Despite these reservations, I still believe that this is a very important book, and not just for its arguments. While the editors portray critical ethnography as a “liberatory struggle of countercriticism against postmodern theory” (Brown 303), their Promethean rhetoric is not shared by most of the book’s other contributors. *Their* rhetoric is better described in terms of that dimension of *ethos* that the Greeks called *phronesis*, the “practical wisdom” a speaker displays in a given situation, inspiring confidence that what that speaker says will lead to sound decisions and wise actions. Modest, respectful, thoughtful, and committed to finding pragmatic as well as theoretically sound approaches to research in a postmodern age, the collective *ethos* of the authors represented here is evidence that the fate of ethnography in Composition is in very good hands.

*Boston, MA*


Reviewed by Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar, Washington State University

Five years ago I was directing a busy, mid-sized writing center at a mid-sized university in the midwest. Like any university, we saw our share of students for whom standard English was not their first language. It was hard finding resources to help my tutors avoid giving purely prescriptive feedback since most training guides, journals, and newsletters tended to overlook the essential differences—linguistic as well as cultural—between tutoring an immigrant, international, or an American-born student of color. Since each of these groups was implicitly lumped together as ESL in the literature, the advice was rarely useful across those lines, especially for tutors. Finally, a book has been published that breaks that disturbing trend. With the release of *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, editors Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth have compiled a series of essays that offer practical training advice as well as detailed explanations of the sociolinguistic and cultural contexts that always affect the tutoring of ESL students.

In their Introduction, Bruce and Rafoth define an ESL writer as “anyone whose native language is not English, who is visiting the United States from another country to study at a college or university, and who is in the process of learning to write (and speak) in English” (xiii). From the beginning, then, they acknowledge the immigrant, international and American-born student of color difference. They even wisely remind (or inform?) readers that native speakers of English come from all parts of the colonized world, and that the English varieties spoken in these countries are just as “right” as the western varieties. It is important that they
begin with these definitions because they set up Nancy Howard’s outstanding first chapter, which suggests that tutors must recognize that both the consultant and tutee’s cultural expectations “[h]ave everything to do with the success or failure of any tutoring session” (1). This chapter explains how cultural expectations form the basis of every person’s beliefs, values, and assumptions regarding analytic thinking, epistemology, body language, socialization, nativism, and our roles in a society. Tutors must understand that their own cultural expectations reflect or challenge those of the students with whom they work. In developing this argument, Howard introduces readers to the basics of the history of the English language, and to linguistic theories such as contrastive rhetoric, language acquisition, and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Especially effective is her last section on intercultural communication, which examines how one’s culture affects one’s views about age and gender as authority issues. Howard writes, “Some ESL students may distrust younger tutors, feeling they do not have the experience and authority of older, more experienced tutors” (13). Doubt about tutor qualifications, especially by graduate students in the sciences and business, those seeking a second degree while studying abroad, or by visiting foreign faculty can lead to embarrassment, shame, and reluctance in asking for help from the writing center.

In a brilliant follow up to chapter 1, Theresa Jiinling Tseng’s essay in chapter 2 explains core beliefs of linguistic theory in an almost colloquial way, including essential concepts such as the difference between competence and performance, or that because every language is unique, none is inherently harder to learn than another, despite claims to the contrary regarding English. The chapter reviews the literature on classic conclusions, such as the idea that native speakers master the grammar of their language in the first few years of life without formal instruction, or that anyone attempting to acquire another language, especially those whose roots come from another language family, inevitably will have more difficulty learning it since their lexicon, syntax, grammar, and other features differ significantly. Tseng’s chapter succinctly introduces key linguistics theories that are essential knowledge for a true understanding of the difficulties that non-native speakers confront while learning English usage.

The next few chapters apply these theories in essays which suggest how tutors can best work with ESL students. In chapter 4, Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox are quick to point out that “[i]n many cases, reading texts written by English as a second language (ESL) writers is not radically different from those written by native English-speaking (NES) writers; tutors can use many of the same principles and strategies they use in reading NES texts” (39). In their own way, chapters 4 through 6 support this claim by demonstrating that existing writing center strategies work with all students, ESL and NES alike. These techniques include setting goals together for using the time effectively; explaining the steps the tutor will take in leading the session; reviewing assignment requirements prior to reading the student text; focusing the discussion on higher order concerns; finding patterns of error instead of overwhelming the student by examining every one; having someone
(either the student or consultant) read the entire piece aloud before commenting on it; taking notes but not line editing without offering multiple suggestions for revising; reiterating or summarizing what the student will work on after she gets home; and inviting the student to come back after completing the next draft. This is an important point since tutors need to believe they can effectively tutor ESL students, without a mastery of grammar, usage, linguistics and the like. Having that training will only support best practices, not supplant them. While tutoring ESL students, consultants should use the same principles that are used with NES writers, remembering to adapt them when necessary.

