Translingual Writing: From Process to Product? Globalizing Written English in the Second

Language

ANGELA HERMANN,
Indiana University - Purdue University, Indianapolis

Many universities are engaged in efforts to internationalize which will lead to

increasing numbers of international students and faculty, thus growing the number

of language contact zones within the university. It is in composition and second

language writing (SLW), classrooms where the influence of internationalization

efforts are often most visible, where traditional teaching practices and pedagogies

in standard written English (SWE) at times insufficiently address language issues.

A growing theoretical movement is nudging the SWE hegemony aside in favor of

translingualism—an attempt to welcome other language structures into the

classroom. For second language writing (SLW) programs, this movement poses

some interesting challenges.

Keywords: English, internationalization, process, product, SLW,

translingual, writing

Introduction

Many universities, including the statewide Indiana University (IU) system, are engaged in an

effort to internationalize. This effort calls on institutions to "incorporate global perspectives into

teaching, learning, and research; build international and intercultural competence among students,

faculty, and staff; and establish relationships and collaborations with people and institutions

abroad" (ACE, 2014). As those relationships grow and evolve, an increasing number of

international students and faculty are choosing IU, thus growing the number of language contact

zones within the university, and by extension, the broader community.

It is in composition and second language writing (SLW), classrooms where the influence

of internationalization efforts are often most visible, where traditional teaching practices and

pedagogies in standard written English (SWE) at times insufficiently address language issues.

These changes have led some experts in composition studies, linguistics, and second language

writing to increase the urgency of an ongoing conversation that questions the monolingual

orientation of the U.S. classroom and the continued privileging of Standard Written English

(SWE) at a time when many other dialects of English are spoken in the classroom. A growing

theoretical movement is nudging the SWE hegemony aside in favor of translingualism—an

attempt to welcome other language structures into the classroom. For second language writing

(SLW) instructors, this movement poses some interesting challenges. For institutions embracing a

translingual pedagogy, what does a translingual writing (TLW) classroom look like and is

translingual writing welcomed in all academic disciplines? As awareness of translingual writing

grows, what are the pedagogical implications of SLW, especially in its treatment of grammatical

errors?

Review of sources

The idea of multiple Englishes is not new. In fact, in 1974, the National Council of Teachers of

English adopted a position statement on "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (NCTE, 1974)

in response to a tendency to delegitimize dialects of English that were considered non-standard, or

worse, inferior. This action was taken in behalf of the growing number of students who speak a

non-standard form of English, whether as an L2 learner of English or a dialect of English such as

African-American Vernacular. The resolution called for instructors "to learn the conventions of

what has been called written edited American English" and that instructors "must have the

experiences and training that will enable them to understand and respect diversity of dialects"

(NCTE, 1974). In following the NCTE recommendations, instruction can be grounded in

sociocultural theory that not only recognizes the sociolinguistic contexts in which students'

language skills developed but also contributes to instructor knowledge of each student's dialect.

Despite this recognition of English's many distinct dialects, the SLW classroom in the

United States has remained largely static, focusing on SWE as the preferred dialect. This practice

is defended given that written language is not native to anyone because everyone must be trained

to write. However, a number of composition studies, linguistics, and second language writing

experts are proclaiming that classroom pedagogies must change to accommodate the evolution of

English, legitimizing translingual writing just as the many varieties of spoken English are

increasingly accepted in many public and social arenas.

Thus a number of books and articles have been published within the last five years to

explain translingualism and attempt to arrive at a consensus on a definition. Despite the effort, an

exact definition remains elusive. Curiously, no entry exists in the OED for the word translingual.

Translingual writing seems to be most commonly associated with those who choose to write (in

the literary sense of the word) and are published in an L2, often a *lingua franca* such as English,

instead of their L1. A manufactured language, Esperanto, which has achieved the status of a *lingua*

franca, is considered "the most ostentatious and willful case of translingualism" … "… the

vernacular of no one, an artificial language barely a century old" (Kellman, 1991, p. 529). In this

sense, translingualism is an "aspiration to purify the words of the tribe by substituting the words of

another tribe" (Kellman, 1991, p. 529). TLW might appear more akin to the willful substitution of

words. Yet, TLW "calls for a more agentive use of various language resources in constructing and

negotiating meaning, identity, and even larger ideological conditions" (Atkinson et al., 2015). That

is, at times an expression or phrase cannot be adequately expressed in the L2, requiring a reliance

on the original L1 and a negotiation of meaning between the writer and the reader.

