

‘Reading and remembering?’ or ‘Reading and interpreting?’: A study of the use of sources by first year university students for whom English is an Additional Language

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Overview

- 1 Context of study;
- 2 Issues & findings in the literature;
- 3 Methodology of present study: research questions, design; study participants, data sources & analysis;
- 4 Findings and discussion of students' perceived use of sources and authoring practices over time;
- 5 Concluding points: Displaying or constructing knowledge?; Comparison with other studies; EAP professionals: Followers or leaders in academic literacy development?

Context of study

Backgrounds of authors

Research

- Intertextuality & authorship
- Genre & disciplinary socialisation
- L2 pedagogy & L2 writer development

Teaching

- EAP credit-bearing subjects & Applied Linguistics
- Cross-disciplinary & discipline-specific
- Honours & RHD Supervision

Context of study

Background to study

- Grant-in-Aid from the School of Languages & Linguistics;
- Collaborative research project;
- Focus on first year undergraduates from across the disciplines for whom English was an additional language.

Using sources: What are the issues?

- Power, representation and authorship in the processes of textual creation (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1984; Starfield, 2002; Thompson, 2005);
- Cultural differences in the use of attribution and SOURCES (Pennycook, 1996; Thompson, 2009; Thompson & Pennycook, 2008);
- EAL students' lack of linguistic resources (Currie, 1998; Storch, 2009);
- Academic literacy and disciplinary socialisation (Howard, 1996; Moore et al., 2012; Pecorari, 2003).

Using sources: Previous studies

- Selection of sources: Availability, ease of understanding and accessibility (Burton & Chadwick, 2000);
- Electronic texts: Formation of opinions, values, linguistic development (Plakans and Gebril, 2012), & ethics of scholarship (Stapleton, 2005);
- ‘Common knowledge’ in specific disciplinary contexts is problematic (Chandrasoma et al., 2004; Wette, 2010)

Using sources: Previous studies

- Literature highlights need for studies into advanced writing development of EAL students over time (Leki, 2007; Storch, 2009; Storch & Tapper, 2009);
- Disagreement about how much research first year UGs are required to do: Burton & Chadwick (2000) vs Leki (2007).

Methodology: Research questions

- 1 What kind of sources do first year undergraduate EAL students select? Do these practices change over time?
- 2 How do students describe the ways in which they incorporate source texts into their research-based writing? Do these practices change over time?
- 3 How do students describe their authoring practices in relation to their use of sources in their research-based writing? Do these practices change over time?

Methodology: Research Design

- Longitudinal case study approach over a year;
- 13 UG students (9 females & 4 males) from across the disciplines;
- Brazil; China; Indonesia; Vietnam;
- IELTS 6.5 or equivalent minimum;
- 5 interviews across the year;
- Data: Transcribed semi-structured interviews (2 to 5).

Methodology: Analysis

- 1 Interviews 2 to 5 transcribed & analysed thematically;
- 2 Initial categories established based on research questions & iterative readings of interview transcripts;
- 3 Categories applied to subsample of data coded by each researcher;
- 4 Comparison & discussion led to final set of consistent categories.

RQ1 Findings: Types of sources

Table 1: Source types

| Source type | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Web site | 9 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Subject provided materials: Lecture, course guides & Text books | 8 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Wikipedia | 3 | - | 1 | - |
| Newspaper/TV news | 2 | 5 | 1 | - |
| Journals /chapters, reports | 3 | 4 | 7 | 1 |
| Other e.g. videos, school book | 2 | - | - | - |

RQ1: Criteria for selecting sources

Table 2: Criteria for selecting sources

| Criterion | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Academic/authoritative/reliable | 10 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Easy to understand | 5 | 3 | - | 1 |
| Relevance | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Interest | 2 | - | - | - |
| Up-to-date | 2 | - | - | - |
| Accessibility | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Type of information presented | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Task type/disciplinary subject | - | 1 | - | 4 |

RQ2: Incorporating sources

At beginning of year

- To support students' own opinions (cf Plakans & Gebril, 2012);
- Used paraphrasing **BUT**: not always with reference; uncertain how to reference (see Angélil-Carter, 2000; Pecorari, 2008; Storch, 2009);
- Unsure what constituted 'common knowledge' (cf Chandrasoma et al., 2004; Wette, 2010).

