ESL COMPOSITION AS A LITERATE ART OF THE CONTACT ZONE

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How do we design an English as a second language (ESL) composition course that situates language and writing in the contact zone? Traditionally, these students (largely from international backgrounds) have been expected to orientate to the norms of “native speakers” of English in their writing. ESL students are expected to develop proficiency in a variety of English normative in native speaker communities, or the version of it labeled “Standard Written English” (SWE) in writing contexts. These students are considered to be alien to English, and the English varieties they do bring with them are considered unsuitable for formal academic purposes. In matters of writing conventions, these students are considered strangers to the genres, knowledge traditions, and voice treated as normative in an American university. The genres of writing in their communities are considered formulaic, when American universities require rhetorical sophistication and creativity. The knowledge traditions they bring are considered too personal or conformist to serve them well in writing that requires criticality and reason. They are perceived to be distinterested in voice, when American universities require individuality. Not only are these students considered strangers to these expectations, they are also considered to be influenced too much by their community norms that they will find it difficult to make the transition to American college expectations. Though I am generalizing these assumptions considerably, the pedagogical practice of even well meaning teachers is often influenced by variations of such assumptions, meant to remedy what these students lack. An orientation to ESL writing as a contact zone activity requires a reconsideration of these assumptions and practices.

A contact zones orientation would first involve treating the identities of these students differently. We have to consider these students as not *ESL* but *multilingual*. The acronym *ESL* treats those who speak English as the first language as the frame of reference in assessing the proficiency of these students. The label connotes that these students are trying to (or should) approximate the norms of the native speakers. However, multilingual life in the contact zone doesn’t enable us to enumerate people’s language proficiencies easily (as first, second, or third). People shuttle in and out of languages, borrowing semiotic resources freely for their communicative purposes, developing equal proficiency in all of them as relevant for their purposes. Besides, a contact zone orientation would make us treat languages as always in contact, borrowing from each other and influenced by each other, often in ways that are not easy to distinguish. The adoption of the term *multilingual* would make us perceive these students as expanding their repertoires rather than adding something missing in their language proficiency. From this point of view, a contact zone writing course would not be remedial. In fact, often English is one of the languages international and minority students possess as part of their language repertoire. This realization would motivate us to look at these students as already bringing some awareness of English, or at least bringing multilingual proficiencies that will enable them to appropriate English in ways they have already acquired so many other languages. More importantly, a contact zone perspective would redefine our goal as not preparing these students for conformity with American norms, but critically renegotiating English for contact purposes. Such a competence focuses on communicating in contexts where there are multiple norms of English, appropriating dominant norms according to one’s own purposes and values, and even bringing together competing norms for voice—a capacity that is beginning to be called *translingual* (Horner et al; Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”). While a translingual competence will find manifestation in different types of written products of both native and nonnative speakers, a particularly creative type of hybrid written product is *codemeshing* (Young; Canagarajah, “The Place”). While current pedagogical wisdom holds that students’ own varieties may be kept for home, informal, or social uses, but SWE adopted for formal classroom purposes, codemeshing brings together one’s repertoires within a single text for voice. In such texts, writers strategically laminate their diverse Englishes within the dominant framework of SWE norms to develop a hybrid text that features diverse codes.

The contact zone perspective has other implications for the writing activity beyond language concerns. It would involve perceiving genres as not already defined according to the norms of specific communities, but taking new shape in relation to intercultural contact. The genres of the contact zone are therefore not static or homogeneous. They are always kept open to change and reconstruction. This applies to academic genres as well. They take different realization according to the communities and contexts involved in the writing activity. While students must recognize that there are always dominant norms relating to academic genres, they must also remember that these norms can be negotiated strategically in relation to their personal agendas and values. The same applies to knowledge. Though the academy has its definitions of what counts as scholarly, knowledge is constructed in the contact zones of the personal and the scholarly, practical and theoretical, not to mention various disciplinary boundaries and community traditions. The established scholarly discourses in the academy often occlude the mediation of these diverse factors that go into their production. Multilingual students must realize that the knowledge represented in their writing has to be negotiated in relation to the intellectual traditions meeting in the contact zone.

A contact zone writing pedagogy therefore treats languages, genres, and knowledge as always contested, but taking new shape in relation to the rhetorical objectives and interests of the people involved. While recognizing the reality of power behind the established rules in different contexts, the pedagogy also inculcates faith in the negotiability of norms. I describe below how my course is designed to encourage a shuttling between languages, genres, and knowledge traditions to develop a translingual writing competence.

