TEACHING, QUOTING, SUMMARIZING, AND PARAPHRASING: THE CURE FOR PLAGIARISM IN THE ESL WRITING CLASS

TED PLAISTER
University of Hawai’i at Manoa

In any discussion of the teaching of writing at the tertiary level to nonnative speakers of English the subject of plagiarism eventually surfaces. Teachers express concern over the fact that they continue to find varying degrees of plagiarism in their students' papers. In the final analysis, the subject of plagiarism is much like the weather: Everybody talks about it, but not too many people do anything about it except for the strict disciplinarians who give failing grades when they discover instances of plagiarism in their students' work, those who caution their students about the evils of the practice, and the handful that actually devote time to teaching the skills of quoting, summarizing and paraphrasing. A quick survey of a number of texts on writing (for both native and nonnative English writers) reveals that, surprisingly, most contain no references to either plagiarism or paraphrasing. Exceptions are Sunderman (1985), Adams and Dwyer (1982), Oshima and Hogue (1983) and the best of these, Hamp-Lyons and Courter (1984). An appendix in Fowler's *The Little, Brown Handbook* (1980) provides some useful information on both plagiarism and paraphrasing for L1 writers.

The skills of summarizing and paraphrasing are especially important in the writing of literature reviews or bibliographical essays. Thus, there is little question that L2 students need to learn how to paraphrase and summarize if they are to write acceptable papers free of plagiarism.

Why Students Plagiarize

Why do nonnative speakers of English plagiarize? Is it for the same reasons that native speakers do? Are the NNSE intentionally trying to pass off another person's work as their own? Undoubtedly there are some who

do, but it would be difficult to cite any figures on the percentages of students who are guilty of what we might term willful plagiarism where they deliberately copy an author's work and incorporate it into their papers. There is another category of plagiarism which we can call desperation plagiarism which is the kind practiced by nonnative speakers of English who are facing deadlines, who are struggling to get through reading assignments that they poorly understand, and who at times copy fairly lengthy parts of another's prose in order to put together a paper so as to meet a deadline. There is a subtle difference between this kind of plagiarism and willful plagiarism and this difference lies in the student's intent. The third kind of plagiarism I will call respectful plagiarism and it covers those situations where students say, in effect, "This piece of material is so well written and states so succinctly what I want to say that I can't possibly improve on it, so I will copy it." Moreover, there is no intention on the part of the student writer to cheat. In fact, this attitude reflects cultural differences towards plagiarism (Hsieh, 1988). Thus, ESL/EFL teachers face the difficult and sensitive problem of working with students who may not view plagiarism of any variety with the same seriousness as they do.

No matter how one classifies the different types of plagiarism and analyzes the writer's intent, it remains a verboten practice in writing. Logically, it can be argued, the cure for plagiarism is to teach students how to quote, how to summarize and how to paraphrase.

Writing teachers routinely instruct their students in the quoting of material, but may restrict themselves to teaching only the mechanics of quoting because this is the easiest aspect of the quoting skill to teach. But teaching students which portions of their research findings to quote, which to summarize, and which to paraphrase is much more difficult.

Developing an Overview of Quoting, Summarizing, Paraphrasing

In order to help students develop a feeling for how these writing skills are handled by academic writers, I recommend that teachers and students work from a term paper or other piece of academic writing which contains a reasonable number of examples of the three skills (quoting, summarizing, paraphrasing) in conjunction with the original sources of
the quoted material. By working with the original sources, the students can see which segments of a particular journal article or chapter have been quoted, which have been summarized, and which have been paraphrased. Not only will they become aware of what has been selected for each aspect, but also how each has been used in a given piece of writing. This is what we might label the big picture approach, i.e., here is a piece of finished work including its summaries, its quotes, and its paraphrases and here are the sources from which the three were taken. While this exercise should prove useful, it is not sufficient to teach the skills of summarizing and paraphrasing—the two most difficult of the three.

Clearly, students need guidelines on which of the three techniques to use with the material they are going to select from their reference sources. Direct quoting appears to be the easiest to teach. Material to be quoted directly can be restricted to important and new definitions, and to text which has been written so carefully and well that it would prove difficult to improve on. Making a decision as to text material which fit these criteria is not all that difficult for native speakers, but can nonnative speakers do this? To my knowledge, the ability of nonnative speakers to select appropriate material to quote, summarize and paraphrase has not been tested. Here is what Fowler (1980) has to say on paraphrasing, "Paraphrase is most useful when you want to use an author's line of reasoning but don't feel the original words merit direct quotation" (p. 430). How are nonnative speakers of English to make this kind of judgment? Obviously, they will have great difficulty in making these decisions. Perhaps only by being exposed to a great number of examples will they come to learn this skill in any way comparable to that of a native speaker of English. Summarizing is probably more difficult than direct quoting, but easier than paraphrasing because in summarizing one is condensing what someone else has written and unimportant details may be excluded.

