

# *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition*

Issues in the Teaching of Writing to  
U.S.-Educated Learners of ESL

Edited by

Linda Harklau

Kay M. Losey

Meryl Siegal

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# **Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition**

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# Preface

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**T**his book is about college writing instruction and U.S. high school graduates who enter higher education while in the process of learning English. These students, primarily immigrants and students from U.S. multilingual enclaves such as Puerto Rico, are becoming an increasing presence on college campuses across the country. The title of this volume refers to Rumbaut and Ima's (1988) characterization of these students as "1.5 generation" immigrants because of traits and experiences that lie somewhere in between those associated with the first or second generation. The initiative for the book came from our realization that although nonnative language college writers educated in the United States are becoming a major constituency in college writing programs, one that draws ready recognition from most college composition and English as a Second Language (ESL) writing instructors, there has been a dearth of research or writing about the instructional issues presented by this student population. Long-term U.S. resident English learners pose a significant challenge to the conventional categories and practices governing composition instruction at the postsecondary level. With backgrounds in U.S. culture and schooling, they are distinct from international students or other newcomers who have been the subject of most ESL writing literature, while at the same time these students' status as English language learners is often treated as incidental or even misconstrued as underpreparation in writings on mainstream college composition and basic writing.

In compiling this volume, our intent is to bridge this gap and to initiate a dialogue on the linguistic, cultural, and ethical issues that attend teaching college writing to U.S. educated linguistically diverse students. The book brings together a number of experienced writing researchers and educators to identify and explore the issues. Working from an overarching perspective that casts writing and instruction as socially situated and constructed, the chapters of this book frame issues, raise questions, and provide portraits of language minority students and the classrooms and programs that serve them. From New York to midwestern land grant universities to the Pacific Rim, contributors to this volume represent a diversity of contexts, populations, programs, and perspectives. Collectively the chapters serve to characterize the shared attributes and diversity of language minority writers. Authors con-

sider how experiences in U.S. K–12 schooling and status as nonnative language speakers and writers of English combine to create the unique linguistic and academic traits of long-term residents. They illustrate how various configurations of college writing instruction serve students and how U.S. language minority students respond in a variety of classroom settings. Together, the pieces sketch the landscape of college writing instruction for language minority students and explore the issues faced by ESL and college writing programs in providing appropriate writing instruction to second language learners arriving from U.S. high schools. The book serves not only to articulate an issue and set an agenda for further research and discussion, but also to suggest paths toward inclusive and sensitive writing instruction in college classrooms.

The book is divided into three major sections: the students, the classrooms, and the programs. In the first section, authors employ case studies and interviews to develop in-depth profiles of the backgrounds, attitudes, and college experiences of language minority students with writing. In the second section, authors address the high school and college classroom settings in which language minority students learn to write and suggest implications for improving classroom practice. Because English language learners who graduate from U.S. high schools seem to present particular difficulties in terms of program placement, authors in the third section explore the strengths and weaknesses of various configurations of writing programs for U.S.-educated second-language learners.

Because we believe that immigrant and resident students coming out of U.S. high schools span the disciplinary, programmatic, and institutional boundaries between ESL and college composition, the book addresses a diverse readership. A broad audience of ESL researchers and instructors, particularly those in Intensive English Programs and academic ESL programs, will find it of interest. The book is also relevant to college composition instructors in community college, 4-year college, and university settings. It addresses programmatic issues faced by writing center and Writing Across the Curriculum administrators educating language minority students. Finally, we expect it to be a resource for graduate courses dealing with issues of diversity and writing instruction.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have many people to thank for their assistance and encouragement during this book's development. The contributors deserve our greatest gratitude. Writing in an area where there was little existing work to serve as a blueprint, they have thoughtfully articulated previously unexplored issues in ESL and college composition. Our sincere thanks for their creativity and professionalism which have made this collection a reality. Our appreciation also goes to reviewers Ruth Spack, Tufts University, and Steven Haber, Jersey City State College, for insightful comments and suggestions which have helped to shape the book. We would also like to acknowledge Paul Matthew's careful reading

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—Linda Harklau

—Kay M. Losey

—Meryl Siegel

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# 1 Linguistically Diverse Students and College Writing: What Is Equitable and Appropriate?

