

## **L2 Writing and L1 Composition in English: Towards an alignment of effort**

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Beverly Anne Baker

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[See table of contents](#)

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#### Article abstract

In North American university contexts, the language diversity found in English mainstream composition (“L1”) classrooms resembles more and more that found in ESL (“L2”) writing classrooms. As these two groups become less differentiated, those specifically trained in L2 writing might well wonder whether the needs of the non-native speakers of English are acknowledged and addressed in the mainstream classrooms. The author examines several different theoretical constructs that have informed and continue to inform the literature on L1 composition pedagogy, demonstrating that some of these allow for the inclusion of linguistically diverse groups better than others. Fortunately, the recent turn to social and critical approaches to teaching composition reflect well the preoccupations of both L1 and L2 writing teachers. More and more attention is being paid to discussions of “linguistic diversity,” a term which now includes non-native speakers. This suggests a future convergence in the activities of instructors of L1 and L2 writing, leading to benefits for linguistically diverse groups.

# L2 WRITING AND L1 COMPOSITION IN ENGLISH: TOWARDS AN ALIGNMENT OF EFFORT

BEVERLY ANNE BAKER *McGill University*

**ABSTRACT.** In North American university contexts, the language diversity found in English mainstream composition (“L1”) classrooms resembles more and more that found in ESL (“L2”) writing classrooms. As these two groups become less differentiated, those specifically trained in L2 writing might well wonder whether the needs of the non-native speakers of English are acknowledged and addressed in the mainstream classrooms. The author examines several different theoretical constructs that have informed and continue to inform the literature on L1 composition pedagogy, demonstrating that some of these allow for the inclusion of linguistically diverse groups better than others. Fortunately, the recent turn to social and critical approaches to teaching composition reflect well the preoccupations of both L1 and L2 writing teachers. More and more attention is being paid to discussions of “linguistic diversity,” a term which now includes non-native speakers. This suggests a future convergence in the activities of instructors of L1 and L2 writing, leading to benefits for linguistically diverse groups.

RÉDACTION L2 ET COMPOSITION L1 EN ANGLAIS :  
VERS UNE HARMONISATION DES EFFORTS

**RÉSUMÉ.** Au sein des universités nord-américaines, la diversité linguistique des classes ordinaires de composition anglaise (« L1 ») ressemble de plus à plus à ce que l'on retrouve dans les classes de rédaction ALS (« L2 »). Au fur et à mesure que les différences de ces deux groupes s'atténuent, les intervenants formés spécialement en rédaction L2 pourraient fort bien se demander si les besoins des personnes dont la langue maternelle n'est pas l'anglais sont reconnus et pris en compte dans les classes ordinaires. L'auteure examine plusieurs constructions théoriques différentes qui ont étoffé et continuent d'étoffer la littérature sur la pédagogie de la composition L1, démontrant que certaines permettent une meilleure inclusion des groupes ayant des profils linguistiques différents que d'autres. Heureusement, le récent virage favorisant des approches sociales et critiques de l'enseignement de la composition reflète bien les préoccupations des professeurs de rédaction L1 et L2. De plus en plus d'attention est apportée aux discussions sur la « diversité linguistique », un terme qui englobe maintenant les personnes dont la langue maternelle n'est pas l'anglais. Cette situation donne à penser qu'il y aura une convergence dans les activités des professeurs de rédaction L1 et L2, qui entraînera des avantages pour les groupes de divers profils linguistiques.

## INTRODUCTION

As a university instructor in English academic writing for non-native English speaking students in Québec, my job has been to prepare students for the type of composing that they will be expected to perform in other university settings. In this way, I have seen myself as “a means to an end,” engaged in an insular activity, but hoping to develop links in my class to my students’ other university classes. However, I have often felt that I was unaware of the future experiences of these non-native English (“L2”) speakers as they leave their specialized ESL writing classrooms and confront university (“L1”) writing. I am using the terms “ESL students/writers” and “L2 students/writers” to refer to international students from many countries, first and second-generation immigrants to Québec who spoke or learned French rather than English upon arrival, and francophone Québec citizens writing in English. English may very well be a third or fourth language for these students. These terms, therefore, are admittedly used for convenience. “L1” is generally used here for groups that consider their first or strongest language to be English.

