Written Communication
Volume 25 Number 3
July 2008 353-388
© 2008 Sage Publications
10.1177/0741088308319229
http://wcx.sagepub.com
hosted at
http://online.sagepub.com

Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and "Deep Theorizing"

Closing the Gap Between Text and Context in Academic Writing Research

Theresa Lillis
The Open University, UK

This article critically explores the value of ethnography for enhancing context-sensitive approaches to the study of academic writing. Drawing on data from two longitudinal studies, student writing in the United Kingdom and professional academic writing in Hungary, Slovakia, Spain, and Portugal, the author illustrates the different contributions ethnography can make to researching academic writing, depending on the level at which it is construed, as method, methodology, or "deep theorizing." In discussing the third level of ethnography, the author draws on recent debates around linguistic ethnography to explore how ethnography as deep theorizing can contribute to refining social practice accounts of academic writing through the specific notions of indexicality and orientation. By working through three levels of ethnography, her aim is to signal the ontological gap between text and context in academic writing research and to open up debate about how this gap can be narrowed.

***Keywords*:** *emic/etic approach; linguistic ethnography; indexicality; orientation; methods for studying writing; research methodologies; writing contexts*

Author's Note: I would like to express my warmest appreciation to all the writers who gave and continue to give of their precious time. Funding to support the project has been awarded by the British Academy and the UK Economic and Social Research Council, award numbers RES-000-22-0098 and 22-2234. I would also like to thank all those who have read earlier versions and helped me to forge the ideas in this article in different ways: Mary Jane Curry, Awena Carter, Janet Maybin, Philip Seargeant, and Brian Street; and to Christina Haas and the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

Introduction: The Drive to Narrow the Gap Between Text and Context

A principal object of academic writing research has been, and continues to be, the written text. There is a long and varied tradition of text-focused approaches to academic writing, drawing on rhetoric, a range of linguistic frameworks, and diverse genre studies (for overviews, see Bazerman & Prior, 2004; Hewings, 2001; Hyland, 2006). But alongside the textualist analytic lens, for considerable time there has also been a growing recognition of the need to focus on the context of writing, for understanding what is involved and at stake in academic writing. This is evident from a recent overview of published articles on writing research by Juzwik et al. (2006) who, based on their study, note that Durst's call in 1990 for more studies of *writing in context* had definitely been heeded by 2004. While in Durst's review of 1990, studies of writing in context were relatively uncommon, Juzwik et al. report that by 2004 research focusing on context and social practices dominated. This recognition of the importance of understanding context is to a large extent born out of a deep pedagogic concern, as teachers around the world grapple with complex communication situations, often in the face of impoverished public discourses on language and literacy, as well as a growing awareness of the geopolitics governing writing for academic publication (for overview examples from the United States, see Crowley, 1998; Horner & Lu, 1999; Rose, 1989; from the United Kingdom, see Jones, Turner, & Steet, 1999; Lea & Stierer, 2000; from South Africa, see Angélil-Carter, 2000; Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006; from Australia, Candlin & Plum, 1998; Skillen, 2006; for examples of discussions and studies on geopolitics of English-medium academic writing, see Canagarajah, 1996, 2002; Flowerdew, 2000, 2001).

In approaches to academic writing concerned with context, ethnography plays an important if often rather vaguely articulated role; sometimes ethnography is foregrounded, as in, for example, academic literacies research in the United Kingdom, where both the theorization of literacy as social practice and the empirical methodologies adopted are explicitly located in ethnographic traditions (see Lillis & Scott, in press, for overview discussion; see also Street & Lefstein, 2007). But more often, the influence of ethnography in academic writing research is backgrounded, as is well illustrated in the classification of methodologies reported in Juzwik et al.'s (2006) extensive review, mentioned above. In their review, they describe the most common methodology in the 1,502 data-driven research articles (published between 1999 and 2004) as "interpretive," in which category they include discourse analysis, case studies, focus or discussion groups, and error analysis. Interestingly for the discussion in this article, they list ethnography as a *method*, alongside categories such as interviews, observation, and case studies, rather than as a *methodology* constituted by multiple methods such as those they mention separately. The point here is not that their classification is incorrect (classifications and taxonomies always involve a range of compromises) but rather that their positioning of ethnography in this way says much about the way in which ethnography is currently (often) framed in academic writing research. First, it tends to be viewed as a method rather than a fully developed methodology. Second, this conceptualization of ethnography as method in academic writing research often gets operationalized as one specific method—notably, the interview, or more precisely, talk around texts—which while offering the researcher an additional lens from which to understand the text, leads to only a truncated engagement with "context." Third, this reduction of ethnography to method means that the value of other levels of ethnography, that is, as fully fledged methodology and as a specific epistemology and ontology, are still often overlooked in academic writing research.[1]

The aim of this article is to argue for the value of ethnography in academic writing research at three levels. At a mimimal level, *ethnography as method* (talk around text) usefully directs the researcher's attention beyond the written text towards a consideration of some elements of writers' perspectives about texts. At a second level, *ethnography as methodology*, involving multiple data sources and sustained involvement in contexts of production, enables the researcher to explore and track the dynamic and complex situated meanings and practices that are constituted in and by academic writing. At a third, and the most radical level, *ethnography as "deep theorizing"* (Blommaert, 2007) fundamentally challenges the ways in which text and context in writing research are often conceptualized as separate phenomena and signals the need to develop analytic tools that narrow the gap between them. In this article, I critically discuss and illustrate each of these levels of ethnography with data extracts drawn from research projects on academic writing in which I have been involved over a number of years—the first exploring student writing (SW) in the United Kingdom and the second, professional academic writing (PW) in four national contexts.

I begin with a background section aimed at setting the scene for the discussion in the article in three ways: (a) by giving a brief overview of the two research studies on which the arguments in the article are derived and from which illustrative data extracts are drawn; (b) by locating the origins of the research "conversation" in this article within a specific geohistorical context; and (c) by offering a working definition of ethnography as a starting point for the discussion in the rest of the article. The article is then structured around a discussion of ethnography in three main sections: ethnography as method, ethnography as methodology, and ethnography as deep theorizing. The aim in each section is to illustrate the value of the different levels of ethnography to academic writing research, progressively working towards a key challenge faced by academic writing researchers committed to contextualizing academic texts; that is, how to narrow the ontological gap between text and context. I conclude by offering some suggestions as to how this gap can be narrowed analytically through two notions in current use in ethnographic research focusing mainly on spoken language—*indexicality* and *orientation*.

Background

As already stated, the discussion in this article is informed and illustrated by data from two research projects in which I have been—and continue to be—involved: The first focuses on the experience of “nontraditional” students and their writing (henceforward, data extracts from this project are labeled SW) and the second on the professional academic writing of multilingual scholars (data extracts from this project are labeled PW).[2] An overview of key aspects of the two projects, including the main research questions, researchers, data sources, time period, and number of participants, is provided in Table 1. I recognize that isolating data extracts in the way I do in this article runs counter to the holistic “pull” of ethnography whereby—as argued in the section below on ethnography as methodology—a key aim is the weaving together of data in order to understand a particular phenomenon. However, such use of data extracts in this article enables me to focus attention on specific methodological/epistemological aspects of the studies, rather than on findings or understandings that are reported elsewhere.[3]

In addition to the more obvious use of my research in this article, that is as “data,” the article is also intended—in the spirit of ethnography as a “reflexive science” (Buroway, 1998)—as a reflection of my own trajectory as a researcher seeking to critically explore what is involved in *contextualizing* academic writing. This article also in part reflects what I see as both the achievements and challenges of the specific geohistorical tradition of ethnographically framed academic writing research in which I am located as a researcher—that is academic literacies research in the United Kingdom;[4] at the same time, I see the discussion as being of direct relevance to other

Table 1
Overview of Two Projects: Student Writing and Professional Academic Writing

	Research Project 1 Student Writing (SW)	Research Project 2 Professional Academic Writing (PW)
Overarching empirical research questions	Focus = Student meaning-making practices in writing within disciplinary contexts: What do student writers write? Why? What do they feel about what/how they write?	Focus = Writing for publication in English by multilingual scholars: What do scholars write? In which languages? Why? How? Is there pressure to write in English? What are the problems scholars face? Views on writing?
No. of participants	10 "non-traditional" students	50 professional scholars
Main researchers	1 (Lillis)	2 (Curry and Lillis)
Data sources	• Texts written by participants • Cyclical talk around text • Literacy history interviews • Documentary data (course guidelines, assignment details, assessment criteria) • Research diary	• Texts written by participants • Cyclical talk around text • Language and literacy history interviews • E-mail correspondence with participants • Correspondence between participants and others about texts (colleagues, reviewers, editors) • Observational field notes/research diary • Telephone interviews/brief discussion • Documentary data (departmental and national policy documents)
National context	United Kingdom	Slovakia, Hungary, Spain, Portugal
Disciplinary focus	Education, law, women's studies. language studies	Psychology, education
Length of research	2–6 years	7 years and ongoing

international "conversations" (Bazerman, 1988) about academic writing research, given, as already stated, there is widespread concern to explore academic writing in context, and thus the relationship between text and context at both empirical and theoretical levels.

