

The Approaches to Teach Writing of EFL Students

Dr. Nouredine BENAIDJA¹, Dr. Oumelkheir CHETATHA²

¹Research Center in Islamic Sciences and Civilization in Laghouat (CRSIC) Algeria, E-mail: n.benaidja@crsic.dz

²Research Center in Islamic Sciences and Civilization in Laghouat (CRSIC) Algeria, E-mail: o.chetatha@crsic.dz

Received: 07/2024, Published: 08/2024

Abstract:

This study focuses on the importance of writing for EFL learners describing the writing skill as a cognitive complex process, attempting to show three main approaches to teach this skill: the product-based-approach, the process-based approach and the genre-based approach. Reference was also made to reading highlighting its role to enhance the written production which is the main concern of our study.

Keywords: literature, vocabulary, reading, approaches, writing skill.

The Writing Skill

The Importance of the Writing Skill

The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (CD-ROM) 2010 defines writing as follows. To write means:

To make letters or numbers on a surface, especially using a pen or pencil, or to produce something in written form (words, messages, letters...etc) so that people can read, perform, or use it. (Oxford, 2010, p. 353)

Writing is a productive skill in which a set of symbols, syllables, or words are composed to produce something in a written form. It is a complex mental activity in which knowledge is organized and changed to form complex texts). Besides the complexity of such a skill, it is a dynamic activity that allows writers to work with words and ideas so as to develop their intellectual abilities. Silva (1990) stated in Michel Byrams' Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning:

Writing is a complex cognitive process in which knowledge is organized hierarchically on the one hand and, on the other, is transformed into linear sentence chains, which in turn form a complex textual web. When writing goes beyond knowledge-telling, it can be of service for transforming or generating knowledge and thus promote intellectual development. (Byram, 2000, p. 809)

Writing is considered as one of the most complex language skills to learn. It is more difficult than the speaking skill as Nunan (1989) agrees: " *It is easier to learn to speak than to write no matter if it is a first or second language* ". (Godbane, 2010, p. 18) In addition, many researchers (Harmer, 2007, p. 250) see: "...*this difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable texts*". (Godbane, 2010, p. 40) So, the difficulty of the

writing skill is not restricted to produce and organize ideas, but also to transform it into comprehensive texts.

Widdowson (Widdowson, 2001, p. 62) states: "...writing in one sense is the production of sentences as instances of usages". For that reason, learners have to master language graphical system, its grammatical patterns, and choose the appropriate terminology that is related to the subject area. That's why writing is the most difficult and complex skill. It can be acquired through great efforts and practice because it is not an easy task to do. Accordingly, White & Arndt (1991) point out: "Writing is also a problem-solving activity developing in progress" (Godbane, 2010, p. 19) This means that it does not occur naturally, but rather through cognitive efforts, training, instruction, and practice.

The writing process can be affected by different elements as the content, the type, and the way of writing. For (Harmer, 2007, pp. 253-254), it has four main steps: Planning, drafting, editing, and final draft. (Richards, 2002, p. 81) have the same view where it is stated: "Writing is viewed as a result of complex processes of planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising" (Godbane, 2010, p. 15) It means that the written production comes after different procedures.

Moreover, writing has to be both coherent and cohesive. Coherent and cohesion are key factors to be considered in writing. The latter cannot be if there is an absence of coherence between the words or the sentences which are put together in a particular order and linked in specific ways to hold meaning. In view of that, (Kroll, 1990, p. 14) states: "Writers must be able to structure and integrate information cohesively and coherently when writing paragraphs and texts". We also find Jeremy Harmer in his book " (The Practice of English Language Teaching, 2006, p. 244) stating:

Coherent writing makes sense because you can follow the sequence of ideas and points. Cohesion is a more technical matter since it is here that we concentrate on the various linguistic ways of connecting ideas across phrases and sentences. (The Practice of English Language Teaching, 2006, p. 246)

In addition, writing is a powerful tool of communication. As a form of expression and communication, writing allows learners to communicate ideas, feelings, and various attitudes in written form. It can be an individual, a personnel, and social effort. As it is reported by Miller (2001):

