

Dimensions of Transnational Writing Exchange: An Exploratory Approach

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পশ্চিমি আজিখুলিয়াছে দ্বার,
সথো হতে সবো আনে উপহার,
দবি আৰ নবি, মলিবে মলিবি
যাবে না ফরি,
এই ভারতরে মহামানবরে
সাগরতীরে!

– রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর, ১৯১০

All bring gifts from everywhere
Giving and taking, mingling and
meeting
They won't ever return
And will remain in Indian shores
Magnanimous souls all!

– Rabindranath Tagore, 1910¹

When Tagore (1910) envisioned and welcomed a transnational collaboration between the West and the Indian sub-continent in 1910, the latter had already been a British colony for 57 years. Tagore was aware of and resistant to the British Empire's unidirectional vision for transnational exchange of knowledge. A British politician, Thomas Babington Macaulay, in his "Minute on Indian Education" in 1835 brazenly lauded the superiority of the English language to such local vernaculars as Arabic and Sanskrit. He claimed, "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language" (p. 349). And the "foreign language" in that colonial context was the English language. He also explained the purpose of educating "a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (p. 352). English as a language during and since the colonial era in the Indian subcontinent was somewhat predatory, and the promotion of English as well as the knowledge in English was politically and ideologically contentious. Given the emergence of the English language in the Indian subcontinent, it is apparently a tool that isolates and excludes rather than connects and collaborates. The deduction here is that any transnational collaboration mediated through the English language in the Indian subcontinent is always, already dubious—perhaps ineffective.

Despite its political and ideological moorings, the English language continued to reign supreme post-colonially in the Indian subcontinent because of its intellectual,

1 I am sincerely grateful to Fakrul Alam, UGC Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, for translating Tagore.

social, and economic potential. The promotion and the consumption of the language, however, assumed a unidirectional trajectory, which has critical bearing for composition studies in the Indian subcontinent in general, and in Bangladesh, in particular. One of the oldest universities in the Indian subcontinent, the University of Dhaka, was launched in 1921 with only twelve academic departments (Rahman, 1981). English was one of the twelve academic departments. Until 1985, the intellectual activities of the department used to revolve only around literature (Alam, 2011). In 1985, the department started to offer an MA in English language testing (ELT). In the meantime, though, literature became the default discipline of English studies in Bangladesh. The physical and intellectual infrastructures of English studies concentrated so much around literature that literature dominated—perhaps diminished—all other branches of English studies in Bangladesh. Besides physical and intellectual infrastructures, the popular culture in general is also complicit in preferring literature to the other subdisciplines of English, composition studies in particular.

Bangladesh has a sovereign writing culture, but unlike in North America, writing is considered as a gift, not a learned skill in Bangladesh. The notion of writing as a gift is always uncontested here in Bangladesh given that the writing icons of Bangla literature such as Nobel Laurate Rabindranath Tagore and the national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam were autodidacts. They hardly had any formal education, let alone learned the craft of writing as an outcome of schooling or training in a sustained period. They were poets, and the genres of writing they practiced and excelled in were so-called creative writing. Therefore, Bangladesh is steeped in a Dionysian or creative writing (Calonne, 2006) culture. Shamsuzzaman (2014) claims that, in such a culture, writing is considered so inductive and idiosyncratic that it is not open to analyses and intervention, let alone teaching. As a result, the steps and stages of writing reified in the North American discipline of composition studies are culturally contested—even inappropriate—for conceiving and constructing writing that the culture admires. Because of the cultural predisposition toward writing that requires no teaching, there is hardly any intellectual motivation to institutionalize the teaching and learning of writing in Bangladesh. Composition studies could not occupy any space in the landscape of English studies in Bangladesh yet as such.

Of course, the (lack of formal) education of Tagore and Islam does not pit composition studies vis-à-vis writing in South Asia—and Bangladesh, in particular—to establish a sovereign writing culture. Neither is the perspective—writing is a gift—unique to Bangladesh, for there is a strong view and long tradition in the West that writing arises from individual geniuses, as Francis-Noel Thomas and Mark Turner (1994) claim about French classic writing culture, for example. Yet the existential differences between composition studies and the cultural framing of writing in Bangladesh are critical. Composition studies mandates a specific way of thinking and languaging. It advocates for prose that is more reasoned and objective than intuitive and subjective. It values prose that is top-down, linear, and sequential. The

