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Multilingual Insights into a Complex Field of Study: An Introduction to the Aims of this Book

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Writing research is currently undergoing a process of open internationalization and increasing global exchange. A vital role in this expansion has been played by international conferences and associations that facilitate translocal exchanges.[1] It was at this moment of expansion and in concord with Latin America's own historical logics that we created the Latin American Association for the Study of Writing in Higher Education and Professional Contexts, ALES, the organization that sponsored the meeting where this book was conceived. I am honored to be the editor of this volume, which has allowed me to learn from this unique compilation of diverse voices and tell the readers our Association's story in first person.

In October 2016, a vibrant symposium was held in Santiago at the University of Chile, promoted by Argentine researcher Federico Navarro. After its closing, a group of scholars from several countries sat on a restaurant's terrace to think about the terms we wanted for an association that would foster the specialization and academic development of our area of study. We defined a vision and determined some fundamental elements of this proposal, established a board of directors and bylaws to ensure a democratic governance, and began to plan a second conference.

The II ALES International Conference was held at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in October 2018 and attracted researchers and attendees from 13 countries. At this conference, two key principles of the ALES philosophy guided the decision-making and the editorial line. The first

1 For example, the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research, ISAWR, and its conference WRAB; the SIG Writing of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction, EARLI, and its biennial congress; the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing, EATAW, and its biennal conference; the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum, AWAC, and the pushing internationalization of the IWAC conference, among many other initiatives.

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of these issues stems from the applied nature of our discipline in the region. To a large extent, the academic attention to the systematic study of writing in higher education arose from the institutional teaching initiatives that proliferated in the 2000s in Latin America. This origin has underscored the need to develop quality research to consolidate the discipline, professionalize our pedagogical action, and influence public policy. The importance of writing in the educational and social agenda should not be sustained by narratives of literacy crises, the myth of writing deficits, or the rhetoric of "basic" competencies that students have failed to acquire by the end of secondary education. On the contrary, the importance of writing must be underpinned by an informed and intellectually challenging perspective that forces us to think about the role and nature of written communication in all areas of our lives.

The second key element that inspired the conference was the need to position the knowledge generated in Latin America in the international disciplinary landscape on an equal standing. This endeavor, which we have called a "decolonial" stance in the Association's vision, implies questioning who produces and who consumes knowledge and generating concrete actions to diversify its directionality. The literature differentiates "colonialism" (a type of political relationship) from "coloniality," the latter being understood as the power dynamics that emerged from colonialism and from which it is not easy to emancipate ourselves; systems of knowledge production are at the center of these power structures (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Thus, as a Latin American association, we advocate for building a dynamic of influence in which developments, theories, and paradigms can also be offered from South to South and from South to North. With these two elements in mind, professionalization and decolonization, we held our second conference back in 2018. These are also the guiding principles of this book.

Before getting to this volume's genesis, I will take the liberty of sharing my own theoretical paths to state the need for this equal exchange. I believe it is a relevant gesture to assume my positionality in this process—that of a Latin American scholar who specialized in the United States,[2] in a field whose denominations fluctuated between "rhetoric and composition," "composition studies," and "writing studies." Today, I feel more comfortable stating that the latter was my disciplinary home. Like many scholars and practitioners in Latin America, my initial training was in linguistics. The processes of university enrollment expansion, the development of student-centered tertiary ed-

2 I think there are many connections with the article "Mirroring Lautaro's gesture: Towards a canon in Latin American writing studies" (Cortés Lagos, 2021), which explores from a similar positionality the emergence of a pedagogical Latin American canon.

ucational models, and university reforms at the turn of the century led to the emergence of this new applied field of university writing in Latin America. Like many scholars in the region, my study path began in the classroom and writing curriculum development.

Walking from South to North to pursue my training was not a trivial decision. By the beginning of the 21st century, there was an implicit assumption that this knowledge was better developed in other locations, all North of Chile. Furthermore, I often found myself telling my doctoral colleagues in California: "there is no field of composition in Latin America." Nonetheless, before long, I was able to problematize this somewhat naïve idea that I kept repeating. While perhaps composition did not exist in the same way that I came to know it in my North American training years, indeed, our practice of university writing draws on a complex disciplinary heritage that includes educational psychology, cognitive studies of reading, discourse studies, critical discourse analysis, and functional linguistics. This strong background challenges the idea that the study of university writing in Latin America is incipient, underdeveloped, or just plain poor; it also challenges the seemingly obvious North-to-South directionality of knowledge flow.

Although I traveled abroad to pursue a Ph.D. with a focus on "Language, literacy and composition"—a disciplinary specificity that seemed astounding to me from Latin America at the beginning of the last decade—I soon realized that, while American writing studies were at a different stage of disciplinary development, they suffered ills similar to those found in other latitudes. Just as in Latin America, in the US there are still struggles against the deficit discourses that predominate in the general public and even in university administration, there are still symbolic power imbalances within departmental spaces—for example, between writing instructors and researchers in traditional disciplines such as literature or linguistics—there are still passionate debates about the epistemological and methodological imperatives to transcend mere accounts of experiences, there are still labor issues and precarity for instructors and directors of writing programs. I realized that it was not true that the enormous disciplinary development of American writing studies meant that the challenges of writing in university contexts had been solved. American writing studies were often "the sad women in the basement" (Miller, 1993), which is how I felt about my situation as a writing teacher back home. I learned that we might as well think through these challenges together and learn from each other in an equal exchange.