Another view of TLW equates translingual practice with code-meshing, "a communicative

device used for specific rhetorical and ideological purposes in which a multilingual speaker

intentionally integrates local and academic discourse as a form of resistance, reappropriation

and/or transformation of the academic discourse" (Michael-Luna & Canagarajah, 2007) in the

interest "of strengthening pedagogies of language difference" (Ray, 2013). One can view a

translingual approach to writing "not as something we have or have access to but as something we

do" (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 27). In reviewing the literature, attempts to rein in a complete

definition of TLW collapse because the term remains "contested and competes with such terms as

interculturalité, multilingualism, plurilingualism, translanguaging, transculturation, *créolité*, and

diversalité, whose meanings are likewise contested" (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 35). In the absence of

a clear working definition of TLW, practitioners attempt to explain TLW, such as its treatment of

grammar and surface forms. However its value is embedded in the notion that TLW "highlights

issues that fall between traditional conceptions of L1 and L2 writing—issues that have

traditionally been addressed by writing studies scholars informed by insights from

sociolinguistics" (Atkinson et al., 2015). Therein lies the concern among some of the "problematic

trend" to "to conflate L2 writing and translingual writing" (Atkinson et al., 2015).

Despite the ambiguity around TLW and attempts in the SLW field to address a diversity of

Englishes, a schism has developed between TLW and SLW experts. A. Suresh Canagarajah, Bruce

Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and John Trimbur represent the TLW side of the debate, while Dwight

Atkinson, Diane Belcher, Dana Ferris, and John Hedgcock, stand on the SLW side. Paul Kei

Matsuda, in refereeing the schism, states that the issues cannot be reduced to "a false binary that

masks their complexity" (Matsuda, 2014, p. 480)—the reality is that theories range somewhere along a continuum and a pedagogical gap exists.

Discussion: Translingual writing and second language writing—process, product, or both?

Despite theorists' best efforts, defining translingual writing remains beyond reach, akin to *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Pirsig, 1974)—we recognize Quality when we see it but we cannot describe it. In the case of translingual writing, we know it when we see it even if it has no agreed upon definition. What, then, does the translingual writing classroom look like and can TLW be "taught?" Furthermore, what is the 'product' of a TLW assignment? To answer these questions, it might be useful to examine a product approach to writing, with a view to audience expectations. Each audience represents a discourse community comprised of established genre-specific norms. L2 writers who are particularly skilled writers in both their L1 and L2 may at times choose to stretch the norms or boundaries of their audience's expectations. An example is Canagarajah's study of Karthigesu Sivathamby, a professor of Sri Lankan Tamil (2011), who "shuttled" between his L1 and L2 by reframing his text for three publications according to the conventions and expectations of each of those audiences. One might conclude that without a sophisticated command of his L2 writing skills, Sivathamby would have achieved neither the nuanced meaning nor the audience acceptance of his work. On the other hand, Sivathamby could be considered a model for TLW.

Advocates of both TLW and SLW embrace the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" position statement, though criticisms have been lodged against the composition field for its historically monolingual, English-only focus (Atkinson et al., 2015; Matsuda, 2014). Clearly, those in higher education benefit from a linguistically diverse community (Atkinson et al., 2015; Matsuda, 2014). The growing diversity of Englishes within the United States in general and universities in particular is reflective of the expansion of English from inner circle countries to

which English is native, to the outer circle of English speakers representing countries previously colonized by inner circle countries, to the expanding circle of English speakers, where English has become nativized (Kachru, 2006). Consequently, the growing diversity of English has implications for university composition and SLW programs.

