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First Draft of Materials

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<div align="center">Decolonizing Writing Classrooms as a Practice of Humility</div>

INSTITUTIONAL DESCRIPTION

Where National Policy, Global English, and Local Classrooms Meet

My project emerges from a private university in Bangladesh that is officially bilingual but, in practice, strongly English-centered. English functions as the primary language of instruction, assessment, administration, and most internal and external communication, particularly in policy-facing and global contexts. The student population is socioeconomically diverse, including high school graduates from English-medium (US- or UK-based curricula), Bengali-medium (national curricula), English-version national curricula, Madrasah education (both Bengali and English medium), technical education tracks, and Bangladeshi international schools worldwide. As a result, students enter the classroom with varied linguistic histories, educational expectations, and assumptions about the role of languages in higher education.

At the same time, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has made *Bengali Language and Literature* a mandatory part of undergraduate education in all universities since 2018. This requirement is based on national commitments to cultural memory, historical awareness, and linguistic identity, shaped by Bangladesh's history of colonialism (1757-1947), the language movement (1952), and the war of liberation (1971). Within a private university's English-focused environment, Bengali plays a complex institutional role: it is both academically required and culturally important yet often regarded as peripheral to students' career goals. This tension

between national policy and international academic standards directly affects classroom interactions, students' responses, and the teaching practices that underpin my study.

KEY THEORISTS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Thinking With Theory, Not Applying It Yet

Instead of viewing theory as a toolkit to be applied outright, I draw on decolonial, institutional, and rhetorical scholarship as ways of thinking alongside classroom practices. The following theorists and their major works (some listed below as complete citations) most directly inform my methodological and analytical choices so far.

Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University

Press, 2012.

Ahmed's analysis of institutional inclusion and non-performativity informs my understanding of how language mandates and curricular requirements can coexist with everyday practices that resist change. Her work helps explain how policies shape but do not guarantee transformative educational experiences.

Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.

Justice's focus on language, storytelling, and relational accountability supports my view of Bengali language, literature, and culture as an ongoing academic and cultural practice rather than merely symbolic or nationalist symbols. His work underlines that language learning is inherently linked to ethical responsibility and relational understanding.

Mignolo, Walter D. "DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the

Grammar of De-coloniality." *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2–3, 2007, pp. 449–514.

Mignolo's concept of the coloniality of knowledge provides a critical lens for understanding English-medium education as part of a global epistemic hierarchy that continues

colonial patterns of knowledge validation. His work helps frame my analysis of language choice not as dominance versus resistance, but as a site of rhetorical negotiation shaped by history, power, and institutional expectation.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–40.

Tuck and Yang's insistence on the incommensurability of decolonization serves as an ethical boundary for this project. Their work cautions against metaphorizing decolonization and helps me distinguish between decolonial sensibilities in pedagogy and claims of decolonization as a material, political process.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed., Zed Books, 2012.

Tuhiwai Smith's emphasis on positionality, reflexivity, and ethical responsibility informs my use of autoethnography as a research methodology. Her work guides my attention to how knowledge is produced, narrated, and authorized, particularly when researching one's own institutional and cultural contexts.

GLOSSARY (SO FAR)

Translingual Education

An educational approach in which participants are encouraged to draw on multiple languages as rhetorical resources, making language choices based on genre, audience, purpose, and situation rather than fixed hierarchies.

Coloniality of Knowledge

The ongoing presence of colonial power structures within Eurocentric epistemic systems shapes what is recognized globally as legitimate knowledge.

Autoethnography

A qualitative research methodology that uses personal experiences, observation, reflective writing, and analytic narration to examine broader cultural, institutional, and pedagogical phenomena.

Decolonial Praxes

Teaching and research practices that critically examine colonial power structures while remaining attentive to ethical limits, contextual specificity, and the risks of metaphorization.

Rhetorical Language Choice

The informed selection of language for communication and writing is based on genre, audience, purpose, and situation rather than assumptions of linguistic hegemony or fear of linguistic marginalization.