WRITING ACTIVITY

The genre I ask students to focus on for this course is itself a hybrid. It permits a range of realizations. It can be rendered as a straight-forward personal narrative on the one end or as a reflexive and well researched academic article on the other. It will be called a *literacy autobiography* in its former version and *autoethnography* in the latter. Furthermore, it can accommodate different voices and rhetorics within the body of the same text. The genre accommodates the personal and the objective, narrative and argumentation, community discourses and academic constructs. The writing process will engage students in activities that are part of academic literacy, such as gathering of literacy artifacts, interviewing others for information, documenting one’s experiences, reading scholarly publications, and data analysis, as students move their first-person narratives to an autoethnography. The trajectory will also take them through shorter texts of diverse rhetorical modes, such as description, comparison, cause/effect, and argumentation. The process of transforming personal experience into an autoethnography will develop the language awareness and rhetorical sensitivity to engage with the hybrid and layered genres one encounters in the contact zones in the academy and outside.

This writing activity is also designed to generate a reflexive awareness of students’ own literacy backgrounds. In reflecting on their multilingual literate lives, students will analyze the tensions between different language norms and literate practices, their strategies in negotiating them, their efforts for voice, and their trajectories of development. The exercise will make students value their experiences and learn from them. Such autoethnographies often show me that multilingual students are developing valuable skills and strategies of negotiating competing languages and literacies in contact zones outside the classroom (see Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”). Teachers should tap into these experiences to develop a more reflective and critical writing competence in the classroom. The writing project would also help students learn from the literacy trajectories of their peers, conduct more reflective analyses of their experiences, and engage in grounded theorization of language and literacy. More importantly, in traveling between their personal experiences, writing about them, and reading research articles, the students will develop a reflective and critical awareness of literacy.

In moving towards the final product of a 12-15 page autoethnography, students will write various shorter drafts. They will start with simple and short narratives that describe their early literacy experiences. As they go further, their drafts will parallel the chapters in Chang’s *Autoethnography as Method,* which orientates readers to the theory, methodology, and rhetoric of autoethnography. After situating autoethnography within different forms of narrative research, Chang leads readers through the processes of gathering literacy artifacts as data, generating memory details, interviewing other sources for information, and storing and analyzing data. The drafts will follow these stages of tapping into diverse sources to elicit details and experiences on one’s literacy trajectory. In the process, students will also engage in different genres of writing— comparison, cause/effect analysis, and argumentation, in addition to description and narrative. Through these shorter projects, students will also discover their thesis for the final product.

Though some might consider this a very demanding genre for multilingual students, in some ways it is also a safe genre. No one is handicapped in this exercise. Every student has a story to share about his or her literacy background. The personal nature of this exercise also makes each person the authority in this writing. It is their story, which only they know best. The final product can be rendered in more complex terms if one has the motivation and aptitude for it. However, textual complexity can also develop slowly through the process of writing, as the students engage in the shorter projects. At the end of the course, we will see different levels of achievement. However, it is important for teachers to provide spaces for the motivations and possibilities of students at different levels. What is important is that the project enables every student to submit a product, of whatever level of complexity.

READING

In addition to the book by Chang, the second important text for the course is *Rotten English* by Dora Ahmad. This book brings together creative writing, personal reflections, autobiographical narratives, and semi-scholarly discussions on the ways English is negotiated in the social life of multilinguals. Poems by writers like Louise Bennett and short stories by those like Grace Patrick show the ways multilinguals confidently use local varieties of English for expression. Excerpts from novels by Ken Sara-Wiwo and Gautam Malkani show the ways English is mixed with urban dialects in fascinating forms of codemeshing. These confident and dazzling uses of English would motivate students to consider how SWE can be appropriated for their purposes or merged with their repertoires for voice.

