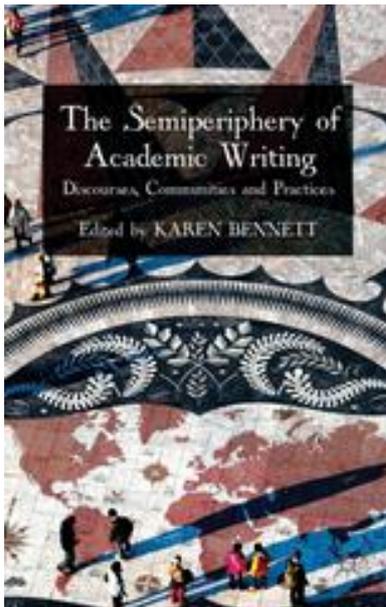


## BOOK REVIEW

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### ACADEMIC CULTURES AND DISCOURSES BETWEEN THE CENTRE AND THE PERIPHERY

**Karen Bennett (Ed.).** THE SEMIPERIPHERY OF ACADEMIC WRITING: DISCOURSES, COMMUNITIES AND PRACTICES (2014), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 282 pp., ISBN 978-1-137-35118-0.

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The material and institutional constraints affecting researchers in economically disadvantaged parts of the world and the linguistic constraints non-native English speaking researchers face have recently been analysed in terms of the core/periphery dichotomy (Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis & Curry, 2010; Salager-Meyer, 2008, among others). The core represents the prosperous centre, with ample resources and a rigorous meritocratic culture, as opposed to the disadvantaged periphery, with very limited access to material resources and institutional infrastructure and rigid academic hierarchies which offer little incentive to produce research. Between these two extremes, however, there exists a third, intermediary category in the global academic order, termed semiperiphery and characterised by the same constraints as the periphery, only in a less severe form. The edited volume *The Semiperiphery of Academic Writing: Discourses, Communities and Practices* brings together twelve papers which focus on various aspects of the inequalities that exist in the world of scholarly publishing. More specifically, the contributions in this volume tackle academic practices in European countries located between the centre and the periphery both economically and geographically (and consequently, in academic culture as well) and showing

characteristics of each of these two regions. Very often, the semiperiphery provides a buffer zone between rich and poor countries and mediates between them. In the context of the production and transmission of knowledge, universities and research centres located on the semiperiphery often play the role of sanctioning the values emanating from the centre while refreshing it with new perspective brought from outside.

As the editor of the volume duly stresses in the introductory chapter, semiperipheral universities are characterised by equipment which is typically in need of replacement or repair, understocked libraries which lack up-to-date publications and subscriptions to the main international journals which depend on oscillating budgets. Thus, the researchers in such institutions do have limited access to the academic network as well as the basic conditions to produce, but they require considerably more effort to do so than in the centre universities. Regarding the incentive to publish, the “publish or perish” ethos of the centre is reduced or even absent in the periphery, which values institutional service above merit. Journals and volumes produced on the semiperiphery are not always peer-reviewed and the selection process may be less strict than in centre countries. Also, there is a weaker sense of intellectual property on the semiperiphery, which is however not as extreme as on the periphery (e.g. in Sri Lanka, cf. Canagarajah, 2002). Finally, the scientific paradigm, as the only valid source of knowledge in centre countries, may face competition from traditional or alternative epistemologies.

Regarding the European context, the semiperiphery includes not only the countries along the Mediterranean border which experienced a sovereign debt crisis (the so-called PIGS countries, namely Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain) but also new or aspiring members of the EU (Croatia, Serbia, Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Turkey), both geographically and economically peripheral to the European centre. The twelve chapters of the current volume all describe some kind of tension between different academic cultures, such as the conflict between the traditional scholarly discourses and the hegemonic English discourse, between sciences and humanities, East and West, local and global, etc. Yet, what they all show is that unlike the centre, which tends to stagnate after a while, the periphery is stimulated by the need to compete, it is more tolerant of non-standard models and procedures, as a meeting and merging point of different attitudes, discourses and practices and consequently, effervescent with possibilities and challenges.