MY FIRST TEACHING APPROACH TO HUMILITY

I still remember the first week of Fall 2018, not because it was my first semester as a college-level faculty member, but because it felt like a quiet collision of worlds I had not yet learned to navigate. It was my first semester teaching a 100/200-level *Bengali Language and Literature* course at a private, non-profit university in Bangladesh. The course was required—partly due to national policy and partly because the university's School of General Education made it foundational. I taught four sections, each with about thirty students, and from the very first day, I could see that "Bengali" was not a shared experience in this room. For some, Bengali was a language of comfort. For others, it was a language of anxiety, memory, and embarrassment. For a few, it was primarily a home-sound spoken, not written.

I met students who had studied in Bengali-medium schools and could already write fluent academic prose. I also met students who had graduated from English-medium schools inside or

outside Bangladesh and had not studied Bengali formally since early grades, sometimes not beyond grade two. A handful carried their education across borders: they had lived in Thailand, Libya, the UAE, the USA, or Canada, and they arrived with confidence in English but deep uncertainty about the Bengali language in practice.

The first week felt less like teaching Bengali and more like creating a space where students with different levels of linguistic proficiency could sit together, learn, and share. I knew the common practice should be to set a standard, enforce it, and bring everyone up. But something in me resisted that instinct, not because I was rejecting standards, but because I was learning to recognize how standards or any gatekeeping can quietly become a form of sorting. In that moment, I did not yet have the knowledge or training to practice decolonial pedagogy in my teaching. I had not yet read the theorists who later helped me name the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo 2007). But I already felt the ethical problem: if my course became a place where students felt ashamed of what they could not do, then I would be reproducing the very hierarchies the course supposedly existed to resist.

Therefore, my first goal was not to fix their grammar or local-level errors. My first goal was atmosphere. I wanted a classroom that felt warm and welcoming regardless of students' linguistic proficiency. I wanted to meet them where they were.

I am writing this now from a later moment, after teaching for several years, after beginning graduate study in the U.S., after encountering decolonial scholarship more. I am trying not to fantasize that I did not know then, or I do know enough now. I do not. But I did feel something, then too, and now as well. That feeling, something like discomfort with hierarchy, became the beginning of this project.

THE ENCOUNTERS

Within the first two weeks, a student asked me: politely, not aggressively, something like: "Why do we need this course? I'm in CSE. I'll code. I won't write Bengali professionally." I have heard versions of that question many times since. Sometimes it came from STEM students. Sometimes from business students. Sometimes, from students who had built their academic identity around English. The question carried different tones: curiosity, frustration, anxiety, sometimes even sadness. However, the underlying assumption was often the same: Bengali was not a "skill" that would matter after graduation.

I could have answered historically: Bengali is our first language; Bengali was fought for; Bengali is tied to identity. And I did sometimes answer that way. But I also realized that if I framed Bengali only as a national duty, I might be teaching compliance rather than meaning. And compliance does not last long without a rationale. So, I asked a question back: "Who do you imagine as your audience, five years from now?" Most students paused. Some laughed. Some answered quickly: "Multinational companies." "Graduate school." "Outside Bangladesh." And then I asked a second question: "And who do you imagine you will be responsible for, inside Bangladesh, too?" That second question was more complex. Not because students did not care, but because the institution around them trained them to imagine English as the future and Bengali as the past. The institution did not say that openly. It did not need to. The language of policies, of assessments, of emails, of professional development, almost everything beyond our classroom is in English.

That mismatch mattered. Bengali was required, but English felt like the language of legitimacy. At the time, I did not want to criticize the university for being English-centered. Bangladesh is part of a global economy; students' aspirations are real; English can be accessed. I

still firmly believe that. What I wanted instead was to create a learning space where students could understand language as a rhetorical choice, not as a hierarchy, and treat Bengali and English as tools, resources, and responsibilities rather than trophies, and/or any other language in a similar way. If that sounds idealistic, it probably is. But idealism is sometimes where pedagogy begins.

