

directions, and developing sound pedagogical applications. These themes are explored by leading scholars from L1 and L2 composition, rhetoric and applied linguistics, education theory and classroom practice, and diverse ethnic rhetorics. Timely and much needed, *Literacy as Translingual Practice* is essential reading for students, researchers, and practitioners across these fields.

**A. Suresh Canagarajah** is Erle Sparks Professor and Director of the Migration Studies Project at Pennsylvania State University.

# LITERACY AS TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICE

Between Communities  
and Classrooms

Edited by A. Suresh Canagarajah

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## GLOBAL AND LOCAL COMMUNICATIVE NETWORKS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY

*Charles Bazerman*

So there is this story going around that the world is flat (Friedman, 2005), such that all knowledge, all finances, all communication can flow everywhere to result in a thin shallow sheet of water, maybe just thick enough to drown us all. If all were flat our educational mission would be a lot simpler. Somebody needs to give these people 3D glasses.

For millennia humans have been developing structures of communication, knowledge, and institutions that provide the spaces within which we play our lives. Knowledge, in particular, is created, inscribed and stored, calculated upon, accessed and applied from particular kinds of documents, or genres, which then circulate in specific activity systems within particular languages (Bazerman & Rogers, 2008a, 2008b). As literacy becomes the knowledge and calculative infrastructure of social institutions, relationships, and actions, we come to live our lives in a built symbolic environment (Bazerman, 2011).

The activity systems within which knowledge flows are complexly organized, finely structured, and deeply varied (Bazerman, 1994; Russell, 1997). The meaning and functions of knowledge even within a single system vary depending on participant interests, roles, and positions. Movement of knowledge across systems, such as from science to law, is far from automatic, requiring translation and repositioning. Language, social, and national differences increase variety and add barriers to common knowledge.

The broad spread of knowledge and common orientations to that knowledge are a result of active communicative work by groups and individuals with interests in extended activity systems and shared knowledge. These range from scientists with a variety of first languages seeking to engage in common inquiries to entertainment and tourist industries wanting to extend markets, from governmental agencies and NGOs attempting to solve regional and global problems, to

investment bankers wanting to coordinate and profit from increasingly integrated economies. These networks continue to grow denser, larger, more complex, with higher entry barriers, even though the balance and relationship of some of the more obvious components are shifting.

### A Short History of Literacy and Society

Literacy and communication at a distance have at each juncture in their history been associated with changing social arrangements, sometimes reinforcing existing relations and institutions, but more often putting power in new hands and building new forms of organization that are larger, deeper and more complex. Let me cite some episodes.

In the ancient fertile crescent, the introduction of literacy helped farmers to keep track of produce, amass larger holdings than they could directly keep watch over, and transmit property without immediate physical transfer. It allowed traders to make deals over wider areas, make contracts, and amass great wealth. It facilitated governments spreading and coordinating power over larger domains, subordinating other kingdoms and tribes, gathering taxes, establishing uniform laws, and organizing and controlling large military forces and bureaucracies. Belief, as well, could become organized and disseminated through scriptures, creating modern religions, with literate clerical bureaucracies that could interpret and apply divine writ, administer, collect gifts, gather holdings, and regulate followers (Goody, 1986).

The Chinese empire showed the power of the unification of all these literate systems—government, law, finances, belief, and knowledge—across a wide domain. The invention of the printing press served to reinforce the organizational structures already in place, as it quickly came under imperial control to produce documents for government use or to reproduce the classical canon—which reinforced the centralized culture and provided texts for students taking the imperial exams (Bodde, 1991; Carter, 1955; Lee, 2000; Luo, 1998). This containment by the central authority and use to intensify central control was facilitated by a common literate language, purchased at great cost in blood and book burning. As a result, for two thousand years there was a highly developed literacy in Mandarin among the elites, but they were largely isolated from L2 books. Further, few speakers of other languages could effectively read Chinese texts, let alone participate in the Chinese literate world (Needham, 1970). About a century ago a series of changes in China began transforming these literate communicative dynamics, with the process still ongoing (Chen, 2010).

