Guest Editorial

The Teaching and Learning of L2 Writing in Asia

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As a result of globalization, the expansion of higher education, and the worldwide trend toward learning English as a second/foreign language (L2) from an early age, writing has begun to play an increasingly significant role in teaching and learning English in Asian countries. The growing importance of written communications, ranging from informal writing for social networking to more formal writing for academic purposes, the workplace, and scholarly publication, has resulted in a proliferation of research on English-language writing pedagogy in the Asian context.

While special issues of writing journals usually address salient themes or topics germane to the field, rarely do they focus on a particular part of the world. The emphasis on L2 writing in Asia in this special issue is pertinent since Asia is not only the largest continent in the world, but it is also seen as key to the long-term development of English as a global language, overtaking the rest of the world in terms of the number of people learning and using English. Presently, there are more L2 than first-language (L1) speakers of English in the world, the majority of whom are based in Asia, and many of them are writing and learning to write in English at different levels and in different contexts.

Although issues of interest to L2 writing scholars in general are relevant to the Asian context, a number of topics seem particularly significant to Asia-based researchers and practitioners, such as pedagogies that are especially conducive to students' writing development, and the specific challenges that Asia-based L2 writers face. Given the role of English as a lingua franca in Asia and English writing as a tool for communication (Kirkpatrick, 2010), one concern among L2 writing scholars relates to teaching approaches that celebrate native speaker norms in writing, which are increasingly deemed unsuitable for Asia-based L2 students learning to

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write in English (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2010; Sasaki, in press). Another topic relevant to the Asian context concerns the role of the L1 in L2 writing classrooms, particularly in EFL contexts where students speak the same mother tongue (e.g. China, Japan, and Korea). While communicative approaches to English language teaching advocate the use of the target language in the classroom, it is suggested that the L1 can be a useful resource that facilitates learning in EFL writing classrooms – for such purposes as in peer feedback activities (Yu and Lee, 2014). Since writing is one of the most difficult skills to master for L2 learners (Hyland, 2003), L2 writers in Asia are bound to face a host of challenges. One of these has been increasingly researched in recent years is writing for English publication. For example, Li (2002) examines the perceptions of Mainland Chinese researchers, who report that they feel disadvantaged when compared with their native speaker counterparts. These important topics are all examined in this special issue dedicated to the teaching and learning of L2 writing in Asia, with the majority of contributions from East Asia (e.g. China and Japan) and Southeast Asia (e.g. Hong Kong and Macau).

The special issue begins with Xiaoye You's featured essay entitled 'Historical knowledge and reinventing English writing teacher identity in Asia', which challenges the preponderant, monolingual perspective on the teaching of English writing in Asia that encourages students to work toward native speaker norms in writing. You maintains that the focus on native speakerism directly impacts on writing teacher identity construction, which is heavily influenced by a monolingual orientation. As a result, English writing teachers in Asia enact their identities in ways that emphasize native speaker norms – for example, giving meticulous feedback on written errors and requiring students to produce error-free writing. Using historical accounts of the teaching of L2 writing in Asia as evidence of the multilingual and transnational nature of such history, You demonstrates that the teaching of L2 writing in Asia has always occurred in a multilingual context. Drawing upon examples of teaching of English writing in China, You further unveils the struggles of Chinese students and teachers brought by a monolingual ideology. Through his detailed historical account, You urges the readers to critically examine the place of monolingualism in the teaching, learning, and assessment of English writing in Asia. Instead of a source of interference, You contends that the L1 (or other languages) can be utilized as a resource to help students write. He argues that L2 writing teachers in Asia should construct a multilingual, transnational identity and design teaching materials, writing tasks, and pedagogical techniques in a multilingual framework. You's featured essay serves as an excellent introduction to the entire special issue, broadening our perspectives on the notion of English writing teacher identity in Asia, and challenging

traditional assumptions that underpin the teaching and learning of English writing in the Asian context. The featured essay also echoes translingual approaches that challenge dominant language ideologies and privilege the various language resources that students bring to their own writing (Atkinson *et al.*, 2015).

There are three articles in the *Research Matters* section, which address three different topics that are under-researched not only in Asia but also in the broader L2 writing literature: teacher oral feedback during conferences, written languaging, and the role of translation in L2 writing.

