

Cross-linguistic Composition: Writing Skills and Self-report Strategies of University Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This article reports the findings of a study that intended to understand the development of L2 writing performances in English in the EFL context of Bangladesh. The 70 participants (male=42, female=28) of the study were freshmen at a private university in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 24 years. The participants completed a background questionnaire, a grammaticality judgment, and a vocabulary test in English. The participants also completed writing tasks in their L1 (i.e., Bangla) and their L2 (i.e., English). At the end of both the L1 and L2 writing tasks, the participants completed the same questionnaires that gleaned information about their usual practices and perceptions of writing across two languages. One of the critical findings of the study was that scores in the essays in both languages correlated, which implied that a good or a poor writer in his first language is apparently the same in his L2. The study also discovered that L2 writing was significantly similar to and different from writing in L1 as far as the foci, purposes, and the times and areas of revision of essays of the participants were concerned. The study indicated that knowledge in grammar and vocabulary significantly predicted the performances in writing in English as an L2. The results implied that the teaching of L2 writing in English should be informed by characteristics common across languages as well as the essential differences between an L1 and an L2.

Keywords: L1 and L2 writing process, grammar, vocabulary

While both Bangla and English are languages of the Indo-European family, these are not cognate languages. The ontological differences in alphabet, syntax, and lexis severely limit transfer between these two languages. Nonetheless, L2 writers apply literate strategy from their native language along with applying translation as a writing strategy (Matsuda, 2013). An unfamiliar and unexplored context of L2 writing as Bangladesh is, no study has attempted till date to appreciate the reciprocal relations between Bangla and English. This quantitative study is a significant first step toward that direction.

Literature Review

Language is the matrix of thought, in that one cannot have an idea if one does not have a word for it (Bizzell, 1982). As such, the structure of a language affects the perceptions of reality of its users and thus influences their thought patterns and world views. However controversial this hypothesis appears, when it comes to L2 writing, it is buttressed both by anecdotal and empirical evidence.



Kaplan (1966), for example, argues that the speakers of English, Semitic, Oriental, and Romance languages write essentially differently. Through some doodles, he demonstrates that while the native English speakers write in a straight line, the native speakers of all three languages write circuitously in various ways. Canagarajah (2006) is critical of Kaplan's views for equating one language with one discourse, as is Matsuda (1997) for not considering the heterogeneity and hybridity implicit in an individual culture. Despite such compelling criticism, Kaplan's view endorses that one learns to think only by learning a language (Bizzell, 1982), and because writing is thinking, it follows that one's native language will influence one's writing.

However, "the relationship between linguistic knowledge and L1/L2 writing proficiency is a complex one" (Williams, 2005, p. 25). How one's L1 influences one's acquisition of an L2 is unclear. L2 writers vary socially, cognitively, and affectively; they go through potentially different learning curves; and they will inevitably hail from diverse L1 backgrounds. These factors aside, the L2 writers of English hail from diverse L1 backgrounds. Empirical evidence is as yet inadequate to compare and contrast L1 writing with L2 writing to discover how they are similar to and different from each other. What makes research in L2 writing more problematic is that it typically revolves around works in North America (Bazerman, 2013). Silva (2005) contends as such that the field of L2 writing has not yet critiqued L2 writing in English outside of North America. Because of "the complex contexts of L2 writing (Silva, 2005, p. 117), researchers have endeavored to investigate "intergroup homogeneity" (Crossley & McNamara, 2011, p. 272) to predict a generic model of L2 writing development despite differences in L1 backgrounds of writers. Research along this line has already yielded information and insights, which are critical to informing theories and pedagogical practices in L2 writing.

For example, Reid (1992) studied the essays written in English by speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, and English to determine whether or not there existed differences in the production of cohesive devices among the language backgrounds of L2 writers. She investigated the use of four features of cohesion: pronouns, conjunctions, subordinate conjunction openers, and prepositions. Reid (1992) found that L2 writers, regardless of their L1, produced a significantly greater number of pronouns and conjunctions, as well as fewer prepositions, when compared to L1 writers. She, however, found no similarities among the L2 writers in the productions of subordinate conjunction openers. These findings suggest that L2 writers, regardless of their L1, share more similarities than differences. While these findings imply that L2 writers are somewhat alike given their L2 writing development, they are open to further interpretation. Lunsford (1980) claims that basic writers' texts are generally egocentric, which is characterized by a high percentage of personal pronouns. Silva (1997) claims that ESL texts in general exhibit more coordination than subordination. It can be argued that Reid's (1992) participants were basic writers, who exhibited the typical characteristics of ESL writers.

Hinkel (2002) carried out a similar investigation to Reid's (1992), though her research slanted more toward intergroup heterogeneity than homogeneity. However, her study yielded critical evidence, which indicated a common pattern of development among L2 learners of different L1 backgrounds. Hinkel (2002) examined 1400 academic essays written by native speakers of English and L2 learners of English whose L1s were Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Arabic. For each text, she computed incidence scores for linguistic, subordinate clause, and rhetorical features. While her analysis of the data reported numerous features, which distinguished

L1 essays from specific groupings of L2 essays, she discovered a predictable pattern of L2 writing, when the L1 essays were compared to L2 essays without considering the specific L1 backgrounds of the L2 writers. Hinkel (2002) defined L2 writing as generally being similar to personal narratives because they contain restricted syntactic variety and complexity as well as limited lexical sophistication. These are, indeed, some of the common characteristics of L2 writers, regardless of L1s. These are, however, characteristics stemming less from their infelicity with the L2 than from their specific L1. Novice writers generally produce what Flower (1979) calls writer-based prose, which are personal narratives. However, expository prose is the only prose that students need to do in their school work (Arapoff, 1967), and as most basic L2 writers struggle over their incomplete control of the language, they cannot demonstrate lexical and syntactic sophistication and complexity in their writing needed for expository writing.

