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978-1-009-63833-3 — Teaching Second Language Academic Writing
Christine M. Tardy
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1 Introduction

Academic knowledge is largely passed down through written texts, and academic contexts are partly characterized by their heavy reliance on the written word. Knowledge is communicated to students often in the form of publications like textbooks, research articles, and scholarly books. Instruction is often supplemented by lecture notes, presentation slides, worksheets and handouts, written (online) discussions, and assignment instructions. Students also do their own share of academic writing. Students' knowledge of course content, for example, is often assessed through writing, in the form of written exercises, lab reports, papers, and essay exams. As students begin contributing to academic knowledge, they compose research posters, proposals, reports, and theses.

A large number of students worldwide compose academic writing in a language that is not their first, primary, or dominant language. In many settings, for instance, students' education is delivered in a second or additional language (L2). The most prominent such example is English medium instruction (EMI), "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority population is not English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37). Though exact numbers are elusive, EMI already has a firm foothold in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, while it appears to be in earlier stages of expansion in Latin America and Africa (Lasagabaster, 2022). In addition to EMI, in which students are typically learning in another language "at home," there are around 6.4 million "internationally mobile students" in higher education, studying at universities abroad (UNESCO UIS, 2024). This population includes many students who are studying in an L2; the United States and the United Kingdom are the most popular destinations, but Germany, France, Türkiye, China, South Korea, and Russia also host large numbers of international students (Migration Data Portal, n.d.). In sum, L2AW occurs all over the world and in numerous languages.

1.1 What Is Second Language Writing?

Second language writing is a field of study that examines writing and the teaching and learning of writing in an additional language. The field encompasses various educational, workplace, and community contexts, and includes writing in *any* additional language, though English as an additional language (EAL) has tended to dominate the scholarship. Second language writing is an interdisciplinary field, which draws on research traditions and pedagogical practices primarily from applied linguistics and rhetoric and composition (Matsuda, 1999; Silva & Leki, 2004), and in different contexts it may draw

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on other relevant fields like education and anthropology. The term *second language writing* is also used to describe courses and instruction for second language (multilingual) writers as well as the texts created by these writers.

Second language writing is not an uncontested label. "Second language" is generally used to refer to a second, third, or other additional language—that is, any language beyond one's first or dominant language. Of course, many "second language" writers may actually be more comfortable writing in their additional language than their first language. There are also good arguments for replacing "second language" with "multilingual" writers for a more asset-based orientation. At the same time, second language writing is a more familiar term in many language teaching contexts, and it is also the label used in numerous publications (including the flagship *Journal of Second Language Writing*) and scholarly and pedagogical settings. In this Element, I use L2 as shorthand for the full set of labels that might apply to an additional or nondominant language. Therefore, an "L2 writer" can be considered a multilingual writer, additional language writer, second language writer, translingual writer, and so on.

1.2 The Scope and Aims of This Element

There are many excellent publications that provide broad surveys of L2 writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Hyland, 2019; Manchón & Matsuda, 2016; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2010). This Cambridge Element is not a substitute for those comprehensive overviews of the field or its research and pedagogical practices. Instead, here I focus more narrowly on one particular sub-area: teaching L2 academic writing, or, for sake of ease, L2AW. Academic writing here refers to written texts that are used for the pursuit of teaching and learning, knowledge dissemination, and knowledge construction. Though academic writing occurs in K–12 education, this Element focuses primarily on the more advanced academic writing found in higher education.

A fairly large body of research and teaching resources now exist to support L2AW instruction, making it impossible to incorporate all of these insights here. Instead, my goal is more modest: to introduce practitioners to some of the key concepts, research insights, and pedagogical practices in L2AW. Therefore, this Element is not a guidebook of how to teach L2AW but instead lays the groundwork for current and future teachers to develop their own "small-t theories" about such instruction. Atkinson (2010) describes such theories as "the opposite of Theory with a big T . . . [similar to] the postmodernist idea of *petits récits*—theories that engage with particular, local situations" (p. 8). He goes on to say that

