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# Bilingual Practices in a Transnational Writing Center: A Foundational Perspective from Russia

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## Abstract

The prefix *trans-* surfaces frequently in the recent scholarship from the related fields of composition studies, applied linguistics, and writing center theory. With its emphasis on moving across/beyond, *trans-* evokes spatiality, liminality, collaboration, negotiation, flux, and destabilization. These concepts have become familiar in the scholarship on US writing centers that supports a transition from monolingual to multilingual paradigm and translanguaging approaches. Multiple meanings of traversing embedded in *trans-* acquire a new significance in the experience of founding and functioning in a *transatlantic* writing center in which all forms of communication occur in more than one language and cut across different cultures. This article draws attention to this less explored territory. I consider the transcultural disposition of a *transatlantic* writing center to facilitate translanguaging approaches that expose and transform power dynamics in ways that emphasize collaboration and negotiation. To this end, I analyze bilingual literacy practices in a Moscow writing center in its foundational stage.

## Introduction

The prefix *trans* surfaces frequently in recent scholarship from the related fields of composition studies, applied linguistics and writing center theory through such terms as *translingual* (Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011; Canagarajah, 2013; Leonard & Nowacek, 2016), *translanguaging* (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Corcoran, 2017), *transcultural* (Zamel, 1997; Lee & Canagarajah, 2018), *transfer* (Leonard & Nowacek), *transnational* (Martins, 2014), and *transatlantic*, as seen in this journal issue. Christiane Donahue (2018b) helpfully delineates the meaning of *trans* as it relates to *translingual*, but her set of definitions can be extended beyond the context of language: “I take the ‘trans’ to mean ‘across,’ ‘beyond,’ and ‘through,’ but also ‘having changed thoroughly’ and ‘transversing’ (‘situated across’), which suggests that the notion of dynamic change is built in” (p. 210). With its emphasis on moving across/beyond, *trans* evokes spatiality, liminality, collaboration, negotiation, flux, and destabilization. These concepts have become familiar in the scholarship on US writing centers. They are particularly palpable in studies that support a transition from a monolingual to a multilingual paradigm (Grimm, 2009; Denny, 2010; Dvorak, 2016) and translingual approaches (Lape, 2013). Similarly, the *trans* sensibility underlies action-driven scholarship about how US writing centers can “challenge institutional hierarchies and traditional ways of knowing and of producing knowledge ... [and] ... enhance student agency” (Lunsford & Ede, 2011, p. 12). Scholars that embrace connections between “writing center words ... and ‘multiple relevant worlds outside the center’” (Severino, 2016, p. viii; see also Kang, 2018, p. 136) also call for *trans* moments.

As evident in the contexts outlined above, this article focuses on cultural, linguistic, and territorial, not gender-related implications of the prefix *trans*-. It illuminates how multiple meanings of traversing embedded in *trans* acquire a new significance in the experience of founding and functioning in a transatlantic writing center, in which all forms of communication occur in more than one language and cut across different cultures. To draw attention to this less explored territory in writing center scholarship, I consider the transcultural disposition of a transatlantic writing center to facilitate translingual approaches that expose and transform power dynamics in ways that emphasize collaboration and negotiation. I analyze bilingual literacy practices at the Writing and Communication Center (WCC) at the New Economic School (NES) in Moscow in its foundational stage, between 2011 and 2013. I choose this narrow temporal focus because in its naturally shifting state, the moment of creation sharply illuminates and facilitates multiple manifestations of *trans* and the relationships between them. In turn, this perspective highlights how the writing center can be a space where the agencies and hierarchies embedded in teaching and learning may shift grounds instantly, as communication between

and among consultants, students, administrators, and faculty are driven by the shared desire to develop several vectors of literacy: cultural, linguistic, disciplinary, and pedagogical.

### A note on terms

According to Eunjeong Lee & Suresh Canagarajah (2018), *transculturalism* emphasizes “going beyond categories and boundaries” and values “practices and processes rather than ... product or form” (pp. 16–17). They observe an important parallel between cosmopolitanism and transculturalism, as both deal with “*transcending* boundaries,” and cite Stuart Hall (2002), who asserts, “We are drawing on the traces and residues of many cultural systems, of many ethical systems—and that is precisely what cosmopolitanism means” (as cited in Lee & Canagarajah, p. 16). They further explain, “transculturalism involves situating oneself in liminal social spaces and drawing from values and practices of diverse cultures to constantly reconstruct one’s identity and social belonging” (p. 16).