I was able to name this idea for the first time when I read "'Internationalization' and Composition Studies: Reorienting the Discourse" (Donahue, 2009), a piece that allowed me to reorganize these tensions—in my case,

embodied tensions, which I experienced in each doctoral seminar with the American professors who had influenced me forever. The concept of "equal trade," so suggestively posited by Donahue, allowed me to glimpse the idea that it is necessary to reclaim our Latin American tradition, heir to our academic endeavors throughout the Twentieth Century, and that Latin American writing studies are not an adaptation of models imported from other centers of knowledge production. Nevertheless, this realization is not exempt of new challenges. There is a clear need to continue advancing toward the field's professionalization to change the directionality of knowledge flows. At a first level, it is a South-South challenge, as different studies show the unidirectionality of theory and methods in Latin American research. Research on writing in Latin America by the beginning of the century was often limited to anecdotal accounts of "cases" of classrooms, universities, or countries analyzed with foreign conceptual frameworks (Ávila Reyes, 2017; Navarro et al., 2016). The second level is the more complex challenge of South-North directionality. In this spirit, we first created ALES and then this book. We wanted to enable a physical space for academic exchange where we could, perhaps, have this conversation in a more egalitarian stance. The publishing house that hosts this venture, the new Latin American section of the International Exchanges series of The WAC Clearinghouse, serves to a large extent the same purpose.

After the II ALES Conference, many colleagues from different latitudes let us know how the immersive multilingual experience of panels and plenaries impacted them. At the conference, we resorted to professional interpreting, code-switching, alternate use of languages in presentations and materials, and even some multilingual panels without interpretation, in which panelists and attendees spontaneously translanguaged to engage in conversation. This "experiment" was meant to make a point: That, to start a new conversation, we need to create spaces where all voices can be heard. This volume aims to collect, at least in part, those multilingual contributions that began to be heard in 2018.

This book, therefore, is not a proceedings volume. Instead, it is an effort to capture the diversity of perspectives enabled by a broad dialogue on writing. It was an open call, which unfortunately left out many meaningful perspectives that were present at the conference, so this picture is, inevitably, partial. We received many chapter proposals, which were evaluated by external peers and by the editor for pre-selection. Then, the complete chapters were submitted to blind reviewing, a process for which I must thank the 16 anonymous referees, all leading academics from Argentina, Chile, Brazil, the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Peru, and Portugal.

As we brought together in the volume chapters in Spanish, English, and Portuguese, the result is the international and multilingual book you have in your hands. This book is the fruit of the committed and often voluntary efforts of many people. Among these, I would like to highlight the assistant editors: Lina Calle-Arango and Ana Cortés Lagos, both doctoral candidates in the South and the North, who participate and research in our discipline. The chapters include contributions (in order of appearance) from the United Kingdom, United States, Chile, Brazil, Sweden, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. Several of these works are collaborations across languages or geographic locations. They also address writing research from vast perspectives, ranging from ethnographic studies to systemic-functional linguistic analyses. Together, these multilingual contributions invite us to envision a discipline that comprehensively accounts for writing as an object of study of a complex nature.

The book begins with a section entitled "Theoretical Contributions to the Conversation about Writing." The first of these contributions is rightly multilingual, and it takes up the conversation about locality and globality of knowledge that we raised in ALES. **Theresa Lillis** opens the section with an article that experiments using two interspersed languages to highlight the value of bringing multiple resources to writing research and discussing the origins of the Academic Literacies movement in the UK and the implications of using this theory translocally. Next, **Bob Broad** offers a persuasive essay on the need to centrally include teachers in the development of large-scale writing assessments. While this text focusses on the discussion of how greater teacher participation and agency can counteract the unintended consequences of standardized assessment and increase the validity of these measures, it raises the critical challenge of professionally educating writing teachers for this purpose. For her part, **Alejandra Meneses** offers a cross-national collaboration with **Paola Uccelli** and **Marcela Ruiz,** exploring academic language development during school years. The article introduces the construct of transdisciplinary academic language, exemplifies its development with data from Chile, and argues about its role as a catalyst for educational equity, as it mediates school learning. The section concludes with an essay by **Charles Bazerman** that reinstates the need to develop research to understand writing as a "practical art," which, counterintuitively, cannot be learned by just "doing" and without systematic instruction or research. Bazerman offers a thorough survey of a kind of research that honors the practical nature of its object of study and also offers practical advice for our teaching and writing practice, addressing issues such as process, knowledge transfer, anxiety, and lifespan development.