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> Theory with a small t presents no already-made, all-knowing prescription for what is wrong with the world and how to fix it. Rather, it offers *small* tools that will help people build their *own* understanding (or not—there is no sense in which one *must* use these tools) of social situations and power structures which will be relevant and useful in their own situations, including how to change them. (pp. 11–12)

Our small-t theories are individual, critical, and constantly developing as we read, teach, learn, and discuss our experiences in offices, classrooms, webinars, social media, and over tea. Small-t theories are a kind of reflective practice that help us make sense of our experiences and give us tools to ask why we do what we do, how our practice affects others, and how we might do otherwise. The goal of this Element is to offer a contribution to readers' own small-t theories about L2AW instruction.

1.3 How to Use This Element

This Element is organized around the assumption that all teaching and learning is deeply contextual. As a result, there is no one way to teach or a single set of strategies that can be used with success in every classroom, with every learner, or by every teacher. The goal for teachers, instead, should be to establish a strong understanding of the local elements that shape their educational setting and of key concepts, principles, and practices of learning and teaching.

First, in Section 2, we'll explore the various contextual features that can have a significant impact on educational choices in L2AW. A framework guides readers through these features as a way to consider how they might impact a L2AW classroom. This section also discusses some of the more common settings of L2AW and their unique characteristics. Following this discussion, the next three sections outline some of the most important concepts (Section 3), pedagogical approaches (Section 4), and pedagogical practices (Section 5) in L2AW. Together, these sections offer readers a toolkit for making pedagogical decisions in their own settings. Finally, the Element ends in Section 6 with a consideration of how rapid changes in technology are influencing L2AW and its instruction.

2 Contexts of Teaching L2AW

General principles of teaching L2AW do exist, and we will explore many of those in later sections. At the same time, teachers quickly learn that the decisions made on a daily basis—in each class period, and indeed with each group of students—do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, teachers are constantly assessing what is appropriate *in this particular situation* and acting accordingly. For

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example, the choice of assignments, the approaches to assessment, and the kinds of activities should all take into account aspects of the local pedagogical setting. This section outlines some of the important contextual considerations that shape L2AW instruction, and it provides an overview of the most common settings in which L2AW is taught. The contextual features discussed can serve as a kind of heuristic or "thinking framework" for teachers as they plan and reflect on their own instruction.

2.1 Important Features of L2AW Settings

L2AW instructional settings vary widely across several contextual levels, such as geographical location, institution type, program type, population, and local language policies and ideologies. Effective instruction, as a result, must adapt to local needs and circumstances, accounting for such features in instructional decisions from course design to classroom activities to feedback and assessment practices.

Figure 1 depicts some of the important contextual features for teachers to consider in planning and teaching courses: languages and genres, language attitudes and ideologies, language policies, educational practices, and writers. These features are relevant at multiple contextual levels, from the broad geographical context of the instruction, to the institution, program, and specific classroom. Although no framework can fully do justice to a complex ecology, Figure 1 offers a basic map for understanding an instructional context. The subsections that follow elaborate on the contextual features represented in the figure.

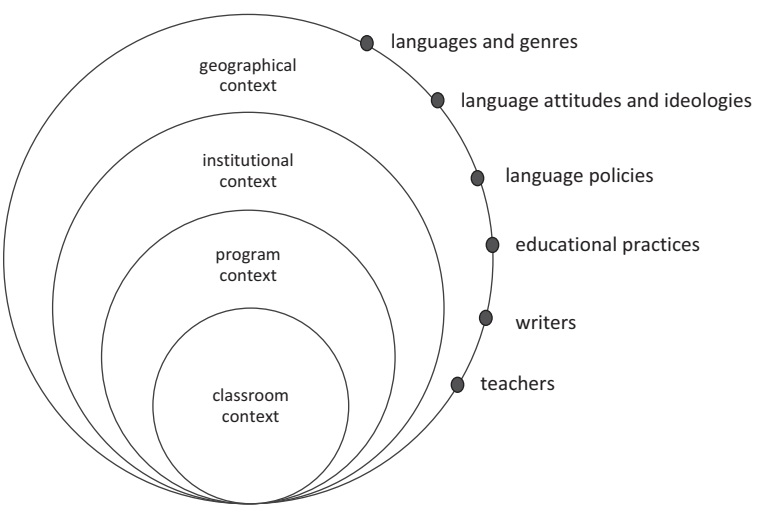

Figure 1 A heuristic for identifying important features of an instructional context.