In Europe the printing press arrived about five centuries after it did so in China, at a time of religious and political fracturing, and served to further that fracturing—along with establishing institutions and communities that escaped national, religious, and cultural borders. Literacy, printing, and participation in transnational networks of commerce, science, technology, belief, and philosophic

inquiry became assets to many of the emerging nations in their struggles. Thus some states sponsored more open inquiries and communications (Eisenstein, 1979).

One final example—in the United States the coordinated introduction of telegraphy and railroads facilitated the transformation from local agrarian economies with limited small-scale manufactures to a national corporate economy and a national market (Yates, 1989).

### The Nation State and the Organization of Literate Activity Systems

By the 19th century such dynamics had left the nation state as a central organizing principle in much of the developed world. Laws, economics, corporations, governance mechanisms, transportation systems, education, languages, politics, and even newspapers were organized and regulated largely within national boundaries and carried out within national languages (Anderson, 1983). Less developed countries that wanted to enter as players into the global system needed to develop those nationally bounded systems of internal governance, economy, and culture in order to take their place among nations, as occurred in Mexico in the 1920s and thereafter (De los Santos, 2007).

Prior to the 20th century there was, of course, transregional communication. Trade routes and interregional dissemination of texts go back to antiquity, but they were limited arrangements (e.g., Frank, 1998). Also, the fluid history of European royal families and borders had created a transnational European commerce and culture, though the effect was mostly limited to the elites. Imperialism was the primary mechanism by which the scope of nationally organized systems spread beyond primary borders. Imperialism also led to the development of communicative systems, whether the large correspondence and archive networks centered in Seville and London or technological advances such as foreign postal systems and telegraphy. Imperialism also led to global distribution of selected European languages and a limited and asymmetric intermingling of cultures.

In the post World War II period, European-wide institutions of security, governance and economics have also emerged and gained strength, overlaying national bureaucracies and institutions, resulting in a flourishing translation industry. Recently, movement of students and employees has increased multilingual competence. Yet, *de facto*, this may mean that the working language of most institutions winds up being English, as it is the language that Finns, Rumanians, Spaniards, and Czechs have in common with some degree of fluency.

Globally, international cooperation after World War II seeking peace and security have resulted in such institutions as the United Nations, but also realized through many NGOs and regional organizations. The great divisions of the Cold War, and now the turmoil in the Islamic world, have also fostered a global orientation. These, in turn, foster an ideology of international curiosity, influencing

the education and entertainment industries. International tourism, including its ideological themes of culture, environmentalism, and service, has coordinately increased as transportation has become easier and affluence has grown in some parts.

Science, from its early years, had been an international endeavor, relying on the printing press for its global reach (Eisenstein, 1979)—but in the 20th century it grew rapidly, transforming higher education.

All these domains, however, have become pervaded by economic development and the growth of corporations that became large powers within states and the vehicles for cooperation, until the corporations themselves escaped the bounds of the nations. I can hardly begin to unpack this complex story of economic growth, corporatism, and capitalism, and the formation of entities of sufficient power and wealth to dominate nations. Nor can I unpack the intertwining of economic interests, scientific growth, rise of global entertainment industries, the formation of global news, and new cooperations among nations.

Immigration also has changed. It was initially fostered by imperialism which brought imperial nationals to rule over foreign lands. As land and property was taken from indigenous peoples, many of whom perished, immigrants from other regions were also encouraged or forced by slavery to come to the newly opened lands, bringing their heritage languages within them—particularly in the Americas after independence. Up to World War I in the United States, Scandinavian and German immigrant communities continued to use and school in their heritage languages, and New York City maintained multiple linguistically insulated communities. Brazil, Chile, and Argentina have many European speaking enclaves, and some even had monolingual heritage language schools until recently. But throughout the 20th century the pressures for national loyalty, identity, and economic integration have demoted heritage languages to a marginal cultural practice. L1 public education grew in the USA and elsewhere.