It is this relationship between text and context that I argue ethnography can help illuminate, albeit in different ways. A key aim in the article is to illustrate three specific definitions or levels of ethnography and consider their usefulness for academic writing research. However, it may be useful to begin with a broad working definition of ethnography in order to establish a basic starting point for discussion and against which some of the discussion in the rest of the article can then be considered.[5] The following is a list of core features of ethnography based on overviews by a widely cited educational ethnographer Martyn Hammersley (1994, 2006):

- Ethnography is concerned with the collection and analysis of empirical data drawn from "real world" contexts rather than being produced under experimental conditions created by the researcher;
- The research involves sustained engagement in a particular site;
- A key aim is for the researcher attempting to make sense of these events from the perspectives of participants;
- Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are often key tools;
- The focus is a single setting or group of relatively small scale; or a small number of these. In life-history research, the focus may even be a single individual;
- The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.

I return to some core characteristics of ethnography in different parts of the article, in particular the importance of lengthy or sustained engagement over a significant period of time and the value of multiple data sources. At this point, I turn to consider what I am calling the first level of ethnography, *ethnography as method*.

Ethnography as Method

As stated in the introduction, there is a strong interest in *context* in academic writing research, which has led to researchers moving away from a sole focus on the collection and analysis of written academic texts. The most widely adopted additional method is that of the interview, or more precisely, "talk around texts." In this section, my aim is to summarize the key characteristics of this talk and to critically discuss the value and limitations of such a method for exploring academic writing in context.

Talk Around Texts

Talk around texts has become widespread in research on academic writing, albeit with significantly different stances adopted by researchers towards the text (written academic text) and the talk, often according to the tradition of the specific field or subfield of writing they are working within. These differences can be conceptualized in one sense as being along a *text–writer* continuum. Examples of the former are where the primary research object continues to be the text, and talk is collected and analyzed as additional or supplementary data. Such an approach is more common in particular fields of academic writing research than others, notably in English for academic purposes (for examples of specific articles, see Chang & Swales, 1999; Harwood, 2006; Hyland, 1999, 2003; Kubota, 1998; Ventola & Mauranen, 1991) as illustrated in journals such as *English for Specific Purposes* and *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, Journal of Pragmatics*. In these approaches, the researcher's gaze clearly moves beyond the text, but the text remains the primary object and the analytic lens—regardless of the specific linguistic-textual tradition adopted, for example, linguistics, genre, rhetoric, discourse—remains predominantly formalist or textualist (Horner, 1999) in nature.[6]

In contrast, research using talk around text from the *writer*-focused end of the continuum involves a (sometimes implicit) recognition of the need to move beyond not just the text but the researcher's own research agenda or frame of reference. The goal of such talk is often characterized as open, collaborative, and often as a way of getting away from the *business as usual* (Ellsworth, 1989/1994) of academia.[7] Typically, such writer-focused talk (a) encourages comment and reflections that go beyond writing within current dominant conventions and practices and (b) recognizes that the participants' analytic lens and perspectives are central to establishing what may be significant and important in any specific context. Examples of talk around text where insider or *emic* perspectives are foregrounded (either implicitly or explicitly) are to be found in some fields of academic writing research, such as the long tradition of pedagogically oriented writing research in the United States in composition and basic writing, evidenced in key journals such as *College Composition and Communication* and *Journal of Basic Writing* as well as in *Written Communication* (for examples of articles, see Angelova & Riazantsteva, 1999; Fishman & McCarthy, 2001; Gentil, 2005; Kill, 2006; Price, 2007) and academic literacies research in the United Kingdom (Ivanič, 1998; Jones et al., 1999; Lea & Street, 1998; Scott & Turner, 2005) and South Africa (Angélil-Carter, 2000; Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006).

My own research can be characterized as being towards the more writer-emic end of the continuum; two brief examples arising from such writer-focused talk from the research on SW and PW are provided in Examples 1 and 2:

Example 1 (SW)

Writer on the use of full rather than contracted forms in academic writing:

It makes me sick—That's how I feel. And that's why a lot of people are not interested. I-am-not [states each word slowly]. What am I saying?—Everybody knows what 'I'm not' means. It's like trying to segregate, you know, you've got like a boundary that sets, you know, you apart from other people. Why? (Lillis, 2001, p. 85)[8]

Example 2 (PW)

Writer on his use of English:

My view with English has always been, well not always but for a few years now, [is] that I should dare to say it, to speak or to write. I'm not fearful of making mistakes, but for me the important thing is to communicate and I don't mind if I say it wrong, or if I use a word which is not the best one, or if I use an idiom which is mistaken. (Lillis & Curry, 2006a, p. 67)

Examples 1 and 2 are tiny extracts from longer conversations about what it means to do academic writing and to be an academic writer in very different geohistorical locations. Example 1 helps the researcher learn about the significance of a particular textual feature—*I'm*—to the writer. The writer doesn't see full versus contracted forms as a question about neutral conventions but rather as having the potential to exclude people, including herself, from engaging in academia. Example 2 introduces the researcher to the range of emotions a professional academic writer experiences in using English as his third language, with "risk" figuring strongly, as evident in his use of words such as *dare*, *fearful*, *wrong*, and *mistaken*. Methodologically, what's important here is that the research lens goes beyond the text, and the researcher adopts an openness to writer-insiders' comments, perspectives, and discourses, whether or not these relate to a research focus (textual or otherwise) predefined by the researcher.

The theoretical relevance of these extracts at this point in my argument in the paper is that they illustrate the value of viewing talk around text through an emic lens for researching academic writing in context. Emic perspectives are central to understanding what is relevant to participants and thus core to understanding what is significant from the very large and empirically unwieldy notion of "context." Here Gumperz's (1982) notion of contextualization is useful. Whereas context from a researcher's point of view could be potentially infinite, contextualization comprises participants' activities and understandings that make relevant any specific aspect of context, in this case, to specific acts and practices of academic writing. Talk around text aimed at seeking out emic perspectives is one important way of exploring what is or isn't significant, from the rather large notion of context, to specific individuals in their specific sociohistorical writing trajectories. Of course, this valuing of insiders' perspectives immediately foregrounds the tensions between etic (outsider, researcher-analyst) and emic (insider, writers') perspectives, the productive tension between which I return to in subsequent sections of this article.

The Value and Limitations to Talk Around Texts

The obvious value of including talk around text within research approaches to academic writing is that such talk extends the researcher-analyst's gaze beyond the text. The extent and ways in which the lens is extended depends on whether the researcher uses the talk as supplementary to written academic text data and whether the researcher moves towards an emic (writer) perspective rather than maintaining a fundamentally etic (researcher) perspective. However, even when talk around texts seeks to actively build in, and on, emic understandings, it has a number of limitations as a method of contextualizing the production and meaning of academic texts. First, such writer-insider talk—particularly if these are one-off interviews—can only ever provide minimal glimpses of writers' perspectives and understandings. Analytically, there is a danger of reifying writer perspectives as expressed in one moment in time and oversimplifying claims framed in relation to such data, whether these be at the level of the individual (a specific student writer, for example) or a group (conceptualized and labeled in specific ways, for example, students, nontraditional students, professional scholars, Slovak scholars, etc.).[9] Second, talk around texts as a single method, while useful, is limited in the kind of contextual understandings it can generate, as I illustrate in the next section. Third, a theoretical point that I wish to note briefly here is that there is often a key—and unexplicated—epistemological difference in the analytic treatment of texts and talk in academic writing research. In contrast with written academic texts—which are treated analytically as complex configurations of relationships between wordings, meanings, and intentions drawing on a range of analytical tools from, for example, linguistics, rhetoric, discourse studies—the talk around texts tends to be treated as straightforwardly transparent, a simple reflection of a writer's perspective.[10] All three limitations—in part methodological and in part epistemological—relate to the central concern in this article, and which I aim to elaborate further in the following sections; the ontological gap between text and context.

Ethnography as Methodology

In contrast to ethnography as method, in this section I argue that ethnography as methodology opens up richer opportunities for developing contextualized studies of academic writing. Core elements of ethnography as methodology, rather than method, are usefully summarized in Hammersley's definition above (see Background), the value of two specific aspects for academic writing research I emphasize in this section; lengthy or sustained engagement in participants' academic writing worlds, and the collection and analysis of a range of types of data in order to build holistic understandings. While research aimed at contextualizing academic writing has significantly increased over the past 20 years, and ethnographic sensitivities are evident in many pedagogically framed studies, longitudinal studies of academic writing are uncommon (Juzwik et al., 2006; but see Haas, 1994; Prior, 1998, 2001; Spack, 1997, as examples of the few longitudinal studies using multiple data sources).[11] In this section, my aim is to argue that sustained engagement in research sites using multiple data sources is a distinguishing feature of ethnography as methodology, rather than method, and is central to the research goal of contextualization.

I begin this section by continuing to consider the value of talk as one of these data sources, once such talk becomes part of sustained engagement in specific research sites and is set alongside other types of data.