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2.1.1 Languages and Genres

One of the first considerations in L2AW instruction is the kinds of communication that occur in the particular setting and that are important for the student writers. For example, L2AW teachers need to know the languages that are used in the target setting(s) and the functions they carry out. In academic writing, functions become indexed largely through *genres*. Genre is described in more detail in Section 3, but in simple terms, it refers to conventionalized (written and multimodal) practices used to carry out common functions or actions within social communities. Some academic writing genres include research articles, grant proposals, case study reports, and scientific posters. The genres that are important for students vary across educational contexts. For example, graduate students in an engineering program need to use very different genres from undergraduate students in a general university writing course.

Using the framework in Figure 1, a teacher can consider languages and genres at various contextual levels that are relevant to their teaching situation. At the geographical level, it is useful to understand which languages are prominent in the region(s) and what those languages are used for. Kachru (1986) referred to this latter issue as *functional allocation*, describing the functions that different languages take on within a society. For instance, within a multilingual society, people may use one language in religious services, another language for most interpersonal communication, and another language for education. This functional allocation of languages to carry out different activities in our lives also impacts which genres are used in different languages. For example, in some contexts, English is the language of education, so students may be most accustomed to using academic genres in English even if it is their additional language.

Institutional settings often use a narrower range of languages and genres compared to the wider geographic setting, so teachers will also want to consider this contextual level. An international school may use languages and genres that are rarely found outside of the school. In other settings, however, an institution's languages of use may be identical to those common in the local geography. Institutionally, some genres may be produced in multiple languages, while others may only ever use one language.

Within institutions, writing and language instruction is often directed by programs, and these units typically have a significant impact on instruction. Language centers, writing programs, or postgraduate communication programs can also use different languages and genres than are used in the larger institution. An English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at a Japanese university, for instance, will emphasize the use of English, though other courses and extracurricular events at the university may primarily use Japanese.

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Finally, even within a program, L2AW teachers will want to learn about the languages and genres that are relevant for the students in their classroom: Which genres are most motivating to these students? Which are most important? Do they write these genres in multiple languages or just in one language? How are they similar and different? Further, in some L2AW classes, students may share the same first language, while other classrooms may encompass students from diverse language backgrounds. Students within a classroom can also have different relationships to the L2, regardless of proficiency; for example, an L2 Arabic classroom in Canada or the UK is very likely to include both students for whom Arabic is a heritage language and those who have no home relationship to the language.

2.1.2 Language Attitudes and Ideologies

Identifying the prominent languages and genres is only the first step in gaining a rich understanding of an L2AW context. Research shows that language attitudes and ideologies can also impact learning and should therefore inform instructional decisions (McGroarty, 2010). The two concepts can be hard to tease apart, but King (2000) offers a useful distinction: Language attitudes are "directed towards a specific object," while ideologies "refer to a broader system of beliefs, norms, or values" (p. 168).

At the geographical level, dominant attitudes toward the L2 can affect practical issues for L2AW, such as funding, resources, and teacher availability, as well as issues like motivation or perceptions of the language's value or importance. Language attitudes and ideologies are impacted by politics, international relations, and current events as well. To share a personal example, I have seen student enrollment in my son's dual-language Mandarin-English program in elementary school dwindle as relations between the United States and China have deteriorated. The complex history and role of English around the world presents another example: In many countries, English has become a common language for education because of a perception that English is important for global participation and perhaps even for personal financial and social success (Lasagabaster, 2022). At the same time, English is often (rightly) associated with colonialism and empire, as well as capitalist and neoliberal ideologies. There is also the further complication that different language varieties may be more or less valued in a geographical setting—and ideologies that value standard language varieties, monolingualism, or multilingualism also impact instructional settings (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). Geographical settings are heterogeneous spaces, so attitudes and ideologies are likely to be multiple and conflicting rather than unitary.