Along this line, another influential study was conducted by Crossley and McNamara (2011). They investigated whether the features of cohesion, lexical sophistication, and syntactic complexity could discriminate between texts written by L1 and L2 writers. They analyzed a huge pool of L2 texts from the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) written by L1 speakers of Czech (Slavic), Finnish, (Finno-Ugric) German (Germanic), and Spanish (Italic), which are languages of four different families. To compare and contrast the L2 texts with the L1 ones, they collected 211 essays written by undergraduate students at a large university in the US. All of the L1 essays were argumentative and ranged between 500 and 1000 words. Most of the essays from the ICLE corpus were argumentative and ranged between 500 and 1000 words, too. Essays from both the corpora, then, enabled the researchers' discourse-oriented as well as grammatical and lexical investigations. The study provided evidence that in such linguistic features as hypernymy, polysemy, stem overlap, and lexical diversity, intergroup homogeneity existed across the L2 writers, regardless of the writers' L1s. As well, using these four features, L2 writers could be distinguished from L1 writers with an accuracy of over 70%. The data revealed intergroup homogeneity between four groups of L2 writers from different and disparate language backgrounds in those four linguistic features. While Crossley and McNamara (2011) cautioned not to interpret their results as a demonstration of universal characteristics of L2 writers, regardless of L1, the findings of their study support those of Reid's (1992) and Hinkel's (2002).

A study that distinguishes the writings of participants of a particular language, which is an L1 for some participants and an L2 for others, falls under the theoretical framework of cross-linguistic influence (CLI) (Crossley and McNamara, 2011). Research has already demonstrated that CLI affects almost all areas of linguistic and communicative competence in L2 learners (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). This has been especially true for L2 writers, for some writing theorists argue that people learn to write only once (Williams, 2005). Influence of the ur-language, therefore, will be pervasive in the texts of L2 writers, who may have learned to write in their L1, however incomplete and partial their learning was. While CLI is more common with novice writers (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009), people cannot avoid displaying their identities, values, and interests in the texts they compose (Canagarajah, 2006). L2 writers are not always novices; they are, in fact, writers, who write with a varying degree of accent. Admittedly, beginning L2 writers are more susceptible to this accent than the advanced ones because of their lack of exposure and experience with the language. No feature of a foreign language exposes this accent of beginning writers than errors with grammar.



The degree and dimension of a causal relationship between an L1 and English as an L2 has not been discovered yet, but Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) contend that less than 25% of grammatical errors in adults' speech is due to transfer from L1. The implication here is that L1 is one of the sources of errors in L2 writing. Errors in L2 writing may also stem from the cognitive, affective, and social development of an L2 learner. While one's L1 does not predict the numbers and types of errors one makes while writing in English, all errors are not essentially grammatical either. Briedenback (2006) claims that, generally, a piece of writing has four constitutive features: content, rhetoric, style, and mechanics. She considers grammar and punctuation as mechanics, and she claims that most written papers focus on mechanics far more than all other considerations. But mechanics is theoretically the least important aspect of the process of communication (Mills, 1953; Pinker 2014). Unfortunately, this least important aspect of the process of communication has been the most critical aspect for L2 writers to learn writing.

Fulkerson (1979) claims this as the formalist approach to teaching writing, which posits that "good writing is correct writing at the sentence level" (p. 344), in that it conforms to "certain internal forms" (p. 344) of grammar. This approach to teaching writing is at best reductive, and at worst, ineffective, for two reasons. In general, writing comes along through some predictable steps and stages such as prewriting, writing, and re-writing. Ideally, writing instruction intervenes in all these steps and stages of writing. The physical act of writing, however, takes only 1% of a writer's time and energy, while 85% of a writer's time and energy is consumed in the prewriting stage (Murray, 2011). A grammar-dependent approach ignores the pre-writing and re-writing phases of writing, and is keyed to writing only. What happens is that writing, accuracy, and editing become more important than writer, fluency, and revision. In a situation such as this, a writer does not have to experience what Perl (1980) calls "felt-sense," which evokes images, words, ideas, and vague fuzzy feelings anchored in the writer's body to engage in a creative process of discovery for crafting meaning through writing. Writing essentially explores and exploits the generative possibilities of language, but a grammar-dependent approach to teaching reduces writing to a test of students' ability to utilize mechanical skills (Spack, 1984).

Secondly, theorists in the field of writing claim that grammar has little or nothing to do with the process of writing (Zamel, 1985; Krashen, 1984; Greenberg, 1985; Arapoff, 1967; Pinker, 2014). Writing is thinking, and grammar is a tool for transcribing thoughts. Thinking is not reflected through an application of grammar or a lack thereof, as much as it is reflected by a writer's semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical options of writing. Ferris's (2002) classification of error as treatable and untreatable is germane in this context. She claims that mechanical or grammatical errors are treatable, in that students can be referred to manuals to find out the solutions of those errors. However, for discursive problems with writing, which is reflected through semantic and rhetorical features of writing, a writer cannot be referred to manuals to locate the solutions. Discursive errors of writing are not as apparent or identifiable as those of mechanical ones. So ESL instructors apparently deal only with those errors that are easily identified (Zamel, 1985). Teaching writing through a grammar-dependent approach is convenient for writing instructors, but it marginally helps students learn writing. Besides, because writing teachers are chronically overworked (Connors & Lunsford, 1988), they do not mark as many mechanical errors as popular stereotypes might have people believe (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). This adequately explains why Mills's (1953) complaint – that students cannot write – remains true even after seven decades.