In chapter 5, Carol Severino grapples with the tricky issue of appropriation, which she claims is actually an issue of control. When tutors or instructors change the writer’s text to the point that the author’s voice disappears, and the writer does not understand the rationale for the changes, the writer loses or abandons control. Severino suggests ten methods for avoiding appropriation by offering ESL students various ways of taking responsibility for the language choices made in their texts. Amy Jo Minett, in chapter 6, continues this argument claiming, “When we offer the writer a number of choices related to meaning, . . . it’s still the writer’s choice in the end to decide which word (and which meaning) he wants to convey. We might even see this as one way meaning is negotiated between tutor and writer, and second language research suggests quite strongly that negotiated meaning (1) facilitates learning, and (2) leads to better writing (and therefore, probably a clearer expression of meaning)” (66). Cynthia Linville agrees, arguing in chapter 8 that novice writers, especially ESL writers, often need a more experienced writer to demonstrate that there are many ways a sentence can be phrased, or a paragraph can be organized. Tutors who provide multiple solutions do not write the paper for the student; they model various solutions. Students can choose which best expresses what they were attempting to say. This ultimately brings more authority to the tutors as well, since they demonstrate their expertise with native English usage.

While most chapters offer much about training tutors for working with ESL students, there are some shorter chapters written by the editors themselves that aren’t very useful. Bruce’s chapter 3 talks about making plans for a session and putting global issues first. However, Jennifer Staben and Kathryn Dempsey Nordhaus, in chapter 7, do a much better job articulating this, and provide a stronger utilization of theory and evidence to substantiate their claims. Rafoth’s essay in chapter 14 also repeats concepts, including multiple English varieties used worldwide, English grammar being no more or less sophisticated than any other language’s, and that many English words are in fact borrowings from other languages and cultures. These chapters bring little to the conversation and, in fact, Rafoth and Bruce even refer readers back to the other chapters where these concepts are developed much more effectively and fully. The same could be said of the chapters with unfounded and unsupported assumptions. In chapter 9, for instance, Rafoth’s discussion of online ESL tutoring lacks a basic grounding within the existing literature on OWLs. I was notably surprised by the lack of evidence supporting the claims and suggestions.
that conclude the essay, like the claim that “the tentativeness or hesitation writers hear in phrases like ‘you might want to think about . . .’ or ‘I wonder if . . .’ [and other] phrases a tutor uses to indicate nondirectiveness, others may interpret as wishy-washy” (102). It’s almost as if Rafoth hasn’t read the previous chapters that warn how some people find directness offensive and rude. He could qualify this by reminding tutors to watch for cues as to whether the student sees nondirective comments as an invitation or an undermining of their authority.

The book could also have been reorganized from a director and consultant’s perspective. Clearly the training chapters (like 4 through 8) are intended more for consultants than directors, while 1, 2, and 10 through 13 are devoted to the theory directors need to know for designing training classes, staff meetings, policies and even the layout of the space given some ESL students’ fear of being seen as inadequately prepared for college. Many essays are intended for both tutor and director, such as the excellent concluding chapter which gives voice to experiences of actual ESL students who used writing centers in the northeast, and the user-friendly glossary. Despite these criticisms, Bruce and Rafoth have, for the most part, selected essays whose scholarship will lead to this becoming the most indispensable resource available to writing center directors and consultants alike working with ESL students from all backgrounds.

Pullman, WA


Reviewed by Shane Borrowman, University of Nevada, Reno

There are terms, such as process and freewrite, whose general definitions are accepted by a majority of scholars in rhetoric and composition. As Hill and Helmers make clear in their preface and introduction, visual rhetoric is not one of these shared terms. Even a cursory examination of the literature of visual rhetoric published in recent decades in long-running professional journals reveals much. Perhaps the finest and most prophetic statement ever made on the study of visual rhetoric in English came from Richard M. Gollin in 1969: “[I]f we bring film study into traditional courses of literature our colleagues regard us with genial condescension, as if we were harmlessly drunk” (424). Certainly this field of study has wavered and waffled and staggered as it has moved forward, frequently stumbling back over its scholarly steps and infrequently making headway. Consider the range of topics, methodologies, and scholarly rigor represented by a random sampling from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.

In 1971, in CCC, Richard Williamson argued that departments of English ought to combine with departments of filmmaking to allow the “student to express