Long Conversations[12]

One way of avoiding some of the limitations to talk around text discussed above, such as the reification of aspects of the writer's experience or perspective, is to use talk methodologies aimed explicitly at developing longer conversations (Maybin, 1994) between writer and researcher; key here are the literacy history interview (see Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000) and cyclical dialogue around texts over a period of time (Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2001, 2006). The literacy history interview (following community literacy studies as in Barton & Hamilton, 1998) involves the researcher eliciting autobiographical accounts of language and academic literacy learning so that current practices and perspectives can be understood within the broader sociohistorical context of an individual's life (and academic writing) trajectory. Examples 3 and 4 are extracts from literacy histories in the two research studies:

Example 3 (SW)

Writer on what encouraged her to study at university:

After I got married, I knew that I didn't want to be studying for the next thirty years and not getting anywhere. I thought, I don't want to go through every job—And I thought, I've got to do it for myself and for the kids, so they can think, 'Mum's done this,' so it gives them a bit of encouragement. (Lillis, 2001, p. 62)

Example 4 (PW)

Writer on her changing view of her use of English:

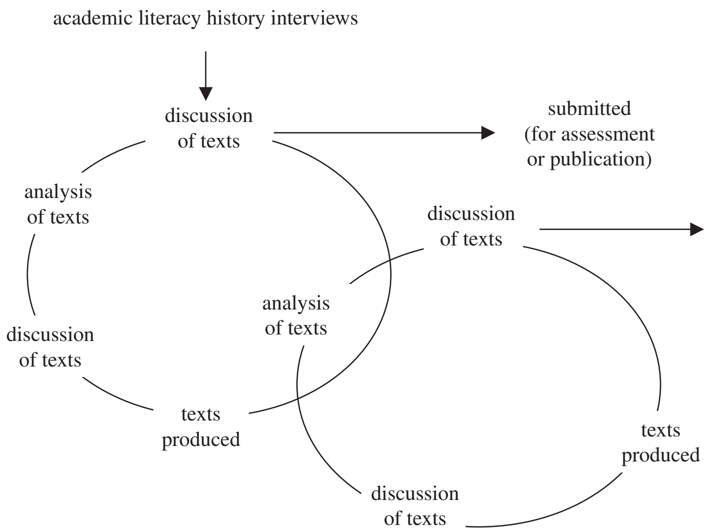
I think that my English is enough. Not very good, excellent, but it's enough. I mean, earlier—it was a suffering for me that I couldn't express myself as I wanted but nowadays as I prepare for the classes and make some English notes etc. etc. I can much more easily express myself. (Interview, November 28, 2001)

Example 3 illustrates how a student writer who is finding academic writing difficult draws confidence and motivation from the significance she attaches to her role as wife and future mother. Example 4 takes the researcher into the changing perspectives of a scholar over time and the importance she attaches to the relationship between her English-medium teaching and her English-medium academic writing.

As well as drawing the researcher into the specific ways in which academic writing is embedded in people's lives, the autobiographical nature of literacy history interviews typically serves to open up a wide range of issues for discussion that are then continued in more text-focused cyclical talk over extended periods of time (see Ivanič, 1998). In my research exploring SW, the cyclical talk with the student writers took place over a period of between 2 and 6 years: In the project on PW, such cyclical talk has been ongoing for 7 years. In the former project, most talk was face to face, with some telephone discussions; in the latter, the talk cycle includes face-to-face discussion, e-mail exchanges, and some telephone talk. A brief outline of the nature of this cycle is provided in Figure 1.

Such cyclical talk allows for an exploratory space to be developed around academic writing, and tiny emic details to be explored, both in relation to specific textual meaning making and changing perspectives and practices more generally, as briefly illustrated in Examples 4 and 5.

Figure 1
Cyclical Talk Around Texts



Example 5 (SW)

Moment 1: Writer uses word ‘immigrant’; following discussion decides to replace with ‘minorities.’

Moment 2: 6 months later studying a second higher education course writer is unhappy with the use of phrase ‘minorities’ and prefers to use specific ethnicity marked groups names, such as, ‘Yemeni,’ ‘Pakistani.’ (Lillis, 2001, pp. 146-147)

Example 6 (PW)

Moment 1: Writer reports feeling under pressure to write in English for publication and devotes energies to writing mainly in English (see Curry & Lillis, 2004).

Moment 2: Same writer 4 years later tells of decision not to write in English any more and to focus all energies on writing in local national language (Interview, February 15, 2006).

Example 5, as part of a longer conversation over a period of years, enables the researcher to explore the relationship between a student’s shifting ethnic identity/identification and the specific discourses she uses in her academic writing. Example 6 briefly summarizes the changing decisions made by a Slovak scholar relating to academic writing for publication. Reasons for resisting, as compared with accommodating to, pressures to publish in English relate to specific family circumstances as located in the specific material and economic conditions in which she lives.

Cyclical talk also facilitates the development of shared points of reference and discourse about the phenomenon under study and provides opportunities for participants to offer up what they consider to be important at a number of levels, as illustrated in Examples 6 and 7.

Example 7 (SW)

Writer on imagining in writing:

See, when I say I think of myself as English [when writing academic essays] what I mean is that I'm trying to imagine how an English person would be writing—to make myself think as if I'm an English person writing this out. (Lillis, 2001, p. 89)

Example 8 (PW)

Writer on a specific text history:

I have a story for you that I think you'll be interested in—it's a story about the impossibility of translating a paper into English. (Interview, October 8, 2003)

Both Examples 7 and 8 here are instances of writer-participants initiating the sharing of something with the researcher. Such emic contributions draw the researcher directly towards contextualization, that is, towards a more specific and/or complex understanding of what is significant to writers at a specific moment in time, in their specific sohiohistoric writing trajectories. They also shape the future direction of the research. Example 7 (as part of a much longer exchange) redirected the researcher's attention towards the need to theorize addressivity in terms of *imaginings* and identity; Example 8 directed the researcher's attention to the importance of networks of relationships around text production, and in particular the range of linguistic and ideological orientations that language professionals adopt towards texts and how these impact on English-medium text production (I return to focus on the notion of orientation in the last part of this article).

At this point, before moving on to consider the importance of using a range of data sources in addition to texts and talk, I want to briefly consider the criticism I made earlier about the epistemological and analytical inconsistency between the treatment of text and talk in academic writing research. Talk in research around academic writing is most typically treated as transparent, 1 in Table 2. As already discussed in this section, it is important to accept what people say as authentic in the sense of meaningful to them and

Table 2
Three Ways of Viewing Talk Around Academic Texts

1	Transparent/referential Insider accounts/perspective on texts (part of a text), practices including information about the writer—for example, about the person—age, languages spoken, number of papers published, number of assignments written, etc.
2	Discourse/indexical As indexing-specific discourses about self, writing, academia, etc.
3	Performative/relational Researcher and researched performing research, identity, power, specific practices at specific moment/place in time

thus significant for building a contextualized understanding of academic writing (see Hammersley, 2006, for a discussion of the status of interviews in ethnography). But this does not mean that talk should be treated as simply transparent; rather, talk around text should be treated in at least three ways as outlined in Table 2.

Thus, in Example 6 the writer is not only telling a "realist tale" (van Maanen, 1995) about herself (category 1) but is indexing (category 2) whole sets of meanings about academia and what is valued in academia—notably here, being English monolingual, monocultural. I return to the notion of indexicality in the final section. Likewise, all the extracts illustrate talk as performative/relational (category 3) between the researcher and researched at a number of levels: most obviously, the kinds of things that are shared between researcher and participants depend very much on the immediate situation/identities/status of both and how these are perceived by the other. These immediate situations, which in turn are shaped by broader sociohistorical dynamics, locate not only the participants but also the researcher: "Some things can only be said at certain moments, under certain conditions. Likewise, and as a correlate of this, some things can only be researched at certain moments and under certain conditions" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 65).

The conversations with the student writers (in the SW project) took place at a time when the problematics of taking part in university study were both high on the individual participants' agenda as critical moments in their lives, as well as the public (politics and media) agenda of widening access to higher education in the United Kingdom. Likewise, conversations with multilingual scholars (in the PW project) were (are) taking place at a time when there is marked and increasing pressure internationally on social sciences scholars to publish in English (see Lillis & Curry, 2006a). Thus, in quite fundamental ways, the researchers' interests are mirrored in participants' interests, making such longitudinal research projects actually possible.[13]

Sustained Engagement and Multiple Data Sources

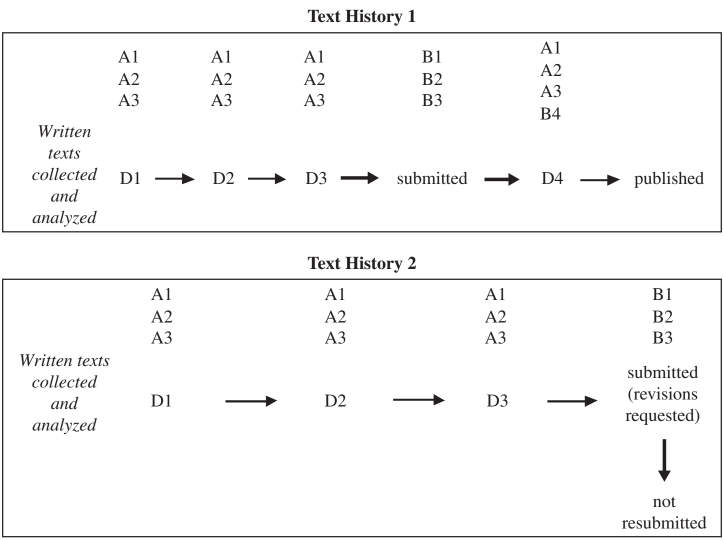
The importance of cyclical talk over a lengthy period of time has been emphasized in the previous section. However, just as important for attempting to make sense of what's significant to writers is the collection of a wide range of data to ensure both "thick participation" (Sarangi, 2006, 2007) and "thick description" (Geertz, 1973).