This article draws on the above framework and conceptualizes *transcultural* experience as a process of moving in liminal cultural spaces (physical, temporal and mental) while engaging in practices that redefine both the self and the cultures it traverses. Underlying this definition of transcultural is Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) concept of contact zones as places “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34), as well as her insistence on creating “safe houses” in academic environments where “groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogenous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (p. 40). Rather than insisting on one of these metaphors, transcultural spaces and practices in transatlantic contexts attune writing center practitioners to the moments of transition between contact zones and safe houses where the rich possibilities of both are present.

Another concept at work in this article is *translingual*. *Translingual* practice stems from the recognition that languages are constantly evolving processes rather than fixed entities (Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011; Lu & Horner, 2013; Donahue, 2018b) and language users move across or “shuttle” through their full linguistic repertoires, through such practices as code-switching and code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 593) as they make rhetorical and discursive decisions. To see a bilingual language user through this translingual perspective means to recognize their engagement with a “unique and shifting blend of practical knowledge and language use” (Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011, p. 287). I rely here on this translingual understanding of a bilingual communicator and delve into specific translingual practices that transform the

axes of power and authority into negotiation and collaboration in bilingual exchanges.

To grasp the relationship between bilingualism and authority in a transatlantic writing center, I want to elucidate the actual relationship between transculturalism and translanguaging. According to Lee & Canagarajah (2018), “transcultural dispositions shape translanguaging practice” (p. 19); both enhance “negotiation strategies” and develop a “cooperative disposition” whereby translanguaging communicators “acquire tastes, values, and skills that favor co-existence with others” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 176). In similar terms, Bruce Horner, Samantha NeCamp, & Christiane Donahue (2011) observe in the translanguaging model of multilingualism a “shif[t] ... [of] focus away from individuals, located on a fixed scale of competence toward ‘mastery’ of a reified ‘target’ language, and toward groups of people working in collaboration to use all available linguistic resources” (p. 288). Transcultural dispositions then underlie translanguaging practices; synergistically, they help to disrupt the constructs of a target language and target culture, divesting them of privileged power.

### **WCC as a *trans-* space**

The NES is an internationally recognized, small (approximately 500 students), and progressive bilingual research university with a liberal arts undergraduate program and graduate programs in economics and finance. In the first two years of its existence (2011–2013), WCC worked in the following directions: providing writing-across-the-disciplines/writing-in-the-disciplines (WAC/WID) support to faculty; training professional consultants; offering tutoring services in writing and oral communication, as well as workshops, to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as alumni; constructing writing-enhanced English curricula; developing resources for students and faculty in both English and Russian; and facilitating professional development across city universities.

I was hired as a founding director and English lecturer after completing a PhD in English at a US university. Having retained my Russian (when I was a teenager, my family had immigrated to the U.S. from Uzbekistan, a former Soviet state), I was in a good position not only to facilitate bilingual practices at the center and beyond, but also to cultivate translanguaging methods. The WCC was an entirely new unit at the NES, so each of its facets required a solid foundation both administratively/logistically (e.g., space, policies, hiring process, pay scale) and conceptually/methodologically (e.g., staff training, curriculum design, resource development). In its first year, I was the only full-time employee of the center, dedicating my time to needs assessment, staff training, WAC/WID faculty training, curriculum development, tutoring students, teaching literature and writing in English, and also teaching writing in Russian. Other staff members were bilingual consultants hired from within

the NES. In 2012–2013, our staff expanded. A full-time assistant director from the U.S. joined the team, along with two US consultants, one of whom was a peer tutor. Two Russian consultants were also hired to develop resources and handle consultations in Russian.<sup>1</sup>