My own ignorance about the expectations and demands of L1 composition instructors is matched by unfamiliarity with their approaches. In my own formal training in the fields of TESL and applied linguistics, I never came into contact with L1 composition instructors. We have been streamed very differently and trained according to very different theoretical constructs and pedagogical goals (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). Yet the language diversity that composition teachers face in today’s university classrooms is every bit as real and challenging as that of specialized ESL teachers (Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC], 2001). (For a more detailed discussion of the “division of labour” of composition studies and ESL writing, see Matsuda, 1999.)

My primary questions are these: As the students of L1 and L2 instructors become less distinguishable, are teaching goals and activities aligning? Do our differing backgrounds as instructors make a difference? How well are the needs of the non-native speakers of English acknowledged and addressed in the mainstream classrooms now that linguistic diversity has become the mainstream?

These questions can be addressed by examining the theoretical positions taken by L1 English composition teachers and English departments – the positions that inform their instructional approaches with their diverse clientele. My examination therefore begins with an overview of several theoretical approaches that have informed (and continue to inform) composition instructors to varying extents over the last few decades. This is done from my L2 perspective; that is, with a view to how these approaches can serve the needs of those from non-English linguistic backgrounds that were not

traditionally served by higher education in North America. This overview is not exhaustive but does include several major and influential theories still debated within L1 composition circles.

After this exercise, I discuss the increasing amount of support for and interest in L2 issues in the L1 literature, occurring as teaching practice is becoming more informed by social-constructivist and critical perspectives. Indeed, in the most recent discussions of the state of rhetoric and composition theory, this critical perspective is undeniable.

This more sympathetic theoretical environment means an acknowledgement of the unique challenges and contributions of students who have English as a second or additional language. This acknowledgement is found both in the L1 composition literature and more formally in North American educational policy statements. In the early literature on composition pedagogy, ESL students were hardly mentioned, and if they were, they were treated as having a learning impairment or other deficit. Later, these students were grouped with students of non-mainstream English dialects as part of the discussions then referred to as “language diversity.” These discussions were heavily dominated by issues of class and socio-economic status. Now, language diversity includes multicultural and multilingual diversity more explicitly, and this topic holds an integral rather than a perfunctory place in L1 composition literature. Matsuda (1999) states that with the professionalization of ESL writing in the 1960’s, nascent interest in ESL writing by composition teachers started to decline. The cause of this decline was the transfer of ESL student issues to the acknowledged ESL specialists. However, Matsuda’s statements were made nearly a decade ago, before many changes that now suggest a blurring of these lines. For example, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) put forth its Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers in 2001, and the CCCC has a committee on second language writing apart from its committee on diversity.

As stated above, my first task was to better understand the training that L1 English composition instructors receive in North America, and what theoretical constructs inform this training. While it is true that teachers of writing can be found in any discipline, and that writing instructors clearly come from varied backgrounds with varying amounts of preparation, I will concentrate on English Departments, where the majority of English composition classes are taught (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2006). Then I will discuss the gradual incorporation of L2 perspectives in the L1 composition literature, coinciding with the social-constructionist turn in the social sciences. In my final section I will discuss my hopes for the future of composition instruction in other disciplines.

## A BRIEF HISTORY – WHERE CAN ESL STUDENTS “FIT?”

### *Classical rhetorical theory*

Classical rhetorical theory is the ancient ancestor of current rhetorical tradition, and its historical study has enjoyed a resurgence of interest starting in the late 1970's and early 1980's (Villanueva, Swearington & McDowall, 2006). The utility of this study for modern composition research has been subject to debate. At first glance, it does not seem to be the place to look for possibilities of inclusion for cultural variety (or gender variety for that matter). As S. M. Halloran notes (cited in D'Angelo, 1978), classical rhetoric strived for the embodiment of the ideal man of the culture. These ontological assumptions are questionable in a modern multicultural society. Villanueva, Swearington, and McDowall (2006) mention that a great deal of criticism has been levelled at pedagogies based on classical models, which have often been dismissed as elitist. However, these authors also point out that although classical Aristotelian rhetoric may face this criticism, there is a revival of the work of the sophists that seems less problematic:

