The Reading Matrix
Vol. 4, No. 3, November 2004

ENGLISH STUDIES AND GENERATION 1.5: WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AT THE CROSSROADS

Adrian J. Wurr
Email: ajwurr@uncg.edu

Abstract

This article highlights the recent demographic trends in American schools and society towards increased linguistic and cultural diversity in order to call attention to the need for more curricular and administrative innovations to meet the needs of Generation 1.5 and other language minority students. Curricular reforms suggested include increased interdisciplinary studies focusing on language and culture, while administrative changes suggested center on professional training and writing program administration. The implications of each change on research, teaching, and learning related to Generation 1.5 learners and writing program administration are discussed.

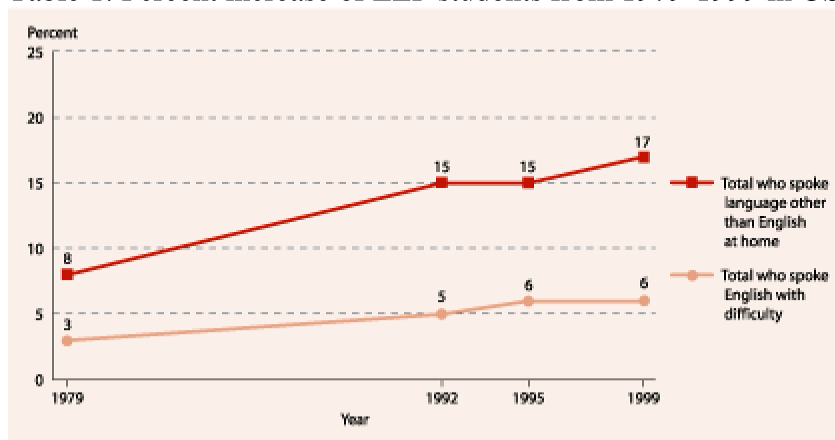
In the 1970s, English departments underwent several disciplinary transformations as programs such as rhetoric and composition, and English as a second language grew in stature and power, competing with more established disciplines such literature for a controlling interest in departmental resources. These changes were brought about by practical as well as epistemological concerns in how best to respond to changing student demographics. As educators struggled to meet the challenges of open enrollment policies adopted in the early 1970s, they experimented with new approaches to language teaching that were better suited to the diverse backgrounds and needs of their students. Within English departments and writing programs, some (Gere, 1978; Trimbur, 1978; Schuster, 1978) have called for curricular and administrative changes in order to better accommodate under-represented students and disciplines in English studies[1] and ensure equal representation at all levels of academia.

Public schools today are witnessing an equally startling increase in the number of learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds as a result of changes in higher education funding, immigration laws, and political strife worldwide. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education's Center for Educational Statistics, "from 1979 to 1999, the population of 5- to 24-year-olds increased by 6 percent. In contrast, the percentage who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 118 percent during this period, and the percentage who spoke a language other than English at home and who spoke English with difficulty increased by 110 percent" (see Table 1). Statistics for the general population mirror these figures: The national census in 2000 found an unprecedented 18% of the American population live in households where English is not the primary language (Shin & Bruno, 2003). With approximately 75% of the American population now attending college at some point in their life, it is only a matter of time before the linguistic diversity found in the general population

[1] I use 'English Studies' here and elsewhere in this article as an inclusive term to refer to disciplines and programs commonly housed within English Departments such as literature, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, linguistics, and cultural studies.

of the United States is reflected in higher education classrooms as well. In many urban settings, particularly in Western and Southern two-year colleges, students from non-English language backgrounds already do form a majority of entering students (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Table 1: Percent increase of LEP students from 1979-1999 in US.



These more recent changes in student demographics represent a considerable challenge for writing programs that must place the students into ill-defined classes such as "basic writing," "remedial skills" or "ESL." U.S.-educated ESL learners living in multilingual households and communities now make up a significant portion of students with ESL writing traits, even though many consider themselves native English speakers and writers. Linda Harklau, Kay M. Losey, and Meryl Siegal refer to these students as "Generation 1.5," students who graduated from U.S. high schools but whose traits and experiences lie somewhere in between first- and second-generation Americans.

