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Clark, Romy & Ivanic, Roz.  
1997. *The Politics of Writing*.  
London: Routledge.

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Imagine the misery of an English native speaker discussing an essay with her/his teacher of Arabic as a foreign language and listening to the following: *your ideas are excellent... you have a lot to say*

*but your language is not flourished enough, try to be less straight forward and to embellish your arguments with a touch of literary metaphor...that would certainly improve your writing and make your meanings clearer.* In another foreign language classroom still another poor English native speaker student is in profound distress as she/he discusses a writing assignment with a Greek as a foreign language teacher. The Master makes the point to the desolated student that *the writing is fine but that the argumentation desires more circularity, with more side ideas and examples to better illustrate the main point.*

While the above is anecdotal and certainly very difficult to actually take place due to a series of linguistic and non-linguistic facts which are not to be discussed in this short review, the truth of the matter is that *The Politics of Writing* brings out an important issue about writing. This issue partially addressed before mainly in studies which related different lines of argumentation to differences in culture and type of education is described by the authors under the term *context of culture*. This concept embodies the whole

set of beliefs, values and privileging patterns that writers bring to the act of writing itself as a political communicative event where power is invariably always at stake. In this sense, it expands the concept of *context of situation* coined by Halliday and Hasan (1985:chapter 1) since in any particular *context of situation*, the *context of culture* provides the range of possibilities that are at struggle, competing for dominance.

This issue whose discussion far expands the type of genre we usually call *academic writing* or the personal dramas of foreign students trying to tame their own histories to succeed in different privileging writing patterns, is described by the authors in 258 pages of a very informal and reader-friendly prose. The question of their own writing — the book is co-authored by two different writers with different back-grounds and experiences in the teaching of writing — is also detailed discussed. In this sense, *The Politics of Writing* also carries a lot of self-reflexivity and intertextuality, topics which are certainly very current in present day linguistic studies.

In their challenge of Anglo-American notions of correctness

in writing and in their argument for a more democratic pedagogy in both the distribution of the right to write and the respect for the reader's personal history and cultural identity, the authors — lecturers at Lancaster University — draw on Fairclough's diagram as presented in *Language and Power* (1989). Their aim is to illustrate that *the most important aspects of social context are the relations of power that exist in it, and the interests, values and beliefs that maintain these relations of power* and to make the point that *relations of power are open to contestation and change*.

*The Politics of Writing* certainly is an interesting book to be read by all those who are professionally involved in the production and consumption of texts. And, although it is very much Eurocentred — it concentrates exclusively on the inequalities of writing in British English by British native speakers — it is certainly a book which provides insights for non-native English speakers and writers who have conformed to the linearity of Standard English in detriment of their own. By challenging and contesting current approaches about writing as a mech-

anical process — where outlines, for instance, play a relevant role — and by associating the writing process with cognition, culture and power, *The Politics of Writing* exposes the parochial attitude towards writing which most British Universities display and impose.

It is in this sense that the work of Clark and Ivanic appeal to translators. It is almost impossible not to establish a connection between the linguistic imperialism imposed by traditional approaches to writing and the practice of translation. Even though not a book particularly designed for translators, *The Politics of Writing* provides *food for thought* for one of the most crucial problems translation theory is facing today: the question of transparent discourse. In a post-modern global society based on grossly unequal cultural exchanges mainly conveyed by written language, it is indeed important that translators be aware of their potential for either the maintenance or resistance to writing practices which, often times, conceal the darkest of the political intentions.

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