles not merely as tools for perpetuating ideologies (therefore not acknowledged), nor as determining the nature and consequences of human actions, but as transforming, while also perpetuating, such ideologies, though such transformations might not, at times, look like any significant change. In other words, taking that to mediation of semiotic practices, the materiality of various modes and technologies does matter, but how that matters is not

dependent completely on their ostensibly inherent material qualities, but on the relationship between their materialities and the user's semiotic practices. Similarly, the materiality of modalities and technologies should not be limited to their formal features. That should include their connection with the material world around them that shape how they contribute to the production or reception of meanings. That is partly what Jay Jordan also means when he talks about the need for translingual analysis to include material aspects of language negotiations. Here, let me give an example of my own experience with job interviews and the roles different technologies of communication played. First, in a materialist way, I thought a Skype interview was better than phone interviews because it is a richer form of communication than phone, what McLuhan might term as a "hotter" medium than the telephone. And it was true that I could make better sense of the interviewers' questions and their implications by looking at material aspects more than their accents, tempo, and stress patterns, including how they are sitting, their facial gestures, their bodily orientation, movements of their eyes, legs, hands, and the way they dressed up. But at the same time there were other material aspects that came to my attention that equally affected the interviews, like the way I had to be dressed up, sit, and perform before the camera. Moreover, sometimes the lights getting through the blinders, the ambient noise (or lack of such noise), etc. tended to affect me, sometimes positively sometimes negatively. Later I actually liked phone interviews more than Skype at times because I found myself more comfortable when I was lying on my bed. The coziness of my bedroom, the relaxation and the feeling of such relaxation that I got from lying on the bed tended to make me feel as if I were talking informally to my friends about something else than giving an interview. The other "insignificant" material objects like a pen I could



play with, and innumerable things that I cannot account for, are part of the ecology of mediation that helped or hindered my performance in those interviews. The point I'm making here is, yes the materialities of technologies and modes play significant roles. But there are more aspects of their materialities and the surrounding (ambience) that we often tend to forget when we focus on the abstracted affordances of such technologies. Therefore, we should be careful not to limit the potentials of the materiality of any technologies to what has so far been seen as their functions or affordances.

Let us take as an example the argument about the relationship between multilingualism and digital technologies (multimodality) that we often see in recent composition scholarship. The common argument is that digital technologies and the multimodality they afford promote multilingualism and help students resist monolingualism. For instance, Amanda Athon argues that new technologies like Web 2.0 empower multilingual students by promoting their local cultures and languages:

Traditional print texts highly value linear communication and thus, a sameness that is also found in standard academic English. The similarities between the rise of homogenous, linear texts in the classroom likely coincides with the emergence of standard academic English as the most valued dialect and the language that permeates our college composition classrooms. We can distance our students from the notion that standard academic English—an inherently linear language that focuses on sameness—is the only correct dialect. With the rise of new technologies and Web 2.0, we should adjust our pedagogical practices to embrace nonlinear texts in our pedagogy. Having our students engage in acts of multimodal composing, such as using visuals to create literacy narratives, or by having students read or view recordings of authors who write in dialects, allows our students to embrace their language and cultural histories.

I do largely agree with many of her points, especially her concern about the potential danger of promoting the ideal notion of standard academic English. But her claim about “academic English” being *inherently* linear and new technologies, especially visual and

aural, as *inherently* non-linear, and therefore, promoting multilingualism has many gaps and fissures to be explored and interrogated. First, by making a binary between writing and visual and assigning linear and non-linear arguments to them, she equates material form with function. Second, she repeats the same mistake that instrumentalist notions of technology make by taking technology as a tool for promoting linguistic and cultural diversity. Third, such a conception reinforces the false notion that there is such a thing called linear standard Academic English; what is rather true is that there is a strong presence of such an ideology about standard English in the teaching of composition. Therefore, focusing only on the materiality of technologies and then limiting the materiality with certain functions limits writing in English (standard or non-standard) to linear arguments or similar thinking. But the accompanying material existence and the practices that what is called the standard language has been part of have made us think that writing does not allow multilingualism, and therefore, the argument goes, multimodality comes as an escape from a monolingual trend in composition.

I'm not denying the fact that digital technologies, coupled with global trends of migration and international trade, have brought language intersections and multilingual realities to the surface. But what I'm pointing out here is the need to focus more on what material social conditions, both seemingly significant and insignificant, besides dominant understandings of the materiality of technologies (including languages) create an atmosphere more productive for appreciation and uses of multilingual and multimodal potentials.

Furthermore, it might be equally or even more interesting to look into whether or how people decide to change how they use their language repertoire depending on

whether they are composing on digital spaces or on paper, but paying equal attention to (f)actors beyond technologies.

Lastly, we also need to redefine agency when we include things into the ecology of mediation. As discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, with regard to plurilingualism/multilingualism and multimodality, the dominant definition of agency in the discussion of language ability and multimodal use in composition scholarship is human centric. That is often reflected in the emphasis on the creativity of multilingual participants in deliberately and strategically utilizing multilingual resources. As Jordan contends: “Crucial to Canagarajah’s articulation of translingual practice is (re)focusing on ‘the work of creative and active social agents’ who ‘employ the disparate and conflictual elements of a language or cognitive system’” (375). In an attempt to counter monolingual hegemony, this tendency replaces the traditional notion of the competent native speaker with the fully conscious and competent multilingual composer. We can find a similar tendency in multimodal scholarship, especially in terms of their focus on the multimodal subject as “motivated” and communicative modes as “resources” (see Kress’s *Grammar of Visual Design*).

Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner try to complicate translingual agency by conceptualizing it in terms of the translingual composer’s ability to negotiate the “‘micro’ and ‘macro’ in light of the specificity of relations, concerns, motives, and purposes demanding meaningful response in individual writers’ past, present, and future lives” (591). Drawing on Pennycook’s notion of language as a mesopolitical practice and Butler’s notion of reiteration as recontextualization, Lu and Horner emphasize how such recontextualization generates potential conditions for transformation. This definition of

agency in terms of practice tries to avoid the human centric rhetoric reflected in many translingual and plurilingual theoretical accounts. Here creativity does not reside only in conscious and deliberate breaks from the conventions, but also in acts of mimicry or reiteration. However, even in this account, they do not go that far to account for agency beyond humans: “A translingual approach thus defines agency operating in terms of the need and ability of individual writers to map and order, remap and reorder conditions and relations surrounding their practices, as they address the potential discrepancies between the official and practical, rather than focusing merely on what the dominant has defined as exigent, feasible, appropriate, and stable ‘context’” (591).

Here, they do acknowledge the role of context, but fall short of recognizing the heterogeneities within the alternative context that they think translingual composers need to pay attention to. Therefore, the new materialist theory of practice would take this notion of agency one step further by reminding us that not only the materials do exert agency, more than “simply [being] the hapless bearers of symbolic projection” (Latour *Reassembling* 10), but also that we are “ambient subjects” (Rickert 91).

In all of these accounts of agency, what we see is a tension, tension resulting from the need to go beyond the division between humanism and anti-humanism, the focus on individual agency and social shaping. An alternative to, and perhaps an extension of, these conceptualizations that might provide us a more productive way of redefining agency is to not replace one context with another or one kind of agents with others, but by diversifying what we call context so that we can count on the role of all actors that make a difference in human actions. Let us attend to things “beyond ‘language’ and ‘linguaging’ to include attention to” the things and technologies that surround us, “the

air, sweat, plastic, memories, twitchiness, cheeses, skin, color that are materially co-present, co-evolving with language” (Jordan 380), but without losing sight of the differences with which certain elements of the context get greater light whereas others remain mostly in the dark.

### Reconceptualizing the Relations between Language and Modality

When we go beyond limited views of mediation where we only think of language and culture(s) or modality/technology and culture/ideology and consider it as a result of a complex set of relations and co-influence of a multitude of (f)actors shaping semiotic acts, whether multimodal or multilingual, it paves our way, at least theoretically, for bridging the gap between issues of multimodality and multilingualism. The first move we need to make is to consider composing as a socio-material practice where social and material aspects interact and shape the uses and consequences of our semiotic acts, which transform social and material aspects in turn. When we focus on a broader notion of practice as consisting of not only the interactions between the individual and the social (structure), and when we see practice in its concrete form, as a repeated activity in a constantly changing ecology of mediation, we cannot and should not separate modality from language, and both from material and social aspects surrounding them. It is important to see beyond the narrow division between language and modality or speech and writing as evidenced in sociolinguistics and composition (see Lillis’s *Sociolinguistics of Writing*) and see them as parts of the broader ecology of mediation. In other words, we go beyond studying language or modality against the backdrop of a force considered to be determining the nature of such acts, thus taking everything else as insignificant or irrelevant. Rather, we need to both broaden what modality and language mean and how

the choices composers/users make are partially affected not only by their intention or their position in the social structure, but by their understanding of what they assume “language” or “modality” does, thus making these as (f)actors mediating semiotic activities in specific situations.

Calvet rightly points out the problem of separating language (assumed as one mode) and other modes (visual assumed as images or audio or other modal appearances) when he develops an ecological approach where he calls our attention to the need to pay attention to the whole range of semiotic technologies/modes and the intersections between network of practices and representations:

In the name of what theory should we separate out, in this sequence of actions, the one which is communicated by the emitting of sounds? The answer generally is that, on the one hand, there is the oral instrument of communication, namely language, and on the other there are facts that have to do with ‘non-verbal’ communication, or semiology. And this affirmation is characteristic of the trap into which the theory of language as an isolatable object, an instrument, has led us. (22)

When we see any linguistic or other semiotic practice, we instantly see how it is intricately linked with modes and technologies assumed to be separate. Therefore, it is important to look for a multitude of connections and meaning potentials in any given semiotic practice: “the notion of language is a model, simultaneously useful and reductive, and we must take care not to allow ourselves to be imprisoned by the models that we use...it [language] does not exist in isolation from social life; language (or at least what I continue, for the sake of convenience, to call language) is a social practice within social life, one practice among others, inseparable from its environment” (Calvet 22). Therefore, the notions of language and modality need to be rethought on at least two fronts: one, going beyond limiting them in terms of narrow ideas of their materiality and

their functions, often reduced to stable categories in dominant representations; two, resisting conceptualizations of them in terms of larger categories like ideologies/power/culture (social-shaping) or focusing on the unique *resources* of multilingual or multimodal users/students (human-centric).

Furthermore, though we often see language being separated from multimodality, in reality, not only are languages always already multimodal, they are, in their specific instances of use, part of the multimodality that operates in most of our communicative practices. As Horner says in Horner, Selfe and Lockridge piece, “it no longer makes sense to treat language, whether as writing, or speech, or both, as apart from the multimodal”:

Following Olson’s warning... it seems ultimately problematic to distinguish between language and modality. Dominant conceptions of language offer a highly attenuated, restricted sense of all that goes on in the activity of ‘language acts’ (a.k.a. communicative acts). Kress (2000) acknowledges this in calling language multimodal (p.186), vs. thinking of language as itself discrete mode. Conversely, it seems appropriate to recognize modalities as a feature of language. From this, it no longer makes sense to treat language, whether as writing or speech or both, as apart from the ‘multimodal’.

