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Mobility and academic literacies: An epistolary conversation

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Introduction

In what follows, we explore the implications of a mobilities perspective for the conceptualization, teaching, and study of academic literacies. Mobility has come to serve as a catalyst for rethinking scholarly work in a variety of fields – most provocatively, the assumed stability as well as uniformity of what is studied and the location and products of acts and actors of study. The concept of academic literacies aligns with a mobilities perspective in its challenge to a still-dominant conception of ‘literacy’ as singular, universal, uniform, and stable. However, in recognition that any attempt to define mobility, academic literacies, or ‘mobility and academic literacies’ may itself be antithetical to the inherent mobility of all concepts, including ‘mobility’ and ‘academic literacies’, our exploration takes the form of an epistolary conversation whose movement – its turns, eddies, currents – may illustrate both the potential directions and navigational challenges of taking a mobilities perspective on academic literacies.

Moving knowers, moving knowledge: Working the mobility of academic literacy

Bruce Horner

I am interested in the question of mobility in research on academic literacies especially insofar as it appears to follow a trajectory akin to, and intersects with, the trajectory of investigations that I and other academic literacy researchers and teachers have been pursuing on cross-language relations in academic writing (marked in US composition studies by such publications as Canagarajah, 2006a; Canagarajah, 2006b; Harklau *et al.*, 1999; Horner and Trimbur, 2002; Horner *et al.*, 2010; Horner, Lu *et al.*, 2011; Horner and Kopelson, 2014; Jordan, 2012; Martinez and Young, 2011; Matsuda *et al.*, 2006; Schroeder, 2011; Smitherman and Villanueva, 2003; and You, 2010). The interest in cross-language relations in academic writing among US compositionists began with compositionists’ growing recognition of the seeming increase in the language diversity of their students. This led to attempts to find ways to accommodate such diversity, typically by making room for other languages and language varieties in the production of academic literacy while also searching for ways to help so-called English as a second language (ESL) students (and students seen as equivalent to ESL students, such as those labelled ‘Basic Writers’) better master Standard Written English (see Bartholomae, 1980; Bartholomae, 1993; Bean *et al.*, 2003; Horner and Lu, 2007; Lu and Horner, 2011; Matsuda, 2003; Trimbur, 2016). (This recognition had its antecedents

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in efforts to accommodate differences in the varieties of English that students appeared to bring with them to school (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1974), broadened to include languages other than English (Horner, 2001)).

However, many of these same compositionists came to recognize the ways that those very efforts at accommodation worked within, and helped to maintain and strengthen, conceptual frames for understanding language difference consistent with the language ideology of monolingualism, as in dominant conceptions of bilingualism and multilingualism that postulated these as deviations from a monolingual norm, and posed them as mere 'pluralized' forms of monolingualism, such as in conceptions of bilinguals as two individuals in one person (see Auer, 2007; Grosjean, 1985; Horner and Trimbur, 2002). In response, compositionists have been developing alternative language ideologies, often appearing under the guise of neologisms such as 'plurilingualism' and 'translingualism', as well as through giving different inflections to recuperated terms (such as 'multilingualism'), poached and patched together from work in applied linguistics on the ideological margins (otherwise known as 'cutting edge') and in postcolonial and performance theory. (See the selected bibliography included in Horner, Lu, et al., 2011: 316–21.)

Those alternative ideologies reject monolingualism's identification of languages as relatively stable, internally uniform, and discrete structures that 'users' – whose language identities are likewise seen as stable and internally uniform – then put into practice (well or badly). Instead, languages, language relations, language users and identities, and the contexts of use are approached as always emergent and in co-constitutive relation to one another. Thus, in place of the stable, internally uniform, atemporal, and discrete character of languages purported by monolingualism, these alternative ideologies postulate languages as fluctuating, internally diverse, and intermingling in character, and locate them in, and as, the emergent product of ongoing material social practices (Guerra, 2016; Lu and Horner, 2013; Lu and Horner, 2016). Recognition of the location of language in time as well as space allows us to see language difference not as deviation from a norm of sameness but as itself the norm of language practice, even in iterations. Thus, for at least some teacher–scholars of academic literacy, what began as a focus on, and an attempt to accommodate, what monolingualism had identified as different from a norm of linguistic sameness is shifting to a focus on, and an attempt to make sense of, difference as the norm of language practice. For example, these teacher–scholars no longer accept the conventional notion of the English monolingual writer writing 'in' English (only) as a valid or useful construct for making sense even of the writing of those designated as English monolinguals, nor of the relation of the writer to the language. Instead, emphasis is placed on the agency and responsibility of all language users for the (re)production/revision of language through their specific language practices (Lu and Horner, 2013).

What I find most promising in work on mobilities in academic literacy (and in education research more broadly) is the potential of a comparable shift in focus. Instead of seeing mobility as a characteristic distinguishing some, usually purportedly novel, types of students, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and learning from what we are trained to think of as the norm of stability, from these perspectives, mobility itself is being understood as the norm – albeit typically going unrecognized. In what follows, I suggest the outlines of a trajectory in approaches to mobility in educational research constituting such a shift in understanding what the norms of education might be, and the consequences of that trajectory for academic literacy research and teaching.

