

Language Ideology and Reflective Practice: English as a Second Language in the First-Year Writing Classroom

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This paper takes as its central concern, the student who speaks English as a second language in the first-year writing class of an internationally oriented university. I will approach this student from a perspective that is too often overlooked. In this paper I want to think about this student in terms of the richness and depth of discussion and perspective that she or he adds to our classes rather than the issues and difficulties that arise in such situations. According to Henry Giroux, one of our purposes as teachers of writing must be to “develop alternative teaching practices...capable of shattering the logic of domination both within and outside of schools” (167). The first step to doing this, I will argue, is to engage our expectations of language, our language ideologies, critically and reflectively as we approach the opportunities that speakers of English as a second language supply for us in our first-year writing classes.

A language ideology, according to Michael Silverstein, is a set “of beliefs about language articulated by users” of that language (Silverstein, 193) that may or may not be explicitly articulated. In fact, such ideas about language often go without saying as “commonsense notions about the nature of language” (Rumsey 346). Language ideologies are culturally and socially situated and are circulated in discourses about writing and language standards, second languages, grammar, style and correctness, among others. Because in any writing class we deal with such discourses explicitly and implicitly, we need to be aware of and actively engage with the language ideologies that we bring into class as well as those that our students bring with them. This is important for two reasons: First, our ideologies are always already embedded in our classroom practices: the readings we assign, the writing tasks we assign, our grading criterion and our classroom discussion. Second, as Gloria Anzaldua reminds us, people’s identities are deeply tied to the language(s) that they speak and as such, when we are commenting on language use and correctness, we are evaluating individual identities. If we begin to think about our students as language users in positive terms rather than negative, we better account for the effects of our instruction on them at the same time that our classes better engage with the ways that language is a social process. To bring this theoretical paper into the realm of praxis, I will ground my analysis using two case studies of ESL students who have successfully completed English 101 at CMU.

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What Does It Mean? Reflections on Implicit Reading Lessons of the Interpretation and Argument Classroom

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It is the explicit goal of Carnegie Mellon University's (CMU's) Interpretation and Argument course (Eng. 76-101) to introduce students to, and develop their skills in, reading and writing at the college level. Yet, while we have developed a number of rubrics that help us describe to students ways they can formulate arguments, generally the process of training student readers has not been as formalized. Of course, this is not to say students are not taught how to read in the course. Rather I am claiming that the practice of teaching critical reading (facilitating and evaluating interpretation) is effectively submerged within the process of teaching and evaluating written arguments, and that this situation can be understood as the result of a complicated (and conflicting) set of implicit assumptions about how and why we as instructors read, and how we understand the ways in which our students need to develop their reading, assumptions which are effectively naturalized by the logic of the writing classroom, and the institutional practices of the university. In many respects, this "intuitive" approach to teaching reading accurately reflects the myriad and difficult lessons of reading research, which according to David Eskey has shown that "no single model of reading behavior can dominate reading research for long . . . [since reading] is a subject that probably cannot be captured in a unified model" (566). In this presentation, rather than proposing a solution to this impasse in the field of reading research, I want to unpack and develop the challenges of teaching critical reading in the context of CMU's Interpretation and Argument course, and suggest how this course can help explain the challenges that obtain to the development of a critical reading rubric. Significantly, because 76-101 places fiction alongside non-fiction (like many writing courses), it assumes a relational view of culture itself, and so seeks to develop students' sensitivity to the needs for critical reading across a broad variety of texts and situations, destabilizing the notion that interpretation is a form of reading reserved for an established canon of literature. And given the fact that CMU's student body is not only culturally, but linguistically diverse, the issue of how we teach reading is an especially pressing one, if we primarily evaluate critical reading in terms of the written essay, "a related product [which] tests reading, but do[es] not teach it" (Eskey 574).

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Peer Review in Freshman Composition: What Does the ESL Student Take Away?