The short essays in the book will also encourage students to reflect critically on the attitudes of other multilingual writers toward using English. We start with excerpts from Thomas Macaulay’s *Minutes* which reveals the colonial motivations for introducing English in other lands. We move on to consider personal reflections by those like Chinua Achebe and Amy Tan on the tensions English generates as they struggle to represent their community experiences. We move on to more strident criticism by those like Kamau Brathwaite, who expresses the need to resist alien values and seek local inspiration for voice in English. We conclude with the essay of Gabriel Okara that calls for experimentation on a hybrid English that represents local experiences, and Gloria Anzaldua’s that enacts such an alternative in a codemeshed text. These essays display a range of responses to using English by multilinguals, and will generate endless debates on the best strategy for voice. More importantly, they acquaint students with linguistic and textual options they can themselves try out in their writing. In fact, some of the texts in this reading, such as those by Tan and Anzaldua, can themselves be considered autoethnographies and serve as models for student writing.

An important source of reading in the course is our own writing. Very early in the course, I provide one of my own published literacy autobiographies as an example. Though literacy autobiographies by better known scholars are available, there is a purpose in prescribing the instructor’s own writing. Students have the option of seeing me, another multilingual, struggling with competing language norms and literacies to develop a hybrid practice for voice. I have heard from past students that this essay has served to give them confidence that their own multilingual experiences are worthy if being rendered in writing and perhaps being published. The essay also motivates them to tap into their experiences for reflection and analysis. Classroom discussion of the essay has generated personal questions that dig deeper into my experiences and probe the rationale for my writing choices.

In the same vein, students also read each others’ drafts throughout the course. This exercise makes their writing purposeful and meaningful. Students are aware that they are writing to a supportive and interested audience. We become a community of practice, involved in a common project, benefitting from mutual help, learning, and practice.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

The course is designed as practice-based. Students learn about writing primarily by writing. The other activities in the classroom, such as idea generating, research, peer reviewing, and serial revising also teach students important practices in the writing process. The course is also collaborative. Students interact with each other and the instructor to interpret the readings, help each other in doing research and collecting data, commenting on each other’s essays, and revising and editing their writing together.

The electronic instructional system (*Angel*, in my university) helps tremendously in a practice-based and collaborative pedagogy. Each student has a folder into which he/she will post their drafts, journal entries, and other course work. Their peers and I will also post our comments on the student’s drafts into his or her folder. This arrangement helps in many ways. Everyone always has access to the various artifacts in the course. The folder provides a record to students on how their own and others’ writing is developing. Students can examine the ways in which their ideas and writing are taking shape. It thus serves as a portfolio of their work during the semester, helping them reflect on their own development. Students often reflexively comment on their material in their folder in their weekly journal entries.

The electronic instructional system also enables us to have online discussions to complement in-class discussions. This medium makes the interpretation of the texts more participatory. Students build on each other’s interpretations to negotiate a consensus on their reading. There is also a lot of sharing of different perspectives and opinions, sometimes leading to debates and arguments that further help in negotiating the meaning of reading and writing.

In all this, the course is highly interactive. It encourages students to engage with each other in developing interpretations for texts, shaping their written texts, assessing their work, and generating ideas and opinions. There are important pedagogical functions behind such practice. Students learn that meaning is co-constructed. They have to collaborate in developing a shared understanding of the texts they read and write. There are research findings to suggest that it is in this manner that communication works and succeeds in multilingual contact zones (see Canagarajah, “Lingua Franca English”). Interlocutors don’t frame their texts and talk in relation to norms exterior to their interaction. They primarily focus on constructing meaning with each other, in relation to the norms they bring to the interaction. Meaning, in this sense, is situational, social, and collaborative. Since there are diverse norms for languages, genres, and literacies in the contact zone, interlocutors have to negotiate them situationally for texts and talk that make sense to each other. This does not mean that multilinguals are insensitive to dominant norms and ideologies of correctness in society. They consider these norms open to negotiation, especially in relation to their interests and values. Though this practice is risky, mutilinguals assume that success depends on their creativity and agency to renegotiate dominant norms in their favor. My pedagogical environment provides a space where such attitudes and orientations multilingual students bring from contact zones outside the classroom can be put into practice.

Students also learn that writing products are socially and contextually shaped. Not only do they generate their ideas collaboratively, in relation to what others are thinking and writing. They also shape the structure, organization, and genre conventions in relation to the uptake of others. Though students may initially come with some strong preferences on what to write, they renegotiate their products in relation to the preferences and suggestion of their peers and instructor. The text emerges out of the contact between these different expectations and values. The final product may not conform to a rigid notion of genre or textual conventions of any one community. It may take a shape that is appropriate to the rhetorical objectives, audience expectations, and authorial interests in that contact zone.

