The White Worsted Thread: Third Space Encounters in English L2 Writing – A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Writing for Publication in English

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Abstract

This paper aims to propose a theoretical framework for investigating L2 speaking scholars who successfully write in English for publication. The theories brought together – which are associated with third space, hybridity, funds of knowledge, intertextuality, heteroglossia and multivoicedness – form a nest of interrelated theories which proved useful for examining writing for publication by non-native English speaking (NNES) academics in our own work (Barbosa-Trujillo 2015, Barbosa-Trujillo and Keranen 2015). The paper first orients the topic within the field of NNES scientific research writing then discusses the theoretical framework presented, first by pulling the strands apart to briefly describe each, then by showing how each strand works within the framework as a foundation for research.

Introduction

Referring to the title of our article, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* Charles Marlow crosses national and cultural boundaries on his journey into Africa. At one point he goes into a grove of trees to avoid the midday sun and finds it full of suffering Congolese people. On looking down, Marlow sees a man's face near his hand and 'sunken eyes looked up at me' (Conrad, 1899/2015 Kindle version loc. 302). This man had a 'bit of white worsted' tied around his neck. Marlow did not know why or what it was supposed to represent – 'Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge – an ornament – a charm – a propitiatory act?*'* (Conrad, 1899/2015 Kindle version loc. 319). The opinion of literary analyses seems to be undecided. One view is that the string represents the choke hold of colonization and its brutal outcomes to a stance based on irony – the Congolese man's attempt to imitate the white collars of the colonizers' company accountants. Another idea is that the two players in the scene have entered a third space (Bhabha 2009). It is the latter interpretation we take as a launching point for the conceptual framework described in this paper.

Third Space Theory proposes that in different situations people draw on multiple resources or *funds* to help them negotiate, understand, or survive the situation (Bhabha 2009). Third spaces are the in-between, or *hybrid*, spaces where first and second spaces come together and generate third space knowledges, discourses, and literacy forms (Moje *et al.* 2004). From this perspective we can interpret Conrad's Congolese man's actions as an effort to

appropriate an 'artefact' from the colonizer's culture in an attempt to create a bridge to a third space where dialogues of understanding could be developed.[1] This action illustrates the notion of social spaces which stand alone and also, in certain circumstances, intersect.

In a similar manner, but certainly in a different context, non-native English speaking researchers who need to publish in English work in a third space. Their lives outside of work reside in their home languages while much of their professional lives function in a transitional border of home language and English. However, when it comes to writing and publishing the results of their research, in most cases English is the language they must use. This situation places them firmly in a third space. To survive in the third space, they must rely on their *funds of knowledge.*

This concept and the associated theories have been applied in fields such as geography, arts, postcolonial studies, feminist studies and recently in education; however, as yet, it has not been widely used to describe L2 (second or additional language) English writing in the sciences. Thus, in this paper we attempt to bring together these theories to help us understand how they can be mobilized in research associated with second or additional language, specifically English, writing for publication.

'Academic writing, like all forms of communication, is an act of identity; it not only transmits disciplinary content but also carries a representation of the writer' (Hyland 2002: 1092). Writing directly engages issues of personal identity which are created, re-created, and reinforced as the writer moves into (and out of) different discourse spaces. These complex changes involve various processes such as 'negotiation, adaptation, appropriation, and resistance that can occur during the acts of conceptualization, drafting, and writing' (Phan and Bahrain 2011: xiv). Theories have been put forward as ways of understanding the complexities associated with academic writing. Some of those complexities involve concepts such as intertextuality (Bazerman 2004), hybridity and heteroglossia or multivoicedness (Bakhtin 1981) and Third Space (Bhabha 2009).

In this article we propose a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of NNES writers. To explain this framework the article has two principal branches: one that very briefly addresses the well-researched field of writing in a second language and the other more detailed branch which attempts to create a more theoretical focus bringing in a number of associated areas which can help illuminate our understanding of the second language writing experience. The discussion leads to the introduction of possible research aims showing how the frameworks constructed can be operationalized for investigations of NNES scientists who write in English.