"Even though the writing production is an expression of one's individuality and personality, it is important to remember that writing is also a social endeavor, a way of communicating with people. (Godbane, 2010, p. 14)

The Writing Skill in EFL Context

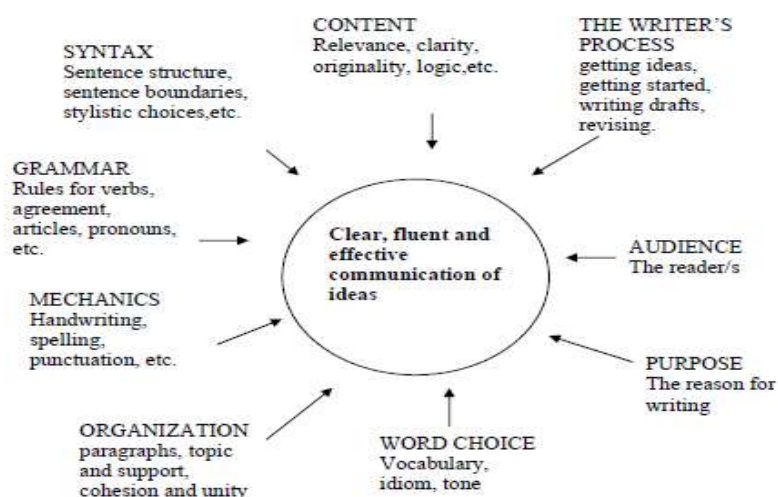
Writing in a foreign language is the productive ability to use language as well as its graphical representation in a usual writing situation. " We mean by writing in a foreign language the ability to use structures, the lexical items, and their conventional representation in ordinary matter-of-fact writing" (Godbane, 2010, p. 16) .Therefore, foreign language writing, that takes place in EFL classrooms, focuses on the teaching of specific structures' reinforcement more than on the writing skills' development. This includes writing sentences to form patterns that have been just presented orally. The objective of such an activity is to teach students to write effectively in the English language.

Recently, the writing skill has been attaining more attention. It has been considered as an essential skill in foreign language teaching and learning. (Harmer, 2007, p. 258) points out: *"The reason for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style, and most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right"* (Onozawa, 2010, pp. 153-163). Certainly, writing is developing to be a necessity not only in EFL school settings, but also in our ordinary life which is dominated by science and technology as writing e-mails, business letters, or technical reports in different fields.

Furthermore, the writing skill can be a main principle to enhance the academic position and to achieve a great educational success. Alexander (2008) states: *"Strong writing skills may enhance students' chances for success"* (Hosseini, 2013, p. 3) Since the majority of course materials in academic careers are tested in the form of paragraphs, essays, students have to express their understanding in written form. There may be students who have a higher degree of knowledge and understanding of the subject of the test, but cannot convey their knowledge because of their weaknesses in writing skill. Thus, writing skill has a fundamental role in the success of education, particularly for EFL students.

Writing is a difficult task for EFL students because of its complexity. EFL learners have to consider many elements when writing such as content, structure of sentences, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, coherence, and cohesion. Nunan (1989) states: *"writing is an extremely complex, cognitive for all which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously"* (Godbane, 2010, p. 16). The following diagram shows elements that writers have to deal with in a written production task:

Figure 1 : Producing a Piece of Writing



Source : (Raimes, 1989; in Öziürk 73)

Writing using reading texts

The Reading Skill

Reading is a receptive skill as it is responding to language rather than producing it. Reading involves making sense or understanding the language of the text at word level, sentence level and

whole-text level. We do this by connecting the message of the text to our knowledge of the world “British Council”.

Reasons for reading

There are many reasons why getting students to read English texts as an important part of the teacher’s job. In the first place, many students want to be able to read texts in English either for their careers, for study purposes or simply for pleasure. Anything we can do to make it easier for them to do these things must be a good idea. Reading is useful for language acquisition. Provided that students more or less understand what they read, the more they read, the better they get at it. Reading also has a positive effect on students’ vocabulary knowledge, on their spelling and on their writing. Reading texts also provide good models for English writing. At different times we can encourage students to focus on vocabulary, grammar or punctuation. We can also use reading material to demonstrate the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. Students then have good models for their own writing. Lastly, good reading texts can introduce interesting **topics**, stimulate **discussion**, excite imaginative responses and provide the springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons.

