

Book Reviews

The Translanguaging Conversation: A Dialogic Review

Reworking English in Rhetoric and Composition: Global Interrogations, Local Interventions, edited by Bruce Horner and Karen Kopelson. Carbondale: SIUP, 2014. 260 pp.

Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms, edited by Suresh Canagarajah. New York: Routledge: 2013. 247 pp.

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There has been a disconnect between scholarship and everyday communicative practices.

—Suresh Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice* (2013)

In this dialogic review, we explore the constructs of translanguaging and a translingual orientation to language and literacy practices as they are directly and indirectly referenced in *Reworking English in Rhetoric and Composition: Global Interrogations, Local Interventions*, edited by Bruce Horner and Karen Kopelson and *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms* edited by Suresh Canagarajah. As the title of Canagarajah's volume indicates, his edited collection most directly addresses the translingual, but, in both texts, contributors address translanguaging as a necessary paradigm shift for our discipline and beyond. The call for that shift to a translingual orientation, approach, perspective, construct, and/or practice is both complex and compelling. Translingual practices in our collective communicative realities, according to these texts, have a longer historical and practical presence than modern, institutionally embedded, and politically expedient monolingual views of languages as discrete and additive systems with clearly defined "native-speaker" standards that "nonnative" speakers must strive to achieve. A translingual orientation, in contrast, makes room for the agency of speakers and the full repertoire of their multimodal communicative resources. In other words, and as is stressed throughout both of these edited collections, translanguaging is the communicative reality of global citizens and, as such, is essential to the investigative and pedagogical choices of composition scholars.

Both edited collections reflect the developing and often contested state of the translanguaging conversation in our field. Thus, both collections are,

essentially, divided into sections that theorize “linguaging;” offer contextualized, local cases of translanguaging practice; and, finally, make the pedagogical turn to consider activity in specific institutions and classrooms. Koppelson and Horner’s first section “Reworking Language” does similar work to Canagarajah’s part I, “Premises.” In both, contributors carve out space for translanguaging conversations by interrogating language research and teaching and by demonstrating that negotiations of language difference are already a part of the communicative practices of communities. We argue that Canagarajah’s, collection, which is divided into five sections, also does this work in part III, where contributors critique rhetoric and composition’s translanguaging conversations. The second section of both texts, “Location and Migrations” (Horner and Koppelson) and “Community Practices” (Canagarajah), are the most specific in regards to conducting the empirical work of identifying translanguaging practices. Again, Canagarajah also offers this research in his collection’s part IV, “Research Directions.” Finally, each collection ends with sections that offer the ubiquitous pedagogical turn, offering classroom cases and specific instructional practices.

We approach this review from our own experiences with a translingual orientation to literacy practices in distinct institutional and social contexts, and each of us is keenly aware that we, like other scholars in rhetoric and composition, as well as researchers in second language writing, literacy studies, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and language education, currently have an uneasy relationship with translanguaging as a paradigm-shifting construct. In her afterword to *Reworking English*, Karen Koppelson addresses the complicated interplay of sociopolitical factors and the statist and modernist narratives of English dominance that undergird that unease, often framed as resistance or inattention, making room for a translingual orientation to writing. Koppelson highlights key tensions present across the collection, noting that “regardless of how we choose to treat attachments to language, it is necessary to remember that they are *experienced as fixed* [emphasis original], and this affective attachment is affixed further by powerful ideological supports” (212). Chipping away at those ideological supports to create an opening for a translingual disposition is difficult work and it is important to note that neither *Reworking English* nor *Literacy as Translingual Practice* does so by offering a definitive statement on translingual literacy. As Canagarajah points out explicitly in his introductory remarks, “It is too early for that kind of book” (8). Instead, these collections offer investigations of and arguments for the perceived value of a translingual orientation to communication and to writing, and contributing authors lay the groundwork for further productive development of the theories, histories, and pedagogies that bridge the disconnect between communicative realities and our classrooms.

