NEGOTIATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN SECOND- OR FOREIGN-LANGUAGE WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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As educational researchers and second/foreign language instructors, we maintain that the second language (L2) writing context elicits the negotiation of difference and develops an awareness of language as a carrier of individual and collective cultural identities. In line with the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer* (2015), we also firmly believe that teachers and others supporting L2 writers can take a number of steps to help students better navigate the challenging and complex process of transferring their writing knowledge and skills in their first language (L1) to the L2. As the *Elon Statement* notes, writing development is strongly linked to meta-cognition of available identities, as well as to situational and audience awareness. This chapter is intended to explore further the concept of developing student awareness of available identities in the process of learning a second language and, particularly, L2 writing. We argue that identity, situational, and audience awareness are "even more critical in writing transfer between languages because of the need to negotiate language-based differences and to develop awareness about the ways language operates in written communication in each language" (*Elon Statement on Writing Transfer,* 2015, pp. 4–5). In this context, the aim of this chapter is to enrich our common understanding of how students experience the transition from L1 to L2 writing in higher education settings. We do this by presenting and discussing the core findings from a multi-institutional project that comprises three separate studies of L2 writing conducted by the authors. The three studies represent three different linguistic, cultural, institutional, and pedagogical contexts. This particular cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary framework allows new perspectives to emerge, especially regarding the crucial role that identity plays in student approaches to L2 writing and issues of writing transfer. Based on these studies, we also claim that L2

writing is a critical transition that involves the negotiation of multiple identities in order to be successful. Finally, we conclude that since L2 writing is inevitably shaped by students' self-perceptions and attitudes, more research should be conducted to study these aspects of second and foreign language writing and, consequently, more effort should be made to develop pedagogies to address self-perceptions and attitudes that deter students from developing as successful L2 writers. We close the chapter by summing up our common findings, showing how the L2 writing context can help provide new reflective frameworks for supporting students' writing abilities both in the L1 and the L2.

The processes and elements of the tasks involved in writing in L1 and L2 are far from identical. Based on the conceptualizations of transfer on the basis of the individual (Bereiter, 1995) and context (Greeno, Smith & Moore, 1993), we view L2 writing development as inextricably linked to students' perceptions of and attitudes toward writing in the L2. They inevitably engage in the changing contexts between the language uses of L1 and L2 and apply their acquired knowledge and principles to new writing situations. Recent writing transfer research has indicated that students' individual dispositions—such as value, self-efficacy, attribution, and self-regulation—play crucial roles in successful writing transfer beyond knowledge and skills (Driscoll & Wells, 2012). While we share this notion that students' individual dispositions are vital to their successful development as L2 writers, we think that students' self-perceptions and their socially and culturally constructed attitudes toward L2 acquisition also play an important role in their ability to transfer knowledge when writing in L2. This may be particularly true for adult students who have received previous training in L1 writing and have already formed distinct identities as academic and professional L1 writers, or those who have different experiences with their L2 writing in different contexts. Thus, drawing in particular on the works of Kramsch (1993, 2010), Byram (2010), and Wenger (1998), we focus on the social and cultural dimensions of language learning and identity negotiation.

To further examine the theoretical constructs of transfer and better understand writing transfer across different L2 writing contexts, we examine the role of student attitudes and perceptions in their development as writers. We explore the possibilities and problems of writing transfer from L1 to L2, as well as the effects that second/foreign language writing has on writers' identities, guided by the following shared questions:

(1) How and to what degree do students perceive their identities as L1 and L2 writers as similar or different from each other? What language learner identities are available to the students in each of our contexts? What role do students' individual and collective identities play in L2 writing?

(2) What do the students find most challenging about writing in the L2? How do their L1 writing experiences inform their L2 writing strategies? How do rhetorical and discursive strategies of L1 writing affect students' learning of L2 writing, and should this effect be viewed as an opportunity or as a problem when teaching second/foreign language writing?

(3) Based on our findings, how can we best support students writing in the L2, in transferring their academic writing skills from one language into another, or from one context to another?

Our multi-institutional research on teaching and learning L2 writing is predicated on the idea that cross-contextual, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary research into second/foreign language writing is essential for a clearer and broader picture to emerge on how writing transfer occurs from one language into another. In the following sections, we present the main findings of our three studies, which are based on quantitative and qualitative data collected in separate institutions, including data from surveys and semi-structured interviews with students. Although the purpose of our research was shared, each of us designed survey and interview questions as was deemed appropriate for his or her institutional context. Each research project was perceived and developed within a very particular institutional and cultural context, and this contextually sensitive approach allowed us to identify common threads in the process of writing transfer from L1 to L2. The first research project focuses on how Danish doctoral students experience and handle the processes and expectations associated with academic writing in L2 English and how they are addressed as a theme in supervision. The second research project addresses the need for designing a more successful approach to teaching advanced-level writing in a US Spanish-language classroom to make the transfer from L1 to L2 more effective, and at the same time to develop students' awareness about the (im)possibilities of directly and seamlessly transferring meaning from one language into another because of the differences in the worldviews that are apparent through language use. The third research project investigates Chinese international students' transitions to writing courses in a US university and how challenges from different, and sometimes conflicting, ways of communicating, living, and learning can account for the students' English writing development.

BECOMING AN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC: THE CASE OF DANISH DOCTORAL STUDENTS WRITING IN ENGLISH

BACKGROUND AND AIM OF STUDY

This project explores the challenges and self-perceptions of Danish students faced with transferring their academic writing skills from Danish to English

at the doctoral level at the Graduate School of Arts at Aarhus University in Denmark. In general, Danish doctoral students have such excellent oral skills in English that some are perceived as being bilingual, a circumstance that shapes both their own and their surroundings' relatively high expectations of their abilities as academic writers of English. This type of L2 writing context, in which the students have strong interpersonal communicative skills in English but are generally only beginning to develop their English academic writing skills, has been underexplored.

We initiated this project in 2011 because we noticed several tendencies that needed more systematic attention. As in other Scandinavian and European countries, an increasing number of doctoral students in Denmark are now completing their dissertations in English in response to the growing internationalization of higher education. In addition, an increasing number of doctoral students in the humanities and social sciences are now following the lead of students in the hard sciences by writing article-based dissertations rather than monographs as the primary dissertation format (Sabharwal, 2013). Overall, this puts pressure on students whose native language is a minority language to publish in English. However, at many European universities, this development has not been accompanied by a corresponding increased focus on students' writing skills. Particularly in Denmark, where students are generally assumed to have sufficiently advanced English skills to perform well in English-language academic contexts, a lack of systematic institutional support of students' academic writing skills has been quite prevalent. But do Danish doctoral students really have sufficient skills not only to write clearly and coherently in English and to relatively quickly master the required academic genres such as the research article, abstract, and literature review, but also to use English as a tool for producing knowledge? We became interested in starting to address this question by exploring how Danish doctoral students perceive their own writing skills and writing needs and whether they receive sufficient support in assessing and developing their writing skills from the institution, including their supervisors.