Different kinds of reading

We need to make a distinction between **extensive** and **intensive** reading. The term *extensive reading* refers to reading which students do often away from the classroom. They may read novels, web pages, newspapers, magazines or any other reference material. Where possible, extensive reading should involve **reading for pleasure** – what Richard Day calls *joyful reading*. This is enhanced if students have a chance to choose what they want to read, if they are encouraged to read by the teacher, and if some opportunity is given for them to share their reading experiences. Although not all students are equally keen on this kind of reading, we can say with certainty that the ones who read most progress fastest.

Teachers feel strongly that extensive reading does help and many successful learners find that it is an excellent way of extending vocabulary, learning phrases and consolidating grammar. It provides rich exposure to language in use. It is valuable and even more controllable than listening, and allows time for reflection. You can read fast or slowly; you can go back and read again. Good students often read texts as learning opportunities and go back over the same papers several times, working out meanings and noting down new words and useful phrases.

The term *intensive reading*, on the other hand, refers to the detailed focus on the construction of reading texts which takes place usually in classrooms. Teachers may ask students to look at extracts from magazines, poems, Internet websites, novels, newspapers, plays and a wide range of other text **genres** (that is, styles or types of text). The exact choice of genres and topics may be determined by the specific purposes that students are studying for (such as business, science or nursing). In such cases, we may well want to concentrate on texts within their specialties. But if, as is often the case, they are a mixed group with differing interests and careers, a more varied diet is appropriate.

Intensive reading is usually accompanied by study activities. We may ask students to work out what kind of text they are reading, tease out details of meaning, look at particular uses of grammar and vocabulary, and then use the information in the text to move on to other learning activities. We will also encourage them to reflect on different reading skills.

The Role of Reading to Enhance the Written Production of Students

Although reading and writing are two different skills i.e. writing is productive whereas reading is receptive, but they are interrelated in the field of language teaching and learning. Most recent trends in English teaching asserted that reading and writing are related. Nevertheless researchers have just recently started to explore this connection. According to researchers, reading can be an important and useful input in acquiring the writing skill. Esterchold (Kroll, 1990, p. 86) points out:

Reading in the writing classroom is understood as the appropriate input for acquisition of the writing skills, because it is generally assumed that reading passages will somehow function as primary models from which writing skill can be learned or at least be inferred.

Stotsky (Kroll, 1990, p. 88) in language correlation studies between reading and writing, found from his survey the following:

- 1) There are correlations between reading achievement and writing abilities i.e. better writers tend to be better readers.
- 2) There are correlations between writing quality and reading experience as reported through questionnaires i.e. better writers read more than poorer writers.
- 3) There are correlations between reading ability and measures of syntactic complexity of writing i.e. better readers tend to produce more syntactically natural writing than poorer readers.

Among other things, successful academic writing includes the ability to use prior researchers' knowledge according to the nature of the study. This information can be facts, ideas, concepts, and theories in the form of quotations, paraphrases, summaries...etc. Accordingly, reading plays an important role in the academic writing. Students can use information from reading texts related to their studies in their own writing tasks.

In addition to its use as a source of information, writers can benefit from reading authentic materials to improve their writing skill. That is to say, if students analyze their reading texts as models of writing, then their writing skill will be better. In this sense, (Richards, 2002, p. 83) Bereiter and Scandamalia (1984); et al. suggest: "*Students can learn much about writing from reading*" (Kroll, 1990, p. 227). So, the primary objective of students' reading tasks is on the reading materials' style rather than the contents. So, to improve the writing skill of students, teachers should include reading tasks in their lessons as (Dudley, 1998, p. 80) call it "*reading to write task*".