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Virtually every U.S. college and university faces the challenges and opportunities entailed in adapting to an increasingly diverse student body. A growing number of students are bi- or multilingual and speak a home language other than English. Although skill in using English in academic writing is often a key criterion for gaining entry to collegiate academic studies and exiting a college degree program, these students' presence in academia has raised political and ethical dilemmas for universities regarding college writing requirements. For example, can or should students from bilingual backgrounds be held to the same writing standards as monolingual speakers of standard English, and if not, how do we establish different but equivalent and appropriate standards? What forms of writing instruction are appropriate for bilingual students? How well do nonnative language writers need to be able to function in written English in order to thrive in the academy, and when is it appropriate to impose a prerequisite threshold of proficiency to participate in college?

These dilemmas are complicated considerably by the ways in which nonnative speakers and writers of English tend to be categorized in existing literature and institutional practices, categories that may not reflect the backgrounds, experiences, and needs of linguistically diverse students in colleges today. This is particularly the case for the population that forms the focus for this volume; namely, bilingual U.S. resident students who enter U.S. colleges and universities by way of K-12 schools. On many, if not most, college campuses students who speak a language other than English at home find themselves classified first and foremost as English as a Second Language (ESL) writers. Although the research and pedagogical literature surrounding sec-

ond-language (L2) writing has been growing substantially in recent years, Nayar (1997) pointed out that genericized uses of ESL can mask the fact that different populations, needs, and goals are intended depending on the context. The field of college ESL in general, and academic writing in particular, focuses on a population of international students who enter postsecondary institutions in the United States after completing primary and secondary education abroad. In her overview of the field of ESL writing, for example, Reid (1993) noted specifically that she wrote about an international student population and excluded other populations from consideration. Although others may not make as explicit a statement, it is clear in many writings that international students are the population in mind. As a result, much of the pedagogical literature on academic language instruction for nonnative English speakers (NNES) at the college level remains focused on instruction for students with limited exposure to U.S. society or the English language, or teaching academic genres and conventions to academically accomplished students, often graduate students, arriving from other countries. ESL texts and curricula often contain an implicit assumption that international students are the normative population of college ESL classrooms, leading to certain suppositions concerning learners' backgrounds and skills; for example, that they have learned English through formal, metalinguistically oriented classroom instruction, that they are literate in their first language (L1), or that they have had considerable life experience abroad to be drawn on in interpreting their experience in the United States.

But growth in the international student population has not been the only source, and perhaps not even the primary source, of increasing linguistic diversity on college campuses. Since the mid-1960s, changes in immigration laws have resulted in ever-increasing immigration of entire families including school-age children and adolescents. Wars and political exigencies have also triggered waves of refugees from southeast Asia, central America, eastern Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. At the same time, populations of indigenous language minority groups in the United States have been growing rapidly. Although in most circumstances the overwhelming presence of English in U.S. society has made these students English-dominant bilinguals by the time they enter secondary school, enclaves (e.g., Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Alaska, Los Angeles, New York) exist where students may still be English learners in high school and beyond.

As a result, there are a considerable and quickly growing number of bilingual English learners graduating from U.S. secondary schools and entering U.S. colleges and universities. Because U.S. colleges and universities collect virtually no information about U.S. residents' or citizens' native language status, we cannot say exactly how many students there are. We can, however, get some indications from the number of language minority students in U.S. high schools. Almost 15% of the limited English proficient (LEP) students in U.S. public schools are at the secondary level. More than 75,000 were high school seniors in 1993 alone (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993). Because LEP classification represents only the most elementary level of English language

proficiency, and because learning an L2 for academic purposes is a protracted process that requires up to 7 years by some accounts (Collier, 1987; Cummins & Swain, 1986), the population of English learners graduating from U.S. high schools yearly is likely to be at least double to triple that figure. The advent of open admission policies and growth of nontraditional student population since the mid-1970s, especially at community colleges, has further facilitated these students' entry into college. As a result, there has been dramatic growth in the population of linguistically diverse students who have entered college by way of an U.S. public school education. In some settings, particularly urban 2-year colleges, students from non-English language backgrounds already do or will soon form the majority of entering students (see Lay, Carro, Tien, Niemann, and Leong, chap. 10, this volume; Padron, 1994).