While the number of linguistically and culturally diverse learners in America today is increasing, the number of schools with ESL programs and faculty are decreasing due to reduced budgets and/or legal mandates. As a result, teachers of introductory writing courses will find ESL, nonstandard dialect, learning disabled, and basic writers all in the same class. As Harklau, Siegal, and Losey point out, the distinct differences in the writing approaches and instructional needs of each of these groups of writers are often overlooked in such situations, while the superficial non-native language textual features of the ESL writers are mistaken for lack of writing expertise (p. 6). Distinguishing between each group of writers is difficult, so writing program administrators and others overseeing placement may fail to identify or inform ESL writers of the resources available to them because the students come from American high schools, or because their spoken English is fluent and unmarked by "foreign" accents and so it is assumed that their written English is also native-like.

How can English departments in general, and writing programs more specifically, better respond to the needs of diverse student populations? In this article I will explore the sometimes-contentious relationship between the disciplines most often charged with educating Generation 1.5 writers—composition, linguistics, and other programs typically housed in English departments such as literary and cultural studies. In doing so, I will note areas in which research interests overlap and what each of these disciplines stands to gain from the others through increased collaboration, particularly with regards to meeting the diverse needs of Generation 1.5 students who enroll in first-year composition courses. I will argue for increased collaboration

between scholars and disciplines in order to better meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

Brief History of Relationship Between Composition & Linguistics

Several prominent writing scholars have researched the sometimes-turbulent relationship that linguistics and composition has experienced since World War II. In 1989, Sharon Crowley published "Linguistics and Composition Instruction: 1950-1980." Dividing her review of linguistics into three parts—grammar and usage, style, and invention—Crowley argued that linguistics' potential contribution to composition instruction was limited by its acontextual orientation to language use. "Linguistics favors an extremely narrow, noncontextual notion of what it means to be a user of language. Thus compositionists must recognize that linguistically based pedagogies necessarily operate as though texts are constructed in a cultural vacuum" (p. 499).

It is important to remember that Crowley was focusing on the period 1950-1980 when she made this claim. As she notes, the earlier half of this period (1950-1965) was the heyday for theoretical linguistics, led by Noam Chomsky's theory of transformational-generative grammar. Chomsky's work offered a new and exciting way to view language, so the growing influence of his work naturally attracted attention of language scholars. Nevertheless, linguistics entails more than Chomsky's theories, more than the "extremely narrow, noncontextual" research Crowley suggests applies to all linguistics. The inaugural 1979 issue of the *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, for example, cites areas as diverse as discourse analysis, first and second language acquisition, bilingualism, language policy and planning, language testing and methodology, stylistics, interlanguages, translation, and lexicography as within the field of applied linguistics, and a list of equal length and complexity could be produced for theoretical linguistics as well.

Another article that appeared at the same time as Crowley's was Lester Faigley's "The Study of Writing and the Study of Language." His assessment of linguistics' contribution to the teaching of writing is more generous than Crowley's, but still guarded. Faigley begins his article by decrying the fact that neither Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge* nor Patricia Bizzell's "Forming the Canon in Composition Studies" mention language or linguistics in their list of important fields informing the study of composition. Faigley points out that the limitations of generative linguistics were carefully noted by Chomsky and others from the outset and that even in the height of the Chomskyan revolution, there were linguists working in other areas unrelated to structural linguistic analyses such as those interested in discourse analysis. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, as the Chomskyan revolution subsided and interest in writing processes came to the fore, sociolinguists such as Dell Hymes and Shirley Brice Heath began to receive more attention for their pioneering work in the social dimensions of language and literacy development. Faigley notes this shift in linguistics toward investigating sociocultural dimensions of language learning to support his call for more interaction between linguists and compositionists in the area of critical linguistics[2], which he identifies as discourses and ideologies associated with gender, class, occupation, education, ethnicity, and subgroups therein (p. 255).

Implicit in the arguments of Crowley and Faigley is a deep mistrust of the empirical approaches to language study with which linguistics and L2 composition is associated. This

[2] Further examples of critical theory applied to language studies include Political linguistics (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 1997), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, van Dijk, 1993), and critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001).

mistrust originates from the epistemological split between L1 and L2 English teachers in the late 1960s. As a result of fundamental differences of opinion over the production and transmission of knowledge in academia[3], scholars in rhetoric and composition allied themselves with literary studies and the Modern Language Association while language teachers gravitated toward linguistics and the American Psychology Association. The MLA is traditionally associated with an interpretist framework, rooted in philology, that values discovery of universal truths through the analysis of printed texts. From this perspective, reality does not exist externally but rather is socially constructed and subject to interpretation. The APA, on the other hand, is said to draw from an epistemology of science that posits that truth and reality can be discovered through careful observation and analysis.