Writing and the Role of Vocabulary in EFL Context

Vocabulary is, obviously, all the words that are used to acquire and convey meaning. Recently, researchers in the field of linguistics and methodology have turned their attention to vocabulary, emphasizing its role in language teaching and reviewing its learning and teaching methodology. Vocabulary has become a crucial aspect of any language acquisition, whether it is first, second, or foreign language. Krashen (1989) states: "*A large vocabulary is, of course, essential for mastery of a language*". It is clearly stated that learning and teaching vocabulary is as necessary as learning the grammatical structures of language. As (Harmer, 2007, p. 257) points out: "*If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh*". Also, Thorbury (2002) asserting the importance of vocabulary states: "*Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed*".

As far as the field of language teaching and learning is concerned, vocabulary can be taught in isolation as well as in meaningful contexts using reading tasks. Nagy and Herman (1987) claim: "*Only a small percentage of vocabulary learning is due to direct vocabulary instruction, and the rest is due to the acquisition of words from reading*". (Skin, 2015, p. 162) This means that traditional vocabulary teaching approaches that asserted the direct presentation of vocabulary within the learning process is less, in providing students with the appropriate vocabulary related to their subject matter, than the incidental approach which gets students to acquire vocabulary incidentally through reading tasks. That is to say, students can acquire vocabulary better in meaningful reading tasks rather than presenting it directly in word lists or other means.

Besides the learning of vocabulary from reading meaningful materials indirectly or learning it directly in isolation, there are many techniques concerning its presentation according to researchers' views. Gairns and Redman classified the presentation of new vocabulary in two techniques: visual and verbal. For him, visual techniques include flashcards, photographs and pictures, wall charts, blackboard drawings, word pictures, incongruous visuals, realia, mime, and gesture. Whereas, the verbal techniques involve the use of illustrative situations, descriptions, synonyms andonyms, scales, and the use of different forms of definition that Nation (1990) described as: definition by demonstration, abstraction, context, and translation. Allen and Valette (1972) also advocate the use of categories-organizing words into sets, subclasses, and subcategories supported by a visual presentation. Of course, the use of these techniques depends on different factors as the learners' needs and their learning styles...etc.

The lack of vocabulary in the subject matter is one of the most elements that make the complexity of the writing skill. Vocabulary development is a crucial aspect of writing improvement. To be efficient writers, students need to develop good vocabulary in English. Almost certainly, you can find that they already know some English vocabulary. Teachers can expand and develop students' vocabulary for further studies and most importantly to enhance their written production as an important aspect for expressing meanings and communication in the target language. McCarthy states: "*... without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in the target language just cannot take place in any meaningful situations*". (Richards, 2002, p. 57) So it seems that involving the teaching of vocabulary using different methods and techniques can enhance the students' written production in any field of study according to their needs.

Approaches to Teach Writing

Writing is viewed as a meaning-created process. It is considered as the most complex skill to be mastered compared to other skills. To be proficient writers, learners have to cover different elements simultaneously when writing. They have to develop a written production which is well structured for effective communication. For that purpose, there have been a number of approaches to the teaching of writing adapted by researchers in the history of language teaching and learning. There are as many approaches as there are teachers with different styles of teaching such as the grammar-syntax organization approach, the paragraph- pattern approach, the free-writing approach, the communicative approach. However, recently the focus is just on three main approaches: The product-based approach, the process-based approach, and the genre-based approach.

The Product-based Approach

The product approach is the traditional way to teach writing. It is based on the notion writing as a product. It has several names: the controlled to free approach, the text-based approach, and the www.psychologyandeducation.net

guided composition. The ultimate goal of product approach is to strengthen writing in the grammatical and the syntactic forms. According to Cheung, (Ho, 2006, p. 28) the product-based writing approach focuses on " *one-short correct writing for the purpose of language practice*". Pincas is well-known advocate of such an approach. She sees writing as being " *primarily about linguistic knowledge with distinct focus on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices*". (Kamrul, 2015, p. 31)

In a product approach-oriented classroom, students are provided with sample of text as a model to follow in composing their written product. Garbrirelatos (Kamrul, 2015, p. 78) points out: " *A product approach is a traditional approach in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, usually is presented and analyzed at an early stage*".