The second section of the book, "Multilingualism and University Writing," offers two chapters on second language teaching and learning. First, **Jaci Brasil Tonelli** and **Eliane G. Lousada** explore the linguistic skills students of French Language and Literature require for writing summaries in a second language from the apporoach of socio-discursive interactionism. The results include various aspects like knowledge of genre and voice, anaphoric resources, and grammatical knowledge, such as conjugation and contractions of the French language. Second, another transnational collaboration, this time between Sweden and Chile, by **Alejandra Donoso**, **Rakel Österberg,** and **Enrique Sologuren,** analyzes discursively and contrastively university writing by three types of Spanish speakers in Sweden: Native, second language, and heritage speakers. The results show that each group has differential patterns in areas such as rhetorical structure, subordination, and the use of transition markers. These patterns seem to be explained not only by linguistic background but also by previous schooling experiences.

The third section of the book "Literacy Practices and the Teaching of Writing" offers a wide range of approaches to think about the teaching of writing. The first chapter, by **Laura Eisner**, adopts an ethnographic perspective to analyze the interaction of a group of students writing a text for school. They are students unfamiliar with the dominant forms of literacy who attend an adult school in Argentina. The results describe how learners interact to construct an "authorized voice," often bringing resources from other literate practices to adjust to the school's academic literacy expectations. **Olga López Pérez** and **Joanna Chávez** report an investigation with university psychology teachers in Mexico. The researchers identify two types of practices that they call "innovative" since they are not part of the curricular requirements. In the innovative practices that they call institutional, professors emphasize writing to fulfill the established curricular tasks better. On the other hand, in the practices that they call self-managed, teachers design tasks with epistemic potential outside the institutionally mandated guidelines. The section continues with **Joan Mullin** and **Jan Rieman**'s chapter, who share the results of their longitudinal study with 19 participants at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Participants do apply learning outcomes to writing new genres, but they report few opportunities for continued writing development after completing first-year writing courses, which poses significant challenges for writing instructors to ensure transfer over the years. Next, **Elizabeth Narváez** leads a team of six authors from different Colombian institutions to investigate the writing practices developed by graduates of different careers in their professional lives. Among her findings, she highlights the predominant role of writing for leadership, coordination, and project management in all the

disciplines studied. Writing for research, however, is central only for some groups of graduates. Their results offer important clues to guide the teaching of writing in universities. The section closes with the work of an authorial team of nine researchers led by **Federico Navarro**. In their study, the authors compare ideas and expectations about university writing in a group of 360 students from a Chilean university with a cross-sectional design covering two groups: First-year students and graduates, in six disciplines. Among the findings, there is evidence of a gradual enculturation process at the university, and the graduates report having learned by themselves through trial and error.

The last section illustrates the linguistic roots of university writing studies in the region and allows us to cross discursive and educational interests uniquely. First, **Estela Moyano** offers a systemic-functional description of the discussion section of a research article, with emphasis on the purpose, structure, and relevant discursive resources. This analysis is offered as input for the process of "joint deconstruction," one of the three steps of a model inspired by Jim Martin and David Rose's genre pedagogy and which includes a deconstruction of an exemplar as a model of the genre, a construction, and an edition. Next, **Orlando Vian Jr.** proposes a "grammatically oriented" teaching—in line with linguist Michael Halliday's idea of "thinking grammatically"—to write academic reviews in English by Brazilian students. The author sets out his Cycle of Teaching and Learning (CEA), which includes constructing the context around the review genre, modeling the text focusing on modality and evaluation, followed by guided practice and independent writing. The book closes with the contribution of **Juana Blanco**, who provides evidence of an action research cycle in which the systemic functional approach Scaffolding Academic Literacy (SAL) is implemented to write summaries at a university in Spain. After the application of the SAL steps, the author finds statistically significant differences in aspects such as purpose, schematic structure, ideation, interpersonal meanings, and periodicity; the same does not occur with appraisal, identification, and syntax of the written modality, which opens new challenges for a subsequent cycle of intervention.

In short, this book gathers heterogeneous views on the nature of writing, which together seek to build a complex picture of its teaching and learning in different languages at the university, including the necessary links with school education and the workplace. We hope that these "Multilingual Contributions" enrich a joint understanding of our object of study and contribute to diversifying the voices that provide empirical evidence on writing.

We finished the assemblage of this book in 2021, during the second year of the global pandemic of COVID-19, a scenario we never imagined when we met at the ALES conference in October 2018 nor when we started to

edit this book. We live today in a world of physical distancing and economic uncertainty; a world with significant challenges and major educational disparities that the pandemic has exposed and deepened; a world that mourns the loss of millions of lives, as does each of the countries represented in this volume. Paradoxically, this historical moment has made us more connected. This is a time when we have been able to embrace international cooperation like never before. I am grateful for the patience and effort of all the different actors that have contributed to bringing this book to completion, despite all the obstacles along the way.

I conclude this prologue with words of hope, with the illusion of being able to meet soon and continue collaborating, speaking our multiple languages in physical spaces where we can see, listen, discuss, learn, make a toast, and hug each other.

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