The center's philosophy behind bilingual services was to emphasize the writing process as a thought-generating activity that can be facilitated through and across languages. The ability to think critically and communicate effectively in both languages has been a distinctive feature of the undergraduate program (leading to the Bachelor of Arts in economics) and thus the bilingual philosophy of the WCC has been receiving full institutional support (Совместная программа). The NES prepares students as independent critical thinkers who can enhance the Russian economy and research, but who can also succeed at the global stage. This dual mission calls for fluency and critical thought in both languages and advocates linguistic equity. Underpinning this mission is a commitment to what Lisa R. Arnold, W. DeGenaro, R. Iskandarani, M. Khoury, Z. Sinno, & M. Willard-Traub (2017) describe as crucial competencies and habits of mind for contemporary university students: “rhetorical dexterities and sensitivities to navigate increasingly postmodern, global contexts—contexts where identity and culture are dynamic and shifting, and where linguistic, racial, and ethnic differences are everyday realities” (p. 221).

The inception of the WCC was situated in several *trans*-zones. For instance, Russian institutions of higher education were beginning to construct a disciplinary niche for writing studies. In the Soviet period, writing skills were taught as part of literature, language, journalism, and creative writing curricula. While students in these and, to a lesser extent, other disciplines were asked to compose texts, writing studies did not grow into its own field. However, the shift to a market economy and the ensuing internationalization of higher education (West & Frumina, 2012), have brought writing to the forefront of institutional strategic trajectories. The major reason is a pressing, state-driven incentive to increase researchers' international publications; it motivated some universities to introduce academic writing in English to support faculty through writing center workshops and tutorials (“Yukaz”; Squires, 2016).

Academic writing courses for undergraduate students in Russian were also beginning to take place. At the same time, the fall of the Soviet Union disassociated the Russian language from international education; it “lost the status won for it by the Soviet Union, making education in Russia inaccessible to foreigners” (Smolentseva, 2004 as cited in West & Frumina, 2012, p. 53), which resulted in the increase of English courses: “English is now the language of most research publications and, increasingly, the language in which du-

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1 For a detailed discussion about WCC services and practices, see Bollinger, 2016, and Squires, 2016.

al-degree programmes or programmes intended for international students are delivered” (West & Frumina, 2012, p. 53).

With the absence of a distinct discourse community of compositionists and rhetoricians, pedagogical and administrative discussions concerning academic writing were taking place *across* multiple national, linguistic, and professional contexts. A good example is the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Fulbright Summer School in the Humanities: “Academic Writing: Perspectives from Russia and the U.S.” (2013). This program was co-organized by scholars (myself included) from three Russian universities specializing in Russian language and literature, discourse studies, translation, Russian and Slavic studies, and Anglo-American composition and writing center studies; co-facilitated by U.S. compositionists and invited speakers from a Russian academic journal and high school instructor; delivered in English and Russian; and hosted by the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Journalism of Moscow State University (Schleifer, Townsend, Tsiopos Wills, Aksakalova, Ignashev, & Venediktova, 2016).

An additional way that the WCC was situated in a *trans*-zone is that the NES is a private research university that was founded in 1992 with a mission to facilitate a transition to internationally recognized ways of practicing and teaching economics. Faculty members are hired internationally and locally, and the two languages of instruction are Russian and English. Until 2011, the NES granted only graduate degrees: a Masters in Economics and a Masters in Finance. A Bachelor’s degree in economics was launched jointly with the Higher School of Economics and, with its focus on liberal arts/general education requirements, called for bilingual WAC/WID faculty support and writing tutoring services for students. These related needs necessitated the creation of the writing center at the NES.

The NES has the reputation of a cutting-edge institution, instrumental to the country’s economic growth due to the school’s educational philosophy of active learning, its tenure requirements, its high index of international publications, and its placement of graduates in highly selective international universities. However, spatially it was situated in the building of an old Soviet research university that still occupied most of the space and was filled with remnants of the Soviet past: a big coat room on the ground floor; a canteen-style cafeteria; and a small elevator, which a rider might share with a baker—a Central Asian migrant worker<sup>2</sup> delivering a cartful of freshly baked, aromatic *piroshki* under white cotton covers, from the canteen to the third floor café—with a US or European expat NES faculty, or with heavily made-up young women in fashionable clothes from the Design School that rents out space in the same

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2 Most migrant workers in Russia are from Central Asian states, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which are former Soviet states with struggling economies (<http://eurasia.expert/trudovaya-migratsiya-v-rossiyu-strany-sng-eaes/>).

building. Certain NES rooms, like the writing center, had very strict access rules. Employees were not allowed to take their office keys home but had to request them every morning from the key keeper, the local Janus, who sat all day reading or watching TV as he guarded the keys with handwritten room numbers on the tags, hanging on the wall.