Research writing in second language (L2)

Currently, English is the dominant language of international communication as well as for reporting research. Thus, research on NNES researchers writing in English has found that they commonly borrow, echo and change patches of the languages of others and their own and interlace them together in their own texts or writings (Bakhtin 1981, Bazerman 2004, Bazerman and Prior 2005). As a result of that blending, *hybrid* conditions (explained further below) are produced in their writings since more than one language source is present. Kramsch (2001) argues that second language users, in this case researchers, should exploit different ways of putting text together by adopting the genres, styles and rhetorical conventions of the English speaking world. They should also know how to 'gain a profit of distinction by using English in ways that are unique to their multilingual and multicultural sensibilities' (Kramsch 2001: 7). However, as well meaning as these perspectives are, writers are still under pressure to conform to what they (and journal referees and editors) perceive to be standard forms of English (viz. Hanauer and Englander 2013, Flowerdew 2008). It is

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[1] Of course the underlying motivation was to alleviate the abject suffering inflicted by the colonizers on the colonized – to help them realize they were engaged in senseless cruelty and damaging or worse destroying an entire culture unnecessarily.

because of this situation that the theories outlined below might provide additional insight into our ongoing understanding of NNES writing in English for publication.

NNES scientists writing in English

Writing and personal identity are closely linked. Language with all its echoes is a marker of identity since, when it is used, we communicate who we are to others. Writers enter their various professional spaces with their personal and professional identities intact (Ivanič 2005: 82). Consequently, the way we use language, no matter whether it is our first, second or third language, shapes the way others see us and reflects the way we see ourselves at the moment of writing. Language marks us as belonging to particular communities or cultures; in other words, it lends us many faces. A variety of those faces are worn depending on the discourse conventions of the various spaces we inhabit and on our ability or willingness to adapt to (or subvert) those conventions. On a more practical level, when NNES scientists wish to become members of their international disciplinary communities, they must have English language knowledge. On one level they should have a good grasp of general English knowledge to engage in conversations with colleagues in social situations. They also need knowledge of scientific English used in their scientific disciplines. In writing their research in English they need a good sense of the complicated elements of writing involving clearness in their communication, understanding and incorporation of the voices of others (intertextuality), understanding of genre conventions of their field, as well as grammatical elements and specific vocabulary used in their discipline (Bazerman, Keranen and Encinas 2012).

How issues of personal identity and language control are managed is the central focus of the following section.

Multi-Theoretical Framework

This section presents the second branch of the framework. It turns the attention to theories which could be useful in illuminating the many elements involved in second language writing – and especially research writing for publication in English. The concepts of *intertextuality* and *genre*, *hybridity*, and *heteroglossia* are initially teased out of the theoretical framework and briefly presented individually to provide a general orientation. As the presentation of the framework progresses, these terms are shown again in their functional places within the context of the larger concepts: *third space theory* and *funds of knowledge*.

Intertextuality and genre

Bazerman (2004: 83) uses a sea metaphor to illustrate in a few words the concepts of intertextuality and genre: 'Almost every word and phrase we use we have heard or seen before. [….] We create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in'. In these sentences he refers to the notion of *intertextuality* which describes the process by which one text relies on or borrows elements from another text (*text* in the sense of written or spoken language) (Bakhtin 1981). He completes the metaphor by describing the idea of *genre*: 'And we understand the text of others within that same sea' (Bazerman 2004: 83). The sea metaphor conjures up the complexity of genre which was initially regarded as a way to refer to the variety of features which characterize a text. As research and discussion about genre has developed over the last decades the notion has expanded to encompass multidimensional concepts of text, context, text construction *and* text interpretation. Genre has been characterized by its fluidity and mutability, and including the individual – the writer, the texts they create and the socially defined spaces in which they participate.

Thus, any writer aiming to write successfully for publication will need to understand the *conversation* (appearing in their intertextual discourse) within their complex networks and how that conversation is *carried out* (genre features) and then be able to incorporate that in their texts (Swales 2009). As a writing tool, being aware of these features can ease writing in an additional language because writers can learn, collect and reuse discourse in their particular disciplines (cf. Flowerdew 2000, Johns 2001, Swales 1990). This know-how is referred to in

the associated literature as *funds of knowledge*, a term which evokes an image of resources to be called on when needed.