The volume is organised into three sections, each dealing with a particular aspect of semiperipherality and featuring four chapters. Part I, “Discourses in Tension”, is centred around the conflict between traditional scholarly writing styles and the hegemonic English model, which is grounded on quite different epistemological principles. Karen Bennett (*The Erosion of Portuguese Historiographic Discourse*) describes a study designed to chart the changes taking place in Portuguese historiographic discourse over a 15-year period. The results of the study suggest a shift in orientation from French or Romance discursive models towards English ones, which results in the substitution of the hermeneutic

epistemological paradigm by positivism, empiricism and linguistic realism characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon world.

*The Changing Face of Czech Academic Discourse* by Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova explores the changes the Czech academic discourse community is undergoing as a result of the globalisation and marketisation of academia. Her investigation of citation choices and the construction of authorial presence in a corpus consisting of English-medium texts published over a period of ten years by 15 Czech linguists reveals features that differ considerably from traditional Czech academic writing conventions. These results evidence that when striving to publish for an international audience, Czech authors make strategic choices in an attempt to accommodate themselves to the predominant Anglo-American academic literacy.

In the chapter entitled *Academic Discourse Practices in Greece: Exploring the 'International Conference of Greek Linguistics'* Dimitra Vladimirova analyses the main site of this conference in an attempt to explore the interplay between the international and local dimensions of academic discourse practices of linguists in the Greek semiperiphery and to offer insights into the definition and delineation of semiperipheral spaces. The language choice of authors at the conference is shown to correlate with the conference location and confirms the 'symbolic value' of English as the language of internationally accepted high-quality academic discourse. However, a closer examination of 20 selected papers by Greek-speaking authors points towards the local holding a central place on the semiperiphery.

The final chapter in this part of the volume, Anna Gonerko-Frej's *Teaching Academic Writing for the Global World in Poland: The ELF Perspective* presents the difficulties of Polish students against the background of Polish education culture (focusing on rote learning and imitation and discouraging self-expression) and traditional values, arguing for the change of models in today's world of global English. Based on an ethnographic study using a questionnaire with 15 open-ended questions and conducted with students at the University of Szczecin, Gonerko-Frej concludes that the students view writing in English as much more codified and rigid. She also finds that students are aware of two different models in operation but they show a clear preference for the 'British' model.

Part II of the volume is centred around academic practitioners and their subjective responses to the pressures of globalisation. In the first chapter of this part, *Centre-Periphery Relations in the Spanish Context: Temporal and Cross-Disciplinary Variation*, Sally Burgess examines how Spanish (humanities) researchers and Spanish research publications have been affected by changes to research evaluation policies and procedures. The tension between semiperipheral practices and the imposed demands of core science onto humanities and social sciences is observable in Spain, too, not only in terms of citations and type of publication but also in terms of the language of publication, where English again tends to be dominant. The author concludes that the adoption of new modes of digital open-access publication could mean that scholars can publish in their first language as long as they can establish the quality credential of their publications.

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The next chapter, *Portuguese Academics' Attitudes to English as the Academic Lingua Franca: A Case-Study*, explores how effectively Portuguese academics use English in their work and investigates the motives prompting them to choose or reject this language. The author, Rita Queiroz de Barros finds that within publishing English is used quite rarely (except in the area of linguistics) though most bibliographic references used are in English. The attitudes of the academics reveal that they are aware of the outreach awarded by the use of English in the dissemination of knowledge and therefore they even advocate the incorporation of English into Portuguese higher education teaching.

Mirela Bardi and Laura-Mihaela Muresan's contribution entitled *Changing Research Writing Practices in Romania: Perceptions and Attitudes* investigates the challenges of writing and publishing research in a non-native language among researchers at the Bucharest University of Economics. The authors reach the conclusion that the respondents in this study have a very pragmatic attitude towards their own progress as members of the international academic community: they accept English as the gate to international participation and tend to reflect on what they can do themselves in order to alleviate their frustration at the inability to express complex thinking with limited language sources. The implications of the study involve considerations of how best to address the complex needs of researchers and to institutionally foster and support their professional development.

Chapter 8, *Looking Back from the Centre: Experiences of Italian Humanities Scholars Living and Writing Abroad*, aims to shed light on the current situation in Italian academia and on the potential changes in the discourse practices and experiences of three Italian humanities scholars living and writing abroad. The author, Raffaella Negretti, finds that publications in Italian have less 'market value' in the eyes of international gatekeepers but that the need to publish in English entails epistemological changes of thought and authorial persona, which may be rather problematic in the humanities. The experiences of the respondents in this study, who adhere to English academic discourse in their work, show that the 'less-scientific, more humane culture and pedagogy' of Italy may influence English academic discourse, too, and lead to fruitful mutual cross-fertilization.