A revival of the concepts of the Greek sophists introduced historical bases for teaching many of the principles of contemporary critical language theories.... [T]he sophists also were compared with many outsider groups in subsequent periods, individuals and groups whose discourses were shunned by dominant and elite cultures. As symbols of subverting dominant and hegemonic discourses, the sophists also became discursive models in composition courses focused on social and political critique. (p. 173)

Increased emphasis on critical approaches form a major part of composition research today. Even older theoretical models such as classical rhetoric, which at first seem completely incompatible with a social/critical viewpoint, are being re-examined from this very viewpoint.

### *Psychological/cognitive approaches to composing*

The cognitive process theory of Flower and Hayes (1981) is a treatment of cognitive “universals” in the writing process. Discussions of the writing process, concentrating on cognitive characteristics of novice writers, dominated composition literature for a time (Durst, 2006). Are these ideas useful in the instruction of ESL learners? The cognitivist approach is critiqued by Patricia Bizzell (1992), among others, who is concerned with the lack of consideration of the social environment in the creation of text.

Inner-directed theorists further claim ... that the universal, fundamental structures of thought and language can be taught.... In contrast, outer-directed theorists believe that universal, fundamental structures can't be taught; thinking and language use can never occur free of a social context that conditions them. (Bizzell, 1992, p. 216)

Moss and Walters (1993) contend that psychological models are incompatible with diversity. By assuming culturally-neutral cognitive processes, a more

serious possible consequence is that those who do not produce writing in this manner might then be seen as being cognitively deviant or deficient. According to Durst, the limits of this approach (as it was originally conceived) have been reached and even Flower herself has continued her work by further elaborating the social dimensions of writing (see Flower 1989, 1994). Flower (1989) decries the treatment of cognition and context as a dichotomy. In her view, the conflict is imagined and can be replaced by an interactive theory which accounts for both forces, where “both cognition and context may in a sense construct one another” (p. 287). Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2006) see cognitive-based approaches continuing in tandem with socially-based critical approaches, also not seeing the two as mutually exclusive (see Canagarajah, 2001, for a more thorough discussion of the applicability of each of these approaches to multilingual students).

There are still current attempts to apply cognitive models to today’s multicultural writing classrooms in North America. For example, Williams’ 2003 book *Preparing to Teach Writing: Research, Theory and Practise* is a text for future instructors of academic English writing. Williams’ pedagogical advice for the multicultural classroom consists of suggesting that mainstream and non-mainstream students be taught in the same way, concentrating on the “universals of language, learning and mind” (p. 254). In his discussion he separates “pedagogical” issues from “political” ones. This is the exact point at which we can contrast this approach with a more socially-directed one, where one would say instead that there are no “apolitical” decisions in teaching and that all “universals” should be questioned.

Williams sees the same goal for both ESL students and speakers of non-mainstream English dialects: an abandonment of native languages (and dialects) in favour of an eventual “leveling” towards Standard English. It becomes very clear in the text that Williams sees bilingual and bi-dialectal models as untenable. He seems resigned to, or at the very least, ambivalent about language shift, stating that language and dialect prejudice is a simple reality and resistant to change.

Williams’ text, which is used in the training of English composition teachers in the United States, is currently in its third edition and is popular, according to the author (p. xiv). This means that the views expressed could be influencing the views of many English composition teachers in the US regarding linguistic diversity. Current reservations about the applicability of cognitive “universals” are not mentioned. This is not to say that an examination of cognitive processes involved in writing may not be useful, but an uncritical acceptance of unchanging and unchangeable universals means there would be no motivation on the part of writing instructors to better understand those of minority language backgrounds, or to ever consult research on cross-cultural writing (seen as an urgent need by Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999; see also Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 1996). Many writing instruc-

tors, no matter what their background, would refuse to accept the idea that multilingual students should simply “integrate” the academic mainstream unquestioningly (see Canagarajah, 2001; Benesch, 2001).