discipline stipulates the mechanical, semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical options and restrictions of prose, and it expects writers to learn and follow those options and restrictions. It cultivates writers' voice, autonomy, and creativity within a framework of convention. The assumption that underpins the discipline is that writing is a skill that can be acquired, and that the acquisition of writing skill presupposes instruction. In South Asia including Bangladesh, on the other hand, the teaching and learning of writing has traditionally revolved around the conviction that writing is a natural endowment rather than an intellectual achievement. Writing is not structurally rigid. Writing, instead, is perceptions transcribed. Because perception is idiosyncratic, writing always tends to be atypical. Conventions do not dictate the production of writing. Neither does instruction contribute to creating a writer as Canagarajah (2001) contends that explicit teaching of writing was not a component of his education in Sri Lanka. Writing in South Asia is apparently indirect, layered, and subtle. The process of writing is not artificially segmented, and writing transpires in a non-linear, non-sequential way. It has its own grammar, unlike the discipline of composition studies. This apparently accounts for why teaching writing is not one of the active agendas of English studies in Bangladesh.

However, after the 1990s the paradigm of English studies in Bangladesh seems to have been shifting apace. The government of Bangladesh sanctioned the establishment of private universities in 1992 in Bangladesh (Alam, 2011), and when the first private university started its operation in 1993 based on the North American model of education (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2014), it first used the word *composition* as GED courses offered by the Department of English and Modern Languages prerequisite for undergraduate programs across disciplines. Following the lead of the first private university in Bangladesh, the private universities around the country which were launched subsequently incorporated some composition courses with such various titles as EAP, FYC, and FC (Foundation Courses). Arguably in 1993, the word *composition* was included in the landscape of English studies in Bangladesh. To date, though, it is a discrete academic subject. It is a "service course" pigeonholed into the roster of courses offering students foundational academic skills. Composition studies lacks disciplinary autonomy, in that no university in Bangladesh offers BA or MA in composition or writing studies yet. The marginal inclusion of *composition* in English studies in Bangladesh signaled, nonetheless, the diversity of English studies following the establishment of private universities when the focus of English studies in Bangladesh shifted from literature to ELT (Alam, 2011). Perhaps because of the ontological tensions between English literature and composition studies that Elbow (1996) discusses, the promotion of ELT somewhat seemed conducive to the development of composition studies in Bangladesh.

Globalization—and its cognate, internationalization—also seems to be a favorable force for composition studies in Bangladesh. As it seems, globalization pertinent to writing studies leans more toward Tagore's vision of transnational

collaboration than Macaulay's version of linguistic and cultural colonization. Because of the arguments and activism by some scholars—Suresh Canagarajah, for example—the geopolitics of academic writing is fiercely contested to diversify and democratize it further. Writing studies is becoming more inclusive and expansive. The discursive patterns and policies are more divergent and equitable these days to benefit scholars and their affiliated institutions across contexts. An inevitable outcome of such undercurrent of writing studies is apparently transnational collaboration happening around the globe including Bangladesh. Universities in Bangladesh—private universities, in particular—have been vying for international space and prestige in recent years. They have been attempting to recruit more and more international students, and to cater to their writing needs at universities based on a North American model, universities must draw upon the knowledge base of composition studies. To globalize the universities, the administrators also motivate faculty members to publish in reputable international outlets. Publication in such outlets presupposes strong writing skills. Administrators and stakeholders are leveraging resources to establish writing centers at universities around the country. Composition professionals are also sought-after in Bangladesh considering that “writing strategies developed in composition and rhetoric departments of the US must also be incorporated” (Alam, 2011) in Bangladesh. Under such circumstances, universities in Bangladesh often invite and sponsor foreign scholars—composition professionals, in particular—for transnational collaboration, though most of those initiatives seem like what Christiane Donahue (2009) characterizes as “intellectual tourism.” However, the collaboration between North South University, Bangladesh, and one of the State Universities of New York is apparently a different one because of its unique vision and unyielding commitment to transnational collaboration. Sharma and Hammond in this anthology detail some of the dimensions and benefits of this transnational collaboration, both as participants and contributors.

Class to Class Collaboration

Back in 2018, two academics from one of the State Universities of New York, US, visited Bangladesh to conduct a two-day long workshop on professional development of faculty members for the Department of English and Modern Languages at North South University, Bangladesh. At the end of the workshop, an MoU was signed between North South University, Bangladesh, and Stony Brook University, US. Since then, the engagement between North South University and Stony Brook is current in research, pedagogy, and professional development. Throughout 2019, some of the faculty members from the Department of English and Modern Languages from North South University, Bangladesh, participated in a weekly meeting

moderated by a faculty member from the State University of New York. The outcome was exceptional—some teachers professionally developed remarkably; some teachers published in peer-reviewed journals, and some teachers advocated for developing further resources for both students and teachers at the universities across these two contexts. We initiated and continued with this transnational collaboration to demonstrate that despite critical context-specific constraints such as class overload, limited resources in instruction and research as well as institutional policies and politics driven by market forces, effective transnational collaboration can potentially empower faculty members.