One way this historical difference of opinion manifests itself today is in the hierarchical nature of writing programs and academia in general, wherein ideas are privileged over skills. As Peter Elbow (1993) notes, the interpretation of literary texts traditionally has been valued in academia more than the basic communication skills needed to express these ideas, leading to the domination of reading over writing, print knowledge over oral, visual musical, and/or performative knowledge (pp. 8-14). Hierarchical metaphors that have been traditionally used to subjugate composition apply equally well to the characterizations of ESL as "remedial," "basic skills," or "lower division" (McQuade, 1992). As a result, ESL courses are often denied academic credit, designated as prerequisites to regular first-year composition courses, or pushed off campus altogether to language institutes and two-year colleges. The ethics of these policies must surely be questioned as public schools are charged with providing equal access to education for all. Admitting students but then denying them academic credit for course work, and often as a result financial aid too, depletes the often-limited financial resources of these students and seriously jeopardizes their chances of successfully completing their degrees. Such policies approach a not-so-benign negligence of professional duties.

The Road Ahead: Blurring L1/L2 Boundaries

Rhetoric and composition scholars take justifiable pride in their interdisciplinary knowledge base. As Mueller (1989) notes in his call for more interdisciplinary discussions in English studies today, "Interdisciplinary work is most difficult but also most productive when it involves the collision of strongly articulated disciplinary ethnicities. Work of this kind is quite rare, because it requires a hands-on experience of, and deep respect for, the otherness of the other" (p. 8). Those working on the cultural fault lines of English studies have often drawn from a common ethnographic research tradition in exploring the common ground shared between the disciplines. For example, Mina Shaughnessy's (1977) careful description and analysis of the logic of students' writing errors in *Errors and Expectations* involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Linguist Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) classic ethnography, *Ways with Words,* combined a variety of research techniques, from theoretical and structural linguistic analyses of literacy development in the communities of Trackton and Roadville to rich narrative participant observations of the nine years she spent in the communities. *Lives on the Boundary* by Mike Rose (1990) also resists categorization in a single discipline or method of inquiry, yet few would argue against its valuable contribution to English studies.

---

[3] According to Kramsch (1998), at least four major factors contributed to the eventual split in English studies, including questions regarding the value of oral vs. text-based knowledge, popular vs. canonical culture, learning vs. acquisition, and information processing vs. critical thinking.

<u>*Contact Zones in English Studies*</u>

ESL research is also, according to Kramsch (1998), beginning to initiate a return to the value of language in literature by "focusing attention once again on the word itself and on language learning as the apprenticeship into a foreign culture" (p. 35). Second Language Acquisition (SLA) "research on the acquisition of non-Western languages and literatures directs our attention to the cultural traditions in which the split between orality and literacy is less pronounced than in the West" (ibid, p. 35). Such developments follow the recommendations of Ernest Boyer's 1987 report to the Carnegie Foundation on the state of undergraduate education in America, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, in which he asserts that colleges "give priority to language" and develop "a core of common learning" in order to revitalize scholarship in the humanities (p. 67).

ESL also has and can continue to learn much from L1 composition theory. In "Ideology in Composition: L1 and ESL," Terry Santos (1992) points out that most ESL composition theories were originally proposed in L1 circles. She argues that while process-approach pedagogies have not been adopted as completely in ESL composition as they have been in L1 composition, examples of expressivist and cognitivist emphases within process pedagogy can be found in the leading course books for ESL college composition in the United States. However, Santos points out the reluctance of many ESL compositionists to embrace more fully a social-constructionist approach to writing. She suggests the reason for this is that the international contexts that L2 compositionists often work, and the subjective nature of ideological discussions serve as impediments to the wholesale adoption of social-constructionist theories, particularly the emphasis on political ideologies, that L1 composition literature has explored with such enthusiasm for the last decade.

