

## Book Reviews

### Hacking Composition: Rethinking Codeswitching in Writing Discourse

**Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing: Approaches to Mixed-Language Written Discourse**, edited by Mark Sebba, Shahrzad Mahootian, and Carla Jonsson. New York: Routledge, 2012. 280 pp.

**Language and Mobility: Unexpected Places**, by Alastair Pennycook. Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2012. 189 pp.

**Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations**, by Suresh Canagarajah. New York: Routledge, 2013. 216 pp.

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In *True to the Language Game*, Keith Gilyard questions the efficacy of “code-switching pedagogy,” stating that there are “no reputable studies demonstrating that speech varieties translate neatly into writing varieties, no possibility that teachers can teach appropriateness” (129). He concludes his criticisms with calls for a reevaluation of the term “code” in the context of its sociolinguistic origins. He also highlights a striking assumption by composition as a field: that we have prematurely adopted a pedagogy developed through research on spoken language varieties without assessing its applicability for written discourse. This questions the field’s implicit marking of codeswitching<sup>1</sup> as unconventional and illegitimate. At best, writing teachers say codeswitching is acceptable in community exchanges but not in professional or high stakes settings.

What is needed is critical literature that studies codeswitching in written discourse as thoroughly as that which has been developed for the oral forms of the phenomenon. The three books reviewed in this essay advance exactly such a project. The first book, *Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing*, illustrates language mixing in written discourse historically and in our contemporary time. The subsequent works, *Language and Mobility* and *Translingual Practice*, generate useful frames to discuss codeswitching as rhetorical practices of contact zones that can inform our writing pedagogy. In developing these frames, the latter two books abandon the term codeswitching in favor of other labels for approaching this form of written practice.

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*Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing: Approaches to Mixed Language Written Discourse*, edited by Mark Sebba, Shahrzad Mahootian, and Carla Jonsson, provides analyses of a variety of multilingual or codeswitched texts. In his introduction to the collection, Sebba argues that a monolingual bias in writing scholarship has resulted in an absence of an “independent, theoretically informed field of multilingual discourse studies” (2). This is a significant oversight for the field as Mahootian states in his chapter “Repertoires and Resources: Accounting for Code-Mixing in the Media”: “[M]ultilingualism is a norm . . . [meaning that] human language capacity assumed to be present in the language acquisition device[s] applies equally across monolingual and multilingual contexts” (193).

The essays making up this collection show ways to start mapping this multilingual norm. They present analyses of multilingual texts utilizing methods such as corpus analysis (Schendl; Nurmi and Pahta; Montes-Alcalá; Sebba), ethnography and new literacy studies approaches (Kytölä; Lee and Barton; Vold Lexander; Mbodj-Pouye and Van den Avenne), and discourse analysis (Mahootian; Jonsson; Leppänen; Angermeyer). The chapters look at texts such as medieval letters (Schendl; Nurmi and Pahta) and sermons (Schendl), miscellaneous contemporary print texts (Mahootian; Sebba; Mbodj-Pouye and Van den Avenne), novels (Montes-Alcalá; Jonsson), digital texts (Kytölä; Lee and Barton; Vold Lexander; Leppänen), and visual texts (Angermeyer).

Two chapters in particular struck me as novel analyses of current codeswitching writing practices. The first, “Vernacular Literacy Practices in Present-day Mali: Combining Ethnography and Textual Analysis to Understand Texts,” by Aissatou Mbodj-Pouye and Cécile Van den Avenne, looks at non-institutional writing in spaces such as the personal notebooks of “low-literate writers” in the multilingual developing nation of Mali (which is one example of the type of contact zone Alastair Pennycook and Suresh Canagarajah deliberate on as well). The researchers find that the texts they analyze use multiple scripts and diagrams with skillful consistency—reiterating Gilyard’s comment about the complex nature of codes—and show that codeswitching on paper exhibits a “fluidity in language and script choice, interferences between languages and a degree of code-mixing . . . [as well as] a sense of norms and genres” (170). Their focus on low-literate writers is also significant because most of the current scholarship on written codeswitching looks at texts produced in classrooms and overlooks the subjects and settings Mbodj-Pouye and Van den Avenne study here. Their findings—that though low-literate writers are not “fully equipped to align their practices to their language choices,” they are still able “to deal with this situation in creative and unexpected ways” (170)—are reminiscent of important work on “basic writers” in composition studies (see Shaughnessy).