### *Expressivist pedagogy*

Expressive pedagogy, which began in the 1970's, can conceivably take into account the “expressions” of speakers of multiple languages because of its preoccupation with the true and the authentic (see Elbow, 1973), giving value to the student's individual voice (no matter what language it happens to be in). Expressivist textbooks emphasize writing as a personal and private activity (Berlin, 1982), and “[subvert] teaching practices and institutional structures that oppress, appropriate or silence an individual's voice” (Burnham, 2001, p. 23).

We see here a parallel with the ideas of feminist and critical pedagogy in an acknowledgement of the varying amounts of power all interested parties bring to the writing process. However, the main concern of expressivist pedagogy is individual expression, not a struggle against this existing power structure. As Williams (2003) notes, this approach has been heavily criticized for being irresponsible, as writing is also social tool, not merely a tool for self-actualization. As a means of expression for the marginalized (such as non-native writers), it has its limitations as it does not look at language as an instrument for social change. The basic assumptions of expressivist pedagogy have also been criticized in the context of cross-cultural writing (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). This approach assumes an individual identity and voice that may not mesh well with cultures that have a more interdependent social basis; that is, with cultures that downplay individual expression in favour of larger community membership.

### *Writing across the curriculum*

The 1980's and 1990's brought the “writing across the curriculum” (WAC) movement, which has a parallel in the L2/applied linguistics literature as “English (writing) for academic purposes” (see Canagarajah, 2001 and 2002 for discussions of the similarities). Both of these traditions start with the attempt to identify and precisely define discourse communities and how to learn to write to effectively “get things done” in these communities (McLeod, 2001). A critique of this movement is that it suppresses politics and de-emphasizes how students can become agents of change in their own communities (Williams, 2003).

What is the benefit of this movement to L2 students? At first glance, it doesn't leave room for a problematization of the discourse community itself. This is of utmost interest to non-native speakers of English and anyone concerned for them. If those with diverse language and cultural backgrounds were never a part of the creation of academic disciplinary communities, and

cannot change them, all they can do is change themselves and adapt. This might mean having to subvert or compromise membership in other cultural communities in the process (Canagarajah, 2002; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). However, Benesch (2001) presents a “critical English for academic purposes,” which includes a “rights analysis” in addition to EAP’s traditional needs analysis. A rights analysis builds in ways for participants in the EAP classroom to develop and challenge the class requirements.

### *Socially-constructed approaches and critical theory*

Smagorinsky, in his overview of the last 20 years of research on composition theory (2006), notes that the questioning of scientific objectivity and the influences from researchers in fields such as educational psychology (such as Vygotsky) and sociolinguistics led to an increase in the value of qualitative studies of composing and a greater attention to “the social and cultural bases of literacy” (p. 12): “Indeed, one might argue that the scientific orthodoxy of composition research prior to the 1980’s was joined, if not displaced, by a cultural and poststructural orthodoxy lasting through the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 12).

This theoretical framework seems adaptable to the inclusion of the needs of L2 students: To benefit non-native English writers, a theoretical framework is needed which is A) “outer-directed” (to take Bizzell’s term); that is, takes the social nature of writing into account, and is B) “inner-directed” or sensitive to individual needs. With the social-constructionism of the early 80’s we see something that is suitable from the point of view of people from diverse linguistic as well as cultural backgrounds: “Because this was the first serious encounter between composition and multiculturalism, social constructivists tried to respond directly to many of the conflicts and questions facing teachers in writing classrooms that reflected a demographic reality” (Severino, Guerra, & Butler, 1997, p. 4). At this point we begin to see multicultural and multilingual diversity taking a greater place in the discussions of composition research and pedagogy.