The interactions and responses of the students are not always homogeneous or predictable in these classroom negotiations. They are as diverse as the communities and social backgrounds students come from. More importantly, it is not uncommon for multilingual students to express the dominant ideologies of literacy and language norms. They have been influenced by socially powerful discourses to treat writing according to established models. Reviewing classroom transcripts of interactions and electronic communication, I have noted how I myself straddle the instructor’s voice that favors established norms and a multilingual researcher’s persona that favors creativity and appropriation. These conflicting responses are important to acknowledge. Contact zone writing occurs in contexts marked by power differences and inequalities. It also occurs in a context of diverse norms participants bring to an interaction. These tensions of the contact zone have to be negotiated by readers and writers for voice. Successful communication calls for strategic and judicious negotiation of these conflicting norms according to one’s own interests and values.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

What kind of final product do I expect from this course? Though the syllabus doesn’t say that a codemeshed essay is required, some students do produce essays that mesh different varieties of English. As they engage with the essays that theorize the possibility of hybrid codes and creative writing that performs such codemeshing in the Dora collection, some students gradually become comfortable with meshing codes. Furthermore, their own reflections on their multilingual lives and increased appreciation for voice in literacy lead writers to experiment with appropriations of SWE. Often drafts which initially approximate SWE norms progress eventually to bring in qualified uses of their vernaculars. In some sense, these literacy narratives require such a codemeshing for their rhetorical effectiveness. When writers discuss the ways they negotiate their multilingual repertoires and literacies, using SWE uncritically would sound contradictory. Therefore, the writing project itself inspires many students to codemesh.

However, not all students codemesh in their final products. Some student display the reverse trajectory. They start with various forms of codemeshing and proceed to approximate SWE norms. In such essays, what I look for is a critical and creative use of this language variety. The notion of translingual practice focuses more on the language awareness and metalinguistic competence that enables students to negotiate diverse semiotic resources for their own interests and voice, and not on a fixed type of textual product. In fact, SWE itself is not a monolithic variety. It is a social construct that accommodates diverse language resources. It is also a hybrid. It can be made to accommodate new registers and discourses. The repertoires of the students will therefore have a bearing on their use of SWE. It is possible that some sentence structures and idiomatic expressions may sound atypical. However, I look for the rhetorical appropriateness of that usage in that context and try to discern the author’s design in doing so. Whether students codemesh or approximate SWE, my focus is on developing a critical awareness of the different linguistic and literate traditions students draw from for their writing.

As it should be evident, the course doesn’t aim toward mastery of the conventional five paragraph essay, with the obligatory thesis statements and topic sentences, and error-free prose. It is difficult for any one-semester course to accomplish much. My syllabus states the following about what students should expect from the course:

This course will orientate you to the basic processes and practices of academic writing in English. Though you may not be able to write perfectly structured essays in language free of errors at the end of this course, you will have developed a good understanding of the ***writing process, language awareness,*** and ***rhetorical sensitivity*** that you will need to keep developing your proficiency as you continue your education in the university. Spending the whole semester on mastering one type of essay and language is unwise, as you will find that genres and registers change in different academic fields and contexts of writing. The processes this course develops will help you deal with any type of writing product you encounter and expand your writing repertoire for different contexts.

The course therefore focuses on the following three aspects:

*Writing process*: a familiarity with the stages of generating ideas, outlining the draft, collaborating with peers and the instructor on drafting and revising your text, and treating writing as an ongoing collaborative project.

*Language awareness*: an understanding of appropriate language for different contexts, the ways language norms are changing, strategies to represent diverse identities in language.

*Rhetorical sensitivity*: an orientation to effective writing style and structure for different contexts, in relation to the diverse expectations of one’s audience.