While SLW seeks to synthesize process, purpose, and context (Hyland, 2003), with attention to both process and (ideally) a contextualized product, **TWL is not about a product. "In contrast to multilingualism, translingualism stresses the process and not the goal" (Huang, 2010, p. 44).** Thus one of the most obvious, and most visible, differences between TLW and SLW is the treatment of errors. In an oft-cited article, especially in literature advancing TLW, Lu (1994) outlines her multicultural approach to teaching composition by describing a lesson with her students who read two student writings that feature the verb structure "can able to." Rather than immediately identify the structure as incorrect, Lu guides her students into an exploration of *why* the writer formed the structure, parsing the possibilities of interference from Chinese, her L1, referring to the dictionary for the proper option, or simply not knowing the correct form. This exploration centers the conversation on "how we do language and why" (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 27). The question of *why* frames the exercise in that sometimes language learners make intentional decisions on language choices that are often dismissed as errors. As the story unfolds, rather than marking the structure incorrect, forcing the student to acquiesce to Standard Written English rules, meaning is co-constructed between the reader and the writer who ultimately exercised agency over her work and decided to use the more "grammatically correct" form "may be able to" because it "says what [the student wants] to say" (Lu, 1994, p. 454).

Therein lies a consequence of privileging Standard Written English, or any standardized form of a language, in the classroom: other dialects are dismissed as unacceptable in the SLW classroom. A translingual approach

"shifts attention to matters of agency—the ways in which individual language users

fashion and re-fashion standardized norms, identity, the world, and their relation to others

and the world … writers are seen not in terms of their degree of proximity, mastery, or

adjustment to dominant definitions of exigent, feasible, appropriate, and stable "contexts"

or "codes," but as always responding to and shaping these" (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 28).

This shift in thinking about how teachers handle errors profoundly alters writing instruction, not

only to L2 learners but also anyone who does not speak a standardized language form. TLW is not

intended to result in the production of an object to be passively consumed and judged by its

grammatical merit by a discerning reader. Instead, meaning is to be co-constructed by both the

writer and the reader. The conversation has become "an intellectual movement to see languages

not as discrete entities but as situated, dynamic, and negotiated" (Matsuda, 2013, p. 130).

While those conversations are important, what about the SLW student who is trying to

master written composition in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program? The SLW

approach to errors would address the higher/lower order concerns of a student's writing to create

an acceptable academic product. A criticism lodged against TLW is that it "has not widely taken

up the task of helping L2 writers increase their proficiency in what might still be emerging L2s

and develop and use their multiple language resources to serve their own purposes" (Atkinson et

al., 2015). Instead of expecting the audience to "read with patience" and "an attitude of

deliberative inquiry" (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 304) as is expected with TLW, L2

writers are judged by their ability to achieve an L2 proficiency that meets their profession's

discourse standards. Compared to TLW, SLW pedagogy suggests that it is the responsibility of the

writer to use language creatively and thoughtfully, drawing on literacy resources in both L1 and

L2 as appropriate, to craft contextualized meaning for the audience. In doing so, the writer meets

audience expectations, and the audience understands the writer's intent, while granting the writer

permission to transmit cultural assumptions, ideological values, and disciplinary knowledge as viewed through the lens of McCrimmon's "writing as a way of knowing" (1984).

Bearing in mind Sivathamby's considerable facility with languages, how might he compare with a medical researcher with impeccable research credentials who seeks publication in professional journals for career advancement? Despite exemplary research, editors send letters of rejection. The researcher believes journal editors are rejecting the articles because of deficient SLW skills that do not conform to journals' editorial standards. Right or wrong, scholars who do not conform to those standards are denied admission into those discourse communities. Clearly, the "differences in rhetorical styles between English and [the researcher's] native language" exist and that "the writing process in English involves a different set of assumptions from the ones they are accustomed to working with. It is not enough for them to write with the view that there is a sympathetic reader who believes a reader's task is to ferret out whatever meaning the author has intended" and that "effective communication in English is the sole provenience of the writer" (Hinds, 1987, p. 72). While some might consider Hinds' work dated, the essence of his message remains relevant today, given an increasingly interconnected world where communications are skimmed in passing. In the case of the medical researcher, Hinds' conclusions have implications for second language writers. Therefore, should this researcher expect the editor's audience to co-create meaning when encountering non-standard verb tenses? In comparing Sivathamby and the medical researcher, would increased proficiency in SLW facilitate the researcher's admission into a journal's discourse community? Is Sivathamby considered an exceptionally skilled translingual writer? What is the responsibility of the audience in negotiating meaning with the writer? To further complicate matters, what about the student in a SLW course who wrote a research paper about food allergy treatments and requested permission to cite Chinese sources even though the student should be doing research in English and the instructor had no way of evaluating the

sources (Ferris, 2014)? In light of these examples, can SLW instruction be more pedagogically responsive to student needs in a world of multiple Englishes?