The third and final part of the current volume is devoted to publication practices. In *Turkish Academic Culture in Transition: Centre-Based State Policies and Semiperipheral Practices of Research, Publishing and Promotion* Hacer Hande Uysal focuses on the tension which exists between the centre-oriented state policies and institutional and personal practices of research, scholarly publishing and promotion at two major Turkish universities. In a country in which personal and political connections and seniority are prioritised over publication for the purpose of institutional promotion and power-related decision taking, the author even finds some indication of indifference or a kind of resistance to centre-based policies that may hamper high-quality scientific productivity and innovation, which are much needed for survival in today's global world.

In the next chapter, *English Medium Journals in Serbia: Editor's Perspectives*, Bojana Petrić explores the nature of English-medium journals on the Serbian semiperiphery by investigating the motivations behind these journals' adoption of English as their goal. English-medium journals in Serbia are found to constitute a diverse category (due to interdisciplinary differences, institutional affiliations, personal editorial styles, etc.) but they all use English in order to achieve a local institutional or an international goal. Petrić suggests that such journals should be viewed as a translocal phenomenon, given that they enable knowledge flows between different local contexts as well as with higher-than-local levels.

In their article entitled *The Croatian Medical Journal: Success and Consequences* Matko Marušić and Ana Marušić report on a particular English-language journal operating in Croatia. They demonstrate that the role of a scientific journal may be much wider than that of mere gatekeeping. In addition to implementing centre norms, it can also provide authorship training and publication opportunities for researchers who might otherwise be excluded from the international scientific community. However, such a journal may also face unsustainable tensions since the dynamics and values of centre publishing may enter into conflict with traditional attitudes and practices. This clash between global and local is however one of the defining properties of semiperipherality (cf. Chapters 3 and 4).

The final chapter of the volume, authored by Malgorzata Sokol, explores academic discursive practices in the communicative context of Web 2.0. In *The Academic Weblog as a Semiperipheral Genre* she proposes that the academic weblog be considered a semiperipheral genre, an informal response to the 'publish or perish' policy. It is shown to be a hybrid genre with conflicting characteristics, where individuality mixes with communality, public and institutional aspects coexist with private ones, personalised content occurs next to factual and objective data, the boundaries between disciplines are more fluid, etc. Sokol argues that the academic weblog nevertheless has the potential to fit into the transforming Polish reality to mediate a much-required change.

The editor of the volume summarises the forces (both centrifugal and centripetal) at play on the semiperiphery of academic culture in the closing chapter of this book. Among the most notable centripetal forces encouraging researchers to assimilate their values and practices to those of the dominant culture are 'brain drain', growing pressure on semiperipheral researchers to publish in high-profile centre journals, the drive for the internationalization of journals, Anglophone dominance in academic discourse (and its epistemological implications) and reward systems in which publication in centre journals is perceived as an end in its own right. On the other hand, one of the most surprising aspects to emerge from this volume is the fact that there are also centrifugal forces at work on the semiperiphery. These are observable in the keen awareness among semiperipheral scholars of the epistemological implications of internationalization and their interest in resisting takeover by the dominant culture. Centrifugal forces

are also evident in the domain of publishing as not all semiperipheral journals appear to aspire to centre status and in fact have markedly local or regional goals.

Focusing on the phenomenon of semiperipherality, first in geographical and economic terms, later also in terms of language and epistemology, the present volume offers an insight into how researchers on the semiperiphery find themselves torn between conflicting academic cultures and discourses. The case studies presented in the twelve chapters of the book all speak in favour of decentralising the system in order to break the iron bond between knowledge, language and capital. It is hoped that these illustrations of the dominance of English and its effects upon scholarly discourses, the challenges researchers on the semiperiphery face in an attempt to reconcile the local and the global, and the discrepancy between state policy and practice in the areas of academic recruitment and intellectual property will contribute to transcending the centre-periphery dichotomy. The volume will be of interest not only to researchers but also to publishers and policy makers in both the centre and the periphery.

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