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Guillén-Galve, I. and Bocanegra-Valle, A. (eds) (2021) *Ethnographies of Academic Writing Research: Theory, methods and interpretation*. **Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Hardcover €95 $143 ISBN: 9789027210067; softcover 9789027210074 €33 $49.95; ebook €33 $49.95 [price for individual customers] XXI, 162 pp. ISBN: 9789027258410 https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/books/9789027258410**

These two volumes, published five years apart, signal the sustained and growing interest in ethnographic approaches to academic writing which provides an important backdrop to the current Special Issue. Both volumes offer broad methodological overviews of the field but, in different ways, also incorporate detailed discussion of a rich range of empirical studies, unpacked in great detail in some cases. These examples help to add 'thickness' to the descriptions of academic writing research and to bring the messy, complex but satisfying aspects of ethnographic research to life for both newer and more experienced academic writing researchers.

Paltridge et al. (2016) position their publication as part of a broad methodological response to hitherto 'predominant tendency' (p. 29) towards text-focused and cognitive approaches to academic writing and in doing so they cover considerable ground. The first three chapters explore ethnography as a diverse and changing phenomenon. Chapter 1 offers an overview of ethnography itself as an evolving research paradigm, from its roots in early twentieth century anthropology to a contemporary 'multiplicity of approaches' coalescing around a set of 'core values' (Scott Jones 2010) including participation; immersion; reflection, reflexivity and representation; thick description; an active participative ethics; empowerment and understanding (Paltridge et al. 2016, p. 14). The authors argue for the need for any researcher embarking upon ethnographic study to understand this historical perspective and characterize the field as one which entails a 'constant problematizing' of itself. Chapter 2 explores conceptualizations of 'language' and 'context' and how these two have been theoretically and methodologically brought into dynamic relation with one another in ethnographic academic writing research. Again the authors explore the early roots of the field, particularly Malinowski's field work in Polynesia (1922) which led to his pioneering conceptualization of language as embedded in the 'context of situation' and 'context of culture'. They trace different routes by which these fundamental notions have travelled into contemporary theories of academic writing, partly via sociolinguists (e.g. Gumperz & Hymes, 1964) but with a greater emphasis on functional linguistics, via Firth and Halliday to SFL-based genre theory (e.g. Martin & Rose, 2008), and on other genre theories such as that proposed by Swales (1990). They describe studies which have gathered and analysed 'contextual' data in conjunction with texts themselves, with 'context' understood at many levels including co-text, intertextual links, settings, purposes, writers and readers, conventions, tacit expectations and underlying values in academic environments. Chapter 3 argues for the value of ethnographic perspectives in bringing together texts and contexts and thus in adding an essential dynamism and contingency to otherwise potentially static conceptualisations of

genre. The authors focus on the different ways in which the text/context gap might be narrowed through ethnographically oriented methodologies. They draw on Lillis' (2008) tripartite framing of 'ethnography as method, methodology and "deep theorizing"' as a means of structuring their discussion in this chapter and indeed throughout the volume, using this heuristically to sift through key differences between the many studies which they survey. Paltridge et al. (2016) themselves, however, generally avoid the word 'ethnography', preferring terms such as 'ethnographic orientation' or 'ethnographic perspectives'; this strategy enables them to cover a huge range of work, including research which does not use the 'ethnographic' label in any form, but which shares some of the core characteristics identified in Chapter 2. This breadth is an undoubted strength of the volume.