As an extension of the engagement already underway between these two contexts, I and my counterpart in the US embarked on a class-to-class collaboration between two undergraduate classes at North South University, Bangladesh and at one of the State Universities of New York in spring, 2019. We paired up 33 students from Bangladesh with 33 students from New York. One student from Bangladesh was linked with another student in the US on Google Docs, where they could post their essays for their peer to review and to provide feedback. On our course website, we posted a short video vignette to demonstrate the procedures to post their essays. We conducted a workshop across the contexts on a sample essay to help students apply the rubric that we designed.

Peer Review Rubric

The class-to-class collaboration fundamentally revolved around guiding students to write essays in order to have feedback from their counterparts situated either in Dhaka for the students in New York, or in New York for the students in Dhaka. As composition professionals, both of us were aware of the affective and intellectual blindspots of peer feedback. We, therefore, designed a peer review rubric (see Appendix A) to help them avoid making insensitive and irrelevant comments. We wanted them to comment on five specific areas of essays from their peers: context, idea, research, perspectives, and language and presentation. Two drafts of the essays they wrote both in Dhaka and New York, were also specific to the prompts (see Appendix B) that we created. We were not teaching identical courses across these two contexts. That accounted for why our essay prompts were different. We wanted to align our essay prompts to the courses we were teaching.

Features of Some of the Essays Submitted

As I juxtaposed the essays of my students in Dhaka with the essays of my colleague's students in New York, I noticed some common patterns across two transnational

contexts.² Compared to the essays of my students from Dhaka, the essays of my colleague's student in New York seemed to look more formal given that they were properly indented, spaced, paginated, punctuated, and referenced. On all these fronts, most of my students seemed to have fallen short. It was a moment when I experienced *déjà vu*. I remembered the first paper that I submitted as a graduate student in the US at a state university in California. While I knew about all these visual dimensions of formal academic discourse, I was inadvertently disinterested in these dimensions of writing. I was never taught about the mechanics of writing the way it is taught in the US. I did teach my students about these visual aspects of writing, but they seemed to have been culturally so conditioned—as I was—that instruction was not strong enough to disabuse them of their cultural perceptions and conventions of writing. My teacher in the US wrote at the end of the paper, “Go to the Writing Center.” I did and incorporated the visual codes of academic discourse practiced in North America. I could, however, never write such a comment on my students' papers, because the university I worked at did not have a writing center.

All my students in Dhaka, Bangladesh, were second language writers of English. Compared to the students in New York, who were mostly native speakers, resident immigrants, and multilingual foreign students, my students were the basic second language writers of the English language. And the basic second language writers in English in Bangladesh are indeed basic given that Bangladesh “is a mono-lingual nation-state and does not need a second language for internal communication” (Islam, 2001, p. 19). The writing practices they had in their native language, Bangla, would hardly complement their skills in writing in English, for the conventions of academic writing in English were incompatible to conventions of writing in Bangla. Despite having had feedback from me as well as from their peers in the US, their essays were riddled with fractured syntax, inappropriate shifting between tenses and pronouns, awkward lexical choices, abrupt shifting from one sentence to another, from one paragraph to another, and from one viewpoint to another, and comma splices. Compared to their counterparts in the US, they preferred short sentences and compound to complex sentences; they used simple diction, non-figurative language; they avoided passive voice; and most of their paragraphs were underdeveloped. Tony Silva (1997) claims that these are exactly some of the characteristics of basic second language writers. While some of their counterparts in the US fell short on all these fronts, the frequency of these errors was not as usual with them as with the Bangladeshi second-language writers.

Perhaps the most critical differences between these two groups of students was that the essays of the Bangladeshi students were not rhetorically as fine-grained as was expected of academic discourse, whereas most if not all of their counterparts in the US demonstrated rhetorical awareness. They maintained a formal tone and texture;

2 We have followed formal protocols across the contexts to collect data.

avoided first person; consulted sources to locate and incorporate information pertinent to their topics; maintained cohesion between sentences and paragraphs; and seemed to have a sense of audience. Besides incorporating these general rhetorical features, several of the essays from the students in New York were outstanding, and they read like dissertations. Their essays embodied typical hallmarks of academic discourse such as critical intelligence, factual diligence, and semantic sophistication as Steven Pinker claims (2014). Despite some outstanding essays, several essays from the students in New York were truly what Maxine Hairston (1984) calls “blue sky papers.” They padded their prose with jargons, pretentious diction, and unduly complex sentences to impress their reader, that is, the teacher. Students from Bangladesh, on the other hand, wrote narrative, but their prose was so much spattered with “I” and “we” that it was more “egocentric” (Lunsford, 1980) than academic. They did not seem to have any sense of audience. They did not seem to have consulted the sources to locate information pertinent to their topic despite the explicit instruction that they had to align their narrative with some theories. They generalized and personalized their narratives so much that occasionally they flouted the convention of objective academic discourse. Also, contractions abounded in their prose. Apparently, these are features of so-called creative writing, and because Bangladesh is predominantly a creative writing culture, their writing style was culturally compatible.