The social turn in composition has been increasingly evident in recent ESL writing texts, too. Trudy Smoke's *A Writer's Workbook* (Cambridge UP 1998) and *Adult ESL: Politics, Pedagogy, and Participation in Classroom and Community Programs* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), for example, both argue for and apply social-constructivist theories to TESOL. *A Writer's Workbook* contains an eclectic mixture of process-oriented writing strategies, including those drawing on social-constructionist theories. In the preface to the third edition, Smoke writes, "Pedagogically, the book is meant to be dialogic, to present the concepts that cultures influence and change one another, that students learn from one another, and that teachers learn from their students" (xxi). *Adult ESL: Politics, Pedagogy, and Participation in Classroom and Community Programs* is a collection of articles by noted ESL professionals on the ways in which politics intersect and affect TESOL.

Linguistic anthropologists and critical discourse analysts focusing on language ideologies have also given new impetus to exploring the political and ideological dimensions of written and spoken discourse. In much the same way as Paulo Friere argued that students must learn not only the mechanical aspects of reading ("reading the word") but also the socio-political contexts in which texts were produced and read ("reading the world"), critical discourse analysts draw attention to the heteroglossic nature of texts; that is, the multiple messages, purposes, and functions reading and writing serve, including the social, cultural, and political. As Bloomaert and Bulcaen (1997) note, "textual practices can be identified as central political strategies for creating, sustaining, or resolving conflicts, and conflicts can be inextricably linked to textual practices" (p. 3). Thus, what sociolinguists used to refer to as the social or cultural aspects of

language has now come to be described in political and ideological terms in an effort to better describe the dynamics of language theory and social practice.

This growing body of research and resources aimed at addressing the needs of diverse learners—basic, nonstandard dialect, immigrant, international, and Generation 1.5 writers—is a step in the right direction, drawing as it does on the work of both L1 and L2 compositionists. But a similar shift in thinking needs to occur in English studies programs, disciplines, and professional organizations.

In "Composition Studies and ESL Writing: A Disciplinary Division of Labor," Paul Kei Matsuda (1999) argues for maintaining close, but separate, disciplinary divisions between linguistics and composition. Extending his historical analysis from 1941 to the present, Matsuda carefully traces the initial developments in each of these fields that led to the formation of composition and ESL studies as two distinct disciplines sharing significant areas of common interest in the area of second-language writing. Matsuda argues that "the professionalization of TESL over the period of 1941 to 1966—just when composition studies was also undergoing a revision of its own disciplinary identity—inadvertently contributed to the creation of the disciplinary division of labor that continues to influence the institutional practices in composition programs across the nation" (p. 701). Matsuda suggests that this division of labor is based on the false assumption held by professionals in both fields that ESL writing can be analyzed in distinct components focusing separately and in turn on linguistics and then on writing. Matsuda argues, however, that the answer is not to merge the two fields into one again, but rather to consider second-language writing "as an integral part of both composition studies and second-language studies, and [that] specialists in both fields should try to transform their institutional practices in ways that reflect the needs and characteristics of second-language writers in their own institutions" (p. 715).

While seconding Matsuda's call for "specialists in both fields … to transform their institutional practices in ways that reflect the needs and characteristics of second-language writers in their own institutions," I believe a more comprehensive, integrated, and unified approach to composition instruction and professional training is necessary. Integrating L1 and L2 composition theory and practice more consistently in English studies would better prepare professionals in the field for today's linguistically diverse classrooms and communities. Graduate programs in rhetoric and composition need to include and require more courses in TESOL and second language writing, while programs in applied linguistics need to increase the number of graduates specializing in TESOL and second language writing in order to better meet the need for specialists in these fields in American higher education. Professional organizations such as The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL), Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and The Council of Writing Program Administrators need to revise their policies and practices governing professional training in language and writing studies in order to attract enough highly qualified professionals to meet the needs of the growing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students seeking post-secondary education in the United States.

For example, the Council of Writing Program Administrators published Portland Resolution in 1992 to outline the necessary and desirable areas of expertise faculty overseeing college writing programs should posses. It states, "preparation for a WPA (writing program administrators) should include knowledge of or experience in teaching composition and rhetoric" and half a dozen other issues, none of which focus specifically on second language learning or

writing, though knowledge of TESOL is listed later as "desirable." Given the rapid change in student demographics since 1992, knowledge of second language writing issues should not be considered optional but rather a necessary and integral part of professional training in composition and rhetoric.

