In coining new terms or proposing a new concept, it is important to survey the new territory to make sure that the land has not been previously inhabited by other peoples. (In fact, much of what passes as new ideas about language in U.S. college composition have already been discussed in applied linguistics.) (Matsuda, 2013: 135)

As noted by Paul Matsuda in Chapter 12 of this volume (“It’s the Wild West Out There: A New Linguistic Frontier in U.S. College Composition”), compositionists need to ensure that intellectual accountability is observed in a new composition era. Echoing a similar sentiment, Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012: 649) point out that “a plethora of similar terms (e.g., metrolingualism, polylanguaging, language, heteroglossia, codemeshing, translingual practice, flexible bilingualism, multilanguaging and hybrid language practices) makes [the] extension of translanguaging appear in need of focused explication and more precise definition” (emphasis added). While these new terms warrant explication, a point to which I will return later, the above observations also underscore how writing and literacy stand to benefit from developments in applied linguistics.

By tapping into the translingual turn in applied linguistics, A. Suresh Canagarajah and the contributors to his edited volume call for an end to an understanding of codes as bearing stable boundaries; instead, they propose...
a reconceptualized field that emphasizes writers’ “ability to merge different language resources in situated interactions for new meaning construction” (pp. 1–2). Such a paradigmatic shift in composition theory and practice emphasizes: (1) the performance and practice aspect of literacy; (2) the ways in which semiotic resources from various languages and cultures are mobilized by writers; and (3) the need to take into consideration how the larger contexts of history, culture, and social relations shape literacy.

The objective of this book, Canagarajah further explains in his introduction, is to focus on “translingual practices [which] are widely practiced in communities and everyday community contexts… [but are] ignored or suppressed in classrooms” (p. 4). In order to advance this intellectual endeavor, this 22-chapter volume is organized into five parts: Premises, Community Practices, Code-Meshing Orientations, Research Directions, and Pedagogical Applications.

The chapters in Part 1 of the volume highlight the hybridity which characterizes translingual practices and the agency of writers who engage in such rhetorical practices. In Chapter 1 (“Introduction”), A. Suresh Canagarajah puts forward his understanding of the term translingual and emphasizes the importance of focusing on linguistic practices instead of form. Underlining the crucial role of language and literacy educators, Charles Bazerman (Chapter 2, “Global and Local Communicative Networks and Implications for Literacy”) examines the implications of global and local communicative networks on literacy and the inequities which emerge through knowing and not knowing English. In Chapter 3 (“Translingual Literacy and Matters of Agency”), Min-Zhan Lau and Bruce Horner urge educators to help students develop strategies which would elicit greater tolerance among readers of writing which mixes codes. The benefits of learning to work with or across the borders of language diversity is the focus of Scott Wible’s chapter (Chapter 4, “Rhetorical Activities of Global Citizens”) as he investigates the rhetorical practices developed within the World Social Forum. Such diversity is also represented in the patriotic Chinese songs examined by LuMing Mao in Chapter 5 (“Redefining Indigenous Rhetoric: From Places of Origin to Translingual Spaces of Interdependence-in-Difference”). These songs, Mao informs us, are constituted and re-constituted by ordinary Chinese to reclaim their own sense of agency.

The chapters in the second part of this book examine community practices across a range of contexts and culture. Morris Young (Chapter 6, “Neither Asian nor American: The Creolization of Asian American Rhetoric”) analyzes creole discourse in the form of poems composed by early 20th century Chinese immigrants and field songs created by Japanese immigrants to Hawai’i who faced harsh work conditions, while Jon
Reyhner (Chapter 7, “Confronting the Wounds of Colonialism Through Words”) explores how the revitalization of the languages and cultures by indigenous peoples can potentially heal wounds caused by colonialism. Crucially, as Ellen Cushman (Chapter 8, “The Cherokee Syllabary: The Evolution of Writing in Sequoyan”) reminds us, the symbolic resources of indigenous people extend beyond the alphabet. Through focusing on the Cherokee syllabary, she calls for a better understanding of graphisms, World Englishes, and hybrid codes. The potential of translingual practices is also emphasized by Nancy Bou Ayash (Chapter 9, “Hi-ein, Hi ? Translingual Practices from Lebanon and Mainstream Literacy Education”) and Esther Milu (Chapter 10, “Translingual Practices in Kenyan Hiphop: Pedagogical Implications”). The former demonstrates how a discussion of relocalized language practices in the media enhanced the metalinguistic awareness of the Lebanese students enrolled in her writing courses, and the latter points out how an analysis of translingual Kenyan hiphop practices enabled students to explore the historical, racial, and cultural relationship between Kenyans, Jamaicans, and African-Americans.

Having been introduced to examples of translingual practices in the first two parts of the book, Part 3 of the volume changes tack by providing readers with some theoretical guidance. The notion of code-meshing is addressed in the next three chapters. Distinguishing translingualism (a philosophy) and code-meshing (a strategy), Vivette Milson-Whyte in Chapter 11 (“Pedagogical and Socio-Political Implications of Code-Meshing in Classrooms: Some Considerations for a Translingual Orientation to Writing”) addresses the implications of code-meshing in classrooms. Her chapter is followed by Paul Matsuda’s (Chapter 12), which was introduced earlier. According to Matsuda, one way to manage concerns over codemeshing and translingualism is to foreground the linguistic aspects of composition by having graduate students take courses in applied linguistics and by participating in conferences attended by language specialists. The third part of this volume closes with a passionate call by Vershawn Ashanti Young (Chapter 13, “Keep Code-Meshing”) to retain code-meshing on the agenda of English teachers.