As reviewers, we have a shared sense of the value of expanding our notions of language and literacy to encompass translingual practices, as well as somewhat different levels of appreciation for the arguments made by each of the contributors to *Reworking English* and *Literacy as Translingual Practice*. Mark approaches these texts as a rhetorician and teacher-scholar at the National University of Singapore in a first-year writing program modeled on the Harvard College Writing Program, situated in the Asian context of the larger internationalization of higher education. Alanna comes to her stance as a reviewer through her role as a WPA at University of Alabama–Huntsville and as a rhetoric and composition teacher-scholar with a social justice perspective grounded in her ethnographic work with First Nations Dakelh women in British Columbia, Canada. Suzanne is informed by her position as rhetoric and composition teacher-scholar with a long history of heading up the English as an Additional Language Program at Columbia College Chicago and a background in Spanish applied linguistics and foreign language teaching. In what follows, we engage in a conversation about how specific ideas and specific chapters in the edited collections we are reviewing further and/or challenge our developing notions of translingual practices and translingual writing.

Suzanne: All three of us believe that a translingual orientation to language invites a paradigm shift for writing studies in ways that mirror the process and post-process movements that developed over the course of several decades (the late 1960s into the early 2000s). Engaging the work of shifting our notion of language, a construct that undergirds our entire discipline, causes, necessarily, a great deal of angst, a great deal of questioning, and a great deal of struggling to define just what “it” is that we are trying to get our heads around and what we will do with “it” when we get there. Both of these edited collections include that type of foundational work, which is so important but also ends up being a bit amorphous and messy. As a result, I am struck by what seems to be our collective desire to simultaneously name and not name what we mean by translanguaging and/or translingual literacy. Horner notes the multiplicity of terms used for the newly developing ideological framework for understanding linguistic difference in the introduction to *Reworking English*, pointing out “this emerging perspective has been ‘variously identified as ‘plurilingual,’ ‘translingual,’ ‘transcultural’—and that heralds ideals of *créolité*, *interculturalité*, *diversalité* (in contrast to multiculturalism and *diversité*)” (3). Moreover, the terms multilingual, code-meshing, and code-switching, among others, are also used throughout both collections. While Paul Kei Matsuda makes an excellent case for an understanding of the language acquisition and language education scholarship that informs both the ideological framework and the terms we are using (Canagarajah 136), I am convinced by Canagarajah’s argu-

ment that we need the neologism translingual “to treat cross-language interactions and contact relationships as fundamental to all acts of communication and relevant for all of us. In this sense, the shift in literacy is not relevant for traditionally multilingual students/subjects alone, but for ‘native’ speakers of English and ‘monolinguals’ as well” (2). I agree that naming a translingual orientation to language and to communication pushes us to see languaging competencies as integrated, as comprised of all of the languages and registers we have at our disposal and, with the “it” named, we can take a deeper dive into why the new paradigm is relevant to composition and rhetoric and how we, as teacher-scholars, can productively engage with it.

Alanna: Indeed, the question of why a new paradigm is relevant to composition and rhetoric engages the scholars in both texts. In Canagarajah's collection, understanding the relevance of the translingual paradigm means turning to community practices to bolster evidence of the “everyday” of translingual practice. It is most obviously evidenced in the “Community Practices” section of the text, where contributors offer cases of translingual communicative work, from Asian American (Morris Young), indigenous (Ellen Cushman; Jon Reyhner), Lebanese (Nancy Bou Ayash), and Kenyan contexts (Esther Milu), but the premise (and argument embedded in much of Canagarajah's work) is that translanguaging has been, for quite some time, nowhere more evident than in communal private and public spaces. In the “Research Directions” section, for example, Christiane Donahue carefully describes her research on French and English students' writing to demonstrate both the ways that students are already “translingually disposed” and to argue for further cross-disciplinary analysis of student discourse. Similarly, Rebecca Lorimer's argument, and productive case studies of immigrants' rhetorical attunement, documents the existing strategies and dynamic attention of communicative choices.

Mark: I think Marilyn M. Cooper does useful theoretical work towards the *why* of translanguaging. Cooper's thinking of language in terms of practices and her commitment to their ethical dimensions is a step in the right direction (Horner and Kopelson). What might happen when we think of language in terms of its use, and are we willing to take responsibility for those uses? For example, higher education writing instruction in Singapore has traditionally been tied to British or Australian traditions, but recently it has drawn more directly from American writing programs and theories—as I mentioned earlier, our program was modeled on Harvard's. And in a larger, Asian context, I see the internationalization of (American) higher education, which is clearly expanding and intensifying. More U.S. universities are partnering with universities and opening branch campuses in other countries. In Singapore, Yale

and Duke partnered with my university; State University of New York–Buffalo, University of Nevada Las Vegas, and New York University opened (and closed) satellite campuses; and several European and Australian universities offer degrees. Singapore illustrates larger trends across Asia. The internationalization of higher education creates an educational landscape that imports and exports—students, labor, pedagogies, histories—but rarely combines different linguistic theories, cultural histories, and pedagogical traditions. Schools from around the world may operate in the same city, yet they tend to operate in silos. But as students progress from primary through graduate education, they may move among these institutions with divergent expectations of writing.