The beginnings of critical writing pedagogy as such can be traced to the development of critical discourse analysis, where it becomes acknowledged that no discourse (including written discourse) is politically neutral (see Van Dijk, 1985). Critical discourse analysis is more than an *acceptance* of wider social realities. Discourse both reflects and plays a role in *changing* those realities (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). In Norman Fairclough’s work *Language and Power* (2001), he states that one of the primary goals of the field of critical discourse analysis is to make people aware of “the widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance and change of social relationships of power” (p. 1). In this light, the university English department is therefore a reflection of and a contributor to the unequal power relations between mainstream and non-mainstream groups. Berlin (1996) reminds us that English teachers are also “gatekeepers,



influencing decisions about who will succeed to higher levels of education and greater degrees of prosperity” (p. 177), and that “[a] college curriculum is a device for encouraging the production of a certain kind of graduate, in effect, a certain kind of person” (p. 17).

Despite the suitability of this framework to the preoccupations of L2 writers, they are rarely referred to in the first critical discussions on composing. At first, “language diversity” in the literature on critical English composition theory and pedagogy seems to refer only to the use by students of non-standard English dialects. Later, speakers of other languages are included with such all-encompassing terms as “students of other linguistically diverse backgrounds” (Farr & Daniels, 1986, p.1). The reason for this trend could be that, in the United States, the term “language diversity” was first associated with its use in certain controversial language policies of the CCCC. These language policies were put in place because of a focus on the class and socio-economic inequalities that were reflected between speakers of mainstream English dialects and non-mainstream ones, such as African American English (see Berlin, 1996; Williams, 2003; Smitherman & Villeneuve, 2003).

The strongest example of such a policy was *Students’ Right to their Own Language*, a 1974 resolution by the CCCC’s Language Policy Committee that was primarily aimed at describing the English dialects of less privileged groups in the United States. It was a strongly polarising document (and still is) as it took a view of linguistic pluralism that would be considered extreme even by today’s standards. Bidialectism was dropped as a goal, in favour of promoting total equality and acceptance of all dialects. Opponents accused the CCCC, despite its good intentions, of actually dooming linguistic minorities to failure and shirking their responsibility to provide students with the linguistic tools to enter the English-speaking mainstream (with all the economic benefits it is perceived to afford – see Smitherman & Villanueva, 2003, for a more thorough discussion of this context). However, a conservative backlash in the 1980’s was dominated by the ideology of English monolingualism in American educational policy – evidenced by the spread of the “English Only” movement (Smitherman, 2003). This movement gave rise to an atmosphere where linguistic equality and diversity is sometimes viewed unfavourably even today.

However, this statement was made before the advent of “student-centred” approaches that have become second nature to educators in the present day. It could be seen as ahead of its time – a pioneer in a paradigm shift (Smitherman, 2003) that is still occurring, and where many instructors accept that language is socially contingent. So despite the backlash, this statement could still be seen as a precursor to other critically-informed approaches in the US.

Although non-native speakers are mentioned in these documents and in the literature of the time, they are more of an afterthought. Smitherman and Villanueva (2003) take a look back at this resolution and its consequences in the field, including the voices of many of the members of the committee that drafted it. Although this work mentions non-native speakers of English often, we are reminded in the foreword that “this isn’t a book about the teaching of English as a foreign or second language” (Canagarajah, 2003, p. 5). The focus at the time was the battle for speakers of linguistically marginalized varieties – those members of society who were also among the most economically marginalized.

Within the North American context, there are important differences between the United States and Canada during this time. In Canada in the 1980’s, a bilingual model was alive and well as immersion programs spread throughout the country. The work of Cummins & Swain (1986) espoused the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism, and there was (and still is) no “English-only” movement to speak of. In the United States, economic disparities correlating with speakers of different dialects of English led to the creation of the term “language diversity” in the literature and the calls for recognition of this diversity by national organizations such as the CCCC and the National Council of Teachers of English. In comparing Canada and the U.S., a complicating factor may be a difference in attitudes towards university education in Canada compared the the US, where it is seen as a “right” and where twice as many high school graduates enter university as in Canada (see Brookes, 2002, for US–Canada comparisons in this context). This fact may contribute to greater disparities of socioeconomic class in the U.S. college system. So is attention being paid to multilingual students in the Canadian context? In the absence of many Canadian studies of academic writing contexts, one might still speculate that the environment was and is at least as sympathetic as its southern neighbour in incorporating multicultural perspectives into writing pedagogy, especially considering the absence of these more conservative political attitudes and policies regarding language diversity in the United States. However, more study of this unique context is necessary.