We also noticed a lack of systematic attention to L2 writing in the literature on doctoral students' writing processes. Until recently, research into writing in higher education has mainly focused on undergraduate students and, to a lesser extent, on postgraduate students (Fergie, Beeke, McKenna & Creme, 2011). As Badley (2009) has suggested, the limited focus on Ph.D. writing in research and curricula is due to the assumption that students at the Ph.D. level do not need to address writing development explicitly. They are simply expected to have the necessary skills to produce publishable academic texts by the time they reach this level. However, recent research on doctoral students' writing processes suggests

that they need much more guidance from their supervisors, peers, and the academic environment than is usually expected and provided (Kamler, 2008; Lee & Boud, 2003; McGrail, Rickard & Jones, 2006).

METHOD: ONLINE SURVEY AND WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

The study draws on both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of two different surveys. The quantitative data are based on an online anonymous survey that we conducted in the spring of 2012 among all Ph.D. students enrolled at the Graduate School of Arts at Aarhus University in Denmark, which included 274 students. The survey encompassed 35 closed-ended questions and six open questions. The questions addressed the students' experiences of academic writing in both Danish and English: genres, extent of experience, feedback received, strategies and tools, the dissertation language and motivation for their choice, supervisory support, and their self-assessment of their writing skills. The response rate was 54% (= 149). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The qualitative data includes pre-course surveys in the form of written reflections collected before three academic writing courses called Introduction to Academic Writing in English for Ph.D. students, offered at the same graduate school in 2011–2012. The course was not mandatory, so we may assume that the majority of the students enrolled were interested in improving their English skills. Prior to the course, the students were asked to respond to reflection questions about their academic writing processes and experiences in both English and Danish, as well as their style, voice, and identity in both languages. They were also asked to complete the sentence "Writing in English is like . . ."/"Writing in Danish is like . . ." (see Table 11.1). This question was included to elicit explicit metaphors from the research participants in order to enrich our understanding of their conceptualizations of writing in both languages.[2] Schmitt (2005) points out the limitations of eliciting explicit metaphors[3] in qualitative research when this approach stands alone, but the overall design of our study, as well as our approach to the analytical process, heeds the importance of what Schmitt calls the "thoroughness of the comparison with non-metaphorical finds" (2005, p. 381). The written reflections of the 20 students who permitted us to use their responses in our research project were analyzed thematically using grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006).

FINDINGS

Our online survey offered some valuable insights into the respondents' experiences of academic writing in English: More than half of the respondents (57%)

Table 11.1. Pre-course survey questions

How would you describe and evaluate your experience with writing in your native language? Consider:

- How you typically organize your writing process
- When and where you write
- What helps you most when writing
- What you like/dislike about writing

How would you characterize your style of writing in your native language? Consider your style, voice, and identity as a writer.

How would you describe and evaluate your experience with writing in English? Consider whether your experience is the same as or different from your experience with writing in your native language, and, if there are differences, how and why.

How would you characterize your style of writing in English? Consider your style, voice, and identity as a writer.

What problems do you experience when you write in English, and how do you solve them? Consider also what type of support you need to become better at writing in English.

Choose a phrase, expression, or metaphor that best captures your experience with writing in Danish. "Writing in Danish is like . . ."

Choose a phrase, expression, or metaphor that best captures your experience with writing in English. "Writing in English is like . . ."

stated that they were writing—or planning to write—their doctoral dissertations in English, and 67% of these rated their writing skills as very good or good. However, 30% of the students writing in English only had very limited experience writing academic texts in English when they began their Ph.D. studies (14% had no prior experience, and 16% had only written between 1 and 10 pages in English in total). Furthermore, 54% of the students stated that their supervisors had not read anything they had written in English before the choice of language was made. Likewise, 25% had neither discussed the choice of language with their supervisors nor had their supervisors read anything they had written in English before making their decision. In addition, 66% of the students writing in English stated they have never attended a course in academic English, and 42% stated that they had concerns about writing their dissertations in English.

Themes from the Written Reflections

Our analysis of the written reflections resonates with the findings from the survey. The students' written reflections reveal that the majority of students considered writing in English to be more demanding than writing in Danish. Their

most frequent concerns were about linguistic challenges in English, in particular insufficient vocabulary knowledge. In addition, though half the students described their writing processes in Danish and English as very similar, the emotions and attitudes they expressed regarding their experiences in Danish and English are generally quite different. Many of the students expressed feelings of insecurity, alienation, and a lack of autonomy in respect to their style of writing, voice, and identity in English—feelings they generally did not associate with academic writing in Danish. For example, one student commented, "Maybe I have a slight tendency to incorporate the tone, wording and terminology of the theoretical texts I read in English, while in Danish I can better recognize my own voice."

The metaphors elicited by 14 doctoral students who attended the introductory academic writing courses reveal similar negative feelings in connection with writing in English. For one student, the difficulty and insecurity experienced in connection with writing in English was like "biking on a pedestrian street"; for another, like "driving without a GPS"; and for yet another, like "a handicap." We also see that several of the metaphors indicate embodied or personal identity-related activities such as "a bad hair day," "not wearing glasses," and "walking in high heels." Furthermore, the metaphors reveal that some students viewed writing in academic English as an unnatural activity involving imitation rather than authenticity and creativity, such as "making an Italian pizza" (as a Dane), "cooking from a recipe without daring to add new spices," and "imitating those who are proficient at writing in English."

The majority of the students' metaphor pairs for writing in Danish and English, respectively, further underline the students' difficulties transitioning from Danish to English, in particular their sense of alienation, inadequacy, and lack of creativity in connection with writing in English (see Table 11.2). For instance, one student pointed to the challenge of clarifying and producing knowledge in English: "Writing in Danish is like thinking," whereas "writing in English is like imitating," while another contrasted the naturalness of writing in Danish, which is equated with "breathing," with the effort involved in writing in English, which is likened to "digging up potatoes." A few students did appear confident (student 6: "Putting my thoughts in writing in English"; 11: "You get better and better"; and 13: "There is the desire to train"), but overall, the picture is of restricted abilities rather than new or alternative possibilities.

Discussion

Although we had known that the students received little systematic institutional writing support, the survey findings still came as a surprise to us. Considering

Table 11.2. Danish doctoral students' metaphors for writing in Danish and English, respectively.

