

## 6 Research on Transfer in Studies of Second Language Writing

As an interdisciplinary field that bridges applied linguistics, composition, and TESOL, second language (L2) writing is unique in its study of transfer. In distinction to adjacent fields in linguistics that mainly study speech, L2 writing examines the relationship of writing to L2 learning, often the learning of standard forms of academic English. In many classrooms, monolingual ideology renders communication in English into an unmarked norm. Thus, language—as a kind and a medium of transfer—can become invisible. Studies of transfer in second language research not only serve as a reminder that language is an ever-present element of the transfer act, but also offer ways to re-see different aspects of the transfer of writing knowledge.

In the study of transfer in L2 learning, a focus on writing offers different perspectives than that of speech: writing can be a slowed-down activity and may involve more intentionality than speech; writing by definition produces artifacts to be studied; writing can support learning and the reflection on learning activities often promoted in transfer research; as an expressive form, writing is wound tightly with identity and voice; writing, especially the texts and activities studied in composition and TESOL, is very much caught up in pedagogical, assessment, and institutional mandates and is thus imbued with power and consequence. These unique facets shape a transfer research agenda that at its best seeks an intentional, reflective, and socially situated understanding of how multilingual writers transfer their literate

knowledge as they write across assignments, classrooms, disciplines, institutional norms, and countless ways of being an L2 writer.

Therefore, the study of transfer in L2 writing is truly complex: it traces the movement of writing knowledge among learning contexts *and* among languages, even as it considers how multiple cultural, educational, and linguistic traditions come to bear on the possibility of transfer. Scholars in L2 writing pursue these complexities in order to understand how language diversity complicates the transfer of writing knowledge and how to best support the linguistically diverse writers who navigate these complexities when they compose. Researchers and teachers want to know why their multilingual students write the way they do. And writing scholars studying transfer increasingly call for an expanded and nuanced understanding of the role of language(s) in writing transfer (DasBender, 2016; Donahue, 2016; Lorimer Leonard & Nowacek, 2016; McCall, 2016).

The transfer research reviewed below shows that, indeed, the role of language as well as culture has been treated with increasing nuance for the last few decades. Across this chapter's sections, the concepts of "culture" and "language" have, in a way, lost their edges. As variables that may impact writing transfer, they are treated as multiplicities more fluid than bounded, and more ongoing than finite. Nevertheless, many grounding questions in the study of transfer in L2 writing show a tension in how researchers view the role of linguistic or cultural background in writing. Are the differences instructors perceive in their students' rhetorical patterns, stance, word choice, or organizational structure "interference" from writers' other languages or are they simply evidence of second language acquisition in process? Are writers' deviations from standard English mistakes or errors, or are they creative choices of mixing or meshing across their full linguistic repertoires? When writers engage in transfer are they actively "linking" writing knowledge across languages or is their prior knowledge simply "haunting" them (Cozart et al., 2016)? Because responses to these questions may be "both," L2 writing transfer research has set out to understand the dimensions of these choices—not just *that* language learners make choices among languages when they write, but why they do, how those decisions occur across contexts, and what the consequences or outcomes are of their transfer attempts for their learning and academic success. In the end, the chapter shows that as the concept of language has become more diffuse and research questions have become more

precise, several complicating factors remain that researchers of transfer in L2 writing have yet to settle, namely the extent and impact of writers' awareness, intentionality, and agency during the act of transfer.

Transfer in L2 writing has been approached through the lenses of several fields, each with different mandates, contexts, goals, and questions. For example, research influenced by TESOL or applied linguistics addresses audiences concerned primarily with language transfer in writing activities, often at the sentence-level, carried out by students who are in the process of acquiring academic English. Transfer research influenced by composition and rhetoric is interested in the practices of multilingual college writers and tends to move beyond the sentence level to consider rhetorical strategies and writing processes. Across these ongoing conversations, some studies follow the skills students transfer among languages, while others examine what teachers should do to facilitate students' transfer among learning contexts. Thus, one could enter L2 writing research from the point of view of units of analysis (type of knowledge transferred; writers' perceptions of transfer), participants studied (student writers; instructors), or curricular or programmatic innovations (genre-based writing instruction; general skills instruction).

But in fact, as James (2008) notes, when it comes to tracing how writing transfer occurs among languages and classroom contexts, "similarity and difference are relative notions" (p. 79). Transfer "tasks that seem different from one angle," he says, "may seem similar from another angle" (p. 79). Because it is a concept that is "highly-situational, context-dependent" and perhaps "unsuited to broader generalizations," research in this area is a challenge to catalogue (DasBender, 2016, p. 277). Is it possible to tease apart the contextual, cultural, linguistic, rhetorical, and educational angles from which to view transfer? The research reviewed below generally does not keep these elements distinct, but instead asks local or language-specific questions while acknowledging that the elements above are inextricably connected. This body of research primarily seeks to understand the activities, perceptions, or conditions that support or inhibit transfer, keeping in mind the unique pressures of cognitive load, cultural multiplicity, and institutional and social stakes that L2 writers also negotiate.

This chapter identifies several themes that organize how scholars in L2 writing have made sense of the phenomenon of transfer: (1) students' writing and rhetorical activities, (2) instructional and curricular

design, (3) the role of genre, and (4) the impact of identity. Such an organization highlights both what is there in the research—how scholars have navigated the issues—as well as what is implicit—the transfer concerns that appear in L2 scholarship whether scholars set out to study them or not. These sections are meant to help readers become familiar with the scholarly conversations readers might enter as they ask questions about transfer in their own research and teaching.

### INFLUENCES FROM SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Within second language writing, research questions, methods, and findings are shaped by epistemological orientations to the languages that writers are transferring from or among: namely whether these languages are separate, connected, or fused systems. These epistemologies have roots in longstanding research on language transfer in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Although applied linguistics, broadly, is interested in issues of language transfer, SLA's focus on acquisition assumes a transformation of linguistic knowledge, which in turn requires at the least a consideration of the phenomenon of transfer. Studies of language transfer investigate how linguistic knowledge moves from native to target language(s). But within SLA scholarship, the relationships among the elements of language transfer—traditionally a source L1, a language construct, and target languages—are differently conceived along a spectrum of complexity. The brief review of these relationships below shows the range of epistemological patterns from SLA that studies of transfer in L2 writing have followed.

