

Introduction. The Transnational Translingual University: Teaching Academic Writing Across Borders and Between Languages

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This collection investigates the challenges and opportunities for the teaching of academic writing brought on by the increasing, and the increasing recognition of, the mobility across linguistic, national, disciplinary, and institutional borders of teachers, students, scholars, and institutional programs. As chapters in this collection demonstrate, the teaching, practice, and study of academic writing now take such mobility as their foundation; it is no longer adequate, if it ever was, to imagine academic writing as a subject for teaching or research, or as a practice, that is bound by linguistic, national, or disciplinary borders.

This is not to ignore longstanding borders among all these, nor, importantly, the hierarchical relations among them: there remains a geopolitics at work in the production of academic knowledge that is manifested in “border disputes,” as it were, among languages, disciplines, institutions, and nation states. But those disputes themselves demonstrate, and enact, the historical character of those borders as ever emergent, in construction, variable, fluid, and, above all, crossed, hence the shifting, intermingling, and interdependent character of what the borders are meant to maintain, however futilely, as discrete, stable, internally uniform, and independent. Like efforts to “contain” the Covid-19 coronavirus, those disputes bring out the many ways in which, contrary to prevalent notions of discrete and stable entities—sedentary and immobile—mobility across borders is in fact the operating condition of our work.

Of course, many institutions of higher education (hereafter “IHEs”) officially claim to be “global” in reach and foundation. But in practice, many of these same institutions maintain curricular structures, placement practices, and support services that were founded on more sedentary conceptions of academic writing and its teaching—those that mobility scholars would characterize as based on assumptions of these as unchanging and immobile. As the chapters in this collection demonstrate, however, these IHEs are increasingly confronting the actual mobility and fluid character of academic writing and writers: their movement across borders of nation state, discipline, and language, and, in the process of that movement, the

continual transformation of these. Against what Christiane Donahue (2009) has critiqued as the “export/import” model of writing programs and writing program expertise, teachers, scholars, and students are increasingly coming to recognize the need to address the inevitable and necessary transformation of themselves as academic writers and their writing as they move across borders, and in the process, their transformation of what those borders are intended to maintain.

Terms like translanguaging, transnationality, and transdisciplinarity have emerged to name this alternative model by which to engage in, teach, and study academic writing and its teaching. Rejecting tenets of the language ideology of monolingualism and outmoded models of immigration and assimilation to address and control student and faculty mobility, they pose new questions: How do we address the issue of the language medium to be used for writing and teaching in such partnerships? How do we formulate a transnational and translanguaging WAC approach? How do transnational perspectives call into question assumptions about disciplinary identities and boundaries? What opportunities do transnational, translanguaging, and transdisciplinary perspectives afford WAC programs?

It is, of course, possible to take up these terms as simply new monikers for more familiar, and therefore understandable, models for addressing differences: translanguaging as multilingual, transnational as “global” or “international,” transdisciplinary as “interdisciplinary” and/or “multidisciplinary.” Such uptakes acknowledge the legitimacy of different practices but, crucially, maintain the borders among these as settled matters. At least some versions of WID, for example, while acknowledging differences among disciplinary writing practices, treat these practices as sets of discrete, stable, internally uniform kinds of writing specific to individual disciplines. And those advocating multilingualism, while acknowledging the legitimacy of the use of different languages, simultaneously insist, in keeping with the language ideology of monolingualism, that each language is discrete from others, internally uniform, stable, and with specific rules governing the locations for its appropriate use. Arguments for adopting “trans” perspectives on language, nation, and discipline are meant to challenge such uptakes as advancing not substantive difference but, instead, surface differences: glossodiversity, for example, papering over uniformity in meaning (see Cameron, 2002), and teaching translation of knowledge across disciplines or between academic and lay genres as a simple matter of recoding rather than rewriting (cf. Donahue, 2021, pp. 26-28). At the same time, such arguments can themselves risk understating the continuing dominance of ideologies that permeate ordinary thinking and practice: named languages, nation-states, disciplines. While it’s easy enough to demonstrate the invalidity of the claims of those ideologies for the discrete, internally uniform, and stable character of what they name (see Bazerman, 1992, p. 63), such demonstrations in themselves do not weaken the power of those ideologies (see Lewis, 2018). As Yasemin Yildiz (2012) has argued, for example, we live not in a translanguaging but a postmonolingual condition, one in

which actual practices conflict with what participants believe and claim about those practices and with what policies, official and tacit, and institutions maintain and dictate about them.

