



Composition Studies in Bangladesh: Retrospection, Inspection, and Projection

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Abstract: English is a colonial imposition on the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh. Post-colonially, the countries in the Indian subcontinent revamped their academic infrastructure to facilitate the nation building project, which reflects their ethical and intellectual agendas and realizes their economic aspirations. However, the colonial legacy continues because of the ubiquity of the English language. English, then, is a necessary evil in the Indian subcontinent where its uncritical consumption warrants some caution and absolute denigration threatens profound intellectual, social, and economic consequences. This paradoxical position of English in the Indian subcontinent has ramifications for the teaching and learning of English there, which may have inadvertently disadvantaged one of the critical components of English studies: composition. Because the locus and focus of this article is Bangladesh, it endeavours to situate composition in the landscape of English studies in Bangladesh. First, it retrospects the ontological tensions between composition and the other branches of English studies, especially literature, which is pertinent in the context of Bangladesh. Then, it inspects the status of composition from the colonial era to date. Finally, it projects the directions of composition studies in the years to come given the latest developments of English studies both locally and globally.

Keywords: Composition, L2 Writing, Post-coloniality

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Introduction

Given the development of English studies around the globe, it is not unusual that composition holds no disciplinary status in English studies in Bangladesh. It is indeed, unfortunate that composition studies occupy no disciplinary space in Bangladesh. There is a geohistorical as well as political context of English in academia to account for this trajectory of English studies in Bangladesh. The emergence of private universities in the 1990s both diversified and expanded the scopes of English studies, where the programs seemed to have been leaning toward composition studies, however marginally. Bangladesh seems no longer a context where institutions can too easily ignore global arguments for local reasons (Porter, Sullivan, Blithe, Grabill, & Miles, 2000). English studies here are in a paradox: they live in the past as much as they want their past redefined. This article intends to take advantage of the kairotic dimension of English studies in Bangladesh to advocate for composition studies. It critiques the past and the present of English studies in Bangladesh to predict or direct its future. The three sections of the article (retrospection, inspection, and projection) can be translated as past, present, and future of composition studies in Bangladesh. It provides some initial ideas, information, and arguments--not a blueprint--to vouch for a disciplinary space for composition studies in Bangladesh.

Retrospection

As an intellectual formation, composition has a knowledge base that can be traced back millennia. The moorings of modern composition studies are in the works of such ancient Greek intellectual icons as Plato and Aristotle. The term, however, did not permeate the Western academic system until the 1890s when Harvard University, in the United States, started to offer first-year writing courses (Ritter & Matsuda, 2012). A fundamental assumption that defines the origin and development of the field of composition studies in North America is that writing is not an art, which is so elusive and esoteric that it evokes emotion, intuition, and awe to mystify both the creation and the creator. In North American dispensation, writing is a craft. There is nothing supernatural and abstruse about writing and writer. Writing is simply hard work (Hairston, 1986). Hard work precedes knowledge about and application of the theories in writing, which determine the linguistic and conceptual options and restrictions for constructing written texts. Simply put, writing is procedural and habitual, not natural and fortuitous.

This definition of writing is incomplete, even controversial. It only applies to the academic genre of writing; it does not apply to the creative genre of writing in that most of the finest writers in the annals of the world's literature did not/do not have instruction in writing. An apologist for the North American composition paradigm would argue that this truism about creative genre of writing does not render instruction in writing redundant. Instead, it warrants some clarifications. Harris (1990) clarifies discourse in such categories as aesthetic and pragmatic. While the aesthetic or creative genre of

writing and pragmatic or academic genre of writing overlap, these are significantly different. They, perhaps, emerge from two different streams of human consciousness; aesthetic discourse is writer-based and pragmatic discourse is reader-based (Flower, 1979). Generally, writer-based discourse is egocentric, which is not tailored, linguistically or conceptually, to a specific audience. It is conceived and constructed arbitrarily. Writing, as such, is a solitary act when a writer is so consumed by his or her own ideas, intuition, and ideologies as well as idiosyncratic panache and perceptions of language that he or she is not constrained by the conventions of writing. A writer expresses his or her beliefs, views, and biases unrestrained since writing transpires in a very personal, private, and autonomous world.