What Horner says here is important because in discussions of multimodality, it is taken as different from linguistic practice. Therefore, multimodal composition is often used, as separate from language (writing in its narrow sense), to refer to compositions like audio essay, photo essay, video, or a website (all of which contain elements of linguistic practice). The problem in such accounts is a very limited understanding of modality. That is why the dominant conception of both language and modality need to be rethought. As Lillis says, even what we call writing involves modes and material existence far broader than what is often described as verbal:

Much has been claimed about what writing is and does, on the basis of assumptions about particular modal-material dimensions, notably, its verbal nature and its object like (or material-permanence) existence. However [. . .], whilst it is important to discuss writing as a verbal-object, there are other important modal dimensions to consider, as well as a need to explore the meanings attached to these different dimensions by users, writers (producers) and readers (lookers, readers, consumers). (Lillis 21)

Lillis points out that it is important to understand writing as “verbal-object” as much as it is to explore how readers/viewers take writing, both in verbal and in other modal dimensions, or as a multimodal text. However, this should not be taken as a denial of how the visuality of traditional writing is different from the visuality of images or video. But the point is that based on such differences, we should not reify language (writing) and “multimodal” as inherently different, especially in terms of fixed functions.

From the perspective of a new materialist theory of practice, it might be more useful to conceive of what we call language and modality as examples and instances of larger technological practices where, in researching and analyzing composing practice, we do not separate language and modality either from each other or from other technologies of remediation. However, when doing so, it is important to conceive of technology in a sense broader than mere ‘technique’ or ‘tool,’ as we saw in materialist and instrumentalist definitions. The use of technique is a part of the definition of technology, but technology is not only the tool, but also how it is used, the “systematic treatment of an art, craft, or technique” (“Online Etymology”), where we take system not as internally self-sufficient and self-regulating, but as patterns of use developed through practice. In that way, we can adopt a more “expansive view and practice” of composing where composing does not get limited to one or a few specific kinds of writing that are assumed to serve certain interests in society. And that expansive view can incorporate not



only the semiotic practices in their complex relationships, but also the ways they are variously used by composers across geo-political and cultural locations.

In that light, language itself is a technology with varying modal possibilities. Other semiotic materials like images, sound, gestures, etc. are also technologies that can be and have been used for communicative purposes, often in conjunction with and complementing writing. At the same time, these technologies are remediated through print or digital technologies. And as they are remediated, their meanings are largely shaped by the habitus of the users, material dimensions (both in terms of their own material existence and their relations with the material surrounding) and social location. In other words, their meanings and roles are constituted by the practices in their material social relations and the beliefs about them. Considerations of language and modality and their relations in terms of the complex relations between dispositions and practices help us understand the durability and transformations of semiotic practices and ideologies about them.

### Dispositions and Practices

Given the mutually co-constitutive relations between practices and representations/dispositions and the possibilities of discrepancy between the two, how can we understand both the durability and shifts in language beliefs and practices? First, it is important to distinguish between belief about language and modal relations and the actual semiotic practices where what we've been calling multimodality and multilingual practices mingle, shape and thereby transform meanings both for the composers and readers/viewers. But it is at the same time true that practices and beliefs shape and co-construct each other. That looks like a paradox, but this is what helps us go beyond

simple determinism, whether it is ideology determining the nature of semiotic practices or the materiality of modes determining meanings and patterns of thought. As Latour contends, “belief is not a state of mind but a result of relationships” and as the relationships across elements in material social practice change, the existing beliefs also begin to be questioned and doubted, creating a ground for change in dispositions (*MC 2*). The direction and the nature of changes depend on a variety of things. Often times, transformation in disposition might not immediately follow change in practices because despite such changes, the users/producers themselves fail to see the contradictions between the practices and ideologies, while, at the same time, such changes are not recognized positively by the dominant institutions, including academia. Moreover, dispositions are forms of sedimentations resulting from long and repetitive uses (of various semiotic practices). Similarly, this is so also because notions of what counts as appropriate are intricately linked to existing power relations and the reproductions of such power relations through academic institutions, language policies, the linguistic marketplace, and geopolitical relations.

For instance, Bal Krishna Sharma’s recent study of how multilingual Nepalese diaspora use online technologies, YouTube in particular, and what role that plays in terms of their language use shows the discrepancy between their language beliefs and their semiotic practices. The study was specifically centered on a UN speech by a Nepalese minister posted on YouTube and the comments on the video, especially those related to her “‘bad’ English” (19). His analysis showed that

YouTube brings superdiverse participants together with their multiple subjectivities, identities and attitudes, and their demonstrated language competence is characterized by varied forms of linguistic repertoires in English and in Nepali. Ideologically the comments seem to reproduce the

modernist view of language as a bounded system, but linguistic resources used to construct these comments show a number of linguistic peculiarities and heteroglossic uses that challenge the writers' own conscious conceptualization of language. (19)

Despite their multilingual practices, their comments reflected monolingual belief. Though it is true that YouTube (or any other social networking sites) “brings superdiverse participants together,” we should not overlook the dangerously uniform belief beneath apparent diversity. The participants in that online discussion utilized their “varied forms of linguistic repertoires in English and Nepali,” but their language disposition seemed to remain largely unaffected.<sup>34</sup> There could be a host of reasons. One important reason that we should not forget is that all languages, as Calvet contends in his recent book, *Toward an Ecology of World Languages*, are not equal, and that inequality, as ingrained in language policies and their assumed values for economic and social progress, tend to make us continually hold language beliefs that contradict ground reality:

Even if to the linguist's eye all languages are equal . . . , the world's languages are fundamentally unequal. . . . But the fact remains that a discourse which would represent English and Breton, or French and Bobo as socially equivalent would be both unrealistic and ideological: all languages do not have the same value, and their inequality is at the heart of the way they are organized across the world. (4)

Here, two things are important to mark. First, the value of languages is tied to socio-economic and geo-political relations in general and to the specific uses and purposes individuals put them to. Second, languages that are valued more than the others (and those valued less than others) continually undergo transformation due to their interactions

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<sup>34</sup> In the study, many participants thought that the minister should have used Nepali language with translation. But many went far beyond the issue of language to comment that it was a shame for Nepal to appoint someone like her to the post of minister. Such comments do show variations in their beliefs, some swept away by the ideology of English monolingualism (in the sense of English only in certain forums or for certain purposes), whereas some considered it important to use native language if it was hard for her to use English. But, at the same time, all the participants did hold, as the researcher mentions, monolingual belief in the sense of taking languages as separate and bounded.

with other language practices. But, despite active roles of the users in transforming language practices, it does take time and opportunities for them to reflect on the discrepancy between language beliefs and practices.