The conceptions of intertextuality and genre and their functional places within the theoretical framework presented in this paper are discussed in the section on *multivoicedness and heteroglossia.*

Hybridity

Things that come together and form something new – with qualities of each of the originals – are said to be *hybrid*. Hybridity means *mixed*; it describes a mixture of elements. There are many forms of hybridity. The term is used to describe mixed conditions in: biology, culture, language, anthropology, politics, and geography, to name a few (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007). Because of this characteristic of mixing, there is no one feature or process that can be used to describe hybrid spaces. People in their social and cultural contexts have access to and draw from multiple funds or resources to make sense of the spaces they find themselves in. However, being in-between or when moving into these spaces (or out of them) can be both rewarding and restraining in the development of identities and literate, social, and cultural practices.

Writers move in and out of hybrid spaces (Fig. 1 below). Each space has indigenous features and also features the writer brings to it which give it the writer's own flavor based on the funds of knowledge the writer possesses and acquires through learning and experiences. Part of how this process of bringing resources to manage and succeed in a space is discussed in the following section.

Heteroglossia / Multivoicedness

Bakhtin's (1981) work on the dialogic nature of language emerges again[2] in this topic. The terms heteroglossia and multivoicedness, used synonymously, refer to the multiple ways of speaking in any given social or cultural situation. As such, these multiple ways of speaking are learning features which allow people to become integrated / assimilated / enculturated (or excluded) in various social and cultural spaces. This feature of learning through language is particularly relevant to understanding the experiences of incipient researchers and those beginning to grapple with publication in an additional language – in this case, English. The relevance of these terms to the present study can be illustrated through a study done by Cohen (2009) on the heteroglossic discourse of children's play.

The literature reviewed in Cohen's (2009) study examined the role of discourse in the development of children's social and cultural identities. Acknowledging the socio-constructivist nature of language and identity construction, Cohen challenges the typical theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky and Piaget, most commonly relied on to explain these phenomena. Both Vygotsky's and Piaget's theories do not encompass the heteroglossic nature of the language children create while playing. Through their play and their language, children 'try on' various social roles and the associated discourse. Thus they not only learn through immersion and observation as Vygotsky and Piaget propose, but they learn by 'extending themselves into the place of *the other*' (Cohen 2009: 332). This allows them to experience how they might react in a variety of potential situations in which they will find themselves as they assimilate into their target social and cultural lives. There are multiple examples of this type of play language but one that comes readily to mind is the child taking the role of the mother or other caretaker and using the language of that 'other' to interact with a doll or another child. Through this play, the child uses the language and all the associated communication elements as if he or she were putting on clothes and testing out how they fit and what other's reactions to (interaction with) them are. Depending on those reactions, the language can be taken up, adapted, or rejected as unsuitable. Just as children try on and test out the language that comes from many areas of their lives which in turn form the foundation of their identities,

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[2]Mikhail Bakhtin is generally thought to be the first theorist to propose the notion of *intertextuality* which he referred to as *dialogism.* Intertextuality was a word coined by Julia Kristeva in her 1966 presentation on Bakhtin's work (Duff 2002).

writers need to try on and test out their language as they form and maintain their professional identities – and as those identities continually evolve.

This appropriation and assimilation of others' words (the concept of *intertextuality* is clear in these ideas) in Bakhtin's theory is a central process of identity formation. This *ideational becoming* is an essential component that everyone engages in – consciously or not – in any developmental situation (Cohen 2009). Thus, it is clear that this concept has something to say about the ongoing developmental processes NNES writers (and all writers) go through as they seek entry into, become more immersed in, and maintain their membership in their international professional communities. These processes are not, by any means, without problems. As the theory presented in the following section shows, as well as other theories which seek to explain what can happen when social and cultural worlds meet (e.g., post-colonial perspectives and Mary Louis Pratt's (1991) concept of the Contact Zone), there are forces which facilitate and those that debilitate such encounters.