A CLASSROOM RULE I NEVER WROTE DOWN

By mid-semester, I realized I was holding one unwritten rule that shaped everything: In this course, I will prioritize how students write over what they write. This is where my commitment to humility began to take shape. Students were used to writing what the teacher wanted. In many academic environments, the teacher's preference becomes the hidden curriculum. But in this course, I wanted students to experience writing as agency: the ability to make meaning for someone, in a situation, with a purpose. That meant I often had to release my own authority: not completely, but selectively. I had to choose when to enforce standards and when to open space. One moment preserved this for me. For a final exam assignment, I invited students to write an academic essay on a topic that mattered to them, something they knew deeply. Many of them wrote about their pets. They also wrote about their favorite foods and recipes. They wrote about hometown rituals and family narratives. At first, I could hear the unspoken complaint: "Is this too simple?" "Is this serious enough?" Even I questioned myself: Was I lowering standards?

However, I kept returning to the same conviction: a decolonial classroom (which I was unsure at the time whether it was postcolonial or decolonial), at least as I was beginning to understand it, should help students practice rhetorical decision-making, not just reproduce "approved" content. I told them, "It is not about whether your topic sounds academic. It is about whether you can make your writing do academic work: make a claim, offer evidence, anticipate readers, craft coherence."

Some students looked relieved. Some looked skeptical. Some looked excited. And some, especially students who had feared Bengali writing, looked like they had been permitted to belong.

I am still working out how to describe this without romanticizing it. Not every student loved it. Not every essay was strong. And not every "open topic" is automatically liberatory. But this moment keeps returning in my memory as a turning point in how I conceptualized humility: humility as trusting students' knowledge, not as abandoning rigor.

WHERE I AM AT NOW

This study is not only about Bengali. It is about what happens when we treat language as a medium of communication rather than as a symbol of superiority. It is about what happens when we recognize that "language" includes not only Bengali and English but also coding, programming, algorithmic, and AI-mediated languages. Students already know this. They code to communicate with systems, with machines, with global infrastructures. Communication is the common thread.

Therefore, the question becomes: Why are some languages treated as "skills," while others are treated as "requirements"? Who benefits from that distinction?

I use autoethnography to assess my teaching choices and classroom moments as data—moments when students resisted Bengali, felt inferior about their writing, or discovered unexpected agency. Over time, I began to see these moments as influenced by colonial histories and global academic standards that favor English as the language of expertise. I also understood decolonial practice not as a declaration ("I am decolonizing!") but as a discipline of humility: recognizing hierarchy, rejecting simple rankings, choosing transparency, and encouraging students to see themselves as writers across languages.

For workshop discussion: In your own teaching contexts, when have you prioritized how students write over what they write? What did you gain, and/or what did you risk?

STUDENT RESISTANCE AND INSTRUMENTALITY

Resistance did not arrive loudly in my classrooms. It came quietly, folded into questions about usefulness, relevance, and time. Students rarely said they disliked Bengali. Instead, they asked whether Bengali mattered. The question often came wrapped in pragmatism: "I'm studying engineering." "I want to start a business." "I plan to go abroad." "Everything important happens in English." What belted me was not the resistance itself, but how reasonable it sounded. These students were not rejecting their language; they were responding to the conditions they had been trained to navigate. In an English-centered private university, English functioned as the language of professionalism, mobility, and legitimacy. Bengali, by contrast, appeared as a requirement to complete, a box to check before moving on. This instrumental framing of language learning is not unique to Bangladesh. But its effects are particularly sharp here, where Bengali carries deep historical, political, and emotional weight. The irony was difficult to ignore: a language that had once been fought for since 1948-1956, literally defended through bloodshed in 1952, was now being questioned for its return on investment.

A BRIEF PAUSE

I want to be careful here. I do not wish to rehearse history as moral leverage, nor do I want to weaponize national trauma to discipline students into compliance. At the same time, I cannot fully understand students' resistance without acknowledging how colonial and postcolonial histories have shaped the status of Bengali in institutional life. Under British colonial rule (1757-1947), the establishment of institutions such as Fort William College (1800) formalized the use of English for administrative purposes, initiating a colonial hierarchy of languages. English emerged as the language of power, governance, and advancement, the language of the *elites*. That hierarchy did not dissolve with independence; it reorganized itself.

In 1952, people in what was then East Pakistan were killed for demanding the right to speak and learn in their mother tongue. *The Language Movement* is often commemorated as a foundational moment in Bangladeshi national identity. Yet, over time, the meaning of that struggle has been compressed into symbolism, celebrated on specific days, referenced in curricula, but often disconnected from everyday academic practice.