In the same way, we also should not conflate ideological representations of modalities and languages with what they are and what potentials they could have in material social practices. For instance, in terms of modality, writing has traditionally been tied to, as in the classic case of Walter Ong or in the general understanding, making rational arguments and “analytically sequential, linear organization of thought,” where as other modes like orality and visual representations have been associated with the opposite mental operations like “rhapsodizing” (Ong 16) and non-linear thinking (Kress and Van Leeuwen 218). Here, we should be careful not to take writing in terms of the limited ideological notion of it. Like stereotypes, such representations of modal aspects are not completely false, but very limited. The same tendency can be found in terms of the values of language varieties. For instance, in some discussions in composition and in general understanding outside the academy, certain language varieties/languages are assumed to perform certain functions or purposes, e.g., native language/dialect as more appropriate for early drafts of writing or for self-exploration (expressivist/accomodationist) whereas standard variety as appropriate for final, official draft/version, publications, or the notion that English is a language of science and technology, of progress, and of advancement. These beliefs, while inherently problematic for their reification of languages from language practices, are still very dominant because of which many students are discouraged from tapping into the semiotic repertoire that they have developed through their participation in diverse linguistic practices or in linguistic practice that is already

diverse. Similarly, even those students who practice multilingualism or multimodality find it hard to resist SL/MN (Single/Standard Language and Modality) ideology.

In concluding this section, it is also important to mark that communicative practices in most cases today are always already multimodal, and issues of linguistic diversity need to be adequately addressed to help our students not only become successful communicators in a globalized world, but also to facilitate development of translingual/transmodal dispositions. While increasing intersections of diverse linguistic practices and the ease with which audio and visual elements can be incorporated into the composing practices have created a more favorable atmosphere for the development of translingual and transmodal dispositions, our attention to diverse socio-material dimensions in the ecology of mediation can provide us ways to recognize the value of differences in student writing/composing. As Cynthia Selfe contends in “Translinguality, Transmodality,” it is equally important to “encourage more teachers not only to recognize or ‘acknowledge the legitimacy of the transmodal position,’ but also to encourage/experiment with/try more transmodal production, to experiment with different semiotic ways of composing meaning—and to help students do so as well.”

### Pedagogical Implications

“It makes me sick—That’s how I feel. And that’s why a lot of people are not interested. I-am-not [states each word slowly]. What am I saying?—Everybody knows what ‘I’m not’ means. It’s like trying to segregate, you know, you’ve got like a boundary that sets, you know, you apart from other people. Why?” (Lillis *Student Writing*, 85)

“Despite these accomplishments, however, the year was not going well for David. Although his computer skills had improved by leaps and bounds, his skills in communicating in Standard English remained seriously underdeveloped—and his teachers in the English Department were very concerned about his ability to organize and write formal essays, his

inattention to standard spelling, his inability to write sentences that were grammatically correct according to conventional standards, and his problems with development and logical argumentation” (Selfe, “Students Who Teach Us” 49).

I think all of us *feel sick* about why David in Selfe’s study or the student in Lillis’s study had to suffer, where their literacy knowledge and skills should actually have been encouraged and promoted. These are only two representative cases. I myself know of many such cases, especially in Nepal where thousands of students *fail*, not once but several times, in their School Leaving Certificate examinations (and many other) because their English is “bad.” We all know the potential consequences of policies that promote monolingual ideology. With the publication of the result of the examinations come news of several suicides and mental breakdowns every year. However, such policies are still dominant in the US and across the world.

Both the quotations above reflect the frustration that many non-mainstream students go through in situations where writing is conceived only in monolingual and monomodal terms. The purposes of teaching composition under such ideological models, as discussed by various scholars in composition, are teaching abstracted notions of writing and language, often focusing on quantifiable outcomes. Such an emphasis assumes what Paul Matsuda calls the “myth of linguistic homogeneity” and what multimodal scholars would call a uniform notion of literacy. As a result, their focus remains on promoting a transmission model of pedagogy, which “extends to the demand for a ‘truth in advertising’ of course descriptions whereby teachers must tell the student consumers what those enrolling will be getting, and, of course, teachers must then deliver what’s promised, and students are assumed to know what they want and will need”

(Horner, “Rewriting Composition” 457). In such a model, students are supposed to learn fixed skills of language and writing. Peruse the major goals or outcomes statements of any US composition program, and you will find such a goal highlighted in the very beginning. Even the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition” mentions a similar goal for FYC courses. It says, “By the end of first-year composition, students should control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling,” assuming there are fixed conventions that students can and should “master” (Council of Writing Program Administration 2008). This language of *mastery* and the characterization of those features as *surface* features mask how they are, in reality, the results of sedimentations of language practices in specific socio-historical contexts. This dominant tendency towards language conventions promotes the masking of the politics of language “standardization.” And this is where what I’ve called a mesodiscursive approach sees the need to change how we approach language conventions, shifting our focus from the masking of politics to historicizing such tendencies in FYC curriculum.