I make clear to my students my rationale for adopting this approach. Since the written products that are expected in their fields of study and in diverse social domains are always heterogeneous, it is unwise to spend the first semester of writing mastering certain fixed norms or forms. I also don’t think that there are certain codes or literacies that can be treated as generic or foundational to prepare students for the communicative challenges they will face later. What are generative and foundational are the underlying practices—i.e., writing process, language awareness, and rhetorical sensitivity—that the course focuses on.I make this clear in the syllabus when I articulate the philosophy behind my course:

The philosophy motivating this course is that writing occurs in the *contact zone*. The idea is that we write and communicate in a context where many languages, cultures, and knowledge traditions meet. Rather than imposing one way of using language or writing, the course aims to teach you how to engage with the diverse norms of the contact zone to construct effective texts. This metaphor of contact zones applies to ESL college writing in many ways. As ESL students, you are bringing language and rhetorical skills that will meet the norms of an American university. Rather than treating one norm (either yours or the university’s) as the sole option, you will negotiate both for creative alternatives. The college is itself a contact zone of diverse academic fields and intellectual traditions, with related styles of communication. In addition to this diversity, there are also changes underway in writing, English language, literacy, and communication in the context of globalization and technology. The writing processes, language awareness, and rhetorical sensitivity that this course focuses on prepare you for such diversity in college English writing.

ASSESSMENT

The variable nature of the written products generated by this course might create some difficult challenges for assessment. However, since the focus of the course is not on products but linguistic/literate/rhetorical awareness, I grade students on process as well as product.

Process refers to many things in relation to assessment. It refers, for example, to the extent to which students involve themselves in the writing process. Their commitment to outlining, serial drafting, revising, and editing would reflect such an engagement. Their involvement in the collaborative process of writing can be judged on their engagement in reading the drafts of their peers and offering constructive feedback. Such involvement will also shape their reflections in their journal. The extent to which they engage with their experiences of past literacies and present projects, and develop their perspectives in a sustained manner in their drafts, will also demonstrate their engagement in process. Process also relates to the ways in which students negotiate meanings and interpretations of the course texts (including peer writing) in collaboration with others.

In assessing process I hope to gauge the three metacognitive strengths I hope to develop through this course-- i.e., writing process, language awareness, and rhetorical sensitivity. The grade for process is subjective, but fair to the level of involvement students individually display. I grade them along the following three categories: Good, Satisfactory, and Unsatisfactory. I give periodic feedback to students to indicate where they stand in relation to these categories in their course participation.

The letter grade for the final product would convey to students that metacognitive skills have implications for text construction. The written product matters. However, it is not purely formal correctness that I look for. Beyond proficiency, I look for aptitude—i.e., the promise students display for future text construction in their trajectory of development. There are also rhetorical considerations that outweigh grammatical correctness. We have to consider the extent to which the chosen organization and structure of the essay suits the author’s objectives; the way the author’s voice finds expression in the essay; the confidence and creativity with which the author is negotiating competing norms; and the ability to develop a thematically focused text. I also keep in mind that sometimes norms have to be violated for performative reasons. Considerations of voice or expressive purpose often demand renegotiating norms.

All this is not to say that norms are to be ignored. An understanding of SWE and its place in academic writing cannot be overlooked. The power of SWE is impressed upon students through various means in the course—i.e., published texts which use it; scholarly essays which discuss their importance; the comments from the instructor and peers which (often unconsciously) assume it as the norm for their evaluation. What is more important is for students to engage critically and creatively with SWE. This calls for negotiation. One has to merge his/her desired codes in a qualified way, in relation to dominant norms. A use of one’s repertoires without consideration of the dominant norms would sound naïve, and fail to display rhetorical sensitivity or language awareness. Besides, the objective of the course is repertoire-building for contact zones, and SWE is an important part of one’s repertoire.

Even when students use hybrid codes informed by their local languages, vernacular Englishes, and personal repertoires, instructors should consider such factors as intentionality, appropriateness, and control in assessing such usage. It can be very difficult to define *error* in hybrid and creative language usage. Is the deviation from SWE a sign of creativity or lack of proficiency? There are text-internal and writer-specific evidences that would help us answer this question. I consider the following questions when I encounter deviations from SWE: 1. Is there evidence that the author is using this feature with awareness? (i.e., if the usages seems contradictory or inconsistent in the same text or in the writer’s other drafts, one can assume that it is a mistake or error); 2. Is the usage rhetorically effective? (i.e., what does the unconventional usage add to the text?). These two questions will also show the writer’s level of control over the medium. The writer’s language awareness will become evident in the extent to which he/she uses language that is rhetorically motivated and textually designed. Not all deviations from SWE are meaningful or grammatical. Not everything goes in the contact zone.