> *I am aware that invoking 1952 can feel heavy-handed. I am not arguing that students "owe" Bengali their loyalty. Instead, I am trying to understand how a language born of resistance can later be experienced as an academic burden.*

What seemed to trouble students was not Bengali itself, but the contradiction they lived inside: Bengali as emotional inheritance versus English as institutional currency.

LANGUAGE AS RESOURCE

One semester in Summer 2019, during a presentation on business communication, a student from business studies raised a point that shifted the tone of the room: "If I want to sell products in rural areas, people won't understand English. Bengali isn't a problem, it's a resource." Others nodded. A few looked surprised, as if the idea had never been framed that way. Moments like this reminded me that resistance is not always refusal; sometimes it is simply the absence of an alternative narrative. Students had learned to associate English with progress and Bengali with limitation because the institution had quietly taught them so, not through policy statements, but through everyday practices.

Since the discussion in that class, I have stopped positioning Bengali as something students had to learn and have begun positioning it explicitly as something they can use. Not just culturally, but rhetorically, ethically, and professionally. I told them: "You are engineers, programmers, entrepreneurs, researchers. Language is a tool. Code is a language. Why would Bengali be the one

language you do not get to choose how to use?" That comparison mattered, especially for students in CSE. Later, some of them built Bengali-language applications: small projects, sometimes imperfect, but meaningful. They were no longer asking whether Bengali belonged in technical spaces. They were making it belong.

THE FEELING OF BEING "NOT GOOD ENOUGH"

For some students, resistance showed up as silence rather than argument. These were often students who had internalized the idea that their Bengali was "bad," not academic enough, not grammatical enough, not elegant enough. One student, who had studied primarily in English-medium institutions, once told me: "I can think in Bengali, but I'm scared to write. It feels like I'll expose how weak I am." That word, "weak," stayed with me. What students often described as personal inadequacy felt, to me, like inherited inferiority. The sense that English was the language of intelligence and Bengali the language of emotion was not accidental; it was the residue of colonial and neoliberal educational logics that continue to shape value systems in postcolonial contexts. Recognizing this pattern helped me respond differently. Instead of correcting students' Bengali immediately, I asked them to explain their ideas first. Meaning before form. Purpose before polish. Confidence before correction.

Thinking with Mignolo (briefly): This is where the idea of the coloniality of knowledge becomes useful: not as accusation, but as explanation. English does not dominate because it is inherently superior; it dominates because institutions have been built to reward it (Mignolo 2007). What do you think about this?

DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic forced another shift. Suddenly, all teaching moved online: synchronously, across unstable internet connections, shared living spaces, and emotional uncertainty. If language were truly a barrier, this moment should have exposed it. Instead, students adapted. They wrote, spoke, presented, coded, collaborated: sometimes in Bengali, sometimes in English, often in both. The medium changed, but communication continued. What mattered was not linguistic purity, but clarity, care, and audience awareness. I still remember collecting students' paper assignments through BuX (the university's learning management system) in Spring 2020, where they clicked images of their papers. It was an alternative for students who did not know how to type in Bengali back then. Because before I moved forward with teaching them professional Bengali writing in multimodal formats, COVID-19 happened, and we had to shift our whole system online. For me, this period reinforced a belief that had been forming slowly: language does not fail students; systems do. When students are supported, trusted, and invited to participate in rhetorical decision-making, they find ways to communicate, even under constraint.

For workshop discussion: Where have you seen students' supposed "language limitations" dissolve when the context or medium changed?

CARRYING THIS FORWARD

Looking back, I see that my classroom was not a site of resolution, but of rehearsal. Students rehearsed how to claim their voices across languages. I rehearsed how to teach without relying on hierarchy. And together, we rehearsed an education that treated language not as a gatekeeper but as a possibility. This is why I am doing this study, not to argue for Bengali alone, but to advocate for classrooms everywhere, for all the written languages, that diminishing

linguistic hegemony begins with recognizing language as a medium of communication, not a measure of worth.