From mobility as the exception to mobility as the norm of academic literacies

Mobility is most commonly approached in educational research as a distinctive feature of contemporary students, faculty, and IHEs, usually in terms of their growing 'globalization' (see, for example, Apple *et al.*, 2005; Block and Cameron, 2002; Burbules and Torres, 2000; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Seawright, 2014; Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, 2004). In the matter of the teaching, learning, and practice of academic literacy, the growing mobility and attempts at increasing the mobility of students, IHEs, and faculty put pressure on the language(s) with which academic literacy is identified, marking a key point of intersection between research on mobility and research on language difference by scholars of academic literacy. This pressure on language in relation to mobility is addressed by academic literacy researchers most often in terms of the politics of the language medium in and by which knowledge might be taught, learned, produced, and distributed, to whom, by what authority, and with what effects (see, for example, Bangeni and Kapp, 2006; Canagarajah, 2002a; Canagarajah, 2002b; Carli and Ammon, 2007; Doiz *et al.*, 2013; Horner, Lu, *et al.*, 2011; Horner, Donahue, *et al.*, 2011; Horner and Kopelson, 2014; Jenkins, 2014; Kapp, 2012; Lillis and Curry, 2010; Matsuda *et al.*, 2006; Wingate, 2015).

Studies of the use of mobile technologies (such as the mobile/smartphone) in academic literacy practices complement explorations of the mobility of learners/knowers by severing the linkage of knowledge production and reception to fixed locations – for example, the stacks and carrels of research university libraries (Pachler *et al.*, 2010; Pegrum, 2014; Pigg, 2014). It is not only contemporary students and IHEs that are now distinguished as 'mobile', but also the technologies of knowledge production and circulation. More significantly, in shifting the focus of academic literacy researchers and teachers to academic literacies as material social practices, such research has offered a salutary break from dominant tendencies to treat such literacies outside the material social realm and to presume instead a fixed location for literacy learning (see, for example, Leander *et al.*, 2010).

Often enough, such technologies, like language differences, are addressed in terms of accommodation: how might educators best accommodate these new technologies for literacy and literacy learning? Framed thus, mobility is understood merely as a feature of specific, new technologies for knowledge communication: technologies to be accommodated, leaving dominant conceptions of knowledge and its communication undisturbed. However, the increasing, and increasingly recognized, mobility of people and institutions in education has also put pressure on dominant conceptions of the nature of knowledge and its mobility and mobilization that promise to overthrow treatments of specific communication technologies merely as something to be accommodated in the teaching and study of academic literacy. We can see that pressure arising in research questioning what, if anything, happens to knowledge in the process of its relocation from person to person, site to site, genre to genre, technology to technology, discipline to discipline, moment to moment.

One uptake of this question takes form in terms of knowledge transfer: to what extent can or does knowledge 'transfer' from one site to another? This is a key concern for currently dominant justifications for education as providing students with the skills/knowledge necessary to their work post-graduation and the possibility of their (upward) socio-economic mobility: if knowledge does not transfer across sites – for example, from the classroom to the workplace – what justification can there be for formal education? (See, for example, Smit, 2004, on the questionable transferability of writing skills.) In a related uptake, knowledge mobilization is also (and simultaneously) an epistemological question: in what sense does knowledge change as it (if it) transfers from person to person and (is applied) to different sites? The research literature on transfer taking up this question increasingly points to the refashioning of any knowledge

transferred by the knower as that knowledge is mobilized in different contexts (see, for example, DePalma and Ringer, 2011; Nowacek, 2011).

At the same time, and as a consequence, that research calls into question more generalized conceptions of the knowledge/skills that might be learned at a given site – leading, for example, to a rejection of the notion of the existence, let alone the unproblematic transfer and applicability, of ‘general writing skills’, or a singular, generalized, and autonomous ‘academic literacy’ applicable across time and space, as well as the project of inculcating such skills (Lea and Street, 1998; Lea and Street, 2006; Lillis and Scott, 2007; Petraglia, 1995). And insofar as writing in a particular language – English – has achieved status as the global academic lingua franca (Lillis and Curry, 2010), this particular challenge to the stability of knowledge is taken up by explorations of not only the diversity of forms that English academic writing might take but also the susceptibility of any of these – and of the constitution of English academic writing ‘itself’ – to change by their practitioners – including students.

The potential and problematics of knowledge mobilization are also being explored in terms of the policy and practical effects of research knowledge: what happens to knowledge produced at research universities as it (if it) travels to and informs policy and practice – for the purposes of this special issue, policy and practice in academic literacy education? Work taking up these matters explores which kinds of knowledge production are and are not supported, and why, and what knowledge is and is not called upon (‘mobilized’) as justification for policy and practice in education and why (see, for example, Fenwick and Farrell, 2012; Goodman *et al.*, 2014; Lubienksi *et al.*, 2014; Wiseman, 2010); and it explores what happens to such knowledge in the process of its ostensible ‘mobilization’ in implementation (see, for example, Ellis and McNicholl, 2015; Lingard *et al.*, 2012; Ozga, 2012). Such work is clearly relevant to grasping the kinds of research on academic literacy/ies and its teaching/learning that are (and are not) supported, the policies such research is used to justify, and the problematics of the implementation of such policies in academic literacy education.

Students and teachers play an integral role in the implementation of knowledge of academic literacy/ies. Research on those problematics is therefore directed at the potential agency and responsibility of students and teachers in sustaining and changing knowledge in the process of its implementation, and hence at forwarding a paradigmatic shift from conventional notions of the stability of knowledge and knowers in identity and location to a conception of knowledge and the location and identity of knowers as always emergent and contingent on their spatio-temporal location and on the specific practices of specific knowers (institutional and individual), whose identities are likewise understood to be neither inert nor stable but also always emergent and contingent on their specific temporal-spatial locations and practices. These locations are themselves best understood as ‘events’ in the sense of being ‘both the context for practice ... and a product of practice’ (Cresswell, 2002: 26).

