

Academic Writing in a Global Context: The Politics and Practices of Publishing in English

Theresa Lillis, Mary Jane Curry.

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Academic Writing in a Global Context is a result of an eight year “text-oriented ethnography”, which investigated publishing experiences and practices of fifty scholars from two disciplines working in four countries in Central and Southern Europe. The aim of the book is to “explore the impact of the growing dominance of English as the global medium of academic publications (...) where English is not the official or dominant means of communication” (page 1). In other words, it addresses the growing global status of English and its effects on academic text and knowledge production, participation and access to resources. The volume makes a relevant contribution to the discussion of the dominance of English in academic publications and its consequences.

The volume is divided into seven chapters, each tackling a different aspect of academic text and knowledge production. The approach, the background, as well as key themes of the study are discussed in Chapter 1. Further descriptions of “Methodological Tools” can be found throughout the book. It is these, together with “Scholar Profiles”, dispersed throughout the chapters, that are the major strength of this book, as they provide a useful and interesting insight into the lives and experiences of individual scholars as well as detailed descriptions of how the analyses of various texts were performed. Additionally, all chapters also include “Text Histories”, through which the authors exemplify different scholar practices and experiences.

The discussion of different aspects of scholars’ experiences begin in Chapter 2, which deals with scholars’ publication practices, how they choose to publish and how these choices are affected by pressures at different levels. A large part of the chapter describes the different choices that scholars make when it comes to deciding whether to publish in a national language or in English, and whether they should intend to reach the national, international or intranational community, as well as academic or applied community. The chapter also investigates how publishing in English has become important in order to receive research funding and promotion, and how these pressures

influence the scholars when it comes to their choice of language and journal. One theme which emerges from this chapter is “the sliding of the signifier *English* towards *international* and vice versa” (page 59, authors’ emphasis), which has resulted in English being attributed greater value. The authors successfully develop and comment on this theme in the following chapters.

In Chapter 3 the authors explore scholars’ participation in local and transnational networks. They focus on how the resources available are different depending on what type and strength of network they participate in. The authors conclude that maintenance of networks, especially transnational networks, is very important, as the availability of resources depends on them. Transnational networks are “less intense and durable than local networks” (page 86), but they provide more opportunities for useful feedback on research, help in publishing articles, books, and conference papers, as well as language help.

Text and literacy brokers and the challenges the scholars face when dealing with different types of brokering activities are the focus of Chapter 4. The authors examine both language brokers, such as translators and proofreaders, as well as academic brokers. It is the examination of the impact of this second type of broker which is the most interesting in this chapter, as this is where the authors clearly show how “unequal power relations” (page 113) affect construction of knowledge, which is the central question of the book.

Chapter 5 continues with the question of how knowledge is constructed and valued by reflecting an “Enlightenment ideology of Science”. In this chapter Lillis and Curry address locality, the relation between the local and the global, and show that while scholars still perceive the local as being the most central to their research, different kinds of knowledge are distributed nationally and globally. The conclusion they draw is that “new” knowledge is published in international journals, whereas “applied” knowledge and summaries are published in national publications.

In Chapter 6 the focus changes to the discussion of the “more dystopic aspects” (page 134) of knowledge construction and publishing in Anglophone journals. Here the authors describe how centre-based gatekeeping affects the construction of knowledge, in particular when the scholars attempt to publish new knowledge. Locality in this context is valued in relation to the Anglophone centre: It is either interpreted to provide contrast and confirmation, or it is relocated within the centre. The scholars

are thus expected “to account for locality in ways which are not expected of knowledge that is located and produced from the default centre” (page 154). This chapter therefore provides a useful contrast to Chapter 5, as it shows how scholars can face great obstacles when trying to publish in major English-medium (centre) journals.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 7) summarizes the key themes and findings of the study, after which the different possible ways of changing centre-based practices for the benefit of all scholars are identified. The authors argue for the support of local publications and local languages, as well as for the shift in criteria for judging journals from “international” towards “internationality”, where non-centre contributions and collaboration should be included and encouraged. Furthermore, in the final pages of the book, Lillis and Curry effectively advocate the idea of “knowledge as a gift economy”, where open access networks and journals and the use of Web 2.0 technology could facilitate global participation in text and knowledge construction.

In conclusion, *Academic Writing in a Global Context* is a thorough exploration of the consequences of the dominance of English in academic publishing. It offers a good insight into the different aspects of academic text and knowledge production and how these are influenced by the current publishing practices. All in all, this volume is highly recommendable for researchers and teachers whose interests lie in language and globalization and academic writing.

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