MULTILINGUAL PRACTICES IN REAL WORLD SITUATIONS

I did not initially imagine that this course would follow students beyond the semester. Like many instructors, I designed assignments to meet learning outcomes, submitted grades, and moved on to the next cohort. But over time, students began to return via email, bringing with them stories that reframed how I understood this course's impact. These moments did not arrive as evidence in a traditional research sense. They came as gestures: expressions of gratitude, reflection, and recognition. And they forced me to rethink what counts as "learning outcomes" in a writing classroom.

WRITING AS POSSIBILITY

Among the students who stayed in touch with me, most were women who faced significant social constraints. For them, writing was not simply an academic practice; it was one of the few spaces where agency felt possible. Several students chose to write publicly in Bengali, including blog posts, social media content, and short reflective pieces, sharing stories about everyday life, social expectations, and personal beliefs. They did this quietly, sometimes anonymously, aware that their ability to work outside the home or pursue visible careers might be limited after graduation. Writing, for them, was not about publication or prestige. It was about voice. One student told me, near the end of Fall 2022, when I was packing for starting my graduate study in the USA: "I don't know if I'll be allowed to work after graduation. But now I know I can write. I can say things in different ways comfortably in Bengali."

What mattered in that moment was not grammatical accuracy or genre convention. What mattered was that writing had become preparation for living within constraint: an ethical and

rhetorical practice that extended beyond the classroom. I do not want to romanticize this, as mentioned earlier. Writing did not dismantle structural barriers. It did not guarantee safety or opportunity. But it did offer something tangible: the confidence to articulate experience, to imagine an audience, to participate in public discourse in English or any other language.

I am aware of the risk here of treating writing as salvation. That is not my claim. Writing is not freedom. But it can be practice: practice in naming, framing, and sharing one's reality.

WRITING BACK FROM ELSEWHERE

Some students have carried Bengali writing practices across borders. One email arrived from Calgary, Canada, in Spring 2024, when I was already in the USA, pursuing my master's. A former student wrote to tell me that the way we discussed writing helped him articulate his goals clearly in application essays as he transferred his credits from Bangladesh to a university in Canada. He did not write in Bengali to apply; he wrote in English. But the rhetorical awareness he practiced in Bengali transferred across the boundaries. He wrote something like: "I didn't think that course would matter for this. But it helped me explain who I am and what I want to study."

That message unsettled a common assumption: that skills developed in "local" languages do not travel. In fact, they often do precisely because rhetorical awareness is not language-specific. This is where my resistance to linguistic hierarchy sharpened. If students can successfully carry rhetorical practices from Bengali into English-medium contexts, then the problem is not transferability. The problem is how institutions frame value. I often reminded my students: "People who know more than one language are never at a disadvantage. They have more choices." This framing mattered. It reframed multilingualism not as a burden, but as preparation for professional life, civic engagement, and ethical responsibility.

BEYOND BENGALI

At this point, I need to say again clearly: This project is not just ultimately about Bengali. It is about challenging linguistic hegemony wherever it appears, about refusing the idea that some languages are inherently academic while others are merely cultural. It is about recognizing that people now communicate across multiple systems: spoken languages, written languages, programming languages, algorithmic languages, and recently emerged AI-mediated languages.

Why do we code? To communicate.

Why do we write? To communicate.

Why do we teach writing? To prepare people to communicate ethically, effectively, and responsibly.

Seen this way, Bengali and English are not opposites. They are part of the same communicative network.

For workshop discussion: How do your students' linguistic practices outside the classroom complicate what your institution values as "academic" language

TOWARD A DECOLONIAL APPROACH

Sometimes, positioning my authority feels natural in my role as a writing instructor, especially when grading students' papers and providing holistic feedback. However, most of the time during my practice as a teacher, I try to be with my students, blurring the boundaries of hierarchy. As I believe, letting go of control does not mean disappearing as a teacher. In fact, this approach required me to be more present, not less. I must guide students through questions like: Who are you writing for? Why does this topic matter to that audience? What does clarity look like here? At the same time, I had to resist the impulse to impose my own aesthetic preferences. This was harder than I expected. Authority, I realized, often disguises itself as care.