	"Writing in Danish is like . . ."	**"Writing in English is like . . ."**
1	zigzagging left and right, but constantly moving forward at a rather fast pace.	being somewhat more uncertain whether it is actually moving forward.
2	Thinking.	Imitating.
3	Building with Lego blocks with my two-year-old son—there are many possible combinations, ways of creating connections; many blocks to move around—and you never know what will emerge in the end.	Playing with a Brio train set (with the same son)—there is still room for deciding how the track should go, on a general level, but it seems more "one-track," with fewer possibilities for variation. It goes in one direction: towards content, and there is less opportunity to play with the language—if the train leaves the track, it gets out of control.
4	Breathing.	Digging up potatoes.
5	Driving on a freeway while my supervisor occasionally tells me to switch to the academic lane.	Driving on a freeway with holes in the asphalt.
6	Putting my thoughts in writing.	Putting my thoughts in writing in English.
7	Shaping clay.	Knitting a sweater without knowing whether there is enough yarn.
8	Playing a grand piano based on 30 years' experience.	Beating on a little tin xylophone without any guidance. In the dark.
9	Painting a very detailed picture while focusing on both the individual figures and the overall design I want to create.	Trying to make the same picture, but now based on the collage method and clippings from old newspapers. The trick now is to get the various text pictures and picture fragments to appear as though they are connected and do not come from different articles or newspapers.
10	Cutting with a laser scalpel.	Hammering with a very big and rather heavy sledge hammer.
11	Biking. Once you have figured out how to do it, it goes really well—even though it can be hard at times.	Playing acrobat; you have to practice and train all the time, so that you get better and better with each task.
12	Blowing soap bubbles.	Blowing soap bubbles that I can't see.
13	Is always a pleasure—rich with opportunities for humor, implications, and wonderful turns of phrase. There is a fundamental sense of security that makes it possible to play with the language.	Is not quite as fun since a sense of linguistic insecurity is always present, but at the same time there is the desire to train the ability to write freely and fluently.
14	Writing to someone familiar.	Writing to a more distant reader.

that more than half of the students surveyed stated that the were writing (or planning to write) their dissertation in English, that one-third of the students facing the demanding task of writing their dissertation in English rated their writing skills as less than good, and that 42% stated that they had concerns about writing their dissertation in English, we cannot but wonder whether the students made the best choice for themselves, and whether they received the support they needed. We also found it remarkable that 30% of the students writing in English had such limited experience writing academic texts in English (10 pages or less). This reveals a structural problem: How could it be assumed that they were able to write a dissertation in English when so many were so poorly prepared for the task through their prior education? Finally, we were surprised to discover that the supervisors were not necessarily involved in the students' language choice, or that if they were, it did not necessarily mean that they had read any of the students' written work in English (as was the case for more than half of the students). This finding is particularly striking since reading students' drafts and providing feedback on them is an integral part of the Danish doctoral supervision process. The findings show that the students were met with extremely high, if not unrealistic, expectations on the part of the institution: They were expected to be able to choose the language of their dissertation on their own, and, as part of that process, to accurately assess their own English writing skills. And if they did choose to write in English, they were expected to be able to do so with little or no systematic support.

The study suggests the important role of identity in the students' development of their academic writing abilities in English, a finding consistent with current writing transfer research, as summarized by the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer.* The written reflections revealed that many students viewed academic writing in English as limiting or restricting their identities as writers, as seen through their overall sense of inadequacy and lack of creativity, rather than allowing them to explore and expand their writerly identities through the linguistic and rhetorical possibilities available to them in Danish. In addition, our overall study indicates that the identity of "(advanced) language learner" was not available to these Danish graduate students within the structural framework of their doctoral programs. No institutional framework has existed to aid the students in assuming such an identity if appropriate—for example, in the form of mandatory academic writing courses either before or during their doctoral studies, formal or informal assessments of students' writing skills in English, or frameworks for discussing students' writing issues or concerns about writing in English with supervisors. Moreover, no institutional space has been made available in which students and supervisors may discuss these quite complex issues, and if the students want to do so, they must carve out this space individually. On the contrary, the increasing demand

to write the dissertation in English and publish internationally in English as soon as possible communicates to these students that they should be capable of constructing and communicating knowledge in English at the highest academic level with little or no support. We suggest that these issues could have a negative effect on their perceptions of themselves as nascent members of their academic communities, particularly considering the central role of writing in the creation and sharing of knowledge in the humanities.

Consequently, it is our view that the doctoral students' writing skills and processes and the challenges that many of them face should not be regarded as an individual or personal problem but rather as a structural issue and an institutional concern that is closely linked to students' writing development in school settings. At this point, we think that significant improvements could be achieved by increasing the students' rhetorical and metacognitive awareness as well as their ability to "remix and repurpose" their L1 and undergraduate knowledge about writing and writing processes (*Elon Statement on Writing Transfer,* 2015). This process can be supported both by writing courses and, equally as important, by strengthening the supervisor's role in the writing process. For instance, the institution could provide better support at earlier stages by encouraging students to practice continuous self-monitored writing (Buckingham, 2008): to write early and regularly and to evaluate their own writing skills and processes, such as by using an individualized portfolio approach to writing, and to ensure that the portfolio becomes part of the supervision meetings (Hirvela, 1997). We also recommend more explicit communication about writing requirements and expectations as part of supervision programs, the creation of opportunities for the students to make well-informed, conscious decisions about the language of their dissertation, and the training of supervisors in order to develop their competencies in talking about these themes in a legitimate manner.

However, the supervisors are not the only or most important resources for doctoral students. The traditional dyadic apprenticeship model has been challenged in recent research in higher education and replaced with a sociocultural approach. In line with this development, we recommend integrating students into wider discourse communities of practice (Boud & Lee, 2005; Wenger, 1998) and creating space for the students to reflect on and discuss writing issues as well as to negotiate multiple identities as L2 writers among peers. This is an approach which also serves to counteract the individualized nature of the problems associated with writing in English as young academics. Students' integration into discourse communities could be encouraged through the provision of workshops on learning from peer reviewers' feedback, as well as through institutionally supported frameworks for peer feedback (Fergie et al., 2011; Parker,

2009), including writing groups (Stracke, 2010) with input from senior scholarly writers, and other forms of doctoral student collaboration. Besides being in line with the recommendations of current research demonstrating the importance of feedback for learning in higher education (e.g., Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol et al., 2013), such pedagogical practices involving self- and peer assessment and feedback should promote writing transfer by further enhancing students' meta-cognition, rhetorical and in particular audience awareness (see the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer,* 2015).

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL LITERACY THROUGH L2 WRITING: THE CASE OF AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WRITING IN SPANISH

Background and Aim of the Study

Most recent studies in foreign-language education have called for the infusion of our curricula (particularly in higher education) with not only communicative language teaching but also content-based education that would be geared toward the development of students' L2 literacy and intercultural competence (Byram, 2010; Kramsch, 1993, 2010; Scarino, 2010). Such pedagogy would combine teaching of the target culture with teaching of language as a carrier of cultural identity as two sides of the same coin. Several important studies have been published in recent years that outline the traditional emphasis of L2 education on action versus reflection, that is, the communicative approach to language teaching as opposed to the literacy-based approach. These studies argue that L2 pedagogy should be grounded on the dialectic relationship between the instruction of target language and target cultural identity through language. Here, as Kramsch writes,

> The experience of the foreign always implies a reconsideration of the familiar. . . . In part because of the rationality of its grammar and the logic of its vocabulary, language has been taught and learned mostly as a tool for rational thinking, for the expression and communication of factual truths and information, and for the description of a stable and commonly agreed-upon reality. It has not been taught as a symbolic system that constructs the very reality it refers to. (2010, p. 5)

Kramsch (1993) points out that the false dichotomy between language teaching and the teaching of culture has been part of the profession, and she argues for the need to educate cross-cultural individuals, those who will encounter

a *third space* through the negotiations of differences when learning language as a carrier of cultural identity. Byram (2010) highlights the need to focus language education on *bildung*, the (trans)formation of the individual as a social actor and active citizen. Scarino (2010) also argues for such an approach, although her argument is that literacy-based and content-oriented language education is transformative for students' individual identities.