However, in recent decades indigenous communities have been gaining rights, more immigrants are arriving as fully educated, and the rise of multinational companies has created an international group of managers, diverse within their corporations and moving about the world. Immigrants are likely to visit homelands and maintain business relations, supporting multiple identities and languages. All these changes have gone hand in hand with changing ideologies of diversity and complex identities within immigrant countries. Many countries, nonetheless, still resist immigration or impose large nationalizing pressures on immigrants.

Whatever these observations add up to, this is now the world we must help our students thrive in. This does not mean we have to approve of all the elements of it. The fact that the strongest institutions globally are now becoming financial and corporate, able to trump the interests and needs of nation states and other institutions, I find deeply troubling. But if there are strong networks to counterbalance them, it may not be the older institutions of the nation state that can do it, and we need to facilitate our students to contribute to building other

communicative social systems with global force to assert other interests on the transnational level.

In particular I want to follow through on several implications.

### Changing Immigration and Changing Students

Among our students we may find students whose heritage language has more vitality and a greater role in their lives than previously, who have strong connections with relatives in other regions (supported by communicative technologies), and who have substantial international experience. This will impact the ideas, goals, and knowledge they bring to their writing tasks, as well as their knowledge of and attitude toward language.

### Changing Career Paths of Students

Students' careers are likely to involve large institutions with complex communicative environments which they will need to understand in order to participate effectively. They will need to understand the complex, multiple, and segmented audiences of their writing, particularly as framed by organizational roles. They will need to understand the distributed and collaborative processes and how to contribute effectively within them. They will need to understand the genres, their purposes, their circulation paths, and the actions they need to accomplish within the complex activity system of the organization. If students enter the riskier world of the professions, emergent organizations, journalism, or public sphere activity, they will need even more subtle knowledge of the communicative systems they are going up against and how they can create counter-discourses and communicative institutions that will project other interests forcefully and that will create thoughtful judgments.

Further, in all careers, to communicate effectively people will need to be able to consider the role of data and knowledge appropriate to each domain, and wield that knowledge intelligently and analytically, relying on theoretical orientations. In many academic, industrial, governance, and activist roles, they will need to be able to collect data, find new knowledge, and develop powerful theory and ideas as the basis for action. This brings us to universities.

### How Universities Stand With Respect to Other Institutions

Universities first developed in Europe as a response to the influx of manuscripts into Europe through Muslim Spain during the wars of rechristianization and Constantinople (Makdasi, 1981; Ridder-Symoens, 1991). The guilds of students and scholars that formed came under the control of the church, and the teachings were limited to a limited canon that remained largely fixed even after the religious proliferation of the Reformation. Rote learning of texts with authoritative



interpretation from the professor became entrenched as the educational model. The sciences only gained a substantial place in the 19th century after the French and German reforms of the university (Ruegg, 2004), with engineering, social sciences, and business only gaining major university place in the 20th century (Porter & Ross, 2003). With the reforms and changing knowledges within the university, national differences proliferated, but rote learning of authoritatively presented canonical texts remained the dominant educational mode in much of the world. Examination often remained oral but, even when written, writing skills needed to reproduce preformulated knowledge were limited. Major exceptions were the German seminar model and the Oxbridge tutorial model.

The United States was the other major exception, because of the need from the beginning to create social elites in a land without a longstanding elite class, and after the revolution to create citizen leaders for democracy. Rhetorical training was at first central to the curriculum and then the USA modified the German disciplinary specialization model by keeping two years of general education, within which the writing requirement emerged (under the auspices of literature departments). This unique history has meant that there has been a much stronger emphasis on meaning, expression, idea development, analysis, agency, and identity than elsewhere. As other nations now are finding a need to provide more support for advanced academic writing, they are needing to find institutional space for it to happen, but there is typically no department that has it in their economic interest to mount courses, and intellectual leadership tends to come either from within the disciplines or, more often, from applied linguists or educational psychologists. Each of these sponsoring locations has its own perception and priorities.

