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Importing Composition: Teaching and Researching Academic Writing Beyond North America

This seems to be a period in which composition as a field takes stock of its history and position among research fields and in the university. One distinctive feature of its development that has not been much discussed is the fact that for all its huge growth and institutionalization in conferences, journals, and departments, composition remains largely restricted to the United States and Canada. Copies of *CCC*, like boxes of Baker's unsweetened chocolate, find their way abroad only by accident, or when ordered by some obsessive expatriate. The large and elegantly produced freshman composition textbooks that seem so ubiquitous in university bookstores sell their tens of thousands of copies entirely in the North American market.

The authors were at Lancaster University, UK, from 1991 to 1994, where Mary, Mulamba, and Ndoloi all held Technical Co-operation Training fellowships from the British Council funded by the UK Overseas Development Administration, and where they all participated in the Teaching of Writing Group. Mary N. Muchiri has taught at Nairobi University, and since 1978 at Kenyatta University College, now Kenyatta University, near Nairobi, Kenya. She now teaches in the Communication Skills Department. She is author of *Communication Skills: A Study Course for Universities and Colleges* (Longman Kenya Ltd.). Her Ph.D. dissertation was on exam questions and institutional culture. Nshindi G. Mulamba was a lecturer for ten years in the Linguistics Department at Lubumbashi University in Zaire before coming to Lancaster to do a genre study of Zairean undergraduate dissertations in English and Linguistics. Civil War and ethnic persecution in Zaire prevented him from returning to Lubumbashi when he was awarded his Ph.D. He has gone to Kasai province, where there are now half a million refugees from Shaba province, and has found a job in a teacher training college. Greg Myers is a lecturer in Linguistics and Modern English Language at Lancaster University, where he teaches a first year course on the Culture and Communication degree. He is author of *Writing Biology* (Wisconsin) and an undergraduate textbook, *Words in Ads* (Edward Arnold). Deoscorous B. Ndoloi trained as a geography teacher before becoming a tutor in the Communication Skills Department at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1983. He has completed a dissertation on shifts of personae in the writing of first year students at Dar.

In some ways this is appropriate. Composition research remains local, in a way other areas of academic research do not, because it has been tied to teaching in specific programs, and innovations in testing or syllabi or tutoring fit specific institutional needs; it is local because it is concerned with practice. But as composition research has developed it has come to see itself as the study of writing in general, and academic writing in particular. In those terms it might be of interest beyond universities in the United States and Canada. But when it is exported, it changes meaning and serves different needs in the new context, just as the work of Foucault, or Bakhtin, or Ngugi changes meaning when it is imported into the US.¹

We are university lecturers teaching in four different university systems who share a research interest in academic writing; the chances of careers and funding brought us together in Lancaster for the last three years. Mary is studying how students at Kenyatta University, in Kenya, interpret examination prompts, and how they draw on the local culture of the institution to do this. Ndoloi is studying the ways first-year students at the University of Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania, represent themselves in their writing. Mulamba is analyzing texts of the final dissertations of students doing degrees in English at the University of Lubumbashi, in Zaire. Greg is studying writing by academic researchers in UK universities.²

The purpose of this paper is to open a discussion of what happens to the published literature on composition in these new contexts. In the Teaching of Writing Group at Lancaster, we often have this discussion with teachers of communication skills or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) from many countries, all trying to adapt composition research to their settings. We believe such a discussion can be useful to composition researchers, in reminding them what they take for granted that is local to their institutions and nation. Composition research makes assumptions about students, teachers, language, and universities. Some of the assumptions from US research are refreshing in these new contexts; some have to be questioned, and some seem bizarre.

Composition and English for Academic Purposes

While there is no composition industry outside the US and Canada, that is not to say that there is no interest or research in academic writing. But most studies are done to support programs for students whose first language is not English—the idea of teaching English to English speakers (L1, or first language, students) is seen as rather odd. Academic writing is studied in applied linguistics or English language teaching departments under such headings as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As the name suggests, institutions around

English for Academic Purposes have a more limited view of their mission than English Departments in the US. Rather than offer a theory of communication or language use or academic knowledge in general, EAP tries to analyze the immediate needs of students, to define a register of English on this basis, and to suggest the most efficient ways of teaching it, so that students can get on with their studies.³

English language teachers around the world may start reading composition research, when they can get it, because the titles sound relevant, but they often stop reading because what is said seems to apply only to the US and Canada—not even to acknowledge that there might be other systems. Of course part of the problem is that composition research is devoted largely to teaching those for whom English is a first language (L1), while English Language Teaching (ELT) is aimed at those for whom English is a second (or third or fourth) language, but who must use it in their studies. But the differences also have to do with the educational systems. In their own universities, the ELT teachers say:

Courses do not focus just on writing, to the exclusion of reading, speaking, and listening;
Students do not write personal essays, with no disciplinary content;
Assessment is by examination with only a small coursework component;
Students who cannot write competently fail the entrance exam, so the teachers don't see them;
Their institutions lack the resources—and the postgraduate students—for extensive essay-marking.

So they may dismiss the whole composition literature on “L1 writing,” and go back to *TESOL Quarterly*, *ELT Journal*, *Applied Linguistics*, and *English for Specific Purposes Journal*, all of which report enough research on academic writing to keep them busy reading, without trying to track down hard-to-get composition articles.

Yet there is work done in composition research that we can't get elsewhere.⁴ This is partly just because in the US and Canada there are so many postgraduate degree programs, meetings, books, and funded projects; most of all, there are so many students, and teachers to teach them, and even some relatively secure positions for researchers, something the ELT world does not provide. Also, the composition literature has produced some inspiring accounts of teaching and learning in difficult situations. Writers like Mina Shaughnessy, Patricia Bizzell, David Bartholomae, and Mike Rose have offered powerful accounts of what it is like to come as a new student to a university. They have helped us imagine how strange the conventions of academic writing might seem to those unfamiliar with them, and have challenged the naturalness of disciplinary expectations.