Thus, the spatial dynamics of the building epitomized a microcosm of Moscow, the city in flux, grappling with its Soviet past and modern reality. In other words, the local space itself was marked by transcultural forms of experience and communication, evoking Donahue's (2018a) understanding of *trans*-. "some roots of the 'trans' prefix," she writes, "allow for movement and for flexibility in unique ways that underscore fluidity, transformation, blurring, and blending" (p. 24). Because the movement and flexibility of historical and cultural encounters occurred habitually and in various spaces—inside and outside of the university building—educators and learners were sensitized to hybridity, a key tenet of transculturalism: "we are always culturally hybrid by nature, however we define 'culture'" (You, 2018, p. 6).

The WCC added several layers to this existing institutional transculturalism. It offered unfamiliar academic services (centralized tutoring program) in a familiar language, as well as in a foreign language. It also adapted pedagogical premises from the Anglo-American educational system and frequently employed the translingual method of code-switching. The process echoed what Brooke Schreiber and Snežana Đurić (2017) note to be the experience of transatlantic writing centers: "Writing center pedagogy may be totally unfamiliar to instructors as well as students, and even incompatible with local understandings of writing instruction, which may be product-oriented or focused on exam requirements" ("Finding a Home," para. 4). To introduce the nature of our work to those in the NES community who did not have a clear frame of reference for the academic unit called the "writing center," we hosted a series of open houses. In these campus gatherings, we discussed writing center practice from a global perspective, focusing on the US and Russian contexts. We also had the opportunity to convey writing center teaching philosophies by introducing process-based writing, student agency, collaborative learning, and the Socratic method. Students and staff had the opportunity to ask questions, and our conversations marked the writing center as a space for negotiating the meaning of teaching and learning. For example, we assured students that while we wouldn't edit written work, we would definitely assist them with English language-learning by locating common error types (Linville, 2009), discussing rules, and assigning exercises.

The WCC also added transculturalism as the physical space of the center underwent transitions and invited transitional experiences. Because of limited space in the building, our colleagues held meetings and classes at the center, so our hours sometimes depended on the availability of the room. On a more

personal level, for expat US directors, the writing center space constituted the closest we could come to having a physical home in Moscow. The apartments we rented came with furniture, dishes, and linens. At the center, we had a bit more agency in organizing the space. We bought lamps from Ikea and plants from a local florist, and we were comfortably surrounded by some US writing center and composition literature. The act of setting up the center together, creating a familiar and shared territory, was one of several treasured moments that connected the directors as expats living in a foreign country.

Yet, as Jackie Grutsch McKinney (2013) explains, treating writing centers as homes is problematic because “homes are culturally marked. If a writing center is a home, whose home is it? Mine? Yours? For whom is it comfortable?” (p. 25). These questions suggested themselves in comforting and troubling ways at the WCC. On the one hand, the WCC was a communal space, co-constructed with our students and sponsors: students shared artwork and wrote their writing goals on Post-it notes that remained on the wall; our main sponsor, Merrill Lynch, presented us with a Smartboard. On the other hand, it was a place for transplants, one in which numerous paths crossed. For example, a cleaning staff member shared her hardships as a Moscow migrant laborer whose toddler daughter, living with her family in Kyrgyzstan, stopped recognizing her as a mother. She and I chatted about Central Asia’s past and present and shared family pictures and news. We both missed that home; but I missed New York more. The concept of home was thus acquiring a deeply transcultural ethos for both of us by reminding us that “[w]e are always in a state of diaspora if there was ever a ‘home’ in the first place” (You, 2018, p. 6).