Never do I, however, default to the perception that hailing from a so-called creative writing culture is akin to lacking critical intelligence, factual diligence, and semantic sophistication. I appreciated some of the rigidly structured essays from the students in New York as much as I enjoyed some of the essays from students in Dhaka with unique and arbitrary turns and twists. The essays from both contexts suggested that such convenient labels as creative and critical are misleading and can complicate appreciation of writing that transpires across contexts. If writing does what it needs to do, its linguistic features and cerebral patterns must not restrain readers from appreciating as well as enjoying it. Such writing warrants no judgment about writers’ intelligence and linguistic sensibility. When detailing the features of good writing, Sword (2012) argues that discourse has never been uniform and stable across disciplines. Neither is, of course, discourse across cultures. Students from Dhaka and New York wrote to order, when they were conditioned by culture(s) and shaped the teaching of writing. I learned an important lesson from this transnational collaboration as I was reading the essays: writing professionals must be open to diversity and change as they teach and evaluate writing.

Peer Feedback

There are both quantitative and qualitative differences in feedback provided to the peers between these two contexts. As I investigated the feedback provided by the

students of my colleague in the US, I discovered that they all provided marginal comments, and none of them cared about providing a summative comment. On the other hand, none of the Bangladeshi students provided any marginal comment. They provided only summative comments. Despite my instruction and insistence, some of my students in Bangladesh even refrained from providing any feedback at all. I had the apprehension that my students here in Bangladesh were overwhelmed by the detailed and extensive feedback they received from the students from my colleague in the US. The peer feedback practice may have renewed and reinforced the native speaker (NS)-non-native speaker (NNS) dichotomy, when native speakers are the default models of linguistic perfection. My students praised their counterparts in the US, and hardly had any critical suggestions to fine-tune their essays further. My colleague's students in the US also praised my students in Bangladesh for their research and writing skills, but they provided extensive feedback to improve the quality of their writing and content. While feedback in general is a "thorny issue" (Raimes, 1991), it is even thornier in transnational contexts given the differences in intellectual, cultural, and linguistic dynamics involved. As they provide feedback on each other's writing, they do not draw from the same intellectual, cultural, and linguistic repertoires. They are physically disembodied and are innocent to the debates and discussions of peer feedback. They are expected to accomplish something they hardly have had adequate experiential and professional capital with. Peer feedback in transnational contexts as such is more complex and chaotic than peer feedback in general.

The feedback that my students received from their U.S. counterparts ranged from language to style to mechanics to rhetoric, which Appendix C demonstrates.

Problematizing Peer Feedback in Transnational Context

Peer feedback is undoubtedly one of the critical aspects of composition pedagogy, but this transnational empirical engagement demonstrates that no assumption and instruction can predict how students will act and react while providing feedback on their peers. The students in the US assume that there is a generalized ESL student despite Raimes' (1991) insistence that there is no entity as such. Therefore, the students from the US assume the persona of acting experts for their Bangladesh counterparts, who, they seemed to believe, are mere linguistic creatures because they are meshed in the syntax, semantics, and mechanics of the English language. Their thoughts and language were hardly transparent and formal. Apparently, there is merit in such an assumption regarding most basic ESL writers across contexts; essentially, however, this assumption is seriously problematic to appreciate the complexity of writing in Bangladesh. Writing is culturally conceived as an autonomous endeavor, and writing transpires beyond such binaries as right or wrong,

or correct or incorrect. More importantly, writers are not culturally considered as fallible creatures. Writers are entitled to visions, inconsistencies, and idiosyncrasies. Unless someone has considerable cultural capital pertinent to conceiving and constructing texts in Bangladesh, she might not appreciate the nuances of texts written by Bangladeshi writers in the English language. To provide feedback in an informed fashion on texts written by Bangladeshi students, teachers—in this context, peers—must understand the primacy of the local over the global.