#### *Interference*

In early research on language transfer, SLA scholars wanted to understand how language constructs (syntactic, phonetic, morphological, semantic, lexical) from an L1 interfered with the acquisition of an L2. Scholars sought to understand obstacles to the acquisition process, focusing on moments when languages were not successfully acquired and isolating their sources. Research suggested that when learners transferred constructs among languages that were similar (in syntax, morphology, etc.), the transfer, called “positive transfer,” was less noticeable; when learners transferred constructs among less similar languages, transfer was visible and was deemed “negative transfer,” what

might, in writing, appear as an error. Studies largely used contrastive analysis (Lado, 1957) to determine similarities and differences in many pairs of source and target languages. Thus, early transfer was closely associated with language error, wherein evidence of transfer was understood to be interference of the L1 into the target L2 (Gass & Selinker, 1992; Selinker, 1969, 1972; Weinreich, 1953). Negative transfer was considered interference into the process of acquisition, leading to the terms interference and transfer often being used interchangeably. This early orientation to transfer as interference, and interference as error, is remarkably durable throughout studies of language transfer in speech or in writing, remaining in recent studies of transfer in writing. In particular, an understanding of transfer as interference from a source to target language guides L2 writing scholars to look for transfer in writing as text, product, or outcome, rather than in writing as vehicle or phenomenon of transfer in itself.

### *Cross-Linguistic Influence*

More recently, SLA research has sought to understand the influence of similarities or differences between, rather than the interference of, a target language and any other acquired language. As Jarvis (2016) explains, SLA scholars moved from researching transfer as an independent variable to treating transfer as “a dependent variable worthy of investigation in its own right, with its own set of independent variables” (p. 18). Scholars Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986) suggested that the term *cross-linguistic influence* might move the study of language transfer beyond behavioristic and deficit connotations. They describe transfer as “those processes that lead to the incorporation of elements from one language into another” (p. 1), while Odlin (1989) defines transfer as the “influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. 27). The word *influence*, it was thought, would stress the interplay among an L1 and L2, or earlier and later acquired languages, as well as the bi- or multi-directional movement of language elements, in that a target language can also influence the source language, which has been called variously the L2 effect, or the reverse or backward transfer of an L2 on an L1 (Cook, 2003; Helfenstein, 2005; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Pavlenko, 2000; Pavlenko & Jarvis, 2002). According to these scholars and others, cross-linguistic influence is the most widely used

term in SLA to describe L1–L2 relationships, although the term *transfer* is sometimes still used interchangeably with it. Research on cross-linguistic influence also has looked at the differing influences—of levels of proficiency, literacy skills, or source language—of an L1 or L2 on the acquisition of an L3, or the other way around, finding bi-directional influences among all three languages, or tracing how third-language acquisition differently reuses language constructs from an L2 or L1 (Alonso Alonso, 2016; Cenoz, 2009; Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; De Angelis, 2007; Jessner et al., 2016; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013; Murphy, 2003; Tsang, 2016).

### *Multicompetence*

SLA scholars have pointed to problems in both of these epistemological orientations. Language transfer conceived of as (one-way) interference or as (multi-way) cross-linguistic influence are both “export” models that treat the language learner as a mover of inert language knowledge from one discrete language to another (Larsen-Freeman, 2013; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). SLA scholars suggest that this three-point movement—source, language construct, destination—not only concretizes often fluid phenomena but also has several theoretical shortcomings. For example, communication can spring from concurrent or simultaneous use of multiple languages of varying proficiencies. And sometimes languages fade, not because they have been transferred elsewhere but because of time passing or a learner’s waning interest. In other words, acts of transfer are more volatile than those depicted as static language constructs moving laterally from one concrete context to another. Therefore, SLA scholars also have proposed theories that can conceptualize language transfer as a fluid and holistic phenomenon.

For example, Cook (1992) proposed the term *multicompetence* to describe language knowledge as a multi-directional system promoting dynamic interrelationships among languages of various proficiencies. Cook (2016) defines multicompetence as “the overall system of a mind or a community that uses more than one language,” extending its scope to any other known languages, including interlanguages (p. 2). Influenced by dynamic systems theory and like other theories of bi-, multi-, or translanguaging that treat repertoires as holistic systems of interaction (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Grosjean, 1989; Larsen-Freeman, 1997), multicompetence describes a linguis-

tic complex of relationships rather than a sum of two monolingual parts. In terms of transfer, such an approach allows SLA researchers to consider, as Cook (2016) says, the ways that “transfer is not about the acquisition of new knowledge or behavior . . . but about the rejigging of existing knowledge or behavior into new configurations” (p. 33). Contemporary studies of language transfer operating with a multicompetence frame seek to understand interaction of all languages of varying proficiencies in a linguistic repertoire. Such studies redirect “attention to what students do rather than to what they don’t do,” turning researchers’ analysis toward what is happening and why rather than what has gone wrong and why, or reconsidering what is there that might be missed because the transfer act has transformed it (Larsen-Freeman, 2013, p. 108).

Researchers studying transfer in L2 writing are influenced by these epistemological orientations, designing studies to understand how writers transfer activities from one separate language to another, across connected languages that mutually inform each other, or within a holistic language repertoire. As hopefully is clear in the brief review above, these distinctions fall along a spectrum, not into three tidy groups. Importantly, these brief summaries of decades of research are not presented as a progression from the naïve to the accurate. Although chronology plays a role, the order of the orientations above does not imply that the most recent thinking is the only or most frequently used thinking on the myriad issues of language transfer.

The epistemological stances toward second language acquisition described above locate second language writing studies of transfer along a spectrum of epistemologies. On one end, languages are treated as separate, enumerated entities, which guides researchers to look for evidence of transfer of writing skills from a native to a target language. Many of these studies originated in conversations in contrastive rhetoric, laying the groundwork for conceiving of transfer at all in L2 writing (e.g., Connor, 1996; Kang, 2005; Kaplan, 1966, 1967, 1987; Simpson, 2000). These studies primarily understand transfer as the movement of writing or rhetorical knowledge from one language or place to another. On the other end of the spectrum, studies operate under assumptions of multicompetence, leading researchers to look for transfer activities writers enact using their linguistic repertoires. Most studies of transfer in L2 writing exist somewhere in between, or even move from one to the other in the process of a research project.

However, because these epistemological distinctions reveal different compasses with which scholars navigate a study, such a spectrum can show how transfer in L2 writing has been differently conceived.

## WRITING AMONG LANGUAGES

L2 writing scholars study the role that writing and rhetorical activities play in the transfer of writing knowledge. The section that follows reviews studies that investigate how L2 writers transfer writing and rhetorical activities—practices or conventions of organization, argument, voice, process, and revision—along the epistemological spectrum sketched above. This section's review proceeds along this epistemological spectrum, from considerations of transfer as one-way L1–L2 movement to examinations of transfer as writing activities springing from a unified, holistic language repertoire.