There are writers who do this in the English Language Teaching and Communication Skills literatures.⁵ But composition researchers have given particular importance to this imaginative leap, perhaps because the field is still defined in part by freshman composition.

We would like to add to this literature by comparing entry processes in our universities. The problem we share is how students can enter universities without intellectual brutality, loss of identity, and waste of talents—how all students, and not just those with special preparation, can have a chance to succeed. But in different countries, both the universities and the worlds outside them can be different. So the process of entry, and the part in it played by writing, may also differ crucially. We will outline differences in the geographical place of the university, in the view of students as individuals, the view of teachers as researchers, the view of English as a language, and the stability of the university as an institution.

The Journey

One common metaphor for the changes a student undergoes on entering university is that of the journey from home: across town from East LA to UCLA, or down to Pittsburgh from the coal-mining towns of western Pennsylvania, or taking the IND subway uptown to City College, Willie Morris leaving Mississippi for Austin, Jude Frawley entering Christminster, or Julie Walters walking onto campus for the first time in *Educating Rita*. Even at an urban community college just a mile from home, some separation seems to be part of the ritual of beginning.

It is helpful to remind ourselves that one of the things a university does is alter one's sense of geography. This journey is part of what defines the relation between the university and the rest of society. In the US, especially at elite universities, it may be a journey to a protected enclave; students remember nostalgically their days in Ann Arbor, or Berkeley, or Cambridge, or even across Los Angeles in Westwood. While secondary schools are usually tied to one community, universities get students from all over town, or the whole state, or the whole country. Thus they have an important social function, not only setting up new social links, but breaking the ties to home.

Of course students at Kenyatta, Dar es Salaam, and Lubumbashi have also left family and friends and journeyed to get there, often spending days on the matatu, daladala, bus, or train.⁶ But the journey is in one sense further for them, because it is not out to a protected enclave, but in to the heart of the nation. Benedict Anderson has noted how universities under colonial domination (his case was Indonesia) contributed in unintended ways to the sense of a national identity, because they brought to one place

students from throughout the country (as it was defined by imperial maps) to an administrative centre (again, as defined by the empire). At Nairobi or Dar es Salaam or Lubumbashi, a student met others from all over the country and learned to take them as part of his or her community, while those from just beyond the national boundaries went to some other center. Even today, there are only four state universities in Kenya, three in Tanzania (counting the medical school), and three in Zaire, so in going away to one of them one is becoming a part of the national life in a new way.⁷ It is not surprising that in these countries (unlike in the US) universities are centers of political resistance, and may be closed whenever a government feels vulnerable.

Another way in which the journey is different is that university attendance remains in most countries in the world the privilege of a tiny minority. It is easy to forget in the US just what a difference this makes to students. Students in these countries may come to university bearing not just the hopes of their family, but the hopes of an entire village, for whom they will become an important link to the worlds of government and business.⁸ The pressure to succeed, or at least to survive, is enormous. Teachers in these universities recognize the experience of their students in Mike Rose's powerful descriptions, in *Lives on the Boundary*, and recognize the stresses on those who are the first in their families to attend university. But they may be less likely to recognize the complete break with the past that Rose describes in his own college career and in that of some of his students. For these African students, the journey to university is also a journey back to those who sent them.

What does this journey have to do with students' writing? One might think that this exciting transformation of students' lives would make their prose burst out with discoveries. And yet, in all forms of students' writing, Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba find again and again a dull correctness and caution. Where is the richness of experience we see in their journey? We will come back to some of the pedagogical factors that might contribute to the bland impersonality of their writing, but part of it may have to do with the distance of the journey. Where the university system is centralized and highly selective, students may have too much at stake to do anything but try to get by.

There may be a more immediate fear as well; part of the caution about personal expression may result from students' or lecturers' fears of punishment if they voice political criticisms. This does not mean there is lack of political discussion; Kenya has just had and Tanzania is to have multi-party elections, and political talk is everywhere, wherever students meet (in contrast to many US universities). But it is too risky to let these issues get into academic work. In Zaire, now torn by civil war, Mulamba says that

topics seen as political are strictly avoided, because group loyalties are so important (or were, before the exile of non-Shaba teachers and the collapse of the university); they would revive political and ethnic rivalries between teachers and students. For their part, lecturers fear that students spy for the political leaders—that is, they side with someone who seems to promise them a future. To those outside the university, this silence may seem like selling out; Ndoloi recalls the proverb: “The fed dog doesn’t bark.”

In America and Canada, the universities are scattered, and most people have a chance to attend them. But composition teachers, too, regularly express annoyance with the dullness and correctness of the run-of-the-mill essays they receive. The annoyance arises when the dullness seems to arise from a rejection of academic challenges. Are we saying that such dullness is (horrible thought) a cultural universal? No, we suspect that a very similar dullness may have quite different social causes. The fear of failure in North American universities may not be so great (of course we cannot say). Certainly the fear of political persecution should be less. Essays may be dull because the university means too little to the student, or because it means too much. Can we tell the difference between the dullness of boredom, the dullness of linguistic limitation, and the dullness of fear?

Students, Difference, and Solidarity

In the African universities Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba studied, students are first of all members of groups: of a small band of students with whom they survive the university, of the body of students as a whole, and of a community beyond the university, of family, village, and tribe. These loyalties are embodied in daily practices of academic life. Mary wanted to know how students at Kenyatta came to know just what was expected on an exam, since the exam questions themselves did not provide explicit guidance. They were getting much of their information, she found, from what they call “survival groups.” Students band together, sharing notes, sharing knowledge of lecturers, so that the strong help support the weak. One student she interviewed distinguishes these survival groups from more general discussion groups.

In the survival group you just get together, write some points somewhere and give one person, then in the exam room you’ll have to sit together and the paper will be circulating. Or in another case, you don’t have to write anywhere, you just discuss the major points . . . just a matter of surviving the exam.