In other words, just as academic literacy researchers’ efforts to accommodate students marked by the ideology of monolingualism as linguistically ‘different’ are now leading to challenges to notions of difference (and sameness) in language, what began with studies of the increasing mobility of students, IHEs, and knowledge as a feature distinguishing contemporary forms of these from the norm is now leading to recognition of the susceptibility of all knowledge to transformation through the process of its mobilization and to an alternative sense of mobility, now seen not as a new phenomenon distinguishing some learners, knowledge, and IHEs from others but as an inevitable feature of all these. Such a conception of mobility and knowledge is forcing educators and education researchers to rethink dominant conduit/transmission models of learning informing the design of curricula and pedagogy, insofar as such models assume the stability and unproblematic transferability of the knowledge to be taught/learned. I am arguing that

a mobility perspective on knowledge calls into radical question such models and the justifications for education they support, while giving renewed recognition to the agency of learners/knowers and the crucial role played by their concrete labour as knowers and learners in the production and reproduction, making and remaking, of knowledge as it travels in space and time. From this perspective, formal education becomes not a site for the transmission of knowledge but an ongoing event for sustaining, as well as refashioning, knowledge through the practices of learners/knowers: not its transfer but the inevitability, as well as necessity, of its continual (re)translation.

Knowledge mobility practices

While this mobility perspective throws into radical doubt dominant conceptions and justifications for formal education as skills production and transmission, it also promises to help bridge the conceptual and institutional divides, and conflicts, between research and teaching, and it offers quite different justifications for extending the pool of learners beyond traditional geographic and linguistic, as well as generational, boundaries and for programmes of ‘continuing’ education beyond the traditional model of terminal degree programmes. Those adopting this mobility perspective shift away from attempting to codify a stable, uniform knowledge – for example, academic literacy or a set of codified academic literacies – to be transmitted to students. Attention is directed instead towards attending to that knowledge as practice: to the ways that engagement in practices works to (re)produce and change the knowledge inhering in those practices, and the means and effects of knowledge translation not only between specific, purportedly discrete and stable sites and forms but also within what is ordinarily perceived as the ‘same’ site and in the ‘same’ (linguistic and other) forms. Translation is seen as the norm, rather than the exception to the norm, of knowing, teaching, and learning (see Pennycook, 2008).

I am suggesting that a mobility perspective on academic literacy brings usefully to the fore a recognition of the key role played by the concrete labour of all students, teachers, and researchers of academic literacy in sustaining and changing the constitution of academic literacy/ies as and through practices. Hence, and likewise, there is a recognition of the responsibility of students, teachers, and researchers, as well as policymakers, for the perpetual (re)constitution of academic literacy/ies and the knowledge inhering in such practices, including the practice of knowledge sedimentation. A mobility perspective leads us to see such labour as engaging inevitably and necessarily in the translation, recontextualization, and transformation of academic literacy knowledge, even (or especially) when it appears merely to reproduce or transmit ‘the same’ knowledge (and type) of academic literacy. In this sense, while the turn towards mobility may have arisen initially as a way to better understand the contemporary teaching and learning of academic literacy in response to distinctively ‘mobile’ contemporary students, teachers, and IHEs as somehow different from what had been the norm for academic literacy education, and in response to technologies allowing for more recognizably mobile sites of learning and teaching, that turn to mobility is also sparking a reevaluation of that norm itself and of the dominant models for academic literacy, now seen as always in motion, contingent, friction-fraught, and in need of reworking.

Friction points in the mobility politics of academic literacies

I will raise two related objections to efforts informed by a mobility perspective – at least as I have articulated it. First, it is worth acknowledging that resistance to such notions of mobility arises not only among the culturally dominant but also among members of groups whose identities are most at risk of denigration or erasure – for example, in the US, Native Americans and African

Americans. For, given dominant models ascribing legitimacy only to that knowledge purported to be stable, translocal, and transtemporal (for example, knowing ‘standard written English’ as the global academic lingua franca), many of those whose knowledge has been refused legitimacy by the dominant (by being deemed transient and [therefore] defective, for example, ‘broken’ or ‘bad’ English, or at best a temporary ‘interlanguage’) have understandably directed their efforts at recuperating, defining, and preserving – that is, stabilizing – that knowledge. Examples include the effort to rescue Native American languages from the threat of disappearance and, by codifying, to argue for the legitimacy of African American English (also known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Ebonics) as discrete, stable linguistic entities (see, for example, Lyons, 2009; Milson-Whyte, 2015).

Of course, one may instead better argue for the legitimacy of minoritized peoples’ languages, and (hence) the legitimacy of their practitioners, as the ongoing accomplishments of their linguistic labour and strategic ingenuity, whatever the forms that labour may take, moment to moment, place to place, event to event (Young, 2009; Lu and Horner, 2013). This entails seeing any instance of such linguistic practice as rhetorical, with one rhetorical effect being the reconstitution of the language or language variety in question. But those wary of a mobility perspective also raise a related concern: the risk that an insistence on mobility as an inevitable feature of all knowledge, knowers, and learners flattens differences in the kinds of mobility experienced and practised. After all, the mobility of refugees and globetrotting jetsetters is not at all the same, much as we may recognize the linguistic ingenuity and transformative effects of the literate efforts of both. This concern is especially pertinent to academic literacy researchers and teachers in light of significant differences in the kinds of ‘mobility’ enjoyed by, or visited upon, differently positioned academic literacy teachers and scholars – for example, between globetrotting professors and itinerant writing ‘instructors’ (‘freeway flyers’) constantly moving in order to ‘stay in place’ (that is, ‘treading water’). Just as an insistence on difference as the unacknowledged norm of language practices can lead to a flattening of all difference (see Gilyard, 2016), so an insistence on the transformative mobility of all learners, teachers, knowers, and knowledge can lead to neglect of differences in the contexts and effects of mobility and knowledge mobilization, as well as the continuing hegemonic position, and differential effects, of conceptions of knowledge and knowers as stable. Given the ways that such ideological conceptions are embedded in the ordinary everyday practices and organization of powerful institutions (for example, the language and literacy textbook and test industries), one cannot simply wish them away by waving the prospect of a mobilities paradigm. Hence there is a need for academic literacy research to attend to the friction, even resistance, exercised in, and necessary to, any movement, and to the specific effects of that friction on kinds of knowledge and knowers. It requires attending to the question of the circulation of people and knowledge, understood not as free flow but as always, and necessarily, fraught and differently consequential (Ferguson, 2006; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Trimbur, 2000; Tsing, 2005).