Postsecondary institutions in several key states are affected most dramatically by enrollment increases of U.S.-educated, U.S.-resident learners of English. With two out of every five immigrants in the United States and majority non-English language background populations in several urban areas, California is in the vanguard of this demographic shift, and it is no coincidence that many of the contributions in this volume come from that state. In fact, a 1990 California State University report contends that the unmet ESL needs of Asian Pacific American and other immigrant and refugee students "looms as a major issue confronting the state's educational system" (California State University, 1990, p. 26). As Lay, et al. (chap. 10, this volume) indicate, colleges in New York and New Jersey are also disproportionately affected by enrollment increases among U.S.-resident L2 learners. A recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article shows the urgency of attending to the dilemmas in considering writing requirements and examinations at institutions such as the City University of New York (CUNY), where nearly half of the student body now consists of first-generation immigrants and Puerto Ricans (Ward, 1997). Also disproportionately affected are Florida, especially Miami (see Padron, 1994), Texas, and Illinois. At postsecondary institutions in these states and in major urban areas around the country, U.S.-resident language minority students are fast becoming a force with which to be reckoned, changing the entire structure and nature of writing instruction. However, as Hartman and Tarone (chap. 6, this volume) and Muchisky and Tangren (chap. 12, this volume) indicate, it is not just traditional immigration centers that are affected by increasing linguistic diversity; virtually every university is or will soon confront the same issues that institutions in these states now face.

This collection is, to our knowledge, the first devoted explicitly to articulating the issues involved in teaching college writing to English learners who reside in the United States and graduate from U.S. high schools. In the following chapters, we address three sets of intertwined questions. The first has to do with the student population—who are these students? How do their backgrounds and experiences vary, and how might they be similar? A second question has to do with programmatic issues. How are U.S.-resident English language learners placed in college writing programs? How do they fit into

existing instructional categories and programs, and how do they challenge them? The third set of questions addresses classroom practices. How do established practices simultaneously serve and fail English learners who are long-term residents, and how might writing instruction be designed to help them to succeed in college?

We offer no pedagogical quick fixes, no easy definitions or solutions. The authors in this collection represent considerable diversity in their personal and institutional experiences, and they take varied stances on the education of language minority students in postsecondary settings. Rather, through the case studies and descriptions of experience collected in this volume, we illustrate significant issues commonly encountered by these students and their writing instructors and in the process, bring into question commonly employed categorizations of English language learners in higher education.

## THE STUDENTS

Who are these students, and from what backgrounds do they come? The contributors to this collection offer diverse answers to this question, differing on how students are identified, what traits are considered most salient, and even on their appellation. The fact that authors differ on something so fundamental as a name for U.S.-educated English language learners shows just how difficult it is to fit these students into current ways of categorizing linguistically diverse college writers—ESL, developmental, regular (and by implication, how problematic those categories are; see Chiang & Schmida, chap. 5, this volume; Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997; Thesen, 1997).

Resident status and generational status is one means of distinguishing this group. Many of the multilingual students discussed in this book would fit Rumbaut and Ima's (1988) description of "1.5 generation" students—immigrants who arrive in the United States as school-age children or adolescents, and share characteristics of both first and second generation. But a generational definition fails us in considering the case of students from Puerto Rico and other parts of the United States where English is not the community language. Students from such areas may still very well be English learners at the college level.

Educational experience also tends to differentiate U.S.-resident language minority students, who graduate from U.S. secondary schools and are somewhat conversant with U.S. school and society, from international student ESL writers who are often new to the United States and have extensive academic literacy training in their home country. Here again, however, there is significant variation and exceptions. Immigrants may begin U.S. schooling in sixth grade or as a high school junior. Some complete secondary school in their native country and then attend a secondary school in the U.S. for a year or two on arrival in order to acclimate to U.S. schooling (e.g., see Lay et al., chap. 10, this volume). Students may be highly privileged and highly edu-

cated on arrival and make the transition to U.S. schooling effortlessly. On the other hand, they may have interrupted schooling histories in their home countries. Some have superlative literacy training in their native language and feel comparatively ill at ease with English language literacy practices, whereas others may only be literate in English.

As Rodby (chap. 3, this volume) and Lee (1997) illustrate, U.S.-resident English learners' college careers must often be understood within the context of social webs that surround each student. Social relationships at home, at school, and in the community and background characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and immigrant generational status shape students' efforts as college writers (Losey, 1997). Family and community may be a significant motivation and support to immigrants in college, but performance in writing courses simultaneously may be impeded by obligations to familial networks. In particular, Lay et al. (chap. 10 this volume) and Rodby's (chap. 8, this volume) work reminds us that the financial status of immigrant families often leads students to assume heavy workloads off campus with negative effects on academic performance.