Everyone in such a survival group then spends less time on study, and they are free to work on social or political activities. Mulamba notes that in his university in Zaire, teachers' responsibility for dissertations in English is limited to the mechanics: bibliography, footnotes, endnotes. Students have to learn everything else about format and writing on their own. They monitor each others' work, working in groups as postgraduate students do in the US and UK.

These survival groups may remind us of the kinds of collaborative activities many composition teachers encourage. But unlike the collaborative writing of Kenneth Bruffee, which seeks to draw students into scholarly dialogue, the collaborations we studied seem to arise from the assumption that the university is an adversarial system, students vs. teacher. Another practice Mary found was the use of "Mwakenya." This refers to a way of folding the paper vertically so that one can recopy one's notes for practice, and memorize them easily on, for instance, the long bus-trip home. Similar methods seem to be developed in other systems, wherever rote memorization is necessary. But it was also suggested that this way of preparing notes made them convenient for smuggling into an exam. It is part of the elaborate cat-and-mouse game of any examination-based system. But what especially struck Mary was the name the students gave this system—*Mwakenya*. *Mwakenya* is the name of a pro-democracy movement, once associated with Ngugi wa Thiongo, before his arrest and exile to the US. Similar practices in other parts of Africa, she found, have similar names. In Tanzania, Ndoloi points out, it is "Nondo," which is "crowbar" in Kiswahili. It can also be called "Kombora," Kiswahili for missile. In Nigeria the name is "Ecowas," after the Economic Community of West African States. The name makes it clear that, whatever the teachers may think of it, the practice is seen by students as group resistance, not just individual cheating. Even in the UK, which is in some ways more like the US, and where neither study groups nor cheating seem to be so organized, Greg finds a powerful sense of a group of all students vs. all teachers, that he did not have in the US.

The sense of group loyalty can also apply to a wider community, of village or people beyond the university. This long-held loyalty can make it hard to take on the kind of academic voice that stresses argument, difference, distinction, personality. Recent historians of composition have tended to trace the concern with voice in an expressivist view of the writing process, but the rhetoric carries through all the schools of composition. In contrast, other cultures may value a voice that identifies one with a group and doesn't make one stand out. Ndoloi found in his analysis of Tanzanian students' writing a tendency to take on various collective personae, associated with traditional speech events. For instance, one first

year project in Commerce and Management requires the student to take a position on a plan to locate a coffee curing plant in a remote, economically depressed region. Rather than marshal economic arguments, some students may take on the voice of the Wise Man, the older brother or village leader who is qualified to make judgments for the group:

In this case what I can advise the people of this region is that economically there is no possibility of constructing a coffee curing plant in Singida region.

Or another example:

As for advice, I would like to ask interested parties to get themselves acquainted with the Tanzanian government policies . . .

Ndoloi points out to his Communication Skills students that these pronouncements or appeals to authority are inconsistent with the kinds of authority favored in academic writing. Called upon to make a judgment, his students take up the rhetoric they knew best before they came to university. This rhetoric depends, not on the marshalling of impersonal arguments or a persona of objectivity, but on a confident assertion of one's right to make such a judgment. And that right is a function of one's place in a family or community or party organization. There are probably similar kinds of authority in American communities, but if there are, they do not seem to be acknowledged by most textbooks and research.

Mulamba, in Zaire, found indications of loyalties to tribe and village even in the highly conventionalized genre of English Language and Literature dissertations. What first interested him in this genre was the strangeness of some of the introductory material. Students would first write many pages maintaining a fairly rigid academic genre (Mulamba's dissertation shows just how rigid they are). But when at the end they came to write dedications and acknowledgements, they would often switch to their home languages (rather than the English of the dissertation or the French of the rest of the university). Clearly there was some powerful desire to link the work back to some group.

Another way Zairean students express a collective persona is by insisting on using "we" rather than "I." Here is a typical example from a student of literature working towards a second degree:

We may finally assume that our dissertation has not treated prejudices and interracial union exhaustively.

Who is *we* here? The *we* seems to be the conventional academic usage that includes the reader. Mulamba gives it a different reading, tracing it to the French use of a magisterial *nous* (see Muhlhausler and Harré). But it could also suggest a different sort of community from that assumed in academic

discourse. When teachers try to get them to change to English conventions, students justify “we” on the grounds that the dissertation has been a collective achievement both intellectually (help from supervisor, lecturers, classmates) and financially (contribution from almost the whole tribe). As with the acknowledgements, they insist on expressing their indebtedness to all concerned in a more permanent form (after all, as Mulamba puts it, *verba volant, scripta manent*). Mary points out how this desire to acknowledge the community contrasts to her Ph.D. viva (oral defense) in the UK, where she could not acknowledge her supervisor’s input. For the purposes of the viva, she had to treat the dissertation as entirely an individual product, while she felt it was really a collaborative product.

How do these senses of group identity relate to composition teaching? Part of the liveliness of articles in composition journals results from their dealing with and quoting individual students. The goal of a one-to-one teacher-student relationship underlies much of the comment on teaching writing, even when it is recognized that, with heavy teaching and large classes, that goal is far off. Mike Rose and Maxine Hairston, like other teachers of writing, often make their points by characterizing individual students:

At twenty-eight, Lucia was beginning her second quarter at UCLA. There weren’t many people here like her. She was older, had a family, had transferred in from a community college. (Rose 181)

Imagine, for example, the breadth of experience and range of difference students would be exposed to in a class made up of students I have had in recent years. One student would be from Malawi. The ivory bracelet he wears was put on his arm at birth and cannot be removed; he writes about his tribal legends. Another student is a young Vietnamese man who came to America when he was eight; he writes about the fear he felt his first day in an American school because there were no walls to keep out bullets. Another is a young Greek woman whose parents brought her to America to escape poverty; she writes about her first conscious brush with sexism in the Greek orthodox church . . . (Hairston 190–91)