Building on the theoretical suggestions in Part 3, Part 4 posits new research directions. The first chapter in this section, by Christiane Donahue (Chapter 14, “Negotiation, Translinguality, and Cross-Cultural Writing Research in a New Composition Era”), reports on how French and U.S. student writers reconstructed their texts by appropriating French and English in order to express themselves in their writing. Drawing on interviews conducted with multilingual immigrants, Rebecca Lorimer (Chapter 15, “Writing across Languages: Developing Rhetorical Attunement”) puts forward a practice-based framework, which she calls rhetorical attunement, to help
researchers and teachers focus on what writers do and not what they know. In Chapter 16 (“Research on Multilingual Writers in the Disciplines: The Case of Biomedical Engineering”), Mya Poe turns her analytical lens toward the development of a writer enrolled in a graduate science course and shows how his development was facilitated by interactions with international collaborators. That literacy development is a collaborative effort is emphasized in Chapter 17 (“Transnational Translingual Literacy Sponsors and Gateways on the United-States-Mexico Borderlands”). Invoking the notion of literacy sponsors (Brandt, 1998), John Scenters-Zapico illustrates how the literacy development of individuals at the United States-Mexico borderlands is supported by traditional sponsors (e.g. teachers, family, and friends) and electronic literacy gateways.

The fifth and final part of this volume focuses on how community practices can be tapped to enhance literacy education and to create practice-based pedagogies. Maria Jerskey (Chapter 18, “Literacy Brokers in the Contact Zone, Year 1: The Crowded Safe House”) reports on a literacy brokers program, comprised of workshops and peer-learning writing circles, which she implemented at her institution for multilingual scholar writers. By harnessing the resources of the internet in order to move beyond a monolingual approach, Joleen Hanson in Chapter 19 (“Moving out of the Monolingual Comfort Zone and into the Multilingual World: An Exercise for the Writing Classroom”) describes how she had her students use Google Translate to translate search terms while working on a researched argument essay. Negotiating difference is also underscored in Chapter 20 (“When ‘Second’ Comes First to the Eye? Sociolinguistic Hybridity in Professional Writing”), where Anita Pandey puts forward a discourse framework which draws on the World Englishes’ paradigm and Conversation Analysis. The key to enhancing a pedagogical understanding of writing, she maintains, is establishing mutual intelligibility. Following Pandey, Aimee Krall-Lanoue (Chapter 21, “‘And yea I’m Venting, But Hey I’m Writing Isn’t I’: A Translingual Approach to Error in a Multilingual Context”) exhorts teachers to act as engaged readers, negotiate language differences, and refrain from editing student writing.

In the introduction to Chapter 13, Vershawn Ashanti Young credits Canagarajah with putting code-meshing on the proverbial radar of composition scholars. As Young puts it, “his [Canagarajah’s] theoretical and practical scholarship on the concept...has propelled it from an explanation...in a footnote to a subject of primary focus in journal articles, edited volumes, dissertations, and published monographs” (p. 139). Indeed, the constructs of both codemeshing and translingualism have increasingly been used as result of Canagarajah’s path-breaking research in composition and applied linguistics. As valuable as his seminal work has been to both
fields, there are two areas from which this volume could have benefitted. First, and as alluded to at the start of this review, a more in-depth discussion of related terms such as *metrolingualism, polylanguaging, languaging,* and *heteroglossia* would have helped readers better understand the salience of the constructs of codemeshing and translingualism advanced in this volume. To their credit, both Canagarajah (“Introduction”) and Matsuda (Chapter 12) do attempt to address this concern. The former, for instance, distinguishes translingualism from multilingualism or plurilingualism, which he argues “keeps languages separated as they address the co-existence of multiple languages” (p. 1). However, a further discussion of these differences – in particular, their intellectual lineages – would help readers navigate this new intellectual terrain. In applied linguistics (e.g. Lin, 2013), scholars have started to interrogate the subtle differences between the different constructs related to code-switching in conversations. Given these adjacent developments, a similar comparative analysis which pertains to the field of composition is timely.

Another aspect of this volume that could have been developed is the pedagogical applications of translingual literacy, a point which is also raised by Dorothy Worden in her afterword (Chapter 22, “Afterword: Reflections from the Ground Floor”). Admittedly, Section 5 and several other chapters in the volume report on the creative efforts of writing teachers and researchers. While helpful, a more coherent instructional approach in the form of pedagogical principles and recommendations which writing teachers could use with their students would have been appreciated. In all fairness to Canagarajah, work on translingual literacy practices is at a nascent stage. As he himself concedes in his introduction, this book does not “provide a definitive statement on translingual literacy. It is too early for that kind of book” (p. 8). Putting this reality into perspective, and building on Matsuda’s Wild West metaphor (Chapter 12), one can easily see how this volume constitutes a new linguistic frontier. To extend this metaphor, I would add that the pot of gold at the end of the translingual literacy rainbow is undoubtedly worth pursuing for researchers, teachers, and graduate students involved in composition and literacy studies. This book brings us one step closer toward realizing this golden treasure.

**About the Author**

Peter De Costa is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Languages at Michigan State University. He holds a Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Peter’s primary area of research is the role of identity and ideology in SLA, though he also conducts research on English as a lingua franca and
critical classroom discourse analysis. Much of his current work focuses on conducting ethical applied linguistic research, scalar approaches to language learning, language learning and emotions, and corpus-based understandings of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) genre-related challenges encountered by international university students.

References