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This project takes a careful view of the ESL experience of peer review and acquisition of academic literacy, analyzing a set of interviews with ESL students enrolled in English 76-101, Interpretation and Argument, during summer coursework at Carnegie Mellon. I use these interviews to assess their goals for the course, expectations of peer review, perceptions of instructor objectives and goals, and general feelings towards the writing process. I contrast these interviews with discourse analysis of the comments provided by their native-English-speaking peers, to ascertain the “productivity” of peer review from multiple angles. I set the scene for this contribution by examining the work of Cheryl Geisler on academic expertise, Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy on goals and expectations of collaborators, Tony Silva and Muriel Harris on tutoring ESL students, and Ilona Leki on ESL experiences of academic literacy.

When English instructors set time aside in their syllabi for peer review, the assumption is that it helps the students formulate ideas, invent arguments, and further their writing processes in some way. As instructors, peer review days give us a chance to step away from our position of authority, and make room for students to collaborate with one another without invoking the authority of the grader/teacher. However, the ESL student often confronts authority of another sort – the authority of the native English speaker. Native English speakers in a composition course are often in a novice role, confronting course content and method for the first time – grasping at the expertise they can salvage from high school days, a focus on the grammatical dissonance of some ESL writing samples becomes a tempting approach in peer review. When peers focus on lower-order, grammatical mistakes, instead of the higher-order categories that make up the bulk of the students’ grades in the first year course at CMU, what exactly can ESL students take away from the activity, and how transferable or useful is this knowledge?

Strategy and Absence: An Argument for Eloquence

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This paper examines rhetorical strategies and absences in CMU's approach to teaching writing. In an attempt to make writing techniques transportable into other academic contexts much attention has been given to structure and generic practices but little consideration has been given to styles of persuasion.

In her recent talk, "The Argument in the Figure: Rhetorical Roots in Science," Jeanne Fahnestock remarked that contemporary science and technical writers seem to intentionally avoid rhetorical figures because presenting research in obviously manufactured language might indicate that the data were manipulated as well. This reluctance to employ self-consciously persuasive language is also prevalent in CMU's academic culture. A suspicion, or simply an absence of acknowledgement, of eloquence is embedded in CMU's 101 classes as well as upper-level classes, such as Language and Culture. The grading rubrics used evaluate between fifteen and twenty-two features, but there is no category for style or elegance. As writing teachers, we want to introduce our students to the generic expectations of academic writing in a technical institution so that they may succeed in future classes. But what do we lose in this process?

Many of my Middle Eastern students employ persuasive strategies typical of Arab and Iranian traditions, writing in a forceful, presentational style that builds tension from lexical and syntactical repetition, and ends in impassioned claims. When evaluated, these essays fall into lower grade categories according to the standard rubric although they are lively, interesting and persuasive.

Using Barbara Johnstone's categories of Arabic persuasive strategies, I examine Middle Eastern students' papers, tracking changes in style through the grading and revision process. Based on these findings, I adapt Arthur Palacas's suggestions for integrating African-American discourse strategies into mainstream education, proposing a reevaluation of grading methods and an expanded teaching segment on presentational style. As Johnstone has pointed out, the presentational style discussed is not just a feature of Arabic eloquence but also of Martin Luther King's rhetorical style. By discounting other methods of persuasion we may lose sight of the rich traditions our students bring to the classroom as well as significant aspects of American cultural heritage.

The Scylla of Composition and the Charybdis of Content: Navigating the Writing Course

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In our 2005 Communication Symposium, we posed a problem. What is the relationship between language and content? This question is especially relevant for teachers of writing whose students are linguistically, culturally, religiously, nationally, and disciplinarily heterogeneous. How do we, as teachers develop course content that is both accessible and interesting to such a diverse audience? How do we develop the necessary skill sets without blurring the students' conception of course goals? How do we manage these concerns without flattening the specific orientations and abilities of individual students? This paper addresses our attempt as writing instructors to balance domain content (Geisler 1994) with linguistic and rhetorical content in our course design and writing instruction.