The second chapter that I want to highlight, “Linguistic and Generic Hybridity in Web Writing: The Case of Fan Fiction” by Sirpa Leppanen, views the space of the internet as the quintessential contact zone, simultaneously local and global. It is this recognition of the global orientation of digital media, Leppanen argues, that drives the young Finnish writers of the fan fiction texts he studies to develop multilingual repertoires made up of English and Finnish. He concludes that the forms of codeswitching in the 700 fan fiction texts he studied are heteroglossia, “motivated by the translocality of the web-space,” and characterized by writing practices that are “fundamentally indexical activities, allowing participants to come together as communities of practice with their shared cultures and orders of normativity” (250). This is a critically important explanation of the effect of the digital medium: Leppanen points out that the internet provides a potential third space for new modes of articulation (where multilingualism is the dominant norm), but also argues that this space reproduces the indexical priority of English as an imperial language on a new translocal scale. Taken together, these two chapters remind us that the medium of written codeswitching (paper notebooks, the internet, writing itself, etc.) is important to understand the message and that written codeswitching fundamentally differs from oral varieties. As a whole, the collection is valuable to the field for its expansion of studies of written multilingualism, extending into texts not ordinarily examined in composition studies. However, as it stops short of attempting to theorize such phenomena, the book’s findings and effects on pedagogy are fleshed out only when read in conjunction with books such as Pennycook’s and Canagarajah’s.

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If *Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing* is to be read in terms of a descriptive treatment of codeswitching, Pennycook’s *Language and Mobility: Unexpected Places* argues for reading certain codeswitching texts as everyday, unprivileged practices of the contact zone. In other words, Pennycook’s treatment is critical. Specifically targeting colonial and modern globalized spaces, he writes that texts of the contact zone are productively approached as “an emotional and temporal journey” and “an exploration of mnemonic traces, of those sensual and tactile pieces of history that connect across unexpected places” (173). The point, for Pennycook, is to look at how the historical context enables a multimodal reading of monolingualism. Chapter one is written like a travelogue, overlaying his journey to South India with details from his grandparents’ migrations during the British Empire era. Pennycook conceptualizes codeswitching as emerging out of mobility and mnemonic traces and as functioning as an index of affective experiences. Chapters two and three

build on this conceptualization, extending it to discussions on sports, language, and pedagogy as social practices. It is a way for him to effect a “critical resistance” in language research, a way to push against the norms of academic epistemology, and to foreground what Michel Foucault calls *penser autrement* (thinking otherwise) through “accounts that interweave family history, travel, language and culture” (17).

Chapters four and six will interest writing scholars and theorists of globalization directly. First, by analyzing a series of letters by his grandparents in chapter four, Pennycook presents what he terms epistolary parenting. He explains that these letters were the primary form of interactions between colonial subjects and families separated by thousands of miles; the letters were communicative tracts that “needed to do so much, to connect, to nurture, to advise, to admonish, to encourage, to direct” (72). In this way, he explains, epistolary parenting functioned to keep families together across the distances of the British Empire and as such can shed light on how “patterns of communication continue under [current] conditions of global communication” (72). Second, the letters evidence how “Indian words, or their Anglo-Indian variants, crept into unexpected places in the language and letters of these colonial workers” (57). While Anglo-Indians are not the focus of linguistic paradigms such as World Englishes, these letters illustrate a need to see English hybridization as something used by socially privileged groups, as well as the peripheral subjects often termed *non-native English speakers*. These findings by Pennycook present significant parallels to the multilingual correspondences of aristocratic English women in the early modern period, analyzed in the chapter by Arja Nurmi and Päivi Pahta in *Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing*: both exhibit a multilingual literacy by women and a concern with everyday practices in the private sphere of women and the family.

Chapter six looks at a series of written farewell addresses gifted as souvenirs to Anglo-Indian managers by the colonial staff, and an open letter to the Dewan, or chief minister, of Travencore. These texts evidence writing that “locates [such farewell utterances] within (Southern) Indian forms of address and interaction, while also acknowledging the overlay of English and colonial relations” (115). Pennycook’s analyses of the texts admirably avoid the pitfalls of “invoking an ‘Indian style’ of writing,” and successfully articulate them as “*mnemonic traces* [sic] . . . of caste, of other languages, of other rhetorical styles[,] . . . of how Indian officials and European managers occupied parallel positions in India at the time . . . [and of] how a certain genre can develop” (116-17). This is Pennycook at his best and is the most consequential part of the book. First, his evocative analysis presents an opportunity to reinterpret the dated arguments of contrastive rhetoric by framing these letters as writing practices that layer various codes in a manner that Mary Louise Pratt has

called “transculturation,” or the selective borrowing of dominant cultural forms by a subordinated culture for the purposes of accessing power and resisting domination (6). It is a contribution that adds to the current debate in composition studies on English usage in contact zones and which Canagarajah also comments on in his treatment of codemeshing in his book and in his 2006 article, “The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued.” Second, Pennycook says that a study of such texts has much to say about understanding our contemporary global society, where fast-food workers and call center workers in developing nations such as India and the Philippines are required to learn the idioms of American English and therefore “may be part of the same linguistically regulated class formation,” yet have “material class positions [that] may vary quite considerably” (123).