These arguments, which seem all too obvious to L2 educators, might sound more like a theory to those outside our field, particularly to students who often view writing in a second language as a simple process. By *simple*, I mean a process that requires transfer of information from one language into another, in which each word and form in one language has an exact corresponding word and form in another. Students often think that with a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary lists, they can unequivocally and seamlessly transfer meaning from L1 to L2. How many of us have been perplexed by students' word-by-word translations of idiomatic phrases and native sentence structures? Students are often surprised that a certain phrase is non-transferable from one language into another, and more importantly, when corrected they realize for the very first time the culturally situated nature of the L1 phrase they just used. All this points to students' lack of understanding of language as a carrier of cultural identity and, as a result, leads to their unwillingness to engage with a pedagogy that is reflective and that elicits a successful transfer through the realization that culture is very much part of every language. The question is: Can the reflective learning of language and subsequent correct transfer happen in the classroom? What would have to happen for this pedagogy to be wanted by students and, therefore, successful?

If we truly believe in the power of language to reflect and transform one's identity, as well as to construct the very reality it describes, we must adopt the literacy-based pedagogy that supports the development of L2 writing based on the development of both linguistic accuracy and cultural competency. But for educators to be successful, we should also make sure that students fully understand the purpose and value of such pedagogy before (or while) it is implemented. Foreign-language instructors who work on developing students' L2 writing often find that the task of convincing students of the value of a content and literacy-based approach to language acquisition is complicated and goes against students' initial and/or previously adopted attitudes towards foreign-language learning and their very pragmatic reasons for learning the language.

In keeping with the questions that guide the three projects regarding the crucial role of students' perceptions of and attitudes toward writing in L2 for successful writing transfer, this particular study shows the gap between students' and educators' understandings of what it means to become a good L2 writer,

and it ventures to determine the reasons for such a gap. It starts out with the following shared questions that guide this multi-institutional research project: (a) Are students aware of their identities as L1 writers? (b) How do students develop beliefs and attitudes toward L2 writing, and what effect do these beliefs and attitudes have on their learning of L2 writing? And (c) do they think that L2 writing could affect their identities?

METHOD: PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEYS

This research focuses on 60 students enrolled in advanced-level Spanish writing course at a private, liberal arts institution (Elon University) in the US, with a relatively homogeneous student population. Students who regularly register for this course are those who intend to minor or major in Spanish. Many times, they are first-year students who have taken several years of Spanish in high school. They are motivated and confident in their learning abilities. Although categorized as a composition and grammar course, the course was developed based on particular cultural content (the relations between the United States and the Hispanic world) that would be appealing to students and would provoke reflection about not only target but also native cultural contexts. The primary goals were to develop students' intercultural competence, deepening their knowledge of self and other. In terms of writing development, the content and structure of the course prompts situations where students have to negotiate the differences between native and target cultural identities.

At the beginning of the semester, students were asked to complete a survey about their perceptions of, and attitudes toward, writing in both their native (i.e., English) and second (i.e., Spanish) languages (see Table 11.3). Throughout the course, students also engaged in writing and editing tasks ranging from short response papers to lengthy argumentative essays and creative writing assignments. Once the majority of the writing assignments were completed, the students were asked to complete a post-course survey (Table 11.4). The major purpose of asking students to complete the pre- and post-course surveys was to inquire into the ways students perceived and articulated their identities as L1 and L2 writers, to see whether the difference (if any) in students' perception of L1 and L2 writing was purely formal (i.e., lack of vocabulary and/or grammatical knowledge in L2) or cognitive, and to see whether there were any changes in their perceptions of ways to develop L2 writing abilities after they had a semester of intensive L2 writing by way of a content-based, reflective instruction that placed learning about culture at the center of the course.

In order to enrich the understanding of students' perceptions of writing both in L1 and L2, students were asked to think of a metaphor to express their feel-

Table 11.3. Pre-course survey

Based on my recent major writing assignments, I have the following experiences (check all that apply):

Perceptions of Writing in English (or your native language):

I avoid writing

I have no fear of my writing being evaluated

I look forward to writing

Taking a composition course is a frightening experience

Expressing ideas through writing seems to be very difficult

I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing

Discussing my writing with others is enjoyable and beneficial

Perceptions of Writing in Spanish (L2):

I think writing in Spanish does not faithfully express my thoughts

I sound childish in my Spanish writing

I don't think Spanish speakers can truly understand my writing

I am always translating my ideas from my L1 to L2

I can be more creative in L2 writing

Writing in my native language and Spanish is pretty much the same to me

I love writing in Spanish

I am very concerned with my language choice and grammar in my writing

I feel frustrated that my writing is not like a native speaker's writing

My goal of learning Spanish writing is to write authentic sentences without foreign "accent"

Table 11.4. Post-course survey

I. What helped you most with improving your written skills in Spanish?

II. What helped you most with grammar?

III. What TWO things helped you most with learning vocabulary and correct phrasing?

IV. What aspect of the course helped YOU the least?

V. Do you have any other suggestions about what might be useful?

ings when writing in their native as well as their target language, similar to the Danish case. Some examples of students' responses are represented in Table 11.5.

FINDINGS

According to the results of the pre-course survey, students have a good understanding of what type of writing is expected of them in a US academic en-

Table 11.5. Metaphors for writing in English and Spanish

	"Writing in English is like . . ."	"Writing in Spanish is like . . ."
1	Riding a bike.	Diving into a cold swimming pool.
2	Wearing comfy shoes.	Wearing shoes on the wrong feet.
3	Sunbathing at the beach.	Getting wisdom tooth removed.
4	Solving a puzzle and having fun doing it.	Trying to solve the puzzle with missing parts.
5	Running, hard but necessary.	Trying to run fast in sand/running in flip-flops.
6	Driving an automatic car.	Driving a stick shift.
7	Dancing across the paper.	Dancing on the razor blades.

vironment. They have relatively high linguistic (syntactic and grammatical) proficiency in L1 and think of themselves as good writers (i.e., they do not perceive themselves as apprehensive writers in L1). What's more, students are very comfortable within their cultural contexts. Most of them have already taken L1 composition courses and have succeeded in them. Table 11.5 shows students' perceptions of L1 and L2 writing expressed in metaphors. It was clear from their survey answers, as well as their metaphors, that students overwhelmingly viewed their identities as L1 and L2 writers as static. They considered language to be a skill and focused on the need for improving the technique of writing, that is, syntax, grammar, and lexicon. Even in their metaphors that could describe their identities as L1 or L2 learners, the emphasis was on their ability to convey the meaning, to communicate with ease—viewing language as a skill that needed to be mastered. L2, as opposed to L1, was physically more demanding, although the images they used were somewhat similar. If L1 was driving an automatic car, L2 was driving a stick shift; if L1 was walking, L2 was running, etc.