The project exploring PW in four national contexts, outlined in Table 1, is a longitudinal study representing to date 7 years of engagement with 50 scholars in four national contexts, and substantial data collection from multiple sources. Data include individual literacy history interviews, approximately 180 episodes of talk around text, 800 written texts, approximately 1,000 e-mail exchanges between researchers and participants, approximately 500 pieces of written correspondence between brokers and authors, observation and journal notes from two researchers based primarily on 12 visits to each site, and a large number of photographs and institutional documents, as well as interviews with librarians and several group discussions with scholars. The data is drawn from face-to-face encounter and observation as well as from e-communication, connecting with some dimension of virtual ethnography (see Hine, 2000; for details of study see Curry & Lillis, 2004; Lillis & Curry, 2006a, 2006b)

The purpose of multiple data sources collected through sustained engagement is to enable both thick description (Geertz, 1973), that is, observe and collect everything that may prove (potentially) to be significant, building up a detailed pictures of places, people, and resources, and thick participation (Sarangi, 2006, 2007), which involves "a form of socialisation in order to achieve a threshold for interpretive understanding." Thick description and participation enable the researcher to explore what's significant and at stake for writers at specific sociohistorical moments and, importantly, thus to engage with what is significant contextually for understanding what academic writing, and specific academic texts, signify for the writer: "The richest histories will emerge from multiple methods, with intertextual analysis, participant accounts, and observation of activity working together to produce a fuller portrait of the process" (Prior, 2004, p. 197).

Data and understandings generated from the data can be brought together in a number of ways. In research projects focusing on academic writing—the

Figure 2
Text Trajectories



Note: A = authors; B = brokers; D = draft.

focus of this article—it is the data that most directly relate to academic texts that tend to get foregrounded, such as the texts and the talk around texts. In our writings about PW, this foregrounded data include written academic texts, cyclical talk around text, copies of correspondence between writers and brokers (such as translators, reviewers, and editors) that together enable the tracking of text histories over time. “Text history” has proved to be a key unit of data collection and analysis for exploring the trajectories of texts in the PW study (see Lillis & Curry, 2006a). Brief outlines illustrating the way in which foregrounded data are brought together to constitute two text trajectories over a period of 3 years—from drafting through to submission and postsubmission—are illustrated in Figure 2.

A key aim in bringing the different data sources together in this way as text histories is to reach an understanding about how certain contextual factors impact on text production and trajectories towards submission and publication. In order to trace the impact of brokers on text production, we developed a heuristic for tracking changes made to texts informed by a number of textual and rhetorical frameworks (in particular, by the work of Knorr-Cetina,

Example 9 (PW): Heuristic for Tracking Changes Across Drafts

Focus on text data			Focus on interview/e-mail/field note discussions			
Changes made to draft	Draft number and section (e.g., AIMRDC)	Text reference/extract	Suggested/made by? When?	Response by Author(s)	Rhetorical/knowledge significance	
					Named author(s) perspective	Researcher Comments
1. Additions *2. Deletions* *3. Reformulation* *4. Reshuffling* *5. Argument* *6. Positioning* *7. Lexical/Register* *8. Sentence level changes/corrections* *9. Cohesion markers* *10. Publishing conventions* *11. Visuals/Representation of text*						

Note: AIMRDC = abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusion.

1981, and Gosden, 1995). In this way, our aim was to clearly connect some aspects of the context of text production (drawn from emic and etic understandings) to the text (etic) analysis (see Lillis & Curry, 2006a).

While the data most obviously relevant to text histories were (and are) a focus for the researchers, other multiple data sources—what might be considered as "background"—provide rich contextual detail for both making sense of the "core" text history data and for understanding the meanings and practices of academic writing in the distinct geohistorical contexts. Examples of some of the backgrounded data from the PW study are in Examples 10 through 13, and their significance to the research process overall are discussed below.

Example 10 (PW) *Observation*

It is a drab 1960s building with locked doors at ground floor entrance and second floor where the department is. Scrawled on the locked entrance door to the department in black felt pan is a large A (we heard the story later—how the department had battled to secure an A rather than a B grading for their research and the head of department had defiantly and delightedly scrawled the letter on the door). The corridor was dark—little natural light and no electric lights switched on (again later we heard they were saving on electricity bills given small annual budget they had to work within). (Notes, July 2, 2001)

Example 11 (PW) *Observation of literacy event*

Preparing conference submissions (Notes, T. Lillis, January 2001)

It's early evening, around 6 pm. I'm waiting to interview Fidel about his latest writings. Fidel is busy, walking in and out of his office from his desk to the printer in another office. NO and AC are discussing in Spanish the draft submissions they are preparing for an English medium European conference. The deadline is imminent and they are all anxious to get these proposals in. Fidel is engaged in several tasks at the same time. He is trying to write a single authored proposal in English, as well as support NO in producing his single authored text in English. Fidel sits at his desk AC comes in and looks at NO's draft and also adds comments. I'm there so I offer to look at NO's draft too. The phone rings and Fidel is talking on the phone to MN and they are discussing in Spanish a version of another proposal they are preparing together on behalf of two other colleagues [JK and JC], also involved in one of the research projects. Fidel listens and responds in Spanish on the phone as he writes at his computer in English, and MN writes at hers. (Lillis & Curry, 2006b)

Example 12 (PW) *Observation*

Example 13 (PW) *Reflective notes*

I moved to the next question—when did you begin to use English for your academic writing. And through her intricate story I was transported to some fifty years earlier in a context when English was not an 'instrument of global capitalism' but a radical challenge to dictatorial power . . . of lost love, imprisonment, escape . . . I turned the recorder off—. Felt guilty about making her start her day like this. (Notes, December 5, 2002)

Observation Examples 10-13 contextualize the writer and her text production in immediate material circumstances. Example 10 illustrates in part the impact of the relative scarcity of economic resources on scholarly writing in this eastern European institution; for alongside other data sources, it serves to establish the nature of the relationship between publishing in English, the departmental grade, and economic resources. Example 11 captures some of the intense activity surrounding academic text production in a specific Spanish department and institution and the ways in which such text production is managed across languages and between participants (for further discussion, see Lillis & Curry, 2006b). Example 12 illustrates the potential value of photographs as a record of a physical location, but also—along with the rest of such multiple data sources—of helping the researcher sustain strong engagement in multiple research sites and with many participants over a period of time. Example 13 is an extract from a journal where notes are made at the time of interviews and informal discussions and, in this specific instance, helps to remind the researcher of the importance of staying located in writers' specific sociohistorical trajectories and to avoid reading the data (in this case, people's lives and perspectives) through any straightforward theoretical (etic) lens; in this specific instance, for example, through any static notion of the hegemony of English in a global context.

The Value and Limitations of Ethnography as Methodology

A key aim of this section was to illustrate the value of ethnography-as-methodology for academic writing research. Ethnography as methodology involving the collection of a wide range of data collected, over a significant period of time, and involving sustained engagement between researcher and participants helps to respond to key limitations evident in the use of the single method of talk around texts for exploring context in academic writing research. Of particular interest here is the way in which what may be conceptualized as background data drawn from multiple data sources over a lengthy period of time is valuable for making sense of the kind of data that is often foregrounded in academic writing research (that is, data that more obviously relate to written texts). First, together, multiple data sources help to build rich descriptions and understandings of the particular material conditions in which people live and work, and to help the researcher maintain an openness to what may be significant to participants. "Thick participation" (Sarangi, 2006) is essential for "tuning into" (Maybin, 2006, p. 12) what might be significant for participants. Second, such data can lead to further specific research questions and explorations. Examples 8 and 10 led into research and discussions about the particular systems of evaluation in institutions, where English-medium publication was part of (different) codified systems. Third, together the data help sustain the engagement of the researchers with 50 scholars from four national contexts, each with their own research interests, academic literacy experiences, and views on the (academic) world. Journal, field notes, and photographs perform an important function here, of helping the researcher reinsert my (our) selves into the "field"—people's ongoing lives. Fourth, the researcher earns the trust and right to gain access to data that she or he may not even have initially sought but that prove to be central to understanding processes and practices surrounding academic text production (see Clarke, 2003, in Sarangi, 2007, for the theoretical importance of the researcher being welcomed by participants). Overall the tuning in involved in thick participation in sustained research contributes towards honing an "ethnographic sensibility" (discussed in Leung, 2005), whereby the dynamic interplay between emic and etic is used as a productive heuristic in terms of the research process—the researcher must work at making the strange familiar and the familiar made strange—and in terms of analysis—the blending of distinct lenses and categories of description (see Agar, 1996; Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990; Wolcott, 1999). This dynamic is particularly important in research on academic writing, where the researcher-as-academic or as teacher can often draw on her own understandings and experiences to make sense of certain phenomena yet needs to avoid making presuppositions about what may or may not be significant to participants in specific sociohistorical contexts at specific moments in time.