The chapters in this collection wrestle with that conflict, navigating between, on the one hand, practices in academic writing and its teaching, and, on the other, the ongoing legacies of ideologies about those practices that shape them and to which those practices inevitably respond. Chapters in Part I, “Rewriting Writing Disciplines: Trans- Perspectives,” provide theoretical overviews on this state of affairs, addressing both the challenges and strategies that adopting a trans- approach can entail. In “WAC/WID in the Age of Trans-: Crossing and Re-crossing Borders of Language, Disciplinary, and National Identities,” Jonathan Hall draws on scholarship from a range of disciplines taking a “trans” turn to rethink WAC/WID as necessarily engaged in “boundary work” as it confronts and responds to long-standing national, linguistic, and disciplinary borders and the inevitable inability of these, as ideological constructs. This, Hall argues, can enable us to account for and make use of the crossings over and continuous revisions of the distinctions of national, linguistic, and disciplinary identities such borders are meant to uphold. Drawing on Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” (1915), Hall argues that in responding to the competing senses that walls “make good neighbors,” but also that “something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” we should think of WAC/WID as engaged not so much in boundary “work” but “boundary play” in which we recognize borders as “porous, fluid, as lines which connect more than they divide.”

In “‘We Are the Other’: The Future of Exchanges between Writing and Language Studies,” Donahue explores the broader history of divides between writing and language studies in the US and the opportunity transnationalism offers to think differently about the relation of writing and language studies. Drawing particularly on scholarship and teaching traditions outside the US and the anglophone realm, Donahue suggests that a transnational approach can help teachers and scholars move beyond limited understandings of such concepts as “transfer” and “codes” by adopting and adapting treatments of these in contact linguistics. Donahue thus brings to the fore the ways that a transnational approach to the study and teaching of composition necessarily involves us in transdisciplinary and translanguaging work. And in “Remapping Writing Instruction at the Borders of Modern Languages, Bilingual Education, and Translation Studies: A Canadian Proposal for a Transnational Conversation,” Guillaume Gentil examines the ways that pursuit of bilingual academic writing development in Canadian IHEs can reinvigorate, and “re-map,” institutional and disciplinary borders separating modern languages, translation studies, and writing instruction, in particular by redefining curricular arrangements for WAC/WID instruction. Drawing on a case study of a French/English graduate student’s cross-lingual and cross-national research and writing, Gentil shows the tensions arising from attempts to draw on a diverse set of linguistic and disciplinary

resources in settings where a strong sense of boundaries between these prevails, concluding that a “transnational translingual” approach to teaching academic writing can help students overcome monolingualism’s “language-nation-identity” links while drawing on their own particular linguistic and national “moorings.”

