online through the Computers and Composition Digital Press website. While the PDF is handy for anyone who wants to read without having to be connected to the internet, the book should really be read online. The interactive nature of the text is best utilized by exploring the links and videos contained within; many of the resources that are discussed by the authors (such as www.storybuilders.org) as well as the references at the end of each selection are active hyperlinks. The final chapter of the book includes a video of authors Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail Hawisher discussing their scholarly efforts. In addition to not including videos, the PDF document may cause some navigation issues. The pagination of the book is not the same as a typical printed book—each selection of Technological Ecologies & Sustainability begins with page one. This presents a problem in the PDF version because the PDF reader will indicate you are on page sixty-four, for instance, when you are actually on page one according to the pagination of the selection. In the online version, the table of contents is hyperlinked and quite easy to navigate. And, as DeVoss, McKee, and Selfe note in the introduction to the book, by publishing online “the tempo of the interaction between the writers and readers” has been accelerated (5). The editors further this sentiment by adding that “the social networking possibilities of current Web 2.0 technologies will allow the collection to take on a discursive life of its own” (5). As a whole, Technological Ecologies & Sustainability is a thought-provoking foray into the rich world of digital scholarship and the logistical needs associated with developing relevant and resonant learning experiences around technology. This book will surely provide scholars of all levels with new ways of thinking about technology in the classroom.

Atlanta, GA


Reviewed by Kellie Sharp-Hoskins, Illinois State University

With front-row tickets to capitalism’s insidious effects on education, it is no wonder that compositionists are increasingly vested in researching and writing about economies and exchange value in addition to composition, curriculum, and classrooms. The corporatization of the university, diminishing state support of public institutions, and hiring practices that elide benefits in favor of contingent workers demand attention from a field with our specific history and institutional location. Beyond these academy-specific issues, however, the field also has the vantage point and theoretical resources
to speak to the complicated connections between language, literacy, and power economies more broadly conceived. At its most basic, Composition is premised on language: where it is used, how it is used, how it is taught, how it circulates, and who has access. And while she does not focus on the composition classroom, these are the very issues addressed by Catherine Prendergast in her 2008 monograph, *Buying into English: Language and Investment in the New Capitalist World*, a “critical ethnographic study” of language use in postcommunist Slovakia (1). Prendergast’s argument clearly offers insight to compositionists committed to pedagogy, practice, and more traditional writing-based research, but it does so implicitly. In the following review, then, I offer an overview of Prendergast’s arguments followed by suggestions for how they contribute to and complicate Composition’s understanding of those very questions that define the field.

Partly attributable to Prendergast’s serendipitous post-undergrad employment there, and partly due to its seemingly exemplary status among post-communist Eastern bloc countries in “buying into” English, Slovakia is Prendergast’s site to study what it means to invest in English in “the new capitalist world.” In her introduction, Prendergast offers the dominant narrative of the history of Slovakia’s entrance into capitalism following the “‘Velvet Revolution’ of 1989” (2). According to this narrative, English language learning and use was taboo under communism but almost immediately became a necessity following the revolution; Slovaks embraced both the English language and English lessons as the price of admission to the promises of capitalism.

In contrast to this narrative of a “somewhat uncomplicated transition out of communism,” Prendergast offers a complex, often contradictory narrative of the Slovakia’s relationship with capitalism and globalization. This comes by way of historical and cultural contextualization—for example, she introduces the 1990s as a “period of strong ethnolinguistic and nationalist identification in Slovakia” [following the breakup of a unified Czechoslovakia in 1993] alongside “simultaneous but seemingly incongruous growing appetite for English” (51)—as well as ethnographic triangulation: Prendergast employs multiple firsthand accounts of Slovaks’ experiences with, and investment in, English both before and after the fall of communism. Her focus on individual research subjects and their variety of experiences confirm that Slovaks’ relationship to English is neither singular nor simple. Though English was officially sanctioned in pre-1989 Slovakia, the subjects of Prendergast’s study already had various and complicated relationships to English, and this is the subject of chapter 1, “Lingua Non Grata: English During Communism.” Prendergast’s detailed accounts of individual relationships to English demonstrate the complexity of its place in communist Slovakia; in chapters two through five, she continues
to complicate Slovaks’ relationship to English, tracking the relationship through its transition into capitalism.