### *Writing and One-Way Transfer*

Studies of writing knowledge transfer in L2 writing that began in a conversation loosely identified as contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966) operated on several assumptions: that students from similar language backgrounds are conditioned by cultural conventions that might conflict with English language discourse conventions; that mastery of writing skills on organizational or rhetorical levels can be measured through grammatical proficiency; that L1 language ability affects the quality of content in an L2 or decision-making behaviors in L2 writing; that writing in an L1 is comparable and thus has explanatory power about writing in an L2; that insights about an L1 can be perceived in a standard academic English college essay written by a multilingual writer (Al-Ali, 2006; Berman, 1994; Carson & Kuehn, 1992; Connor, 1996; Cumming, 1989; Gosden, 1998; Johns, 1993; Kang, 2005; Kaplan, 1966, 1967, 1987; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Kubota, 1998; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Odlin, 1989; Simpson, 2000). In these studies, transfer is conceived of primarily as a linear phenomenon that moves one way, from an L1 to an L2, which is most often English. As Kubota (1998) notes, in looking for the influence of L1 cultural rhetorical patterns on English language writing, contrastive rhetoric assumes that culturally unique rhetorical conventions exist that can be generalized, named, and followed across languages or contexts (p. 69).



For example, Berman's (1994) study of 126 secondary EFL students in Iceland examined how essay organization skills were transferred between Icelandic and English. Grouping three instructional approaches—L1 essay instruction, L2 (English) instruction, no instruction—he looked for differences in pre- and post-intervention organization and grammatical proficiency scores. Berman concluded that students did transfer organization skills from Icelandic to English, showing that the groups with instruction improved regardless of language of instruction. He highlighted that instruction on a particular skill was a more powerful enabler of transfer than was language or grammatical proficiency in that language. While some research continues to position the L1 as a problem to be overcome in pursuit of standard academic English writing, most research pursuing one-way transfer activities adopts a complex understanding of the “dynamic” factors influencing transfer beyond cultural or rhetorical norms (Matsuda, 1997). For example, researchers include considerations of grammatical proficiency (Berman, 1994; Cumming, 1989; Wolfersberger, 2003), educational experiences with writing (Cozart et al., 2016; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Kubota, 1998; Mohan & Lo, 1985), L1 literacy (Carson & Kuehn, 1992; Mohan & Lo, 1985), and student characteristics, motivations, and intentions (Cozart et al., 2016; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008). Even with inclusion of these dynamic factors, by and large these studies proceed from the assumption that writing or rhetorical knowledge is being transferred one-way, among separate language entities.

Writing and rhetorical activities explicitly designed to raise meta-linguistic awareness play an especially important role in high-road, or conscious and effortful, transfer of writing knowledge (DasBender, 2016; Figueredo, 2006; Matsuda, 1997; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Sersen, 2011). For example, Figueredo notes that transfer may be a “conscious, strategic approach” occurring through meta-linguistic abstraction when students relate L1 meta-linguistic skills to ESL spelling skills (p. 893). Sersen claims that helping student writers become “consciously aware” of the “specific aspects” of the L1 that would “appear to affect their English writing products in a direct and negative way” is a kind of meta-linguistic awareness that might mitigate negative transfer (p. 341). Matsuda notes that teaching “ESL students” to write should be considered a method of “raising ESL students’ awareness of various factors” involved in writing, including text arrangement and readers’ expectations for that arrangement (p. 56). He argues that L2 organiza-

tion is not always the use of prescribed cultural patterns conditioned from the L1 or imposed by L2 teachers, but is instead a conscious “process of complex decision making” and “understanding of the dynamic nature of the context of writing” (p. 56). DasBender similarly suggests, reporting on two case studies of international multilingual writers in first-year writing courses, that asking students to reflect on the English language experiences in their literacy histories raises a metalinguistic awareness that helps them more intentionally choose writing strategies they had successfully used in past struggles with English-language writing assignments (p. 274). DasBender finds “sufficient evidence” in her results to claim that the “extent of their metacognitive awareness of linguistic and rhetorical differences in writing” plays a “critical role in their development as multilingual writers” (p. 273). To capture the effects of meta-linguistic awareness, such research proceeds from a dynamic understanding of transfer activities, but nevertheless frames awareness as a finished result or outcome of a one-way transfer act.

#### WRITING ACROSS BI-DIRECTIONAL TRANSFER

L2 writing research on transfer also studies how writing and rhetorical knowledge moves among connected languages, considering transfer activities that occur “cross-linguistically and bi-directionally” (Gort, 2006, p. 346). For example, Kubota’s (1998) study of the negative and positive transfer of rhetorical style between Japanese and English was premised on the possibility of negative transfer or interference from students’ L1, Japanese, but its findings moved away from generalizations about Japanese or English and toward the decisions of individual writers. Kubota researched the expository writing of 46 Japanese college students who had studied English for at least eight years in Japan in order to understand how their L1 and L2 interacted in the composing process. Student participants in her study wrote on the same topic in both languages twice, one week apart. She evaluated the location of the main idea and macro-level rhetorical patterns in essays together with survey and interview data. The study’s results revealed the nuance of L1 to L2 transfer of writing ability: students who had more experience writing in their L2 produced higher quality essays than students who had more L2 English education. Kubota suggested that this is because English language education focuses on isolated sentence-level concerns, which affected the control over vocabulary and syntax

in the L2 essays. Thus, she concluded that students' essay organization that teachers find puzzling may be less a phenomenon of negative L1 transfer and more a factor of little experience with academic L1 writing (p. 88).

Ultimately, Kubota's findings incorporate transfer factors as expansive as those found in Matsuda's (1997) dynamic model of L2 writing, which moves beyond cultural, educational, and linguistic influences to include "variations within his or her native language (i.e., dialect) and culture (i.e., socioeconomic class), his or her knowledge of the subject matter, past interactions with the reader, and the writer's membership to various L1 and L2 discourse communities" (p. 53). Kubota notes, for example, that simply sharing a language background did not lead her research subjects to write in a similar way. Instead, the "students use various organizational patterns" from an L1 with "certain intentions" in their L2 writing (1998, p. 89). The presence and interactivity of these dynamic influences in Matsuda's model and Kubota's conclusions challenge the discrete, one-way, and negative assumptions about how transfer of writing knowledge works among languages.

Building on previous research like Kubota's, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2008) focused on university entrance essay exam instruction to study how writing skills transfer bi-directionally across Japanese and English. They investigated the influence of four types of writing instruction—intensive writing in L1 and L2; intensive writing in only L1; intensive writing in only L2; none in either language—on 28 Japanese students' L1 (Japanese) and L2 (English) exam writing strategies, especially in organizational use of structure and discursive markers. Using textual analysis and post-essay student interviews, Kobayashi and Rinnert concluded that instruction did affect how students approached their exam writing. As students constructed texts in either language, transfer "occurred in both directions," with student interviews showing that students called on both of their languages as sources of knowledge about organization and discursive norms. Thus, Kobayashi & Rinnert (2008) reinforced Berman's (1994) finding that explicit instruction affects the transfer of writing knowledge but extended his findings to show that L1 writing instruction supports writing choices in the L1 and L2, and that instruction that stresses the interaction of an L1 and L2 in writing "led to greater effects" in students' writing than the training that focused on the languages alone or separately (p. 20).