The errors identified by the students in the US in the texts of their Bangladeshi peers are apparently performance errors rising from such factors as unfamiliar tasks, topics, audiences, and genres (Matsuda, 2006). Two of these factors—audiences and genres—are critical criteria in understating the theories and philosophies of writing in Bangladesh. Audiences for writing in Bangladesh are not apparently taxonomized as they are in North America, and writing is appreciated independent of preconceived principles and parameters. Writers are agentive, as are the readers. Such a culture renders the assessment of writing redundant, which feedback underpins. Writing that stands the test of time touches and transforms the audiences, who are connoisseurs of texts. They are not critics of texts. Writing that does not conform with and add to such a legacy generally does not endure. In a culture such as this, no one is conditioned to separate so-called good writing from so-called bad writing by looking into its structural and mechanical properties. This may account for why Bangladeshi peers did not provide any feedback between the margins specific to structure, mechanics, and language contrary to their counterparts in the US. Peer feedback, as it happened with the students in the US, is a learned activity, which is critically informed by a sense of audience. For the Bangladeshi students, peer feedback is low stake commentary (Canagarajah, 2006) hardly informed by a sense of audience.

An arbitrary demarcation of writing between pragmatic (EDNA-expository, descriptive, narrative, and argumentative) and aesthetics (PDF-poetry, fiction, drama) so widespread in North America does not capture the complex writing culture that permeates the landscape of writing in Bangladesh. Genre is an abstraction that hardly has any real-life application beyond academic contexts in Bangladesh. The genre of writing that they call essay in North America is locally called “প্রবন্ধ.” The Bangladeshi students in this study wrote a “প্রবন্ধ” in the English language, which is structurally, conceptually, and linguistically different from its North American version. A typical North American essay, as Robert Kaplan (1966) seemed to have claimed, is top down, linear, and sequential, where the language is formal, hedged, and objective. While Kaplan overgeneralized the hybridity and complexities of writing cultures across languages and cultures, his assumption that composing is a cultural construct merits careful consideration. In Bangladesh, for example, “প্রবন্ধ” is another form of story without plots and characters with a fair amount of intuition, subjectivity, and peculiar diction. It has its own character

and conventions that combine creative abandon and rational control. It doesn't fit in the mold of any genre; it, instead, falls in a hybrid genre. Providing feedback on a “প্ৰবন্ধ” with the criteria suitable for an essay ignores “the need to attend to and engage local, institutional, and national differences in thinking about writing and writing instruction” (Horner et al., 2011). Likewise, the Bangladeshi students who are mostly innocent about the North styles and structures of essay, did not have the linguistic and intellectual capital to provide effective feedback on the writing of their U.S. counterparts. Therefore, despite their best intentions, peers from both the sides provided feedback that was not completely responsive to the complex cultures of writing both of these contexts steeped into and had preference for.

Fakrul Alam (2011) claims that most writing teachers in Bangladesh are not writers themselves. Virtually any teacher is a writing teacher in Bangladesh if she has some advanced studies in one of the subdisciplines of English studies. This relegates the instruction of writing to a lesser light position in Bangladesh to align writing studies with the “low status of writing instruction in the modern university (Horner & Trimbur, 2002). What is unique about writing instruction in Bangladesh is that most writing instructors in Bangladesh enact only the linguistic dimension of composition pedagogy. The rhetorical dimension of composition pedagogy is all but missing. What passes off as composition pedagogy in Bangladesh is explicit grammar instruction, and most writing teachers are but error hunters. Peer feedback is always an imitation—and sometimes, extension—of instructor feedback on students' writing. Besides language, rhetoric is critical to composition pedagogy in North America. The North American peers while providing feedback on their Bangladeshi counterparts always indicated shortcomings in cohesion, transition, and flow on top of grammar. The Bangladeshi peers were almost non-responsive to the rhetorical dimensions of texts of their counterparts in the US.

What is apparently puzzling when it comes to providing feedback by the Bangladesh peers on their counterparts in the US is absence of any feedback on language at all, even though the linguistic feedback is almost always the only feedback they receive in Bangladesh. This is an interesting twist that perhaps echoes across contexts regarding any transnational collaboration. The transnational collaborations that transpire between the Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries are incongruous on many grounds. Canagarajah (2006) claims that all speech events are language games, but the rules of the games are not identical across contexts for participants. The Bangladeshi participants in this study, for example, knew that their counterparts were native speakers of English. They are from the US—the site of intellectual, economic, and political prowess—and they are some of the best students attending one of the state universities in the US. The Bangladeshi peers are already overwhelmed by the superiority of their U.S. counterparts. Therefore, instead of a critical approach to the texts, they had a colonized engagement with the texts. As such, while providing feedback on the texts of their counterparts in

the US, they assumed the persona of active cheerleaders. They heaped gratuitous praise on their counterparts in the US. Apparently, then, any transnational collaboration, including this one, has profound psychological implications that transcend language as well as the restrictions and options of providing peer feedback.