Thus, the writing center functioned in and fostered a deeply hybridized cultural space (mental and physical) that shuffled multiple histories (personal, national, colonial) and facilitated several forms and registers of communication. As follows from the discussion above, the center’s transcultural disposition exemplified a leaning toward fluidity and resistance to ossified categorization (e.g., nurturing safe house or contentious contact zone). Lee & Canagarajah (2018) explain that a “transcultural orientation distinguish[es] between *propositional* (i.e., a product-oriented understanding of cultures as essentialized features and values) and *procedural knowledge* (i.e., a disposition to engage with diversity with tolerance and openness, and construct new identities and relationships)” (p. 5, original italics). In the context of the WCC, the instances of procedural knowledge were most striking in the encounters between bilingual staff, students, and administrators. The following section focuses on these.

## Transcultural and translanguing approaches to bilingual practices: power, authority and collaboration

At a traditional, U.S.-based writing center, different vectors of professional relations (e.g., between consultants and students, between directors and consultants) embody both processes of producing texts and negotiating power through language. A bilingual setting of a transatlantic writing center, however, allows these processes to achieve significant momentum and illuminates possibilities for US writing centers currently exploring multilingualism (Lape, 2013; Bruce & Rafoth, 2016).

At the WCC, my own positionality as a US director with the native fluency of Russian decentered the levels of formality and subordination with my Russian colleagues and WCC staff and fostered the atmosphere of mutual learning. Especially in the first year, most of the WCC staff were Russian faculty from the English department. We could freely communicate in English, but we preferred Russian with frequent code-switching and code-meshing mainly because our shared L1 made us less strange to each other, enabling friendships, collegial support, and mutual learning.

I conducted training sessions not only in the formal setting of my office, but also in my apartment, partly due to the general enthusiasm I shared with the English faculty to get acquainted. Our training sessions were not unidirectional, originating with me and extending to them, but reciprocal. If the English faculty members were under time constraints to develop process-based writing pedagogies and consulting practices, I was pressed to develop a writing seminar curriculum for undergraduate economics students and teach it in Russian. When I was developing reference materials in Russian, needless to say, I needed a lot of assistance. As I was translating familiar concepts and terms into Russian, I was going through a process similar to my Russian students and colleagues composing or speaking in English. As language users, we depended on each other for guidance, and the English faculty, who were also the first cohort of WCC consultants, helped. They also taught one session of my seminar that focused on students' most common Russian language errors. Likewise, when it came to English writing, I was happy to provide them with guidance on assignment design and student feedback.

In addition, while I was initiating my Russian colleagues into the conventions of Anglo-American composition and writing center theory, my colleagues were providing me with important institutional history, especially with regard to English programmatic decisions on writing. For example, since the school offered only graduate programs before 2011, English courses were conceived of as service to the economics program. The curricular focus was on business writing, academic writing, and oral presentations, taught in separate courses depending on students' levels of English proficiency. With the

creation of the WCC, upper administration and students expressed interest in a more integrated curriculum with enhanced writing and speaking practices. Even though I was given a leading role in creating the new curriculum, it was a collaborative effort. Two English faculty joined me in constructing a curricular framework based on Brinton, Snow, and Wesche's (1989/2003) model of content-based, integrated English curriculum. My training in composition and WAC/WID enabled me to provide the course content and methodology while my colleagues' English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) training was crucial in adapting this curriculum to students' English proficiency levels using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, an important assessment framework used in Russia and Europe. We worked long hours on weekends and evenings, driven not only by our professional commitment, but also by our camaraderie generated by the sense of belonging to the Russian culture and language.

A similar example of linguistic reciprocity concerned Russian and English consultants. A Russian consultant who provided services exclusively in Russian brought to the WCC not only her linguistic expertise, but also the cultural history of Russian education, of which she was both product and producer. Proficient in English but specializing in Russian language and literature, she was not willing to participate in staff meetings led in English (to accommodate English-speaking consultants). Her linguistic reticence was deeply rooted in the Russian philological tradition, namely the expectation of implacable fluency and correctness in a foreign language; lacking that, philologists are discouraged from participating in a foreign discourse. Another consultant, an undergraduate peer tutor from the U.S., was reticent to speak Russian. The two consultants decided to help each other; they met informally and practiced their conversation skills.