The chapters in Part II, “Professional Development: Trans- Perspectives,” offer accounts of specific challenges at chapter authors’ IHEs and their strategies for professional development to meet these. In “Advancing a Transnational, Transdisciplinary, and Translingual Professional Development Framework for Teaching Assistants in Writing and Spanish Programs,” Alyssa G. Cavazos and her colleagues describe a cooperative effort among faculty and graduate and undergraduate students from several disciplines to make good on their IHE’s designation as an Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and its commitment to becoming a truly bilingual IHE, an effort that led to a series of workshops and continuing initiatives to think through an approach to the teaching and learning of writing and languages that treated students’ and faculty’s heritage languages and transnational and transborder/transfronterizo experiences as resources rather than barriers to their learning and scholarship. Likewise, Gail Shuck, describing the development of a “global business communication” partnership at her IHE, explains how the tripling of its international student population over a four-year period, primarily from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, served as a catalyst prompting faculty to develop policies and pedagogies more reflective of the students’ linguistic and cultural diversity and, more specifically, to a coordinated effort between various program administrators and instructors to revise her school’s business communication course to address and incorporate intercultural communication and global business practices, a change useful to all students, international and domestic. In “Centering Our Students’ Languages and Cultures: WAC and a Cross-Departmental Collaboration,” Joyce Meier and her colleagues describe similar collaborative efforts at their IHE to draw on the linguistic and cultural diversity of its students. Reporting on a study involving faculty across disciplines at their IHE, they demonstrate the importance of engaging faculty from non-language-focused disciplines as well as in such disciplines as writing studies in efforts to recalibrate teaching to take into consideration and make use of the cultural knowledge and languages all students, from outside as well as inside the US, bring to their academic work, and to defamiliarize their own cultural references by rethinking, as well as translating, common instructional language that is foreign to many students (again, domestic and international). And in “Transnational Telephone Games in Writing Education: Collaborations on Writing Education in South Asia,” Shyam Sharma and Gene Hammond describe their and their colleagues’ efforts to engage directly in establishing collaborations with IHEs in South Asia. Finding little effect from one-off visits to IHEs outside the global North by U.S. experts in writing, Sharma and Hammond describe both exciting opportunities and humbling challenges experienced through a series of

transnational WAC collaborations among Nepalese and U.S.-based faculty and administrators, leading them to advocate for exchanges valuing experience and processes more than the institutionalization of programs and centers.

Chapters in Part III, “Transing Institutional Structures,” explore the challenges and strategies for transnational and transdisciplinary work posed by specific institutional conditions, locations, and arrangements. In “Mapping Transnational Institutions: Connections between WAC/WID and Qatar’s Engineering Industry,” Amy Hodges draws on data from interviews with alumni of TAMUQ (Texas A&M University Qatar), an international branch campus, and learning outcomes statements from course syllabi to show how the “export” of learning outcomes for WAC/WID programs is mediated by the specific conditions, interests, and needs of “local” students hailing from diverse nationalities and bringing diverse language backgrounds despite claims and institutional policies to the contrary that aim to offer “the same” education and educational experience at both “home” and “branch” campuses. As her interview data show, specific needs of students lacking Qatari citizenship to secure employment, and the prevalence of translanguaging practices of moving among English, various Arabic dialects, and other languages produce simultaneously an apparent reinforcement of beliefs in the value of English monolingualism and a “flexible mindset towards communication” involving continuous invention of new rhetorical knowledge, and an “inevitable slippage between institutional and course policies and the lived experiences of student writers” that WAC/WID program directors can work to realign.

The need to take local considerations and needs into consideration in positioning WAC/WID programs is further highlighted in Monica Kwon’s chapter addressing “Challenges in Positioning WAC/WID in International Contexts: Perspectives from a Japanese Engineering Program.” Drawing on a study of engineering faculty at a Japanese IHE striving to draw more students from outside Japan as part of the Japanese government’s Top Global University Project, Kwon finds that faculty’s concern with teaching disciplinary knowledge in Japanese conflicts with that project’s aim to increase English Medium instruction (“EMI”), and that the greater importance those faculty place on the ability to speak, but not write, English conflicts with basic tenets of the WAC/WID movement postulating a close relation between writing and knowledge development. Likewise, the faculty’s own lack of training in EMI, and their perception of such instruction being culturally different and more conducive to critical thinking than Japanese instruction, leads them to reject EMI as ill-suited to Japanese students (while advantaging non-Japanese students), despite their own belief in the importance of critical thinking to students in their academic and post-academic careers.