It is often assumed that professional communities have a single discourse form which everyone uses to communicate. An overly simplistic definition of *genre* would propose that researchers in, for example, mathematics publishing internationally should be able to learn the *language* of the genre and then be able to publish without any problems within the discourse conventions of that language. However, that clearly is not the case. As we have been trying to demonstrate, there are many forces from many directions and dimensions acting on writers.

Bakhtin identifies two of those forces as being *centripetal* and *centrifugal* (Cohen 2009). The former describes forces which draw all language elements into one system in which there are clearly defined norms which all participants conform to – it is a monologic language. At the same time there are centrifugal forces that *problematize* the common understanding assumed in the monologic language. These centrifugal forces 'are the products of social and linguistic diversity' (Cohen 2009: 335). They are the social and cultural languages we speak – *heteroglossic* and *multivoiced*. These are illustrated in Fig. 1 below which shows the spaces a researcher inhabits, intersects, and creates (hybrid spaces) as she or he functions within her or his scientific field (or *fields* as science becomes more and more multi-disciplinary).

What can be deduced from this discussion so far is that social and cultural spaces (including professional spaces) are not unified – they are heteroglossic and multivoiced. They are also conceived as monological, and that is the source of the difficulties encountered by people writing in the professions and particularly the challenge for those writing in additional languages. The heteroglossia and multivoicedness of these discourses can upset the power balances in the disciplines because they challenge established norms. This is demonstrated in much of the literature on publishing in an additional language as discussed above (e.g., Hanauer and Englander 2011). This spatial conflict is taken up in the following section on Third Space Theory.

Third Space Theory

Ikas and Wagner (2009: 1) use the term 'nomads' to describe the people of the 21st century: 'At the turn of the 21st century globalization has turned the earth into a planet of nomads …. millions of immigrants challenge the existing power structures …. Meanwhile, the residents' collective identity is ceaselessly confronted' by the newcomers and their customs and traditions. This observation can be extended to any social or cultural space which newcomers are constantly crossing the boundaries of – as in the case of professional disciplines when novice members enculturate via learning the profession and constructing career identities (Carrasco, Kent and Keranen 2012). As discussed above, this is not a problem-free process. Third space theory proposes a way to understand the complicated situations and processes associated with this activity.

The third space theory or perspective (Bhabha 1994) states that in the different contexts in which we find ourselves, we use multiple resources (or funds) to make sense of those contexts. In the case of education, the theory helps to describe how resources are mobilized to make sense of oral and written texts applying *funds of knowledge*, integrating different

components such as spaces, contexts, and people's identity to construct new knowledge. Third space theory, like hybridity theory, re-conceptualizes the first and second spaces of human interaction. First and second spaces are binary. They possess certain characteristics maintained by physical and social interactions of the people in the spaces (Moje et al. 2004). Binaries in literacy are the first and second spaces of everyday versus academic knowledges. Third spaces, on the other hand, 'are the in-between, or hybrid, spaces where the seemingly oppositional first and second spaces work together to generate new third space knowledges, discourses, and literacy forms' (Pane 2007: 79) (Fig.1 below).

The conception of third space was first developed and established in depth by Bhabha (1994) as a metaphor for the space in which cultures come together or overlap. In these spaces, groups come together (either by choice, necessity, or force). The groups possess distinct levels of power and authority within which group members need to function or survive. The most successful draw upon their knowledge to help them negotiate the various discourses encountered. This negotiation leads to the development of hybrid identities. These identities are 'neither one nor the other' but a completely new set of identities (Ikas and Wagner 2009: 2). This space is not cohesive. Bhabha (2009) stresses that it is often a site of tension, of competing powers and differences.
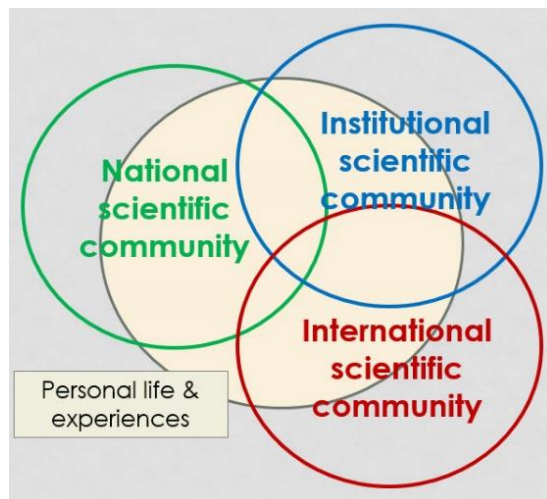