The first *Research Matters* article, entitled 'Oral corrective feedback on L2 writing from sociocultural perspective: A case study on two writing conferences in a Chinese university', by Ye Han and Fiona Hyland, explores the role of oral corrective feedback in writing conferences in a Mainland Chinese university context from a sociocultural perspective. The authors draw on the regulatory scales for corrective feedback developed by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and Erlam, Ellis, and Batstone (2013) and analyze the two participating teachers' individual conferences with two university student volunteers. Although the two teachers were found to generally shift from implicit to explicit corrective feedback strategies during the writing conferences, they displayed a very different approach to giving corrective feedback, with one engaging the student in negotiation while the other dominated the process by diagnosing errors and providing corrections for the student. One possible reason that emerged is that the student in the teacher-dominant writing conference was not provided with the teacher's feedback prior to the conference, and hence might have had to grapple with the additional cognitive load to read, process, and comprehend the teacher feedback. Han and Hyland conclude the article with a number of useful suggestions, such as the importance of pre-conference preparation on the part of students, as well as the need for teachers to tailor their corrective feedback to individual student needs.

While Han and Hyland focus on oral feedback, when the majority of teacher feedback studies have investigated written feedback, Wataru Suzuki has written languaging as his research focus, when the bulk of existing research on languaging has examined oral languaging. In his article 'The effect of quality of written languaging on second language learning', Suzuki draws on Swain's (2006) concept of languaging, defining it as meaning making through the use of language. While oral languaging (e.g. collaborative dialogue and private speech) is found to play a critical role in L2 students' learning, the effects of written languaging on L2 learning are under-researched. In Suzuki's study, written languaging is referred to as the written externalization of writers' dialogue with the self. Specifically, participants in the study produced written reflections and explanations of

the teacher's direct corrections of their written errors, referred to as writing language episodes (WLEs). The study investigates the extent to which 24 Japanese language learners engage in written languaging, measured in terms of the number and type of WLEs (i.e., noticing, noticing with reasons, and uncertainty), as well as the effects of the quality of WLEs on their revisions. Analyses of students' WLEs and revisions show that both written languaging at the level of noticing and noticing with reasons lead to accuracy improvement. The findings of the study are in line with those of oral languaging research, suggesting that providing learners with opportunities to engage in written languaging can enhance their L2 learning. Suzuki concludes his article with a clear call for teachers to encourage L2 students to keep written reflections – e.g. in diaries, journals, and portfolios, on the linguistic problems they encounter during learning.

In the last article of the *Research Matters* section, 'L1–L2 translation versus L2 writing tasks: An empirical study on non-language major students' improvement in writing proficiency', Janice Lo examines the role of translation in L2 writing classrooms. She compares the effects of translation tasks and L2 writing tasks on students' attempts to make improvement and their actual improvement in the lexical and grammatical aspects of their writing. The findings show that translation tasks are more effective than L2 writing tasks. Specifically, both translation and L2 writing tasks can prompt students to improve the lexis more than the grammar of their writing. Although the role of translation in the L2 language classroom has remained controversial, with mixed findings from previous research, the findings of Lo's study, coupled with recent resurgence of interest in the use of translation in L2 classrooms, underscores the potential value of L1 and L1–L2 translation in aiding L2 students' language development.

There are three articles in the *Reflections on Practice* section, which focus on reference management in discourse, students' agency in their development of academic literacy, and scholarly publishing for L2 writers in the periphery.

Peter Crosthwaite's reflection on practice centers on reference management in discourse among Asian writers of L2 English. In his article 'Managing referential movement in Asian L2 writing: Implications for pedagogy', Crosthwaite discusses the linguistic and cognitive challenges that face Asian L2 writers in their learning of reference in writing, which contributes to coherence in writing. He examines four challenges regarding L2 referential movement for Asian L2 writers, namely, the marking of definiteness through the article system, topic versus subject prominence in languages, the use of pronouns, and how references are used to build extended L2 discourse. Drawing on his own teaching experience, the author provides practical suggestions about tried-and-tested classroom activities

that can help improve L2 reference maintenance, such as picture sequence descriptions, gap-fill tasks, and collaborative writing projects to enable L2 students to track reference over extended discourse sequences. This article provides useful reading for L2 writing teachers, especially those keen on helping their students develop reference management as a coherence creating mechanism in writing.