In “Enhancing Science and Engineering Undergraduate Students’ Writing in the Disciplines at Chinese Universities,” Yongyan Li provides a different exploration of the significance of the “local” in grasping WAC/WID practices. Based on

her study of a corpus of published scholarship (in Chinese) on Chinese undergraduate disciplinary writing pedagogy (in Chinese and in English), Li identifies three strands in that scholarship that appear to be unknown to scholars of writing outside the Chinese context, and notes that scholars working in any one of the strands are not aware of those working in others—e.g., content teachers and language teachers—despite the fact that both groups appear to agree with Donahue that “writing and disciplinary knowledge are embedded in each other” (2011, 25). That said, Li finds promise in the move toward English for Academic Purposes for greater emphasis on “writing to learn” and increased cross-cultural discussion.

In “Dimensions of Transnational Writing Exchange: An Exploratory Approach,” Mohammad Shamsuzzaman describes both quantitative and qualitative differences in the writing produced by U.S. and Bangladeshi undergraduate students and in their comments on one another’s texts in a course engaging peer review between undergraduate students at North South University, Bangladesh and the State University of New York in the US. These suggest not only different degrees of familiarity with English-medium academic writing conventions encouraged in the US but also conflicting beliefs about writing development generally.

In “Transnational Translingual Literacies: Re-thinking Graduate Student Identity and Support,” Jonathan Hall and Nela Navarro use their study of graduate students currently designated as “international” to argue that these students can be better understood as “transnational emerging scholars” with complex relations to a diversity of languages, disciplinary and professional identities, and socio-cultural affiliations. Focusing on graduate academic support programs (“Grad-ASPs”), Hall and Navarro reveal how, all too often, there is a mismatch between such programs’ assumptions about and expectations for the graduate students recruited to U.S. IHEs, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, those students’ experiences, interests, and desires. That mismatch leads Hall and Navarro to argue for programs to engage students more directly about their own complex identities and to treat them as emerging transnational professional participants in disciplinary work rather than as outsiders deficient in knowledge and language.

In Federico Navarro’s Afterword, “Translingual Lives and Writing Pedagogy: Acculturation, Enculturation, and Emancipation,” he reflects on the collection’s chapters and cautions against naïve approaches that overlook local constraints and conditions, and those that treat locality as determinative and that overlook commonalities across disparate locations. Instead, Navarro argues for a stance attentive to the specific pressures and conditions obtaining in historical, temporal, and spatial locations. Noting, by way of illustration, differences in how evidentiality is marked in Quechua in comparison to Spanish and English, Navarro highlights the need to be attentive to such structural differences without dismissing the need to challenge center-periphery power dynamics engaged in linguistic negotiations. And, more broadly, Navarro reminds us of the need to extend notions of transnationality,

translinguality, and transdisciplinarity beyond those that take as their anchor those conditions and concerns dominating the Anglophone Global North, whereby cross-language relations are defined in terms of English monolingualism only, and the institutional and curricular structures of U.S. IHEs as the presumptive norm, whether to be maintained or challenged.

Navarro's Afterword usefully highlights the friction engaged in the movement across languages, cultures, disciplines, institutions, and nation states in teaching academic writing. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2005) reminds us, friction is "where the rubber meets the road," necessary to any movement while simultaneously shaping the velocity and direction of that movement—even producing what might seem like stasis (p. 6). While often seen as nothing more than an impediment to movement, that friction, arising from the inevitable encounters with difference, defines and makes possible that movement.

At the same time, such friction itself, as Tsing warns, charges and changes all participants in such encounters (2005): all that meets, as it were, is transformed by the meeting, thereby not so much highlighting what was different previously but making newly different all involved. The transnational, translingual, and transdisciplinary character of contemporary university work, including the character of academic writing it produces, is the ever-emerging product of such encountering. As the chapters in this collection and the collection itself demonstrate, such products mark instances of the confluence of previous movement and the friction causing and resulting from such movement: how and why academic writing and its teaching are moving in the ways they are, and what new movements and changes might result from the encounters to which these lead.

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