Mobility and the re-imagination of academic writing

Jan Blommaert

I would like to start from a particularly inspiring and welcome fragment from Bruce Horner’s text:

I am suggesting that a mobility perspective on academic literacy brings usefully to the fore a recognition of the key role played by the concrete labour of all students, teachers, and researchers of academic literacy in sustaining and changing the constitution of academic literacy/ies as and through practices. Hence, and likewise, there is a recognition of the responsibility of students,

teachers, and researchers, as well as policymakers, for the perpetual (re)constitution of academic literacy/ies and the knowledge inhering in such practices, including the practice of knowledge sedimentation.

In this fragment, Horner points towards the powerful effect of *re-imagination* and *reinvention* brought on by the mobility paradigm. I call it a paradigm because accepting mobility as a *fundamental* condition of language (and, by extension, of human social processes), rather than as an *exceptional* condition, turns the entire theoretical edifice of language studies upside down. What used to be seen as exceptional (and problematic) becomes the default situation, and vice versa. *Not moving* – the residential locality so favoured in the era of Grand Theory sociology from Durkheim to Parsons – is one among many possibilities, a variable if you wish, within a spectrum of mobile, unstable, relatively unpredictable, and perpetually changing patterns of language in social action (see Pennycook, 2007; Coupland, 2010; Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert, 2014; Blommaert and Rampton, 2016; Parkin, 2016). Horner is absolutely correct in identifying the virtually endless ‘slipstream’ caused by re-imagining language from the perspective of mobility. This seemingly simple move reformulates potentially most of what we believe social reality is, including all the features we traditionally ascribe to it: learning and transmission processes, knowledge units, forms of social and cultural competence, identities and roles.

The Durkheimian sociological tradition defined ‘society’ in terms of a number of bounded and scaled spatial units, the most important of which was the nation state. Parsons, of course, emphasized that fixedness of horizon – people operated socially in a town, a region, and a country, and each of those scales could be characterized by specific norms and values, the most overarching, dominant, and penetrating of which were those of the nation state (see Parsons, 2007). To be sure, Durkheim himself was deeply aware of how the escalating industrialization of France had led to mass migration from rural to urban areas. This mass mobility, however, was seen by Durkheim as disrupting, even destroying an (imagined) order of residential locality, leading to estrangement, antisocial tendencies, and individualism. It needed to be countered by new efforts towards national integration and a rediscovery of the common moral bonds that tied the French into one national community (Durkheim, 1961; Durkheim, 1984). Mobility within and across the nation state was not considered a normal or self-evident feature of societies – a view we still encounter today in widespread discourses on migration. ‘Normal’ people stay where they are and ‘integrate’ into the community that spatially surrounds them; to the extent that ‘foreigners’ appear, the pressure to integrate unidirectionally into the local norms and values complex is evidently even higher for them.

This tradition of residential locality, in which the default orderly and harmonious social unit was geographically fixed, was, as Glyn Williams (1992) emphatically demonstrated, transposed into the first wave of sociolinguistics and adjacent branches of applied language study.

Re-imagining language and literacy in mobility

The mobility paradigm dislodges that older (and anachronistic) sociological imagination and replaces it with a view in which language is used specifically *for mobility*. It is developed, maintained, and perfected, as Horner asserts, for *transfer*, a transfer of meaning from one person to others and back. Technologies such as literacy added a portable materiality to the system of language explicitly designed to enable samples of language to travel across time and space. Literacy, from this point of view, should have alerted scholars (very) long ago to the intimate connection between language and mobility, and it is regrettable that this never happened (but see Lillis, 2013). I believe it has become inevitable now, and I wish to add two things to Horner’s survey of the paradigmatic effects of mobility.

One: the received idea of ‘language’ (for example, ‘French’) strongly resembled the Durkheimian and Parsonian view of society, as Glyn Williams elaborated in detail. The most basic sociolinguistic observations of any language sought to establish it in relation to two other things: a community (of ‘speakers’) and a territory (usually a nation state). Thus, French is spoken by the French in France, and French spoken by non-French and/or outside of France loses its ‘normal’ (and unproblematic) character. There is no need here to redo the definitive critique of this particular, methodologically nationalist, view of language (see essays in Makoni and Pennycook, 2007; Blommaert, 1999), because we now see that the point is that this territorially bound imagined language needs to be considered in far more precise and specific ways in an actual world of mobility. When people move, it is not ‘their language’ that moves along, but *actual, specific bits* of it – registers, genres, styles (Agha, 2007). These bits reflect their own ‘indexical biographies’, their trajectories through social life, in which specific sets of resources were gathered, developed, shed, and replaced in a continuous process of repertoire change (Blommaert and Backus, 2013). To put it simply, mobile people take along just the amount of linguistic resources they require, and during their journeys, these resources are complemented by a continuous feed of new ones, gathered from different ‘languages’ (conventionally understood) in comparable but always unique individual repertoires.