CONCLUSION

There are many questions that might arise on the appropriateness of such a practice-based and collaborative pedagogy of translingual writing for ESL first year students. Many instructors assume that ESL students have such low proficiency in English language that it is idealistic to address issues of voice with them. Even well-intentioned teachers often assume that a course for such students should focus on “basics.” Basics, for ESL students, is often interpreted as grammatical competence. Therefore, the whole ESL first year course is focused on teaching basic grammar in many institutions. But this is a pedagogy of deficiency. It underestimates the ability of multilingual students. We must remember that these students often come with advanced metalinguistic competence, deriving from socialization in contact zones and shuttling between languages. They have the aptitude to develop competence in additional languages. Furthermore, the global status of English for contact purposes means that many students already come with considerable exposure to the language. Rather than thinking that we have to start building competence from scratch, we have to consider how to we can build on the strengths and resources multilingual students bring with them. Moreover, issues of voice are not irrelevant for novice writers. Some models of language and literacy acquisition theorize that any learning is entwined with identity development (Norton). They are not separable. The possibility of forming empowering identities motivates students to appropriate a language with agency.

The expectation of codemeshed uses of English or hybrid literacies may also be considered too idealistic for ESL first year students by some instructors. Many prefer to have students write short paragraphs, culminating in five-paragraph essays in SWE. Well intentioned teachers may argue that we can teach codemeshing only after SWE has been mastered. Codemeshing and hybrid literacies might be considered possible only for advanced writers. However, research in multilingual communities shows that language contact and mixing is the norm for these communities (Canagarajah, “Lingua Franca English”). Notions of standardization, language separation, and linguistic purity are the exceptions. Besides, multilingual students already come with rich traditions of codemeshing. What I have found in beginning level ESL classes is that students already bring a repertoire of Englishes from social media sites and popular culture. They are already codemeshing. What they need is a rhetorical awareness about what extent of meshing goes where and when. In other words, codemeshing is not a new skill and doesn’t have to be taught. What needs to be taught is the extent and type of codemeshing that is acceptable in academic settings.

There are also concerns about how such classroom literacies relate to the dominant norms in larger educational and social institutions. By encouraging multilingual students to use English creatively for voice, are we preparing them for failure and stigmatization in educational and social institutions which value privileged forms of English? Contact zone literacies don’t mean that students don’t develop an awareness of dominant norms. As they shuttle between different varieties of English, students are also developing a keen sensitivity to divergent norms in different social contexts. In other words, my pedagogy is not disinterested in developing an awareness and competence in privileged norms. It actually expects students to go beyond a passive and mechanical use of norms and engage in creative appropriations of them. As students engage in translingual practices, they are shuttling in and out of codes and developing a metalinguistic awareness of what is contextually appropriate.

Therefore the course goes beyond developing competence in only one mode of writing or tradition of literacy. While recognizing dominant norms for various institutional contexts, the course aims to develop competencies for the relativity of norms in the global contact zones. As students receive conflicting feedback, read texts with different norms, and compose serial drafts for slightly different rhetorical objectives, they are also developing a rhetorical awareness of what codes are appropriate in what setting. A student who composes only one form of text all the time (even though admirably hybrid) has a poor repertoire. The more versatile students recognize and develop competencies for shifting norms in response to the context. The course aims to develop the language awareness to recognize fluid contexts and norms, and perform accordingly.

Is this pedagogical goal eventually helpful for social and educational mobility for mutlilingual students? My assumption is that appropriating texts and codes from one’s own perspective gives one a critical edge. It also develops a language awareness and rhetorical sensitivity that will help students engage with the diverse texts, genres, and knowledge they would encounter in the global contact zones. Success today requires dealing with unpredictable, changing, and relative norms of language and literacy. It is possible that some students may not succeed in the short term to produce the stereotypical language and literate artifacts expected in some academic contexts. However, in the long run, the development of the more subtle writing processes, language awareness and rhetorical sensitivity will help them go far. Moreover, we have to prepare students for risk taking in the contact zones. In fact, all writing is risky. Writing involves making rhetorical and linguistic decisions that are controversial and subjective, relative to one’s contextual constraints and rhetorical objectives. While we sometimes miscalculate our strategies and/or face unimaginative audiences who don’t measure up to our expectations, in others we find that our risk taking is richly rewarded. Preparing students for these variable responses and rewards in the global context zones is part of the training my collaborative and practice-based writing pedagogy provides. Assuring them success if they master a monolithic product is to lead them up the garden path.