Students may self-identify as English learners. However, as Chiang and Schmida (chap. 5, this volume) point out, second-generation students may see themselves as bilingual although they have little productive command of a non-English language or designate themselves as native speakers of English when English is their second language. For students such as these, English is often the only language in which they have experienced academic preparation and literacy, and yet at the same time they often do not feel that the language is truly theirs. Chiang and Schmida emphasize that linguistic affiliations are just as much a product of sociocultural positionings as they are of technical competence. Although students have attended high school in the United States, some might feel more comfortable within the social milieus of international students in college settings (see Leki, chap. 2, this volume). Thus, students' linguistic and cultural affiliations may not always neatly parallel their generational status or the language in which they have been educated. Furthermore, as Blanton (chap. 7, this volume) indicates, even students who are still actively engaged in learning English often view language support for second language learners as stigmatized and are insulted by designation as an "ESL student." Although some students may see learner status as a distinct and negative influence on their academic experiences in college, Leki (chap. 2, this volume) illustrates that others may see their status as English language learners as a more or less peripheral issue, viewing study strategies, academic talent, and knowledge of the system as more critical to collegiate success.

In all, the picture that emerges in these chapters is of a tremendously diverse student population along continua of language proficiency, language affiliation, and academic literacy backgrounds. It is not surprising that colleges and universities have responded with a number of varying programmatic and placement options.

## PROGRAMS AND PLACEMENT OPTIONS

What sorts of writing programs do U.S. colleges and universities offer for high school graduates who are English learners, and how are these students placed in such programs? Work specifically examining postsecondary institutional language programs and policies for U.S.-resident language learners is sparse (but see ESL Intersegmental Project, 1997; Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996). The programmatic configurations contained in these chapters reveal a multitude of options from institutions around the country. Most of the programs described here include an ESL-specific preparatory presequence for a college-wide composition class or test requirement. Programs are housed in Intensive English Programs (IEPs), ESL departments, ESL programs that are part of other departments (e.g., English) or off-campus in university-wide extension, and academic assistance programs. Composition sequences may include adjunct or linked courses, as they do at City College of New York (CCNY; see Lay et al., chap. 10, this volume). They may also be part of a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program in which students engage in intensive writing in designated discipline-area courses (see Wolfe-Quintero & Segade, chap. 11, this volume). These course sequences may be in the form of ESL and mainstream sections with parallel curricula, or they may be undifferentiated.

In which program or configuration immigrant students are placed depends on how they are classified when they arrive in college out of U.S. high schools, and the way in which bilingualism is construed in any given institutional setting appears to be quite varied, if not idiosyncratic. Although not represented by institutions discussed in this collection, one option is simply not to differentiate among entering first-year students on the basis of language background. Although that option may be the product of principled egalitarianism, it is probably more often the result of institutional reluctance to take on the issue of linguistic diversity. If colleges make an explicit effort to sensitize and train composition instructors, WAC faculty, and writing center personnel about the characteristics of nonnative language writers, this option may serve students well. However, many institutions do not appear to undertake such training efforts, pursuing a policy of not-so-benign neglect of language learners on campus (Gray et al., 1996). As a result, evidence suggests that distinct differences in the writing approaches and instructional needs of nonnative writers (Inghilleri, 1989; Schecter & Harklau, 1992; Silva, 1993) may be overlooked and superficial nonnative language textual features can be mistaken for a lack of writing expertise (Land & Whitley, 1989; Valdés, 1992; Zamel, 1995). Anecdotal evidence suggests that at such institutions, developmental writing courses may become *de facto* ESL writing courses, and writing centers are often overrun with nonnative language writers who have no other means of language support.

Probably the most commonplace practice is to identify and place incoming students who are English learners in an ESL presequence of courses for

first-year composition. In a 1995 survey of U.S. universities, Williams found that a separate ESL course or sequence of courses exists at virtually every postsecondary institution that identifies nonnative speakers of English at admission, and at the majority of institutions ESL must be completed as a prerequisite before students can enroll in regular first-year composition courses (Williams, 1995). There are a number of logistical and equity issues in the placement of U.S. educated language minority students in ESL course presequences; among the most contentious are those of credits, tuition, and financial aid. Although Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has long recommended that ESL coursework be accorded the same status as foreign language courses for the purpose of college credit and distribution requirements, Williams (1995) found that ESL is nevertheless treated as noncredit bearing on most campuses today. Even when such courses are credit bearing, they are seldom applicable toward any degree requirements. As Lay et al. (chap. 10, this volume) relate, immigrants often attend college on the thinnest of financial margins, and financial aid is a key factor in their persistence (or attrition) in degree programs. Noncredit-bearing status not only affects the applicability of financial aid to ESL courses, but also affects students' status as full-time students. Moreover, Lay et al. (chap. 10, this volume) and Smoke (1988) reported that CUNY research has shown that when students are kept in ESL over several semesters to the exclusion of other degree coursework, their financial resources may be depleted before they are able to complete other degree requirements. Although Lay et al. (chap. 10, this volume) indicate that such findings have led to considerable reforms in CUNY ESL policies, there is no doubt that there are other programs in which U.S. high school-educated bilingual students have similar experiences.