Certainly, writing in second versus foreign language contexts may not be essentially different (Matsuda, 2013), but writing in L1 and L2 are not alike in any way. It is not only the basic L2 writers who demonstrate their incomplete command of the language in their writings, but expert L2 writers also seem to have been haunted by the specter of a second language. Edward Said, a literary critic, for example, has been one of the most elegant and eloquent L2 writers in English. Said (1999) claims that he wrote in English with almost but never native-like fluency. Writing in an L2 is an enriching experience, but the language also colonizes writers too much and turns them into ghost-writers (Bradatan, 2013). This considered, every L2 writer is a ghost-writer who has no subliminal link to the language, and who is overcome too much to be swayed by its essential idiosyncrasies. This breeds uncertainty about the mechanical, syntactic, and semantic options and opportunities for an L2 writer. Apparently, then, an L2 writer writes with actual or perceived accents. The speakers of Bangla, a language from the Indo-European family, who are the participants of this study, might yield information that can conform to or challenge these views and beliefs about L2 writing in English.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that influenced performances, perceptions, and practices in writing in an L2, English. The study contrasted writing across the participants' L1 and L2, and compared their writing performance with measures of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. The study revolved around the following two research questions:

1. How is writing in an L1 (i.e., Bangla) similar to and different from writing in an L2 (i.e., English)?
2. To what extent do grammar and vocabulary predict performance in L2 writing?

Method

Participants. Data collection lasted for six weeks at a private university in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Data were obtained from students in three classes as they consented to volunteer for this study. Altogether, 95 students participated. However, 70 students completed all the components of the study. The current analyses were based on the data from these 70 students. The participants were all first-year undergraduate students. When the data were collected, they signed up for one of the three core English courses mandatory for all students to earn a Bachelor's degree, regardless of majors. Participants reported ages between 17 and 24 (the majority, 60%, were 19-20 years old) and 42 students (60% of the sample) were male. Entry to the mandatory English courses was based on the results of an English placement test, which suggested that L2 proficiency levels of the participants were apparently uniform during the time of the study.

The participants reported an average of over ten years of formal English learning (mean 13.53 years, standard deviation 4.33), when the average age of exposure to English was about four. These formal learning and exposure data are consistent with the school system in Bangladesh that provides formal instruction in English from the initial years of primary school. This makes these students a potentially interesting group to study, since although English holds the status of a foreign language in Bangladesh, all learners have to study it formally for several years. Besides,



the possession of the English language is very critical in the context of Bangladesh because of its economic and academic significance. The majority of the participants (80%) reported that they were studying English in order to either obtain a job after graduation or to pursue higher studies.

Instrument

Background Questionnaire. Every participant filled out a background questionnaire, which asked for such biographical information as the learners' age, gender, language background and languages spoken, number of years spent in learning English, the age of first exposure to English, last academic qualification earned, the purposes of learning English, and difficulties encountered in learning English. The background questionnaire was completed in the first session with the participants during which an Information question Sheet and Consent Form were also discussed and completed.

Grammaticality Judgment Test. This task (Appendix B) comprised 30 items covering 15 areas of English grammar: article, tense-verb, singular vs. plural, interrogative, word order, third person singular, parallel structure, apostrophe, continuous, redundant, incomplete/fragment, sequence of tense, verb tense, double negative, wrong pronoun, and perfect modal. Each item was a three-sentence paragraph in which a single grammatical error was embedded. Each grammar area appeared twice in the test, with the exception of errors of apostrophe and perfect modal, which appeared only once, and problems with interrogative appeared four times in order to represent the multidimensional aspects of this area in the English language. The test was developed based on the work of Johnson and Newport (1989), though the current measure was qualitatively and quantitatively different from that used by Johnson and Newport, which comprised more items and errors contained within one-liners. The rationale for providing a short paragraph was to minimize the chance of fortuitous error identification and to provide a more realistic written context to the detection of errors. The participants were asked to underline errors found in each short paragraph. They were informed that there was an error in each passage, but not the type of error. The participants had half an hour to complete the test.

Vocabulary Task. The participants were given a vocabulary size test based on that developed by Nation and Beglar (2007). The original version of the test comprised 10 vocabulary items from each of 14 sections, from the first to the fourteenth 1000 word families in the English language, and was designed to provide a "reliable, accurate, and comprehensive measure" (Nation & Beglar, 2007, p. 9) of a non-native speaker's vocabulary size. Nation and Beglar (2007) claimed that initial studies using the test indicate that non-native undergraduate students studying at an English speaking university have a vocabulary size of 5000-6000 word families. Given the proficiency level of the participants of this study, who were about to undertake studies in New Zealand, vocabulary items were selected from the first six 1000 word families. Half of the 10 items from each of these six word families were selected, making a total of 30 vocabulary words. For each item in the test, a sentence context was provided in which a single word was italicized. For each italicized word, the participants were asked to underline the approximate synonym from four options underneath the sentence. The participants had 30 minutes to complete the test.