However, limitations to ethnography as methodology for understanding a particular phenomenon, and/or the particular ways in which data are collected and analyzed, have long been recognized, most notably within anthropology but also within disciplines where ethnography has been extensively used, such as education. These include considerable debate on a number of counts, notably the need to avoid naïve or realist descriptivism or the parallel danger of reading micro data through macro social/critical theory (Blommaert, 2007; Brodkey, 1996; Lather, 1991; Smith, 1999; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995). I have already pointed to the importance of treating spoken interview data as both transparent and discursive. The same—and other—complexities are involved in using other kinds of data.[14]

But of particular concern in this article is the extent to which ethnography as methodology can support contextualized studies of academic writing and, more precisely, to consider how ethnography can help bridge the ontological gap between text and context, whereby text and context are treated analytically as two distinct phenomena. This gap between texts and contexts is significantly narrowed, I would argue, by engaging in ethnography as methodology as illustrated in the discussion above; thick description and thick participation help move the researcher towards emic perspectives and towards analytic lenses that help foreground what is significant to writers from their specific sociohistorical perspectives. However, as illustrated in Example 12, there is still a strong sense in which adopting an ethnographic methodology may still maintain a textualist-formalist and contextualist divide; textual categories used in Example 12 from the PW study sit *alongside* rather than *informed by* contextual aspects. It is not that such analysis is not valuable—it is clearly useful to track who did what to a particular text and how this then impacts on the high-stakes activity of academic writing for publication. However, as I argue in the final section, we also need to work at developing more nuanced ways of relating text to context.

Ethnography as Deep Theorizing

In this final section of the article, I want to engage with what Blommaert (2007) refers to as ethnography "at a very deep level of theorising" (see also Blommaert, 2006), which I argue both makes visible the ontological gap between text and context in academic writing research and the need for us to narrow that gap. In this section, my aims are as follows: to discuss the way in which the text-context relationship is often theorized in approaches to academic writing explicitly drawing on ethnography, that is, through the notion of *practice*; to argue that practice accounts often work with textualist notions of text rather than building in contextualist understandings to the study of academic texts; and finally to illustrate how the gap can be narrowed through discussion of data from the PW study using two notions drawn from linguistic ethnography, *indexicality* and *orientation*.

The Notion of Practice in Academic Writing Research

Theoretically, the text-context relationship in research explicitly drawing on and using ethnography, such as new literacy studies (see Barton et al., 2000) and academic literacies studies (see Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, in press) is through the notion of *practice*. The notion of practice is used as a way of linking specific instances of language use with what individuals, as socially situated actors, do, both at the level of "context of situation" and at the level of "context of culture" (Malinowski, 1923). First, practice signals that specific instances of language use—spoken and written *texts*—do not exist in isolation but are bound up with what people do—*practices*—in the material, social world. Second, that ways of doing things with texts become part of everyday, implicit life routines both of the individual, *habitus* in Bourdieu's (1991) terms, and of social institutions. At this third and most abstract level, and in specific relation to literacy, the notion of practice offers a way of linking "activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help to shape" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6).

However, a key point I wish to make in this article is that while the notion of practice usefully takes the focus outwards, as it were, from text to context, there is often no parallel move in academic literacy studies circulating back from context to text. This potentially leaves the text-context divide intact, and text analysis within the realm of traditions of textualist-formalist approaches. Thus, curiously, in contrast with the stated goal of a social practices approach, the outcome is that to a certain extent, while an ideological notion of literacy frames understandings surrounding the text, an autonomous notion of literacy often remains attached to the text, (see Street, 1984, 2004, 2005, for his influential notions of autonomous/ideological approaches to literacy). The need to move beyond this dislocation between contextual understandings arising from ethnography and textualist-formalist ways of analyzing academic texts is the focus of the following section.[15]

Closing the Gap

Blommaert (2006) emphasizes that whatever our (as researchers) specific disciplinary home or field (applied linguistics, education, composition, English for academic purposes, psychology, sociology, etc.), we need to recognize that ethnography, because of its specific historical origins in anthropology, has a specific epistemological and ontological "architecture." Of specific relevance to the key concern in this article is that this architecture does not recognize any dichotomy between language and culture, text and context:

> One important consequence [of the anthropological architecture to ethnography] has to do with the ontology, the definition, of language itself. Language [within this frame] is typically seen as a socially loaded and assessed tool for humans, the finality of which is to enable humans to perform as social beings. Language in this tradition is defined as a resource to be used, deployed and exploited by human beings in social life and hence socially consequential for humans. . . . A second important implication is about context. There is no way in which language can be 'context-less' in this anthropological tradition in ethnography. To language, there is always a particular function, a concrete shape, a specific mode of operation, and an identifiable set of relations between singular acts of language and wider patterns of resources and their functions. (Blommaert, 2006, p. 4)

The separation between language and culture, text and context is evident both in formalist-textualist approaches to academic writing, and in the range of attempts to overcome such a separation, as illustrated in the methodological efforts at contextualizing academic writing discussed in this article. The separation is a consequence of the influence exerted on academic writing research of a very different kind of theoretical and academic architecture: that drawn from linguistic/formalist approaches to the study of language. This ontological architecture has led to a gap between text and context that many of our available lenses and languages of description—because of their origins in formalist approaches (rhetoric, applied linguistics, genre)—are not able to bridge.

Linguistic ethnography (LE; for overview, see Creese, 2008), which is growing in use in the United Kingdom as an umbrella term to refer to approaches that draw on traditions of ethnography and linguistics, is relevant to the discussion here because it engages directly with the problematics of bridging the gap between textual with contextual analysis (for influential foundational work in linguistic ethnography centering on ethnographies of communication, see Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1974). The ontological gap between text and context is tackled head on:

> Linguistic ethnography generally holds that to a considerable degree, language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity. (Rampton et al., 2004, p. 2)

In a discussion paper, Rampton et al. (2004), and in a more recent paper, Rampton (2007), outline the productive tensions between linguistics and ethnography: This is framed in terms of a metaphor of *tying ethnography down* and *opening linguistics up*. They argue that a linguistic lens has the effect of "pushing ethnography towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes, increasing the amount of reported data that is open to falsification, looking to impregnate local description with analytical frameworks from outside" (Rampton et al., 2004, p. 4). In contrast, ethnography brings

> reflexive sensitivity to the processes involved in the production of linguistic claims and to the potential of what get lefts out, encouraging a willingness to accept (and run with) the fact that beyond the reach of standardised falsification procedures, [e]xperience . . . has ways of boiling over, and making us correct our present formulas. (W. James, 1978, in Rampton, et al., p. 4)

A key point to note here is that in bringing the distinct ontologies of linguistics and ethnography together, LE does not seek to simply combine analytical frameworks and categories but rather to develop languages of description born out of the productive emic/etic tension of the kind that is central to making sense of context in anthropological work. Thus, in LE, while linguistic-textualist categories are used for analysis of language use, these are mediated through more contextually sensitive categories that link directly with ethnographic understandings. Contextual understandings thus feed directly into the development and use of the particular array of textual tools or categories that linguistic ethnography advocates, drawing on the work of Gumperz and Hymes (1974) and Silverstein and Urban (1996).

There are two notions I wish to foreground here that could usefully be applied in academic writing research; the notion of *indexicality*—that is, the specific ways in which bits of language (speech, writing) index, or point to aspects of social context—and *orientations*—that is how speakers/hearers orient to what is said and written, both aspects being embedded socio-historically. What is particularly useful about these notions is that (a) they are not denotational or referential categories—that is, refer to fixed categories of text (as in, e.g., linguistic description)—but are rather meditational and relational categories—and as such they can help the researcher navigate between emic and etic understandings and discourses, and (b) are fluid enough to capture connections between context and text. To give one example from spoken language analysis, linguistic (phonemic) categories of description might be used to label and categorize a specific feature of spoken pronunciation. But the social significance of such a feature is explored empirically through a range of ethnographic data and analytically through the meditational notion of indexicality. Indexicality and orientation have been primarily used by those working within LE to research *spoken interaction* as their primary concern (see, e.g., Maybin, 2006; Rampton, 2006). The development of these and similarly context sensitive categories and tools with which to explore written texts lags far behind (a point also made in general terms by Bazerman & Prior, 2004, Introduction), but in the final section I want to illustrate how these particular notions can help contextualize academic writing in nuanced ways.