In the initial survey, when students were asked to rate course-related work according to their importance, the vast majority of students rated grammar and vocabulary practice as the most important component for developing L2 writing skills. Most students noted that their goal for the course was to achieve "error-free grammar and mechanics." They ranked learning about the target culture, as well as reading and analyzing texts, last or second-to-last for their value in becoming better writers. In the survey given at the end of the course, students' comments showed that editing their writing, which involved the improvement of content, structure, and form, was one of the most helpful parts of the course. But their comments also suggested that editing their writing for grammatical accuracy and having the course structure based on grammatical concepts rather than cultural content would have been more useful. Students were once again

asked to rank the value of learning new vocabulary, learning grammar, reading and analyzing texts, learning about culture, and writing and editing when trying to become a better L2 writer. Fifteen percent of the students (as opposed to 0% initially) ranked learning about culture and reading and analyzing texts as the top most helpful tools.

Discussion

From students' responses and reactions, it is evident that the implementation of the content-based reflective pedagogy adopted for L2 writing development is challenging. The learners of a second language do not necessarily view the process as one that requires the creation of or the negotiation with a different identity, which caused their lack of understanding of the importance of the right kind of transfer. As proposed in the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer,* successful development of students' writing abilities is closely tied to their awareness of language as a bearer of different cultural identities. Unfortunately, students do not perceive language learning to be in a dialectic relationship with developing cultural competence and, for the most part, do not view L2 writing as an opportunity to enrich their identities. Most second language learners view it as a tool to communicate, devoid of any content that can only be expressed in the given language. Their assumptions are that (a) whatever identity they have already assumed as L1 writers will seamlessly transfer from one written language into another, and (b) although often packaged together, learning the target language is irrelevant to learning the target culture.

This is why, in agreement with the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer*, we strongly believe in the need for teachers and others supporting L2 writers to make consistent and explicit efforts towards developing not only students' linguistic and grammatical accuracy skills when teaching L2 writing, but also their awareness of the language learning process as one that involves the formation and even a change of identity. Without students' awareness of language as a bearer and the creator of not only linguistic but also cultural and rhetorical differences, transfer of knowledge from one language into another leads to miscommunication(s), awkward phrasing, and failed attempts to reach the desired audience. Furthermore, without students' awareness of language as a carrier of cultural difference and their intentional engagement with this difference, the process of L2 writing development seems extraordinarily frustrating for both instructors and students due to the differences in their understandings of the value of the particular method of instruction that is based on developing learners' cultural competence and understanding of what it means to learn a language.

UNLEARNING AND RE-LEARNING ESL WRITERLY IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF CHINESE STUDENTS WRITING IN ENGLISH

BACKGROUND AND AIM OF THE STUDY

The third study we report on was undertaken at Michigan State University (MSU). Since 2006, MSU has admitted more and more international undergraduate students, with the number rising from 1,333 to 4,519 between 2006 and 2013 (Michigan State University, 2014). Among the 130 countries sending students to MSU, China is ranked number one and is the major source of the increasing international undergraduate student population on MSU's campus. The number of Chinese undergraduate students increased from 92 to 3,458 between 2006 and 2013, making them the majority international student population at MSU. They were most visible in the required first-year writing courses, especially the courses at the basic and developmental level for less appropriately prepared students—preparation for college writing (PCW) courses. The PCW courses were a prerequisite course for most international students for the regular Tier 1 writing courses at MSU. During the time of this research project, the PCW courses were based on the same curriculum that engaged students in writing and reflection through invention, arrangement, and revision activities across different inquiry situations. Students would develop knowledge and awareness of how contextual factors and the rhetorical situations affect their inquiries of knowledge and their engagement in reading, writing, and researching.

The PCW courses were intended for either domestic or international students who needed to take a slower pace at transitioning from high school to college and adapting to writing requirements and literacy practices in US higher education. However, with the influx of Chinese students to the MSU campus, Chinese students with varying degrees of English proficiency dominated the PCW courses. The makeup of the student body in the PCW courses constituted a unique ecological environment and a community of literacy practices, which made noticeable and critical the question of how Chinese students' preparation is related to college writing at MSU and how the students' previous experiences with writing in Chinese and English affect their transitional processes and their perceptions of their own writerly identities.

This study primarily focuses on how the transfer of prior knowledge affects individuals' engagement with writing tasks in new writing contexts and how the students engage with the ecological system and their writerly identities across contexts. We ask (1) how students identify themselves with L2 writing and what role students' individual and collective identities play in L2 writing; (2) how

their L1 writing experiences inform their L2 writing strategies and how L1 strategies transfer to the L2 context; and (3) what we can learn from the case of these Chinese students to inform new perspectives on supporting L2 writing development and transfer.

In search for answers to and insights into our shared research questions through the qualitative data, this study of Chinese undergraduate students touches upon multilayered issues of language learning, curricular structures, literacy and identity, and the role of L1 in cross-language communication in the case of Chinese undergraduate students.

METHOD: SURVEYS AND FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

The participants recruited from first-year writing courses varied significantly in their English proficiencies and previous writing experiences. Some came from high schools in China, some completed non-credit ESL courses at the English Language Center at MSU, and some had graduated from high schools in the US or international high schools in China. This study reports on three focus groups and three individual cases in PCW and Tier 1 writing courses between spring 2012 and spring 2013. The participants were enrolled in the PCW courses when they started participating in this study.

Data collected from the participants included general survey questions regarding students' perceptions of the difference between their previous classes and current writing classes, their reports on writing processes, reflection essays on their writing development, and their writing assignments. The survey questions, presented in Tables 11.6 and 11.7, were conducted in class, and the researcher followed up with the focus groups and individuals in open-ended interviews at the mid-term and the end of the semester to allow the participants to elaborate on their responses to the surveys. The interviews were conducted in the students' first language, Mandarin Chinese, and the researcher also collected their notes, pre-writing activities, and group discussions in both English and Chinese.

FINDINGS

When the Chinese students were adapting to the new learning contexts and attempting to transfer their writing skills, they were situated in a new environment and confronting an unfamiliar community of literacy practices. Mapping the new context onto their existing knowledge in writing and prior experiences with

Table 11.6. Questions for mid-term reflection

Writing class. Previous writing class vs. current writing class. Any noticeable changes?

How was your first month of the WRA (PCW) class?

What changes do you notice in the writing classes? How is it different from your experience with your previous writing class (high school, other institutes, etc.)?

Do you like the class? Do you have questions about this class?

What do you think about the classmates?

What do you think about college writing so far? Do you think this is a required class that you just need to get out of the way?

Writing process.

How long did it take for you to complete this paper? How many drafts did you do? How many hours did it take?

What kind of difficulty or questions did you have in mind when you were composing this paper? How did you cope with those problems, if there were any?

Whom did you talk to? What resources did you use? What tools or strategies did you use?

Where (what places) did you write your papers?

What change did you see in your writing process, compared to your writing experience before?

Writers.

What are your goals in this class?

Are you making progress to reach your goals in this class?

Did you feel nervous about Paper #1? Why? Why not?

Did you have a goal in completing this paper (e.g., did you target an A paper)?

