

<https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2022.13383>

# Reconciling translingualism and second language writing: A Book Review

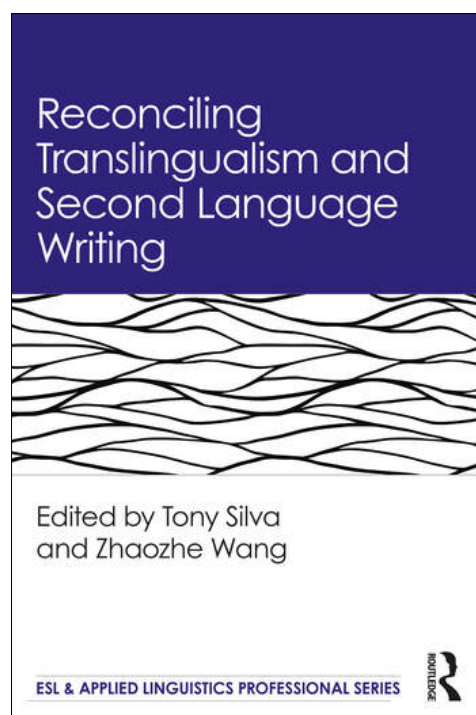
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Silva, T., & Wang, Z. (Eds.). (2020). *Reconciling translingualism and second language writing*. Routledge. ISBN 9780367435134

Translingualism, which concerns the freedom to use different languages and use them for different purposes (Horner & Alvarez, 2019), has recently become a trendy topic in language education. Despite the fresh perspectives brought by translingualism, some disputes have emerged regarding how this concept could coexist alongside scholarship in second language writing (SLW). A group of L2 writing studies scholars even expressed their concern over the misunderstanding that translingual writing would replace SLW (Atkinson et al., 2015). Given this, the book is a timely volume that revisits and reconciles the tension between scholars of translingualism and SLW. The purpose of this book, as stated by the authors, is to achieve a constructive and productive interaction between the two entities, thereby improving the L2 writing instruction practice in multilingual classrooms.



The book is composed of six parts: an introductory chapter and five sections devoted to reconciling translingualism and SLW under respective themes, namely discourses, languages, scholarship, institutions, and curriculum and pedagogies. To achieve a balanced view, the book authors intentionally invited a similar number of contributors representing the translingual writing camp and the SLW camp.

In the introduction, Wang and Silva trace the divergent attitudes towards languages between translingualism (language as a fluid, dynamic repertoire) and SLW (language as a bounded linguistic system). They also argue that the two fields are incompatible in L2 writing pedagogies. Given these divergent theorizations and practices, “writing teachers often find themselves caught up in the ongoing battle between a celebratory and a critical view of translingual approaches to teaching writing, feeling increasingly disoriented and less certain as to how to pedagogically deal with students’ languages” (p. 3). Therefore, there is a necessity to address and disentangle the relationship between translingualism and SLW. The authors call for a reconciliation of the two entities to co-exist and mutually develop. Definitions of key terms, for example, translingualism, are then provided, thus ensuring a proper understanding for the readers.

**Citation:** Liu C., & Huang T. (2022). Reconciling translingualism and second language writing: Book review. *Journal of Language and Education*, 8(4), 200-203. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2022.13383>

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**Received:** October 19, 2022

**Accepted:** December 01, 2022

**Published:** December 26, 2022



In Chapters 2 and 3, Tardy and Jordan offer reasoned discussion regarding how the dichotomy between translanguaging and SLW is created discursively and, consequently, could be resolved in the same way. Tardy, based on her examination of publications concerning the relationship between SLW and translanguaging, identifies incompatible discourses characterizing the two areas, for example, SLW as a field and translanguaging writing as an approach. She then argues that similar rhetorical strategies should be employed to avoid creating and deepening dichotomies, to acknowledge the diversified perspectives, and to consider the relationship between composition studies, SLW, and translanguaging. In Chapter 3, Jordan discusses the rhetorical concept of *kairos* as a way to shift the focus from the mastery of proficiency to a sense of fluid interaction among contexts, resources, and bodily movements across time and space. He further argues that, rather than targeting at the correctness, more attention should be directed to the spatial and temporal dimensions involved in teaching and learning L2 writing.