Reader-based writing, on the other hand, is reified. Writing shifts from personal and private to public and social. The purpose of this writing is not to philosophize or create linguistic or conceptual quagmire so the audience comes away feeling baffled and hazed. Instead, it aims to explain and clarify ideas and concepts to a specific audience who expects a writer to conform to some established conventions of styles, structures, and strategies. Writing, in this dispensation, is formulaic, logical, and linear. Objective as it is, it nearly erases the human agency (Sword, 2012). Being creative with language and assertive with argument must happen within the constraint of conventions. Indeed, because every aspect of this type of writing appears to be predictable and sequential, writing scholars contend that the skills in writing are amenable to instruction. This assumption undergirds the paradigm of North American composition studies. Nonetheless, composition scholars in North America do not essentialize this view of writing in that it takes a lifetime of training to be a writer (Bazerman, 2013). In addition, a teacher cannot assume all the responsibilities of teaching something so personal and complicated as writing (Draper, 1969). As is, the North American composition studies are not as absolute or “totalizing” as they appear (Foucault, 1984, p. 375, as cited in Atkinson, 2010).

Originally, the bailiwick of North America-based composition studies excluded creative writing as well as second language (L2) writing and writers. The unique needs of L2 writers cannot be adequately served by theories in composition studies, which are meant for first language (L1) writers in English. Ideally, the process of writing enacts a synergy between retrospective and projective structuring when a writer moves back and forth to lyrically skewer his thoughts (Perl, 1980). This process is cognitive, not linguistic, so as not to differ across languages. Silva (1993), however, claims that L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing despite the existence of a uniform process of writing across languages. L2 composing is generally more constrained, more difficult, and less effective (Silva, 1993). This does not imply, in any way, that L2 writers are cognitively inferior to their L1 counterparts, rather they are being initially linguistically underprepared to compose as correctly and cohesively as L1 writers. L2 writers perceive writing and learning differently because of their prior cultural, linguistic, and academic orientations. To cater to the peculiar needs of L2 writers, the field of L2 writing emerged in the 1990s (Matsuda, 2013), though its origin is traced back to the establishment of the English Language Institute (ELI) in 1941 at the University of

Michigan (Matsuda, 1999). L2 writing is recognized as an independent intellectual formation, but one of its feeder disciplines is composition studies (Silva & Leki, 2004). Therefore, the field of L2 writing does not render composition studies insignificant or redundant. Instead, it accommodates and compounds it.

The distinction between composition and so-called creative writing is moot, rather than practical. Composition scholars contend that writing is an organic, developmental process (Elbow, 1973), and that all writing is experimental (Murray, 1978). Writers, regardless of the genre of writing, are daunted by the complexities of composing so inevitably that they revise their works frantically. For example, the ease and elegance of Vladimir Nabokov's prose is nonpareil. His language seems to have emanated from a source that is amenable only to gifted people. When a curious journalist wanted to see one of his manuscripts, as cited in Calonne (2006), he said, "I don't want to show my literary sputum." An implication here is that he had to go through a messy process to produce his pithy, poetic prose. Likewise, one of the stalwarts of American literature is Ernest Hemingway, who changed the last page of one of his books 37 times (Rico, 1983). As cited in Rico (1983), when one journalist wanted to know what stumped him, he said, "I'm not getting the right words." William Wordsworth exemplifies this aspect of so-called creative writing even more decisively as Calonne (2006) claims. The first edition of his *Prelude: Growth of a Poet's Mind* came out in 1805, and the second edition came out in 1850 following his death. During those 45 years, Wordsworth revised almost every aspect of this book. Penguin Books brought the parallel versions of both the editions to show that whatever denomination a piece of writing is ascribed to, the process of production does not differ fundamentally. The truth is that writing is a struggle for all (Breidenbach, 2006), and writers transform incorrigibly all along, both linguistically and conceptually.