Did you feel you were changing as a writer?

English academic writing turned out to be a source of struggles. They struggled with the rhetorical differences between L1 and L2, the linguistic uncertainty of L2 writing, the unfamiliar literacy practices in the first-year writing courses, and their perceptions of English writing and their established identities.

L1 Rhetoric in the New Rhetorical Context

First and foremost, Chinese students struggled with their language control over their L2 writing in English whenever they wanted to impart something sophisticated or original. They searched for language beyond their comfort level and resorted to translation from L1 linguistically and rhetorically; in other words, they cognitively struggled with the sense of uncertainty in the L2 language choices and linguistic forms that might end up being confusing or simply sounding

Table 11.7. Questions for final reflection

Writing class. Previous writing class vs. current writing class. Any noticeable changes?

How was your learning experience with the WRA (PCW) class?

What changes do you notice in the writing classes? How is it different from your experience with your previous writing class (high school, other institutes, etc.)?

How do you like the class? What's your favorite part of the class? What is the part of the class you don't like?

What do you think about the classmates? Are they helpful to your learning?

What do you think about college writing so far? (How) Do you think this required class is relevant and helpful to your college career?

What are your suggestions on making this class a better collaborative learning space?

Writing process.

What is the most challenging part of the process to you?

How are you able to find the time, space, motivation, or support for your writing?

How do readers' responses (including the instructor's) help you with your writing process and the product?

How do the rhetorical concepts of MAPS, SWAP, RAIDS facilitate your writing process?

What are the challenges or problems with the assignments? How are you able to understand and meet all the requirements?

Whom did you talk to? What resources did you use? What tools or strategies did you use?

How does your home language or native language play a role in your writing process? Do you work with other writers who share your home/native language?

How does your social network (friends) play a role in your writing process? Do you seek support from the people you hang out with? What kind of support from them that benefits your writing process?

Where (what places) did you write your papers?

What change did you see in your writing process, compared to your writing experience before?

Writers.

What does writing in college mean to you now?

Do you feel good about accomplishing the goal of becoming a better writer through this course?

Do you feel you are changing as a (better) writer? How and why?

How do you feel about your competency in joining in the written conversation in the academic community?

How confident are you in your written communication with the audience in college?

How you feel about college writing outside PCW? Are you confident or nervous about it? Why or why not?

What's your goal of improving your writing skills?

What do you think the most important factors are in your writing development?

awkward to the readers. This happened in particular when a student was writing about a significant concept in Chinese culture that should not be compromised by simplified language. For example, in describing the foot-binding culture in the Qing Dynasty, one student, Lao (pseudonym), wrote, "When I know why women need to foot-binding, I think that most important thing is women play the part of humble person."[4]

> **Researcher**: When you say that is the most important part, what do you mean?
>
> **Lao**: What I want to say is, for now, the culture has changed. Women should not practice foot-binding and women in China have got some rights and respect in society. Maybe instead of humble, the word should be vulnerable. That was the reason.

The student was culturally literate on the topic and had a clear argument to make; however, her control of language was not on par with her thoughts in writing.

In another example, Lao wrote, "But after 19 century, the Qing dynasty was destroyed. China got some western method about women which was very different between China and other countries."

> **Researcher**: What do you mean by method? Like ideas and stuff like that?
>
> **Lao**: Yeah . . .
>
> **Lao**: I want the person who reads my paper to know exactly what foot-binding is, because a person who is not Chinese may not be able to understand what foot-binding really means to Chinese culture and the society in Qing Dynasty.

The student felt compelled to explain the cultural significance of the foot-binding phenomenon in Qing Dynasty to her readers. She was concerned that the significance and complexity of the cultural issue might be lost in a simple word like "idea" and decided to try the unusual word "method" for the readers to consider it from a different perspective. In fact, the student's language choice reveals her sense of audience and her purpose to communicate with the audience.

In Chinese rhetoric, like Western rhetoric, the author-audience relationship affects how writing is composed, though significantly in different ways. This difference is illustrated by a piece written by another student, Moyu (pseudonym), who started his lived literacy paper with a lengthy narrative on how he suffered in his new life in the US and how he experienced rapid changes in every aspect

of life. At the end of the paragraph, he finally introduced his topic of his piano playing, a musical literacy he had developed in China and brought with him to the US. When asked in Chinese why he would not start off by introducing a scene from his musical development and quickly get to the point about piano playing for the readers, he looked confused and replied, "Wouldn't that be *bai le*?"(白了, "bai le": explicit). In Chinese, skilled writers avoid a straightforward introduction that deprives the readers of the joy of reading between the lines and contemplating the subtlety of the author's texts. The student purposefully engaged the readers by writing in an indirect and roundabout fashion, which demonstrated a fundamental awareness of the audience in his first language, Chinese. Thus, in his attempt to communicate respectfully with his readers, the student applied a Chinese rhetorical pattern in his English writing.

Another example came up in the same paper when the student made an abrupt shift in topic from one paragraph to the next and started an unrelated scene of the story. He explained, "This is called *tsa shu*" (插敘, "tsa shu": a writing strategy involving narration interspersed with flashbacks). Again, the student drew upon the familiar Chinese rhetorical pattern in hopes of engaging the readers in his narration. As the above examples demonstrate, the influence of L1 in L2 writing is noticeable in the students' linguistic choices and rhetorical decisions.

L1 Perspective on the New Rhetorical Context

The linguistic and cultural barriers also resulted in students struggling with rhetorical knowledge—in other words, cultural and conventional knowledge of how to communicate with different types of audiences effectively. When introduced to different audiences, they did not share the assumptions of Western audiences. Understanding the rhetorical context created in an assignment sheet is like piecing together a rhetorical puzzle. The data show that in attempting to complete the writing assignment based on the FYW curriculum, students struggled with writing in the second language, understanding terms, and meeting the requirements. Below is an excerpt from the students' group discussion (with pseudonyms) when they tried to reach a shared understanding of the assignment and the requirements.

Excerpt 1 (researcher's translation from Chinese):

> **Chi-ni**: We used Wikipedia to look up the term "critical thinking" and translated into our own language. In Chinese, it means *pi pan xin de* (批判性的: criticizing); you have to know how to ask questions of others and yourself.

> **Sherry**: I think "critical reflection" asks for deeper level of self-reflection on why I would do this. Did I want to just earn the credit or for other motivation.

Bi: Then, to be critical on what?

Sherry/Chi-ni: Your story, your experience.

Chi-ni: What you did this semester, the activities, the assignment you did, and your—

Qi: How to criticize those . . .

Shirley/ Chi-ni: Not to criticize, to self-reflect—

Bi: To reflect on myself what I did wrong?

Sherry: How you did it.

Chi-ni: It doesn't have to be what you did badly. It can be . . .

Qi: Why do you reflect on something good?

Sherry: You can talk about why you did well? What was your motivation? Why . . .

Chi-ni: Being critical doesn't mean being negative. You don't have to be critical only on the things you do badly. Being critical does not mean self-reflecting either. Don't judge it good or bad. Just think first. Make good things as experience; make bad things as education. There are always two sides of a story. That's the point of being critical.