In keeping with the choice to maintain methodological and theoretical breadth, the authors have chosen to organise central chapters around roughly distinct domains of academic writing: undergraduate, postgraduate and writing for publication. Each of these three chapters (4, 5 and 6 respectively) begins with a broad introduction to ethnographic empirical work in the specific domain, signposting numerous studies. This is then followed in each case by a more in-depth survey of selected studies, representing a range of national contexts across the three chapters (particularly the US, Hong Kong, and UK). The authors explain the rationale for including such detailed examples as aiming 'to provide a sound case for furthering the [ethnographic] approach' (p. 1) and they succeed in this aim since the reader is given plenty of opportunity to think through points of relevance to their own areas of interest and to explore the affordances of ethnographic work as a response to the highly situated nature of writing within these broad domains. Descriptions are full enough to enable the reader to make a judicious selection for further reading – a valuable feature given the limited time even postgraduate researchers often have for exploring the literature(s) of the field. Chapter 4 includes sections on research carried out in and across a wide range of undergraduate spaces in the academy, on work which highlights identity and power and on studies addressing language policy and assessment. Chapter 5 surveys postgraduate writing research, with the emphasis mainly on 'second language writing' for doctoral study. One section focuses on thesis and dissertation writing and another on the social roles and pedagogical relations surrounding postgraduate study. A final section explores work in the rapidly evolving area of art and design research writing – here the language backgrounds of study participants are not explicitly stated but appear to include 'first' language doctoral students. Chapter 6 initially discusses some well-known early studies of the writing practices of North American academics, particularly those working in the 'hard' sciences. It then focuses primarily on studies of academic writing for publication in English by scholars based in the global 'periphery' and semi-periphery and thus continues the main focus of the volume on 'second language' and multilingual writers. Sections deal with the widespread pressure to publish in English and with the inequalities resulting from the near-hegemony of English within a neo-colonial, globalised system of knowledge production and circulation. A further, detailed section focuses on brokering practices in a number of different national contexts including Hong Kong and China but also on the brokering experiences of 'non-native-speaking' academic writers located in anglophone centre institutions.

The authors' focus on educational contexts and purposes for ethnographic work, especially where multilingual students and scholars are writing in English, is borne out in their choice to include an entire chapter (Chapter 7) on the learning and teaching of academic writing,

although they acknowledge that this focus inevitably overlaps with work discussed in previous chapters. This chapter has interesting sections focusing on the different ways in which writing development, issues of writer identity, transition and learning transfer have been investigated both within disciplinary spaces and in language-oriented spaces of various kinds (such as 'second language' and Composition writing classrooms). A further section also covers the use of ethnographic approaches as a pedagogic tool. This chapter emphasises the affordances of longitudinal research and sustained engagement with participants over time in exposing the complexity, non-linearity and sheer variety of learner-writer trajectories. Such research poses a challenge to educators but is essential in forestalling simplistic pedagogic notions leading to 'one-size-fits-all' interventions. The authors conclude by calling for further research, pointing to ongoing changes in the nature of education and its relationship with economies and states, in the porosity of boundaries between disciplines and between academic and applied knowledge, as well as to profound shifts in student populations and in the technologies and modalities of academic writing which future ethnographic researchers need to take into account.

In their edited collection, **Guillén-Galve and Bocanegra-Valle (2021)** demonstrate the continuation of the 'ethnographic turn' identified and called for by Paltridge et al (2016). The volume opens with a Foreword by Lillis who reminds us of the power of ethnography not only to attend to previously hidden phenomena but to prompt researchers to question apparently stable or taken-for-granted categories such as *language*, *English*, or *writing*. Paltridge et al.'s 2016 volume is clearly one of the starting points in the editors' opening chapter, which is comprised of a series of linked 'methodological reflections'. Although these author/editors reference the same set of 'core' ethnographic values (also citing Scott Jones 2010), they set out explicitly to emphasise certain of these values, particularly reflexivity, participatory dialogue and empowerment. They argue that ethnographies of academic writing should go 'well beyond thick description' to involve thick participation, collaboration and narrativization, and so to reflexively tell the 'inside story' of research (p. 3). Thus, somewhat in contrast to Paltridge et al.'s eclectic approach, Guillén-Galve and Bocanegra-Valle regard it as important to avoid 'methodological derailment' and to get 'academic writing research on the right ethnographic track' (pp. 6-7). Interestingly, they also use Lillis (2008) as a key reference point, seeking a 'more solid understanding' (p. 13) of 'deep theorizing', along with Geertz's notion of 'thick description', as desirable elements in ethnographic work. This introductory chapter, as in Paltridge et al.'s book, also deals (though more briefly) with the intellectual origins of contemporary ethnographic approaches to academic writing but the focus is to a much greater degree on the influence of linguistic ethnography rather than on ethnography as an extension of genre-based approaches. This contrast between the two volumes may in part stem from the greater focus on education, learners and teaching in Paltridge et al. who state that the 'ultimate goal of our research' is to 'enable students to meet the literacy demands of the academy' (p. 170), whereas the core thread running through Guillén-Galve and Bocanegra-Valle's edited collection is rather a focus on ethics and ways to achieve 'trustworthiness', and so to address 'key methodological concerns' (p. 17).