In the next four chapters, Canagarajah, Horner, Donahue, and Gevers examine the language relationships in translanguaging and SLW. Canagarajah draws on his life story and illustrates how one's language identities could change due to historical and sociopolitical reasons. He further proposes that the SLW actually could draw some insights from translanguaging without losing its legitimate position as a field of academic exploration. Horner approaches translanguaging as a set of language ideology which does more than implying certain geographic, linguistic, and social characteristics. The debate on the divide between translanguaging and SLW seems to be the consequences of monolingualism. Given this, Horner argues that the two research entities should develop in a complementary way as they are not totally against each other. Donahue reviews research on SLW, translanguaging, and foreign language writing and gives a detailed examination of the divergence and convergence between the former two. She suggests collaborative research on the shared terms, labels, theories, key documents, and so on. Gevers cautions the oversimplified attribution of translanguaging as fluidity and SLW as fixity. He proposes a shared recognition of fluidity and fixity as interconnected dimensions of language in use rather than two exclusive categories. Such understanding, in his opinion, could also help us move forward in thinking the relationship between translanguaging writing and SLW.

Chapters 8 to 12 are grouped under the theme of scholarship, indicating an effort to reconcile translanguaging and SLW through a revisit of their theorizing trajectories. In Chapter 8, Matsuda draws on his personal and professional story to illustrate his struggle with the "translingual bandwagonism" (p. 111). He suggests that SLW researchers should make use of the attention to language as initiated by translanguaging. Employing an emotional labor interviews approach, Cox (an SLW researcher) and Watson (a translanguaging writing scholar) in Chapter 9 discuss their positionalities, experiences, and

perspectives. They argue that the identity labeling of SLW researchers and translanguaging researchers actually causes divide. In Chapter 10, Ferris rightly points out the tension between translanguaging and SLW comes from the hurtful possibility that one might replace the other. She then calls for a shift of attention from the scholarship divide to the pedagogical implications. Given this, Ferris suggests that translanguaging writing research should undertake more empirical inquiries and draw on the expertise of SLW scholars. Besides, for SLW research, it needs to recognize contributions brought by translanguaging studies and embrace transparency. Ruecker and Shapiro (in Chapter 11) start with an insightful comparison of idealists (critical of the standardized writing conventions) and pragmatics (embracing accepted norms) in teaching English academic writing. To resolve the tension between the two orientations, they employ the perspective of critical pragmatism and situate their argument within the feminist rhetorical tradition. Based on a detailed discussion of theories, practice, and implementation of critical pragmatism, Ruecker and Shapiro propose a *both/and* approach to academic writing (i.e., teaching and problematizing the standardizations), thereby shedding light on how to reconcile a similar tension between translanguaging and SLW. In the next chapter, You expresses his concerns on the wide-spreading nationalism and calls for a yin-yang or dialectical perspective in dealing with the tension between writing studies and translanguaging writing research.

The fourth section is composed of two chapters and calls for institutional efforts to mediate the dichotomy between translanguaging and SLW. In Chapter 13, Kubota problematizes the divide between plurality and fixity. She urges for performative engagement to transform theorizations in translanguaging into actions for change, especially with the following five recommendations: (1) remaining open to language variations, (2) allowing for negotiation in classroom assessment, (3) encouraging plurilingualism, (4) reaching out to wider audiences including policymakers, and (5) addressing the institutional and epistemological heterogeneity of power. Hall and Jerskey, in Chapter 14, describe a diversified student body of linguistic backgrounds at the City University of New York where a monolingual institutional structure prevails. They propose a strong argument that translanguaging and SLW researchers should, regardless of their disciplinary and departmental underpinnings, work together to promote linguistic justice in institutions and in wider society as well.