By the 1990s in the United States, scholars such as Moss and Walters (1993) observe that language diversity is no longer simply a question of class. Their work challenges the fundamental assumptions of having one correct view of academic literacy. In a direct contrast to Williams (2003), Moss and Walters claim that academic literacy is not “universal” in any sense. They take a sociolinguistic approach (which they term the “pedagogical conversation”) and view language as identity construction or modification. They insist that no pedagogical moment is “neutral,” meaning teaching is never free from underlying assumptions of how language should be appropriately used: “each display of knowledge is a possible locus – a point in real time

and social space – at which diversity may play itself out before our eyes” (p. 142). Their conclusion is that – contrary to Williams – language shift is an untenable position, not only undesirable but unnecessary, and that teachers must acknowledge that most people want to (and can) exist in several linguistic and dialectal groups at the same time. The common goal can still be Standard English as the desired dialect in academic settings, but with an inclusion of the students’ own rich and valid cultural backgrounds.

This relativist and constructivist position is reflected in Richard-Amato & Snow (2005), where L2 researchers present advice on multicultural issues for mainstream teachers. In this book, we see the introduction of concepts that those from the applied linguistics tradition have taken for granted for decades. For example, their discussion of the connection between bilingual proficiency and academic achievement is received knowledge in the ESL community in North America (see Cummins & Swain, 1986). This work and others like it (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Fox, 1994; Hamp-Lyons, 1995; Leki, 1992; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Silva, 1993), aim to reduce ethnocentricity in dealing with language diversity in the classroom.

## **L2 WRITERS FIND THEIR OWN VOICE: A PROGRESSION IN THE L1 LITERATURE**

As stated previously, the issue of non-native speakers was not always integral to texts on English composition. If discussions of L2 learners existed before the 1990’s, they were generally in separate texts devoted to students outside of the linguistic mainstream. (Matsuda [1999] even discusses how some institutions in the 1950’s sent ESL students to speech clinics, as if they had speech defects!) Recent published literature on L1 composition still shows evidence of this “deficiency” theory, but there is also promising evidence of an integration of L1 and L2 issues.

Authors in the field of composition are sometimes at a loss as to where to “put” discussions of speakers of other languages in their textbooks. In Williams (2003), there is a chapter on “non-mainstream students” which is about equally divided between issues with non-standard-English-speaking students and ESL students. The author still assumes a similar low socio-economic status for both “LEP” students (Limited English Proficient) and non-standard dialect students. This is at a time when the majority of the academic community already sees these groups as distinct (and two years after the CCCC resolution officially stating the distinction – see CCCC, 2001).

Even in 2005, we still see perceptions of deficiency in the discussion of students with cultural and linguistic differences. In the fifth edition of *Creating Literacy Instruction for all Students* (Gunning, 2005), discussions of English language learners are still, inexplicably, in the same chapter as discussions of economically disadvantaged students and those with learning disabilities

such as ADD. These learners clearly form part of an all-purpose classification of “anomalous cases,” set apart from “proper” discussions of composition.

Luckily, at the same time there are texts where native speakers receive their own individual treatment, and are not just included under all-encompassing rubrics such as “problem writers.” This more individualized treatment is found in texts that have embraced a more social constructivist approach. For example, White, Lutz, and Kamuskiri (1996) give an overview of the beliefs, assumptions, perspectives and demands of several principal interest groups concerned with writing assessment in higher education in the United States. This work is a synthesis of the preoccupations of critical writing assessment before that term became popular. Only one chapter specifically discusses non-native writers, but this is one more than had generally been seen in collections of this type previously, and these writers are discussed in terms of their difference rather than their deficit.

Severino, Guerra, & Butler (1997) embrace today’s multicultural realities in the composition classroom. Notably, their text includes a critical overview of the studies that compare the writing of non-native English and native speaking writers (Silva, 1997). In this overview, Silva states that this is the first step towards a model of differences that could enhance any theory on English composition. Silva stresses that “a credible general theory of writing must be based on more than research on the writing of native English speakers” (p. 216).