Pedagogical implications: Hybridizing the second language writing classroom?

In considering the examples illustrated above, Sivathamby, the professor of Sri Lankan Tamil, the medical researcher, or the student who uses L1 resources in an L2 paper, the objective of the writing instructor is to prepare students to communicate in a language-diverse world. In the case of Sivathamby, a command of his L2, along with a nuanced understanding of each of his three audiences resulted in the transmission of his message in three formats and in two languages. His audiences were not expected to co-create meaning. In the case of the medical researcher, being denied publication due to a lack of L2 proficiency suggests that editors of publications in the medical field adhere to rigid language expectations—for students entering this field, writing instruction must make students aware of these expectations. In the third example, the student represents an expectation that L2 learners should be able to move freely between L1 and L2 research worlds, even while studying English in an English-speaking country. Students and instructors are navigating a world where "universally acceptable standards are absent" due to the Post-Colonial "phase of *decontrol* of English, as it were, from earlier, reasonably well-accepted standards" (Kachru, 2006, p. 241).

SLW as a field has already begun addressing issues unique to L2 instruction in the form of the Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers (NCTE, 2009). In light of new realities however, the statement falls short. For instance, in classes comprised of exclusively ESL learners, the SLW statement recommends no more than 15 students. However, given the diversity of ESL learners in universities (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Matsuda, 2011), class size should be reduced further to better facilitate language instruction specific to students' needs. Writing instruction

might look more like a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) class than a composition class. That is, instruction

> …should reflect the methodology of the disciplines and the professions it serves; and in more specific English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching the nature of the interaction between the teacher and learner may be very different from that in a general English class" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 4).

Furthermore, the "language should be the defining feature" of the instruction (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 4), which means teaching can be customized to meet student needs in a smaller class setting. Students can be grouped by academic disciplines that share 'carrier content' as the academic English serves as the 'real content' of their EAP class. The distinction between 'carrier content' and 'real content' are hallmarks of ESP teaching (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998); the language learned is presented within an authentic discipline-specific context. The increasing likelihood of other same-L1 students and faculty within a specific academic discipline opens the possibility of translingual learning opportunities which can lead to language skill sets similar to Sivathamby's.

Another approach to writing instruction might be modeled on that described by Elbow (1999) combined with socioliterate instruction where student language differences are navigated through instruction that "focuses on examining, practicing, and reproducing the implicit and explicit features of texts geared toward particular audiences" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014, p. 79). Students learn to maintain, yet adapt, their own voice to cultivate multiple literacies. While Elbow's pedagogical approach was not specifically intended for the SLW classroom, his approach acknowledges that if students want to succeed in an academic discipline, they need to understand the language conventions and nuances of that discipline. Elbow's approach recognizes the diversity of Englishes in the classroom and allows writing to take shape according to the

assignment. In a departure from Elbow, through a series of revisions—a process to product approach—students can write to accommodate the various genre conventions, exploring the structure, language, and grammar required to meet audience expectations. This approach honors the student voice, otherwise "instruction that is unconstrained may result in learner failure to learn dominant discourse modes and would ultimately be a disservice to learners" (Polio & Williams, 2009, p. 498).

Conclusions

English has evolved over the centuries—the earliest forms being virtually unintelligible to today's English speakers. Furthermore, in a span of less than 60 years, English has seen "a linguistic phenomenon of unprecedented dimensions in language spread, language contact, and language change" (Kachru, 2006, p. 241). A theory of translingual writing, imperfect as it is, offers a response to these changes. Meanwhile "linguists are still conditioned by a monolingual model for linguistic description and analysis, and have yet to provide a framework and descriptive methodology for description and analysis of a bi- or multilingual's use of language and linguistic creativity" (Kachru, 2006, p. 241). In the absence of this framework and methodology, TLW offers an attempt to create a process for writing instruction in response to language-diverse, globalized classrooms in internationalized universities.

