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From Crisis to Opportunity: Turning Questions about "Plagiarism" into Conversations about Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

■ As TESOL and writing specialists in the U.S. higher education context, we are often called upon to support faculty in their work with multilingual and/or international students. In these conversations, we work to promote strategies that not only make learning accessible but also treat linguistically diverse students as an asset. We see **access** and **asset** as the two core values underlying linguistically responsive pedagogy (LRI): If we focus on access but not asset, we may (inadvertently) promote a deficit orientation toward linguistic and cultural diversity (e.g., Canagarajah, 2002; García et al., 2017). However, if we focus only on asset, without giving consideration to access, students may not receive the instruction and other support necessary to achieve their goals in higher education and beyond (e.g., Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomaš, 2014/2018; Shapiro et al., 2016). This access-asset framing has links to other frameworks in linguistics and writing studies, including translingual/translanguaging pedagogy (e.g., García et al., 2017; Horner & Tetrault, 2017), teaching for linguistic justice (e.g., Schreiber et. al, forthcoming) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (e.g., Paris & Alim, 2017).

There is one issue, however, for which this access-asset approach can be particularly challenging–**plagiarism–**which faculty bring up often (e.g., Mahalingappa, et.al., this issue). When colleagues approach us about suspected instances of plagiarism, there is often a "crisis" undertone to the conversations. In addition to being concerned about student learning, faculty often feel disrespected, hurt, or even outraged at the academic "dishonesty" they feel has been displayed (see Benesch, 2018 for more on emotional responses to plagiarism). For example, when Author 2 was talking with a group of first-year writing faculty about different conceptions of textual ownership among students from international backgrounds, one of her colleagues responded, angrily: "But this is a moral issue! And in my view, morals are not relative!" While not all faculty have such an extreme response, many do see plagiarism as a crime to be punished, rather than as an opportunity for learning and growth.

This is just one of the many simplistic assumptions that faculty often hold about plagiarism and writing with sources. We know from decades of research, however, that learning to use sources effectively is anything but simple: it involves an *exceptionally complex, multi- dimensional* set of skills that can only be mastered with extensive practice (Mott-Smith et al., 2017). How, then, do we help to broaden our colleagues' understanding and equip them with strategies to support students developing this skill set? How, in other words, can we shift the conversation about plagiarism from "crisis" to "opportunity"?

This question is important not only to the academic success of multilingual writers but also to our own professional identities: TESOL specialists are still seen by too many of our faculty colleagues as a remedial "fix-it shop" rather than as equal educational partners (e.g., Benesch, 2001; Shapiro, 2011; Siczek & Shapiro, 2014). This hinders our ability to advocate on behalf of students, as well as to contribute to educational equity and global learning across the curriculum. A productive conversation about plagiarism, thus, can be the starting point for a long-term relationship that benefits ourselves, our colleagues, and the students we serve.

This article provides rhetorical framing and pedagogical strategies that can guide our conversations with colleagues, in addition to informing our own teaching practice. We outline five "realizations" about source-based academic writing, which we use as a starting point for promoting linguistically responsive pedagogy or LRI (Gallager & Haan, 2018). After we unpack each realization, drawing on published research and professional experience, we discuss its most relevant pedagogical implications for faculty across disciplines. We emphasize widely applicable pedagogical strategies such as having clear expectations, making space for critical conversations, and providing explicit instruction and support. We also highlight ways to promote an asset orientation toward language and cultural difference in this work. By promoting access and leveraging assets, we can ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn from one another, so that *we all benefit* from having multilingual and international writers at our institutions (e.g., Shapiro et al., 2014/2018; Zawacki & Cox, 2014).

REALIZATION #1: IT'S COMPLICATED

Plagiarism definitions range widely; however, most definitions emphasize the importance of "credit" or "attribution" in using ideas and/or words of others (e.g., Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.). Many definitions also evoke the aforementioned analogy with crime, using words such as "stealing" or "theft" (e.g., Merriam Webster, n.d.). We try to help faculty colleagues understand the many limitations of this "crime" analogy: First, it causes faculty to focus more heavily on "punishment" than on causes or opportunities for learning. Second, the crime analogy assumes intentionality, when in reality, most instances of "plagiarism" (or what we prefer to call "unconventional source use") by L2 writers are unintentional (e.g., Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). It is worth noting as well that instructors often have widely varying views about what constitutes appropriate source use (e.g., Pecorari & Shaw, 2012; Shi, 2012). Is it fair to call something a "crime" if it is unintentional and inconsistently defined or enforced?

A number of L2 writing scholars have advocated for a less punitive view that recognizes the complex nature of source use. Some have suggested distinctions between *prototypical plagiarism* (i.e., intentional plagiarism) and *non-prototypical plagiarism* (i.e., unconventional source use that might have resulted from other academic or linguistic challenges). The latter, which often occurs at the sentence- or multi-sentence-level, may also be called "patchwriting" (Howard, 1995) or "attempted paraphrase" (Keck, 2010), to avoid punitive language. Distinguishing among types of plagiarism helps to highlight that some instances are commonly viewed as more "transgressive" than others (Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014).[1]

This more nuanced understanding of plagiarism can further our commitment to LRI by making space for more thoughtful conversations about source use. Using sources effectively requires knowledge about academic culture, disciplinary literacy practices, university plagiarism policies, instructor expectations, and our own goals and intentions as writers. Thus, if we want students to avoid plagiarism, we need to support their learning and growth in all of these areas. In order to illustrate the difference between a punitive and a pedagogical approach, Author 1 uses a video she co-created for a faculty development workshop (Tomaš and Marino, 2014) in which each approach in a conference with a student writer is modeled.