Bi: [nodding]

In this conversation, the student Bi was not sure about the meaning of the term *critical thinking* stated in the assignment sheet. The other two students, Chi-ni and Sherry, figured out its meaning by looking it up on Wikipedia in Chinese. When they explained it to Bi in Chinese, the literal translation of "critical" caused Qi to misunderstand it. Finally, Bi was able to understand the meaning through her classmates' elaboration of the concept rather than from the literal word-to-word translation. This example shows that even the terms and language used in college-level writing assignments might pose problems of understanding for these Chinese students, and Chinese students' L1 perspectives on the new rhetorical context could affect their navigation into the college academic discourse. Once again, we see that Chinese students learning the new academic discourse by translating Chinese knowledge into the academic English context encounter cross-cultural barriers.

Writerly Perceptions and Identities

The students' experiences with previous English writing classes and their perceptions of writing and themselves as writers have carried over to their new writing courses and affected how they engage with the FYW curriculum. Most

of the Chinese students have very limited English writing experiences. In China, their English writing classes, like other classes, are designed to prepare students for tests on their knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary. Preparing for standardized writing tests like the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or SAT writing tests is viewed as the purpose of improving students' writing skills. Significantly, when describing their experiences with previous English writing in the surveys, they frequently used the words "dull," "terrible," "scary," "nervous," "frustrated," "boring," "hard," and "difficult." The students understood writing skills were essential, and they all believed that improving vocabulary and grammar was fundamental to improving their writing in English. At the same time, they had mixed feelings about the label "ESL students" and all the stereotypes and assumptions about their competence and developmental processes associated with the fact that they spoke English as a second language. As their ultimate writing goal, they wished to be able to write "like a native speaker of English" and write "like an American adult"—thus, "no more baby sentences." In particular, they wished to conceal their Chinese traits in writing, which they called Chinglish. Revealing their Chinese identities in English writing would give a negative impression of their English skills.

Becoming Better Writers

The Chinese students were conscientious about improving their English writing proficiency and mindful of the limitations of being ESL writers, which they were constantly reminded of in various writing classes, both in China and in the US. One student commented, "I want to learn some skills about how to write a beautiful article and avoid common mistakes since I am limited in vocabulary and poor at structure." The students nevertheless knew about the significance of writing, and the definitions of good writing learned from previous writing experience remained influential on them. Writing "logical" and "beautiful" texts was a common desirable quality for good writing. One student explained, "I was in high school in China, so teachers always taught us to expand the prose gracefully by using rhetoric." She expressed her goal of learning writing: "I hope my writing would be logical and fascinating." The students wanted to learn English rhetoric to write logical and emotionally appealing texts, which were most valued in their understanding of writing.

The students' writerly perceptions of what they could do and what they hoped to do with writing were interwoven into their development in the new contexts of US college writing classes. One student reflected on her experience with writing: "To be honest, I do not like writing in English, but I love writing in Chinese. Writing is one of the best ways to reduce my stress. However, the fear of English grammar hinders me to love English writing." They had mixed feelings about

how they were taught about writing and what writing meant to them as they continued to develop their writing skills and identities for different purposes.

Discussion

Similar to the Danish doctoral students in the first case presented in this chapter, the Chinese students were more concerned with linguistic accuracy and language problems in their English writing; however, they did not know exactly what language issues are entailed in academic writing, which involves complicated rhetorical decision-making in connection with language choices. They intended to write to impress the reader or the rater of their papers with their texts, rather than to communicate effectively with their readers. Unlike the students of L2 Spanish in the second case, whose Spanish writing tasks were more detached from everyday life and did not result in high-stake consequences, the Chinese students' English writing processes involved engagement with the real-life communication situations and survival, which made their transition from previous linguistic and rhetorical traditions and transfer of knowledge critical and significant. When transitioning from previous writing classes and academic literacy practices, Chinese international students were linking their knowledge and strategies to the new contexts of college literacy practices in the US. They brought with them their own literacies, their ways of communicating, their identities, and their individual dispositions to engage with the transition and transformation in their first year of college. Writing for tests and all the familiar struggles with English writing appeared to be haunting them in the process of their transition and development.

When the students were introduced to new writing tasks and different rhetorical contexts, language problems and L1 interference were the constant concerns rather than the process and transcending different writing contexts. While students might be expected to change their conceptions of writing in college, getting rid of the Chinglish impression seemed to be the common ultimate goal of the Chinese students, however unrealistic and unethical it might be. In reality, though, they relied on their L1 to engage in the learning process of college writing, and their learned knowledge from previous writing classes carried over into the new discourse context. When the Chinese students were encouraged to write not for tests but to engage in authentic communication with the audience in their papers, they would draw upon their Chinese rhetorical strategies to engage the audience and communicate their ideas. The clash between their own perspectives and the new expectations constitutes a contact zone (Pratt, 1991) between two linguistic and rhetorical traditions (L1/L2), where the transformation of writers and construction of knowledge occurs.

Students' dispositions play a significant role in their writing transfer (Driscoll & Wells, 2012), and how students perceive the learning context is linked to how their dispositions may affect their successful transfer in college writing courses. Different identities implied and imposed by different writing courses affected how students felt motivated, how they engaged in the class, how they set their goals, and how they evaluated their own engagement and performances. The developmental sequence of writing courses affects how the student writers perceive themselves as developmental writers. However, writing development is never a linear process. It is multi-directional participation and negotiation that constructs an individual writer within the local contexts and the local discourse community. In addition, the students' perceptions of who they are as students in college writing courses are complicated by the ecological system they share with intimate Chinese networks.

For the Chinese undergraduate students in US higher education, developing as L2 writers of English over different writing courses and writing contexts involves a constant contest among identities they embody in and outside the classroom, on and off campus. The occurrence of writing transfer is manifested in the writing process, where students unlearn and relearn to identify the rhetorical requirements and identify with their new roles as college writers. As proposed in the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer* (2015), successful writing transfer occurs only when students can transform or repurpose their prior knowledge and understanding when confronting a new and challenging writing task. When keeping the process and opportunity for writing transfer in perspective, as writing teachers, we can help students overcome the writing struggles, benefit from the necessary trouble in unfamiliar rhetorical contexts, and come away with new applicable knowledge.

Pedagogical Implications

How do we mitigate the "necessary trouble" that the Chinese international students had to go through in order to settle into their environment and develop confidence in their writerly identities and ultimately benefit from US higher education?

Writing classes are too familiar for the students to expect anything new, novel, or exciting. Students have preconceptions about their writing and themselves as ESL writers that stand in the way of their learning. This existing knowledge and these misconceptions may inevitably apply to writing instructors, as well. In order to meet the students where they are in their developmental process, learning targets, materials, and expectations should be relevant to students where they are in their writing classes. It is essential for writing instructors to acknowledge students' strategies and take advantage of what they bring with

them to the classroom to address their instructional needs. Instructors might consider the following aspects of learning when they work with Chinese international students:

- Acknowledge that Chinese students' multilingual and multi-identities can add to the complicated layers of the transitional process and the transfer of writing skills.
- Acknowledge that students' instructional needs both inside and outside the writing classroom contribute to their successful adaptation to the learning environment.
- Acknowledge students' linguistic problems and writing struggles across different contexts.
- Engage and change the students conceptually through different contexts and the changing relationship between themselves and the audience.
- Engage and change students' perceptions of writing for testing and of themselves as learners of standard academic English.
- Engage and change students' understandings of their writerly identities as writing strategies.
- Acknowledge that students' developmental processes are complicated, networked engagements with literacy activities inside and outside the classroom.