Two: consequently, their ‘knowledge of language’ will always be restricted to those resources that fit, to degrees, the social niches in which they drift or dwell, and will reflect the norms valid in those niches. People mostly pick up bits of language because they have to be able to deploy them in order to fit more or less appropriately in those social environments. Repertoires, so to speak, are chronicles of power relations. We thus arrive at an infinitely more layered, scaled, and fragmented – but empirically far more accurate – view of the relationship between knowledge of language and social ‘integration’. People do not simply ‘learn English’ and ‘integrate in British society’ (other than in government policy documents): they acquire specific sets of linguistic-communicative resources that enable them to fit into *specific* and often chronotopically organized parts of society – let us say academic life – but such resources do not directly guarantee them integration into entirely different social milieux (Blommaert, 2015a; Blommaert, 2015b). This might be the reason why otherwise brilliant overseas students with superior IELTS scores and performing excellently in their study programmes can simultaneously feel lonely, unhappy, and socially marginalized in, say, London or Chicago, and feel profoundly inarticulate most of the time spent off campus (see Blommaert, 2016).

I hope that taking both points together makes the paradigmatic re-imagining effect clear: it involves a transformation in our view of how language operates in society; it also, in the same move, reformulates the structures of that society, and helps us see life in any real social environment in ways that force us, at last, to abandon an inheritance of static, totalizing, and synchronic images of it.

Academic literacy repertoires in mobility

Now what has all of this to do with academic literacy? One clear answer to that question is that we now need to think carefully about *where exactly* it fits into people’s repertoires; or, to be more precise, in which specific social niches it will play a vital, perhaps defining role.

In order to clarify this answer, I must briefly return to the chronotopic organization of social niches mentioned above. The idea behind the term is straightforward: a lot of what we do, and of what we are, in social life is conditioned and organized in relation to specific spatio-temporal configurations – specific sites and specific time frames (see Blommaert, 2015b). Thus, ‘academic life’ would typically be a *part* of an academic’s life, spent in academic buildings, one’s private study,

or sites chosen as ‘fields’ for research; and it would coexist alongside entirely different ‘lives’ – that of a spouse, a parent, a neighbour, a friend, a malt whisky lover, and so on, all of which would be spent in other spatio-temporal configurations and involve entirely different types of activity (drinking malt whisky in one’s university office during office hours, for instance, is widely dispreferred as ‘academic’ activity nowadays). Academic writing, in that sense, would define part of the chronotopes of ‘academic life’.

But chronotopes are *fractal*. That is, large chronotopes such as ‘academic life’ can be broken up into a multitude of far more specific ones: lecturing is done in a lecture room during well-defined slots in the working week, while writing would more pleasantly be performed in the monastic atmosphere of one’s own study, in more fluid time frames. Reading can be done on a train or plane, while lecturing or workshoping is seriously more difficult there. And so on. We can therefore be more accurate in locating academic writing. At least, so it seems.

For things are slightly more complex than that. We see that academic writing is, in fact, part of a narrowly intertwined set of ‘academic’ practices spilling over (and connecting) several different chronotopes. Academic work, in its totality, heavily revolves around textuality-as-object and textualization-as-practice, and both object and practice (1) cannot be neatly divided into, for instance, ‘oral’ and ‘written’ parts, while (2) they are both in a phase of rapid and profound transformation due to the technological innovations already mentioned by Bruce Horner.

Point (1) here must be understood as follows. Texts are, in academia, a central ingredient of the ‘*raw material*’ for teaching and research – we need them, in sometimes astonishing quantities, in order to lecture and investigate ‘academically’. And, typically, we *read* them, *annotate* them, or write commentaries and notes about them. They are, at the same time, of course, the defining *products* of academic work, from student essay all the way to journal article and research-based monograph. In these activity types, we *write* texts, *edit* them, and, in a slightly stretched sense so as to include students submitting an essay to their lecturers, *publish* them. But they are also indispensable in the *spoken* genres we use – we lecture very much in a ‘literate’ fashion, we support our lectures with written documents such as mandatory or recommended readings, handouts, PowerPoint presentations, or electronic support sites; and even tutorials, supervision sessions, topical discussions, or more casual conversations-on-the-job are text-oriented and require resources that could not be obtained without the reading-and-writing activity chains mentioned earlier.

About point (2): the shifts in the nature and scope of textuality and textualization as an effect of new technologies have been amply documented by now, and there is no need to go into it at length here (see, for example, Jewitt, 2005; also Scott, 2013). The speed and volume of text production, circulation, and consumption have risen dramatically. There is a plethora of new genres currently attached to ‘core’ academic writing tasks (think of logging publications on repositories and databases, storing data in data repositories, performance and output reporting, writing research blogs, announcing studies and results on social media, and so forth). New audiences are being found through such genres, at once expanding the range of possible impact of research and imposing new demands and constraints on academic text producers. Students’ searches for information now cover an apparently unlimited scope and reach thanks to Google and Wikipedia. All of this has a tremendous impact on the structure of the knowledge economies in which academic life is lodged (see Burke, 2012 for a broadly based discussion). In terms of the theme we discuss here, new technologies, their affordances and effects, have made the entire thing into a *perpetuum mobile*.

Thus, the niches in which we can situate academic writing are: (1) not autonomous or isolated but networked across several others, involving different activity types not commonly scoped under ‘writing’, and (2) evolve and change rapidly into complex arrays of old and new

genres, practices, and audiences, (3) with changes both at low levels of textual and discursive practice – the new genres mentioned above – and at high levels of now restructured knowledge economies.