When the boundary between creative and academic writing is blurred, and the field of L2 writing is accommodated in the wider gamut of composition studies, the field of writing transcends genre as well as language, time, and space. Some universal principles and presumptions underpin the field of composition studies as such. Perhaps the most fundamental of those principles and presumptions is that writing is composing, which is a sustained activity of discovering meaning through thinking (Norstrand, 1979). This considered, the basic tenet of composition theory does not conflict with the objective of formal education across contexts. While some post-modern thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault criticize the West of their dominant thought style for last three centuries, which is a metanarrative of absolute, all-encompassing, and exceptionless truth (Atkinson, 2010), composition theory, apparently, is not informed by this Western belief or bias toward theory building. Put differently, composition theory is not a "traditional theory" (Horkheimer, as cited in Atkinson, 2010), but a "critical theory" (Horkheimer, 1972), which is "local, contingent, experimental, and diffident" (Atkinson, 2010, p. 15). The deduction proposed by these characteristics of composition studies is that composition theory is integral to formal education in general, and English studies in particular, across contexts.

In Bangladesh, however, it has not been the case. English studies occupy a critical position in the landscape of formal education in Bangladesh from primary to tertiary levels, but have apparently progressed independently of composition studies until recently. Whether this is intentional or inadvertent merits a critical discussion, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, someone who is exposed to the academic system of Bangladesh both as a student and an instructor and has subsequently studied composition theories in North America (this author, for example) qualifies to critique the developments of English in Bangladesh studies with reference to composition, following what may have been the reasons why composition studies in Bangladesh has been a victim of a “historical accident” (Elbow, 2002, p. 535).

Bangladesh owes its paradigm of English studies to the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent. Having colonized the Indian subcontinent for about 200 years, when the British left in 1947, it was reduced to penury and beggary (Novak, 1993). In the meantime, however, they established British literature as an inevitable academic discipline, which apparently bracketed off Commonwealth and American literature from English studies. This may have accounted for why English studies traditionally slanted toward British literature in the Indian subcontinent. Bangladesh was not susceptible to the influences of composition studies the way it was susceptible to British literature, as composition studies is a (North) American development. Novak (1993) contends that Bangladesh is never close to the U.S. because of sheer physical distance. As a consequence, English studies in Bangladesh may have been immune to the influences of (North) America. Or, because Bangladesh is already entrenched in a culture of British literature and composition studies is a relatively new (North) American development, composition studies failed to compete with literature with a compelling intellectual agenda to permeate the landscape of English studies in Bangladesh. Apparently, of course, literature resists composition. English literature in Bangladesh has been a colonial discourse, and “colonial discourse tends to exclude” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 43). The exclusion of composition from English studies in Bangladesh has been a colonial legacy.

While British literature emerged in the Indian subcontinent because of British subjugation, its subsequent continuation is not apparently politically encumbered. Following the British colonization, one of the most critical and encompassing tropes that linchpinned literary studies in Bangladesh is post-coloniality. Post-colonial discourse registers resistance to colonization and celebrates de-colonization. Literature is compatible to this discursive stance, but composition is not, for literature is apparently an exploration or appreciation of already existing texts, when composition is conception and construction of new texts (Elbow, 2002). When one has to conceive and compose that text in an L2, he descends to a zero-point of existence (Bradatan, 2013). The disappointment that stems from the difficulties and uncertainties of writing in an L2 dispossesses a writer initially, linguistically. As is, every L2 writer is colonized by the language in which he writes (Bradatan, 2013). The strain and stigma of writing in an L2 gnawed even Said (1999) when he claimed that he wrote with almost but never native-like fluency. Staying away from writing, then, aligns with the de-colonizing project, at least psychologically, of post-colonial nations. Writing in an L2

generally renews 'composition colonization'. This may have been a strong psychological rationale to shy away from writing in English in Bangladesh.