While English was discouraged, marginalized, and contained under communism, Prendergast explains that “As Slovakia moved toward capitalist integration, it moved as well toward embracing English as the medium through which profit could be generated” (53). But this apparent profitability of English centered on what Prendergast calls “the promise the global economy makes but never fulfills,” that of “linguistic fixity” (22). Chapter 2, “Other Worlds in Other Words,” tracks this unfulfilled promise by way of Fero, a university instructor, and Maria, an artist, who, Prendergast argues, were “chasing imaginaries of English” initially made possible by Slovakia’s isolation from the West in the early 1990’s. Both Fero and Maria chose specific dialects of English (British Received Pronunciation and American idiomatic English, respectively) in response to “the unsatisfactory political situation” in the aftermath of 1993 breakup of Czechoslovakia (52). Each found, however, that neither English itself nor the dialect they chose could offer security in the new capitalist economy. The closest Fero could come to the “locus” of Received Pronunciation, the South of England, was to join a labor pool for farm work in Northern England (67), and although he was later accepted into a graduate program at Cambridge, he could not afford the tuition. Despite Maria’s command of American English, she found herself nearly starving while trying to gain access to the New York City art scene in the closest city she could manage: Boston.

These obvious limits to the exchange value of English for Slovaks following the Velvet Revolution did not slow its ascendancy to the status of lingua franca. Prendergast argues that it is the image and ideal of English that construct it as a “technologically perfect medium” free from ideological investments (148). In chapter 3, “We Live and Learn,” Prendergast uses both pre- and post-1989 English textbooks in Slovakia to evidence the ways this image was created and maintained in Slovakia. She finds that after 1989 “lessons” in English increasingly propagate the logics of capitalism, especially its paradoxical demands of global English users: it is marked both as a standard, necessary for all, but also as a commodity to “buy into,” capable of providing advantage in the market: “learn me, it beckons, and you will know things others don’t. Don’t learn me, and you will be the one not to know” (78). In contrast to its paradoxical promises and ideal, Prendergast represents “Real Life in English” in chapter four which, she shows, is about “ranking and sorting,” or, like she says later, “borders [and] visas” (108, 148). Her argument culminates in chapter 5, where Prendergast argues that global English is “The Golden Cage,” perversely attracting users with promises of security and mobility, meanwhile “add[ing] to their feelings of immobility by initiating them more forcefully into the unbalanced world” (131).
Throughout *Buying into English*, Prendergast emphasizes how English follows the logic of capitalism—it does not, and really cannot, escape the political and economic forces in which it participates. Further, it invites global English users to invest while masking the “deeper logics of capitalism”: English “w[ill] always be manipulated and controlled by more powerful players in more powerful countries” (3). Importantly, Prendergast implicates herself in this logic, as a language user and citizen in a more powerful country. She not only acknowledges her returns on investment in the capitalist world as more valuable than those of other global English language learners and users but recognizes her research itself as bound up in the very capitalist logic it critiques. This issue of implication is, finally, central to Prendergast’ project of showing how English circulates in the new capitalist world. This book is not an account of how *some* global English users are positioned in relation to capitalism and its language, but how *all* English language users are always already implicated by it. Unlike the image or ideal of English as a “technologically perfect medium,” Prendergast teaches us that language is never value neutral, never free from its relation to economic and political interests (148).

In the context of this argument and despite not including a conventional pedagogy chapter (not surprising given that her study and objectives neither begin nor end with language learning in a university classroom) Prendergast’s work becomes invaluable to the field of Composition in both the ways we conceptualize language and in what it means to teach English. Insofar that English is not a technology or tool, not a “medium,” and never reaches “linguistic fixity,” we cannot teach composition as if we are merely offering reading, writing, or critical thinking “skills” to our students. Rather, like Prendergast, we must be willing to implicate ourselves in the complex economy in which our pedagogies and practices, our research, the field of Composition, and English itself exists. We can do this with our students, through assignments that question simple equations of English language and literacy with economic self determination. We can resist framing our English lessons themselves as rhetorical “tools” that serve students without consequence in the larger social, political, and capitalist world. We can follow Prendergast in doing this in our research, recognizing ourselves as beneficiaries of an asymmetrical language economy. In short, we, like Prendergast, must begin to question the narratives that posit English as outside of the global marketplace and insist that composition, as a language-centered activity and field, is always already bound to it.

*Normal, IL*