Writing Task and Writing Questionnaire. The writing task was conducted in two different sessions. On the first, participants were given a writing task in English. They were asked to write an expository essay on a topic selected by the researchers (i.e., *Many students choose to attend schools outside*

their home countries. Why do some students study aboard?). Of the various modes of discourses, expository prose is the one that students typically need to use in their academic work (Arapoff, 1967); hence, this was selected for the essay task. The participants were given 25 minutes to write the essay, and were told to use their normal style of composing. There was no instruction about the amount to be written, though they were informed about the 25-minute time limit. Having written the essay, the participants spent another five minutes to complete a questionnaire that asked them to report about their planning and revision strategies as well as their areas of focus during the writing task.

At the next meeting, the participants were given a writing task in Bengali. The topic for the English and Bangla writing tasks were identical. The rationale was that a rhetorically and cognitively similar topic would glean apparently authentic data across these two languages. This session also lasted 30 minutes. They wrote for 25 minutes and completed the questionnaire for the remaining five minutes. The post-writing questionnaire again asked about their planning and revision strategies as well as the focus during the writing task in Bengali.

Each student's writing was evaluated with the rubric used by the Educational Testing Services (ETS) on a 0-6 scale (Educational Testing Services, n.d). Two independent raters evaluated all writings; both raters had been English second-language writing instructors for several years, with Bengali being their first language. When the scores of the two independent raters were within one score, the average was used to determine the final score of an individual essay. If the markers differed by two or more marks, a third-rater was enlisted and the average between the two closest was used.

Results

The results are presented in three sub-sections, with the main focus of each sub-section being each of the research questions. In the first sub-section, analyses of the four main measures used in the study were performed to compare scores on the two writing tasks (Bangla and English) along with the measures of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. The second section focused on the students' perceptions of writing in English, whereas the third considered the self-reported strategies used by the participants during writing in English (L2) and in Bangla (L1).

Skills Associated with Writing Performance. The results of the writing, grammatical knowledge, and vocabulary tasks are presented in Table 1. These showed a range of scores indicative of differences in performance across the participants.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and minimum-maximum scores for the grammatical knowledge and vocabulary tasks, and English and Bangla writing tasks

	Mean score	Standard Deviation	Minimum-Maximum score
English writing score	3.24	0.88	2-5.5
Bangla writing score	4.09	0.80	2-5.5
Grammatical judgment score	15.39	6.33	3-28
Vocabulary score	24.11	3.44	13-30

The study measures were then investigated to assess potential relationships between these areas of performance.

In Table 2, first-order and partial correlations, controlling for years of learning English, are reported. The partial correlations are performed to ensure that any relationship found across



measures was not simply a factor of general language experience.

Table 2. Correlations (above and to right of clear diagonal) and partial correlations controlling for years of learning English (below-left of diagonal) between the writing scores in English and Bangla, the English grammatical judgment, and vocabulary scores

	English writing score	Bangla writing score	Grammatical judgment score	Vocabulary score
English writing score		.733	.195	.306
Bangla writing score	.779		.077	.269
Grammatical judgment score	.153	.098		.321
Vocabulary score	.292	.299	.284	

Note: bold = correlation significant at .05 level; bold+italics = correlation significant at .01 level

Self-reported Perspectives on L2 Writing. Questions about engagement with writing in English produced mixed responses. In addition to academic engagement with English, the vast majority of the respondents (93%) reported that English was most likely to be experienced through watching English-language movies, though some 60% participants also engaged in reading and speaking in English as well as listening to English-language music. The majority of the participants (96%) also indicated that they sometimes (56%) or often (40%) practiced writing in English outside of their academic requirements. Hence, there was evidence for a reasonable amount of engagement with English. However, over 60% of the participants felt that they needed more practice speaking in English to support their current studies, whereas only 7% felt that more writing practice would improve their academic work. This suggested that the motivation to practice English writing may not have been high among the participants of this study. Similarly, Table 3 shows the participants' self-reported views of their ability as English second language writers, and it suggested that their confidence levels as writers varied significantly across the two languages. As can be seen from the table, the majority felt that they were fair to good writers in English, whereas their reports of the writing levels in their L1, Bangla, suggested that most felt that they were good to excellent writers.

Table 3. Numbers of participants self-reporting different ability levels in English versus Bangla writing

	English writing	Bangla writing
Excellent	1 (1%)	26 (37%)
Good	29 (41%)	32 (46%)
Fair	34 (49%)	11 (16%)
Poor	6 (9%)	1 (1%)

Self-reports about the areas of writing that caused them difficulties when writing in English suggested that, of the five areas provided (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, critical thinking, and topic knowledge), most difficulties in the English writing were encountered with vocabulary. Indeed, the responses indicated that some 74% (52 of the 70 respondents) participants felt that this was an area of difficulty in writing compared to 40% participants, who reported that grammar was an area of difficulty.

Self-reported Writing Strategies. When the participants were asked to report what they felt was their focus when writing in English and in Bangla, similar results were found across the two languages. Clarifying their own ideas as they wrote was the most common focus reported across the two languages. For example, 50 participants (71%) indicated this focus when writing in English, and 52 participants indicated it (74%) while writing in Bangla. Thinking about communicating with the readers was also indicated as roughly equally important in both writing tasks – by 24 (34%) participants in English and by 27 (39%) in Bangla. The same was true for those who claimed that the focus of their thinking during writing was to discover new ideas through writing. This was reported by 27 participants (39%) for the English writing task and by 23 participants (33%) for the Bangla writing task.