There were moments when I intervened, when writing became unclear, when arguments drifted, when students needed structure. But I tried to intervene with students rather than over them. This distinction, small but significant, became central to how I understood humility. Humility did not mean pretending I did not know more. It meant recognizing that my knowledge did not need to dominate every decision. It was around this time that I encountered scholarship cautioning against the casual use of "decolonization" as a metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012). That work unsettled me, and productively so. I began to ask myself: What am I actually doing when I call my teaching practice decolonial? What am I not doing? Where might my good intentions obscure structural limits?

I do not claim that letting students write about pets, their dance classes, track teams, or their grandma's famous pie recipe decolonizes writing and composition classrooms. That would be an exaggeration and an ethically disputed definition. What I do claim is that this teaching choice disrupted a small but important hierarchy: the one that equates academic legitimacy with distance from lived experience. In this sense, decolonial practice emerged for me not as a declaration, but as a discipline, one that required constant self-interrogation, transparency, and restraint.

> *Thinking with Tuck and Yang (2012): I understand this work as engaging decolonial sensibilities rather than enacting decolonization itself. To what extent do you think such a distinction matters, especially in institutional contexts that remain deeply shaped by colonial and neoliberal logics?*

HUMILITY AS DECOLONIAL PRAXES

Choosing humility came with costs. It took more time. It required more explanation to students, to me, and sometimes to others. It involved the risk of being misunderstood. But it also produced moments of genuine learning, moments when students saw themselves as capable writers rather

than as deficient language users. And perhaps most importantly, it reshaped my own teaching practices. I began to see authority not as something to defend, but as something to deploy carefully, ethically, and occasionally to set aside.

For workshop discussion: Where have you felt tension between maintaining "standards" and making space for students' lived knowledge? How have you navigated that tension?

TRANSITIONING FORWARD

What began as a classroom strategy became a lens through which I started to see language, power, and pedagogy differently. A misinterpreted aspect of my teaching practice, sometimes by colleagues, was my deliberate use of English to talk about Bengali. At first glance, this seemed contradictory. Why would a teacher who commits to resisting linguistic hierarchy rely on English, especially in policy documents, course rationales, and institutional communication? A few of my colleagues asked for my explicit position on this rhetorical choice in my teaching. I asked myself these questions repeatedly. And I still do sometimes.

But over time, I came to understand this choice not as surrender, but as a rhetorical strategy. Rather than resist this condition outright, I chose to work deliberately within the blurred boundaries between the languages. I wrote about Bengali's academic and epistemic value in English so that those with decision-making power, for example, trustee board members, administrators, accreditation audiences, and international collaborators, could understand why this course mattered. This was not about translation alone; it was about argument. In those documents, I framed Bengali not as a cultural ornament or a nationalist obligation, but as a rigorous site for developing rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and ethical communication, skills that the institution already claimed to value.

This is one of the places where my work sits uneasily between critique and participation. I am aware that working within English-centered systems can reproduce them. I am also aware that refusing to engage those systems can render certain forms of knowledge invisible.

What mattered just as much as writing these documents was making my reasoning transparent to students. I told them directly: "I am using English here because this is the language the institution listens to. That does not mean English is better. It means we are choosing the language that fits the situation." This transparency became a teaching moment. Students began to see language not as a moral hierarchy, but as a set of tools, each with affordances and limits. This framing helped students reconcile what they experienced as a contradiction. They could value English without devaluing Bengali. They could learn Bengali deeply without feeling that it threatened their global aspirations.

THINKING THROUGH INSTITUTIONS

Here, Sara Ahmed's work on institutional life helped me articulate something I had been sensing intuitively: institutions often absorb the language of inclusion without transforming everyday practice (2012). Policies can mandate courses; values can be written into mission statements, but the lived reality of classrooms tells a more complicated story. By writing Bengali's value in English, I was not trying to "fix" the institution. I was trying to create legibility, to make visible a form of knowledge that might otherwise be dismissed as peripheral. This was a pragmatic choice, but not an uncritical one.

Thinking with Ahmed (2012): Inclusion does not automatically produce transformation. To what extent can strategic engagement sometimes open small spaces where different values can be articulated and defended?