Gort's (2006) research on emergent bilingual first graders in a Two-Way Bilingual Education (TWBE) program's writing workshops details early writers' cross-linguistic transfer that is relevant even for college writers. Gort's intensive data collection and analysis (see p. 333) looked for moments of "positive literacy application" such as strategic lexical codeswitching to connote "unique cultural constructs" (Perez, 2004), or the use of "interliteracy," the application of language-specific elements of literacy among languages (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1992). Importantly, "when the children began writing in both languages, they employed the majority of their writing-related behaviors and skills cross-linguistically and bi-directionally" (p. 346). Gort claims that these writers developed two written language systems at once by "applying what they knew about writing in one language to the other language" (p. 346). So while transfer of emergent literacy skills was contingent on the stage of biliterate development, the proficiency of interlocutors, and the literacy context, skills transferred when young writers could draw on their "dual language knowledge as they searched for ways to express themselves about things that mattered to them" (p. 341). For Gort, authentic motivation is at the root of the potential of transfer, even for L2 writers early on in their literacy development.

### *Writing with Holistic Language Repertoires*

Another group of L2 scholars studies transfer as a phenomenon among interconnected and mutually informing languages with "soft boundaries" (Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2007). Such research operates from a set of assumptions that are primarily holistic: that transfer processes are general to writing rather than language specific and draw on shared writing knowledge across languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011); that the writing knowledge of multilinguals is distinct in its "multicompetence" from that of monolingual writers (Cook, 2003; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012); that what appears to be negative transfer or "interference" in writing might be evidence of positive transfer or writers intentionally negotiating meaning (Canagarajah, 2006); that literacy knowledge gained in one language is an asset (rather than an interference) that serves as a foundation and facilitates literacy learning in another (Cummins, 1981, 1991). Taken as a whole, this line of thinking moves beyond monolingualism—languages as singular and

separate—to approach the transfer of writing knowledge as a relational phenomenon (Canagarajah, 2011; Ortega & Carson, 2010).

Researchers who study multilingual writing activities treat transfer as a rhetorical activity that can “co-exist” in multiple languages at once, frustrating the simple tracing of writing knowledge from one language to another (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013). For example, Kobayashi and Rinnert’s (2013) longitudinal case study examines how one Japanese multilingual writer developed her L1 (Japanese), L2 (English), and L3 (Chinese) writing multicompetence over two and a half years. The researchers analyzed student texts, text-based interviews, and observations to trace “multi-directional interactions” among the student’s languages. They concluded that her transfer of writing knowledge was affected by dynamic factors such as proficiency, prior writing knowledge, imagined audience expectations, and perceptions about writing conventions, leading “boundaries [to] become blurred among both the textual and the linguistic features in the three languages” (p. 25). Specifically, Kobayashi and Rinnert found bidirectional lexico-grammatical transfer between the writer’s L1 (Japanese) and L3 (Chinese), and the transfer of process-based composing activities from the writer’s L2 (English) to her L1. Because the study was designed to capture multiple dimensions of writing development, Kobayashi and Rinnert were able to capture a multi-dimensional understanding of writing transfer as well.

Studies of codemeshing also draw on holistic notions of language transfer. For example, Canagarajah’s (2006) study of a scholar’s bilingual academic writing argues that multilingual writers call on rhetorical strategies from multiple languages simultaneously, on purpose. Working against monolingualism, in which successful writing is the error-free performance of writing in a standard, single language, he proposes a negotiation model that recognizes how writers shuttle among their languages to negotiate and achieve social meaning (p. 602). Canagarajah’s 2011 study of a student writer interacting with peer and teacher feedback proposed four types of code-meshing strategies in academic writing—recontextualization strategies, voice strategies, interactional strategies, and textualization strategies—that he traced in one student’s academic writing. Canagarajah concludes that “what may appear as grammatical deviations or idiomatic novelties are explained as a positive case of transfer from the other languages in one’s repertoire rather than a negative case of interference” (p. 402).

Canagarajah's taxonomy of codemeshing strategies is significant for its situating of transfer in the social negotiation among writers rather than in an individual writer's competence. Further, it initiates the agency of negotiation with the student rather than the teacher. In fact, Sánchez-Martín (2016) argues that codemeshing, itself, is evidence of transfer of writing knowledge, as written evidence of students' negotiation of their full repertoire of resources. She follows Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi (2008) and Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) to frame codemeshing as a "boundary-crossing" strategy that shows how writers "connect in meaningful ways their prior knowledge (on writing, languages, modalities) to new writing situations" (45). This is because, she says, codemeshing is evidence of multilingual writers explicitly negotiating and then re-adapting their writing knowledge.

### INSTRUCTIONAL AND CURRICULAR DESIGN

In L2 writing, transfer also has been treated as a curricular phenomenon. Many studies in L2 writing examine how students transfer writing strategies and skills from ESL or EAP courses to other college courses, often finding missed transfer opportunities between general and disciplinary courses (Currie, 1993, 1999; Gosden, 1998; James, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Johns, 1988, 1993, 1995; Leki, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997; Snow, 1993; Snow & Brinton, 1988; Spack, 1988, 1997; Swales, 1984, 1990; Tardy, 2009; Tedick, 1990; Zamel, 1995; Zamel & Spack, 2006). These studies often seek to understand the purpose of an ESL or EAP writing requirement by examining instructional design that supports transfer from one class context to another. Researchers tend to follow two lines of thinking in their conclusions. One suggests that first-year courses should work on general writing skills like revision or voice (e.g., Spack, 1988) while the other promotes conceptual or genre-based activities that might prepare students explicitly for specific disciplinary courses (e.g., Currie, 1993; Johns, 1995).

Several large-scale studies find students experiencing a disconnect between the rhetorical context of their EAP courses and the audience, purpose, and content knowledge of their disciplinary discourse communities (e.g., Hansen, 2000; Tardy, 2009). Spack (1988) anticipates this concern in her review of nascent writing in the disciplines approaches in first-year writing, which she frames in light of what she calls

a “problematic trend” in teaching disciplinary preparation in first-year courses. She sets preparation for disciplines in opposition to a humanities focus, saying disciplinary instruction can be overly formulaic and lacking in depth (p. 46). She suggests instead that first-year courses continue to teach general skills like the writing process, writing from sources, and working with data: “general inquiry strategies, rhetorical principles, and tasks that can transfer to other course work” (pp. 40–41). Conducting a longitudinal study to support her initial review, Spack (1997) studied the reading and writing strategies of one ESL student over a three-year period in order to understand how the student’s skills learned in the ESL program transferred to her disciplinary courses. Spack analyzed student and instructor interviews, classroom observation, and texts from ten of the student’s courses across three disciplines. Spack found that there was no guarantee of application of learned writing knowledge in new situations. She argues that while the student “benefited significantly” from her first-year ESL courses, the general skills strategies learned in those courses—e.g., paraphrasing and quoting—were not taken up when writing about increasingly complex content. In this way, Spack’s research added important caveats to her earlier aversion to disciplinary writing: “academic skills are not fixed” and “can be understood only within specific contexts,” including the context of first-year writing (p. 50).