When the guiding principle in curriculum design assumes difference in language use as deviation/error, it not only upholds the myth of discreteness and stability of a language “system”<sup>35</sup> (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur 2011; Pennycook 2010), but it also frustrates many students in ways similar to the one we see in the above quotation from Lillis. In many cases, the direct impact of such language beliefs would be students getting a lower grade, the consequences of which can be devastating (loss of scholarship, ineligibility for admission, etc.). Besides the false theoretical assumption, the real

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<sup>35</sup> It’s not only the dominant monolingual policy/ideology that assumes language fixity. Other language theories that acknowledge diversity also end up holding the same belief, emphasizing either on ELF or on separate varieties of World Englishes. Therefore, these theories would not help us overcome the problem of overcoming monolingual ideology in curriculum design.

practical problem is that most of non-mainstream students are systematically placed at a disadvantage because the norm often comes from the idealized notions of language practices of the dominant class. Many students who use English differently go through serious frustration and heavy pressure due to the fact that teachers always mark their writing as “incorrect,” requiring them to master the dominant variety. For instance, in the quote above, the student feels as if she is “segregat[ed]” simply because she uses “I’m” in place of “I am”. Theresa Lillis rightly points out the political ramifications of such practice: “Example 1 helps the researcher learn about the significance of a particular textual feature—I’m—to the writer. The writer doesn’t see full versus contracted forms as a question about neutral conventions but rather as having the potential to exclude people, including herself, from engaging in academia” (*Student Writing* 360). Such students also often go through psychological struggle due to the fact that they feel insecure about their future prospects. In other words, in such models, difference is punished rather than, as Selfe says, making it an instance for learning, learning for both students and teachers (“Students Who Teach Us”).

In place of a pedagogy that promotes what Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge call SLMN ideology, we should promote translingual and transmodal pedagogies that not only recognize the legitimacy of different ways of meaning making, but also encourage students and teachers to utilize their literacy potentials and experiment with literacy practices different from the dominant notions of *proper* literacy. Similarly, as Selfe, James Slevin, and many translingual theorists have argued, such experiments and students’ unique literacy practices should be taken as sources of learning for teachers.



So, the goal of teaching composition should be to develop understandings across differences. Such a focus becomes even more important in today's world where intersections of people and cultures facilitated by digital technologies have brought diverse semiotic practices together. This is an extension of what Slevin says in a slightly different context about the disciplinarity of composition:

Composition is a discipline, an *educational* practice in the older sense I have sketched, that cannot know itself because we have lost our power to name what we do. Our discipline is about the encounter of different ways of reading and writing; our discipline arises in acts of interpretation and composing, different ways of reading and thinking and persuading brought into our classrooms by students. Our disciplinary work in all its forms, including research, arises from the need and the desirability of promoting and enriching the dialog, already underway. (44)

As Slevin says, the work of composition should concentrate on promoting and enriching the dialog in engaging the encounter of different ways of reading and writing conceived in a much broader sense. We should reimagine composition as an activity of learning; it is learning new way of thinking and interpreting, learning new ways of using language and other semiotic systems.

However, when we emphasize making difference the center of our focus in teaching (and research), we should try to go beyond additive notions of literacies, whether multilingualism or multimodality and pay attention to the everyday practice in its complex socio-material complexity. That means, as I discussed in the third chapter while talking about Arjuna Parakrama and Neha, assumptions of separateness are not only unrealistic, they make language negotiations even more difficult and frustrating for many students. In other words, those who do not seem to use a particular language or variety in its pure form (mastery, which is never possible) will suffer.

Similarly, we should resist the temptation to fetishize some practices as creative and separate them from everyday practice. Such a tendency, as in the popular notion of code-meshing or celebration of a dominant notion of multimodality, “threatens to render it [code-meshing] a species of exotica to be marveled at rather than a feature of everyday practice” (Horner in Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge, “Transmodality and Trans/Multimodality”). Furthermore, the notion of multilingual/multimodal agency as composers’ deliberate, active, and strategic uses of language or modal resources, seen in many translingual/plurilingual/multilingual accounts, and their focus on metalinguistic or metadiscursive awareness can sometimes do a disservice to many students because such an emphasis ignores their struggle and difficulties negotiating differences.

At the same time, such an emphasis ignores creative uses of language/modality that look repetitive. For instance, when one of my students in a FYC class was asked to remediate her research paper into a different format that explicitly uses a variety of modes, she made a flyer with the uses of different fonts and sizes, experimenting with various compositional possibilities in terms of the arrangement of different blocks of texts and white space, creating a clearly visual representation of her written text in a form of a flyer. It looked appealing and creative. But that visual text was itself “written.” It would be a mistake to just require her to use images as visuals in her flyer or to consider her flyer a verbal mode. While encouraging students to experiment with a variety of modes and linguistic possibilities, we at the same time should not forget that our singular focus on mixing of modes (as understood in an additive sense) might not only curb her creative potential, but take away the possibility of providing clear instances of the fluidity of assumed technologies or modes.

Furthermore, students' semiotic practices should be considered in their material ecology where we consider not only the materiality of modes and socio-political conditions, but also seemingly insignificant material surroundings, from furniture, lighting, black/white boards and trashcans to the location of a classroom and the way the room is structured. Similarly, we should show our willingness to understand students' own material conditions. Considering such ecology, broader, more complex, and diverse than our common understanding of cultural ecology, helps us develop our teaching strategies accordingly and see students in their specificity. When we do so, we can perhaps appreciate not only deliberate and obvious instances of code-meshing, but also those that do not look diverse/multilingual. That way, we see diversity not only based on the differences between "native" and "non-native" students, but among what we call "monolingual" students. We can see how the code-meshing of the Malaysian student in Lu's study and that of Buthaina in Canagarajah's study are different and that both should be considered creative despite the fact that the Malaysian student decides to reiterate so called standard use, whereas Buthaina uses Arabic script with English, emoticons with alphabetic texts.