In this paper I argue that content in a writing course cannot be viewed as incidental or as a neutral landscape in which students acquire writing skills. We know from James Berlin that in teaching writing, "we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it" (1982). Further, George Hillocks argues that "writers need two kinds of knowledge: strategies for inquiring into the substance of writing and strategies for producing various kinds of discourse" (1995). These ideas show us that the student's inquiry into the content itself must be handled as a distinct skill, and that this operation is likely to have enormous stakes for the individual student. Through an application of ideas from process pedagogy, narrative theory, situated apprenticeship and instructional design, I will discuss the relationship between content and writing. In particular, I examine the strengths and weaknesses that emerged in my own experience of treating inquiry into content as a natural, first-order process (in Janet Emig's terminology), and discourse production as a recursive process of revision and response. I examine this approach in the context of two different kinds of course topics—one primarily political and the other primarily ethical.

“This work relates to mine, too”: The task of the literature review for ESL graduate students and its implications for English 101 instruction

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While many English 101 instructors would agree that the issue analysis paper is the most difficult assignment to teach undergraduates, the difficulties of teaching and learning the task of issue analysis do not stop at the doors of a 101 class. As graduate students work to publish, they take on the issue analysis task: the literature review. As John Swales and Christina Feak suggest in their work, a literature review is one of the tasks that is particularly difficult for graduate students, particularly those who speak English as a second language, to accomplish. They must move from summarizing other works to a stance as a critic who synthesizes and analyzes others scholars' work in order to place them in context. This is the very task that I have found graduate students struggling with in my work as a technical writing consultant for a computer security lab on campus, where nearly all of the graduate students and post-doctoral fellows use English as a second language.

These students, when faced with a much more specific and purpose-driven situated task for text production in the publication realm, still initially construct the issue analysis as a place to list the texts with which they are familiar, rather than creating a theme-based analysis or constructing a literature review based around questions connected to their own research. Their professors find it necessary to ask the students to articulate the connections between the students' own work and the “relevant work” in their literature review sections.

In this paper, I describe the task-specific challenges facing graduate students in this lab, which mirror and reflect in new contexts the challenges facing undergraduate students in our 101 classes. In particular, I propose that their difficulties with the issue analysis task can help us understand how to improve techniques for teaching the issue analysis to those from all language backgrounds, as well as for graduate students, a segment of the population that has fewer required interactions with writing instruction.

What is ‘Good English’? Course Design for Pittsburgh-Doha English Curriculum

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In the Spring 2006, I was a TA for David Kaufer’s Pittsburgh-Doha course 76-244 World English. As a result of this experience, we have formulated a few questions that go beyond the bounds of the course, but need to be addressed for classes of this kind to be successful. In this paper, I would like to focus on one such question: Given we have different mother tongues, cultures, and proficiencies, how do we design a writing course with uniform standards across cultures?

By course design I mean a systematic ordering of goals, objectives, skills, activities, assignments, and criteria of assessment that guide learning experience. In a cross-cultural setting, all of these moments have to be defined in a way that addresses both cultural audiences. But what 76-244 World English made evident is the need to emphasize one more dimension of course design, which cuts across all of the above elements—*standards*, or what we consider success for our students in reaching teachers’ expectations. While in regular Pittsburgh courses, the question of standards often remains tacit, both students and teachers acculturated to a certain idea of academic excellence, in Pittsburgh-Doha courses it comes to the forefront as a murky and contested issue.

In such debates over standards, two concerns often become conflated: rigor and cultural difference. I believe that to design successful Pittsburgh-Doha courses, we need to separate and settle both. I argue that rigor is a trans-cultural category. The amount of effort that we demand of our students should be realistic but high enough to ensure their progress, and we should expect that foreign students may need additional ESL support to improve their English. However, to measure rigor in a joint setting, we need to clarify our respective cultural expectations of what constitutes ‘good English’ and to decide on a common target. This decision should take into account recent ESL perspectives on English as an International Language (Gnutzmann, 1999; Modiano, 1999, 2000; McKay, 2002; Willis, 2003). Since Qatar has no national standard of English, our decision should be ultimately provisional and pragmatic to let us build coherent language and skill development courses on its foundation.

Clearly, we cannot clarify cross-cultural expectations in Pittsburgh alone, without the active participation of our CMU-Qatar colleague and students. In my paper, I will rely on the input of the World English participants, research into the status of English in Qatar, and literature on contrastive rhetoric. I will discuss the World English course design with respect to *what specific questions about standards we need to answer* when defining goals, objectives, skills, assignments, and criteria of assessment in a writing class.