Figure 1. Third spaces occurring in academic disciplines

As pictured in Fig. 1 above, in the context of professional academic writing for publication, these spaces are not literal geographic spaces. They are *virtual spaces* and because they are third spaces, they challenge the traditional binary notions of *space* and *spatiality*, e.g., place, location, region, territory, and country (Soja 2009). Thus, third space is not a stable geographic or 'either / or' construct but a fluid concept of 'both / and' (Soja 2009: 51).

This section has attempted to create a theoretical framework with third space notions at the center. To understand this, it was first necessary to unpack the constituent theories of intertextuality, genre, and hybridity. Once those were briefly glossed, the discussion turned to the heteroglossic nature of discourse and how that feature of communication is characterized by fluid intersecting spaces. Finally, third space theory was brought in to give us a means of understanding these spaces.

But how can this conceptual framework be operationalized in academic contexts? Specifically, how can writers of any language or additional language negotiate the third spaces they find themselves in? The remainder of this paper addresses these questions.

Funds of knowledge

Writers inhabit a third space by drawing on their knowledge(s) of the various languages and language usages – vernacular, academic, every-day, and disciplinary – that make up their *funds of knowledge* and *discourses*, i.e. the texts (spoken, written or non-linguistic) they generate and texts they interact with. Culture and funds of knowledge are inseparably related. However, *culture* is a broad and ambiguous term. A thorough discussion of the complicated concept of culture is not practical (nor entirely relevant) in this paper, but a definition of culture as understood is possible. For our purposes, we adopt the position that culture is not only systems of 'behaviour, attitudes and values' but refers to the *process* through which these things become known to members. This cultural knowledge is in itself a *hybrid* entity because it contains 'traces of other meanings and identities', while at the same time it is interpreted, re-interpreted, and enacted by the individuals acting within the spaces (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007: 53). This concept of culture becomes more evident in 'borderland' spaces (Gonzales 2004: 37). In anthropology this refers to the fluid nature of culture as people cross back and forth over geographical borders. This concept can be extended to the virtual borders and spaces writers cross into and out of in their personal and professional lives (Fig. 1 above). Thus, for the purposes of this study, we regard *culture* as fluid, mutable, hybrid, and interpreted, and *funds of knowledge* as the means by which culture is enacted in all its forms. In other words, funds of knowledge are the tools or know-how that are engaged when encountering cultural elements. This knowledge provides the *means* for directing behavior in the spaces in which we find ourselves. These funds are acquired throughout our lives and, in line with the definition we have taken regarding culture, the funds are changeable and context dependent.

One way to understand the concept of funds of knowledge is to frame it in terms of household knowledge (Vélez and Greenberg 2004). A home needs a variety of funds of knowledge to function: 'caloric funds, funds of rent, replacement funds, ceremonial funds, social funds' (Vélez and Greenberg 2004: 49). These are defined as 'bodies of knowledge of strategic importance to households' (ibid). This definition allows us to ask a number of questions: 'How were such assemblages historically formed? How variable are they? How are they transformed as they move from one context to another? How are they learned and transmitted? How are they socially distributed?' (ibid). Those questions give us clues as to the nature of funds of knowledge: i) they are formed through historical processes; ii) they are variable; iii) they have context dependent elements; iv) they are learned and transmitted; and v) they are socially distributed. Those characteristics then can form the basis of investigation as reviewed in the following section.