Another key issue for universities is who pays the bills and who calls the shots. For centuries, the universities were church institutions, fostering elites for church-dominated societies. In the United States, beginning with Jefferson's plan for the University of Virginia, and the later the Morrill Act, the state asserted for public universities an interest in creating an educated citizenry, developing regional economies, and advancing knowledge, fostered by free inquiry and broad freedom of expression, within American rights ideology and within the separation of church and state, with little specific immediate accountability (Veysey, 1965). Through the middle of the 20th century, however, even as public support for higher education expanded, government saw more direct interest in academic knowledge, beginning with the Manhattan project and reflected in current high levels of Department of Defense research funding (Van Nostrand, 1997). In addition, in recent decades industry has begun to assert its authority over university priorities. Further, as the power of academic inquiry to influence an educated citizenry and foster social change began to be realized, some political forces became suspicious of and attempted to limit university autonomy. Particularly relevant to writing is the increasing research orientation of universities that has heightened the focus both on graduate education and on the undergraduate major as a preparation for graduate education and research careers.

## The Increasing Role for Writing Education in the USA and Globally

In both the developed and developing world, expectations of participation of faculty in international research and scholarship and the growth of advanced degree programs are increasing, often tied to governmental funding models, as in England, Spain, Hong Kong, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile. This pressure on graduate students and faculty has required higher degrees of more tightly focused and evidenced original arguments tied to disciplinary contributions. In addition, needs to have professionals at the highest international level to address pressing problems in health, environment, and other issues requiring scientific knowledge have required full participation in global academic and governance communications. Local economic interests are, as well, being tied into global financial and corporate organizations.

The problem is often first recognized at the end of the educational process, when graduate students need to write theses and dissertations, or researchers need to publish. Often the first writing support offered is at the Masters and Doctoral level, but in some cases this is starting to wash back to the undergraduate and secondary level. Of course, having highly skilled academic writers at the graduate level requires continuous attention and support from the earliest years of schooling onward. As writing support seeps downward it raises tensions with whatever local traditions and beliefs about literacy and writing have been forming the curricula at lower levels, because the higher end needs or professionals, business, and researchers are shaped by contemporary international standards.

## The Issue of English and Multilingualism

Writing at the higher end of professionalism, scientific and medical research, multinational corporate and financial organizations, international activism, government cooperation, and so on, means that writing is directed towards the international languages of cooperation—which currently is predominantly English, although in evolving forms to reflect its new global status (Crystal, 2003).

Earlier colonialism, recent corporate neocolonialism, the Cold War, and US military dominance are no doubt important forces in this linguistic spread, along with media and popular culture from films to the internet. But also are the dominance of US and British science and academic research in the latter half of the 20th century. The expansion and reputation of US universities and the attractiveness of the elite British universities has meant that many leading scholars, professionals, and government and corporate leaders received undergraduate or graduate educations in the United States. Because of this academic dominance, in a number of countries the medium of instruction shifts from local languages to English as students move from secondary to higher education and postgraduate education, particularly in scientific disciplines.

Whatever the forces that have led to the situation, there is no doubt English is the dominant global language and becomes more important as one moves into elite or leadership professions, though elite British and US dialects no longer set absolute standards. English has escaped the English-speaking nations so that now there are about twice as many people who speak English as an additional language than do so as a first language. Of the estimated billion and a half English speakers in the world, half are from not from English-speaking countries or the former colonial empires of the USA and Britain (Crystal, 2003, pp. 68–69). If we stratified English speaking in those countries by education, wealth, or position, we might have even more striking results. Further, English as a language has escaped the control of dominant dialects from England and the USA, as new dialects have developed and are gaining recognition in different regions, though the weight of propriety, and education still tilts towards Anglo-American prestige dialects (Kachru, 1990).