Indexicality and Orientation: Exploring the Problem of "Style"

In the study on professional scholars' writing, outlined in Table 1 above, the research aim is to explore the practices and experiences of scholars whose first languages are Slovak, Hungarian, Spanish, or Portuguese when writing English-medium academic texts for publication. While the scholars write in local national languages, what we know from both etic (information on publishing activity collected by the researchers) and emic (writers' comments and accounts) is that they are under considerable pressure to publish in English because of the global status of English in academic publishing. The issue of what counts as an acceptable or appropriate style of English for securing the publication on such texts, particularly in high-status Anglophone center journals, is one recurring theme in cyclical talk with scholars. Scholars express concerns about the English they use, in different ways, sometimes indirectly through phrases such as my "poor English," "brutal English," "my Spanish English," sometimes through reference to style and sometimes through reference to specific features—the feature most commonly mentioned as being problematic by participants across all four national contexts is the "long sentence." Whereas long sentences are a key feature of academic writing in many languages, and often index scholarly activity and erudition (see, e.g., discussion in Bennett, 2007), scholars indicate that the long sentence is not viewed positively by brokers (such as reviewers, editors) involved in English-medium international journals. Example 14 illustrates the kind of concern about style expressed by scholars:

Example 14 (PW)

> If the style or the form of the paper is not native or not current, reviewers think that 'this is a stupid man, this is unacceptable materials.' They're not accepted for regional accent, for regional style, absolute refusal, this is their attitude.' (Curry & Lillis, 2004, p. 678)

The obvious research questions arising from scholars' (emic) concern with what may be at stake in issues of style are, Is there a problem with scholars' style? If so, what is the nature of this problem? What are the consequences of this problem for scholars' success in English-medium publishing? One approach is to analyze the texts themselves, and through some form of etic (linguistic-formalist) analysis, seek to identify problematic stylistic features in the text. A text-analytic approach can tell us about the workings of the text, which of course may be very interesting in different ways to both the researchers and participants;[16] and a text-analytic approach juxtaposed with data serving to track the impact of authors and brokers can tell us about the different ways in which people impact on text production—who did what, where, when to the text—and can tell us something about text production practices from local national to international contexts (as illustrated in Example 9 above). However, what's clear is that in order to understand the problem of style raised by scholars, text analysis alone, or in isolation from contextual understandings, will not tell us anything about what counts as acceptable style in the particular contexts in which they are written or read, or the interrelationship between these. That there is an interrelationship between these is strongly signalled in the scholar's comment in Example 14 above. It is here that the meditational notions such as indexicality and orientation can help draw together text and contextual understandings, as I now turn to illustrate from brief extracts from two text histories.[17] The text histories are drawn from writings by established scholars who have published in national languages and have experience of writing and publishing in English. Both examples include extracts from texts submitted to English-medium international journals and extracts from reviewers' comments which—while relating to the papers overall—directly link with the specific text extracts included here. Example 15 is part of a 3-year text history of a journal article that did not lead to publication; Example 16 is part of a 2-year text history of a series of articles that finally led to publication.

In both examples, the importance of style in the reviewers' comments is clear. Thus, in Example 15, the reviewer isn't criticizing the text in terms of what might be considered transactional values—for example, clarity of expression and meaning, grammatical correctness—but explicitly (and negatively) comments on uses of language which she or he perceives to be inappropriate, in her or his terms "pretentious." While the reviewer doesn't mention long sentences as a problem, the fact that she or he quotes verbatim several long sentences, including the one in the extract, rather than shorter ones from the paper, suggests that sentence length may be part of the problem with language use that the reviewer then defines as pretentiousness.

Example 15 (PW)

Extract From Submitted Text	Reviewer Comment
This paper is situated at the crossroads of the idea that international surveys serve valuable, although specific, comparison purposes, with the belief that these surveys can gain from incorporating questions based on previous detailed analyses of particular realities.	As regards the language, the text also needs some revision.There are formulations that, in my view, are *a little bit over the top* and *too pretentious* (for instance "This paper is situated at the crossroads of the idea . . . with the belief"; "Theory that has a theoretical and empirical tradition"; "social transformations of our times.") *Maybe it is not the language, but it is just too Latin for a North-West European*. [italics added]

Example 16 (PW)

Extract From Submitted Text	Reviewer Comment on Papers Submitted by Group of Scholars
Thereafter, we used the narrative of loss—revealing the most remarkable deviation as far as the relative frequency of negation is concerned—as a textual basis, and by then, by means of LINTAG, we compared the minimum (low-L, the relative frequency referring to negation is lower than 0.022) and the maximum (high-H, the relative frequency is higher than 0.046) quartiles of the frequency rates resulting from the negation module to the results of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with the help of two-tailed t-tests.	*These papers do not want reading, they want translation. Poor writing* doesn't encourage the reader to turn the page to read more about the ms. *This comment is not about the authors' competence in scientific English. It is about thinking.* Using *weasel* words ("phenomena," "approach," "consideration") is useless to the reader. Their sole utility is to fill a void in the author's mind. One author—the one who's fond of "phenomena" and "approach"—Freudianly forgot to paginate his or her ms, while allowing himself or herself sentences 50-word long and more. And what about using weasel words 92 times (the word 'perspective') as one author allowed himself or herself to do (in the ms X). *Talking about long sentences, our prize goes to the ms with one sentence 83-word long.* [italics added]

What is unusual in the reviewer's comments in Example 15, as compared with many reviewer comments in the PW study, is that the reviewer's final reflective comments offer an explicit articulation of where in fact the problem may lie; not so much with the text but with what the text indexes—a particular tradition of scholarly writing, referred to as pretentious—and how she or he orients to that form—negatively. What is important here, of course, is that this orientation is located geoculturally; the reviewer indicates that her or his response is not an individualized response but can rather be located in terms of differing geocultural (rhetorical) traditions. This is highly relevant to understanding what is at stake when scholars writing out of non-Anglophone traditions submit papers to "center" journals where brokers (editors, reviewers, publishers) are predominantly from the Anglophone center.

In Example 16, the reviewer is commenting on a number of papers submitted from the same national context for a special issue of a journal, and concludes with a comment on one specific paper that contains a number of long sentences. The text extract included in Example 16 is from the latter paper. Once again, style is clearly relevant to the reviewer's response; the reviewer reacts negatively to certain words used, which are dismissed as "weasel," rather than, for example, offering any serious paradigmatic or epistemological critique of the discourse used; the reviewer also has strongly negative views on long sentences. Furthermore, the reviewer seems to connect "weasel words" with syntax in the text in some fundamental way; towards the end of the extract, the reviewer states "talking about long sentences" (even though she or he is talking about specific words at that point), and thus indicates that the previous comments on word usage cohere (for her or him) with her or his negative view on long sentences.

What is particularly significant in this reviewer's comments is her/his statement that s/he is specifically **not** concerned about the authors' "competence in scientific English." Rather, s/he claims to be treating language as a transparent medium on the mind. Within this frame, the text indexes intellectual capacity and the reviewer orients negatively to what s/he regards as the intellectual *content* of the text. But there is more going on here: While s/he states that style, or in her/his phrase, "competence in scientific English," is irrelevant, the fact that s/he mentions "competence in *English*" and points to specific textual elements, strongly suggest that the style is indeed significant to her/his orientation to the text; specific features in the text index "non-Anglophone writer/scholar" (hence the reference to English), and, I would suggest, account for (at least in part) the reviewer's strongly emotive and negative orientation. This particular reviewer's orientation to the text seems to provide support for the concerns expressed by non-Anglophone scholars, and illustrated in Example 16, that if the style is judged to be inappropriate, it is not just the text that is negatively evaluated but scholars themselves and their intellectual activity.

What is important methodologically and epistemologically in the use of notions such as indexicality and orientation is that they can help relate contextual (emically informed) understandings with textual analysis (etically informed)—in this case, analysis of written academic texts—by acting as analytic categories that can usefully mediate between context and text. They can also be used not only to empirically analyze texts in the immediate context of interaction but also to link these to larger social structures and patternings, through *orders of indexicality*:

> ‘orders of indexicality’ allow us to focus on the level of the concrete, empirically observable, deployment of semiotic means, while at the same time seeing such micro-processes and semiotic features as immediately connected to a wider sociocultural, political and historical space. By orienting to orders of indexicality, language users (systematically) reproduce these norms and situate them in relation to other norms. (Blommaert, 2005, p. 74)

Attention to microdetail involves an explicit recognition of the importance of the interplay between emic and etic dimensions. The relevance of paying attention to microtextual and contextualized details of academic writing is that they can help us explore the complex politics of academic text production.

Conclusion

In this article, I have aimed to contribute to the growing interest in researching academic writing in context by reflecting critically on my work in two longitudinal studies. I have illustrated what I consider to be the importance of ethnography at three different levels: *ethnography as method*, *ethnography as methodology*, and *ethnography as deep theorizing*. Ethnography hovers in the background of much research on academic writing that seeks to be context sensitive, through an array of often oblique glosses, such as “case study” and “qualitative,” but it is often reduced to the level of method, and most commonly to one method, that of talk around texts. I have argued that talk around text is indeed a valuable step away from a textualist-only lens involving an (often implicit) recognition of the value of emic perspectives for exploring what’s significant and at stake in any specific act of academic writing. However, in order to move away from a container notion of context (writing *in* context) and towards a notion of contextualization—that is, researching what is relevant from any specific aspect of context to specific acts and practices of academic writing—we need to engage with ethnography as methodology. Ethnography as methodology involves sustained engagement with participants over a period of time, using a broad range of data in collection and analysis and a commitment to seeking out what is relevant to participants. The thick description made possible through such thick participation enables the researcher to explore specific microdetails of the relationship between texts and contexts. Furthermore, the interplay between emic (writer, informal) understandings alongside etic understandings and languages of description (researcher, academic) is used as a productive heuristic in terms of the research process—the researcher must work at making the strange familiar and the familiar made strange—and data analysis—blending emic and etic understandings and categories of analysis.