Academic literacies as re-entextualization

In concluding, I wish to return to the fragment from Bruce Horner's text that I quoted earlier, and address it from a different angle:

I am suggesting that a mobility perspective on academic literacy brings usefully to the fore a recognition of the key role played by the concrete labour of all students, teachers, and researchers of academic literacy in sustaining and changing the constitution of academic literacy/ies as and through practices. Hence, and likewise, there is a recognition of the responsibility of students, teachers, and researchers, as well as policymakers, for the perpetual (re)constitution of academic literacy/ies and the knowledge inhering in such practices, including the practice of knowledge sedimentation.

The 'concrete labour' is indeed the key here, and I hope to have explained the complexity – and increasing complications – of such labour. Academic knowledge is now being dispersed over an expanding range of genres, intertwined and multimodal, and involving 'big' genres – the journal article, the monograph, the encyclopedia – as well as 'small' ones – the blog, the social media post, the short bureaucratic report. From labour to labours (plural), thus, and certain of these labours deserve perhaps more structured attention.

I can in no way claim to be an expert in academic writing *per se*, but what I see with the benefit of analytical distance is that the complex of skills and competences to be imparted under the label of 'academic writing' now should revolve, quite emphatically, around *practices of re-entextualization*. We mean by re-entextualization the capability to turn a text into several others, across the boundaries of genres, languages, audiences, and functions, re-centring them each time towards specific goals in ways that maintain the intertextual (indexical) links between the different texts (see, Silverstein and Urban, 1996; Gal and Woolard, 2001). In essence, re-entextualization builds on the intrinsic mobility of texts as well as of the positions of their authors and audiences, and given the development of the economy of knowledge, it becomes inescapable as a key competence.

This is because I believe that academics, presently, are not just 'authors' and 'readers' of books and papers, but live (and *have to live*) with a complex, layered, polygeneric publication system that involves the established and highly visible 'core' products as well as several 'hidden literacies' (I borrow the term from Nabi *et al.*, 2009), the latter notably revolving around the new genres mentioned above. Being trained in just one aspect of this complex will increasingly be experienced as insufficient, for developing and maintaining such a system is rapidly becoming the precondition for 'success', even for 'adequacy', as an academic text producer. This, undoubtedly, involves some major turnarounds in the approach to, and practice of, training for academic writing. I have to declare myself insufficiently competent to comment on those practical aspects of re-imagining, however, and gladly give the floor to someone more knowledgeable and experienced in these aspects.

Response

Bruce Horner

Jan Blommaert significantly extends the context in which to approach mobility as a feature of academic literacy/ies and the conditions of mobility. I want briefly to pick up on two pedagogical

issues raised by his comments, having to do with the effects of the concrete labour entailed in efforts at (re)translation, re-imagination, reinvention, and re-entextualization – all terms that the two of us have used to describe academic literacy from a mobility paradigm. First, what are the implications of such a paradigm for notions of academic literacy ‘competence’? And, second, how do those adopting such a paradigm address the practice and effects of sedimentation of academic literacy/ies?

If all academic literacy is mobile in the sense of being (1) diverse, (2) fluctuating, and (3) in interdependent relation to other kinds of literacy, users, and contexts, then both the conception of the competence towards which learners might strive and the means of achieving such competence must change. For example, attempts to produce and measure the degree of a student’s ‘mastery’ over the production of a singular and stabilized ‘Standard Written English’ are no longer applicable in a mobilities paradigm. Instead, as Jan Blommaert suggests, emphasis is increasingly on writers’ ability to ‘re-entextualize’ across genres, media, languages, and so on (see Canagarajah, 2010 for a useful account of such re-entextualizations). While Blommaert uses the term *repertoire* to capture the diversity of practices that writers might attempt to expand their command of, he also cautions that any one such linguistic/literacy practice a writer might call upon as a resource is itself in flux and interdependent in relation to others – we have here a picture of a writer deploying always different, and constantly changing, amalgams of resources that change in the process of amalgamation, and across which the writer must work.

In some ways this picture aligns with increasingly frequent calls in composition studies for teaching ‘rhetorical dexterity’ and ‘flexibility’ in literacy practices. I anticipate, however, that the mobility of the model that such terms suggest is at high risk of being evacuated. The model may devolve to an enumerative one of a set of resources comprising a repertoire – of stabilizing, through codifying, distinct resources, each of which is then assigned a particular, stabilized context, which students are then to be trained in adjusting to through mastery in its assigned resource. Such a model would lapse into the ‘appropriacy of appropriateness’ that Fairclough (1995) has warned against, whereby power relations shaping what counts as appropriate, to whom, and when are evacuated, as is the susceptibility of what are claimed to be appropriate forms and their uses to change by users. We would instead have something like a model for teaching orchestration by explaining the specific (assigned) function and role to which each musical instrument is to be put. While it seems mandatory to be aware of dominant notions of the traditions of specific academic literacy practices (for example, Swales’s (1990) Create a Research Space (CARS), the Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion (IMRD) structure of research articles, and the various citation styles), it seems equally mandatory to be aware of (1) the presence of diverse, alternative traditions, and (2) the interdependent, limited, and contingent status of all these as susceptible to change and contest in and through their mobility. That is, we need to move from a model of writers choosing from among a set of seemingly inert resources comprising the writer’s repertoire to a model of change as the norm, which itself will require recognizing the change effected through seeming reiteration. For, from a mobilities perspective, stasis itself entails movement necessary, paradoxically, to produce the effect of stasis (like a skipper manoeuvring among waves and wind to keep a boat ‘in place’).