The international role of English carries the ideological baggage of the events that fostered its growth. Equally, the growing dominance of English exerts unfortunate pressures on local languages, as many of the more sophisticated and/or power-related functions migrate to the international language. Yet global cooperation requires some ability to communicate with each other in a common language. In the past, the emergence of international languages of cooperation was accompanied and maintained by the governmental and religious institutions, often at the cost of violence. The rise of English certainly followed this pattern, but it is not clear that this will be the case in the future, as many of the interests and activities supporting global English are no longer tied so directly and exclusively in the interests of the English-speaking nations. For example, the default language on the websites of both Unilever and Phillips is English, not Dutch, as are all the major company documents available there, despite the history and corporate homes of each being in The Netherlands. We will see what the future holds, and also whether communication technology cements this global presence of English, or whether improvement of translation technologies will allow more symmetry among languages. Nonetheless, in the interim, there seems a real global need for English, and knowledge of English creates inequities not just between nations but within non-English-speaking nations, between those who can write fluently and precisely participate in international activities and those who cannot. As language and literacy educators this is an issue of vital concern, defining our role.

### The Increase in Diverse Forms of Writing Research

All the concerns I have spoken about to this point have eventuated in an increase internationally in research on writing, writing processes, how people develop as writers, how education can support writing development, and other related issues. This has happened in each region, but has also led to international communication and support.

In the United States, while there was some movement to advance research on the teaching of writing since the 1960s with linguistically based work, and peaking in the mid-1980s with cognitive psychological research, this effort remained small compared to the large endeavor of the teaching of writing and the growth of practice-based institutions like the National Writing Project, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. In the 1990s this psychological work diminished, but work on rhetorical history and the history of the profession continued and there were regular conferences. Student- and community-based ethnography grew, as did studies of specialized forms of writing in science, technology, and industry, but largely meeting at the periphery of practice-based meetings. As Haswell (2005) documented, National Council of Teachers of English based institutions were not centrally focused on research, though a few independent research journals thrived.

I must qualify this characterization in one way. The opportunities of the new communicative technologies, changing the economics and dynamics of publishing and expanding the possibilities of student expression, were rapidly taken up in college composition and in the new literacies movement elsewhere.

In any event, out of caution, when we first started running regional conferences in Santa Barbara in 2002, we framed the topic to straddle practice and research, but to our surprise our first iteration in 2002 turned out to draw nationally and doubled our attendance expectation at around 150. So, in 2005 we framed the conference nationally and on writing research, though modestly as “Writing Research in the Making.” Again we doubled expectation, at around 350, and drew internationally. This suggested to us that there was something serious going on, as there was, and so in 2008 we created an international conference, inviting interest in all age levels and all methods. We drew around 600, representing over 30 nations. In 2011 we drew around 700 from over 40 nations to the conference at George Mason University, and founded the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research in order to carry on the conference under global societal auspices and to carry on other activities. Membership now numbers close to a 1000. Through this and other conferences that are mentioned below, I have become aware of the variety of work going on globally. What follows is my idiosyncratic impressions of what is going on in different regions. I am sure there are many counter-examples to be cited.

For a half a century, a strong applied linguistic research tradition has emanated from the Britain and Australia, in large part motivated by the teaching of English as an additional language and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This work has been global in its influence, and research along these lines has been done in many regions and many different languages have been studied. This strain of work has looked at linguistic forms, from the micro to the macro level, from a functionalist perspective, as resources for expression.

In Europe, writing research started to heat up in the 1990s, with the first meeting of SIG Writing in 1988 in Padova, Italy, and its 13th conference in 2012 in

Porto, Portugal. In recent years this organization has brought together a stable core of around 150 to 200 researchers from across Europe, with growing numbers from elsewhere. The organization is a special interest group of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI), and the traditions it draws on have been focused on psychology and education, but include higher education as well as primary and secondary education. The psychological work done in North America has had some influence on European activities, but European workers also have their own traditions that have grown out of phenomenography, emergent literacy, linguistic cognition, and other educational and psychological traditions.