Research in Third Space Theory and Literacy

A number of researchers have demonstrated that third spaces build bridges between everyday and academic knowledges and that discourses do support literacy and content learning. Those studies have focused on hybridity as a theoretical lens for exploring diversity in elementary education (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Alvarez 1999); how children cross boundaries between home literacies and school literacies (Heath 1983); how Haitian children use their funds of knowledge (a part of third space theory) to use the argumentation genre in science classrooms (Hudicourt-Barnes 2003); and understanding the discourses of children from minority languages (Moll and Gonzalez 1994), to cite a few.

In Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Alvarez's (1999) study, third space, hybridity, funds of knowledge and interaction are all operationalized. As the students in their study engaged in an activity, they constructed their interaction based on their need to communicate and to accomplish the activity, but this only happened within the constraints of the intersecting cultures (hybrid spaces). The theories describe the interaction and construction of knowledge associated with the collaboration within the hybrid space.

In Heath's (1983) remarkable 30 year ethnography on language and families in the southern United States, she used the theories associated with third space to frame her interpretations of the communication between students from two distinct ethnic groups. Her study looked at children and how their cultural spaces – family, medical, educational, religious, and other

spaces – influenced the children in the study and how those influences were manifested in classrooms and how teachers interpreted the children's interactions and reactions, performance, and learning. Her study contributed to our understanding of how individual cultures are present and how they come together in hybrid spaces. The importance of understanding these theoretical concepts can help educators understand the dynamics of hybrid spaces which learners inhabit.

Hudicourt-Barnes (2003) used the 'funds of knowledge' concept to challenge the notion that Haitian children could not actively participate in argumentative forms of discourse. She brought to the science classroom the Haitian form of argumentation referred to as *bay odyans.* Thus, by recognizing a culturally transmitted form of discourse and bringing it to another culturally influenced space (science), she was able to create a hybrid space where the students' funds of knowledge from another space worked in this space. What her study strengthened were the theoretical notions of third space, hybridity, and funds of knowledge, and how those concepts could be mobilized to help the children in her study negotiate the spaces they found themselves in, i.e. the spaces associated with science (in their educational setting).

Moll and González (1994) used the funds of knowledge concept to explore the literacy practices of bilingual third grade elementary students as they used them to manage their school projects and assignments. Their article begins with examples of how the students were using both Spanish and English to carry out research on Native American tribes. Using both their languages, the students were able to 'formulate their own research questions, search for and document their sources of information, abstract relevant information from multiple texts, conduct interviews and supplement their readings, and produce texts that summarize and communicate what they have learned' (Moll and Gonzalez 1994: 440). The authors stress the importance of the 'strategic use of cultural resources for learning' (Moll and Gonzalez 1994: 440) i.e., funds of knowledge.

From the studies briefly reviewed in this section, it seems evident that much of the research based on similar frameworks has been until now focused on children's learning spaces. What may be lacking are studies from this perspective looking at L2 writing especially in the sciences.

The theories presented work together to offer (a myriad of) explanations for events that happen when cultures come together. To operationalize this conceptual framework, we used it to investigate in our own university setting how the NNES academics writing in English mobilized their funds of knowledge to negotiate the communication of their disciplines – particularly focusing on their research writing in English for publication in international journals. Our study, therefore, aimed to (i) identify the different funds of knowledge and discourse that may shape NNES scientists' writings when publishing in a second language and (ii) explore how NNES scientists bring this knowledge and discourse to support their writings (Barbosa-Trujillo 2015, Barbosa-Trujillo and Keranen 2015).

Using this perspective would enable future studies of NNES scholars to explore issues such as the development and foundations of funds of knowledge / academic literacies, the social elements in their personal and professional lives that seem to contribute to their literacy development, writers' authoring practices, how third / hybrid spaces impinge on writing choices, and how those elements are socially distributed (learned and transmitted) within academic disciplines.

Conclusion

This article has presented a theoretical framework of the topic under investigation. The importance of this framework lies in its apparent ability to explain the complex processes involved in participation in professional communities and in particular the management of communication (especially writing) in those communities. The wider implications lie in the potential of the framework to help educators create or provide access to third spaces via

career enculturation and literacy resources for students or new academics / researchers and those struggling to survive in academic careers.

Acknowledgements

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