Human agency cannot transcend cultural biases (Canagarajah, 2002a). Culture may have been complicit in the apparent aversion to writing in English in Bangladesh. Referring to South Asia, Canagarajah, (2002b) contends that the dominant mode of knowledge construction in the periphery is not writing but speaking. Speaking is considered superior to writing, which implies that writing is subservient to speaking. In a culture such as this, people are pushed or even primed to speak more than to write. Speaking irreducibly differs from writing. Writing is not an orthographic transcription of speech *per se*; it is instead a purposeful selection and organization of speech (Arapoff, 1967). Writing, in addition, is essentially recursive and is open to revision, which speaking is not. Because of these essential differences between writing and speaking, shifting from a speaking-dominant culture to a writing-dominant culture is consequential. It requires critical mental, intellectual, and even emotional transformations, which do not instantly come off because of an atavistic cultural orientation. Bangladesh, then, lacked a convenient culture for composition studies to gain ground. Against this backdrop, the next section of the chapter endeavours to critique the position of composition studies in Bangladesh vis-à-vis the other constituents of English studies in the current context.

Inspection

Hardly can anyone contextualize composition in the landscape of English studies in Bangladesh in that the history of English studies has emerged independent of writing instruction up to the point when the first private university was launched in 1993 (Shamsuzzaman, Everatt, & McNeill, 2014). The institutionalization of composition in English studies in Bangladesh, then, is a very recent development. Contrary to that, the English language in the Indian subcontinent has been an inseparable component of academic and intellectual activities for about two centuries. Initially, English had been a colonial imposition on the Indian subcontinent by the British. Post-colonially, it had to be adopted in the nation building project given its intellectual, economic, and cross-cultural potential. As such, the origin of English studies in the Indian subcontinent pits the language against its colonial heritage vis-à-vis its contemporary status as a *lingua franca*. Thus, "English holds a paradoxical position" (Shamsuzzaman, 2014, p. 220) in the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh, in that the language is essentially controversial but immediately convenient. Situating composition in these conflicting undercurrents of English studies in Bangladesh warrants some clarifications regarding the historical development of the field in the Indian subcontinent.

The British officially colonized the Indian subcontinent in 1757. They had to leave the Indian subcontinent in 1947. During these almost two centuries of occupation, they changed the geographic, economic, political, cultural, and linguistic landscapes of the Indian subcontinent so irrevocably that following their departure, the

Indian subcontinent has never been the same. However apparent and acute the fallout of the British occupation was, it complied with Said's (1979) observation of colonization. Referring to the occupation of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798, Said (1979) contends that in the colonial dispensation, political subjugation is innocuous in that it is a precondition to producing knowledge and civilizing the natives. It is not clear whether the British occupation of the Indian subcontinent was provoked by this grotesque excuse of knowledge production, but the most pronounced *raison d'être* of British occupation of the Indian subcontinent was, of course, civilizing the natives. This desire is responsible for setting up the paradigm of education in general, and English studies in particular, in the Indian subcontinent. Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (Macaulay & Young, 1979) was critically instrumental toward that direction.

Thomas Babington Macaulay joined the British *raj* in India in 1834 as the first law commissioner and member of the supreme council in Bengal (Cutts, 1953). He proposed the "Minute" in 1835, which "was the decisive and final piece in a long series of propaganda articles written over a period of more than half a century in the formation of British educational policy in India" (Cutts, 1953, p. 824). Having collapsed some of the finer details of this document into a summary statement, one can claim that Macaulay proposed to supplant vernaculars such as Sanskrit and Arabic with English "to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue" (Macaulay & Young, 1979, p. 349). He overtly touted the intrinsic superiority of the English language to the indigenous languages of the Indian subcontinent. However, his concept of the English language education was discursive in nature, not linguistic or mechanical, in that he wanted British literature to be the portal of the English language. He claims, "The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity" (Macaulay & Young, 1979, p. 351). Even though he claimed that he had no knowledge either about Arabic or Sanskrit, he was politically so influential and intellectually so persuasive that British literature gained a strong foothold in the Indian subcontinent because of his activism and advocacy. This may have accounted for why English studies in the Indian subcontinent leaned toward literature, not language.