Both Rose and Hairston get emotional effect by breaking with the usual tendency to generalize in writing about education. They treat students as individuals, even while placing them in familiar social categories (such as ethnic groups). This sort of social background is common. But somehow the relations between students, in a group, or their relations to teachers, as a group, remain mysterious. They appear as a group only when they become a problem, such as when the class attacks an individual student or resists some goal of the teacher. Collaborative writing is something to be

promoted, against the grain of student experience, by careful organization. How much do we know about actual collaborative practices? Plagiarism is often, though not always, seen as a problem with individual students and their knowledge of conventions. But how much do we know about organized plagiarism, such as through fraternity files, and how it works? In the composition literature, students may come from communities, but at university they succeed or fail on their own. The strain of individualism in writing instruction has often been pointed out by composition researchers, both those who critique it and those who seek to promote it (compare, for instance, the critique in Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality* with the comments in Hairston's "Diversity").

We do not mean to over-simplify the group loyalties of students by attributing to them some special social consciousness or warm tradition known only to those outside Europe and North America, and we do not mean to deny the multiplicity of cultures in the US, which has been a key topic of recent CCC articles. And we are not saying that it is always a good thing to identify oneself with a group. Current events in Kenya and Zaire show that loyalties to village and tribe and group and nation can clearly be dangerous, as well as liberating. Our point is that there are ways of belonging to a group, in one's student life and in one's writing, that differ from the life of the isolated, aspiring, and expressive individual assumed in some composition literature. It differs also from the rather abstract community proposed in some writing on social construction (that's why Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba sometimes find Greg's research on academic writing rather odd). This belonging is a matter of daily practices (such as copying), traditional echoes (such as acknowledging the home village in its language), and powerful, sometimes even unwilling, ethnic and linguistic loyalties.

Teachers: Getting on the Map

Why is it that Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba had to leave their families and friends and work, and leave large cosmopolitan cities, to come to Lancaster, a small university in a small town in a country where it always rains, in order to study the writing done back at their own universities? Clearly there is something rather odd about the academic map, so that hundreds of small institutions in North America and Europe are on it, and others elsewhere are off it. Of course, there has been research done by faculty at Kenyatta, Dar es Salaam, and Lubumbashi, in languages and in other fields. But there is a widespread assumption that validation of knowledge comes from distant and powerful research centers. And that changes the whole approach to academic writing.

It is important to stress that lack of money and time by faculty members is as important in marginalizing research as geography. Ndoloi points out the significance of the fact that university lecturers at Dar drive pick-ups. It seems they do at the other universities in Africa as well. This is because they must also have something going on the side, delivering vegetables from one's village to the city, or keeping hens, or having a little cafe. In Kenya these moonlighting jobs are called "Jua kali," after the open air workshops around Nairobi. These other jobs are of course unofficial, but the university salary is so small and so unreliable that they are usually necessary. It is difficult to do research, even if the materials are available, if one has to juggle several jobs at once. Many composition teachers trying to do some research while working on temporary contracts, perhaps at different institutions across town, already know this. The difference is that in Africa, all university teachers must struggle this way. It is only by going abroad on a fellowship—as Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba did—that one can get the money and time to do the research. Thus knowledge remains identified with other centers. Students at Kenyatta, Dar, and Lubumbashi find they have come to the center of things, in their country, but they have come to the margins of the world of research. Ideas in composition research about the function of academic writing assume that the university is at least notionally a place of research as well as teaching, where new knowledge is produced. What happens to this assumption if a university denies that research is done there?

This issue came up when Mulamba and Greg were discussing whether what the students were doing at Lubumbashi could be called "knowledge-making."⁹ If knowledge is ultimately validated elsewhere—in North American and European journals, conferences, experts, and textbooks—then the function of the lecturer is just to pass it on, more or less efficiently. This means the lecturers have a frustratingly limited job; it also means the students become skeptical about just how much some of their lecturers know, and how up to date their knowledge could be. The students in Mary's interviews said it isn't worth reading beyond the one book the lecturer happens to know, because to know more on an exam could be dangerous. It is important to stay within circumscribed areas. In this context, a teacher who tried to open up study, to include a range of reading and the students' own findings and conclusion, would be seen as raising and blurring the requirements, changing the rules in the middle of the game.

In his detailed study of dissertations, Mulamba traces the appearance and disappearance of the review of the literature as a section. This section would not have been found in any of the French texts that students might have used as models of academic writing. It does not seem to have made

sense to them, as they collected what they could find in the library at Lubumbashi. But Mulamba has a few papers with reviews of the literature, all from before 1983, when the department had Peace Corps volunteers or Fulbright scholars visiting. They brought the literature review with them, and it duly went in. When the foreign lecturers left (the university no longer provided accommodation for them), the review of the literature left with them.

Mulamba pursued this issue further in interviews with the lecturers. They recalled having done some essay-writing themselves, but said that now students no longer read (a familiar complaint all around the world). Students could point out, in their defense, that the books are old, and the library is almost permanently locked. Since 1991 (when the government of General Mobutu began its long and continuing collapse), the library at the American Cultural Centre, which did have some recent publications, has been ransacked. So students write up their dissertations based on other, earlier dissertations still available in the department (preferring to use those written by the lecturers themselves when they were students). It is not surprising that under these conditions the literature review disappears.

While students do not expect their teachers to be models of research, this does not mean they don't respect them. But they have difficulty finding what form this respect should take. Ndoloi has found signs that the university can be treated as an extension of family and community. For instance, a typical acknowledgement of assistance concludes:

First and foremost I am indebted to my supervisor Mrs. R_____ of the Foreign Languages for her motherly supervision, which really uplifted me . . . May God the almighty bless her abundantly.