Self-reported planning and revising strategies also indicated relatively consistent findings across English and Bangla. For the essays in English, 56 participants (80%) claimed that they planned before writing, and 51 (73%) claimed the same for Bangla. And when participants reported planning in one language, they were more likely to report doing the same in the other. For example, 48 participants claimed that they planned in both languages, with only 11 of the 70 reporting that they planned in only one language. Such planning strategies showed evidence of leading to better essay scores, with those planning in both languages receiving overall better writing scores (3.36 for English and 4.21 for Bangla) than those not planning or only planning in one language (2.95 for English and 3.84 for Bangla).

Additionally, for English and Bangla writing, similar numbers of students reported revising during and/or after writing (see Table 4), though there was a slight tendency for more students to indicate that they revised English after writing compared to Bangla. For Bangla, the tendency was for more to report revising during writing compared to when they were writing in English. However, these tendencies were relatively small compared to the overall picture of similar self-reported revision strategies across L1 and L2. Such revision strategies also appeared to support better writing, with those saying that they did not revise typically gaining lower writing scores (see Table 4). Again, there was a tendency for those revising both during and after writing in English to produce the best writing scores, whereas for Bangla the best writing scores were produced by both those who stated that they revised during and after writing, and by those who stated they revised during writing (Table 4).

Table 4. Self-reported revision strategies and writing scores in English versus Bangla writing

	English writing		Bangla writing	
	Number of students (% in brackets)	Writing score (SD in brackets)	Number of students (% in brackets)	Writing score (SD in brackets)
Revise during writing	16 (23%)	2.97 (0.81)	19 (27%)	4.26 (0.75)
Revise after writing	33 (47%)	3.15 (0.77)	29 (42%)	3.95 (0.70)
Revise during and after writing	18 (26%)	3.77 (1.03)	14 (20%)	4.29 (0.78)
Do not revise	3 (4%)	2.68 (0.58)	8 (11%)	3.88 (1.25)



Furthermore, the focus of revisions differed somewhat across the two languages (see Table 5). For English, the vast majority of the participants (70%) focused their revision strategies on grammar and spelling, whereas in Bangla the majority of the participants (over 50%) reported focusing on revising organization and spelling. Indeed, this focus of revision seemed to be the main difference in strategies in writing across the two languages.

Table 5. Participants' self-reported aspects of English versus Bangla writing in need of revision

	English writing	Bangla writing
Grammar	49 (70%)	24 (34%)
Spelling	50 (71%)	37 (53%)
Punctuation	18 (26%)	19 (27%)
Vocabulary	29 (41%)	22 (31%)
Organization	36 (51%)	39 (56%)
Clarity	25 (36%)	31 (44%)

Discussion

This study was conducted in the EFL context of Bangladesh, and it aimed to discover the features of university students' L2 writing in English to inform options about teaching and learning of L2 in such contexts. Overall, the findings indicated that despite these participants' relatively long period of formal English learning and despite their selection based on a placement test, there was variability in performance in L2 writing along with English vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. This variation in L2 writing performance was related to variation in L1 writing, as well as vocabulary, but not grammatical knowledge. The majority of the participants also self-reported vocabulary as an area of difficulty in L2 writing, with more participants finding this problematic compared to grammar. However, most participants reported revision strategies in English writing that focused on grammar. Grammar was not one of the areas of difficulty for the participants and grammatical knowledge not linked to good writing in English; nonetheless, the participants felt that grammar was an area in need of targeted revision. Grammar loomed so large in the revision strategies perhaps because the writings, of the first draft at least, were riddled with grammatical errors. Or it could flatly indicate the preoccupation of the Bangladeshi instructors with grammar at the expense of other features of writing.

Except for one participant, who did not respond to this question, all the participants of the study were exposed to English before the age of seven. The mean age of the participants of this study was about 19 years, and the mean age of learning English was about 14 years. Numerous studies have established that to achieve academic competence in a foreign language, one needs five to seven years of exposure or more (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). This considered, the participants of this study may be considered to have achieved a reasonable level of competency in English. However, the variability in grammar, vocabulary, and writing scores indicated that some participants were not as competent in English as their years of learning ideally predicated. This leads to two potential implications about the participants in this study. For one, years of exposure, as well as years of learning a foreign language, do not necessarily predict competence in that language. Secondly, the achievement of competency predicted by the years of exposure and years of learning is likely contingent upon other academic, environmental, and personal factors. As for the participants of this study in the EFL context of Bangladesh, the age of exposure and years of learning were not apparently buttressed by other factors to enhance learning.

In the context of Bangladesh, while writing is the most critical skill to predict academic success, the majority of the participants indicated that practicing speaking more would support their current studies, whereas few indicated the need for additional writing practice. This pits the academic culture against the culture in general. Generally, as Canagarajah (2002) claims regarding South Asia, speaking is considered superior to writing. As such, competence in a foreign language is demonstrated through fluency in speaking, instead of fluency in writing. Another perception about writing may have prompted the participants of this study to lean more toward speaking than writing. A culturally held belief regarding writing, particularly in Bangladesh, was that writing is not amenable to instruction or practice, for it is absorbed (Shamsuzzaman, 2014). Because in the academic settings in Bangladesh, writing is valued more than speaking, one of the objectives of writing instruction is to acculturate learners into the culture of academic writing, which is amenable to instruction and practice. Success of instruction in writing may require changing perceptions about writing in Bangladesh.