I have argued that a third level of ethnography needs to be explicitly recognized which raises considerable challenges to researchers, ethnography as deep theorizing. This level of ethnography radically challenges the dichotomy between language and culture, a dichotomy, I have argued, that has led to an ontological gap between text and context in much academic writing research. This gap is evident even in approaches to academic writing that are explicitly ethnographic in approach and that frame the relationship between text and context in terms of social *practice*. While this notion usefully draws the text into issues of context, we have still much to do in order to circulate back from context to text. In order to close the gap between text analysis and context analysis, and drawing on linguistic ethnography, I have suggested some ways in which this can be done, notably by prioritizing notions such as indexicality and orientation that are widely used in analysis of spoken interaction. These are useful intermediary categories, relational rather than denotational or referential, and can help bring contextual understandings to written textual analysis.

Of course, in arguing in this article for the value of ethnography as methodology and deep theorizing, I am not denying the considerable practical difficulties involved: Ethnographic studies are labor intensive as well as emotionally exhausting, given the commitment to reach beyond the researcher's frames of (relatively safe) disciplinary-academic reference to seek out what may be significant to participants. It often involves dealing with the chaos that is the "mangle of practice" (Pickering, 1995, quoted in Prior, 1998) and "rich points"—where the researcher is profoundly surprised or puzzled by something (Agar, 1996). Furthermore, the considerable emphasis in the academy on researchers as text producers works against the notion of researchers as actively engaging in specific sites of research over time. But if reaching towards context and contextualization is a stated goal of academic writing research, ethnography at these two levels in particular has much to offer the academic writing researcher.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Philip Seargeant for sharing with me his ideas about ontologies of language.

2. Where data extracts have appeared in publications, details are given; otherwise, dates of data collection are provided.

3. Key summaries and discussions of the findings from the two projects can be found in Lillis (2001); Curry and Lillis (2004); Lillis and Curry (2006a, 2006b).

4. Academic literacies in the United Kingdom has emerged from a predominantly teacher-researcher recognition of the limitations in much official discourse on language and literacy in a rapidly changing higher education system and draws on a number of academic traditions to explore what's at stake in literacy practices as they are played out within different disciplinary and institutional contexts, including new literacy studies informed by anthropology (see, e.g., Baynham, 1993; Street, 1984, 2003), critical discourse studies (notably the work of Fairclough, 1992, 1995) and the sociology of knowledge (Latour & Woolgar, 1986).

5. Of course, discussions and definitions of ethnography abound and vary according to the specific academic tradition through which ethnography is refracted and used. I briefly consider the impact of such refractions later in this article.

6. The work of Odell, Goswami, and Herrington (1983) has been highly influential in text-focused approaches.

7. Moving away from "business as usual" also usefully signals the challenge faced by researchers close or inside the research context, for example, teachers researching their students' writing practices and experiences, to make a conscious decision to adopt an outsider or etic gaze in order to make visible to themselves phenomena which may be taken for granted.

8. In extracts of spoken interaction, the broad conventions of punctuation used in writing are followed to indicate my understanding of the sense of the spoken words.

9. For fuller discussion of the current ways in which ethnographic studies tend to be carried out over short periods of time see Hammersley (2006).

10. Not only does this marked difference in the treatment of discourse within the same research study seem theoretically inconsistent, it ignores major developments in two key areas: (1) sociolinguistic research where talk is treated as a complex phenomenon through which meanings and identities are enacted (see, e.g., Cameron, 1997; Rampton, 1995) and (2) postmodernist understandings of the research interview whereby the involvement of the researcher—including work in critical ethnography—is recognized as playing a key part in (co)constructing the focus, content, and direction of what is said, and therefore the nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny (for discussions, see Brown & Dobrin, 2004; Kvale, 1996; Lather, 1991; see also discussion in Clintron, 1993).

11. Other important work is that of Canagarajah (2002), whose "textography" after Swales (1998) is built from an explicitly emic-to-etic research study over a significant period of time and across national boundaries.

12. I am borrowing the phrase here from Janet Maybin (1994), who uses it to refer to ongoing talk in primary school classroom contexts.

13. Here, I am just touching on what is a much bigger debate relating to performative processes in research and the larger question of objectivity. See Fabian (2001, pp. 11-32) for discussion.

14. For examples of discussions around interpretation see Brown and Dobrin (2004).

15. "Voice" grounded in Bakhtin's notion of language as situated utterance offers a way of connecting contextual understandings with textual analysis (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) by working

both as a personal and sociohistorical phenomenon. See for examples Ivanič (1998), Prior (2001), Lillis (2004). However, I would argue that voice also needs mediational notions such as indexicality and orientation; see Maybin (2006) for example focusing on spoken interaction.

16. Discussions with participants drawing on our etic-formalist categories have taken place informally on their request.

17. Both text histories include several interviews with the main authors, three versions of the papers as they moved towards publication, reviewers' and editors' correspondence.

References

Agar, M. (1996). *The professional stranger. An informal introduction to ethnograph*y (2nd rev. ed.). New York: Academic Press.

Angélil-Carter, S. (2000). *Stolen language? Plagiarism in writing*. New York: Longman.

Angelova, M., & Riazantsteva, R. (1999). "If you don't tell me, how can I know?": A case study of four international students learning to write the U.S. way. *Written Communication*, *16*(4), 491-525.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination. Four essays by M. Bakhtin* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. (1986). The problem of speech genres. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), *Speech genres and other late essays* (V. W. McGee, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. London: Routledge.

Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanič, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context.* London: Routledge**.**

Baynham, M. (1993). Code switching and mode switching: Community interpreters and mediators of literacy. In B. Street (Ed.), *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy* (pp. 294-314). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bazerman, C. (1988). *Shaping written knowledge*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Bazerman, C., & Prior, P. (Eds.). (2004). *What writing does and how it does it. An introduction to analyzing texts and textual practices*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bennett, K. (2007). Galileo's revenge: Ways of construing knowledge and translation strategies in an era of globalization. *Social Semiotics*, *17*(2), 171-193.

Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse. A critical introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Blommaert, J. (2006). Ethnography as counter-hegemony: Remarks on epistemology and method. *Working papers in urban language and literacies* (Paper 34). London: Institute of Education.

Blommaert, J. (2007). On scope and depth in linguistic ethnography. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *11*(5), 682-688.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Polity.

Brodkey, L. (1995). *Writing permitted in designated areas only*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Brown, S. G., & Dobrin, S. I. (Eds.). (2004). *Ethnography unbound: From theory to critical praxis*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Buroway, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, *16*(1), 5-32.

Cameron, D. (1997). Performing gender identity: Young men's talk and the construction of heterosexual masculinity. In S. Johnson & U. Meinhof (Eds.), *Language and masculinity* (pp. 47-64). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Canagarajah, A. S. (1996). Nondiscursive requirements in academic publishing, material resources of periphery scholars, and the politics of knowledge production. *Written Communication*, *13*(4), 435-472.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). *A geopolitics of academic writing.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Candlin, C., & Plum, G. (Eds.). (1998). *Researching academic literacies: Framing student literacy: Cross cultural aspects of communication skills in Australian university settings*. Sydney, Australia: NCELTR/Macquarie University.

Chang, Y. Y., & Swales, J. M. (1999). Informal elements in English academic writing: Threats or opportunities for advanced non-native speakers? In C.Candlin & K.Hyland (Eds.), *Writing: Texts, processes and practices* (pp. 145-167). Harlow, UK: Longman.

Clintron, R. (1993). Wearing a pith hat at a sly angle, or can writing researchers do ethnography in a postmodern era? *Written Communication*, *10*, 371-412.

Creese, A. (2008). Linguistic ethnography. In N. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 229-241). New York: Springer.

Crowley, S. (1998). *Composition in the university*. *Historical and polemical essays*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Curry, M. J., & Lillis, T. (2004) Multilingual scholars and the imperative to publish in English: Negotiating interests, demands, and rewards. *TESOL Quarterly*, *38*(4), 663-688.

Ellsworth, E. (1994). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In L. Stone (Ed.), *The education feminism reader* (pp. 300-326). London: Longman. (Original work published 1989)

Fabian, J. (2001). Ethnographic objectivity: From rigor to vigor. In. J. Fabian, *Anthropology with an attitude* (pp. 11-32). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longman.

Fishman, S. M., & McCarthy, L. (2001). An ESL writer and her discipline-based professor. *Written Communication*, *18*(2), 180-228.

Flowerdew, J. (2000). Discourse community, legitimate peripheral participation, and the nonnative-English-speaking scholar. *TESOL Quarterly*, *34*(1), 127-150.