Chapters 2 to 5 in Guillén-Galve and Bocanegra-Valle are therefore methodologically focused. In Chapter 2 Tardy conducts an interesting critical survey of studies claiming to use 'thick description'. She interrogates Geertz's original meaning, identifying a number of key elements which are required to produce thick description: multiple data sources, longitudinal

or sustained engagement, an interest in emic (insider) perspectives, researcher reflexivity and theorized interpretations. She draws on Lillis (2008) and Lillis and Curry (2010) to point to the value of thick descriptions for elucidating what is significant to writers themselves and also reminds us of the importance of the combination of micro with macro analysis in such theorised descriptions. Tardy quotes words of Geertz which sums this up well: 'The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts…' (Geertz, 1973, cited in Tardy's chapter, p. 23). This chapter will be useful for researchers aiming for 'thick description' in their own research, especially for doctoral students who may wish to explore this concept in depth in a thesis methodology chapter. Tardy's chapter is described by the editors as an exploration of 'ethnography as methodology', while Chapter 3 by Sizer is positioned as an exploration of 'deep theorizing'. Sizer's chapter focuses on textography and surveys a number of studies including Swales' original 1998 textography *Other Floors, Other Voices*. Abstract methodological discussions here are complemented by accounts of the practical procedures carried out by Swales and others, for example field work observations of 'routine business', principled collection of images, the use of collaborative approaches and the use of verbatim transcription including paralinguistic cues. Drawing on work in linguistic ethnography (e.g. Copland & Creese 2015), Sizer sets out to demonstrate that textographies can achieve the analytic narrowing of the gap between text and context by incorporating the analysis of specific texts (presumably those considered to be core objects of study) alongside multiple data sources such as observations, 'contextual texts', images and artefacts gathered from the research site as well as interviews. However, the precise nature of the analysis and how this might close the ontological gap remains somewhat elusive. One affordance of textography which Sizer discusses is its potential to bring to light 'temporal' findings on different scales, such as the rhythms of academic working life or the lifecyles of specific academic texts, a characteristic which perhaps reflects the field's broad direction of travel and which make it worthy of exploration by researchers interested in dynamic approaches to academic writing research.

In contrast to the generally physical, geographic nature of textographic 'sites', in Chapter 4 Albero-Posac and Luzón address the expanding field of research on writing in virtual spaces. They use the term 'digital ethnography' (but also survey research using broadly cognate terms such as 'virtual ethnography', 'online ethnography' and 'netnography'), again deploying a distinction between ethnographic methods and tools at one end of the spectrum and methodologies/theorized approaches at the other. The chapter is based on a critical review of 37 articles, and the authors structure their overview according to data collection procedures (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observation, document analysis, reflection on own writing – often combined in any single study). This approach supports the authors' preferred definition of digital ethnography as a 'broad, open approach' which involves the study of 'realities that include but may not be limited to practices in online settings' (p. 65), which they argue is particularly apt for the study of scholars' writing practices which are distributed across offline/online boundaries. This chapter is very much in a practical spirit and will be a useful resource for researchers planning to study blended or online-only academic writing practices. Chapter 5, by Manchón, 'zooms in' on writing processes, an aspect of writing which has traditionally been studied predominantly as a cognitive phenomenon, giving rise to what she characterises (citing Atkinson 2002) as the 'lonely cactus' concept of the language user (p. 88). She explores the ways in which ethnographic approaches can contribute to our understanding of the hidden aspects of 'real-life' (p. 86)