A significant number of participants indicated that vocabulary was the most difficult area for them in writing. This is understandable in that L2 learners see the acquisition of vocabulary as their greatest source of problems (Green & Meara, 1995; Meara, 1980). This can be contrasted with perceived difficulties with grammar. Grammar is mechanical, and as such should be amenable to simple rule-based teaching (Elbow, 1973). On the other hand, vocabulary is semantic. While words come loaded with meaning, it is a writer who has to manoeuvre and manipulate the lexical resources to move from what Murray (1982) calls meaning identified to meaning clarified. In a situation such as this, a writer is left with no universally acknowledged conventions of composition. A writer, instead, embarks on an inductive and idiosyncratic process of composing, which is daunting mainly because of inadequate vocabulary of L2 writers. Despite that, Folse (2004) claims that vocabulary is hardly taught compared to grammar. This may have been the case with the participants of this study in the EFL context of Bangladesh. What identifying vocabulary as their most difficult area of writing might imply was the need for more instruction in vocabulary to hone their skills in writing in English.

This study reconfirms that L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing (Silva, 1993), and that L2 writing processes are more laborious than those in L1 (Silva, 1992). Out of the 70 participants of this study, 26 (37.1%) participants claimed that they were excellent writers in their L1, that is, Bangla. However, only one participant (1.4%) out of the 70 claimed that he was an excellent writer in English. Although Zamel (1982) asserts that ESL writers who are ready to compose and express their ideas use strategies similar to those used by native speakers of English, the perceptions of the participants of this study about their performance in writing in English vis-à-vis their performance in writing in Bangla did not ascertain that. Bradatan (2013) is revealing in this context as he claims that there is something natural in one's becoming a writer in one's native language, but becoming a writer in another language goes against nature. Essentially, every L2 writer is a ghostwriter, who is colonized by the language he writes in (Bradatan, 2013). The implication in this context is that the ontological differences in composing between L1 and L2 may never be eliminated, especially for adult L2 writers. However, the differences can be minimized, as far as academic writing is concerned. Academic writing is convention-ridden, and the conventions of academic writing are amenable to instruction. Therefore, to ease the process of writing in English as an L2, instruction in writing should explicitly focus on teaching the process of writing.



Because a piece of writing is never final (Murray, 1969), revision is key to writing. The participants of this study demonstrated this truism about writing across languages. About 95% participants of the English essay and about 88% participants of the Bangla essay indicated that they revised their essays at different times during composition. What was more critical in this regard was that the times of revision of the participants across languages were uniform. Regarding the English essay, about 47 % participants of the study indicated that they generally revised after writing. Likewise, 41% participants of the study, regarding the Bangla essay, indicated that they revised after writing. The writing behavior of the participants, while shifting from one language to another, did not vary significantly. While revision is anathema for student writers like expert writers (Emig, 1967), sophistication in writing presupposes adequate and informed revision. Zamel (1982) is relevant in this context, claiming that revision should become the main component of writing instruction. Because the participants of this study indicated that they extensively revised, writing instructors must provide the learners with appropriate schemata to revise effectively. Teaching writing across languages and across contexts does not change the fact that revision is integral to writing, and that writing instructors cannot abdicate the responsibility of teaching techniques of revision.

Writing in an L2, therefore, is not completely different from writing in a first language (Matsuda, 2012). Zamel (1983) contends that certain composing problems transcend language factors and are shared by both native and non-native speakers of English. A logical deduction here is that if the composing problems persist across languages, so do the facilities of composing, and the correlations between L1 and L2 found in the current study are consistent with this perspective. Skills in writing are not necessarily tied to one language; they can be generic or translingual. This conclusion aligns with Arapoff's (1969) assertion that native speakers are not always native writers, given the essential differences between speaking and writing. However, identifying factors or strategies that can cross languages does not mean that teaching L2 writing is unnecessary, for no one is born with English composition skills per se (Pinker, 2014). Writing in English should be taught regardless of the individual's L1 skills. Rather, certain strategies that support good writing may be taught in one language and used in a second as long as the links between the two languages are clear to the student (and the teacher). Indeed, strategies taught in L2 writing may be usefully assimilated into L1 writing. As Kaplan (1966) has argued, the conventions of North American academic writing are linguistically, strategically, and rhetorically so distinct from the conventions of writing in other parts of the world that prior ability (or a lack thereof) in writing in one's L1 hardly predicts one's ability (or a lack thereof) in English. Someone from a different cultural and linguistic orientation in the North American academic setting has to learn the written code (Raimes, 1985) apparently from scratch to learn writing in English. However, once successful writing strategies have been acquired in English, these may be applied to the individual's L1 writings.

An implication that emerged from analyzing the perceptions and practices of writing of the participants of this study in the academic setting in Bangladesh was that writing should be taught as a process. Shamsuzzaman, Everatt, and McNeill (2014) urged writing instructors in Bangladesh to teach writing as a process. In doing so, writing instructors in Bangladesh must be cognizant of some potential pitfalls or qualifications. Santos (1992) and Faigley (1986) contend that the concept of process pedagogy in writing revolves around such three schools as cognitivist, expressivist, and social constructionist. The expressivist school of process pedagogy emphasizes the personal voice in writing, while social constructionist school of process pedagogy emphasizes social and political aspects of writing (Santos, 1992). The participants of this study indicated that they were not slanted toward the expressivist and social schools of process pedagogy.