Post-colonially, English studies have evolved in the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh. It is worth mentioning in this context that Bangladesh is a post-colonial country because of British and Pakistani subjugations. Since the departure of the British in 1947, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan until 1971. Pakistan had two parts: east and west. Erstwhile East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh, was virtually a monolingual region; around 98% of the population spoke Bangla (Chowdhury & Ha, 2008). Bangla, the native language of the Bangladeshis, pitted West Pakistan against East Pakistan when the latter had to sacrifice lives in 1952 to defend its native language, for the former threatened to proscribe and replace it with Urdu, the dominant language of the ruling class of West Pakistan. The year 1952, known as the year of language movement, was believed to be the nucleus to spur the war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan. Bangla, then, already emerged as a critical factor in defining and determining the identity of a potential nation. Following its independence in 1971, linguistic nationalism emerged in Bangladesh. Consequently, "English thus lost its

status as a medium of educational instruction, which it had had until 1971, and was now replaced by Bangla at all levels of education” (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008, p. 20). But the events that unfolded subsequently were not monolithic and conclusive. They were, instead, tentative, even regressive.

The influence and importance of the English language waned simultaneously from the academic and administrative undertakings of the government of Bangladesh. In 1980, English was withdrawn as a compulsory subject of study for tertiary level students (Rahman, 1999). In 1987, the government passed the “Bengali Introduction Law,” which mandated that “Bengali was to be used in all spheres and at all levels of government purposes” (Banu & Sussex, 2001, p. 126). Despite these policies, the possession of English was critical for academic success and economic mobility in Bangladesh. The deterioration of the teaching and learning of English was already conspicuous, and its attendant consequences were already noticed. A survey conducted in 1990 by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Bangladesh, (NCTB), discovered the dismal state of English proficiency of students (as cited in Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). This swung the government into action. It re-introduced English from the first grade to the tertiary level in 1991 (Rahman, 2007). While these shifts in policy regarding English studies in Bangladesh have bearings for composition studies at tertiary level, they do not explicitly inform much about the state of composition. The scopes of these changes are confined mainly to secondary and higher secondary levels of English studies in Bangladesh.

Alam (2011) has situated these transformations of English studies in the context of tertiary education in Bangladesh, when he also renews the ontological tensions between composition studies and literature. He considers these transformations poised toward the “commodification of English studies in Bangladesh” which contributes to the declining interest “in the study of English literature” (p. 251). The shift toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at both secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh since the 1990s has been responsible for effecting and establishing English Language Teaching (ELT) at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, he implies. He contends that these changes in English studies in Bangladesh are more political (because of the influence or involvement of some foreign forces, the British Council, for example), than informed and principled. He claims as such that ELT pedagogy in the context of Bangladesh has been “on the whole, a waste of money and resources” (p. 268); therefore, its potential to facilitate the teaching and learning of English is severely lacking. Sceptics might find Alam (2011) too assertive and can accuse him of “trained incapacity” (Burke, 1984, p. 8) for critiquing the developments of English studies through a subjective lens because of his background training in literature. Alam, of course, deplors that “less and less literature courses are being taught”, and that “ELT is all the rage” (p. 266).