Chapters five and seven weigh in on the long debate over the binary of the native speaker (NS)–nonnative speaker (NNS) category by articulating a critical commentary on the binary of the pedagogy theorist and the practicing teacher. Pennycook says that seeing languages as local practice (his previous book is *Language as a Local Practice*) reorients language pedagogies according to a “local understanding of [the] social operation of language and power,” and “locate[s] the capacity to speak in the social domain” (87). However, these two chapters represent the weakest sections in the book. His method of outlining “at least thirteen ways of looking at a blackboard” does not reach a substantial conclusion (Canagarajah proposes the notion of performative competence to address a similar issue) nor does it inform the practical ways in which power differentials and gaps between academics and practicing teachers might be reconfigured.

The final chapter turns to the mobility and transformation of social practices on a global scale by looking at the example of cricket. Here Pennycook presents a stimulating recapitulation of the classic postcolonial reading of the history of the sport by C. L. R. James, Ashis Nandy, and Arjun Appadurai. He frames India as the irrefutable center of modern cricket, a fact he says can teach us a great deal about the future of English and the teaching of English.<sup>2</sup> This chapter reads like a work out of cultural studies and reiterates Pennycook’s basic argument that “we are not in fact ‘native speakers’ of things called ‘languages’ so much as we engage in local language practices . . . becoming a *resourceful speaker* is what we are surely aiming at, an idea that embraces both the ability to accommodate others and to manipulate different resources” (172). This chapter responds to Gilyard’s call to reexamine the status of “code” in codeswitching, though in the form of speculative theorizing of language and its traces as an historical phenomenon.

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*Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Practices* will interest anyone involved in language use and language teaching. Whereas the previous two works look at codeswitching texts in terms of social practices, this book presents a critical deliberation of potential meaning for the language classroom. Building on recent conversations around translanguaging in composition by prominent scholars such as Bruce Horner, John Trimbur, Min-Zhan Lu, and Jacqueline Jones Royster, among others, Canagarajah proposes a new episteme that extends notions of multilingualism, one where “communication transcends individual languages [and] transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances” (6). Translingualism, as a theoretical approach, is an ambitious one, and given the scope of *Translingual Practice*, addresses a multiplicity of fields, such as rhetoric and composition, writing studies, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and globalization studies.

Canagarajah begins the book by recounting the composing process of a student in his class who *codemeshed*—his preferred term, as he finds that codeswitching in writing pedagogy still segregates and hierarchizes linguistic codes. In chapter two, translanguaging is presented as denying the problematic notion of unified languages articulated by models based on the Herderian triad, “the equivalence of language, community and place,” and redefining linguistic systems as dynamic structures perpetually in flux (20). Canagarajah presents monolingualism as a false hegemonic construction of modernism, which denies, among other things, how Westerners themselves actually used language before the advent of various national projects in the West. The medieval texts—sermons and tracts—studied by Schendl in his essay in *Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing* directly support this latter point by illustrating forms of functional multilingualism based on audience awareness.

Chapters three, four, and five argue for the historical continuity and universality of translanguaging and posit what translanguaging means in language scholarship. First, using pre-colonial, pre-modern examples from South Asia and beyond, Canagarajah writes, “translingual practices may not be as difficult or esoteric as we might assume... It is monolingual communication that might seem strange to many” (55). Second, translanguaging is presented as an expansion of World Englishes, English as an International Language, and English as Lingua Franca models, and is thereby informed by decades of scholarship. However, what sets translanguaging apart from these other approaches is its focus on English as the incorporation of non-linguistic elements in communication, enabling a way of understanding “how unshared words or grammatical structures gain situated meaning” by attending to “the local contexts and practices of negotiation with the fullest ecological resources” (75). Despite efforts by scholars in these schools to address the diversity of

English, their arguments still assume a need for shared norms because their models assume them.

In terms of what codeswitching means vis-à-vis translanguaging, Canagarajah's illustration of it in chapter five through the formulation of a "grammar of practices" is as clear a presentation one is going to get of such a speculative concept. Analyzing interactions between a group of students—made up of native and nonnative speakers, subjects of European and non-European descent—at a UK university, he provides a close analysis of the strategies of "en-voicing, recontextualization, interactional, and entextualization" and explains how language scholars might use these concepts to understand communicative interactions in the contact zone of the university (77-79). Chapters six and seven build on this "grammar of practice" to see how it holds up as a way to understand standard written English, particularly in academic contexts, and how negotiations making up the composition processes might be analyzed to identify generative meaning. Skillfully using examples to develop a comparison between the codemeshing strategies used in a 1999 article by respected scholar Geneva Smitherman and the student-text he presents in his introduction, Canagarajah explains how writers might effectively deploy "recontextualization and entextualization... [to] agentively develop new meanings and values for [their] codes as [they] pluralize dominant norms and literacies" (126). Canagarajah also writes that in order to understand codemeshing texts we need new literate practices and reciprocal reading strategies, which are best learned with experience. Gilyard's point about teachers not being able to teach appropriateness vis-à-vis codeswitching seems particularly pertinent here. Teachers need to understand contextually the effectiveness of such practices and their instructional potential, particularly given the impossibility of reproducing the conditions such moves require in environments like the classroom.