These participants were responsive, instead, to the cognitivist school of process pedagogy, which emphasizes the intellectual, analytical approach to teaching writing. Simply put, the cognitivist school of process pedagogy explores and exploits what goes on inside the brains of writers as they write. Fulkerson (2005) contends that today's process approach to teaching writing is deeply influenced by the cognitivist approach, which considerably draws upon the works of Linda Flower and John Hayes. Flower and Hayes (1981) contend that the writing process is not a creative accident; it is, instead, plain thinking. The participants of this study appeared inured to thinking, for they focused on clarifying their ideas to themselves as they wrote. However, as the participants of this study indicated, the cognitivist process approach that Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed needs to be adapted to the needs and linguistic development of these L2 writers. The correlation between vocabulary, grammar, and writing of scores of this study implied that vocabulary and grammar were deeply implicated in the process of writing that these participants perceived and enacted. Unlike the process proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981) that emphasizes the discovery and generation of thoughts, this process is contingent upon adequate knowledge in grammar and vocabulary. The participants of this study indicated that they wished to discover and generate thoughts through a process of syntactic and lexical exploration. Writing instructors in Bangladesh must come up with strategies to teaching that accommodates this aspect of process in L2 writing in English.

Conclusion

This study yielded some specific as well as ambivalent information regarding writing in general and L2 writing in particular. It demonstrated that writing in an L1 and an L2 was significantly similar as far as the process of writing was concerned. However, it also demonstrated that the process was enacted differently in L1 and L2. While the study demonstrated that scores in grammar and vocabulary tests as well as scores in L1 and L2 essays correlated, it demonstrated that scores in all those tests significantly varied across individual participants. This implied that even in the same academic, cultural, and linguistic setting, L2 writers did not learn L2 writing alike even when they were in the same age range. The difference between L1 and L2 writing was further reinforced when the data demonstrated that the participants of this study did not perceive writing to be similar in L1 and L2. They indicated that writing in an L1 was easier and more natural than writing in an L2. The participants claimed that vocabulary was more critical in L2 writing than grammar. The findings of this study merit critical consideration to promote the teaching of L2 writing in English in the EFL context of Bangladesh and beyond.

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Appendix A

Background Questionnaire for Bangladeshi Participants

Name:

1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Indicate where you undertook your primary/secondary education:
 - a. Urban area in Bangladesh
 - b. Suburban area in Bangladesh
 - c. Rural area in Bangladesh
 - d. Outside of Bangladesh (specify the country):
4. Indicate where you undertook your higher secondary education:
 - a. Urban area in Bangladesh
 - b. Suburban area in Bangladesh
 - c. Rural area in Bangladesh
 - d. Outside of Bangladesh (specify the country):
5. The last qualification earned:
 - a. HSC
 - b. A' Level
 - c. Other
6. Name the language/languages you speak (underline the primary language):
7. Approximately how old were you when you were first exposed to English?
8. Mention the approximate number of years you have already spent in learning English:

Please tick the appropriate option/options below:

1. What is the highest qualification of your parent/parents?
 - a. primary
 - b. secondary
 - c. tertiary
 - d. none
2. Do you practice English in any of the areas below at home and/or with members of your family?

• speaking	Yes	No
• reading	Yes	No
• writing	Yes	No
• listening	Yes	No
3. Which one of the following do you think you need to practice more to support your current studies?
 - a. Speaking
 - b. reading
 - c. writing
 - d. listening

4. What is your purpose for learning English? (Tick as many as apply)
 - a. job
 - b. higher studies
 - c. intellectual development
 - d. peer pressure
 - e. parental persuasion
 - f. emigration
 - g. others (please specify):
5. Besides academic training, what are the activities that you personally engage in to improve your English? (Tick as many as apply)
 - a. watching movies/documentaries in English
 - b. reading texts in English
 - c. speaking in English with friends and family members
 - d. listening to English music
 - e. none
 - f. others (please specify):
6. If you at all engage in any of the above mentioned activities to improve your English, how often does it happen?
 - a. daily
 - b. once a week
 - c. twice a week
 - d. less than once a week
7. Besides your academic assignments, do you write in English?
 - a. often
 - b. sometimes
 - c. never
8. While writing, what is the area you find most difficult to deal with? (Tick as many as apply)
 - a. grammar
 - b. vocabulary
 - c. punctuations
 - d. critical thinking
 - e. knowledge of the topic
 - f. all equally difficult
9. How would you rate yourself as a writer in your mother tongue?
 - a. Excellent
 - b. good
 - c. fair
 - d. poor
10. How would you rate yourself as a writer in English?
 - a. excellent
 - b. good
 - c. fair
 - d. poor
11. I would much appreciate if you would share your experiences as an English language learner that is not covered by this questionnaire.

Appendix B

Grammaticality Judgment Test

Name:

Instruction: Each item of the grammaticality judgment test has ONE error. Please underline that error.

Example: I am going to an Indian restaurant for lunch. Will you go with me? It's not too far away. It serve the best food, I believe.

1. He played the cricket with few of his friends yesterday. He enjoyed the game, too. But he left the field a bit early. He forgot that he had to prepare for an exam the next day.
2. Sean always reaches his office in time. He is truly punctual and responsible. Yesterday, however, he is late by an hour to reach his office. That surprised everyone.
3. I prefer cricket to soccer. Although cricket is more time-consuming than soccer, it is more exciting than soccer. Sometimes, I go to the stadium with three of my cousin to watch cricket.
4. Who does believe it? He did not turn in his assignment once again today. He was sick. Strange that he was only sick before the due date of assignment.
5. I went to the mall for some groceries. As I was coming home from the mall, I saw my friend Delta. He there went for groceries, too. We exchanged pleasantries.
6. I take care of my teeth as well as possible. I see a dentist at least once a year. Yet, two of my tooths are developing cavities. I can't believe it.
7. Ronny know that his cousin is coming to visit him today. He is very excited. He plans to go to the movie with his cousin in the evening. He anticipates wonderful times ahead with his cousin.