Pincas (Grossmann, 2009, p. 7) identifies four stages to the product-based approach to writing: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. The objective of the familiarization stage is to allow students to consider some features of specific texts in their written production. They study some models focusing on the correct language. While in the controlled and guided writing stages, students practice the features of the chosen model in an organized way. They simply imitate the models focusing on the structure and the organization of ideas to compose their final product in the free writing stage. At this stage, students are expected to transform the models that have been studied into a new written production emphasizing the use of correct language. After that, they submit their written product to be corrected by teachers. The role of the teacher in the product approach is to provide students with the appropriate model, to guide them in their writing tasks, and to evaluate their final product. Silva (Kroll, 1990, p. 228) summarizes the product approach as follows:

Learning to write in a second language is seen as exercise in habit formation. The writer is simply a manipulator of previously learned language structures; the reader is the ESL teacher in the role of editor or proofreader, not especially interested in quality of ideas or expression but primarily concerned with formal linguistic features. (Kroll, 1990, p. 13)

The product-based approach is widely used by teachers as it has several advantages. Students learn how to write in a systematic way using its techniques i.e. familiarization, controlled writing...etc. They also learn how to use vocabulary and structures of sentences from the model which the teacher provide them with. Moreover, this approach makes L2 learners aware when writing, particularly concerning the grammatical structures. Nevertheless, it suffers from a great criticism that led researchers to reassess it. Writing using the product approach gives less attention to the audience and the purpose of writing as learners highlight the importance of grammar, syntax,...etc over content. Learners, within this approach, also may lack motivation in writing because it discourages creative thinking and writing. In addition, it is criticized for the presence of repetition in the writing process. As it has been mentioned before, writing using this approach is considered as an exercise of habit formation.

The Process-based Approach

The process-based approach to teach writing in the classroom is an idea that began three decades ago as a result of widespread research on the first language writing. It refers to a teaching approach that emphasizes on the process the writer goes through when composing meaning. Brown (Onozawa, 2010, p. 154) states: " *Writing is a thinking process, a writer produces a final written*

product based on their thinking after the writer goes through the thinking process". The process approach embodies a shift in emphasis from the product writing tasks to the methods in which writing can be developed. Tribble (1996) defines the process approach as *"an approach to the teaching of writing which stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and which pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models"*. It deals mainly with linguistic skills as drafting and planning rather than an emphasis on linguistic knowledge as grammar, and structure of texts. Applebee says:

Process approach provided a way to think about writing in terms of what the writer does (planning, revising, and the like) instead of in terms of what the final product looks like (patterns of organization, spelling, and grammar). (Kroll, 1990, p. 8)

The process approach advocates focus on the several stages that any writer follows in a recursive way when writing i.e. the writer may move backwards and forwards within these stages during the writing process. There are various stages that the writer goes through in producing any piece of writing. Ron White and Valerie Arndt (Harmer, 2007, p. 258) consider process writing as *"an interrelated set of recursive stages"* that include:

- Drafting.
- Structuring (ordering information, experimenting with arrangements, etc).
- Reviewing (checking context, connections, assessing impact, editing).
- Focusing (that is making sure you are getting the message across you want to get across).
- Generating ideas and evaluation (assessing the draft and/or subsequent drafts).

The following diagram (figure 2) represents the model that is identified by White and Arndt to the process-based writing approach:

Figure 2: White and Arndts' Process Writing Model



Source : (Alodwan, 2014, pp. 139-155.)

From the late 1970's to the 1980's, several researchers considered the process approach, which focuses on the process of writing, as the key in writing and an effective approach in classrooms. In spite of being widely used in ESL/EFL writing tasks, process approach has some criticism. To complete one particular writing task in the classroom, students have to spend long time. Sometimes, process approach doesn't suit the classroom, especially those with limited time, because it takes

time when going through its stages. In addition, the main concern of process approach is that it emphasizes content and pays less attention to grammar, structure, and the final product (accuracy). Silva (Kroll, 1990, p. 15) states: "*Content, ideas, and the need to communicate would determine form*".

So, to be good writers, students need to master the content as well as the grammatical structures therefore some scholars consider the product and process approach as complementary rather than contradictory.