By the same token, however, Alam (2011) has criticised the ubiquity of literature in English studies in Bangladesh in that it has been responsible for unexamined, even ineffective, teaching when instructors have “preferred to lecture to them as if from a pulpit” (p. 270). In this dispensation, he claims, teaching of literature appears to be a civilizing mission, when the instructors “do nothing about the teaching of reading and

writing of the English language” (p. 270). English studies at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, he claims, are so irreversibly immersed “in a seemingly perpetual embrace” (p. 252) with literature, that the disjuncture between composition and literature appeared compatible with the culture of English studies. Alam (2011) continues:

Even now I marvel at the obtuseness with which I was taught English literature at the University of Dhaka; nobody has bothered to teach us how to read intensively or write purposefully then; my teachers and their teachers must have assumed that one could write since one can read; what was there to teach here? (p. 252).

Alam’s (2011) observation in this context proposes a deduction that composition studies in Bangladesh is stuck in the rut of a chronic crisis, since it is inter-generational. Instruction in writing in such a context is redundant. Exposure to literature is the only and absolute prerequisite to learning to write.

Bangladesh, nonetheless, presents no unique context of composition instruction as far as the history of composition studies is concerned. Traditionally, there was hardly any symbiotic relation between composition studies and literature, in that the former has been “the weak spouse, the new kid” (Elbow, 2002, p. 533) of the latter. Elbow (2002) claims that writing programs were originally housed in the English departments, and writing teachers were usually less paid to work under poorer conditions in order to help literature professors, who were teaching less under better working conditions to get paid more. Composition did not have any disciplinary identity or intellectual agenda the way literature did, for composition started out as “nothing but a motley collection of people historically thrown together” (Elbow, 2002, p. 543). As such, writing educators were working in primarily reactive modes and were frequently under pressure to follow others’ lead (Estrem & Reid, 2012). The “others” in this context are instructors of literature. Given the mode and focus of instruction, these two streams of intellectual formations are hardly alike. Elbow (2002) claims that while in literature lecturing in classes is extremely common, it is rare or absent from writing classes. Additionally, while the focus of literature classes is the analysis and appreciation of an existent text, the focus of composition classes is the conception and creation of a new text. As these differences between literature and composition are considered, Bangladesh presents no idiosyncratic context of composition instruction.

As far as the local nomenclature is concerned, the essential differences between composition and L2 writing blur, in that as a denomination, L2 writing has not gained currency in English studies in Bangladesh yet. Instruction in writing in English is called composition, a term that did not permeate the terrain of English studies in Bangladesh until 1993, when the first private university was launched in Bangladesh (Shamsuzzaman & Everatt, 2013). Since then, different universities have been using the term in different English courses they offer, which are compulsory for all students earning a bachelor’s degree. Matsuda (2012) contends that L2 writing is writing in any language that a writer did not grow up with. Composition, then, is a misnomer in the context of Bangladesh. It is, in fact, L2 writing. Alam (2011) repeatedly used the term “composition.” It could be a deliberate option, as Matsuda (2012) claims that

composition is a non-stigmatizing or stigma-resistant term compared to L2 writing. Or, L2 writing apparently smacks of Applied Linguistics/TESOL, which a literature-steeped culture like Bangladesh hardly recognizes. In any case, no university in Bangladesh as of yet offers any programs, B.A., M.A. or Ph.D., in composition, though they offer all these programs in literature and language-related areas.

The context of composition studies in Bangladesh is a complex one. The landscape of English studies has been changing apace in Bangladesh (Shamsuzzaman, Everatt, & McNeill, 2014), but how that swings toward the direction of composition studies is yet uncertain because of two potential pitfalls. For one, the academic culture in Bangladesh uncritically cowers to the belief that the process of writing is so inductive and idiosyncratic, that it is not open to external intervention or exploration (Shamsuzzaman, 2014). Instruction in writing is not culturally compatible as such. Secondly, effective instruction on L2 writing is contingent upon undergoing training in North America since it is the birthplace and hub of composition studies (Silva, 2006). Besides North America, opportunities for training in composition studies are hardly available and authentic, but North America is a tough option to avail for the potential composition instructors from Bangladesh for various reasons. As far as the cultural disposition and intellectual infrastructure are concerned, the field of composition in Bangladesh is apparently in an inconvenient position currently to develop and pass into professional common sense like literature and language-related fields.