This is what I take as a key significance in Jan Blommaert’s terms ‘re-imagination’ and ‘reinvention’. That model of re-imagination and reinvention pulls the rug out from dominant conceptions of competence in academic literacy (and other forms of linguistic practice) as a finite and stable condition to be achieved or not. Instead, it poses a model of continuing learning (and relearning): just as all those using English (including those dubbed ‘native English speakers’) remain, until death, ‘English language learners’ insofar as ‘English’ is diverse and always in flux, so all of us engaging with academic literacy, at whatever ‘level’, remain academic literacy

learners, learning because and as we are contributing to the reinvention of academic literacy/ies. Competence with academic literacy, then, is no longer something to be achieved once and for all, but at best a shifting state of tolerance for engaging diversity and change with literacy practices. What would an academic literacy curriculum based on such a model look like?

This brings me to the question of sedimentation. The deeply sedimented character of academic literacy practices is commonly invoked in arguments that reject as dangerously misleading any suggestion that those practices are subject to change – at least by students. A mobilities paradigm does, of course, offer a theoretical counter to those arguments, claiming that, in fact, writers reinvent academic literacy with each effort at its (re)production, whatever form that effort takes. (For an extended discussion of students' role in doing so, see Bartholomae, 1985.) Helping students to see themselves as always reinventing academic literacy would seem to be crucial to their meaningful engagement in those efforts at (re)invention. Nonetheless, there is a seeming intransigence built into our institutional practices and consciousness that supports arguments against just such a view of academic literacy as subject to (and in need of) perpetual reinvention. Just as we live at best in a post-monolingual, rather than a translingual or plurilingual, world (see Yildiz, 2012), likewise the mobilities paradigm, at least presently, remains at best an emergent alternative to the dominant paradigm of stasis (immobility) as the norm. How, then – in our teaching, reading, and writing practice, and in representations of these – might we inflect academic literacy sedimentation, not as a *fait accompli* (or set of *faits accomplis*) to which writers must adapt their writing but as an ongoing practice for which all writers (and readers, including examination readers) must be held responsible for contributing to (either by altering dominant practice or by furthering it), with justifications for the latter that invoke a selected set of academic literacy practices as a *fait accompli* ruled out from the start?

Two additional terms merit consideration in relation to matters of competence and sedimentation: opacity and recognition. Inherent to a mobilities paradigm, at least as I believe the two of us are posing it, is an acceptance of opacity as an inevitable feature of all literacy practice (hence the need, always, for retranslation, with all the problematics posed by every act of translation). This runs counter to dominant notions of literacy as a technology for the smooth exchange of knowledge. And with opacity come the power dynamics of readers granting, or withholding, recognition of the significance (value and meaning) of specific texts (for example, as properly academic and/or meaningful). Competence in academic (and other) literacy, from a mobilities perspective, would seem to entail the ability to negotiate both the opacity and recognition of one's own writing and that of others. But the 'success' of negotiations is by definition contingent, rendering such competence a perpetually moving target.

The normative complex of academic literacies

Jan Blommaert

I would like to follow up on an important point made, in several steps, by Bruce Horner in his rejoinder: that academic literacies are subject to a range of evaluative processes, that they are perhaps *the* focus of normativity in judgements of academic performance, and that change will, consequently, be perceived as 'dangerous', as dislodging the certainties of benchmarking now institutionally and bureaucratically entrenched.

It is indeed a point we have not touched upon explicitly so far: the point that academic literacies are, in effect, both the object and the instrument of academic institutional and bureaucratic gatekeeping. And at several levels: the level of students gaining entrance to academic institutions, where a hierarchy of 'quality' is often enforced through measurement of academic literacy performance; the level of staff recruitment and career development, where the volume

and impact of published work are used as decisive criteria; and the level of publishing itself, where style guides are not negotiable and where ‘accent’ in written academic English is used as a criterion for acceptance or rejection of work. Throughout these different levels, and creating cohesion between them, we see a process that reminds us of the Weberian ‘rationalization’: an increasing standardization of sociolinguistic and literacy resources and procedures typical of an increasingly pyramidal bureaucratic–commercial system. The more we see the academic world – as a sociopolitical and economic system – being ‘concentrated’ into one unified competitive industry, the more we can expect ‘rationalized’ mononormativity to prevail. I started my publishing career with an article in Dutch in a Belgian scientific journal, and in my studies I had to consult academic sources in English, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese. I was not alone, of course: Einstein and Heidegger wrote in German, and Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, and Foucault wrote in French. Nowadays, articles or books written in Dutch no longer qualify as top-level output in my annual performance assessment, and all of us are emphatically encouraged to publish in ‘high-impact’ journals published by three or four global publishing conglomerates, whose vernacular is US English. The journal in which I published my first article has ceased to exist. Scholarship has moved, in the few decades of my career, from a polyglot to a monoglot occupation, and this precisely at a time when globalization has made the world of scholarship superdiverse. The default bureaucratic response to increasing diversity is increasing uniformity, as Dell Hymes observed long ago. And such uniformity will, consequently, increasingly result in exclusion and discrimination.

So it does. I am stating a truism here, but it merits repeating: scientific journals now receive a majority of submissions from scholars who use academic English often as an uncomfortable medium acquired late in life (I learned it ‘on the beat’ and never had any formal training in it). Sometimes intellectually excellent work does not make it to the printed pages because of ‘poor English’. Similarly, students whose intrinsic intellectual abilities are outstanding get eliminated or downgraded because of their ‘deficiencies’ in academic writing. The globalized world is not flat at all, and neither is it a global village (to adopt two well-weathered metaphors). It is rather more like a global New York, with its own Upper East Side, Wall Street, Brooklyn, Queens, and Bronx – a heavily stratified complex in which the use of a ‘global’ vernacular (English) is mythically seen as a unifying feature while, in reality, its minutest accents and dialects provoke hierarchical ordering and sanctioning. An ideological monoglossia comes down on a polyglot reality, and does what it is supposed to do: it stratifies this reality.