The blurring of hierarchies in the chain of command and collaborative work across different lines of employers may be familiar aspects of the writing center experience. The above instances of mutual support and learning among WCC staff members, however, afford a new understanding of collaboration, giving it a global dimension and facilitating what Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue (2011) call "transnational connectivity" (p. 287). As we moved freely between language practices and pedagogical constructs associated with the two nations and cultures, the concepts of L1 and L2 lost their meaning as static entities. We were fully proficient in both and joined each other in shuttling between the two languages. In this sense, we were decoupling language from specific forms of "social identity and citizenship" and placing it in service of our communication needs. In doing so, we engaged in the translingual practice of "working across a variety of fluctuating 'languages'" (Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011, p. 287).

However, the newness of the center on campus also provided an opportunity to revise traditional assumptions about authority, language, and power. Namely, writing center practices that involved interactions in Russian between students and me proved a fertile environment for negotiating power and authority through language. For example, during writing sessions in the economics seminar, my students quickly learned that I could provide them with composition and citation strategies, offer feedback on higher-order concerns, and facilitate a peer review or debate; I could *not* offer nuanced disciplinary knowledge of economics to assess their arguments fully; I could *not* offer feedback on Russian grammar beyond basic errors. In class, my limitations resulted in students' dependence on each other during discussions and peer reviews. When I was giving feedback in one-to-one consultations or email, I often focused on higher order concerns. If I saw what looked like a grammatical error or sentence-structure issue, I noted it to the student, but explained that I was not in the position to verify errors or suggest corrections. Here is an excerpt from my emailed feedback on lower-order concerns as originally composed in my Englished Russian:

я увидела несколько опечаток или то, что мне показалось ошибками. Они в желтом цвете, обратите внимания и вообще обязательно перечитайте эссе несколько раз до задачи, чтобы поймать все грамматические и орфографические ошибки.

Here is the translation:

I saw several typos or what appeared to me as errors. They are highlighted in yellow. Please pay attention to these and make sure to re-read the essay several times before submitting, so as to catch all grammatical and orthographic errors.

My hedging, while reducing my authority in a traditional, hierarchical sense of the word, also helped to place responsibility on the student. By including “to me” in the first sentence, I convey to the student the perspective of a particular audience.

During consultations, students actually engaged in correcting their errors and explained to me the rules behind their corrections. Sometimes, to help me understand their Russian prose, students explained the meaning of a particular idiomatic expression or cultural reference. Other times, I could read their passages and notice a problematic word choice in Russian. In one consultation, both the student and I noticed an imprecise word choice in Russian. While the student was searching for a Russian synonym, I mentally translated the sentence into English and the word “cohort” suggested itself. The student had a high level of English proficiency, so when I shared with him that in English the word “cohort” would work best, he quickly came up with a Russian translation of “cohort” and agreed that this word precisely convey his point. This practice draws on Suresh Canagarajah's (2002) notion of “shuttling”

between languages and responds to Carol Severino's (1993) call for "collaborative exploration of cultural and linguistic differences" (p. 57) in writing center contexts. My work with the student illustrates how writing center pedagogy brings into translanguing practice an element of mutual learning, turning it into *collaborative shuttling*.

These writing center practices helped to redefine the construct of authority: it lay not in my ability to provide answers or correct errors, but in my skill to read and ask questions indicative of (a) my interest in learning about the writer's ideas and rhetorical choices and (b) my need, as a Russian-language user, to enhance my linguistic and cultural literacy—as well as in my commitment to collaboration. This shift in perspective on authority yields several important learning moments about the work of a bilingual transatlantic writing center. First, when the consultant cannot provide substantial support with grammar, attention shifts toward higher order concerns, validating their place in a session. In the Russian academic milieu, in which the teaching of writing skills had been historically associated mainly with syntactical and grammatical correctness, such opportunities of engaging with the writing center principle of prioritizing higher order concerns are invaluable. Second, collaborative shuttling introduces an element of spontaneity, flexibility, and experiential fortuitousness to a learning moment. As this collaborative effort takes precedence over a traditional hierarchical model of authority in one language, in this case Russian, it can be more easily imagined in English. In other words, when the shift from authority to negotiation and collaboration becomes a recurring and expected move, a student can develop a habit of mind to take responsibility for their learning and extend it to English consultations, spaces where EFL students usually expect a more directive way of tutoring.