In Bloom, Daiker & White’s 2003 text on the future of composition studies, several chapters take a decidedly critical approach. Min-Zhan Lu’s contribution, “Composition’s word work: Deliberating how to do language” is the most outspoken. She challenges those who speak of active, student-centred learners and commitment to diversity in the classroom, but who still exercise “the tyranny of linguistic imperialism” (p. 207) in practice. This practice begins with the unquestioned idea of students as passive consumers of the standardized rules of the gatekeepers of academic domains. She does not argue that students should not learn these standardized rules but that they should be given the right to discuss and challenge what these rules can and cannot do within their own (legitimized) purposes. (Recent texts in the same vein that target classroom practitioners as well as researchers include Leki, 1992; Johns & Sipp, 2004; Boyd & Brock, 2004; and Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005). Russel K. Durst (2006) writes on the present state of writing research at the postsecondary level. He also identifies the current trend towards the “internationalization of composition studies” (p. 99). This includes the presence of non-native English speakers not just as students of composition but researchers and contributors to the literature. Language diversity (in this case explicitly including ESL diversity) is acknowledged by almost every author of this text. Durst also notes the influence of critical theory in current research activities in rhetoric and composition.

*Critical studies comparing L1 and L2 writers*

The L1 composition literature has done more than just acknowledge linguistic diversity. Recent studies have been undertaken from a more critical perspective looking at L1 and L2 students in mixed settings such as those found in the modern North American writing classroom. Some of these specifically take the perspective of the student writer, while others triangulate data by incorporating contributions from document resources and instructor/administrator informants.

Johns (1991) discusses the specific case of an ESL student who repeatedly fails a high-stakes written competence examination, despite succeeding well in the writing of his subject matter courses. This leads to a questioning of the culturally specific nature of this exam, and the conception of academic writing competence it assumes: "We owe it to our culturally and linguistically diverse students to recognise the values that permeate our tests and to decide which of these values are basic – and which are not – to determining writing competency" (p. 396). Leki and Carson (1997) use direct interviews with students as part of their analysis comparing the writing tasks of mixed L1/L2 composition courses, ESL writing classes, and academic courses. Braine's 1996 study reveals disquieting reports of intolerance of the ESL students who choose mainstream rather than ESL writing classes (Braine, 1996).

Janopoulos (1992) compared the relative tolerance of errors by various university faculty. Half of the time faculty were told they were reading ESL errors and the other half they were told that the errors were made by native speakers. In general, Janopoulos found that, at least in classroom settings, errors were treated more severely when the readers believed that the writers were native speakers. The author then suggests that this does a disservice to ESL learners when testing time comes, creating a double standard.

Ruetten (1994) looked at holistically-scored writing proficiency exams, comparing ESL students and native English speakers. Her results showed that the ESL students typically fail this exam in much higher numbers but very often passed the appeals process, where a dossier of representative writing work during the semester was evaluated. She then discusses the benefits of portfolio assessment for all students, as better reflecting the complex nature of academic writing. In addition, she believes that non-ESL trained faculty should be trained in evaluating ESL error during this scoring to help to avoid overemphasis on surface errors. Hamp-Lyons (1991) also points to strong visceral reactions to the low-level surface errors of ESL students by raters in university writing exams, and in a later work (Hamp-Lyons, 2004) warns of the disservice holistic scoring may do to ESL students in particular.

## A FUTURE DIRECTION: COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS AS INFORMANTS FOR WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

English composition instructors and ESL writing teachers can speak with one voice when their concerns are the same: In 2001, the Executive Committee of the CCCC approved the *Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers* (HYPERLINK "<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/level/coll/107645.htm>" 2001). This statement was also endorsed by the TESOL (Teachers of English as a Second Language) Board of Directors at their February 2001 meeting. It includes guidelines on the creation of mainstream writing programs that can best serve the needs of an increasingly multilingual, multicultural clientele. In this current climate we also see the birth of scholarly journals in English such as *Assessing Writing*, which began in 1994 and includes all discussions of writing assessment regardless of location or language being studied.