Therefore, when we read and respond to student writings, with our focus on difference as the norm and ecologies of writing as broader and more complex than handy categorizations, we should approach difference not in terms of broad categories like identity markers (ESL, non-native, etc.) but in terms of what Stephanie Kerschbaum calls "markers of difference": "It will be useful to re-emphasize the distinction between markers of difference and identity markers more generally. Markers of difference are always situated, negotiable, and part of individual interactions.... Thus, markers of

difference do not provide cross-contextual understanding of the meaning associated with any particular identity marker” (109). In other words, we should discard the static notion of difference and use what Kerschbaum calls “a dynamic, relational, and emergent construct” (116). This is what Helen Fox says when she talks about the importance of not generalizing the problems of ESL students: “It would not be a good idea to assume that anyone who comes from abroad, or worse, anyone whose last name is Wong or Das Gupta or Hernandez must have a particular writing or thinking style, or must be affected by cultural differences to the same degree or in the same way as other world majority students, or even at all” (110-111). In other words, when we see difference in student’s composing practice, it’s better to follow the traces of every agent than to assign the source of such difference to any a priori known or assumed reason/force.

Finally, though there is a general misconception that translingual/transmodal approaches are useful only for non-traditional/non-mainstream students, partly due to the focus on additive notions of language and modal difference in the academy, we should show how it is perhaps more useful to seemingly monolingual students and teachers alike. This is particularly so because translingual/transmodal approaches need to focus as much on material practices as on dispositions. Students tend to suffer a lot not only because they are not capable of navigating across linguistic and modal diversities (which is hard), but because they are accustomed to think about writing in a way that makes it hard for them to appreciate the strength of their unique practices. Similarly, given current geopolitical and cultural realities, so-called monolingual students also find themselves in many situations, both within the academy and outside, that demand ability to understand and appreciate semiotic practices that look quite different from their own. And, since

dispositions and practices are co-constitutive, encouraging both teachers and students to experiment and take risk in translingual and transmodal composing practices (since they are inextricably linked), while helping them to see the limitations of existing notions of language and modality will be central to teaching-learning practices. Constant exposure and continuous experimentations help teachers and students develop dispositions that can see the value of things that looked inappropriate to them in the past.

As most of us have been trained in monolingual and monomodal educational systems, we tend to ignore productive differences in student texts. For instance, when I was working in a writing center, one student showed a comment on her paper from her instructor. It read like “Your paper is very difficult to read because your sentences wander around.” Due to our monolingual training, we still ignore sentences that “wander around”; we don’t have tolerance towards ambiguities and complexities that differences in composing could generate, at least if they are written by students. This applies not only to teachers outside the English department, but also to those who teach FYC. This pervasive ideology of English monolingualism and monomodality of writing still governs how teachers think about language despite semiotic practices going through constant transformations in varying socio-political contexts. What it says is that writing programs need to work continuously towards changing the dispositions of such teachers because, as Patricia Friedrich says, they cannot be changed and “implemented overnight” (26). Some ways towards changing such disposition can be by encouraging teachers (including graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and adjuncts, who form the majority of those who teach FYC), as Patricia Friedrich says, to learn from recent scholarship on language learning and modal relations:

I recommend that both WPAs and faculty read and discuss works in sociolinguistics and particularly in world Englishes. When instructors become aware of the magnitude, the scope, and the many different functions of English around the world, their perceptions of the language tend to change completely, and their sensitivity to issues facing users of the language who are different from themselves seems to grow accordingly.

This applies to promoting transmodal disposition and practices too. The focus on experimenting and taking risk at using different semiotic practices is equally important, especially because many of us think that we do not know much about use of “new” media and modalities. Cynthia Selfe points out such resistance and the need to equally focus on experimenting:

At the same time, I also see another complicating tension: on one hand, a celebratory recognition of multimodality/transmodality and, on the other hand, a push-to-the-background/resistance to teaching certain forms of/environments for multimodality/transmodality production: like some English teachers' resistance to teaching/recognizing anything but conventional print-based word papers (which, granted, are themselves multimodal, but not in the same ways as texts created in digital environments can be). (Selfe in Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge, “Translinguality, Transmodality”)

Here, it is important to remind those who resist new literacy practices not only that we are more and more surrounded by texts that utilize the resources of a variety of technologies and modalities, but also that they themselves practice such literacies in many seemingly monomodal texts. Second, we can utilize, as Wendy Hesford et al. advocate, the resources that a diverse group of teachers can bring, especially from their experiences of teaching or learning linguistic and other multimodal practices that are different from our mainstream tradition. However, it would be a mistake to assume that non-native or multilingual GTAs/faculty are free from monolingual bias, particularly because the teaching of English is equally (sometimes even more) governed by

monolingual ideology outside the United States and other English-speaking countries. The sharing of these diverse experiences, by both native and non-native teachers, can help promote greater awareness about language politics and discursive practices.

It is also important not to separate the issue of language diversity from modality in teaching as they are, in most situations, inextricably connected. For instance, let me take the case of David in Cynthia Selfe's study. In his case, monolingualism is as much of the source of the problem as the monomodal focus in US composition teaching, besides many other aspects of material-social relations that went undetected. It is perhaps partly true that David could have done well in his composition class had the teachers been cognizant of his alternative literacy skills and recognized the value of them. But, it is equally possible that he would have suffered because the ghost of monolingual belief follows even in what we often call new media literacy practices. We all know that most multimodal assignments include a "writing" component, often in the form of reflection, that needs to fulfill the same requirements of a traditional essay. It is definitely better than limiting students to essayistic writing. But if we do not address the issue of language diversity in conjunction with modalities and literacies considered different from writing, we expect the same thing from what we call multimodal composition or new literacy practices, repeating the same problem, but in a different form.