Third, in a transatlantic setting, giving a student the opportunity to educate a consultant not only augments student agency, but also strengthens the value of L1 and the local culture in the student's mind. In turn, the student may perceive the writing center not as an English language center, a mere stop on the route to global success that privileges international over local culture, but a space where multiple literacies are emphasized, exchanged, and expanded in an open dialogue. Offering an integrated, translanguing approach to writers' multiple languages, so as not to prioritize English, is an important element of a transnational writing center. For instance, Sharifa Daniels & Rose Richards (2011) report that in South Africa, "the power relations are often far from symmetrical and language is highly contested" (pp. 33–34). Daniels and Richards draw on Canagarajah's work to suggest that the collaborative translanguing practices of South African writing centers "allo[w] multilingual writers to bring some of their own resources to academic discourse and in that way enable students to 'shuttle between discourse communities' (Canagarajah 2002: 41)" (p. 34). Christian Brendel (2012) describes the affordances of such

collaborative shuttling, which he calls “comparative multilingual tutoring, or CMT”:

Since writers already possess a fully functional and fully developed native language, tutors with the proper training and background who also have an understanding of that language can use it as a springboard to compare and contrast analogous (or non-analogous) concepts in English. By highlighting how each language system expresses a certain idea and comparing the syntactical, lexical, or idiomatic reasons behind the expressions, perhaps the writer will gain a better intuitive understanding of how these aspects of English work. (p. 82)

The CMT model worked well not only in our consultations, but also in a series of workshops that offered a comparative analysis of punctuation marks in English and Russian. Regardless of their location, then, multilingual writing centers make effective use of CMT practices. Yet, in settings where English is a primary language, CMT, or collaborative shuttling, works in the service of English mastery (see the last sentence in the above quote). In an EFL setting in which another language is also the medium and subject of writing center practices, a consistent engagement with CMT can help to bring all language groups on equal footing.

## Conclusion

Bilingual practices and translingual approaches as discussed in this article re-contextualize how collaborative learning and negotiation of authority can be achieved through a writing center. I highlighted moments from the formative stages of WCC that divulge transculturalism as the experiential reality of a transnational writing center. This transcultural orientation fueled flexible attitudes to language and creative implementations of collaborative work across languages and professional hierarchies that, in turn, helped to deconstruct the axes of power, increase student agency, and problematize the status of international writing center professionals as brokers of English as a *lingua franca*—purely as a commodity necessary to enter the global stage. This perspective illustrates that a transatlantic writing center both confirms and extends Carol Severino’s application (2002) of Pratt’s concept of contact zones. Severino suggests, “Within the academy the writing center is the contact zone where diverse cultures, languages, literacies, and discourses ‘meet, clash, and grapple with each other’” (p. 231). She also employs Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands to explain the writing center’s interdisciplinary positioning, careful to emphasize the linguistic rather than spatial connotation of the concept (p. 230). A transatlantic writing center, where services are offered in several languages that are also mediums of instruction and where the same consultants can offer services in different languages, places all agents of writing

center work into *linguistic* and *cultural* borderlands, as it destabilizes the concept of a dominant language and culture.

The rich array of *trans*-spaces and relationships are not always unique to transatlantic writing centers. A transatlantic center highlights the *trans*-reality vividly, and, in so doing, it opens up conceptual avenues for writing center researchers and practitioners in less *trans*-settings to recognize and theorize the nature of *trans*-moments at their centers. For example, Suresh Canagarajah (2018) reminds us that multilingual students in US colleges are writers who “occupy a space that is liminal—i.e., between communities, languages, and nations. Such positioning motivates in them a search for identities and literacies that go beyond bounded, static, and territorialized constructs and norms” (p. 41). Writing centers in the U.S. and other countries can foster such *trans*-identities and literacies by embracing multilingual tutoring (Lape). They can also facilitate translanguaging communication through what I described above as collaborative shuttling and CMT. Such practices can in turn blur the lines of authority and hierarchy and place emphasis on each participant’s assets rather than deficits. These practices will place reflection, spontaneity, and collaboration at the forefront of the writing center experience and help to disassociate writing center practice from the strict metaphors of fixed spaces, such as contact zones and safe houses, emphasizing instead openness, possibility, and exploration implicit in liminality.

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