Given the quantity and quality of feedback provided by the peers across these two contexts, this transnational engagement apparently renews and reinforces the ontological differences between “prototypical students” (Matsuda, 2006) in the US and so-called basic writers of multi-lingual and multi-cultural origins. The basic Bangladeshi writers in this study, however, are not basic thinkers. They all can think critically and write coherently—as expected of typical undergraduate students across contexts—in their first language, বাংলা (Bangla). The fractured syntax, slipshod semantics as well as underdeveloped and incoherent paragraphs of the Bangladeshi peers in this study do not straightforwardly imply that they are cognitively deficient compared to their counterparts in the US. They are victims of what Kasia Kietlinska (2006) calls “double hats problem,” when language learners are performing writers. The English language is a compulsory component in all the stages of formal education in Bangladesh: primary (grades 1–5), secondary (grades 6–10), higher secondary (grades 11–12), and tertiary (university education). Until tertiary education, English is just a subject and its learning and teaching is mostly restricted to grammar drills and rote learning. The exposure to the language is severely limited, and learners do not develop a critical and creative engagement with language, for বাংলা (Bangla) is the medium of instruction. At the tertiary level, however, the medium of instruction is mostly English, and students also have to accomplish assignments in English that must demonstrate critical and creative intelligence. They can hardly transfer any linguistic capital when they shift from higher second to tertiary education. Therefore, they perform poorly in English as did the Bangladeshi peers in this study.

Besides being the victims of the “double hats problem” at the tertiary level, they are also the victims of genre theory and genre pedagogy. At the tertiary level, students in Bangladesh are oriented to the North American version of academic discourse that taxonomizes writings and writers in various categories. These categories are presented in composition primers as if these are invariant to always lead to cold and objective discourse of scientific precision and directness (Zamel, 1996). Such an approach to conceiving and constructing discourse strips writing of individual passion and panache along with requiring a formulaic way of thinking and languaging. While in Bangladesh scholars and critics theorize writing, writing hardly emerges from reified theories. Writing is thoughts transcribed and language approximated with abandon. Genre always meshes and clashes to bleed creativity into criticality. Converting students at the tertiary level, who already have defaulted to such an understanding of writing is time-consuming and consequential, both intellectually and emotionally. The peers in the US in this study are apparently immune to such dilemmas

of writing. The finished products that this study investigated came out of processes where different sets of factors and forces intersected and interacted. The peers in this study from both the ends were not aware of such complexities inherent in texts and contexts. Therefore, while the peers both in Bangladesh and in the US read the texts correctly, they understood partially as their feedback reflected.

For all these complexities and contradictions between these two contexts of transnational engagements, one critical common phenomenon emerges about peer feedback. Peers across these two contexts seemed more sensitive to and respectful of each other. Students from Bangladesh as well as from the US demonstrated a fair amount of cross-cultural capital so as not to crush the ego and smash the confidence of their peers. We suggested that our students from both the contexts forge an ethical, intellectual engagement with their peers. Never have we had a comment that could hurt and humiliate their peer at other end; never has anyone reported any objectionable behavior. Peer feedback in this study seems more humane unlike the “hostility and mean-spiritedness of most of the teachers’ comments” (Sommers, 1982). This dimension of this transnational collaboration is somewhat intriguing given that our identical rubric for providing feedback across these two contexts of transnational engagement yielded different outcomes. Our guidelines for behavior yielded the same outcomes across contexts. They seem to have common “structures of feeling” (Orram & Williams, 1954) in transnational engagement, even though I would not vouch for such an assumption. As it seems, our guidelines for providing peer feedback perhaps were linguistically more formidable and cognitively more challenging than following the principles of behavior. The structures of mutual feeling are perhaps a fortunate accident emerging out of this transnational collaboration. If this phenomenon holds out across contexts, it might be utilized to optimize pedagogical outcomes in transnational collaborations replicating such a model.