As Muchisky and Tangren (chap. 12, this volume) indicate, additional complications may arise when institutions make the decision to place U.S.-resident English language learners in IEPs. Because such programs are generally intended for nonresident international students, they are often self-supporting. Thus, as Muchisky and Tangren relate, U.S.-resident students in such programs may find themselves paying far more in tuition than they would in other college coursework while at the same time IEPs may find themselves in financial jeopardy for serving these students with discounted tuition.

ESL course sequences are often stigmatized as remedial and students may be reluctant or dismayed to be placed in them. ESL is also widely regarded as remedial by college administrators and policymakers, making the programs and the students they serve extremely vulnerable to the vicissitudes of institutional and state mandates. For example, ESL programs are at issue in antiremediation projects underway on U.S. college campuses. The antiremedial movement, in an appeal to higher academic standards in collegiate instruction, places the responsibility for providing courses such as ESL on institutions prior to or outside of college under the premise that once students' language is "fixed" there, they can transfer to college. It is precisely the population of U.S.-educated, U.S.-resident language minority students who would be most profoundly affected by current anti-remediation efforts directed at ESL programs. Without



such programs, many U.S.-educated language minority students may not gain entrance to college or founder once admitted.

It is not surprising that the equitability and appropriacy of criteria under which students enter and leave ESL programs is a particularly contentious issue in the case of U.S.-educated language minority students. In particular, it is a difficult indeed to distinguish between the population that is the subject of this book—students who are still actively engaged in the process of learning English—and those who are fully bilingual. Written text features and scores on standardized writing placement and exit measures are also commonly used to distinguish English learners from fluent bilinguals. However, as Frodesen and Starna (chap. 4, this volume) illustrate, when used in isolation such measures may not give an accurate rendering of students' linguistic development. Significant concerns are raised in this book (see Frodesen & Starna, chap. 4, this volume; Muchisky & Tangren, chap. 12, this volume; Wolfe-Quintero & Segade, chap. 11, this volume) and elsewhere (see Valdés, 1992; Ward, 1997) about bilingual college students being mistakenly defined as English learners on the basis of relatively permanent and superficial nonnative-like language features. In part, these features have been attributed to the immersion process through which learners acquire English in U.S. public schools. As Lay et al. and Reid (1997) indicated, English language learners educated in U.S. schools might be understood as “*ear*” learners—they have learned most of their language intuitively through exposure rather than through explicit instruction. As a result, contributors to this volume identify several ways in which they might differ from the international student archetype prevalent in college ESL curriculum. For one thing, as Ferris (chap. 8, this volume) shows, they may not be conversant with metalinguistic labels and rules for the language that they know. As Muchisky and Tangren (chap. 12, this volume) and Wolfe-Quintero and Segade (chap. 11, this volume) indicate, they may also learn English through immersion in a community speaking a nonstandard dialect of English and retain features of this dialect in their writing.

The issue of how nonnative language features are to be interpreted is crucial because such features frequently form the basis for placement in and exit from mandatory writing coursework. Inappropriate assessment measures or misinterpretation of those measures may thus result in inappropriate ESL course placements and unnecessary delays in bilingual students' progress through degree programs. Lay et al. (chap. 10, this volume) and Ward (1997), for example, noted that students at CUNY have often succeeded in the rest of their academic programs but have been unable to obtain their degrees because of their performance on writing exit tests. On a broader level, Valdés (1992) and Silva (1997) argued that the widespread expectation that adult language learners can attain completely monolingual-like command of an L2 is unrealistic and only possible in a nation that is overwhelmingly monolingual. As Ward (1997) and several of the contributors in this volume argue, in a cosmopolitan and linguistically diverse society, we may have to accept that not everyone will develop a monolingual's competence in English.