## Conclusion

With increasing diversity in the student population and proliferation and intersections of diverse semiotic practices, it has become a necessity for us to address challenges our students are facing and the opportunities that such developments have created both for us as teachers and our students. While it is important to be cognizant of

and learn from students' composing practices within and outside the academy, especially in terms of how they, as what Steven Fraiberg calls knotworkers participating in a variety of networks, produce texts outside the academy and how that affects their writing/composition within, it is equally necessary to see how such practices are transforming or/and perpetuating problematic assumptions about language relations and its relation to other semiotic modes. In examining such composing practices, we should resist the temptation to separate languages from other semiotic practices as they are part of the same material-social ecology and are inextricably linked with each other.



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- . *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.
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- . *Writing in the 21st Century*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009. Print.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Hem Sharma Paudel

### Education

PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville (August 2015)

Dissertation: "Mediation in Literacy: Language, Technology, and Modality"

Committee: Bruce Horner (Chair), Min-Zhan Lu, Bronwyn Williams, David Anderson, and Cynthia Selfe

MA in Professional Communication, Clemson University (May 2010)

Thesis: "Acting in an Antifoundational World: Conversation, Poetic Redescription, and Solidarity"

Committee: Martin J. Jacobi (Chair), Susan Hilligoss, and Huiling Ding

MA in English, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal (2001)

### Publications

#### Peer Reviewed Articles

"Beyond the Politics of Despair: Imagining the Possibilities for Change." *JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition* 32.3-4 (2012): 758-767. (Co-authored with Tika Lamsal).

"Globalization and Language Difference: A Bidiscursive Approach." *Journal of English as an International Language* 6.2 (2011): 69-90.

"Elements of Teaching Online: A Literature Review." *Teacher Education Journal of South Carolina* 11.1 (2011): 113-123. Co-authored with Ron Knorr and Lienne Medford.

"Conrad's Entrapment into Imperial Ideology." *The Atlantic Critical Review* 6.2 (April-June 2007): 61-79.

"Blurring Boundary between Home and Exile: Reading Surendra Prakash's 'Dream Images.'" *Literary Studies* 23 (2007): 27-36.

### Book Chapter(s)

“Globalization and Language Difference: A Mesodiscursive Approach.” *Transnational Writing Program Administration*. Ed. David Martins. Utah: Utah State University Press, 2014. (In Press, to be released in March 2015.)

### Book Review(s)

“Review of *Language as a Local Practice*, by Alastair Pennycook.” *International Multilingual Research Journal* 5.2 (2011): 157-159.

### Newspaper Articles

Several op-ed articles in *Space Times Daily* (national newspaper in English, Nepal) and *स्पेस टाइम्स* (national newspaper in Nepali).

### Conference Presentations

“Techno-Linguistic Mediations: Mapping Dominant Discourses in Composition.” 2015 Computers & Writing Conference. May 2015.

“Theorizing Mediations of Semiotic Resources in Writing: A Posthumanist Perspective.” Research Network Forum. CCCC. March 2015.

“Mediation in Literacy: Language, Technology, and Modality.” Thomas R. Watson Conference. October 2014.

“Multilingual Rhetorics and Digital Composition: Toward an Alternative Theory of Mediation.” 16th Biennial Rhetoric Society of America Conference: Border Rhetorics.” May 2014.

“Mediations of Translingual and Transmodal Practices on Online Forums.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. March 2014.

“Difference as a Norm: Toward a Theory of Dialogical Pedagogy in the Context of Increasing Diversity in Student Population.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. March 2013.

“Construction of Self through Personal Narratives: Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*.” The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. Feb 2013.

“Fitting Pedagogies to Global Language Difference: Making Meaning through Repetition.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. March 2012.

“Teaching with Technology: YouTube and Its Affordances.” Annual Conference of Kentucky Philological Association. March 2012.

“Revisiting the Debate on Foundationalism/Antifoundationalism: Rorty's Intervention.” The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. Feb 2012.

“Philosophy Reborn (?): Badiou's Redefinition of Truth and Subjectivity.” Annual Conference of Kentucky Philological Association. March 2011.

“Globalization and Language Difference: A Mesodiscursive Approach.” 22<sup>nd</sup> Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition. June 2011.

“The World with Diversities: A Rortian Solution” at the Annual Conference of North West Communication Association. 2009.

“Double Consciousness of Caste Subalterns in Anand's *On the Road*” in India-Nepal Conference on “Mulk Raj Anand and Social Change.” 2007.

“Blurring the Boundary between Home and Exile: Reading Surendra Prakash's ‘Dream Images’” at Annual Conference of Literary Association of Nepal. 2007.

## Teaching Experience

### University of Louisville

#### Graduate Teaching Assistant

English 101: Introduction to College Writing (Fall 2014)

English 102: Intermediate College Writing (Spring 2012)

English 101: Introduction to College Writing (Fall 2011)

English 306: Business Writing (Summer 2011)

### Clemson University

#### Graduate Teaching Assistant

English 103: Accelerated Composition (Fall 2009-Spring 2010)

### Central Department of English (Tribhuvan University)

Lecturer (2003-2008)



English 501.1: Survey of British and American Literature (MA First Year)

English 501.2: History of British and American Literature

English 504.2: Rhetoric and Composition (Ma First Year)

English 506.1: British and American Poetry (MA Second Year)

English 508.2: Non-Western Studies (MA Second Year)

Kathmandu Model College (Tribhuvan University)

Lecturer (2004-2008)

English 308: Business and Technical Communication (BBA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

English 301: Compulsory English (BA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

English 302: Compulsory English (BA 2<sup>nd</sup> Year)

English 303: Background to Literary Studies (English Major, BA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

English 304: Essay and Fiction (English Major, BA 2<sup>nd</sup> Year)