COLONIALITY AND DECOLONIALITY

Here I return to the question of coloniality. English did not become dominant in Bangladesh by accident. Its authority is tied to long histories of colonial administration, global capitalism, and educational prestige. Acknowledging this history matters. But acknowledging it does not require treating English as an enemy. Instead, I began to frame English as a contested resource, a language shaped by power, but not owned by it. This framing mattered deeply for students who felt caught between pride in their mother tongue and fear of falling behind globally. It allowed them to understand that choosing English in some contexts did not mean abandoning Bengali, just as choosing Bengali did not mean rejecting the world.

I am still negotiating how to talk about English without either celebrating it uncritically or rejecting it symbolically. This tension remains unresolved, and it needs to remain so.

IN AND BEYOND THE CLASSROOMS

Looking back, I can see how these choices shaped not only my teaching but also my scholarly identity. As I later moved into graduate study in the United States, I carried these questions with me. I began to understand myself as an international, multilingual woman scholar of color navigating academic spaces that often take English dominance for granted. The strategies I practiced in Bangladesh: transparency, rhetorical awareness, and humility did not stay behind. They traveled with me. And they continue to shape how I think about decolonial work in writing studies: not as purity or refusal, but as careful, situated decision-making in unequal systems.

For workshop discussion: Where have you found yourself using dominant academic languages strategically, either to protect marginalized knowledge or to make it legible? What tensions did that create?

LOOKING AHEAD

I am bringing this work to the 2026 CCCC IRC not as a finished argument, but as an invitation to think together about how decolonial sensibilities might inform writing classrooms across languages, cultures, and institutions. As I clarified my teaching commitments, it has also made visible how much remains unresolved between theory and practice. Autoethnography, for me, has not been a method of arrival. It has been a method of staying with questions, tensions, and ethical uncertainties that refuse easy answers. Writing this text has reminded me that decolonial work in classrooms is not something one achieves; it is something one practices, revises, and sometimes missteps through.

I keep asking myself several questions, and I want to discuss them with my IRC peers now: When does flexibility turn into exclusion? If students have broad rhetorical freedom, how can we ensure that those who are already confident do not benefit unfairly? How can we provide support without reestablishing hierarchy? How can we assess humility without turning it into a tool or measure? What occurs when humility is something to be "performed" or graded? How can we respect this boundary without neglecting our ethical duties? How much is this work applicable across different contexts? My project originated in Bangladesh, among Bengalis, shaped by specific histories and institutional conditions. What aspects can be transferred across contexts, and what should remain unique?

I am intentionally resisting the urge to turn these questions into conclusions. I am bringing them here because they feel generative rather than paralyzing.

WHY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I chose autoethnography not because I lacked empirical data while writing this study, sitting in the USA, but because I needed a way to stay accountable to experience: my own and my

students'. Autoethnography allowed me to trace how pedagogical decisions were shaped by institutional pressures, colonial histories, student lives, and my own positionality as a multilingual woman scholar navigating multiple academic worlds. At the same time, I recognize its limits. Autoethnography does not speak for students. It does not dismantle structures. It can risk centering the teacher's voice if not handled carefully.

And yet, it remains one of the few methods that allows me to explore how teaching feels, how authority shifts, how uncertainty enters the room, and how ethical decisions unfold in real time. For me, that attentiveness is not a weakness; it is the start of responsibility. As I mentioned earlier, I am bringing this project to the IRC not just as an argument but also as an invitation. I want to learn how scholars and teachers of rhetoric, writing, and composition worldwide navigate similar tensions. I want to hear where my approach resonates and where it remains underexplored. I want to understand how decolonial practices develop differently in contexts influenced by other colonial histories, such as settler colonialism, different language politics, and other educational pressures.

More specifically, I hope to use this workshop as a space to revisit the questions I have left open here: to think collectively about what humility can look like in writing classrooms, to begin sketching a toolkit-in-progress for decolonial writing pedagogies, one that is flexible, context-sensitive, and ethically cautious. Though I have started drafting the toolkit, I should not write it alone. That is why I am considering this workshop as a focus group discussion, an invitation to think together. If there is one thing I hope we carry forward, it is this: decolonial practice in writing classrooms is not about getting it right. It is about staying accountable, staying curious, and staying willing to learn together.