Conclusion

Understanding a human behavior as complex as writing is hard, and understanding transnational writing behavior is even harder, as Wendy Hesford (2006) claims that the field doesn’t have the methodological foundation to study transnational rhetorical practices. This experimental approach to studying transnational writing between the US and Bangladesh concerning peer feedback evinces that the profiles of so-called advanced or so-called basic writers are cultural constructs and that they don’t equally apply across contexts. Writing is apparently critical to any literate society, whether it is taught or absorbed. Bangladesh has a sovereign writing culture developed over centuries, and the assumptions that underpin that writing culture are idiosyncratic and inscrutable. Writing is shrouded in a mysterious complexity. Parsing writing is not yet an academic agenda, but savoring it is. To provide

feedback or to write to have feedback is a cultural anathema. However, the sub-culture of academe influenced by composition studies seems to have challenged that culture to consider critically such stipulation as every writing is autobiographical to some extent; for it is an intellectual activity carried out in an emotional environment (Murray, 1982). The Bangladeshi peers in this experiment revealed their identity and intentions as they provided feedback on their peers from the US. So did the peers from the US as they wrote and provided feedback on the writing of their Bangladesh peers. They acted and reacted as unique cultural, cognitive, and linguistic creatures. And this experimental engagement yields some critical information on all these fronts pertinent to peer feedback in transnational contexts. This transnational engagement doesn't propose any grand theory regarding peer feedback in transnational context; it, instead, contributes to clarifying the "intersection between the global and the local" (Lu & Horner, 2009) so as to approach transnational writing engagement in a more informed fashion.

Bangladesh, for example, is a post, postcolonial country because of multiple occupations. For all its economic, political, and intellectual potential, the English language is a colonial artifact. It is at once embraced and denigrated. Growing up academically in a postcolonial Bangladesh warrants being cognizant of such undercurrents involving the English language. Learning to write in the English language knowing and enacting specific styles and strategies smacks of further colonization. The discipline of composition studies, as originated and flourished in North America, falls out of favor in Bangladesh as such. The way the Bangladeshi students reacted to the writing of their counterparts in the US may have profound psychological dimensions unaffected by literacy in a second language reflected in writing. Writing is a discursive behavior, which is often impervious to instruction in that it is already shaped by inveterate autochthonous forces across contexts and languages. Every transnational collaboration brings to the fore some of those forces, as does ours. As our experimental study suggests, classrooms practices as well as students, genres, and contexts need to be redefined by creating an epistemic tension between local and global. Our preparation as transnational educators on that front to facilitate writing studies is still inadequate, or why does Canagarajah (2016) contend that teacher development in composition studies is not well advanced? Teacher development, however, is an ongoing and unfinished undertaking, which is sometimes complemented by insights and information gleaned from such studies.

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Appendix A

CONTEXT: Is the essay context-specific and focused? Are there any additional contextual issues that the writer may need to consider when revising this draft?

IDEA: Is the writer's main idea, argument, or research question/objective clearly stated in the draft?

RESEARCH: Does the draft reflect that considerable research was done? Are the sources reliable? Are they engaged well by the writer?

PERSPECTIVES: Does the draft indicate any misunderstanding or oversight about something—or are there one or more perspectives that the writer should consider in order to refine the paper's key argument/idea?

LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION: Do the language and presentation of the draft follow the codes of standard academic discourse?

Appendix B. Prompts

Prompt for Students in Dhaka: Literacy Narrative of an L2 Learner

PART 1: Find one of your peers to interview about their journey as an L2 learner in English. When interviewing, ask questions to be able to cover issues like the

following in your narrative about their second language acquisition. Does your peer remember when he/she was first exposed to the language? What piqued his/her passion in the language? What obstacles did he/she face and to what factors and issues does she attribute those difficulties? How did he/she overcome (or is overcoming) the challenges? When writing, go beyond simply reporting/describing to making sense of the story. When describing their language acquisition, draw upon theories of second language development, using themes and issues about language learning in Bangladesh or similar contexts.

PART 2: In the second part of your essay, shift focus to your interviewee’s development of academic literacy skills (reading, writing, communication) in English. When and how did she/he develop literacy skills? What were her/his challenges with it and how did she/he overcome them (or is overcoming)? When writing this part of your essay, pick one of the “literacy narratives” from this set of samples, written by native and nonnative English speakers in the United States, through some online research. Read it carefully and compare your classmate’s literacy development with that of the student in the US. How do language acquisition and the development of literacy skills seem to compare/differ in Bangladesh and the United States? Again, develop issues and themes out of the comparison.

You can blend the two areas above into one or use two subheadings: language development and literacy development. In both areas, you should develop and use your own argument about language acquisition to frame your narrative and discussion, supporting your argument with compelling explanations and relevant sources.

Ideally, the assignment should not exceed 1,000 words.

Prompt for the Student in New York: Writing Across Cultures Essay

DRAFT 1: Write a 800–1,200 word expository/persuasive essay about an educational, intellectual, cultural, social, economic, or other significant topic in the context of the country of Bangladesh. For best credit, your writing must reflect a solid understanding of guidelines provided throughout this document. Also draw on readings and discussions from class, as well as exercises on conducting research, developing and supporting argument, writing in a thesis-driven manner, and engaging sources substantively and responsibly that you’ll be learning in the course.