Alanna: Both texts rely on the work of Alastair Pennycook, who, amongst his important studies of communication in communities, critiques the export of English via English Language Teaching, in part for obliviousness to local language practice. But I am also concerned with how it imports. As the recently former WPA and the newly appointed department chair, I have engaged directly with administrative concerns relating to multilingual students. Most recently, I attended a meeting at which participants voiced concerns about new agreements between our university’s administrators and Chinese universities for “2 plus 2” transfers. Students from the Chinese schools are to be given credit for the first two years of their degrees, completed at home, and the junior and senior years completed at our school; concerns involve the students’ English proficiency. The conversations in the meeting began with the ubiquitous worry about the students’ ability to produce standard written English (SWE) before moving on to the specific bureaucratic issue about how to count courses that only loosely resemble our general education requirements.

What the chapters of both collections offer, for the most part, are pragmatic, historical, and theoretical arguments that I can present to my colleagues. The chapters I find most compelling are those that speak to my own felt-sense of the injustice of English-only policy, begun in my own work with indigenous people and fed through advocacy of the interests of international and multilingual students at my own institution, who can get caught in cycles of remediation because they check the “limited” box on their applications, indicating that their first languages are not English.

Mark: Alanna, you talk about your strategies for making arguments to your colleagues. In Maria Jerskey’s chapter, she describes the Literacy Brokers Program that she developed to support multilingual faculty at LaGuardia Community College (Canagarajah). Touted as a “safe house,” the writing circle’s goal was to support multilingual faculty’s writing. But she finds that working

with faculty produced unanticipated responses and created surprising collaborations among faculty and administrators. I think her article reminds us that such programs (as well as discussions like you're having) are messy, filled with challenges but also opportunities for surprises.

Alanna: And both edited collections, I think, offer suggestions for opportunities. Like Mark, I found compelling Marilyn M. Cooper's careful review of scholars who argue (essentially and often) for an ecological view of language production that is dependent on the communicative act between communicators, particularly as she situates this ecological view as combating the "linguistic misbehaviors" that result from SWE propagation. Similarly, I am convinced by Brice Nordquist's assertion that English handbooks are also a culprit in the propagation of SWE. In Canagarajah's collection, I am drawn to Ellen Cushman's consideration of the Cherokee writing system as an example of "the evolution of indigenous writing technologies" which developed alongside and in spite of SWE (92).

Mark: Yeah, I was really struck by Scenters-Zapico's piece (Horner and Kopelson). I really appreciated his discussions of indirect and direct literacy sponsors. I hear about these kinds of sponsorships all the time from people who migrate across national borders in Southeast Asia. Many people who migrate to Singapore tell me stories about how friends or relatives made their language learning possible by providing technological access, especially cell phones.

Alanna: In Canagarajah's text, Scott Wible describes responsible practice as evidenced by the multilingual work that went into the creation of the "World Social Forum." Wible cites the Forum's policy of supporting "multilingual meetings" by supplying translators to all participants, so that their contributions in their native language are valued (43). Similarly LuMing Mao's articulation of "indigenous rhetorics" speaks to the efficacy of local and iconic discourses of communicative power (Canagarajah 47; Horner and Kopelson 77). Mao's essays in both collections help us rethink the idea of an indigenous rhetoric in relation to globalization. He complicates the role of origin in indigenous rhetorics and expands it by considering the contingent historical encounters of competing discourses within those spaces that link back in various ways to this "origin." Mao's use of "interdependence-in-difference" will become, I think, a crucial idea for thinking about how, as he says, "discourses travel" (Canagarajah 53).

Mark: Right—Nancy Bou Ayash also addresses this issue directly as she traces the specific history of language instruction in Singapore and Lebanon (Horn-

er and Kopelson). Her piece cautions that American writing pedagogies could be at odds with local policy. I agree. When American writing pedagogies come to Singapore, they encounter not only Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, and (mostly British) English, but a history filled with rich language differences. These three contributions give us pause to consider the forces that are at play in any context. I worry that as we dismantle our own dominant, monolithic conception of English, we will forget that other languages are shaped by historical forces as well.