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Appendix:

Syllabus

First Year ESL Composition:

Writing at the Contact Zone

This course will orientate you to the basic processes and practices of academic writing in English. Though you may not be able to write perfectly structured essays in language free of errors at the end of this course, you will have developed a good understanding of the writing process, language awareness, and rhetorical sensitivity that you will need to keep developing your proficiency as you continue your education in the university. Spending the whole semester on mastering one type of essay and language is unwise, as you will find that genres and registers change in different academic fields and contexts of writing. The processes this course develops will help you deal with any type of writing product you encounter and expand your writing repertoire for different contexts.

The course therefore focuses on the following three aspects:

Writing process: a familiarity with the stages of generating ideas, outlining the draft, collaborating with peers and the instructor on drafting and revising your text, and treating writing as an ongoing collaborative project.

Language awareness: an understanding of appropriate language for different contexts, the ways language norms are changing, strategies to represent diverse identities in language.

Rhetorical sensitivity: an orientation to effective writing style and structure for different contexts, in relation to the diverse expectations of one’s audience.

The philosophy motivating this course is that writing occurs in the *contact zone*. The idea is that we write and communicate in a context where many languages, cultures, and knowledge traditions meet. Rather than imposing one way of using language or writing, the course aims to teach you how to engage with the diverse norms of the contact zone to construct effective texts. This metaphor of contact zones applies to ESL college writing in many ways. As ESL students, you are bringing language and rhetorical skills that will meet the norms of an American university. Rather than treating one norm (either yours or the university’s) as the sole option, you will negotiate both for creative alternatives. The college is itself a contact zone of diverse academic fields and intellectual traditions, with related styles of communication. In addition to this diversity, there are also changes underway in writing, English language, literacy, and communication in the context of globalization and technology. The writing processes, language awareness, and rhetorical sensitivity that this course focuses on prepare you for such diversity in college English writing.

Required Texts:

Ahmad, Dohra. (ed.), *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology*. New York: Norton, 2007.

Chang, Heewon. *Autoethnography as Method*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast, 2008.

Supplementary Material:

Additional essays will be posted online (in *Angel*) in the folder titled “Supplementary Material” as relevant to the themes and tasks that emerge in the course. The following materials are already posted in that folder:

Canagarajah, A. Suresh. “The Fortunate Traveler: Shuttling between Communities and Literacies by Economy Class.” In Belcher and Connor, eds., *Reflections on Multiliterate Lives.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001. 23–37.

Questionnaire for literacy autobiography: Belcher, Diane, and Ulla Connor. (eds.) *Reflections on Multiliterate Lives*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001. pp. 209-211

Course Requirements:

The main writing requirement is a literacy autobiography. This requires writing about the development of your literacy skills in the languages of your proficiency. This is a very fluid genre, taking different shape according to your interests and abilities. At its simplest, this is a personal narrative on your language and literacy development. At a more advanced level, it takes the form of an autoethnograpy, a genre valued by researchers and scholars. To satisfy the requirements of this genre, you are encouraged to do disciplined research to collect data relating to your development and document literacy artifacts. You will also read research articles that relate to your themes and may help you further analyze and interpret your personal experiences. These components will make this genre of writing very hybrid. It can merge narrative and argumentation, the personal and the academic. In other words, this genre ranges from a simple first-person narrative at one level to a well-researched autoethnography at the other end, allowing you to approximate whichever level based on your motivations and interests.

We will do several short writing assignments that will help you develop your literacy autobiography and then turn it into an autoethnography. We will also read and analyze several model narratives, including mine (see Canagarajah in the supplementary reading), to give examples of this genre. We will read an accessible book, *Autoethnography as Method*, to learn more about the academic version of this writing. The chapters in this book will walk you through the research and analysis that will strengthen your narrative.

The second required text for the coure is *Rotten English.* The readings from this book will help your writing project and language awareness in many ways. The book features different genres of writing: essays, autobiographies, poems, and fiction. These texts are written by multilingual and second language writers like you. They present diverse views on the role of English in multilingual communities in different points of their history; models of writing by multiliguals who use English creatively to represent their identities; narratives on the role of English in the lives of multilinguals from different lands; and debates on different attitudes and orientations to English in multilingual communities. The selections scheduled for each class meeting have to be read before you come to the class.