The language here is sufficiently odd for Ndoloi to mark it for discussion. But the attitude, he believes, is typical. And it differs from acknowledgements in the North America, where teachers can certainly be nurturing and parental, but where students are unlikely to have the language or assumptions that enable them to celebrate this role. The student at Dar finds a way to define the teacher-student relation by treating it as being like that between a mother and child, close and nurturing, and invokes a shared religious belief. The teacher may be parent, as here, or may be impersonal judge, a representative of the state, but it is hard for the teacher to be a mentor, a research model, a link to a larger conversation.

Of course all North American universities, even the most prestigious, also have many faculty who mainly teach, rather than publish. And at some North American universities, only a very few can ever publish or get

a research grant. Still it is possible to maintain the notion that every community college and isolated campus is an outpost of the academic world. Look at the notes on the authors in this journal. If this is a typical issue of *CCC* there will not only be authors from the predictable places, research universities with graduate programs, there will also be authors from small and relatively isolated colleges and large teaching institutions. Why do the more than a thousand US colleges and universities remain in touch, while a university in the huge and cosmopolitan city of Nairobi does not? Again there are matters of history (no colonial legacy), and geography (the distances are less great), and institutions (like annual conferences), and, underlying all this, money. The links are also embodied in the everyday mechanics of academic life. It is not too much to say that the photocopier, personal computers, and regular mail make North American academic life possible. (Both Mary and Ndoloi point out that even the high-quality paper for photocopiers can be scarce and expensive).

What does this contrast tell us about academic writing? The academic networks that we take for granted in any composition textbook are politically, geographically, and historically contingent. Academic networks define concepts like novelty, evidence, and discipline that are the basis of much of composition teaching. The ideal is to invite the students into an ongoing conversation. Charles Bazerman has dramatized the sense of a network in *The Informed Writer*, trying to get students to see they are entering an ongoing conversation, even in a first year essay. David Bartholomae argues that the main characteristic distinguishing less advanced from more advanced writers in a placement test is not the presence or absence of sentence-level errors, but the way the more advanced writers

establish their authority as *writers*; they claim their authority, not by simply claiming they are skiers or that they have done something creative [as in earlier examples], but by placing themselves both within and against a discourse, or within and against competing discourses, and working self-consciously to claim an interpretive project of their own, one that grants them their privilege to speak. (158)

We wonder to what degree this modelling of an academic conversation depends on the sense that the student is entering a world of research and debate. The "research essay" that takes up so much of many composition handbooks seems to assume the student links into a network of new knowledge, through the library and the teacher. Composition teachers may forget just how fragile these links are.

English as *a* Language or as *the* Language

Recall the tongue-tied, conventional students who wrote the weaker passages in Bartholomae's "Inventing the University." Now imagine that these placement essays had to be written in Latin. (Only a century ago they might have been.) That gives some notion of the problem for African students, even in a country like Kenya where English is the medium of instruction throughout the schools and is widely spoken. English will always be one language among many, a student's third, fourth, or fifth language (after Gikuyu and Kiswahili, or Kichaga and Kiswahili, or Ciluba and Kikongo and French), one marked for special purposes, such as school or church or business. One problem is that it is, of course, hard to learn so many languages well, and most students give up well before they reach university. But the most determined or fluent students do learn (remember these are highly selective universities), and their English is pretty good by any standard. The more interesting issue for us is that choosing English as a language in a multilingual setting always conveys a social and political meaning.¹⁰

The use of English has a different meaning in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zaire.¹¹ In Zaire, French is the main European language of the university and of public life, and English is left with a tiny niche. English is not the language of the former colonial power; the desire to learn English may mean, for instance, that one hopes for a career in business, perhaps as a translator or bilingual secretary. It is a marketable, practical skill, like computer programming. In Kenya and Tanzania, English can never be considered apart from the colonial past. In Kenya, English is widely used in education, government, and business, though Kiswahili is also an official language. In Tanzania, Kiswahili is widely used as a national language, which means that special fluency in writing English can still be a distinctive personal skill.

The students at Kenyatta, Dar es Salaam, or Lubumbashi have already learned English to a certain level, or they wouldn't have gotten through the rather strenuous exams. But many of them still have problems with their written work at the university. Administrators, teachers in other departments, and the students themselves may attribute the difficulty to lack of knowledge of the English language. Their assumption is that the students just need to continue English lessons to the next level, not having been taught properly earlier. Students may become defensive—after all, it is their examinable knowledge of English that got them here, and to challenge it is a direct threat to their self-esteem and future careers. Ironically, the effect of the focus on language difficulties is to conceal the

other difficulties students have in entering a university, and in seeing themselves as part of the process of making knowledge. If a student uses an odd verb tense in the introduction to a paper, the teacher could assume he or she just didn't know English verbs, and call for more drill. Thus there would be no thinking about why the verbs tenses shift as they do in introductions. Composition research can help the teachers argue that the main problem is not some specific competency in a language, but the social uses of language as communication within academic institutions.

What relevance do these multilingual settings have for the US (a multilingual country that keeps insisting it is monolingual), and the institutionalized bilingualism of Canada? English teachers in other countries, including Britain, are puzzled that institutions in the US and Canada would expend such huge efforts and resources to teach English to university-level students, most of whom speak it as a native language. The justification offered by the profession is that composition teachers are not teaching English as a language alongside French or German or Kiswahili, but are rather teaching a kind of language *use*. So while some faculty members and legislators may think that composition classes should teach prescriptive grammar, the classes are more likely to teach processes of invention, or arrangement, or stylistic choice. The composition industry is based on an equivocation between these two senses of "English"—as a language (a lexicon and grammar that can be contained in a handbook), or as the language of academic discourse (which is both a narrower and a broader topic).