While reference management is seen to play a pivotal role in academic writing, the second article in the *Reflections on Practice* section takes a different perspective and argues that there is more to academic literacy than the acquisition of discourse competence. In his article, 'Japanese graduate school students' writing in English: Facilitating pathways towards "design"', Glenn Toh reflects on his practice as an EAP teacher teaching academic writing to a group of Japanese graduate school students studying for a Master of Arts in English Language Education at a private university in Tokyo, and shares his realization of the potential richness of students' writer ontologies and subjectivities as a means of constructing and legitimating knowledge. Drawing on Lillis' (2003) notions of 'critique' and 'design', the author proposes a critically transformative way of approaching academic writing that challenges static views of academic discourse or genres, taking account of writing as a socially situated, meaning making activity. To this end, Toh introduces a number of classroom activities that help students move into a 'design' mode through imagining and asserting new possibilities for meaning making – e.g. reflecting on significant life episodes using socio-histories, auto-ethnographies or journals. Concluding his piece, the author underlines the importance of the teacher role in helping students discover themselves in their own writing so that they better understand how negotiated identities and subjectivities can be reified in academic writing.

The third contribution in the *Reflections on Practice* section, by Theron Muller and John Adamson, focuses on writing for English publication by authors living and working outside the Anglophone center – what is sometimes called the 'periphery'. This article contributes new knowledge by bringing together the perspectives of not only editors and authors but also reviewers. Part of the data reported in the article was collected from the mentoring system of the *Asian EFL Journal*, of which the second author is Chief Editor. Reflecting on their journal editing experiences as well as findings from their previous and ongoing research, the authors share a number of insights. First, it is found that even for an Asia-based journal like *Asian EFL Journal*, reviewers tend to adhere to Anglophone-centric standards and review manuscripts with an idealized center audience in mind. Inevitably, authors are made to conform to center values and discouraged from presenting their own contexts as legitimate in their own right. To

address reviewers' entrenched center-focused values, it is suggested that journal editors work on awareness raising and critical reflection through a developmental mode that sensitizes reviewers to the authors' rights to their locally authentic voices (e.g. by pairing new reviewers with experienced reviewers as in the mentoring system the *Asian EFL Journal* has put in place). Also, the dialogic talk among editors, reviewers, and authors has the potential to develop all the parties involved. In particular, reviewer and editor comments on manuscripts and the suggested revisions have a key role to play in facilitating successful publication. For instance, editors' tactful feedback to authors and their helpful advice in case of conflicting reviews can go a long way toward reducing authors' frustration and facilitating their revisions.

There is one book review in the *New Books* section, authored by Cille K. Longshaw. The text reviewed is *Effective Curriculum for Teaching L2 Writing: Principles and Techniques* by Eli Hinkel. What is unique about the book, compared with other seminal texts on the theory and practice of second language writing, is its specific focus on the needs of second language learners. In her book, Hinkel provides pre-service and in-service teachers with useful tips about how to design the writing curriculum and instruction to cater for the specific needs of L2 students in academic contexts.

A number of important implications can be drawn from the various contributions in this special issue, such as the importance of out-of-the-box thinking when we consider the needs of L2 writers. This is emphasized in the featured essay in which You challenges the traditional monolingual orientation to L2 writing that celebrates native speaker norms, and argues for the importance of a multilingual, transnational identity that valorizes the various language resources that students bring to the L2 writing classroom. In a similar vein, Muller and Adamson caution against rigid adherence to Anglophone values in academic publishing and instead encourage Asia-based L2 writers in the periphery to exercise their agency and make their local voices heard. Goh, in his reflection on practice article, also places a high premium on L2 writers' own experiences and voices, reminding the readers that there is more to academic literacy than the acquisition of textual or discourse competence.

Another important implication emerging from the special issue is the need to capitalize on the specific resources of L2 writers bring to the writing classroom in order to benefit their learning, such as their L1 and metalinguistic knowledge of L2. Suzuki's research article about written languaging demonstrates that using L1 to engage in written languaging (that draws on students' metalinguistic knowledge) can assist students' L2 development. Another way to utilize students' L1 is to make use of L1–L2 translation tasks in the writing classroom, as illustrated by Lo. Extending her findings,

one could consider the use of L1 in other writing activities, such as collaborative writing and peer feedback.

Finally, a significant implication arising from the special issue, which is of no less importance than the abovementioned, is the need for writing pedagogies that cater for the specific needs of L2 learners. This is underscored by Han and Hyland in their research article on oral feedback, Crosthwaite's reflection on reference management in writing, and Goh's reflection on students' academic literacy development, in which the authors provide practical suggestions about what teachers can do to enhance L2 students' writing – e.g. through delivering feedback geared toward student needs at oral conferences, designing classroom activities that facilitate their management of references in discourse, and a 'design' mode that incorporates writing activities such as socio-histories, auto-ethnographies, and journals.

I hope this special issue can provide interesting reading and stimulate further research interest in the myriad unexplored issues arising from the work reported.

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