8. John is an attentive student. But he also loves to play, to swim, and catching fish. He is knowledgeable. He is physically fit as well.
9. My neighbor sometimes complain about the loud music from my house in few mornings during a week. But I don't listen to music loudly. She should know that I only play the piano.
10. Perhaps no game requires the captain to be so responsible as cricket. He has to perform; he must motivate other players to perform. A captain responsibility is immense in cricket.
11. Writing in English is very difficult for me at the moment. I don't know many English words. Grammar is not easy to learn, too. But my teacher is teach me the skills to improve my writing.
12. When I saw Susan, she was reading book in the cafeteria. I went close to her. She saw me. She said Hi to me, but she kept reading again.
13. Does she already knows that she is a good student? She can think critically. She writes persuasively. She reads deeply as well.
14. I find New Zealand really scenic. The weather of this country is soothing as well. In my opinion, I think this is one of the best countries to live.
15. Eric visits his country last month after staying five months in New Zealand. He felt homesick in New Zealand. He learned English here. He missed his parents, friends, and the food of his country.
16. She is writing a letter to her friend. She will send it by post. She knows that it will take some time to reach. Why should it takes so long to reach by post?
17. I could not find my car as I stepped out of the mall. I was edgy. I saw a police around. So I him asked a question about the car.
18. I am scared of writing in English. Because English is not my first language. I am trying to improve my writing skills in English to continue my studies in New Zealand.
19. I thought that he scores a century in that match. But he got out on 99. He played really well. That was unfortunate.
20. Bret invited his friend, Andre, for a dinner at his place. It was Bret's birthday. Andre was too late. Why did not Andre knew that he had to come in time?
21. It is one of the best articles I have ever read on Sachin Tendulkar. It's detailed, and it is easy to follow. You must have to read it.
22. The day was rainy and windy. I stayed home and watch cricket on TV. The day was enjoyable altogether, though it was not productive anyway.
23. Yesterday, I attended a lecture on Yoga. The speaker was inspiring and informed. I listened to him attentively, sincerely, and serious. Yoga looked helpful for our physical and mental health.
24. I had a class at room no. 21 at 9:30 am. I reached there on time. But nobody was not present. Perhaps, I went to the wrong room.
25. He must have go there before. The place looked confusing to me. I felt lost. But he helped me roam around.
26. The man drove fast to the station to catch the train. He was late. The train already left. It disappointed her.
27. They played well, and they almost won the match. Their supporters were cheer for them. But they lost too many wickets in the end. It was a very tight match, though.
28. Russell looked upset in the cafeteria. I went close to him. He left. Saying nothing.
29. My friend was cooking for both of us. I was trying to help him. But I severely burnt one of my fingers. My friend said, "Don't come to the kitchen never."
30. Rebecca came to New Zealand as a tourist from the UK. She liked New Zealand. She could not decide instantly himself whether she would live in New Zealand, or go back to the UK.

Appendix C

Name:

Writing Task

*Instruction: Write for 25 minutes on the topic below first, and then answer the following questions for another 5 minutes.
Many students choose to attend schools outside their home countries. Why do some students study abroad?*

Writing Task Questionnaire (English)

1. Did you plan for some time before you started to write on the topic?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
2. When do you generally revise your writing?
 - a. during writing
 - b. after writing
 - c. both
 - d. never
3. What do you generally revise if you revise at all? Tick as many as apply.
 - a. grammar
 - b. spelling
 - c. punctuation
 - d. vocabulary
 - d. organization
 - e. clarity
4. Which of the following do you generally think about as you write? Tick as many as apply.
 - b. communication with a reader
 - b. clarifying our own ideas about the topic
 - c. discovering new meanings through thinking
 - d. correct sentence
 - e. finishing as early as possible
5. Would you like to take the opportunity to compose a few drafts to improve your writing?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. do not know

Appendix D

Writing Task in Bangla

নির্দেশনাঃ লিখিত অংশের জন্য নির্ধারিত সর্বমোট ৩০ মিনিট। প্রথম ২৫ মিনিটে নিম্নোক্ত বিষয়ে লিখুন। তারপর বাকি ৫ মিনিটে অন্য প্রশ্নগুলোর উত্তর দিন।

অনেক শিক্ষার্থী দেশের বাইরের স্কুল বা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে পড়তে যায়। কেন তারা বিদেশে পড়ে?

Writing Task Questionnaire (Bangla)

1. Did you plan for some time before you started to write on the topic?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
2. When did you revise your writing?
 - a. during writing
 - b. after writing
 - c. both
 - d. never
3. What did you revise if you revised at all? Tick as many as apply.
 - a. grammar
 - b. spelling
 - c. punctuation
 - d. vocabulary
 - e. organization
 - e. clarity
4. Which of the following did you think about as you wrote? Tick as many as apply.
 - a. communication with a reader
 - b. Clarifying my own ideas about the topic
 - c. discovering new ways of thinking about the topic
 - d. pleasing the researcher
 - e. finishing as early as possible
5. Would you like to take the opportunity to compose a few drafts to improve your writing?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. do not know