It is no longer only ESL writing teachers who have the experience and empathy needed to help multicultural, multilingual students in their negotiation of the North American academic context. English L1 composition instructors can now be employed to defend the interests of these students and challenge the instructors of other disciplines to re-think their notions of appropriate academic discourse.

Fishman & McCarthy's work (2002) reflects an approach which demonstrates this new awakening of instructors in all disciplines to the specific needs of non-native speakers. The book is written jointly by a composition instructor (McCarthy) and a philosophy instructor (Fishman). Fishman was perplexed by the conflicting goals and unexpected behaviours of a few of his students (including an ESL student). Instead of dismissing these students as unworthy of university studies or of his attention, he asked himself what *he* might be missing in not understanding their seemingly idiosyncratic writing performance. To do this, he turned to the tools of critical theorists such as Freire and Dewey, and to the expertise of McCarthy, who had a much greater experience with a diverse clientele in writing.

This approach to understanding language diversity is encouraging in three ways: first, the content instructor realized that even though he was not a composition specialist he could not ignore the need for training in dealing with the writing of diverse linguistic groups. Second, he recognized that critical theory provided the tools he needed to deal with the new types of writing he found. Finally, he maintained an open dialogue with a composition instructor who, although not technically specialized in ESL, was in a perfect position to defend these students' contributions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The most common depiction of the college composition instructor in published work over the last 15 years is as a critical teacher. (Durst, 2006, p. 92)

My initial question was whether L1 and L2 writing instructors had the same concerns regarding linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In a partial response to this question, it is clear that issues of linguistic diversity are integral to any discussion of the future of university level academic composition.

Sociocultural and critical theories are a framework by which composition instructors can engage with their multilingual and multicultural students. This does not mean, however, that all ESL writing instructors agree or take a critical approach. In fact, it has been suggested by Canagarajah (2001) that L2 writing teachers may be even more positivist and less critical than their L1 composition counterparts. Therefore, my argument has not been about how L1 composition instructors can become “more like us” as L2 instructors, but what approaches work best in addressing this clientele and whether L1 composition instructors have embraced them. As university composition instructors become more influenced by critical theory, they may be in a perfect position to teach us, the L2 instructors who supposedly specialize in this clientele.

Critical awareness for all university instructors means that we can all recognize that language communities are far from static, and can be changed from within. We could see the role of the teacher as “a mediator [...] ensuring that no code, including his or her own, goes unchallenged” (Berlin, 1996, p. 131). Previous theoretical constructs, although beneficial and fruitful in many ways, cannot effectively answer many questions instructors are asking regarding linguistic and cultural diversity in the writing classroom.

It remains to be discovered whether this ontological and epistemological shift translates to useful techniques in our university writing classrooms. However, instructors are certainly less likely to see L2 students as a “problem” or an “anomaly.” The tools exist to better recognize and respect these students’ unique contributions to the changing academic writing landscape. It is still a very new direction, but a critical framework would allow all instructors of all disciplines to ask how we can appreciate diversity and evaluate it not in terms of problems but in terms of how language diversity (as one of many diversities) benefits our classrooms.

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BEVERLY A. BAKER is a PhD candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, at McGill University in Montreal. Her research interests include second language writing and assessment, critical applied linguistics and critical language testing (CLT), and English in North American university contexts. She has also taught ESL and EFL for more than twelve years, both in Quebec and abroad.

BEVERLY A. BAKER est une candidate au doctorat du Département d'études intégrées en éducation à la Faculté de l'éducation, de l'Université McGill. Sa recherche porte sur la rédaction dans une langue seconde et l'évaluation d'une langue seconde, la « linguistique appliquée critique » et l'« évaluation des connaissances linguistiques critique », ainsi que l'anglais dans les universités nord-américaines. Elle a également enseigné l'anglais, langue seconde de même que l'anglais, langue étrangère pendant plus de douze ans au Québec et à l'étranger.