Scholars currently involved in writing program administration can better serve Generation 1.5 writers by exploring the cultural fault lines between disciplines in the humanities, and redrawing the lines of their colleges and departments as they do (Greenblatt & Gunn, 1992; Kramsch, 1998). Jeanne Gunner's (1994) call for "decentering the WPA" and the many collaborative models of writing program administration featured in the Spring 1998 *WPA Journal* describe some ways in which this can be done in order to achieve more equitable and interdisciplinary work environments. Such changes bode well for the future of writing program administration, but graduate programs in English studies must also change by rediscovering the common ground that exists between language and literary-cultural studies.

References

Bizzell, P. (1987, March). Forming the canon in composition studies. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta.

Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (Eds.). (1999). Political linguistics. Amsterdam & Philadephia: John Benjamin.

Boyer, E. L. (1990). Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Profèssoriate. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Crowley, S. (1989). Linguistics and composition instruction: 1950-1980. Written Communication 6: 480-505.

Council of Writing Program Administrators (1992). The Portland resolution: Guidelines for writing program administrator positions. WPA: Writing Program Administration 16, 1-2: 88-94.

Elbow, P. (1993). The war between reading and writing—and how to end it. Rhetoric Review 12: 5-23.

Faigley, L. (1989). The study of writing and the study of language. Rhetoric Review 7: 240-56.

Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis. London: Longman.

Gere, A. R. (1978). The long revolution in composition. In L. Z. Bloom, D. A. Daiker, & E. M. White (Eds.), Composition in the twenty-first century: crisis and change (pp. 119-132). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Greenblatt, S., & Gunn, G. (Eds.) (1992). Redrawing the boundaries: The transformation of English and American literary studies. New York: MLA.

Gunner. J. (1994). Decentering the WPA. WPA: Writing Program Administration 18, 1-2: 8-15.

Harklau, L., Losey, K. M., & Siegal, M. (Eds.). (1999). Generation 1.5 meets college composition: issues in the teaching of writing to U.S.-educated learners of ESL. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.

Heath, S. B. (1983). Ways with words: language, life, and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Kramsch, C. (1998). Constructing second language acquisition research in foreign language departments. In Burnes, H., Learning foreign and second languages: perspectives in research and scholarship (pp. 23-38). New York: MLA.

Matsuda, P. K. (1999). Composition studies and ESL writing: A disciplinary division of labor. College Composition and Communication, 50, 699-721.

McQuade, D. (1992). Composition and literary studies. In Greenblatt, S., & Gunn, G. (Eds.), Redrawing the boundaries: The transformation of English and American literary studies (pp. 482-520). New York: MLA.

Mueller, M. (1989). Yellow stripes and dead armadillos: some thoughts on the current state of English studies. ADE Bulletin, 92, 5-12

North, S. M (1987). The making of knowledge in composition: portrait of an emerging field. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boyton/Cook.

Pennycook, A. (2001). Critical applied linguistics: a critical introduction. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.

Rose, M. (1990). Lives on the boundary. NY: Penguin.

Santos, T. (1992). Ideology in composition: L1 and ESL. Journal of Second Language Writing, 1(1): 1-15.

Schuster, C. (1978). Seeking disciplinary reformation. In L. Z. Bloom, D. A. Daiker, & E. M. White (Eds.), Composition in the twenty-first century: crisis and change (pp. 146-52). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Shaughnessy, M. (1977). Errors and expectations a guide for the teachers of basic writing. NY: Oxford UP.

Shin, H. B., & Bruno, R. (2003). Language use and English-speaking ability: 2000. Census 2000 Brief (October). www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html

Smoke, T. (1998). Writer Workbook. Cambridge: Cambridge UP

Smoke, T. (1998). Adult ESL: politics, pedagogy, and participation in classroom and community program. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.

Trimbur, J. (1978). Writing instruction and the politics of professionalization. In L. Z. Bloom, D. A. Daiker, & E. M. White (Eds.), Composition in the twenty-first century: crisis and change (pp. 133-45). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2003). The condition of education 2003, NCES 2003-067. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Van Dijk, T. (1993). Discourse and elite racism. London: Sage.

Adrian J. Wurr is an Assistant Professor at UNC Greensboro, where he teaches courses in applied linguistics and composition, and associate editor of *The Reading Matrix*. His research interests include Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), second language writing, assessment, curriculum development, program administration, experiential education, and literacy instruction. He has published numerous scholarly articles in the U.S. and abroad on reading and writing theory, service-learning, and TESOL. Mailing address: UNC Greensboro, Department of English, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170.