Let me now join this insight with elements from my earlier intervention. Sociolinguistically, the situation can be summarized as follows: (1) there is an institutional tendency towards language-ideological monoglossia, supported and enforced by real-world developments of increasing institutional-bureaucratic concentration within the academic system; (2) while the globalized and continually expanding academic population (the ‘users’ of academic literacies) develops in the opposite direction towards a superdiverse polyglossia; (3) which not only operates through a tremendous diversity in users but also through the diversification of genres and modes of communication; (4) this means that the sociolinguistic system in which we situate academic literacies is increasingly *polycentric* but dominated by a *monocentric* hegemony, which rather than supporting and facilitating the development of the system acquires the major function of policing and disciplining the system.

This is a textbook example of a language-ideological phenomenon in which we see ‘false consciousness’, if you wish, articulated through the monocentric hegemony and contrasted with a polycentric set of processes and practices, which are fundamentally at odds with the hegemony and therefore continually open to negative sanctioning and misrecognition in Bourdieu’s sense, while they cannot, in practice, be avoided by learners and practitioners of academic literacies.

The rules do not fit the system they are supposed to direct, and Durkheim's *anomie* is the result. Observe, however (and here we part ways with Durkheim), that *anomie* is not just the absence of clear and applicable norms – a negative concept – but also the production of new, alternative ones – a positive concept that circumscribes a space of innovation and creativity. *Anomie*, in the latter sense, is the evident correlate of social change. (As an aside, one can note that *both* of Brian Street's (1984) models of literacy are intertwined here as different aspects of the same language-ideological complex.)

I would suggest that this language-ideological phenomenon is in itself a *pedagogical objective* and a *didactic object*. I mean by that: make this language-ideological dimension of academic literacies a topic of teaching, and make a clear and sharp awareness of the complex and dynamic interplay of different norms a target of learning. We have known since Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957) that the hegemonic norm is often 'exnominated': it is not defined, presented, and experienced as a contestable norm in a polycentric and functionally diversified field of normativity, but preferably presented as a simple fact of life; the contesting norms, in turn, are not seen as norms but as *deviations* from that simple fact of life, as transgressions that will be didactically marked as errors. Explaining the true nature and structure of the field of normativity in academic literacies, and clarifying the fact that different norms (including the hegemonic one) direct different practices aimed at different publics and organized around different topics, genres, and styles, and are consequently subject to very different forms of judgement – this, I believe, would be a pedagogical achievement. It would enable students and practitioners to understand the actual social conditions under which certain forms of literacy are judged to be right or wrong, and perhaps instil in them also a sense of dynamics in a field that will continuously be subject to change. It may, thus, provide them with a more useful and realistic self-perception: that rather than just following rules, they create and innovate academic literacies whenever they practise them.

Coda

Bruce Horner

Jan Blommaert expresses far better than I have the pedagogical implications of a mobilities paradigm for academic literacies. Nonetheless, and at the great risk of reducing his argument, I will offer one translation of his comments into the terms I most commonly encounter in discussions with my colleagues. In those discussions, the issue is commonly framed in terms of whether or not to teach 'the standards' for academic literacy: Standard Written English, and more specifically *academic* Standard Written English. Insofar as a mobilities paradigm seems to call into question a dominant view of such standards as stable and monolithic, it prompts some to worry that it would lead students down the proverbial garden path by telling them that 'anything goes' in their academic writing. As demonstrated by the ongoing history Blommaert recalls of the exclusion of some writers' writing, and hence of some writers, from the academy on the basis of the putative deviation of that writing from those standards, that is decidedly not the case. (The deviation is putative, given the exnominative character of those standards, which allows for their invocation by those in positions of power to deny the legitimacy of some people's writing whatever the form that writing takes. The clear parallel here is to Standard English *tout court*, invoked exnominatively to deny the legitimacy of speakers one dislikes for speaking English 'with an accent' (Lippi-Green, 1997).) On these grounds, a mobilities paradigm is seen as unrealistic, pie-in-the-sky, dangerously misleading.

But instead, as Blommaert argues, it is in fact *more* realistic, both in the sense of being truer to the historical facts and experiences of writers, and in the sense of being more practically

useful for practitioners of academic literacies, student and professional, to study, teach, and engage such standards as: (1) historical, that is, varying across time and space, (2) contested and contestable, and (3) a site for the exercise of power relations – what Blommaert calls the ‘language-ideological’ character of academic literacies. Academic literacies are not entities to transmit or withhold but, rather, demonstrably a site of contest and change. Blommaert’s account of shifts in the acceptability of the languages he has used over the course of his own scholarly writing (in line with the findings of such studies as Lillis and Curry, 2010) illustrates, as he observes, that ‘the sociolinguistic system in which we situate academic literacies is increasingly *polycentric* but dominated by a *monocentric* hegemony’. But his account also illustrates the historical character of standards for academic literacies and their contested, contestable nature, as well as the politics those contests engage. We are indeed witnessing monocentric hegemony in the face of polycentric conditions for academic literacy practices, but we are also presented with clear evidence of the susceptibility of any language and literacy regime to change (within our lifetimes, from polycentric to monocentric), though the future form and direction of that change are unknown.

To return to the issue of standards, then, the question is not whether to teach them but what to study, teach, and practice them as: instead of attempting simply to determine and transmit *what they are*, which assumes their character as stable monolith, students and teachers can ask how they do and might vary and have varied across time and space, and how they are, might be, and have been contested, and to what ends and effects – in other words, to approach academic literacies as an ongoing complex of practices meriting, and in need of, critical inquiry, engagement, and revision, by students and teachers. The contributions to this special issue illustrate what such inquiry, engagement, and revision might entail.

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