writing and/or text production, moving research away from a purely cognitive framing of writing to a more socially situated, time-distributed understanding of how writing unfolds across` 'languages, modes, times and environments' (abstract). Hence the chapter throws light on text production as a dynamic and complex set of micropractices entailing not only the linguistic encoding of meanings, but a range of processes, strategies and actions and often involving multiple participants. Starting with an account of studies which are more holistic than purely cognitive research, but which remain focused on *individuals* writing, Manchón then moves on to discuss research on text production processes from a supra-individual perspective. The focus may be of particular interest to readers of this Special Issue as Manchón shows how ethnographic approaches are ideally adapted to an understanding of contemporary academic (and workplace) writing as fundamentally social and collaborative, and to the study of writing as a dynamic phenomenon which can be tracked across time (micro and longer trajectories and cycles) and space (from university to workplace, from screen to paper). Manchón demonstrates in this chapter the value of the 'cross-pollination' (p. 100) of psycholinguistic with ethnographic approaches.

The final two chapters of the edited volume stand out in that they each offer methodological reflections on empirical studies carried out by the chapter authors themselves. In this way, we see how some of the more abstract methodological concepts and arguments introduced earlier in the volume are operationalised in the doing of research and in its reflexive re-telling in these chapters. The authors of Chapter 6, Khuder and Petrić, provide a vivid account of the delicate negotiations involved as they carried out a study of exiled Syrian academics writing for publication. They emphasise that ethnographic work often involves navigating unchartered waters, especially with vulnerable participants, with micro-decisions of ethics and representation to be made at every turn. Examples of such decisions discussed in the chapter include: adjusting the level of participation (moving from minimal to maximal presence in the course of the research); dilemmas around perceived political affiliations of one of the researchers (herself Syrian), thwarting attempts to remain 'neutral'; problematising the translation of data from Arabic to English; and how to balance researcher roles with practitioner/support roles. Another thought-provoking aspect discussed in detail in the chapter is the issue of representation. For example, Khuder and Petrić made careful word choices in order to navigate sensitive areas, for example, they opted for the term *exile* rather than *refugee*, Syrian *conflict* rather than *revolution* or *uprising*. What the authors show is that not only are the functions performed by *participants'* language to be 'ethnographically determined' (Blommaert, 2007, p. 687) but the precise meanings of the *researchers' own* familiar terms and categories e.g. 'insider'/'outsider', are complex, not fixed and can themselves only be truly determined *in situ* through reflexivity during the research process (p. 120). Chapter 7 by Ávila-Reyes provides another thick description of ethnographic method/ologies, in this case the literacy history and talk around texts. The chapter is based on two studies which build on one another – a good example of the iterative nature of ethnographic work and the benefit of cumulative study in this field. The studies focus on 'non-traditional' undergraduate writers in a Chilean university and, perhaps more than any other study in this or the other reviewed volume, echo early work in academic literacies (e.g. Lillis, 2001) which did not focus specifically or exclusively on 'second language' writing, and was heavily influenced by widening participation agendas and adult literacy research. In Ávila-Reyes' chapter the focus is on ethnography's potential as a 'counter-hegemonic' paradigm to expose the ideologically hidden forces underlying educational injustice and

exclusion (the theme of Lillis' introduction to this volume). As with Chapter 6, this detailed methodological reflection provides a rich example of reflexivity in action. Finally, Atkinson's Afterword revisits the editors' focus on the 'inside story' of ethnographic research, framing ethnography as fundamentally part of the 'ancient human practice' of storytelling. Atkinson provocatively (given the methodological focus of the entire volume) suggests that ethnography is better thought of as 'anti-methodology', 'learning to listen and then to tell the variable practices of human beings…through other people's stories, filtered … through our own' (p. 150).