RQ2: Incorporating sources

By middle of year

- Presented range of ideas & opposing viewpoints;
- More confident with referencing & aware of disciplinary differences in citation styles (see Leki, 2007; Pecorari, 2008);
- Role of task type influential (Judy, Arts) (cf Plakans & Gebril, 2012);
- Importance of analysing assignment title (Nhung, Economics & Commerce).

RQ2: Incorporating sources

By end of year

- Students as active participants in the research process: More discriminating & focussed in their use of sources;
- Making notes and planning highlighted;
- Commerce subjects : “picking up knowledge, reading and remembering”; Arts subjects : “reading and interpreting” (Alex, Economics & Commerce).

RQ3: Authoring practices

Beginning of year

- Students learning to become academic writers, therefore not yet ‘authors’;
- Source text authors were ‘factual’ (Judy, Arts) (see Cassanave, 2002; Thompson, 2005);
- Author identity: “I had to change myself to write [for different subjects]” (Laura, Arts) (Abasi, et al., 2006);
- Textual ownership: “Sometimes author’s ideas and [my] ideas come together, so it’s not always clear who owns the ideas” (Kelly, Science) (Thompson, 2011).

RQ3: Authoring practices

Middle of year

- “Being an academic author means [explaining] things clearly in a proper structure and a proper language use” (Yves, Economics & Commerce);
- “Sometimes you’re more of an author [and] think that your opinion is important enough to be shown ... I don’t think I’m an author yet. I think it’s a process” (Laura, Arts);
- Referencing to express ideas; as well as being able to change the language of her source texts: “to make it my own sentence but keep the idea the same” (Kelly, Science).

RQ3: Authoring practices

End of year

- Some students: Personal investment, confidence in the development and ownership of ideas, as well as critical analysis and copying;
- “I have my own opinion now. That has changed. ...I would like to impose myself more” (Laura, Arts);
- “I didn’t used to know that it was important to be evidence-based, ... now I have to research first before I develop my argument” (Judy, Arts);

RQ3: Authoring practices

End of year

- “[academic writing] it’s about putting other people’s ideas together; it’s about referencing and that’s it!” (Kelly, Science);
- At start of year “you’re basically describing the info.”; now could “maybe make a judgment about whether it is useful or not and state my point of view”; if text was difficult would still copy rather than interpret (Alex, Economics & Commerce).

Key finding

In Semester 2

- Arts students required to complete research-based written work;
- Not the case for students from other disciplinary majors.

Concluding points

- Internet use becoming more focussed;
- University-based search engine used to access discipline-specific electronic databases;
- Continued use of lecturers' materials;
- Sources selected on basis of authority, reliability, ease of comprehension & relevance;
- Towards end of year a few students identified task & discipline as influential in source selection.

Concluding reflections

Display or construction of knowledge?

- From incorporating sources that supported own opinions to evaluating sources from range of perspectives - but NOT all students;
- Most not required to undertake research-based assignments (apart from in their EAP subjects);
- Reading limited to textbooks & course materials;
- Focus on comprehension & understanding of key concepts NOT on interpretation & synthesis.

Concluding reflections

Support in the literature

- Leki's research (2007) which highlighted lack of research-based writing across the disciplines;
- Recent study by Moore et al. (2012) of perceptions of academic staff about literacy demands of first year tasks, also found clear differences between more humanities-oriented and technically-oriented subjects.

Concluding reflections

EAP practitioners – followers or leaders in academic literacy development?

- This study highlights importance of ongoing research into EAL students' acculturation into disciplinary communities of practice;
- How does/should undergraduate pedagogy: Articulate with graduate attributes? Prepare students for postgraduate study? Contribute to the research agenda of our universities?