This may seem to overstate the contrast with the US. After all, composition teachers have long stressed the social context of language, from Labov's "The Logic of Non-standard English" to multiculturalism today. Teachers actually have to argue, against the opposition of "English Only," that the US is and should be culturally and linguistically diverse. But discussions of bilingualism or bidialectalism usually assume these islands of difference exist within a sea of monolingual English culture. For monolinguals in the US, ideas like "speech community" or "code-switching" or "register" have to be painstakingly established as abstractions and illustrated with data. In Africa, as in all multilingual countries, people do sociolinguistics on every streetcorner. Someone in Nairobi market who switches from English to Kiswahili to Gikuyu in the course of buying a *kiondo* (a bag) is changing footing, and knows just what is going on. (People do the same thing with registers in English, but it takes them a whole seminar to show that that is what they're doing.) In Africa, the diversity of cultures, sometimes explosive, is a given, not an ideal to be defended, and academic life must work with it, one way or another.

One effect of a largely monolingual society is to contribute to the apparent authority and generality of academic knowledge. Patricia Bizzell comments on the omnivorousness of academic discourse:

It seems, then, that bi-culturalism is likely to be very difficult when the academic world view is one of the world views involved, because the academic seeks to subsume other world views to which the students may retain allegiance (Bizzell, *Academic Discourse* 171).

Much of the work of teaching composition critically is making students aware of the tricks of language, the way academic language is different from everyday language and may take on unjustified authority. Researchers like Shaughnessy, Bartholomae, and Bizzell have written eloquently to show how strange the language of the university can seem from outside. Others, like Peter Elbow, have lamented the fact that academic language is cut off from everyday language. But it remains true that a US teacher must convince each new group of students that there are different uses of English that need to be learned even by fluent speakers of English.¹²

English for Academic Purposes works in multilingual settings by narrowing the range of English until it is considered teachable. Its researchers and teachers have something to learn from the broader range of English use considered in composition research and literacy studies. But composition teachers and researchers also have something to learn from settings in which English is a minority language. One effect of a multilingual society is to frame academic knowledge as a distinct and limited institution: there is English for Academic Purposes as there is English for diamond dealing, for diplomacy, or for working in hotels. For students at Kenyatta, Dar es Salaam, or Lubumbashi, academic knowledge is already in a box marked, "treat this with awe, but with skepticism." Again, imagine if the academic journals you read were all in Latin. It could give them prestige, but could also serve as a kind of warning: everything here is not just in language (the code of thought) but is in *a* language (a particular code, among others).

The University, The Degree, and Time

A freshman composition program is built around cycles so regular that people hardly notice them: essay deadlines, course syllabi, degree years. These cycles carry two assumptions: (1) that individual students develop in coherent stages, and (2) that the university goes on permanently without major change. The assumption of coherent development does not seem to be made in all systems. The three African universities, like most European universities, focus on a single moment, rather than on the long story; they conceive of the student career as an examination, preceded by a

period of preparation. The examination is one more step in the rigid ladder of selection that led the student to secondary school and university attendance. As in most European universities, there is not much conception of how the student develops over his or her time there.

The whole idea of a first year as a preparation for entry into the university has until recently been alien to both African systems and the European systems on which they were based. Looking at a first-year course in a US university, the European or African lecturers would ask just what US students *did* learn in secondary school. The ideal of higher education in the US is that it is open to all, like the public schools; only on that assumption does Mike Rose's powerful indictment of waste have its force. In most universities elsewhere, those who are ready will go on, those who are not ready will fail, and there will be no Mike Rose to call it an injustice. A high failure rate may be taken as an indication of institutional failure (as in recent reports in Kenya) or as a sign that standards are being maintained (as in Zaire). In either case vast failure is taken for granted.

Mary and Ndoloi are involved in Communication Skills courses aimed at reducing this failure rate, but these are relatively new operations.¹³ The idealism of Shaughnessy, Bartholomae, Bizzell, and Rose is part of what makes the enterprise of composition interesting¹⁴ to them, and it is interesting to those teaching study skills in other elite systems where the intake of students is expanding (such as the UK, or now, South Africa). All composition research assumes that students must be prepared explicitly for the tasks before them. Ideally, they must be given a series of chances to practice any skill on which they might be assessed, and given support, through writing labs and basic writing courses, if they have difficulties. It is as if composition courses came with an entirely different conception of human nature and of education. Certainly they come with a different conception of time. Instead of the once and for all judgment of exams, the career of a US student is to be broken down into smaller and smaller units; it is bumpy road rather than a cliff-face.

The developmental view of a student's career, planning for the future and offering support where necessary, is linked to a second key assumption, of the overwhelming stability of the university. The reality in Africa, as in most countries outside North America and Europe, is that universities are very fragile. Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba had three-year grants to study writing at their respective universities, and in the course of that time all three universities were closed for some period. In Kenya the universities were closed between January and August 1992, during the political struggles that finally led to the first multi-party elections. Now, as Mary plans her return, Kenyatta university is closed again, in a lecturers' strike over resources for teaching. In Tanzania all universities were closed in May

1990 for a whole year, and again in February 1992, as students rebelled over "cost sharing," the demand that for the first time they pay fees to attend.¹⁵ Lubumbashi University has been closed during the civil war raging throughout Zaire as other parties challenged the ruling party, and as part of a staff strike over pay. More recently, the English Department in particular suffered as hundreds of thousands of members of other ethnic groups, particularly the Baluba people from Eastern Kasai, were driven out of Lubumbashi and the rest of Shaba (Katanga) Province.¹⁶

The effect of this constant threat to the continuity of studies does not seem to be, as one might expect, wholesale abandonment of the educational system. When the universities reopen, as they usually do, students return, deposit their dissertation, and sit their exams. Staff put on extra sessions, as they did at Kenyatta, to handle the now double load of students, or students have to wait a year to enter, as they do at Dar. Of course, some kinds of damage to the students are permanent. As Lubumbashi University closed again last year, Mulamba thought first of the students who had completed years of work, and might now be denied the chance to get a degree, since the department was so depleted. Everything is at risk, and not just from the usual individual threats—the disk is erased, money runs out, glandular fever strikes—but from historic changes. It affects the students knocking on the door of the university if they know that there might be no door out the other side. For instance, Mulamba has observed how students have tended to choose shorter, more practical, if less prestigious courses, that they will have a better chance of finishing in the coming years of unrest. For those who remain, English becomes more and more a short-term acquirement, and each written exercise becomes a hurdle rather than an opportunity for development. In the US, first-year composition students could believe they were learning for their third year (we do not know if they do). In Zaire now, that third year looks very far off indeed.