Flowerdew, J. (2001). Attitudes of journal editors to nonnative speaker contributions, *TESOL Quarterly*, *35*(1), 121-150.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gentil, G. (2005). Commitments to academic biliteracy. Case studies of francophone writers. *Written Communication*, *22*(4), 421-471.

Gosden, H. (1995). Success in research article writing and revision: A social-constructionist perspective. *English for Specific Purposes*, *14*(1), 37-57.

Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J., & Hymes, D. (Eds.). (1972). *Directions in sociolinguistics. The ethnography of communication* (pp. 35-71). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Haas, C. (1994). Learning to read biology: One student's rhetorical development in college. *Written Communication*, *11*(3), 43-84.

Hammersley, M. (1994). Introducing ethnography. In D. Graddol, J. Maybin, & B. Stierer (Eds.), *Researching language and literacy in social context* (pp. 1-17). Clevedon/Milton Keynes, UK: Multilingual Matters/OUP.

Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: Problems and prospects. *Ethnography and Education*, *1*(1), 3-14.

Harwood, N. (2006). (In) appropriate personal pronoun use in political science: A qualitative study and a proposed heuristic for future research. *Written Communication*, *23*(4), 424-450.

Headland, J., Pike, K., & Harris, M. (Eds.). (1990). *Emics and etics: The insider/outside debate*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Hewings, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Academic writing in context. Implications and applications*. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham Press.
Hine, C. (2000).*Virtual ethnography.* London: Sage.
Horner, B. (1999). The birth of basic writing. In B. Horner & M. Zhan-Lu (Eds.), *Representing the other: Basic writers and the teaching of basic writing* (pp. 3-29). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
Horner, B., & Lu, M. (1999). *Representing the other: Basic writers and the teaching of basic writing*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
Hyland, K. (1999). Academic attribution: Citation and the construction of disciplinary knowledge. *Applied Linguistics*, *20*(3), 341-367.
Hyland, K. (2003). Dissertation acknowledgements. Anatomy of a Cinderella genre. *Written Communication*, *20*(3), 242-268.
Hyland, K. (2006). *English for academic purposes. An advanced resource book*. London: Routledge.
Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Jones, C., Turner, J., & Steet, B. (Eds.). (1999). *Students writing in the university: Cultural and epistemological issues*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Juzwik, M., Curcic, S., Wolbers, K., Moxley, K. D., Dimling, L. M., & Shankland, R. K. (2006). Writing into the 21st century. An overview of research on writing 1999 to 2004. *Written Communication*, *23*(4), 451-476.
Kill, M. (2006). Acknowledging the rough edges of resistance: Negotiation of identities in first year composition. *College, Composition and Communication*, *58*(2), 213-255.
Knorr-Cetina, K. (1981). *The manufacture of knowledge: An essay on the constructivist and contextual nature of science*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
Kubota, R. (1998). An investigation of L1-L2 transfer in writing among Japanese university students: Implications for contrastive rhetoric. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *7*(1), 69-100.
Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews. An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart. Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. London: Routledge.
Latour, B., & Woolgar, S. (1986). *Laboratory life: The construction of scientific facts* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Lea, M., & Street, B. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, *23*(2), 157-172.
Lea, M. R., & Stierer, B. (Eds.). (2000). *Student writing in higher education: New contexts.* Buckingham, UK: Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press.
Leung, C. (2005) Convivial communication: Recontextualizing communicative competence. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *15*(2), 119-143.
Lillis, T. (2001)**.** *Student writing: Access, regulation, desire*. London: Routledge.
Lillis, T. (2003)**.** An "academic literacies" approach to student writing in higher education: Drawing on Bakhtin to move from "critique" to "design." *Language and Education*, *17*(3), 192-207.
Lillis, T. (2006). Moving towards an academic literacies pedagogy: 'Dialogues of participation.' In L. Ganobscik-Williams (Ed.), *Teaching academic writing in UK higher education: Theories, practices and models* (pp. 30-45). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2006a). Professional academic writing by multilingual scholars: Interactions with literacy brokers in the production of English medium texts. *Written Communication*, *23*(1), 3-35.

Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2006b). Re-framing notions of 'competence' in multilingual scholarly writing: From individual to networked activity. *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, *53*, 63-78.

Lillis, T., & Scott, M. (in press). Defining academic literacies research: Issues of epistemology, ideology and strategy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics.*

Malinowski, B. (1923). The problem of meaning in primitive languages. In C. K. Ogden & I. A. Richards (Eds.), *The meaning of meaning* (pp. 451-510). London: Kegan Paul.

Maybin, J. (1994). Children's voices: Talk, knowledge and identity. In D. Graddol, J. Maybin, & B. Stierer (Eds.), *Researching language and literacy in social context* (pp. 131-150). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Maybin, J. (2006). *Children's voices. Talk, knowledge and identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Odell, L., Goswami, D. and Herrington, A. (1983). The discourse-based interview: a procedure for exploring the tacit knowledge of writers in non-academic settings. In P. Mosenthal, L. Tamor and S.A. Walsmsley (Eds.). *Research on writing. Principles and methods*. New York: Longman.

Pickering, A. (1995). *The mangle of practice: Time, agency and science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Price, M. (2007). Accessing disability: A non disabled student works the hyphen. *College, Composition and Communication*, *59*(1), 53-76.

Prior, P. (1998). *Writing disciplinarity: A sociohistoric account of literate activity in the academy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Prior, P. (2001). Voices in text, mind, and society. Sociohistoric accounts of discourse acquisition and use. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *10*, 55-81.

Prior, P. (2004). Tracing process: How texts come into being. In C. Bazerman and P. Prior (Eds.), *What writing does and how it does it. An introduction to analyzing texts and textual practices* (pp. 167-200). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rampton, B. (1995). *Crossing: Language and ethnicity among adolescents*. London: Longman.

Rampton, B. (2006). *Language in late modernity. Interaction in an urban classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rampton, B. (2007). Neo-Hymesian linguistic ethnography in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *11*(5), 584-607.

Rampton, B., Tusting, K., Maybin, J., Barwell, R., Creese, A., & Lytra, V. (2004). UK linguistic ethnography: A discussion paper. Retrieved December 14, 2007, from http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/organisations/lingethn/documents/

Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary*. New York: Penguin.

Sarangi, S. (2006). The conditions and consequences of professional discourse studies. In R. Kiely, P. Rea-Dickins, H. Woodfield, & G. Clibbon (Eds.), *Language, culture and identity in applied linguistics* (pp. 199-220). London: Equinox.

Sarangi, S. (2007). The anatomy of interpretation: Coming to terms with the analyst's paradox in professional discourse studies [Editorial]. *Text*, *27*(5), 567-584.

Scott, M., & Turner, J. (2005). Creativity, conformity and complexity in academic writing: Tensions at the interface. In M. Baynham, A. Deignan, & G. White (Eds.), *Applied linguistics at the interface* (British Studies in Applied Linguistics, Vol. 19). London: Equinox.

Silverstein, M., & Urban, G. (Eds.). (1996). *Natural histories of discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Skillen, J. (2006). Teaching academic writing from the 'centre' in Australian universities. In L. Ganobcsik-Williams (Ed.), *Teaching academic writing in UK higher education: Theories, practices, and models* (pp. 140-153). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave/Macmillan.

Smith, D. (1999). *Writing the social: Critique, theory and investigations*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Spack, R. (1997). The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language. A longitudinal case study. *Written Communication*, *14*(1), 3-62.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (2003). The implications of the new literacy studies for education. In S. Goodman, T. Lillis, J. Maybin, & N. Mercer (Eds.), *Language, literacy and education: A reader* (pp. 77-88). Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books.

Street, B. (2004). Academic literacies and the new orders: Implications for research and practice in student writing in higher education. *Learning and Teaching in the Social Science*, *1*(1), 9-20.

Street, B. (Ed.). (2005). *Literacies across educational contexts: Mediating learning and teaching*. Philadelphia: Caslon Press.

Street, B., & Lefstein, A. S (2007). *Literacy: An advanced resource book*. London. Routledge.

Swales, J. (1998). *Other floors, other voices: A textography of a small university building*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Thesen, L., & van Pletzen, E. (Eds.). (2006). *Academic literacy and the languages of change.* London: Continuum.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field. On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Van Maanen, J. (1995). An end to innocence. The ethnography of ethnography. In J. Van Maanen (Ed.), *Representation in ethnography* (pp. 1-35). London: Sage.

Ventola, E., & Mauranen, A. (1991). Non-native writing and native revising of scientific articles. In E. Ventola (Ed.), *Functional and systemic linguistics: Approaches and uses* (pp. 457-492). Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wolcott, H. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing*. Lanham, MD: Rowman Altamira.

Theresa Lillis is a senior lecturer in language and communication in the Centre for Language and Communications at The Open University, UK. She has published books on academic literacies including *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, and Desire* (Routledge, 2001) and *Teaching Academic Writing: A Toolkit for Higher Education* (Routledge, 2003) and articles on academic writing for publication in a global context, including those published in *Language and Education*, *Written Communication*, and *TESOL Quarterly.*