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A cross-cultural comparison of Chinese and U.S. students' argumentation in collaboration: Implications for classroom discourse

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I will discuss findings from a study on collaboration in decision-making and the implications of these findings for classroom discourse practices. We analyzed argumentation by pairs of native U.S. English speakers and Chinese ESL speakers working in face-to-face and computer-mediated contexts. Pairs completed two survival scenario tasks in which they ranked six items in importance of survival separately and collaboratively. The pairs' collaborative discussions were coded for argumentation behaviors, and measures of persuasion—post-discussion *agreement* and pre- to post-discussion *change* in rankings—were calculated.

Transcripts were coded for Claims, Questions, Reasoning Activity, Convergence Markers, and Disagreement-Relevant Intrusions. Proportions were calculated to control for differences in conversation length, and the mean proportions of each category were compared between cultures. Results revealed that Chinese participants (N = 28) utilized proportionally fewer Claims than U.S. participants (N = 32) (M = .11 vs. M = .18, $p < .001$), more Reasoning Activity (M = .15 vs. M = .09, $p < .05$), fewer Convergence Markers (M = .18 vs. M = .32, $p < .001$), and more Disagreement-Relevant Intrusions (M = .07 vs. M = .04, $p < .001$). Convergence Markers were negatively correlated with measures of persuasion (*agreement*: $r = -.307$, $p < .05$; *change*: $r = -.518$, $p < .01$).

These findings suggest that Chinese and U.S. students may work differently on collaborative tasks in the classroom. Chinese partners, giving more of their reasons and stating openly more of their disagreements, may work harder to achieve intersubjective understandings of an instructional task. U.S. partners, stating more claims and more convergence, may negotiate with each other to complete an instructional task but maintain their individual understandings. In intercultural pairs, Chinese students may find that U.S. partners use statements of convergence more than expected and that these statements do not indicate genuine agreement. U.S. students may find that Chinese partners persist in tasks until genuine agreement is achieved and use more direct argumentation in terms of reason giving and disagreements than expected. Additionally, students working in intercultural pairs may benefit from encountering different discourse practices and learning to orient their discussions to different discourse goals.

Cultural assumptions and genre expectations in professional writing: The job application package

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In both Pittsburgh and Qatar, Carnegie Mellon professional writing students produce a job application package (i.e., résumé and cover letter). In an effort to help the students connect more effectively with their audiences, instructors encourage students to take a rhetorical approach to the assignment by bridging the goals and values of their prospective employer with their own qualifications. This approach is commensurate with the writing process supported by authors of leading professional and technical textbooks (many of whom are rhetoricians themselves), who urge students to analyze the audiences, purposes, and contexts of their communications (Anderson, 2003; Burnett, 2004; Gurak & Lannon, 2004; Lannon, 2002; Lay et al., 1999; Markel, 2004). What is unclear, however, is how students' own cultural assumptions and genre expectations (which may differ from the Western and, in particular, U.S. conventions outlined in the textbooks) guide their analyses, and how these assumptions and expectations shape and constrain their documents. These issues are particularly pertinent to the Carnegie Mellon professional and technical writing community, which is both culturally and linguistically diverse, and includes many students who seek career options outside their home country.

This study explores the intersections of cultural assumptions, genre expectations, and résumé and cover letter writing among Carnegie Mellon students in two ways. First, I analyze the extent to which the aforementioned professional writing textbooks address résumé and cover letter writing in the global context, as well the rhetorical genre conventions they privilege. Second, professional writing students from both Pittsburgh (both NES and NNES) and Qatar will be surveyed regarding their own assumptions about the form and function of these documents, and what struggles they encountered in constructing them. Student samples serve as the backdrop to their arguments. Results are discussed in terms of current linguistics research on cross-cultural issues in professional writing genres (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; 2000; Connor, 1996; Swales, 1990; 2004), as well as seminal works in rhetorical genre theory that explore how novices use available rhetorical resources in genre writing practice (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko, 2002; Freedman, 1994; Miller, 1984; 1994). Discussion will include how we can better help our students juggle competing cultural and generic assumptions, as well as how we can incorporate more intercultural themes into our professional writing curricula.

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