Native Speaker Summarizing/Paraphrasing

It can be argued that the way to learn how to summarize is to practice summarizing and the same argument can be made for learning how to paraphrase. But is this really the case? When native speakers of English summarize or paraphrase they instantiate certain schemata for these skills which they know by virtue of being native speakers of English; skills which have been enriched by subsequent training and practice. One
of the features that defines a native speaker of a language is the ability to paraphrase within that language. Native speakers possess a schema for verbal summarizing and paraphrasing as well as one for the written counterparts if their language has a written form. That native speakers of a language exhibit differing degrees of skill at these two tasks is obvious. Still, in their various language competencies they have resources, both lexical and syntactical, which permit them to perform these tasks in ways which are or may not be available to nonnative speakers of their language until they gain considerable expertise with the use of the language in its written (as well as its spoken) form.

Thus, when teachers instruct their students to use summarizing and paraphrasing in their papers they are asking their students to perform rather sophisticated linguistic tasks. If we no longer expect adult nonnative speakers of English to acquire native-like phonology, is it any more logical to expect them to be able to paraphrase and summarize on an equal footing with native speakers? Yet when language which has been written by nonnative speakers is evaluated there usually is an expectation of native-like performance. Because of social constraints which obtain during conversational exchanges, correction is withheld, but when the nonnative speaker puts words on paper, politeness constraints evaporate, and they are expected to produce on a par with L1 writers especially if the writing is academic.

Paraphrasing Ability in the L1

One matter concerning paraphrasing which we have not addressed thus far and which is important in an overall consideration of the subject is the ability of students to paraphrase in their native tongues and the extent to which paraphrasing is used, as well as how it is done in written form in their native languages. Students who are native speakers of German and who have done academic writing in German should find paraphrasing in English primarily a matter of transfer (Schwizer, 1988). Native speakers of French and Spanish should also be able to transfer these skills when writing in English (Dias, 1988; Quinn, 1988). Students from cultures that do little or no academic writing in their vernaculars (students from Micronesia, for example) have no schema for written paraphrasing or summarizing in their native languages and thus they have nothing to transfer except their ability to paraphrase in the spoken form plus any skills
they may have learned while going to school in a second language (English). Given the state of English language teaching in Micronesia, any such skills are minimal, at best. Thus, in terms of learning paraphrasing and summarizing in written form, the Micronesians rank as beginners.

Ways of Teaching Summarizing/Paraphrasing

Clearly there is a need to teach the skills of summarizing and paraphrasing and we have already provided one example of how this might be done. We turn now to some other possible exercise types. Perhaps one of the simplest ways to approach the teaching of paraphrasing is at the sentence level. Here we would expect the teacher to prepare a list of suitable sentences for practice in paraphrasing. By suitable is meant sentences that are taken from academic writing and are not simplistic examples which the teacher has contrived to illustrate the technique, although it may be well to start with one or two of such sentences. Having selected a collection of sentences, what next? The teacher could give the students the sentences and ask them to paraphrase them to the best of their ability, but it should be immediately apparent that this is not teaching. It is testing. A more acceptable kind of testing with teaching overtones is to group students and have them work out paraphrases cooperatively with appropriate teacher input.

In lieu of the above, a technique which involves some direct teaching has the teacher write a sentence on the chalkboard and then paraphrase it for the students. But does this teach the students how to paraphrase, or does it merely demonstrate to the students the teacher's ability to paraphrase? An improvement on this technique has the teacher write a sentence on the chalkboard, and then call upon the students to paraphrase it in concert with him, thus combining teaching and testing.

So, the question remains: How do students learn to paraphrase on their own? Students don't need to observe a teacher practicing her paraphrasing skills at the chalkboard although they can undoubtedly learn some aspects of paraphrasing through careful observation. Rather, what they need is a method, a modus operandi, of paraphrasing which they can take with them when they leave the classroom. Is there such a method which can, in a very direct way, teach students how to paraphrase? I think
there is, but in suggesting this method, I am not claiming that the resulting paraphrases will always be lexically and syntactically appropriate, but at least they will be honest attempts at paraphrasing and thus not instances of plagiarism.

How Do Native Speakers Paraphrase?

When native speakers of a language paraphrase within their native tongue, what do they do? First, they identify and/or determine the meaning of the material to be paraphrased. Second, they make lexical substitutes for certain of the words and phrases in the text. (Students must recognize that for certain, usually technical and scientific terms there are simply no lexical paraphrases possible except for extremely wordy and clumsy paraphrases which would not be considered acceptable writing and that using such words and phrases as used by the original author is not considered plagiarism.) Third, native writers use syntactic forms which differ from those used in the original.