Currie (1993) challenges Spack’s earlier (1988) work and others who advocate teaching general writing skills by following Swales (1984, 1990) and Johns (1990) to focus on the explicit teaching of disciplinary discursive norms to support transfer. Currie promotes teaching disciplinary “conceptual activities” to support EAP students’ disciplinary socialization. In a precursor to Carter’s (2007) concept of meta-genres, Currie (1999) describes a sequence of student activities in which students record the disciplinary values they observe and collect by interviewing an instructor: kinds of question-posing, the values around writing and knowledge-making in the discipline, and visual representations of knowledge. In studying students’ experiences of these conceptual activities, Currie finds that transfer was more likely when students could build a conscious awareness of disciplinary expectations prior to using them in writing (p. 340). She notes that in terms of transfer, “what might be perceived as writing problems are, in fact, difficulties with the conceptual activities required to write” (pp. 340–341).

Leki (1995), on the other hand, claims that an EAP curriculum shouldn't teach discipline-specific forms but should teach whatever best prepares students to *acquire* discipline-specific forms. Leki and Carson (1994) undertook a large-scale survey of students' perceptions (n=77) at two institutions in order to understand "how well ESL students are able to use what they have learned from our writing classes in their writing tasks across the curriculum" and which elements best transfer to students' disciplines (p. 82). Admitting the limitations of surveys that seek students' perceptions of instruction that is often implicit—simply modeled rather than explicitly taught—their findings remain helpful for understanding students' writing knowledge transfer among curricular contexts. For example, 77% of students felt adequately, well, or very well prepared for disciplinary writing, a perception that their final grades supported. Survey respondents commented that they found instruction in process strategies most helpful (35%) and argument or analytic development least helpful (13%). On the other hand, when asked which writing and language skills students used in later courses, respondents inverted their priorities and listed rhetorical skills first with process skills last, which Leki and Carson interpret as a desire for more language fluency under the time pressure of disciplinary writing.

In a follow-up study, Leki and Carson (1997) examine this seeming inversion by focusing on 27 ESL students, interviewing them at the beginning and end of an academic year. The student interviews reveal the central point that writing classes require more personal writing than writing from source texts. The study found EAP students responding to source texts, but without responsibility for the content, which Leki and Carson argue does not prepare students for disciplinary course's expectations for responding to source content. They suggest an important disconnect regarding transfer: the writing in EAP courses is focused almost entirely on the how—clear writing no matter the accuracy of content—while content courses use writing to demonstrate comprehension of the what—accurate and understood content. Leki and Carson argue that EAP courses must give students practice in learning and grappling with ideas in their writing (pp. 61–62). They conclude that their earlier puzzling inversion—students' perceptions of being prepared more for process than language fluency but using and wanting more of the opposite—is not students' misplaced focus on



sentence-level concerns but rather their desire to direct cognitive energy toward the intellectual demands of their disciplines (1994, p. 92).

While Leki and Carson's research sought breadth in students' perceptions, Leki's further qualitative research accomplished depth by focusing on the experiences of five ESL students' "coping strategies" as they move from ESL to courses across the curriculum. In seeking to understand how an EAP curriculum could best prepare students for disciplinary discourses, Leki (1995) identified ten coping strategies reported in interviews by students, some of which focus on interference (relying on past writing experiences) and others that frame students' prior knowledge as useful for transfer: "students came to their studies in the US with a battery of well elaborated strategies for dealing with the work they would face here" (p. 253). Leki notes that these transfer strategies might occur implicitly because participants did not explicitly comment on anything they learned in ESL classes when discussing their writing in disciplinary courses (p. 255). She thus recommends that instructors actively seek out and support students' existing strategies in order to best facilitate their transfer.

Finally, James's extensive research agenda on transfer (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2012) has pursued specificity in understanding curricular articulation. Based on a 2006 study that showed how writing transfer from ESL to other courses was shaped by the subject matter that students wrote about, his 2008 article sought to understand how both subject matter and task similarity/difference influence the transfer of writing skills. Like Leki and Carson's early research, this work focuses on how students' perceptions of task affect transfer between ESL writing courses and "tasks outside the classroom" (p. 76). In other words, James (2008) asked not how subject matter itself affected transfer—how writing about globalization in both an ESL and environmental studies course might affect transfer—but how students' *perceptions* of writing about globalization in both contexts affects transfer. James asked 42 students to complete an out-of-class writing task and subsequent reflective interview, and then analyzed both in terms of transfer. He found (a) that learning transfer did occur between the class writing assignment and out-of-class task, but (b) that transfer was more frequently described and seemingly carried out when students perceived the writing tasks to be of similar difficulty levels (p. 92). Because James found that task difference had less of an impact on transfer than students' understanding of that difference, he

concludes that *perception* of writing task difference matters more for transfer than actual difference in the task.

## THE ROLE OF GENRE

Genre as a writing and rhetorical practice of L2 writers is a major line of thinking in scholarship on transfer in L2 writing. (Cheng, 2007; Gentil, 2011; Parks, 2001; Tardy, 2006, 2009) and genre-based writing instruction (GBWI) (Fishman & McCarthy, 2001; Gosden, 1998; Hyon, 2001; Johns, 1988, 1995, 1997, 2011; Johns et al., 2006; Mustafa, 1995; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011). Findings indicate that genre-based pedagogies can support the transfer of writing knowledge when they explicitly raise students' awareness of textual form and function (Hyland, 2003, 2016). Swales (1984, 1990) laid the groundwork for this line of inquiry by developing text-based genre analysis. Much genre inquiry in L2 writing follows Swales' (1990) understanding that "genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (p. 58). Some studies pursue this understanding of genre by tracing the transfer of writing knowledge across genres, or by looking for the replication of genre conventions between an L1 and L2 as evidence of transfer. Other scholars use a Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) framework to focus on the transnational and multilingual transfer of writing-related knowledge (Coe, 2002; Coe et al., 2002; Rounsville, 2014). Scholars investigate genre, and its context-dependent, recurring nature, in order to understand wide-ranging questions about transfer, including about the sociocultural contexts of genre transfer, the institutional conditions that allow the transfer of genre knowledge, or the pedagogies that help L2 writers draw on their prior genre knowledge across multiple languages (Gentil, 2011).