The Genre-Based Approach

The notion of genre is defined as "*abstract, socially recognized ways of using language*" (Kamrul, 2015, p. 81). It is not related only with fiction writing as stories or novels, but also the written texts which students produce to function in English as letters, reports, or writing scientific experiments.

Since the mid 1980's, great attention goes to the genre approach to teach writing in ESL context. Genre approach regards writing as a social and cultural activity. The objective of genre writing includes the context of writing, and the conventions of the target discourse field. Faltridge (Kamrul, 2015, pp. 80-81) claims that genre approach emphasizes the teaching of specific genre students need for later social communication. state that genre approach aimed to help students become effective participants in their academic and professional environment as well as in their broader communities.

According to Hicks (1997), the emergence of genre approach as a set of pedagogies derived from linguistic theory and criticism of some principles in language instruction as a whole. Hyon (Kamrul, 2015, p. 81) claims that recent genre theories have increased in three research areas: English for specific purposes (ESP), North American new rhetoric studies, and Australian systematic functional linguistics. Accordingly, some researchers consider the genre approach appropriate in the field of ESP. Jeremy Harmer, in his book: (The Practice of English Language Teaching, 2006) *The* mentions:

A genre approach is especially appropriate for students of ESP. But it is also highly useful for general English students if we want them, even at low levels, to produce written work they can be proud of.

The framework of genre approach assists writing of students with generalized, systematic guiding principle about how to produce meaningful passages. Language, discourse features of specific texts, and the context of text would be the centre of writing. Students are first expected to study texts in the genre they are going to be writing in before they start their writing. In this way, if students have to write business letters of different kinds, they need to see some models of such letters as a first step. If they have to write newspaper articles, instructors have to provide them with authentic materials to find out facts related the structure and the specific language of that genre. This can be seen as a part of the pre-writing stage because students need to know about the topic, the conventions, the style of the genre, and the context of their writing to be read (Harmer, 2007, pp. 258-259)

Bibliographical references

1. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. (2006). London: 3rd ed, Longman.
2. Alodwan, T. A. (2014, 3.2 Jun). The Effect of Using the Process Approach to Writing on Developing University Students' Essay Writing Skills in EFL" . *Review of Arts and Humanities*.
3. Byram, M. (2000). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning*. London and New York: Routledge Group.
4. Dudley, E. T. (1998). *Development in ESP: A Multi-disciplinary Approach*. . Cambridge : Cambridge UP.
5. Godbane, N. (2010). " *Identification and Analysis of some Factors behind Students' Poor Writing Productions: The Case Study of 3rd Year Student at the English Department*". Batna U: Diss.
6. Grossmann, D. (2009). " *Masters in Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: Process Approach to Writing*". Birmingham: Diss.
7. Harmer, J. (2007). *How to Teach English: An Introduction to the Practice of English Language Teaching* (éd. 2nded). England: Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Longman .
8. Ho, B. (2006). " *Effectiveness of Using the Process Approach to Teach Writing in Six Hong Kong Primary Classrooms*". Hong Kong: Diss.
9. Hosseini, M. e. (2013). " *In the Importance of EFL Learners' Writing Skill: Is there any Relation between Writing Skill and Content Score of English Essay Test?* ". Iran: Diss.
10. Kamrul, H. ., (2015). " Approaches to Writing in EFL/ ESL Context: Balancing Product and Process in Writing Class at Tertiary Level" . *Journal of NELTA*, .12 Mar(1-12. 30 Mar), 15.
11. Kroll, B. (1990). *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
12. Onozawa, C. (2010). " *A Study of Process Writing Approach: A Suggestion for an Eclectic Writing Approach*". Japan: Diss.
13. Oxford. (2010). *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (éd. 8thed). .Oxford U P: CD-ROM.
14. Richards, j. C. (2002). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics* (éd. 3rd ed). London: Person Education.
15. Skin, K. C. (2015). " Developmental Approaches to the Teaching of EFL Reading " . *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 17.2 (12Mar), 159-170.
16. Widdowson, H. (2001). *Teaching a Language as Communication*. (éd. 12 th ed). Oxford: Oxford UP.