The apparent stability of US universities may help explain the difference in political focus in North American composition studies and in language studies in some other countries. There has been a debate in composition studies about whether composition courses should or should not take social change and cultural diversity as a topic.¹⁷ To Greg's surprise, at first, this debate has not particularly interested Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba, partly because they take the involvement of the university in politics as a perhaps painful fact of its life, not as a link either to be strenuously asserted or equally strenuously denied.¹⁸ Mary points out that a course stressing cultural diversity (Development Studies) is a part of the foundation year at Kenyatta, but it is seen as supporting the status quo. Ndoloi quotes national documents that define the political role of university education. Mulamba

traces thought on *négritude* and the codification of four national languages in Zaire. In each case, what counts as radical for them seems to be different from what counts as radical in the North American debates. The educational ideal for them is not the pursuit of diversity and an active role for universities, but the pursuit of consensus and some new and as yet undefined sort of continuity.

The Local and the Global

As we four have discussed this paper, we have kept coming back to the word “importing” in our title. In earlier drafts we used the word “exporting,” but that seemed to suggest that this flow of ideas is part of neocolonialism, the way that, for instance, the export of an examination system, or European ideas of research, has been considered part of colonialism. This is a familiar and important line of criticism of the transfer of educational ideas. Patricia Irvine and Nan Elsasser compare the importation of composition standards to the West Indies to the misguided application of inappropriate agricultural technologies.

By importing a curriculum and applying it as if West Indian students had practised the forms of writing integral to a North American education, we contribute to confusion and lack of learning. To improve writing qualitatively at the college, we must . . . incorporate the social, economic, and political realities in bold, innovative curricula. (Irvine and Elsasser 318)

Gloria Paulik Sampson defends Chinese language teaching methods, involving memorization, focus on reading, and teacher-centered classrooms, against the “technocratic imperialism” of methods imported from North America. Mary has insisted, in similar terms, on the importance of taking local cultures into account in planning educational change (Muchiri).

There certainly are elements of neocolonialism in the educational systems of Kenya, Tanzania, and Zaire—for instance, the examination systems that are taken for granted. Even the Overseas Development Administration aid and British Council fellowships that took Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba to Britain are part of a larger strategy of development and trade links. For better *and* worse, their universities remain tied to the former imperial powers. Following this line of critique, North American institutions, including universities, step in with a new colonialism, as unidirectional and potentially inappropriate as the old. But the relation of methods from North American composition to these universities is more complex than this. Unlike the flow of British language teaching and testing methods, sponsored by the British Council, the flow of ideas from US universities is accidental, unsponsored, and erratic. It has the same dangers of inappro-

priate application in a new context, but not the same political associations. Nor can it really be compared to McDonalds or CNN or the World Bank, all powerful multinationals. What we need is not a colonial metaphor, as conventionally applied, but some way to go from the global circulation of writing research to the local contexts of writing.

North American and European academics may be struck each day by how institutions of knowledge become more and more global in their reach. This change is particularly striking in composition research, as it achieves academic respectability, but it is true to different degrees in all fields. Journals, conferences, publishers, and research projects are international, linked by e-mail, photocopies, faxes, and airlines. But this apparent globalization is deceptive. Everyday academic work is still overwhelmingly determined by its national setting. The funding, the geography, the politics, the national ideology determine daily concerns like hours, class size, assessment, careers. And access to that global network of contacts is by no means equally apportioned.

Let us say that Mary, at Kenyatta University, wanted to try to institute the kind of responses to students' essays urged in the composition literature. What would she need? First of all, she would need a lot of money; there is no chance of such comments when each tutor has hundreds of students. She would need a course based on coursework instead of exams, and for that she would need a different relation of students to teachers, and a different university year. But she might need different students, as well, since those selected by a ruthless examination system may not be those most likely to benefit from comments intended to develop their own voices. She would need students confident enough in their English to bear comments on it that had nothing to do with its correctness. She would need somehow to be able to cut free from institutional hierarchies and ethnic divisions and regional origins and suspicions of bias, all of which she found in her research, and institute a kind of free trade zone in which these comments could be taken as one to one, teacher to student. She would need to know the student was coming back next week, next term, next year. She would need to know the university would still be there. She would need an ideology of opportunity and fairness to fall back on, to persuade people that this sort of education was characteristically Kenyan. And when she became discouraged, as she would, she would need to be able to turn to other writing researchers and teachers at the next CCC, who would say she was doing the right thing. If Ndoloi wanted to introduce process pedagogy, or Mulamba to change the way students used references, or if Greg wanted to start freshman composition and placement exams in the UK, they might find in a similar way that they had to reconstruct a whole institution and culture.

One response by North American composition teachers to this experiment in transporting composition might be a sigh of relief, that their universities have composition classes of large but manageable size (not 500, as at Kenyatta), that they have access to research and libraries, that sequences of courses consider the preparation of students, that universities can remain open, that lecturers are not summarily arrested. That is true enough, but rather complacent. A more useful response to the uneven spread of composition research would be to see how much of the work is tied to the particular context of the US. When composition researchers make larger claims about academic knowledge and language, it needs to acknowledge these ties. The very diversity rightly celebrated in the composition literature may lead a teacher to forget that it is diversity joined in a peculiarly American way, within American institutions, in an American space. The teacher in New York or Los Angeles may look out over a classroom and think, "The whole world is here." It isn't.

