REVIEWS

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Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations

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Suresh Canagarajah has been engaging in boundary-crossing work between Sri Lanka and the United States since the early nineties when his publications first started appearing in the West (see Canagarajah, 2012a), and continues to write from this nexus of multimembership and bridge Western scholarship with contemporary global realities. In his new book, Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations, Canagarajah argues that, for many generations, academic discourse has been dominated by a monolingual orientation that has colored perceptions around the English language enterprise. Over the space of ten chapters, Canagarajah lays bare these orientations and explores a contrasting paradigm by theorizing about translingual practices in postmodern cosmopolitan contexts.

In Chapter 1, Canagarajah identifies translinguals as speakers who demonstrate the ability to use their language(s) successfully across diverse norms and codes in response to specific contexts and purposes. The author draws a distinction between those who are monolingual and those who hold a monolingual orientation. Canagarajah identifies two central tenets of the monolingual orientation—(a) efficient communication occurs successfully in the context of a common language with shared norms, and (b) these norms are defined by the so-called native speaker. In contrast, those who claim native ownership over
English may also employ translingual practices to negotiate intelligibility. The author then goes on to argue that there exists a long history of codemeshed communication, with codes from different languages (and language varieties) being brought into and meshed together in the same (con)text. Identifying these old-yet-new forms of hybrid communication as part of translingual practices, the author describes a translingual orientation as one where “communication transcends individual language [and] words, and involves diverse semiotic resources [in addition to language] and ecological affordances” (p. 6).

In Chapters 2 and 3, Canagarajah traces the monolingual paradigm’s emergence from eighteenth-century Europe and its subsequent dominance in Western discourse. He also identifies translingual practices in precolonial history—such as multimodal and multilingual literacy practices of the tlaquilolitzli of the Oaxacan Federation in Mexico, and the mixing and meshing of Tamil and Sanskrit by Dravidians as part of the manipravala tradition in South India. Canagarajah proposes that such practices have continued to evolve, albeit unacknowledged and discouraged, in many global contexts. Recent transnational migration patterns are now bringing these orientations (back) to the West, creating new opportunities to examine these practices.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Canagarajah explores in further depth English as a multifaceted historical contact language that continues to evolve in diverse postcolonial contexts, and the strategies that global English(es) users adopt to negotiate resulting variations. He critiques existing models—world Englishes, English as an international language, English as lingua franca—for focusing more on the emergence of form and language varieties, or glossodiversity; and emphasizes the need to balance that approach with a focus on changes in meaning, or semiodiversity. The semiodiverse nature of postmodern postcolonial translingual English is illustrated in such instances where the meaning of a word or grammatical item changes “as it travels through diverse spatio-temporal contexts” (p. 57), and where the language users employ a range of strategies to negotiate the differences in communication. To illustrate this, Canagarajah analyzes a conversation between two cheese traders—one Egyptian and the other Danish—as they coconstruct meaning around an atypical term in their trade (blowing) in order to successfully communicate with each other.

In the second half of the book, Canagarajah focuses on pedagogical considerations. In Chapters 6 and 7, the author looks at his primary areas of teaching—English language and literacy—and explores the negotiated coconstructed nature of literacy. He redefines literacy, emphasizing that “it is not uniformity of meaning but the capacity and willingness to keep negotiating for meanings that
interlocutors strive for in negotiated literacy” (p. 151). The author draws upon an ethnography of writing practices in his university course on second language writing, challenges the positivistic conventions that inform academic publishing in the West, and builds a case for pluralizing academic writing where translingual students can give voice to their own norms and identities (through such practices as codemeshing).

After this microlevel analysis grounded in the classroom, Canagarajah explores on a broader scale his pedagogical considerations in the remaining chapters. In Chapter 8, adopting a spatiotemporal orientation, he pushes for a more nuanced understanding of English use in translocal spaces. Sharing excerpts from his conversations with migrants from Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, Canagarajah shows that global English speakers use the language strategically to create new meanings and values. In Chapter 9, Canagarajah focuses on dynamic language learning and acquisition, where performative competence is determined by suitable negotiation strategies and reciprocal practices, and argues for a refashioning of pedagogy to accommodate these current realities. Specifically, the author advocates that teachers turn classrooms into sites of translingual socialization where the students draw upon a range of conditions, resources, and affordances to develop their performative competence defined as the ability to employ dynamic and reciprocal strategies in response to diverse audiences and norms.

In the final chapter, Canagarajah explores translingual practice in terms of cosmopolitan relations and global citizenship. As an alternative to existing models, he proposes a practice-based dialogical cosmopolitanism (p. 196), in which translinguals align disparate values for common goals through negotiation and collaboration to achieve community-building in diverse global contact zones and to construct and perform strategic situational identities.

The past decade has seen a gradual increase in the number of TESOL scholars problematizing monolingual orientations and theorizing about translingualism (see Canagarajah, 2012b; Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011; Motha, Jain, & Tecle, 2012; Pennycook, 2003, 2007). This seems to be in keeping with an emerging tradition of translingual activism (Pennycook, 2008), and suggests that a paradigm shift may be occurring in the way we think about language study. Canagarajah’s latest work makes a valuable addition to this body of literature with his global groundedness, shaped by his own lived experiences and theorization across the East and the West. In bringing his critical insights into the mainstream academic discourse, Canagarajah is helping push the boundaries of our own thinking.
REFERENCES


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**Promoting Plurilingualism: Majority Language in Multilingual Settings**


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- Plurilingualism, or an individual’s ability to speak more than one language, has become a cornerstone of the European Union’s (EU) language policy. One of the key goals of EU language policy is for Europeans to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue. Additionally, with immigration on the rise, many European school children’s first language is not the language of schooling. With individual plurilingualism as both goal and reality, there are political dimensions to the impetus for educational institutions to focus on the teaching and learning of other languages, and teaching through the medium of majority languages that are not always children’s first...