For example, Hyon (2001) conducted interviews with eight L2 writers in a genre-based EAP reading course to understand the effects of this pedagogy. Collecting interviews one year after the course was taken, Hyon traced the extent to which four genres—journalistic news story, feature article, textbook, research article—were useful in students' later course requirements and personal interests. Interviews also asked participants what they remembered about the genre instruction as well as their perceptions of how the genres taught had shaped their reading in English. Hyon noted several lasting features of the pedagogy including a "rhetorical sensitivity" that participants suggest-

ed transferred from reading instruction in course genres to their reading in general. Interestingly, even though the course was focused on reading, several participants noted that components of genre instruction, like text organization in research articles, “transferred positively to their academic writing abilities” (p. 431).

Discussions of genre in L2 writing pay special attention to pedagogical concerns. For example, a 2006 commentary section of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* focused on experts’ understanding of the state of genre studies (Johns et al., 2006), in which many contributors’ “take” on genre in L2 writing was implicitly related to issues of transfer, as in Coe’s “culturally typical structure that embodies a socially-appropriate strategy for responding to varied situations” (p. 245). Others explained how explicitly teaching genre in L2 writing courses might support transfer, helping students “anticipate” new rhetorical situations (Reiff, p. 240) or explicitly examine the conventions that shape these situations (Bawarshi, p. 244) in order to lay the groundwork for transfer (Tardy). All contributors admit that teaching with genre or for genre transfer is especially complex in ESL writing, in that L2 writers are grappling with multiple cultural, rhetorical, educational and linguistic perspectives at once (Tardy). These scholars believe that critically engaging L2 students in these complexities may help mitigate the potential for genre analysis to replicate social relations that disadvantage L2 writers (Hyland, p. 241).

Johns (1988, 1995, 1997, 2011) has especially sought to understand how genre-based instruction in ESL writing courses facilitates transfer to content courses. Across her work on genre, she describes how EAP instructors use classroom and “authentic” genres (those that serve clear communicative purposes) to support the transfer of writing knowledge. Challenging a formulaic approach to teaching the writing process, Johns describes a curricular innovation that she calls a “transition package” for students who might benefit from additional English language support in the general education courses (1995). By attaching “adjunct” English language courses, or labs, to general education courses, students benefit from extra time discussing study skills as well as the implicit discourses of their disciplinary content courses. Students are exposed to disciplinary assumptions about speaking, argumentation, and knowledge claims that shape the genres students work with. Ideally, the lab situates students in an “investigative” or “ethnographic” role toward implicit disciplinary genres, which in turn

heightens students' awareness of genre conventions and the likelihood of knowledge transfer. To help students avoid replicating only classroom genres, Johns recommends that instructors make clear the "connections and possible transfer of skills among all academic genres" (1995, p. 283). She suggests integrating classroom and authentic genres in portfolio assessment and classroom reflections to allow students to understand differing disciplinary purposes for writing, to be open to styles that depend on situation, and to analyze differing audience expectations in general (p. 289).

Johns (2011) helpfully builds on Hyon's (1996) categories of genre approaches—(1) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1978); (2) English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Swales, 1984); and (3) Rhetorical Genre Studies (Miller, 1984)—to consolidate four main instructional problems or questions that persist in GBWI. Johns first points to the issue of text naming—whether genre means text type and whether naming that type is an effective pedagogy. According to Johns, text naming asks students to identify textual structure, rhetorical mode, and grammatical or lexical elements in order to identify similar structural patterns across their languages or courses. Text naming is an ongoing issue in GBWI because it may support students' memory of text types but lose the social context that give these types meaning. At its best, Johns says, text naming incorporates SFL's link between genre pattern and genre purpose—between structural pattern and the social motive or action that makes the genre meaningful in a specific context (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). Johns points to Bhatia's (2002) use of genre in discourse communities and Hyland's (2003) focus on explicit genre instruction as instructional guides to keep text naming linked to specific reading and writing communities.

The second GBWI issue that Johns (2011) says crosses SFL, ESP, and RGS genre theory is genre acquisition vs. genre awareness. Following Macbeth (2009), Johns defines genre acquisition as non-reflective genre learning that may only accomplish low-road transfer; genre awareness then includes explicit instruction in and student reflection on genres' rhetorical purposes and contexts, which can support the high-road transfer that allows for students' genre adaptation in new contexts (Flowerdew, 2011; Hyland, 2011). Johns identifies pedagogy, itself, as the third GBWI issue, pointing to decisions about instructional focus, including the extent to which teachers should teach dis-

ciplinary values around genres. Johns suggests that for novice students with lower L2 proficiency, instructors start with pedagogies that focus on text types and then move into the complexity of disciplinary values. Finally, Johns identifies the fourth issue in GBWI as the role of hegemony and ideology around certain genres. Following Luke (1996), Johns highlights the tension around genres that require “assimilation” or “accommodation”—the timed essay, for example—as adhering to the status quo of disciplinary power structures.

Tardy’s (2006) review of studies of genre also is relevant to transfer in L2 writing because the gap she locates to justify her review is lack of attention to genre transfer. More specifically, the gap is a lack of studies that follow the same L2 writers across multiple settings to understand their genre learning. She looks across 60 empirical studies that investigate how writers learn genres in order to understand how the movement of genre across domains is relevant to learning. Tardy categorizes her reviewed studies into (1) practice-based settings, how genre-based knowledge is developed without instruction in disciplinary, educational, or workplace practice; and (2) instructional settings, how genre knowledge is built through explicit or implicit classroom instruction. In the category of practice-based contexts, Tardy synthesizes findings that include: drawing on experience and practice in genre learning; oral interactions with peers and experts in building genre knowledge; interacting with text in learning genres; composing strategies; instruction and feedback; transferability and conflict; dimensions of what genre knowledge entails; mentoring; and individuality and identity. In the category of instructional contexts, Tardy synthesizes findings that include: influence of prior experience and exposure on genre learning; textual modeling; explicit instruction; transferability and conflict; and dimensions of genre knowledge. Tardy argues that neither category contains studies that fully explain how learners transfer genre learning to other domains (p. 91), or fully investigate the impact of explicit genre-based teaching approaches like genre analysis or ethnography like those advocated by Johns above (p. 97).

On the topic of transfer, Tardy (2006) finds in her review that both practice-based and instructional studies stress the difficulties of transferring skills among rhetorical situations like workplaces (Smart, 2000) due to differing disciplinary genre expectations. Tardy notes that conflicts among student, peer, and professor expectations seem to impede writing transfer; but conflicts also highlight the pivotal role

of students' perceptions of task authenticity in transfer (p. 92). Tardy focuses on Parks' (2001) longitudinal study of francophone nurses in their first year of work at an English-medium hospital as an example of a study that does trace genre learning across practice *and* instruction domains. Because Parks links domains through nursing care plans, a genre explicitly taught in school and then used at work, she is able to trace changes in nurses' use of this genre across domains and over time. Parks finds that discrepancy among school and work genres did not drastically impede nurses' learning. Instead, nurses were able to quickly adapt the genre according to workplace demands and collaboration with colleagues, with the nursing care plans eventually resembling workplace rather than classroom forms. Importantly, Tardy notes that transfer of genre knowledge is not "exclusively an L1 or L2 issue" in that writers and readers struggle to transfer knowledge no matter their language background (p. 95). Studies of genre learning with L1 or L2 writers differ most in their consideration of how factors such as "race, class, and gender, as well as linguistic, ethnic, and cultural background" impact oral interactions and the extent to which access to peer and teacher conversation supports genre learning (pp. 95–96).