Projection

English studies in Bangladesh are on the cusp of a transition. Shamsuzzaman, Everatt, and McNeill (2014) discovered in a study that the next generation of English instructors in Bangladesh preferred to specialize in language stream over literature. Their study, however, implied that it would take about two decades for language stream, not literature, to become ascendant. How composition would emerge as English studies in Bangladesh evolve in the decades to come is uncertain. Presumably, composition would permeate more in the landscape of English studies in Bangladesh, as language-stream dominant English studies potentially lean more toward composition than literature-stream dominant English studies do. The gradual inclination of English studies in Bangladesh toward composition--however promising it appears--accompanies potential pitfalls, as the origin of composition as Elbow (2002) claims presented literature, not language, as the other.

The scope of North America-based composition studies is academic writing. Academic writing is a complex and often contradictory business (Sword, 2012). It has its own grammar, and construction of academic text presupposes knowledge about and application of that grammar. Academic writing, then, is not spontaneous, subjective, or idiosyncratic. It is instead objective, conventional, and linear. Learners must have instruction in academic writing to learn it. Admittedly, Bangladesh does not have a "coherent energy and esprit de corps" (Elbow, 2002, p. 544) to enact the

principles and procedures of composition pedagogy. Instruction in grammar is masqueraded as instruction in composition to fill that void. This is a regressive move and runs counter to the principles of composition that developed and flourished in North America. As Silva (2006) claims, when composition studies emerged in North America at the beginning of the 19th century, the focus was “on formal accuracy” (p. 112), that is, grammar. The pedagogical approach that underpinned that method of teaching writing is “controlled composition.” Because it became evident that the potential of controlled composition was severely qualified to help learners write, the field of composition experimented with “current traditional rhetoric” before it embraced the method of teaching writing as a process in the 1970s (Silva, 2006). A process approach to teaching writing considers writing to be more discursive and rhetorical than mechanical and formulaic. For all the importance attached to grammar in teaching writing, grammar is the most insignificant part of writing given that two of the most critical attributes of writing--critical intelligence and factual diligence--are not captured by grammar (Pinker, 2014). For composition studies, Bangladesh lives in the past as much as it wants to do away with that past. As such, the move toward composition studies in Bangladesh is more impulsive than informed.

English studies in Bangladesh may have been suffering from the consequences of a transition since the 1990s when the private universities were launched in Bangladesh. Private universities appeared to have different visions of English studies; they shifted the thrust of English studies in Bangladesh from literature to language. Private universities created a “disciplinary division of labour” (Matsuda, 1999, p. 699), but they lacked sufficient intellectual infrastructure to support that disciplinary division of labor. The shift was abrupt and ambitious. They apparently depended on an inexperienced cadre of professionals to advance their visions of English studies. Altogether, indeed, they enacted an “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1988, p. 76) against literature. Literature slid backward, and language stream came to the fore. This split between literature and language, when the former was relegated to a lesser light position, critically influenced the trajectory of English studies in Bangladesh. This transition accompanied implications for composition studies in Bangladesh, too.

The whole paradigm of English studies has revolved around literature in Bangladesh for nearly two-hundred years since the introduction of English in the British colonial period. Literature is a fully developed discipline in Bangladesh because of pedagogical, institutional, and intellectual resources it has amassed over the centuries. As it is, the expertise and experiences of literature professionals are critical to facilitating the promotion of English studies in Bangladesh. Ideally, a transition in English studies in Bangladesh draws upon the knowledge-base of literature. But as Alam (2011) indicates, this transition in English studies toward ELT/Applied Linguistics is initiated independent of literature, in that it was aberrantly motivated by an urge to commodify English studies in Bangladesh with the involvement and intervention of a foreign agency, the British Council. This development is counterproductive to the promotion of composition studies. While composition and literature share some ontological tensions, composition scholars (Murray, 1982, for example) contend that the act of writing is inseparable from the act of reading. Literature inures potential

writers to the semantic, syntactic, and mechanical options and restrictions of writing. Composition benefits from literature. Composition and literature are not essentially antithetical.