SUPPORTING TRANSFER IN L2 WRITING: STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

COMMON FINDINGS

We have examined students' experiences and perceptions of L2 writing in three different contexts where students engage with L2 writing for various purposes and navigate through multiple identities in their writing and communication. The Danish case illustrates some of the effects of assumptions made about L2 writing transfer at the highest educational level, as seen in the lack of a systematic institutional framework for supporting L2 academic writing in English. The case of US American undergraduate students writing in Spanish invites us to reflect on our pedagogical strategies and find ways to bridge the gap that exists between students' and educators' understandings of what it means and what it takes to become a good L2 writer. Finally, the case of Chinese students writing in English reveals the need to address the cultural and political premises of the types of writing we require from students in US academia.

Our common findings tell us that although students perceive writing as a reflection of their identities, they do not necessarily and always think of L2 writing as an opportunity to experiment with and create new identities. This is frequently due to the fact that students do not perceive foreign language as a meaning-making mechanism, but rather as a translation tool. That is to say, meaning is created in L1, while L2 is only used to communicate (translate). Students are often concerned with being handicapped when writing in L2 and want to have better knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary, rhetorical strategies, and cultural conventions of the given language in order to sound more authentic. Hence, they perceive L2 writing in terms of limitations and restrictions rather than experimentation and opportunities. However, the inextricable link between L1 and L2 in the L2 writing process is manifested in our data across the contexts.

Our research showed that the immediate goals of the US students of Spanish when writing in L2 were the correct use of form and correct transfer of information. Similar to the US students, the Danish students viewed language proficiency as key to successful academic writing but were, on the contrary, acutely aware of how their language and rhetorical skills affected their voices and identities as budding scholars. And, perhaps due to their exposure to and integration into the target cultural and curricular setting, the Chinese students developed an awareness of language as a carrier of cultural identity and started exploring their voices, combining and enriching their L1 identities with the L2.

Finally, we found that successful L2 writing development is closely tied to students' self-perceptions and their socially and culturally constructed attitudes towards L2 writing. This is particularly true when it comes to adult students who in some way have already had successful academic experiences and/or see themselves as accomplished L1 writers. Thus, consistent with the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer*, which proposes that "prior knowledge is a complex construct that can benefit or hinder writing transfer. Yet understanding and exploring that complexity is central to investigating transfer" (2015, p. 4), we argue that it can be difficult and at times counterproductive to teach L2 writing without addressing students' prior knowledge about L2 writing, the potential gap between students' and educators' perceptions of successful L2 writing development pedagogy, and the value of such pedagogy.

Future Directions

Our studies clearly show the need for increased and improved institutional and societal support for the development of L2 writing abilities. L2 writing instruction and pedagogies are informed by scholarship in relevant disciplines but de-

veloped and practiced in local contexts. To support students' continuous development of L2 writing competence and identities, we think that it is important for researchers and teachers across the borders to have an open and in-depth conversation about how we teach L2 writing and what pedagogical resources we use to foster the development of L2 writers. It is also important to examine our own cultural biases when we teach L2 writing.

Based on our findings, we argue that L2 educators need to adopt a much more purposeful approach to address students' lack of awareness of language as a creator of identity, and to advocate actively for reflective pedagogy that views language study, particularly the study of L2 writing, as an activity that expands and enriches one's identity. The realization that language is a carrier and a creator of identity and culture is one of the threshold moments in the development of L2 writing. In other words, this is the moment when learners become aware of the culturally situated nature of language and, as a result, develop heightened awareness of culturally determined linguistic structures not only in the target language but also in their native ones—when they encounter the third space discussed by Kramsch (1993) and when knowledge transfer encounters roadblocks that need to be overcome. The moment when learners develop awareness of these roadblocks and start searching for ways to overcome them is the turning point in the development of L2 writing. Once this awareness happens, transfer can be a positive practice because learners are better able to identify the problematic features of transfer from L1 to L2. They can see places where transfer can happen seamlessly and others where "unlearning" needs to take place in order to give way to the differences in worldviews and perspectives that are manifested through language.

A more consistent pedagogy needs to be adopted throughout all levels of L2 writing development that would explicitly connect language acquisition with the enrichment of students' identities. Our studies indicate that taking into account the connection between language and identity is as critical for writing development as it is complex. While some students are unprepared to think of L2 writing as an opportunity to explore new identities, others view their L1 writerly identities as authentic and their L2 identities as inauthentic. Students' notions of authentic linguistic identity are inseparable from their comfort levels as speakers and writers. For some students, L2 writing is a tool that helps them adopt or rehearse another's established identity rather than expand or reshape their own identities; hence they dwell on imitation instead of creation in their L2 literacy development. In the end, both groups fail to see L2 writing as an enriching experience, focusing mainly on their limitations and lack of linguistic "authenticity." Our studies also indicate that the creation of a new identity (a third space) comes very late in the process of foreign language

learning and the development of L2 writing. Although this is and should be the ultimate goal, educators should take into consideration the limitations that students have in the process and lead them very intentionally and carefully toward the understanding of language learning as an opportunity to expand and enrich their identities.

To conclude, we suggest that L2 writing instructors adopt a pedagogy that not only develops students' linguistic proficiency and cultural competency but also communicates to the students the purpose and value of their pedagogical approach. Otherwise, the gap between their perceptions of the learning goals and our teaching practices will make it very hard to achieve the desired goals. Our work points to the benefits of researching writerly identities in a cross-cultural perspective through cross-cultural collaboration as a means to make visible culturally embedded understandings of and approaches to writing that we tend to take for granted in the local context. To borrow Kramsch's (1993) term, we view this kind of collaboration as a way to carve out a third space for carrying out writing transfer research.

NOTES

1. The authors are listed in the order of the separate institutions appearing in the chapter. Each author contributed equally to this work.
2. For the first two courses, we asked the students to answer the reflection questions and to complete the sentence "Writing in English is like . . ." In order to get a better sense of student attitudes toward writing in their first language and the relation between the two, we decided to ask the students enrolled in the third course to complete the sentence "Writing in Danish is like . . ." in addition to answering the reflection questions. A total of seven students completed the sentence about writing in Danish. We have since gathered seven more metaphors from students who attended a similar course offered in the spring of 2013.
3. Conceptual metaphors are understood here as words/phrases that in the given context transcend their literal meaning and transfer the literal meaning (from a source area) to an often more abstract target area (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, and Schmitt, 2005, among others).
4. All the quotes and excerpts from the students' writing that are presented here are transcribed as they wrote them, without corrections.

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