During the last decade, research in writing in Brazil has centered on the concept of genre, and the biannual International Symposium on Genre Studies (SIGET) has become the main site for presenting writing research, though this subject also receives some attention at applied linguistics meetings. Genre is identified as an educational priority in the Brazilian national curricular parameters for elementary and secondary schools, but the concept has also gained force in higher education and has come to stand for the kinds of things students should be writing. The genre and applied linguistics worlds are quite eclectic, drawing on multiple traditions, including Anglo-Australian applied linguistics and ESP and North American genre theory—but also Swiss French educational investigations of genre, drawing on Vygotsky, other European educational traditions, and French literary theory. One of the leading approaches is grounded in the philosophy of language (Marcuschi, 2001). But all of these are bound together in a uniquely Latin American Frietian interest in the everyday world and power relations, with a concern for social justice (Freire, 1970). Elsewhere in Latin America there is emerging interest in higher education writing, with a focus on graduate student and research writing, to support the development of intellectual leaders and international scholars, but again with a continuing concern for social justice and the needs of minority and poor populations. Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico are at the forefront of this work.

In China there are two separate writing worlds that are just becoming aware of each other. One of these is English, based on English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with a strong interest in ESP (academic and scientific writing), and drawing on applied linguistics, but with an expanding view into social context and purpose. The other is L1 Chinese writing, which still draws heavily on the ancient literary canon and standards of style. Interest in genres, functions, and situations of writing is also divided by language, with a special focus on English language in scientific and technical writing.

This interest in research writing (often associated with English) seems to motivate much research in many parts of the world, often starting with applied linguistic investigations with an expansion of perspective as issues of context and communicative expression grow. It is curious that much of writing research globally is focused on higher education, except primarily in Europe where there is a

good spread across all age groups. In the USA, given the large higher education world of practice, one would expect much research at that level. Less research at the lower grades may have to do with the conflation of literacy with reading and with the development of what practice there is through the National Writing Project being largely outside the world of research. The recent addition of writing in school assessment has motivated some research, but much of it is limited and focused by the particular terms of assessment. There is, nonetheless, some strong ethnographic work in the primary and secondary world.

In the rest of the world where there are few sites of higher education writing support and few teachers of writing in higher education, the focus on higher education writing is indeed worth noting. The focus on higher education, particularly in an EFL context, speaks to the large perceived need, plus the neglect of attempting to develop a deep and principled understanding of writing beyond the development of basic transcription skills, which often relies on traditional methods and beliefs. The one bright spot in early childhood and early education research for more than three decades has been the emergent literacy tradition. This has been truly an international movement, with major research produced in Latin America, North America, Europe, and the Middle East.

These various traditions are now becoming more aware of each other through conferences and publications, particularly handbooks that have appeared in the past five years. Whereas six years ago there were no handbooks or reference books devoted exclusively to writing research, today there are at least four published, some with a deeply international perspective, and several more on the way. The journals and books also are becoming more international, as publications in Europe, Latin America, and North America are soliciting and receiving more international submissions. There are also several major initiatives that are expanding capacity in Europe and Latin America.

## Final Comments

As educators we work within national educational systems within the national language of schooling, yet our students are increasingly international and multilingual in complex ways, as are their likely careers and the forces that will affect their lives. These complexities intersect local and global institutions and activity systems, through media that permeate national barriers—and create the locales at which people now write. This is the world we are educating for. The richness of institutions depends on maintaining multiple complex strands of communicative activity that move across languages, with institutions able to counterpoise each other. The real danger of flatness is that the financially motivated communicative systems in a single disciplinary and national language will wash over all other systems and languages. Money and finances are strong motivators and create the resources for strong action. But if money talking overwhelms all other discourses, leaving the rest of the world flat, guided by the mountains of wealth, then we



really are in trouble. Governance in a democratic spirit without the dominance of strong imperial nations is a complex affair, requiring communication, cooperation, and coordination at many levels and in many venues. It is our rewarding and challenging task to help people learn to express and recognize in their writing the great complexity of humanity, with all its desires, needs, knowledge, and visions carried in the many languages of the world.

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