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At the institutional and program levels of L2AW instruction, language attitudes and ideologies may align or conflict with the wider social context. For example, a dual-language school in which students build literacy in two languages can be located within a geographical region where monolingualism dominates. The language ideologies and attitudes in a program can also differ from the larger institution. It is not unusual, for instance, for language and writing programs to value multilingualism or diverse language varieties more highly than their institutional homes.

Institutions, programs, and classrooms can hold complicated attitudes not just toward the L2 and its varieties but also toward *writing*. For example, even institutions and programs that value linguistic diversity may teach or assess academic writing in ways that suppress that diversity (Horner & Trimbur, 2002). A given classroom is also likely to encompass a range of language ideologies and attitudes, from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. Similarly, teachers who value linguistic diversity may find themselves still adopting and reinforcing more restrictive language practices. L2AW teachers will do well to understand the complex ways in which language attitudes and ideologies impact their institutions, programs, and individual classrooms.

2.1.3 Language Policies

For many people, language policies call to mind rules or regulations that stipulate or restrict language use in a particular setting. In applied linguistics, following Spolsky (2004), language policy is often considered to be made up of three components: language practices (i.e., people's actual choices and uses of particular languages or varieties), language beliefs or ideologies, and actual interventions or management intended to influence language practice. These components are also interrelated and can shape one another. For instance, management policies that promote monolingualism may also normalize monolingual or standard language ideology and thus lead to negative attitudes towards linguistic diversity.

At the geographic level, we can look to national language policies, which exert a powerful influence on education. Some countries, for example, have promoted the use of additional languages, with a focus on language instruction or medium of instruction in schools. When a language becomes common or required in the educational system, it will be used for more purposes, expanding the genres it is used to carry out as well as its perceived importance in society. At the same time, language policies may ignore, actively promote, or actively suppress the use of nondominant languages, such as the languages used by indigenous communities, ethnically marginalized communities, and immigrants and refugees.

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We can also consider language policy at the level of institutions and programs, both of which influence L2AW instruction. Higher education institutions, for instance, may require a certain number of foreign language courses (or demonstrated proficiency) for graduation, or students may need to demonstrate proficiency in the language of instruction for admission. An institution's language-related policies may lead to the development of courses and other services (such as tutoring centers) to support students in meeting these requirements. Even when no explicit language policies exist, institutional and program practices create *de facto* policies—that is, unstated practices that become normalized and routinely followed (Shohamy, 2006). The assumed use of English for academic coursework in most US institutions, for instance, creates a *de facto* policy of English Only.

L2AW program and classroom language policies may also be overtly articulated (e.g., a program's or teacher's policies toward multilingual use in the classroom) or just reinforced through practice. In settings where writing or language programs lack overt policies about language use, an institution's or region's dominant policies (formal or de facto) will likely hold sway. In such cases, faculty and student dialogue can help to learn more about the community's values and desires for L2AW instruction; such conversations can eventually lead to the ground-up articulation of program visions or goals related to language policies (Tardy, 2011).

Within their own L2AW classroom contexts, teachers may construct, work within, resist, or challenge language policies. Discussing with students how policies and ideologies shape their goals for academic writing (see, for example, Swales, 1997) can help students recognize the social and political forces that influence language and writing. Without such explicit attention, normative language policies are likely to dominate in many settings.

2.1.4 Educational Practices

Educational practices in L2AW—ranging from course design to classroom activities to assessment (see Section 5)—can vary greatly within national contexts, institutions, programs, and classrooms. Geographic settings are always heterogeneous in educational practices, but there may be widely shared practices due to language policies, ideologies, and so on. For example, in some regions, education is very test-driven; in L2AW instruction, this practice can contribute to an emphasis on timed writing, formulaic text types, and over-attention to grammatical accuracy. Geographical areas can also share expectations about typical roles for teachers and students. Do teachers typically lecture and distribute information with students? Do students ask questions or contribute to knowledge construction in the classroom? How common are practices like peer review, collaborative writing, or class discussion?

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