Chapters eight and nine take on the notion of agency and how it functions in the face of the normative discourses of standardized English and grammar. Citing a series of interviews with skilled migrants in the UK, Canagarajah makes the case that non-native speakers of English are not overwhelmingly the victims of normative discourses—an argument that seemingly replies to Jan Blommaert's writings on language mobility and global scales in *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Rather, the responses by these skilled migrants show virtual spaces that are "polyaccented, multilingual, and plural," constructing a translanguaging space and scale that deviates from the power of "standard English" (163). By creating and utilizing these spaces, Canagarajah says migrants become agents who "contest [the imposition of center-norms] in their own negotiation strategies" and "redefine the translocal space to their advantage" (170).

To understand the negotiation strategies of a translanguaging approach, Canagarajah proposes what he terms *performative competence*, as opposed to

grammatical competence (of monolingualism) or communicative competence (of multilingualism). In a fitting response to the exigence that Pennycook raises about the disconnect between theorist-pedagogues and practicing teachers, Canagarajah defines performative competence as a concept more adept at addressing the interactions in classrooms because it explicitly accounts for the “dynamic and reciprocal strategies” used by interlocutors (174). A translingual approach assumes that meanings in the classroom emerge through dialogic practices, and so performative competence facilitates pedagogy with ways to “find the right balance between writers’ voices and readers’ uptakes . . . all leading to the appropriate sense of coherence, meaning and rhetorical effectiveness” (188).

The final chapter connects these discussions on translingual practices and the ideology derived from them to current philosophical and normative deliberations on cosmopolitanism. Canagarajah appropriates Anthony Appiah’s metaphor of conversations to present his understanding of emergent cosmopolitan subjectivity, arguing that conversations are the universal practice through which all individuals understand each other. He sees an emphasis on the dialogism of intercultural conversation as providing insights into cosmopolitanism’s theoretical impasse. Dialogic cosmopolitanism, as articulated through translingualism, affirms the identities of communities based on historical investments while also explaining how they might engage with other communities to develop new coconstructed identities and values.

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The three books reviewed here approach codeswitching as rhetorical practices of contact zones and analyze how they function as communication and articulation. In response to Gilyard’s call to rethink the term *code*, all three works reinterpret linguistic codes as symbolic practices of “so many linguistic habitus which are at least partially orchestrated, and of the oral production of these habitus” (Bourdieu 46). Read in the context of the descriptions of multilingualism-as-norm addressed in the collection by Sebba, Mahootian, and Jonsson, both Pennycook’s and Canagarajah’s books can be seen as appropriately advocating for teaching strategically to contest power differentials between languages and as part of a poststructuralist critical project. Pennycook shows that contemporary English language and global society carry traces of historical mixing and no one approach or view of language pedagogy can account for all varieties. Canagarajah’s call for a translingual approach posits an entirely new episteme and pedagogy of language-study in terms of its semiotic ecology rather than distinct linguistic systems. Read together, these books articulate a critical point: assuming multilingualism as the norm

fundamentally transforms how we have to think of the field of composition studies. A lot more needs to be done in this area, but these three books are a good beginning.

We also have to remember that rhetorical theory teaches that audience is critical to understanding how languages are used. The three books under review only nominally deliberate on the role of the reader in written codeswitching, a gap that needs to be filled. Future scholarship has to account for the question of reception, or how codeswitched texts are read and the ethics of such readings. Skillful writing encodes multiple layers of information and rhetorical appeals into texts to facilitate the communication and interpretation of such works. Audiences, for their part, grant authority to the writer before they even engage with the logic of an utterance. “Indeed,” Gilyard reminds us, “writing is largely an exercise in creating the listener” (119). However, the take on written codeswitching as rhetorical practices by these books does foreground a holistic approach to writing that includes both the production and reception aspect of texts, and thereby asks the kinds of questions which will inevitably lead to greater scholarly, pedagogical, and theoretical development of the field.

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## Notes

1. I follow the conventions of prominent sociolinguistic journals such as *Language in Society* and *Journal in Sociolinguistics* in using *codeswitching* as a de-hyphenated term.

2. India has the largest self-identified English speaking population in the world and most of them use multiple languages simultaneously as normal linguistic practice.

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