Work that takes these factors into account includes Gentil's (2011) literature review that forwards a biliteracy perspective on genre research. Gentil aimed to "untangle" research on genre, writing, and language, using a biliteracy perspective—how bilingualism shapes the cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of reading and writing (Hornberger, 2003)—to examine how L2 writers develop genre expertise across their languages. Such crosslinguistic movement is an issue of transfer for L2 writers: if writers' genre knowledge in one language has a "common underlying proficiency" (Cummins, 2000) with another, "the more it may be acquired in one language and used in another" (p. 7). Gentil's review groups several findings regarding the transfer of genre knowledge: (1) L2 writers are not "conditioned by linguistic codes" but instead have "superior rhetorical savvy" due to their transfer of genre knowledge among codes (p. 17); (2) some discourse communities have preferences for the languages used to accomplish a genre while other communities have the same genre expectations no matter the language; and (3) genre expertise for L2 writers means they can "draw on their whole repertoires of genres and rhetorical strategies across languages strategically" (p. 19). Summarizing these points,

Gentil (2011) concludes that the genre preferences of discourse communities are “not linguistically determined,” that is, one language does not condition only certain genre activities (p. 18). Instead, L2 writers develop expertise by transferring genres across (rather than staying within) their languages and recognizing which contexts will validate their genre innovations (p. 10). In the review’s pedagogical implications, Gentil concludes that L2 writers can be guided to identify and draw on their crosslinguistic genre knowledge.

## IDENTITY

Researchers studying transfer in L2 writing also consider how elements of identity shape the transfer of writing knowledge. Because identity is mutually constitutive with language, writerly identities are bound up in the languages writers are composing among; for many writers labeled L2 or ESL, cultural or sociopolitical aspects of their identities become particularly salient when they enter a writing classroom, sometimes heightening feelings of outsider status or non-native foreignness (Johnstone, 1996; Matsuda, 2015; Norton, 2000). Therefore, transfer in L2 writing is infused with identity concerns (Cozart et al., 2016; Elon statement, 2016). The research reviewed in this section recognizes that L2 writers bring to classrooms lifetimes of experiences with previous English-language instruction and seeks to understand how these experiences complicate or support students’ writing transfer.

Because scholarship in L2 writing often seeks better understandings of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of student writers, such scholarship promotes the validation of these backgrounds to support transfer (Gort, 2006; Jesson et al., 2011; Leki, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1997). For example, in studying the connections between ESL students’ extracurricular and classroom writing practices, Leki (1995) argued that research needs “at once closer looks at individual students and broader looks not only at their English classes but at their lives as they negotiate their way through higher education” (p. 236). Such calls to consider student lives aims to recognize writerly identities perhaps not visible through a narrow classroom lens. These scholars also use asset rather than deficit approaches to students’ linguistic repertoires, calling for more intentional recognition of multilingual resources to help shape respectful and rigorous curricula (Cozart et al., 2016; Fish-

man & McCarthy, 2001; Harklau, 1994; Kutz, 2004; Zamel & Spack, 2004, 2006).

For example, Harklau's (1994) ethnography of four high school students transitioning from ESL to mainstream classes found a double bind in these course combinations: While mainstream courses inhibited the extended student and teacher interaction necessary to practice English and socialization skills, well-intentioned ESL courses were stigmatized, perceived by students to be too easy and remedial. The bind resulted in students not fully realizing the linguistic assets they could potentially transfer, while also not further developing their academic English. Harklau recommends integrating the aims of these courses to avoid the marginalization of ESL students. Similarly, Fishman and McCarthy (2001) find that the progress of one ESL student in a writing-intensive philosophy course was shaped by conflicts in the student and professor's interpretations of success in that course. While the professor understood this student's success in terms of written fluency in standard academic English, the student understood her success through multiple lenses including conflicting sociocultural expectations, misunderstandings of assignment genres, and an insultingly easy composition course. Fishman and McCarthy found that the student needed instruction that was respectful, relevant, and collaborative (p. 211).

Other research in L2 writing recommends better recognition of students' linguistic backgrounds to support the transfer of writing knowledge. For example, Leki (1995) identifies cultural multiplicity as a literate "strategy" that L2 student writers already use themselves. She labels the strategy: "taking advantage of first language/culture" (p. 248). Leki noticed this strategy used "in every possible context" by one of the five L2 writers she studied who struggled but who succeeded by calling on "an entire body of knowledge and experience that her classmates and even her professors lacked" (p. 248). In a study of English for Academic Purposes students, Zamel and Spack (2006) argue that an instructor's role in facilitating multilingual students' learning is to invite students to join the classroom conversation by building on their existing linguistic resources (p. 129). Zamel and Spack analyzed collected student surveys, written journals, and interviews to conclude that students "fear that linguistic and cultural difference [masks] their intelligence and knowledge" (p. 129). Zamel and Spack challenge the presumed deficiencies (or interference) caused by L2 writers' languag-



es, concluding that cultural and linguistic repertoires are a source of academic identity and authority in EAP courses. Like Johns (1988), Zamel and Spack suggest that students be taught to view each new classroom through the eyes of ethnographers, looking for the norms and routines of classroom cultures (p. 138).

Studying primary classrooms in New Zealand, Jesson et al. (2011) recommend improving writing instruction for “minoritised cultural groups” by using transfer to make culturally responsive teaching more intentional, to “incorporate the familiar and unlock the unfamiliar” (p. 73). Drawing on Bakhtin (1986) to argue for a focus on intertextuality that includes social and cultural experiences, they suggest incorporating the linguistic resources students bring to school and making clear connections across home and school literacy contexts (p. 66). In their study, an instructional focus on intertextuality supported the transfer of textual knowledge that in turn leveraged students’ culture in several ways, allowing students to (1) identify their existing knowledge of textual networks, (2) participate in textual dialogue, (3) create multi-voiced texts with intertextual histories, and (4) borrow techniques and strategies for rhetorical ends (p. 67). Jesson et al. claimed that a linear writing process (brainstorming, writing, revising), a focus on mimicry or emulation (planning, translating, reviewing), or a genre pedagogy that focuses simply on text types can miss prior knowledge that comes from what students actually read (rather than what schools think they should).