Suzanne: Mark, I think you voice here precisely some of the concerns that undergird the resistance to translanguaging as a construct—that we will forget that languages (all of them) are shaped by historical and socio-political forces and social interaction. For me, the opening to a translanguing approach invites us to always remember that all communicative practice is shaped by and constantly being reshaped by historical, social, political, and contact forces. The power dynamics that are easily hidden by ideologies of native and dominant languages might be more effectively revealed with a translanguing orientation to languaging.

Mark: Geographic forces are at play, too. As Charles Bazerman's sketch of writing instruction around the world shows, our research-based writing pedagogies also differ from those in other places (Canagarajah 13). Our history of qualitative research is strong, vibrant, and important, but other locations around the world have adopted more social scientific approaches to studying writing. Again, I think that Cooper's call to think of language as a practice can be a way to bridge these approaches, as theories of practice exist in many social science fields. And practices can help us delineate the specific locations and objects of study for us. In fact, as I read both of these books, I thought a more developed theory of practices may be useful to many of the articles. It would, I think, help pin down the concrete and specific situations of writing.

Suzanne: I agree that we need a more developed understanding the definition, theory, and practices relating to translanguaging, and I think that in essence, these collections in juxtaposition offer very good starting points for exploring what we are developing and what we are pinning down. If, however, we do adopt translanguing/translanguaging as the name for that work, for me it is absolutely essential that we pay very close attention to the scholarship that has influenced our arrival at this naming. In *Literacy as Translanguing Practice* Matsuda, Donahue, and Dorothy Worden all caution against considering only the scholarship and methods of composition and rhetoric and provide excellent suggestions for how we might be thoughtful about and careful in

developing theory and examining translanguaging practices by utilizing cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives. Matsuda reminds us that rhetoric and composition's valorization of language difference is often guilty of ignoring much earlier recognitions of multilingual practices and research in fields such as applied linguistics and language education. Moreover, he notes that a deeper understanding of language scholarship, not to mention actually learning other languages, is necessary for critiques of translanguaging trends, specifically in relation to the celebration of difference to the detriment of the material necessity in global-citizen's lives of the acquisition of global English. Donahue echoes that call and argues that our research is strengthened when we look outside of our U.S. and disciplinary contexts for tools and methods of analysis. Donahue, further, reminds readers that our work currently depends on designating English as the second language (L2), which ignores rich research from traditions for which a student's L2 is not that. Finally, in the closing chapter of *Literacy as Translingual Practice*, Worden identifies what is, for me, the clearest danger in applying translanguaging labels, in a potentially trendy fashion, without further understanding both cross-disciplinary research and how a writer's translanguaging orientation and practices play out as they approach a rhetorical situation. Worden says, "this research must not revert to simple tallies of the languages used in an instance of communication" (238), and my response is, really, to shout "Yes!" and to jump up and give her a high five.

The contributors to *Reworking English* and *Literacy as Translingual Practice* provide both thought-provoking explorations of how a translanguaging orientation to writing affects our approach to investigations and understandings of the work of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. In tandem, these two collections lay significant groundwork for further refining what we mean by translanguaging and a translanguaging orientation to writing, offering examples of fruitful exploration, compelling questions, and critical directions. Moreover, these investigations help us understand the draw, or "lure" (Matsuda 478), of the translanguaging conversation, and help us to recognize the reality of individuals' fluid language(s) negotiation(s). The concept and attendant investigative focus of translanguaging offers composition instructors a powerful means of acknowledging and understanding the agentive communicative choices students make. It is the agency, we would argue, that composition instructors are drawn to, that composition has always recognized, and thus, despite Matsuda's cautions, that rhetoric and composition scholars are so prepared to adopt as theory and practice in writing studies. But we also must heed the thoughtful critiques of jumping into new waters without attending to the disciplinary trajectories and knowledge in second language writing, ap-

plied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language teaching as a necessary step in our pedagogical and investigative interventions. As the afterwords in both edited collections assert, socio-political forces must also be interrogated; indeed, despite the attraction of attending to difference in this way, external forces (the “linguistic discrimination” cited by Worden) and internal forces (citizens “fixed” attachments to linguistic identity and ideology cited by Kopelson) are not going anywhere anytime soon. There is much more careful work to be done and these two collections offer rhetoric and composition teachers-scholars a wide range of provocative points of departure for that continued work.

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