

Teaching Citation Methods to Degree Seeking ESL Students

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Several concepts and techniques in the field of second language acquisition command the attention of researchers and classroom teachers, yet one of the most frequently discussed topics in both university English language institutes and community college ESL departments is plagiarism of source material. Unfortunately, most teachers misinterpret this form of student copying as a discipline problem. Actually, the problem of undocumented copying of published texts in an ESL classroom should be treated as an acculturation problem rather than one of cheating. Cheating is, after all, a cultural concept, subject to societal interpretation; and since many students in English language institutes intend to pursue academic degrees in western colleges or universities, they need to understand the western or English language interpretation of plagiarism. Viewed from a perspective of culture, therefore, the solution to student plagiarism becomes one of an acculturation process rather than a more stringent application of rules.

The First Projects

The problem has been addressed in a rudimentary way in the native-speaking, mainstream classroom through a practicum project done by Ann W. Hall (1986). Her project emphasized critical thinking skills as one potential solution in an eighth grade class. Through an integrated approach for developing note-taking, writing, paraphrasing, and summary skills, Hall managed, in the ten week unit, to significantly reduce instances of plagiarism of published texts. Classes of different age groups, as well as students in TESOL classes, would require some adjustments to Hall's approach, however, since strategies similarly applied have met with only minimal success in those teaching environments.

Current strategies for dealing with the problem in the ESL or EFL classroom frequently prove inadequate because of cultural differences. These cultural differences seem to be responsible for both problem areas of plagiarism and, as such, cannot be controlled through mainstream critical thinking instruction or simple authoritarian methods. Unlike United States college students (or grade school students) raised with a Western concept of cheating, non-native speakers of English cannot simply be told to avoid

copying because of many of their cultures do not relate to the term in the same way that we do. For them, a published text is part of the public domain.

Also, in most cases, students' initial experience with the concept of plagiarism of published texts comes in intermediate or advanced classes when they are first asked to produce relatively long compositions. By contrast, native speakers have dealt with the issue for most of their academic lives. Pennycook (1996) discusses the concept of ownership of texts as a Western notion, and Brownlee (1987), suggests the necessity of using specific techniques to help students avoid Western concepts of plagiarism. Neither of their strategies goes far enough, however; the best they do is teach students to paraphrase. That just circumvents the issue and does a disservice to students planning an upper level education in the United States.

It seems more reasonable to combine Pennycook and Hall's research with theories of composition, schema, intercultural communication, and literature to present strategies for teaching the Western cultural significance of authorship and textual ownership to ESL and EFL students. Such a strategy would have the additional benefit of teaching proper citation methods at an early stage, an important consideration for language institute students looking forward to pursuing a college degree in an English speaking country.

The Cultural Assimilation Strategy

The strategy would be designed to teach the concept of textual ownership as well as the difference between (and proper use of) sentences of original thought and those of support paraphrased or quoted from published sources. Over the course of a semester, students learn the Western cultural concept of copyright sanctity not only through the mechanical techniques of citation, but also through the study of authorial background and intertextual contrast.

My experience in applying the strategy proved quite enlightening with a diverse English Language Institute literature class of low-intermediate students from Colombia, France, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia. Most of the students fell into the traditional college age range, and most intended to pursue a United States university degree after attaining English language proficiency.

Direction of the Lesson Plans

During the course of a semester, the low-intermediate students learned to use basic literary terms; and they analyzed eight short stories in a format similar to a mainstream literature class. After initial vocabulary work, students discussed various aspects of the stories in small groups first, and later as a class, with constant reinforcement of literary

terms. Early quizzes were closed-book and multiple choice, standard fare, except that a frequent question dealt with the name of the author. There were no writing assignments during the first third of the semester, and the word "plagiarism" was never mentioned.

First, I always scheduled the stories grouped by author, pointedly circumventing the textbook sequence, and began the first lesson of each new author with some biographical information in the form of an essay or audiotape. This had an added benefit of humanizing the stories and increasing student interest, especially among the Middle-Eastern and Latino students. Second, I devoted one lesson to the difference between an idea or opinion and factual or textual support, taking most examples from the stories. Thereafter, during every lesson, I reinforced the author's name, and during every discussion, I asked the students to find and read their textual support for their opinions of the stories. Quite on their own, students began to back up their claims by saying, "Here on page ten, O. Henry says . . ." or "The protagonist in O. Henry's story says. . . ." In this way, the students began to acquire our cultural concept of crediting an author and supporting their ideas without having rules imposed upon them. Interestingly, their analytical skills also improved as their varied responses showed their differing cultural perspectives, and students began to debate the relative applicability of textual passages chosen for support by their classmates. Essentially, the level II ESL group began to behave like a college level literature class. The next step was to transfer what they learned from class discussions to their writing.