A Suggested Pedagogy for Teaching Paraphrasing

I want to argue that the single most difficult task for the nonnative speaker of English in doing paraphrasing is to understand well the meaning of the material to be paraphrased, something which obviously involves reading. Once the student writers have identified the meaning, they are ready to try their hand at paraphrasing. How can these students demonstrate that they have, indeed, understood the meaning? There is no fool-proof method for this but one workable way is to have the students examine the material that they are going to paraphrase and underline its most significant words and phrases. For most academic writing, this should suffice to identify the most meaningful and salient units. This underlining procedure results in a telegraphic version of the original text. Once the underlining is completed, the next step involves a search for lexical substitutes for the words and phrases which have been identified as the meaning-bearers. At this juncture, as noted above, the student must realize and recognize which items cannot be paraphrased. These items remain the same in the paraphrased version. To find suitable synonyms to substitute for the original author's words, the student will have to consult a dictionary and/or thesaurus for those items for which he doesn't have a ready substitute in mind. When native speakers of English use these
reference works, they have a general to good idea of the meaning of the lexical equivalents which are listed, but how is the nonnative speaker to judge which are appropriate selections among the choices offered? Dictionaries are more useful than thesauri in that they provide explanatory material, but unfortunately they do not indicate the register level of the entries so that even with a well-crafted dictionary, the nonnative writer is, on occasion, apt to choose the wrong word. Thus, we have a Catch-22 situation. The nonnative writer knows that he has to choose a word, but he doesn't know which one to choose. Is there a ready solution to this problem? I don't think so. What nonnative speakers must do is to make educated guesses and hope for the best. If they are wrong, at least they have made an honest attempt; they have not plagiarized; and one hopes that they will receive corrective feedback on their work which should, in time and with sufficient examples, give them more information about the language so that eventually they increase their chances of selecting appropriate choices.

Teaching Paraphrasing – An Example

At this point, an example of how to paraphrase using this method may prove useful. The following is an original sentence with the key words and phrases underlined: "If you want to recover, you must learn to be tenacious in fighting your disease and hopeful about the outcome." (Wechsler, 1987).

Possible substitutions are:

- you = person, people
- want = wish, desire
- recover = get well
- must = have to
- learn = strive
- tenacious = persistent
- fighting = combating
- disease = illness
- hopeful = look on the bright side, think positively
- about = concerning
- outcome = result

The next step is to show the students that they should start with a
reference to the original author so that the reader will know that a paraphrase is to follow. Thus, Wechsler (1987) says (feels, argues, advocates, claims, etc.) that if people desire to get well, they have to be persistent in combating their illness and think positively concerning the results.

While this sentence qualifies as a paraphrase of sorts, it is too close to the original to be considered a "good" paraphrase. However, if nonnative speakers of English will follow the suggested procedure, they will not be guilty of deliberate plagiarism. If we then rearrange the syntax a little keeping our lexical substitutions, we will have written a bona fide paraphrase. Such a sentence might read, People must be persistent in combating their illness and think positively concerning the results if they desire to get well, according to Wechsler (1987).

Our three sentences read:

1. If you want to recover, you must learn to be tenacious in fighting your disease and hopeful about the outcome. (Original)
2. Wechsler (1987) says that if people desire to get well, they have to be persistent in combating their illness and think positively concerning the results. (First paraphrase)
3. People must be persistent in combating their illness and think positively concerning the results if they desire to get well, according to Wechsler (1987). (Second paraphrase)

The first paraphrase is the easiest to write because it involves only lexical substitution. The second paraphrase is more difficult because it requires some syntactical manipulation. If only single sentences are being paraphrased, this means of paraphrasing should prove adequate. However, if several sentences or an entire paragraph are to be paraphrased, which is more usually the case, then another step is required in which the context of the entire paragraph is used in rewriting the individual sentences. The same steps advocated for use with single sentences can be followed, but there should be another re-write of the paragraph once the individual sentences have been paraphrased. It may be the case, for example, that two or more sentences can be combined in the paraphrased version.
Minimizing the Influence of the Source Material

In order to minimize the influence of the original sentence/paragraph, it is advisable for student writers to set the original aside when writing their paraphrases. That is, having identified the salient features in a particular sentence or paragraph, the students list these on a sheet of paper and then do their re-writes from this sheet rather than by having reference to the original. It is doubtful that students will remember the exact syntax of the original sources and thus will arrive at their own versions as they incorporate the essential information in their paraphrases. The same technique may be applied in summarizing with the exception that in summarizing, nonessential information should be excluded. This is in contrast to paraphrasing where the totality of the author's information must be included.

Summary

Teaching L2 students to avoid plagiarizing in their writing is a complicated matter including a consideration of student attitudes towards what is considered plagiarism in different cultures, and the linguistic and stylistic skills necessary for summarizing and paraphrasing an author's words for incorporation in one's own work. The skills of summarizing and paraphrasing are difficult enough for L1 writers to do well, and thus they present a real challenge to the ESL/EFL teacher and student alike. A fairly simple method of teaching these skills has been suggested which includes careful reading and understanding of the original material, identification of the salient features, extracting these features and rewriting them, and finally the actual rewriting of the paraphrase. While the resulting summaries and paraphrases may, in a number of cases, not be examples of good writing they will, nonetheless, be original and not instances of plagiarism. The students efforts at summarizing and paraphrasing can then be edited by peers and teachers. Ultimately, the problem of plagiarism should be reduced substantially (if not eliminated completely) if the students are first made aware of its seriousness and then shown how to do it by themselves.
REFERENCES

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