Special issue: writing research across borders

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Introduction

The current special issue took shape following an international conference focused on writing research: “Writing Research Across Borders 2021,” sponsored by the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research (ISAWR)\(^1\). This online event took place over two days in March 2021 in the midst of the COVID19 pandemic and included 250 participants from 26 countries. Topics covered at the conference included: Digital Transnational Projects; Approaches to Writing Instruction; Multilingual Writing; Writing Across Contexts/Cultures; Writing & Cognition; Writing Trajectories; Writing Assessment; Writing Initiatives; Writing Teacher Education; Writing Development; and Scientific Writing. This virtual conference replaced a planned, but canceled, 2020 conference “Writing Research Across Borders V”, which was scheduled to take place in Xi’an, China, in February of 2020. The conference was part of an ongoing series of international conferences hosted by ISAWR dedicated to empirically grounded research on writing, which are held tri-annually\(^2\).

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For this special issue we invited researchers who had presented at the 2021 virtual conference to develop full papers based on their conference presentations. Given that the papers emerged in alignment with the goals of ISAWR, they reflect those values, namely: the bringing together of different writing research traditions from around the world; furthering a deeper collective appreciation for the complexities of writing as an object of study; and, the use of sound (and diverse) research methods, i.e., the methodical gathering of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods data appropriate to its claims. Our goals in presenting a sample of empirical research papers from the conference include providing a basis for cross-paradigm discussions of writing across international contexts and indicating some of the directions where writing research is heading.

As an editorial team, we reviewed the submitted abstracts and selected potential submissions based on quality and the maturity of the research, as many of the presentations given at the conference were works in progress. We then engaged a set of global experts, in cooperation with the editorial team of Literatura y Lingüística, in reviewing the papers based on a rigorous rubric. The evaluation criteria addressed a variety of elements including the clarity of aims, questions and formulation of the problem under study; connections and relevance to current lines of research on writing; the soundness of the research design and implementation of the research methods; the significance of the findings; and the quality of the writing and the communication of the work as a whole. Each paper was reviewed independently in a masked review process by two external referees and the journal editors and underwent a third level of review by the editors of the special issue. In the end, like the conference from which the submissions emerged, the topics were wide ranging: from the early uses of writing in society building, to paraphrase patterns of expert academic writers, to metadiscourse in scientific communication.

Our decision to publish these fully refereed papers in the journal Literatura y Lingüística was a strategic one grounded in the goals of ISAWR to advance international research on writing, our appreciation for the multilingual publishing traditions in many Latin American journals, and the reputation of journal. In our call for papers we welcomed submissions in a number of languages; and, although the ma-
Majority of the papers ended up being submitted in English (in part due to technical difficulties that arose which hindered the submission of papers written in French, which we regret), the authors whose work is presented in this special issue and the objects of study in their submissions come from five of the 26 countries represented at the conference: Argentina, Chile, France, Spain and the United States.

The papers in the special issue reflect the title of the conference from which they emerged, Writing Research Across Borders, which recognizes the borders and boundaries that surround research on writing (methodological, epistemological, disciplinary, educational, political, and geographical) while inviting movement across those borders. For it is in the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas that we collectively advance field-level knowledge of valuable research designs, methods, and findings. It is in this spirit of encouraging the global, multidisciplinary, and multilingual exchange of writing research that we offer this special issue.

In addition to the value of this border-crossing work, however, we also acknowledge the many serious difficulties that must be addressed in building knowledge across these boundaries. Knowledge does not easily cross disciplinary boundaries, and traversing linguistic, cultural, methodological, and epistemological borders can be extremely difficult, as our respective training in particular research traditions, language barriers, and cultural backgrounds can narrow our ability to comprehend, participate, and appreciate work that is sometimes radically different from our own. It is with these challenges in mind that this special issue seeks to offer a cross-section of the wide-ranging approaches to writing research taking place in countries and contexts around the world.

In addition to the challenges of crossing disciplinary, theoretical, and epistemological divides, the hegemony of Anglophone research also can obscure many research contributions from around the world, which seriously hinders the advancement of our field-level knowledge. As Navarro et al. (2022) point out in their position statement on English as Lingua Franca in scientific and academic contexts, “The imposition of English as a presumed scientific-academic ‘lingua franca’ is a manifestation of the unequal distribution of knowledge production and uptake” (p. 1). In this regard, the International Soci-
ety for the Advancement of Writing Research recognizes and respects the path-making efforts of scholars and journals in Latin America, including the editors of Literatura y Lingüística and others around the world (e.g, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Clearinghouse in the United States) who continue to support multilingual research on writing.

Advancing writing research around the world remains an increasingly vital endeavor, as writing, in all of its dimensions, plays many important, though often unrecognized, roles in the building of social institutions. Never in history has knowledge advanced as rapidly as it does today, and writing continues to mediate much of this activity. Writing also plays important roles in advancing learning and schooling from preschool through graduate education and contributes to many aspects of civic and personal life. Further, new advances in technology and communication, including AI, machine learning, virtual reality, and blockchain, as well as new understandings of human development in education, linguistics, and psychology, invite greater attention to writing and the learning of writing across its many dimensions.