DRAFT 2: After exchanging feedback, via Google Docs, with an assigned peer reviewer, a fellow student at the North South University in Dhaka, Bangladesh, revise your paper using his/her feedback and the same rubric (in this doc) that he/she has provided to review your paper draft. You should also use feedback by your peer in class and your instructor, as well as notes from class activities. If you add words while revising your first draft, you must condense the draft (meaning you’re expected to practice condensing skills, as needed, with this paper).

Appendix C

One of my students wrote in her essay, “Bangladesh is very much amorous about the English language.” Her U.S. counterpart underlined the word “amorous” with a marginal comment: “word choice.” Another of my students wrote, “He ended up being pathetically interested with the English language.” The marginal comment from her peer in the US was, “pathetically typically has a negative connotation.” Having read the sentence “She always felt intimidated, and will be judged in front of the class,” her peer from the US underlined “intimidated” and corrected in the margin “intimidated.” Another student from Bangladesh wrote, “She had to face lots of difficulties.” Her peer from the US underlined, “lots of” and corrected in the margin with “many.” As one of my students in Bangladesh wrote, “In the school his teacher used to speak English consecutively,” her peer from the US underlined “consecutively” with the marginal comment, “very frequently.” Similarly, another of my students in Bangladesh wrote, “It also varies learners to learners.” Her peer from the US corrected her with the following marginal comment, “add the word ‘from’, and ‘leaner’ should be singular.” These are some of the many examples when the students from the US identified and fixed errors with linguistic infelicities.

Some of the recommendations from the students in the US are straightforward instruction. For example, underlining the title of one of the essays from a student in Bangladesh, her counterpart in the US wrote, “center,” along with the instruction, “indent every paragraph.” Other widely used instruction by the students in the US on the essays of the Bangladeshi students were “delete; rephrase the sentence as it not clear; you should clearly point out your topic sentence in the beginning of the paragraph; need citations and bibliography for researched information; central argument? Keep in the first paragraph; don’t start sentence with ‘and,’; don’t start sentence with ‘but,’; no need to use colon; go more in depth in regard to the questions asked; make sure to cite your sources; you can skip this; and connect these two sentences to make it sound more sophisticated.”

When the students from the US were confused about the ideas and arguments proposed by their counterparts in Bangladesh, they asked for further information, or they asked questions directly. For example, having read “Thinking the part of grammatical rules basically hinders their production, because they are very much are of it,” her counterpart in the US commented, “Not sure what you are trying to say here.” One of the students in Bangladesh wrote, “He properties the challenges he looked with on himself, conceivably he ignored certain things and there for he has these deficiency in English,” and her counterpart in the US commented, “I don’t understand what you are trying to say here.” On the following sentence, “When she started to talk it was not the beginning of her language verifying, it was the eventual outcome of the conceivable data,” appearing in one of the essays of a student in Bangladesh, the student from the US commented, “The sentence

is little hard to understand. Could you rephrase it in a simple way?” Some of the direct questions from the students in the US as they provided feedback on their counterparts in Bangladesh were, “So are you going to mention the topic of the essay here?; what are you trying to convey here?; Is this common in Bangladesh?; How can this issue be addressed?; “what do you mean by this phrase?; how does this show extroversion?; Is there a better way to start this sentence?”

Besides these comments and questions for further information, there were also some positive and motivating comments on the essays of the students from Bangladesh from their counterparts in the US—for example, “I really like your introduction. It has lots of information and sets up the topic well”; “Even though you don’t speak English every day, your ability to write complex ideas and convey how Israt was feeling in this language is very impressive. Keep it up”; “This is a great essay to show how your friends experience to acquire a new language”; “I believe this is nice way of framing the thesis, clear and concise”; “This paragraph has a really nice flow”; “Loved these few sentences”; and “This paragraph was very clear.”

As I mentioned earlier, students from Bangladesh did not comment on the margin for linguistic and rhetorical correction and clarification from their American peers. Instead, the students from Bangladesh had one summative comment on the essays of their American peers. These one-off summative comments apparently lack details and directions, as demonstrated by feedback from the students in the US. One such comment was, “I think this paper is very well written. I feel the claim is very relevant as it addresses a very important issue. And this is true that Bangladesh has dealing with this overpopulation issue for long time and it’s still very much concerning for the current and the next generation of the nation. Here it is clear that the evidences provided by my peer doesn’t acknowledge any counter argument. But I still believe this paper is fine work because it is organized very impressively. The quality of the language is excellent. It is very simple, making it easy for the reader to clearly understand the author’s intention.”