If one grants the local origins of composition research, there are two kinds of messages that one might draw from this exercise in following composition research in other systems. One is that composition researchers and ELT teachers are reminded just how radical composition ideas can be, perhaps not in their own local settings, but transplanted into a setting with different assumptions. The assumptions about malleable writer identities in composition meet the rigidities of the European and colonial examination systems. The recognition of links *and* differences between academic and non-academic languages contrasts with the tendency of some EAP needs analyses to isolate and reify language. The insistence on the teacher as a link into a larger conversation challenges stereotypical roles of teachers confronting suspicious students in a hierarchical system. Composition researchers take a surprisingly long view of development, of students and of the university, that can be refreshing and sometimes astonishing in the scramble of teaching and learning in African universities. All that is for the good, at least in these new contexts.

Lest the composition researchers get too complacent, one should look for places where composition is difficult to transplant, and ask if these difficulties don't sometimes arise closer to home. We have mentioned the dull errorlessness of the prose, and wondered how it relates to similarly depressing prose in North American students, perhaps seeing a variety of causes, not all of them matters of laziness or lack of imagination. We have mentioned apparently absurd arguments from authority in essays, vague reliance on consensus, uncritical use of written sources, treatment of teachers as parents, invocation of religious belief, all of which can be dismissed as simply conformist, but all of which may be valued differently from other perspectives. North American teachers develop ways of dismiss-

ing some kinds of resistance to their reforming message as not worthy, while other kinds of resistance are to be promoted as progressive. Mary, Ndoloi, and Mulamba reconsider some of these distinctions.

As we said at the outset, we mean this essay only to open a discussion, one involving North Americans but also, we hope, writing teachers elsewhere. We can perhaps sum up our intervention with three questions for composition teachers and researchers. Imagine you could pack something of the world of composition, just enough to fit in a small box that would fit under an airline seat. It is not for foreign aid, or for trade, both of which can be exploitive; let us think of it as barter. What would you pack in this box; what is essential in the composition enterprise? That's the fun part. Now here comes the hard part: Where would you send it? And even harder: What would you expect to get in return?

Notes

1. For some examples of this process of transformation across cultures, see Edward Said, "Travelling Theory,"; Tzvetan Todorov; Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*; and Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Moving the Centre*.

2. Mary, Mulamba, Greg, Ndoloi. Teachers who puzzle over class lists with names from many nations will recognize our problem here. University forms require a Christian name and a surname; teachers use one for informal address, and the other for formal address, alphabetization, and official documents. But for many people, African or Asian, the names do not work this way. We finally just used the names we use with each other, even if that means two Christian names and two family names. What counts as informality is, of course, culture-specific.

3. These studies are often supported in Britain by such agencies as the British Council, which funds research studentships and conferences as part of its mission to spread British language and culture (and thus trade and political links). Thus they are part of an explicit program of promoting the national interest.

4. To take some examples, our various projects at Lancaster have drawn on papers on disciplinary differences in texts (MacDonald; Kaufer and Geisler); on discourse communities (Harris; Raforth); on collaborative writing (Bruffee); on genre (Miller); on theories of composing (Faigley), and on textual construction of knowledge (Bazerman).

This is not meant as a list of Greatest Hits, but as an indication of the eclectic range of studies that, for one reason or another, cross the Atlantic.

5. We are particularly indebted to Brigid Ballard in Australia, Hywel Coleman at Leeds, John Swales's appendix to *Genre Analysis*, Jin and Cortazzi, and to our colleagues Roz Ivanic and Romy Clark.

6. *Matatus* (in Nairobi) and *daladalas* (in Dar) are the mainstays of local transportation; minibuses that run out to the suburbs or to outlying towns, they are typically cheap, crowded, fast, and (to the uninitiated) terrifying.

7. This is not counting colleges of education in these countries or the new private universities in Kenya or Zaire, which serve different functions.

8. Ngugi wa Thiongo comments bitterly on this break in discussing African writers' use of European languages: "The writers who emerged after the Second World War were nearly all the products of universities at home or abroad. Some of these universities like Ibadan in Nigeria, Makerere in Uganda, Achimota in Ghana had been set up to manufacture an elite that could later make a good partnership with the British ruling circles. The curricula reflected little or nothing of the local surroundings. The situation was quite ironic. Many of the educated Africans had been sent to the higher seats of learning by their peasant communities so they could come back and help in

the collective survival. But at the end of the educational pipeline, these select few had more in common with the very forces which kept the communities down in the first place" (106). We may disagree with Ngugi's socialist evaluation of this movement, but the sense of being sent out as a lifeline is recognized by many university students in highly selective systems.

9. Mulamba was taking the phrase from MacDonald.

10. For a good introduction to the issues of multilingualism in literacy research, see David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*, Ch. 5. On the relation of English to Neo-colonialism, see any of Ngugi's non-fiction collections; on linguistic imperialism from the point of view of critical English language teaching, see Phillipson.

11. For background on English in Africa, see Schmied; Rubagumya; Mulamba; and Bloor and Bloor.

12. On Critical Language Awareness and Knowledge About Language in the LJK, see Clark and Ivanic.

13. Now Kenya has embarked on a new system called 8-4-4, with two years less of secondary school and one more year of university, that does include a foundation year

for everyone. It is partly in response to these changes, and a huge influx of new, less prepared students, that Mary is studying the examination system.

14. This word was "fascinating" in an earlier draft, but Mary revised it. Let's not overdo the enthusiasm.

15. Students resisting the changes were taken away from the university by troops, and three lecturers who supported the students were summarily transferred within 24 hours.

16. Latest reports are that all holders of doctorates in the department, not being Shaba, have had to leave.

17. See Hairston, "Diversity," and responses in later issues.

18. Ngugi wa Thiongo comments on his teaching in exile: "The kind of issues we are raising in classrooms of Yale would land all of us in prison for anything between one and ten years" (157). There is in his comment thankfulness for the real academic freedoms in the US, but also a kind of astonishment at the innocence of the US students, who do not realize that these issues (in this case, the relation of literature to society) could be (and in his view, *should* be) explosive and threatening to those in power.

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