In this regard, this special issue is like a finger pointing at the moon, which itself reflects a greater light. That bright light is the exponential and steady growth of writing research around the world over the past sixty plus years, as evidenced by the increase in peer reviewed journals devoted to writing, the numbers of articles published in all journals on writing, growth in graduate programs with an emphasis on writing, and programs and centers focusing on writing research as well as the improvement of writing instruction and support in educational institutions. As Anson (2022) notes,

written communication will constantly evolve, mediated by as yet unimaginable technologies, learned in new ways by new generations of children and adults, in forms affected by language policy on a global scale, and through processes involving unexplored dimensions of personality, neurology, culture, and experience. (p. 22)

Given the context of the expansion of writing as a meaningful object of study, we envision research on writing will continue to evolve to address new problems and new questions.
Papers in this Issue

The first two papers were contributed by two of the plenary speakers for the conference and were based on their presentations; in this regard, they provide broader perspectives on aspects of research on writing than the rest of the studies.

Montserrat Castelló Badia’s article offers a personal yet comprehensive review of recent mixed-methods, longitudinal research on the relationship between writing for research purposes and identity. Writing in research contexts is depicted as a hybrid activity—including reading and speaking to write across multiple discourses— which dwells across multiple transitional and final texts. As identity is multiple and related to the activity spheres we participate in, developing an identity as a writing researcher implies active and diverse participation—doing, thinking, communicating—in research communities and written genres as a researcher who mainly writes.

Charles Bazerman’s paper describes the emergence of literate societies in Mesopotamia and China, highlighting some of the ways writing facilitated the consolidation of power across many dimensions of social life and ways in which society came to depend on literacy. Through an examination of the documentary record, he elaborates on how writing mediates forms of social organization and provides infrastructure for “many institutions, organizations, knowledge systems, cultural affiliations, and other social networks [including schools] through which ... we live our lives” (p. 63). The extent to which literate activity undergirds and gives rise to the development of complex legal, economic, educational, and ideological systems extends and invites further inquiry into the consequences of literacy.

Fabiana Castagno, Gabriela Luján Giammarini, and Diana Waigandt explore the developing field of Writing Studies in South America by tracing the contributions of, and exchanges among, academic research programs at three universities. By seeking to better understand how knowledge production practices are affected by the differences among varying international contexts, they were able to demonstrate that language practices are situated in their own cultures, traditions, and movements, all of which shape the theoretical and methodological frameworks with which language practices are understood in their respective contexts.
Viviana Innocentini and Federico Navarro’s article investigates the occurrence of metadiscourse across three corpora of abstracts written in English and Spanish. Using independent language variables to contrast the corpora, they found that authors adjusted their use of rhetorical structure, hedging language, and interpersonal features when shifting from one language to another. They posit that while there are coexisting communication patterns across both languages, Spanish speakers deliberately adjust their participation strategies in particular ways when writing in English.

In their article, Paul Michiels, Karyn Kessler, and Paul Rogers present a linguistic analysis of the language borrowing practices of expert writers. Using Keck’s taxonomy of paraphrasing to analyze five corpora of paraphrase and source passage pairings (n = 233), they found that 27% of the average paraphrase of expert writers was made up of language from the source passages. They argue that paraphrase and language borrowing practices exist on a spectrum affected by a wide variety of factors, especially disciplinarity, that require more attention because of the important implications of paraphrasing for writing, pedagogy, and plagiarism policies.

Adeline Chailly and Marie-Noëlle Roubaud conducted an intervention study of student writers focused on coherence and organization in student narrative texts (n = 180). Using an analysis grid that focuses on three types of temporal organization, chronological succession, backward movement, and forward movement the authors describe the ways in which students at different age levels (8-11) organize their narratives in relationship to time. Results suggest that the writing of narrative texts proceeds developmentally and point to the important role writing instruction plays in constraining and facilitating writing performance.

Dacia Dressen-Hammouda applies indexical analysis, which she argues offers particular value for scholars of writing, in order to examine how French politeness norms affect perceptions of application letters written in English by French L1 speakers. Her results reveal that where and how politeness is expressed can have a negative impact on readers, and therefore, supporting writers’ cognizance of the implicit sociocultural and contextual conditions, or norms, which govern the structural expectations that abound expressions of politeness and the
attitude of writers may allow for better recognition of how indexes may differ across languages.

Sandra G. Kies and Olga D. Lambert’s study investigates vocabulary gains —together with perceptions about vocabulary— by Vietnamese EFL teachers taking an MA Linguistics TESOL joint program taught by an American and a Vietnamese university. The study demonstrates that despite perceived vocabulary weaknesses, non-native writers compared favorably with graduate-level reference writing corpora, although they show greater vocabulary repetitiveness.

Closing Words
This special issue aims to contribute to the acceleration of research on writing in international, multidisciplinary, and multilingual contexts, and in ways that focus on writing both in and beyond schooling. We view writing as a social practice that relies on cognitive processes, and which can be studied at a variety of levels from trans-, inter-, cross-, and multidisciplinary perspectives. We recognize that a great deal of knowledge concerning writing in all its dimensions is being advanced in languages around the world other than English; yet much of that work remains hidden to the global writing research community, and we call on scholars around the world to make concerted efforts to engage with scholarship beyond familiar linguistic, cultural, methodological, and epistemological boundaries. We challenge the readers of this issue to continue advancing knowledge of the ways writing mediates human activity, the roles texts and genres play in school and the workplace, individual and collaborative writing processes, technological advances in writing tools, and the development of writing abilities across the lifespan.

References