English 307: Critical Thinking (English Major, BA 3<sup>rd</sup> Year)

English 501.2: History of British and American Literature:  
Movement/Genre Studies (MA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

English 502.1: Literary Theory (MA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

English 506.1: Survey of British and American Poetry (MA 2<sup>nd</sup> Year)

Patan Multiple Campus (Tribhuvan University)

Lecturer (2002-2006)

English 303: Background to Literary Studies (English Major, BA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

English 304: Essay and Fiction (English Major, BA 2<sup>nd</sup> Year)

English 307: Critical Thinking (English Major, BA 3<sup>rd</sup> Year)

English 502.1: Literary Theory (MA 1<sup>st</sup> Year)

Administrative Positions

University of Louisville

Assistant Director of Business Writing (Summer 2012-Spring 2013)

Clemson University

Graduate Lab Assistant: Studio for Student Communication (Fall 2008-Spring 2009)

Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University

Exam Coordinator and Technology Committee Director (2006-2008)

Workshops Presentations

“Plagiarism and APA Style” for Marketing students at College of Business, University of Louisville. March 25, 2013.

“Structuring Academic Arguments: IMRaD” for graduate students at College of Business, University of Louisville. Feb 6, 2013.

“Critical Thinking, Citation Styles, and Plagiarism” for students of Information Systems, College of Business, University of Louisville. Jan 14, 2013.

“Plagiarism and APA Style” for Marketing students at College of Business, University of Louisville. Nov 6, 2012.

“Writing Literature Review” for graduate students at College of Business, University of Louisville. Oct 22, 2012

“Incorporating Writing into Business Courses” for College of Business faculty at University of Louisville. Sep 4, 2012.

“Critical Thinking, Citation Styles, and Plagiarism” for students of Information Systems, College of Business, University of Louisville. Aug 27, 2012.

“Using Dreamweaver for Website Design” for interested graduate students and Faculty through MATRF (The Multimedia Authoring Teaching and Research Facility), Clemson University. April 16, 2009.

“MA Thesis Writing: An Alternative Perspective” a paper presented at National Seminar/Workshop on Proposal and Thesis Writing, conducted by Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for those teaching MA in English courses in all Tribhuvan University affiliated colleges. Dec 12-13, 2003.

Lead workshop sessions as an Instructor for 3-month writing workshop conducted to teach argumentative, analytical and research writing skills for thesis writing students. Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. Jan 2006-March 2006.

#### Service to the Profession

#### Editorial Boards

Served in the Editorial Board of *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*, Oxford University Press.

Served in the Editorial Board of *Business Communication: In Person, in Print, Online*.

Serving as a member of the Editorial Board of *Punarjiwan*, the monthly newsletter of Blood Donors of America (July 2014 – Present).

#### Manuscript Review

Serving as manuscript reviewer for *International Journal of Multilingualism*.

#### Volunteer Activities

Served as a Member of Technology Committee at *Watson Conference* 2012.

Served as a Technology Resource Instructor at *Celebration of Teaching and Learning: Envisioning Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age*. Annual Celebration of Teaching and Learning by Delphi Center and School of Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies, University of Louisville. Feb. 2012.

#### Thesis Supervision

Supervised over 20 MA thesis projects, CDE, Tribhuvan University

Served as an External Examiner on over 25 thesis projects, CDE, Tribhuvan University

Served as an Outside Reader on one thesis project, Patan Multiple College, Tribhuvan University

#### Committees/Memberships

Executive Member	:	Literary Association of Nepal (2006-2008)
Executive Member	:	English Graduate Organization, University of Louisville (Aug. 2011-July 2012)
President	:	Nepalese Student Association, University of Louisville (July 2014-Present)
Vice President	:	Nepalese Student Association, University of Louisville. (July 2013-June 2014)

#### Awards and Honors

Graduate Fellowship, University of Louisville, 2010-2015  
Doctoral Dissertation Completion Award, University of Louisville.  
Fellowship, BA 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> years (First position), Tribhuvan University

Distinction, MA Oral Exam, Clemson University  
Distinction, MA Thesis Defense, Clemson University  
First Position: Short Story Competition, Tribhuvan University

#### Graduate Courses

PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville

History of Rhetoric I (Carol Mattingly)  
Outside Composition (Bruce Horner)  
New Cultural and Media Studies (Aaron Jaffe)  
New Media and Composition Pedagogy (Bronwyn Williams)  
Revision: Theory and Practice (Min-Zhan Lu)  
Writing in the Disciplines (Joanna Wolfe)  
Teaching College Composition (Joanna Wolfe)  
Work in English (Bruce Horner)  
American Authors 1900-Present: Postmodern Literature and Culture  
(Thomas Byers)  
The Work of Ethnography (Debra Journet)  
Watson Seminar on Language and Literacy (Min-Zhan Lu, Brian Street,  
Ralph Cintron, and Suresh Canagarajah)

MA in Professional Communication, Clemson University

Theories of Rhetoric and Professional Communication (Martin Jacobi)  
Teaching Professional Writing (Summer Smith Taylor)  
Professional Writing (Shannon Walters)  
Advanced Technical and Business Writing (Jan Holmevik)  
Theories and Practices of Workplace Communication (Sean D. Williams)  
Visual Communication (Jan Holmevik)  
Empirical Research Methods (Tharon Howard)  
Composition Theory and Teaching Practicum (Cynthia Haynes)

MA in English, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

British and American Poetry, Drama, Fiction, Literary Theory, History of  
English Literature, Linguistics and Literature, Creative Writing, Non-  
Western Studies, Intellectual History

#### Language Proficiency

English (high proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing)  
Nepali (high proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing)  
Hindi (good proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing)

#### Professional Membership

Member : STC (2008-2010)  
Member : CCCC (2010-Present)  
Member : MLA (2013-Present)