At the low-intermediate level, student writing was limited to short, simple paragraphs. As the semester progressed and students became comfortable with using literary terms to discuss the stories; backing up their opinions with textual support; and comparing different stories by the same author, I gradually, with a lesson of preparation, began to supplement their objective quizzes with open-book, open-ended questions that were similar in format to the class discussions. The first lesson in writing with source material included a handout which walked students through the citation process step by step (see Appendix A).

Teachers should, of course, adjust the handout to suit the direction of the class, their own purposes, and the texts they are using. Teachers may also mention that exact citation styles differ from one field of study to the next, (although ESL students need not worry about such specifics until much later in their academic careers). In addition, teachers may want to begin with a relevant vocabulary, although in a literature class, students will already have a working knowledge of most of the words. The handout works as both class exercise and model for future writing assignments. After reinforcing the cultural aspects of literary citation and working through a couple of examples, students worked in groups and then alone, first with the handout in front of them for reference,

and later on their own. By the time of the first open-book quiz with an essay question that requested quoted sources, the students knew they would be evaluated in three areas: the quality of their response, the relevancy of their support, and the accuracy of their punctuation in citing their support from the text.

They were already comfortable with the first two points. I presented the third, Modern Language Association citation methods, as a grammar lesson along with the citation handout. As in each lesson thus far, I gave them citation methods in small, easily digested doses. Since there was no research paper—nor would they see one in the near future—I did not teach the “Work Cited” page. I also did not teach off-setting paragraphs or any other complicated details. I merely told them that they would learn more about crediting authors at higher levels of study. All they were required to learn was a basic, parenthetical citation with quote marks, the author’s name, and the page number of the citation.

The reason for the basic approach relates to the original goal: to show them a cultural perspective in a way that they can relate to, understand, and use effectively as they are learning to use the target language.

Conclusion

By the end of the semester, the entire class had a better grasp of paragraph construction and textual support; and they had an intuitive understanding of the need to consistently and correctly cite anything they borrowed from a printed text. Best of all, the students actually enjoyed learning this new way of writing.

References

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- Hall, A. W. (July 1986). Decreasing plagiarism using critical thinking skills. ERIC Microfiche Document #ED323495.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Michael H. Long. (1991). *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. London: Longman.
- Pennycook, A. (1996). Borrowing others’ words: Text, ownership, memory, and plagiarism. *TESOL Quarterly* 30, 201–230.
- Seelye, H. N. (1994). *Teaching Culture*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC.

Appendix A

Reference text: *Surprises*. Ed. Burton Goodman. Chicago: Jamestown Publishers 1990.

Acknowledging Sources

When you support your topic sentence with evidence from the text, you should give credit to the author. To give credit to the original author means to acknowledge your source. The evidence that you quote is called a citation. To credit the citation to the author, you need to use quote marks around the citation followed by the author's last name and the page number in parentheses. Then put your period at the end. The following is an example from "A Secret for Two," by Quentin Reynolds.

Text: Relevant Textual Passages

Page 10 *At the stable, Pierre would boast of Joseph's skill. "I never touch the reins," said Pierre. "Joseph knows just where to stop. Why, a blind man could handle my route with Joseph pulling the wagon." It went on this way for years—always the same.*

Page 11 *Pierre had a remarkable memory. When he returned to the stable he'd always remember to tell Jacques, "The Paquins took an extra quart of milk this morning. The Lemoines bought a pint of cream."*

Page 12 *"But of course," the president laughed. "I know his record. He has been on this route for thirty years. Never has there been even one complaint. Tell him it is time he rested. His salary will go on just the same."*

Test Question: How would you characterize Pierre in "A Secret for Two?"

Answer: Pierre is very smart and reliable, and he is proud of Joseph. The story shows the Pierre is smart when the narrator says, "Pierre had a remarkable memory" (Reynolds 11). The story shows that Pierre is reliable when the president says, "He has been on this route for thirty years. Never has there been even one complaint" (Reynolds 12). Pierre shows his pride in Joseph when "Pierre would boast of Joseph's skill" (Reynolds 10). The story shows that Pierre has always been a good worker who is loyal to his friend.

The answer has a topic sentence, four sentences for support, and a conclusion. Notice that you need one extra quote mark, called an apostrophe, when you quote dialogue. Also, try other ways of constructing the sentences. You can use your own style. The main thing to remember is to credit your source; that is an important part of the culture of United States and British colleges and universities.

About the Author

William Rand currently teaches ESL grammar, reading, and conversation at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, Florida. Previously, William taught literature to EFL students at the English Language Institute at the University of South Florida and EFL grammar and conversation at the Foundation of the Technological Institute at Cartago, Costa Rica. William has also taught mainstream grammar, composition, literature, and creative writing at Cosumnes River College in Sacramento, California.