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Recently, I participated in a conference workshop on issues in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. One of the attendees remarked that, because she taught Advanced Writing, she had no need to think about second-language writers. This notion, that second-language writers are easy to identify and do not exist outside of segregated sections of ESOL courses, stems from what the authors of this collection refer to as composition’s tacit policy of English Only (1). The policy, which champions standard, academic English above all others, keeps instructors from following the best pedagogical practices for second-language writers. The lack of scholarship and teacher training in language diversity doesn’t help, with scholars having a tendency to align themselves on one side of the conversation—either TESOL instructors focusing on ESOL issues or composition instructors focusing on dialects. Given these concerns, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Paul Kei Matsuda’s collection is an important contribution to the field. Issues in language diversity are rarely given attention in the first-year composition classroom, but these essays reveal the benefits of this topic to all composition classes.

The collection features eighteen essays, divided equally between two sections. The first, “Struggling with ‘English Only’ in Composition,” discusses the evolution of language and provides background on how English Only policies have manifested in the college composition classroom. Part 1 has essays from scholars such as John Trimbur, Gail E. Hawisher, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Paul Kei Matsuda. The second section, “Responses to Struggling with ‘English Only’ in Composition” offers calls to action for increasing linguistic diversity and a discussion of the real challenges presented by attending to these issues. This section begins with Shirley Wilson Logan’s discussion of language and ownership and ends with a reflection by Victor Villanueva. Throughout the collection, the authors continually prove the need for language awareness in the classroom. The problem, Horner asserts in the book’s introduction, is that instructors falsely assume that their students are native speakers of English (1). By exposing attitudes promoting monolingualism, the book makes clear the need to study, teach, and assess language in all of its variations.

In the first essay of the collection, “Linguistic Memory and the Uneasy Settlement of U.S. English,” Trimbur notes the United States’ tendency to forget its heritage as a linguistically diverse nation. He provides a historical overview of the evolution of language in the US, including dialects, pidgins, and creoles born out of the travel and expansion of settlers. For example, African American slaves used a type of plantation creole as a form of secrecy,
while this creole was sometimes learned by white slave owners to help control slaves (30). Although the nation’s forefathers are often heralded for not making English the official language of the colonies, Trimbur references Benjamin Franklin’s warning on the increasing numbers of Germans in Pennsylvania, whom he dubs a “colony of aliens” (34). In this way, Franklin bound language to national identity, even class, something that permeates our culture still. Forgetting our history of language, or linguistic memory, leads to the notion that dialects are somehow inferior to standard English.

While Trimbur details our national history of language, Gail Hawisher, Cynthia L. Selfe, Yi-Huey Guo, and Lu Liu discuss the relevance of our individual literacy histories in their essay “Globalization, Guanxi, and Agency: Designing and Redesigning the Literacies of Cyberpace.” Their research reveals that our attitudes toward language largely depend on the social ties we make in our communities and families (57). The authors analyze the literacy narratives of two graduate students, Liu and Guo, to study how language learners can form identities and make connections through the internet. Just as community ties can influence our digital literacies, they also shape how and why we learn English. By studying our individual history with language, we can better understand our present attitudes.

A recurrent theme throughout the collection is the importance of teacher training in language diversity. In “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition,” Matsuda argues that, despite the pressing need, few graduate composition programs offer coursework on issues in ESOL or language diversity. Writing programs assume that students are native speakers of English despite the increasing presence of non-native speakers. The “good writing” we want students to produce is that which shows no features of second language writing. Similarly, in her essay “Living English Work,” Min-Zhan Lu describes the extremes that some go to speak English mimicking that of a native speaker, noting an example of South Korean children who undergo surgery to remove bits of their tongues (42). Instead of trying to speak “perfect” standardized English, Lu argues, users of English should embrace its ability to change as a living language, noting that “our sense of ease with a particular usage might inadvertently sponsor systems and relations of injustice” (48). By showing our students models of English that deviate from standard, academic English, we can increase awareness of the changing nature of English. Later in the collection, in “Discourse Tensions, Englishes, and the Composition Classroom,” Shondel J. Nero agrees with Lu and reflects on why our culture insists on the existence of language purity. Nero believes that in order to dispel these myths, instructors need to give examples of authors writing in a vernacular, citing Sapphire and Mark Twain as two possibilities.

Elaine Richardson builds on Nero and Trimbur’s discussion of language heritage in the US in her essay “‘English Only,’ African American Contributions to Standardized Communication Structures, and the Potential for Social Transformation.” She points out how, historically, few have acknowledged
African Americans’ contributions to language and that words such as tote, banjo, juke, and yam have origins in African languages as well as terminology taken from today’s hip hop (99). Academic institutions of all levels provide little instruction on the history and influence of African American English, in comparison to the influence of Greek and Latin.

Part 2 of the collection begins with Shirley Wilson Logan’s “Ownership of Language and the Teaching of Writing.” Logan asserts that greater TA training is needed in language diversity, echoing Matsuda’s call earlier in the collection. Most students neither realize that they speak a dialect of English, nor recognize the multiple variations of English. Logan suggests that those who train graduate students for teaching first-year composition ask students to collect examples of vernacular writing that they encounter in a given week, as a method of opening up the conversation about what it means to speak standard English (187-188). By not providing this training in language diversity, we perpetuate a culture of monolingualism.

Further showing the US’s attitude of monolingualism in “Why Don’t We Speak with an Accent? Practicing Interdependence-in-Difference,” Lu Ming Mao cites a $500 fine that a trucker with a heavy accent received from an Alabama police officer. Even though the driver spoke English, the officer felt the driver violated the federal requirement that those possessing a CDL speak enough English to communicate with a police officer (189). Examples like this, Mao claims, show our negative attitudes toward non-standard English (190). If one has an accent, he or she is assumed to be an inferior speaker of English. Much like the other authors in the book, Lu feels a critical change is needed in the way we teach composition to combat these issues of monolingualism. These changes, as Susan K. Miller-Cochran points out in “Language Diversity and the Responsibility of the WPA,” must not only happen in the classroom but also program-wide. Miller-Cochran provides five rules that writing program administrators need to follow to accommodate second-language writers (213-215). She dispels the myth that second-language writers all have the same needs, and that these needs are purely grammatical (215). Instead, WPAs should work to train their staff in issues in teaching ESOL and determine reasonable, realistic means of placement.

Throughout the book, the authors are continually in conversation with one another. Many of the authors reference other essays in the collection before they begin their own argument to demonstrate the importance of cross-language conversations. This is undoubtedly a strength of the collection. Still, there are some places, notably part 2, where less summary of prior arguments and more response would have been ideal. Yet, the collection provides excellent insight into the field of language relations, starting conversations that have not been had often enough in Composition Studies. Not only does the collection examine second-language writing issues, but also the broader field of language diversity, instead of treating them as separate, unrelated topics. Scholarship of this nature is often labeled ESOL, as if to say it has no implications for first-year composition, but issues in
language diversity are important for those working with native as well as non-native speakers of English. We need reminders that neither we nor our students are native speakers of academic English. *Cross-Language Relations* is an essential read for those who teach composition—regardless of the level or specialization—and is highly recommended.

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