It is worth briefly commenting on some common threads running across these two very different publications. First, the use of Lillis (2008) as a touchstone is notable. The notion of ethnography as 'theorizing' itself suggests a dynamic activity, theory as verb rather than noun (Thesen & Coleman, 2018), and this is borne out for the reader as familiar concepts are revisited, probed, questioned and refined. A good example of this is the way in which a number of authors whose work is described in Paltridge et al.'s (2016) volume modulate and extend the notion of 'discourse community', including Swales himself (see p. 44), Starfield (pp. 38 – 40), Prior (pp. 40-42) and Chiseri Strater (p. 57). Yet the concept of 'deep theorizing' remains somewhat elusive analytically. In a sense most of the research discussed in these books represents an attempt to bring context and text closer together, though in hugely varied ways. But the deep challenge of bridging the ontological divide – which Lillis (2008) seeks to move towards through, for example, her use of concepts such as *orientation* and *indexicality* – is not a straightforward one. Approaches which track text production over time and space perhaps come closest, and this is where the work in the current Special Issue pushes the field further.

Another point worth noting is that both sets of authors/editors rightly emphasise the very real practical challenges of research which 'ticks all of the ethnographic boxes'. Difficulties of access, ethics, recruitment and time in carrying out longitudinal, in-depth empirical work cannot be underestimated. Paltridge et al. (p. 48) remind us that the most extensive and robust ethnographies of academic writing carried out to date have either been (in part) grant-funded or doctoral projects. Large quantities of data gathered over long periods of time go against the grain of the current academic 'output' culture and require slow research (Berg & Seeber, 2018). This makes ethnography a hard path to follow, involving considerable labour. At the same time, the same features often explain why we enjoy ethnographic enquiry. The chance for authentic engagement with participants and the building of mutual respect; the immersion in others' everyday worlds; the opportunity to 'lift the lid' on powerful structures and discourses to expose the much messier lived reality beneath; the open-ended and often surprising nature of ethnography, are all in its favour. And the chapters in both of these volumes do offer plenty of examples of researchers' very valid mitigations and 'work arounds', finding solutions to methodological challenges which may muddy the 'purity' of individual ethnographic studies but which cumulatively have contributed to a significant and convincing shift in contemporary perspectives on academic writing. Ethnographic research is inherently 'untidy' and both volumes preserve this sense of messiness while at the same time finding ways to package complexity and variegation in ways which will be helpful, both to readers relatively new to academic writing research and to more experienced researchers hoping to go back to first principles.

Finally, both volumes are testament to the 'constant problematizing' that is fundamental to ethnographic research perspectives and which Paltridge et al. (2016) refer to early in their introductory chapter (see also Lillis' Foreword in Guillén-Galve & Bocanegra Eds., 2021). Inevitably, a critical reading in hindsight reveals possible gaps. One significant omission may be a lack of reference in either volume to the colonial historical connotations of ethnography and to the importance of material and epistemological decolonization in the study of academic literacy. Related to this may be what seems to be a relatively limited representation of ethnographically oriented research conducted in the Global South. 'Resistant categories' (Lillis, 2015) such as 'writing', 'English' and '(non-)native-speaker' sometimes remain relatively unquestioned. But the spirit of both volumes is one of openness to future developments. Although both stabilise the field helpfully for the reader, 'for the moment', they also provide rich resources with which to explore the field's huge potential to address the new challenges in academic writing research, and to throw light on rapidly changing practices in a mobile, diverse and connected world.

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