> **NOTE:** This paper received the Joan and Larry Cimino Award for Excellence in Intercultural Communication in April 2015 through the IUPUI School of Liberal Arts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela Herrmann is a graduate student at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI), where she is earning a master's degree in English with graduate certificates in TESOL

and teaching writing. She is currently on a teaching internship at Peking University Health Science

Center in Beijing, China. She holds a professional certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign

Language from the American Language Institute at California State University-Long Beach

(CSULB). She has taught a listening/speaking class at CSULB and IUPUI's International Center

for Intercultural Communication, organized an ESL class through Ustinov College in Durham,

England, and tutored international students at the CSULB Learning Assistance Center and the

IUPUI Technical Communication Writing Center. She anticipates completing her master's degree

in May 2016.

Inquiries should be directed to aherrman@iupui.edu

REFERENCES

ACE, A. C. o. E. (2014). Campus Internationalization.   Retrieved November 21, 2014, from

http://www.acenet.edu/higher-education/topics/Pages/Campus-Internationalization.aspx

Atkinson, D., Crusan, D., Matsuda, P. K., Ortmeier-Hooper, C., Ruecker, T., Simpson, S., &

Tardy, C. (2015). Clarifying the Relationship between L2 Writing and Translingual

Writing: An Open Letter to Writing Studies Editors and Organization Leaders. *Manuscript

submitted for Publication*.

Canagarajah, S. (2011). Writing to learn and learning to write by shuttling between languages.

Learningto-write and writing-to-learn in an additional language, 111-132.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A

multi-disciplinary approach*: Cambridge university press.

Elbow, P. (1999). Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond" Mistakes,"" Bad English," and" Wrong

Language". *JAC*, 359-388.

Ferris, D. (2014). Review: "English Only" and Multilingualism in Composition Studies: Policy,

    Philosophy, and Practice. *College English, 77*, 73-83.

Ferris, D., & Hedgcock, J. (2014). *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice*.

    New York: Routledge.

Hinds, J. (1987). Reader versus writer responsibility: A new typology. In T. Silva & P. K.

    Matsuda (Eds.), *Landmark essays on ESL writing*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Horner, B., Lu, M.-Z., Royster, J. J., & Trimbur, J. (2011). Opinion: Language difference in

    writing: Toward a translingual approach. *College English, 73*(3), 303-321.

Huang, T.-C. (2010). The Application of Translingualism to Language Revitalisation in Taiwan.

    Asian Social Science, 6(2), P44.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*: Ernst Klett Sprachen.

Kachru, B. B. (2006). The English Language in the outer circle. In K. Bolton & B. B. Kachru

    (Eds.), *World Englishes: Critical Concepts in Linguistics*: Routledge.

Kellman, S. G. (1991). Translingualism and the Literary Imagination. *Criticism, 33*(4), 527-541.

Lu, M.-Z. (1994). Professing multiculturalism: The politics of style in the contact zone. *College

    composition and communication*, 442-458.

Lu, M.-Z., & Horner, B. (2013). Translingual literacy and matters of agency. In A. S. Canagarajah

    (Ed.), *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms* (pp. 26-

    38). New York, NY: Routledge.

Matsuda, P. K. (2011). International and U.S. Resident ESL Writers Cannot Be Taught int he

    Same Class. In J. Reid (Ed.), *Writing myths: Applying second language research to

    classroom teaching* (Fourth ed.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Matsuda, P. K. (2013). It's the wild west out there. In A. S. Canagarajah (Ed.), *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms* (pp. 128-138). New York, NY: Routledge.

Matsuda, P. K. (2014). The Lure of Translingual Writing. *PMLA, 129*(3), 478-483.

McCrimmon, J. M. (1984). *Writing with a Purpose* (8th ed.): Houghton Mifflin Company.

Michael-Luna, S., & Canagarajah, A. S. (2007). Multilingual academic literacies: pedagogical foundations for code meshing in primary and higher education. *Journal of Applied Linguistics, 4*(1), 55-77. doi: 10.1558/japl.v4i1.55

NCTE. (1974). Students' Right to their Own Language (with bibliography).   Retrieved October 1, 2014, from http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/righttoownlanguage

NCTE. (2009). Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers.   Retrieved September 23, 2014, from http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting

Pirsig, R. M. (1974). Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance. New York: William Morrow and Company: Inc.

Polio, C., & Williams, J. (2009). Teaching and testing writing. *The handbook of language teaching*, 486-517.

Ray, B. (2013). A Progymnasmata for Our Time: Adapting Classical Exercises to Teach Translingual Style. *Rhetoric Review, 32*(2), 191-209.