The course is computer-assisted. You will find on *Angel* a folder with your name, where you will post your assigned work. Your peers and I will have access to your folder. We will comment on your drafts periodically. The web based instructional system will allow us to conduct online discussions; share our journals; post our drafts, data, and activities; and communicate with each other on writing collaboration, classroom management, and other course issues.

Scheduled writing assignments have to be posted into your folder before the class meeting. You will find my comments in your folder before the following class meeting. In addition to writing your own drafts, you will periodically review the drafts of your peers and post your comments into their folder.

An important requirement is maintaining a weekly journal. You may comment on your reflections on the writing projects, reading assignments, or research activity. Post your journal entry into your folder. Note that your peers and I will read and comment on your entries periodically.

Grading:

Drafts: 35%

Journal: 10%

Research activity: 10%

Peer review: 10%

Final Submission of Literacy Autobiography: 35%

The drafts, journal, research activity, and peer review will be graded as Good, Satisfactory, and Unsatisfactory. You will receive feedback that will indicate how you are faring. The final submission will have a letter grade. The grade will be based on thematic focus, appropriate organization, effectiveness of style, and care in editing.

Schedule:

Week 1: Introductions;

Reading: Canagarajah, “Fortunate Traveler” essay

Writing: Answer questionnaire from Belcher and Connor on your literacy development

Activity: Share questionnaire with peer and interview him/her on additional matters of interest

Week 2: Reading: Macaulay excerpt (Ahmad, p.469); Chang, Ch.1

Writing: Draft 1: My feelings about English writing; outline and paragraph

Activity: Exchange paragraph with peer and suggest improvements

Week 3: Reading: Achebe essay (Ahmad, p.425); Chang. Ch. 2

Writing: Draft 2: Revision of Paragraph

Activity: Edit revised version of peer

Week 4: Reading: Tan essay (Ahmad, p.502); Chang, Ch. 3

Writing: Draft 3: Attitudes to English and home language: A comparison essay

Activity: Small group discussion of drafts

Week 5: Reading: Grace (Ahmad, p.165); Chang, Ch. 4.

Writing: Draft 4: Revision of “Attitude to English and home language”

Activity: Peer critique and editing of draft 4

Week 6: Reading: Bennett (Ahmad, p.37); Kasaipwalova (Ahmad, p.202); Chang, Ch. 5

Writing: Draft 5: Most striking memory of earliest writing in English

Activity: Collecting Personal Memory Data; send summary of your findings to folder

Week 7: Reading: Brathwaite essay (Ahmad, p.458); Brathwaite poem (Ahmad, p.42).

Writing: Draft 6: Revision of “Most striking memory”

Activity: Peer critique of draft 5; identify and start reading at least three published articles that relate to your literacy experiences

Week 8: Reading: Lovelace (Ahmad, p.214); Chang, Ch. 6

Writing: Draft 7: Explaining my attitudes: A cause/effect essay

Activity: Collecting Self Reflective Data; send summary of findings to folder

Week 9: Reading: McKay (Ahmad, p.82); Keens-Douglas (Ahmad, p.68); Chang, Ch. 7

Writing: Draft 8: Revising “Explaining”; send annotations of articles to folder

Activity: Collecting external data; send summary of findings to folder

Week 10: Reading: Johnson (Ahmad, p.64); Mutabaruka (Ahmad, p.85); Chang, Ch. 8

Writing: Outlining literacy autoethnography

Activity: Review of peer’s outline; read summary of peer’s research results and help find a thesis for his/her literacy narrative

Week 11: Reading: Malkani (Ahmad, p.348); Mistry (Ahmad, p.232); Chang. Ch. 9

Writing: Draft 9: First draft of literacy autoethnography

Activity: Managing data; read draft of peer and provide comments for improvement

Week 12: Reading: Okara essay (Ahmad, p.475); Chang, Ch. 10

Writing: Draft 9: continuation

Activity: Analyzing and interpreting data; peer critique of partner’s draft

Week 13: Reading: Anzaldua essay (Ahmad, p.437);

Writing: Draft 10: Revision of literacy autoethnography

Activity: Review peer’s draft

Week 14: Reading: Iweala (Ahmad, p.330); Saro-Wiwa (Ahmad, p.390)

Writing: Second revision of literacy autoethnography

Activity: Editing your peer’s draft

Week 15: Reading: Chosen student essays for general class discussion

Writing: Final edits and submission of final draft of literacy autoethnography