The last section (Chapters 15 to 19) addresses the troubled relationship between translanguaging and SLW with an emphasis on writing curricula and pedagogies. Arnold proposes *weight* as a term to acknowledge the power dynamics of language and illustrates how translanguaging writing might become undesirable in practice due to the weight of English. She suggests a further exploration on weighing English in the theorization of languaging and translanguaging so as to develop writing pedagogies in a way accommodating the

needs of multilingual students. In the next chapter, Ayash, instead of examining the divide between translanguaging and SLW, focuses on how the two could work collaboratively and transdisciplinarily, especially through the pedagogy of translation. In Chapter 17, Du, Kim, Lee, Lenz, Sahranavard, and Sok reflect on their recent curriculum development that is generally inspired by translanguaging. However, they consciously avoid using this term for *branding* (i.e., a strategy for concept valorization) and consider their approach as “with or without translanguaging” (p. 212). They conclude with a call for less attention on translanguaging as a brand and more on developing writing curriculum that meets local students’ needs. In the next chapter, Schreiber problematizes the translanguaging pedagogy of negotiating language differences and considers it a pedagogical shift rather than a fully translanguaging approach. She draws on two major principles, the first concerning linguistic boundaries as normal and overlapping and the second viewing linguistic conventions as “historical codifications” (p. 228). She then proposes three tenets in defining a translanguaging approach to writing pedagogy. In the last chapter, Severino suggests two strategies to reconcile the relationship between translanguaging and SLW, i.e., mapping the controversy and learning to write in an additional language.

Taken together, the 19 chapters represent a joint effort to address the relationship between translanguaging and SLW. Whether their divergent positions are constructed rhetorically or for the fear of being replaced, translanguaging and SLW, as argued by most chapter contributors, should draw on strengths from each other and develop in a mutually respectful way.

The chapter contributors of this volume are all top scholars in their research fields. They mobilize their expertise and altogether present a multifaceted examination of translanguaging, SLW, and the interaction of the two. This book is recommendable for researchers, especially novice scholars, interested in translanguaging and/or SLW. Most of the chapters are reflective and concern historical development of L2 writing research. Thus, this volume serves as an excellent resource to navigate through the mounting discussion on translanguaging writing and SLW. Moreover, this book is of value for multi/bilingual writing teachers. Some of the chapters contain practical suggestions regarding how teachers could reconcile the tension between the emerging translanguaging writing and the well-developed SLW instruction. Such pedagogical implications are especially abundant in the last two sections, *Reconciling Institutions* and *Reconciling Curricula and Pedagogies*.

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This book contains rich insights that could elicit reflection from writing instructors on their teaching practices. For example, as discussed in several chapters, how to treat writing errors remains a big challenge. Teachers, from a translanguaging perspective, might view errors as commingling of diversified languaging means. At the same time, institutional requirements regarding writing improvement propels teachers to focus on well-established writing conventions. As pointed out by Hall and Jerskey in Chapter 14, writing teachers need to “keep in mind that they [multilingual students] are more than their errors or their awkward sentences, they have lives and personal experiences and histories of education in other languages and/or other systems” (p. 183). This is particularly prominent in the current research on L2 writing feedback. With its primary focus on effective feedback practices, feedback research might ignore students’ overall linguistic repertoires, cultural values, education background, and experiences. Such an orientation might lead to feedback practices effective in improving students’ academic performance but ineffective in sustaining learning motivation (Yu et al., 2021).

Relating to the organization of this book, the overall clustering of the chapters shows a coherent, logical organization of stances and focus of argument. A few chapters might contain several parallel argumentations and assigning them into these single-focused section could cause confusion. However, this is inevitable given the complexity and multiplicity of issues involved in each chapter. Besides, even though some chapters may overlap regarding their content, it does not leave an impression of unnecessary duplication.

To conclude, with its insights into language education, this book is highly recommended for postgraduate students, university teachers, and researchers. It could help them to have some fresh understanding of translanguaging and SLW and also to think more deeply about these issues when applied to teaching and learning L2 writing.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Chunhong Liu:** Drafting and revising the review.

**Taiji Huang:** Drafting and revising the review.

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