Paradoxically, however, literature seems to have been throwing a spanner in promoting composition studies in Bangladesh. Bangladesh presents a classic context of conflict between literature and composition, where the latter is “the new kid” (Elbow, 2002, p. 533) of the former. Literature, as such, suppressed, even denied, the existence of composition. The exclusionary nature of literature went unchallenged for so long that literature emerged as sacrosanct. In Latin, the word *vates* stands for both poet and prophet (Calonne, 2006). Because Latin influenced the Western intellectual culture profoundly, and literature is a staple of the Western culture that Bangladesh embraced, Bangladesh seems to embody the pristine context and connotation of literature. It has elevated the poets and writers of literary texts to the position of prophets. Teachers teaching those texts have emerged as preachers; students have become moral acolytes; and classrooms have become sanctuaries. However idealistic this edifice of literature appears, it ignores “the genuine needs of the students” (Elbow, 2002, p. 537), who need to read critically and write persuasively. Composition, on the other hand, is student-centered and need-based in that the core activity in teaching composition is the act of reading what is on students’ minds (Elbow, 2002) as reflected in their writing. When literature is ascendant, as in the case of Bangladesh, and upholds such a vision of teaching and learning, composition struggles to exist.

Literature, nonetheless, is not an invincible impediment to the promotion of composition studies in Bangladesh. The influence of literature is already compromised. It poses only residual resistance as the paradigm of English studies shifts in Bangladesh. Alam (2011) contends that the literature professionals in Bangladesh must critique their perceptions and practices of teaching and learning English to customize themselves to the changing landscape of English studies in Bangladesh. ELT is the problem. The emergence of ELT in Bangladesh, especially following the launching of private universities in the 1990s, is tantamount to the beginning of an apocalypse in English studies. It has promised the world, but it has delivered hardly anything thus far. It renounced the knowledge-base of English studies in Bangladesh that accrued over two centuries; it destabilized the styles and strategies of learning and teaching English, which were consistent with the local contexts and constraints; and it superimposed a group of professionals, who were underprepared. While these professionals could sport some fishy foreign credentials (mostly from the U.K.), teaching was not their strong suit. As such, ELT professionals in Bangladesh have been still struggling because of the jinx of an abrupt and ambitious beginning. ELT is already “bogged down” (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008, p. 16) in Bangladesh, but it reigns over the realm of English studies. Until the ELT monster is stopped and streamlined, the transition in English studies in Bangladesh toward composition might run from a crisis to a catastrophe.

Conclusion

The English language occupies a critical space in the landscape of formal education in Bangladesh. Learning the language is as non-negotiable as teaching it. Because no discipline, including English, is a pure monolith, it contains space for reflection, revision, and productive action to adapt it to the new developments on the economic, political, and global scenes. The infamous literature-language binary is a false one, as is the timeworn conflict between literature and composition. All English professionals in Bangladesh must realize that despite their disciplinary affiliation, their mission is identical: they do English, they do language. They should develop and reinforce a sense of collective identity. As a discipline, English is essentially hybrid, so it warrants collaboration, not conflict, among professionals. Their energy and expertise should be consumed by their effort to make the discipline more practical, useful, and diverse. Under such a circumstance, composition seems a critical component to English studies in Bangladesh. That does not necessarily imply that composition would move “toward a ubiquitous major” in Bangladesh, as claimed by Giberson and Moriarty (2010, p. 2) in the context of North America. Instead, it expands and diversifies the scope of English studies in Bangladesh to make the discipline more accessible, attractive, egalitarian, and current to the stakeholders it serves.

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