Scholars also have sought a more direct relationship between identity and transfer, isolating elements of student identity to investigate their impact on writing transfer. For example, Cozart et al. (2016) reported findings from a multi-institutional project that comprises three separate studies of L2 writing transfer held together by a focus on identities: a study of Danish doctoral students writing in English, a study of American undergraduates writing in Spanish, and a study of Chinese undergraduate students in the US writing in English. Across the three studies, the researchers examine the “possibilities and problems” identity creates in transferring writing knowledge among students’ languages (p. 300). For example, in the study of undergraduates writing in Spanish, researchers find that students understand their identities in both languages as a “static” skill but approach writing in their L2 as more physically demanding: “if L1 was driving an automatic car, L2 was driving a stick shift; if L1 was walking, L2 was

running” (p. 313). Considering results across the three studies, Cozart et al. find that student writers, both undergraduate and graduate from varying backgrounds, do connect their identities to their writing as an “inextricable link,” but they do not perceive of writing in a second language “as an opportunity to experiment with and create new identities” (p. 326). Student writers, researchers say, understand writing in a second language as an act of L1 to L2 translation rather than L1 to L2 meaning making; because their writing identity is more established and malleable in their L1, meaning is made there and then moved over (a translation kind of transfer) to their L2. For the transfer of writing knowledge, this means that fixed or static writerly identities may inhibit the *kinds* of transfer that more recent approaches to writing transfer promote or seek to understand, such as the “remix and repurpose” approach the researchers cite following the Elon Statement on Writing Transfer. Because of this, Cozart et al. suggest writing instructors more purposefully increase students’ rhetorical awareness around the phenomenon of language transfer and guide students to approach L2 writing as an opportunity not only to make meaning but also to “expand and enrich one’s identity” (p. 327). In other words, writerly identities might be better conceived as a site of meaning-making opportunity, but student writers need to be explicitly taught to recognize and make use of them.

#### PATHS FORWARD: EMPIRICALLY GROUNDED AND THEORETICALLY COMPLEX

In the progression of scholarly conversations on transfer in L2 writing, concepts central to this research—language, literacy, expertise, culture, competence—have become increasingly complex even as the research questions asked to attend to them have become quite precise. Studies increasingly aim to examine a small slice of the multilingual writing transfer phenomenon, like student perceptions of one assignment prompt in one kind of disciplinary course. Recent conversations on transfer in L2 writing also bring together increasingly disparate research foci while maintaining the complexity of contemporary scholarly approaches. For example, DePalma and Ringer (2011, 2013, 2014) propose a complex theoretical framework they call adaptive transfer. Aiming to better account for writers’ agency in adapting prior writing knowledge to new contexts, DePalma and Ringer propose transfer as

a “conscious or intuitive process of applying or reshaping learned writing knowledge in order to help students negotiate new and potentially unfamiliar writing situations” (2011, p. 135). In their formulation, adaptive transfer moves beyond students’ application of prior knowledge to the adaptation of writing knowledge in dynamic, idiosyncratic, cross-contextual, rhetorical, multilingual, and transformative ways (2011, p. 141).

In a 2013 response, Grujicic-Alatrisme argues that DePalma and Ringer’s adaptive transfer is too broad to be useful for workplace or classroom realities. She also lists the model’s theoretical components—complexity, sociocultural perspectives, power, Swales’ “instantiations”—that she believes are already accounted for in language socialization and genre theory. DePalma and Ringer (2013) respond to Grujicic-Alatrisme’s critiques that, indeed, theory building was their aim. They acknowledged her concern with adaptive transfer’s lack of applicability but resist a “neatly ordered taxonomy” of transfer’s dynamic components (p. 465). In their reply and subsequent publications on their theory (2014), DePalma and Ringer stress that writers, including L2 writers, can perform adaptive transfer on a continuum of agency with context transformation on one end and knowledge adaptation on the other (2013, p. 468).

The exchange between DePalma and Ringer and Grujicic-Alatrisme displays a common stalemate in scholarly conversation: DePalma and Ringer argue that their framework is meant to be a theoretical push forward, while Grujicic-Alatrisme asks important questions about methodology and pedagogy, critiquing the lack of specificity in an overly general model. But such tension between theoretical formulation and demand for utility can lend the energy necessary for empirically grounded and theoretically sophisticated work in transfer research (Lorimer Leonard & Nowacek, 2016). One path forward in L2 writing might focus on how methods unintentionally obscure more complex aspects of L2 writing transfer, such as crosslinguistic writing expertise or recontextualization strategies (Canagarajah, 2011). Sociocultural components that add complexity to L2 writers transfer attempts can also be explored. Much research locates frustrated transfer attempts in the student rather than in the classroom context, student-teacher interaction, linguistic bias, and institutional pressure that L2 writers also negotiate.

*Implications for Pedagogy and Methodology*

Several pedagogical and methodological suggestions can be distilled from these paths forward for study and teaching in L2 writing transfer. First, researchers and practitioners interested in language issues in the transfer of writing knowledge should consider the influential factor of proficiency, not simply “in terms of how successfully they mimic monolingual native speakers,” but as determined by the writers themselves (Cook, 2016). As a field concerned with “the phenomenon of writing in a language that is acquired later in life” (Atkinson et al., 2015, p. 384) and primarily with students “writing in languages they are actively learning” (Matsuda & Hammill, 2014; p. 267), L2 writing continues to suggest that proficiency—a factor of active acquisition in process—is a core analytic component in understanding transfer (Clarke, 1979; Cook, 2003; De Angelis, 2007). Second, the source and target of transferred knowledge should factor into research and pedagogical inquiry around transfer. Investigators should continue to consider how language knowledge is moving—from prior language knowledge to similar more recently acquired knowledge? Among concurrently used languages in different stages of proficiency? Studies should also consider the consequences of that direction: Is that movement creating gain, loss, alteration, insight, systematicity of language knowledge? Rather than thinking of transfer as the linear or lateral portability of fixed knowledge, a focus on language reveals simultaneity, showing that knowledge can move in multiple directions (three, four) at once, revising prior knowledge even as it lays down a path to future knowledge innovations.

Third, considering language in the transfer of writing knowledge can lead educators to reconsider what successful or failed transfer *looks like* in a text and, in turn, who may be concealing or entailing transfer and why. Donahue (2016) reminds readers to consider the role of productive resistance in transfer—that some students may be able to transfer writing knowledge among their languages but may not do so for a range of good reasons. Cook (2016) suggests that transfer acts appearing in text may index not inferior or deficient language users, but instead writers composing from different states or combinations of acquisition. As with all best practices concerning the teaching of writing, in L1 or L2 traditions, practitioners can continue to reflect on empathic inquiries, asking themselves: How can I know about the range of knowledge, including languages, my students are transfer-

ring? How does my evaluation account for language acts that may look like error but might also be crosslinguistic influence in process? How might this play a role in culturally responsive or sustaining pedagogies? Finally, rather than thinking of language simply as the transparent medium that communicates transferred knowledge, a focus on language reminds us that language, itself, is additional knowledge that students transfer as they write.

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