Exploring the complexities of source use often causes faculty to remember some of their own struggles in learning to write with sources. We encourage them to talk openly about these experiences, in fact, and to create opportunities for students to do the same. Using an anonymous online platform, in addition to in-class discussion, can create a safe space in which students can ask questions and share experiences related to source use. Bringing in the viewpoints of multilingual writers from published case studies is also an excellent way to normalize confusion and challenges around source use (e.g., Gu and Brooks, 2008; Shi, 2006).

REALIZATION #2: SOURCE USE PRACTICES ARE INFORMED BY CULTURAL VALUES THAT ARE NOT UNIVERSAL

One reason that so many U.S. instructors see plagiarism as "theft" is that individual "ownership" of ideas and words is an important value in U.S. academic culture (and in some other academic cultures as well). Students who have been educated primarily in a different academic culture—particularly one that values respect, humility, and/or aesthetics of writing over originality—often have difficulty adjusting to this academic culture (Mott-Smith et al., 2020).

[1] To clarify, we are not saying that there are no instances of prototypical plagiarism for which punishment is warranted. Rather, we are suggesting that instances of non-prototypical plagiarism are more common among multilingual writers.

In navigating cultural expectations around textual "ownership," students often raise valid questions such as:

- How do I know whether an idea I came up with is already "owned" by someone?
- How can I have an original argument about something I have only studied for a few weeks?
- How do I know what is common knowledge and doesn't need a citation?

Recognizing that source use can create emotional and cognitive dissonance for multilingual writers (e.g., Gu & Brooks, 2008), faculty can demystify this aspect of academic culture by being explicit about our expectations, including showing students examples of effective and ineffective source use across disciplines. As we define terms such as "research" and "primary/secondary source," within the context of our discipline(s), we help to socialize students into the ways of knowledge-making and knowledge-sharing in disciplinary discourse communities. We also encourage faculty to think more carefully about what "being original" actually means. In professional development workshops, we have invited colleagues to articulate examples of student writer originality that are tailored to their course or discipline, including:

- reorganization or synthesis of information gathered from sources,
- demonstration of a theory or concept with an example not mentioned in the text,
- articulation of a critique or possible extension of the argument,
- application of a text/theory to students' own experience, or
- connection of course learning to another discipline or community.

We can also support students in finding the "original" aspect in their writing: Mott-Smith et al. (2017) describe activities that can help multilingual writers learn to draw upon their cultural backgrounds and experiences as fodder for an original contribution.

As faculty make their cultural values around source use more explicit, they can also invite critical conversations about the problems or limitations with some of these values. For example, the pressure to be "productive" and "original" in our work often contributes to high amounts of stress not just for students but for faculty. The emphasis on individual ownership, moreover, can create barriers to collaborative work, since single-authored publications are valued more highly in some disciplines. Inviting critiques like these can increase our international and multilingual writers' sense of agency, as they consider their relationship to U.S. academic culture: They may decide to assimilate in some ways but push back in others. Creating space for these kinds of conversations can help all students—domestic and international—come away with a deeper understanding of the academy, both as it is and as it could be. (For more on how critical conversations with multilingual writers can lead to institutional change, see Benesch, 2001).

We also remind faculty colleagues that U.S. students studying abroad often go through their own processes of adjustment to unfamiliar academic cultures. Those students may be surprised to find, for example, that in some academic cultures, writers are expected to give more weight to seminal or historical texts than to recent work. This is a rhetorical strategy that shows respect for classical scholars, which may be quite familiar to some international students, but seem strange to those who have been educated primarily in the U.S.

REALIZATION #3: ALL FACULTY TEACH ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

University faculty in most disciplines tend not to see themselves as teachers of language (Gallagher & Haan, 2018). However, no matter how much English language instruction multilingual writers have received, they will likely need language support across the curriculum—in part because academic language is so context-specific. Hence, while TESOL and/or writing specialists have an important role to play, all faculty must realize that they can and should share some of the responsibility for supporting multilingual writers, in part by teaching discipline-specific academic language (Avni and Finn, this issue; Shapiro et al., 2014/2018; Zawacki & Cox, 2014).

This is not to say that instructors need to have expertise in applied linguistics in order to do their work effectively. However, we often point out to faculty ways that they are teaching and enforcing language expectations *already* in their pedagogy, without realizing it. For instance, they may tell a student to work on "using secondary sources," without clarifying whether they are referring to the language of paraphrasing or the format of citations. By being explicit about the linguistic aspects of source use in relation to their own courses and disciplines, faculty help to support students' continued development of academic language. Some such aspects include:

- Rhetorical purposes and features of particular genres (e.g., IMRaD format for a scientific article—i.e. Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion)

- Linguistic manipulation during paraphrasing (e.g., changing "Effective paraphrasing involves linguistic manipulation." to "Skilled writers are able to make lexical and grammatical changes when paraphrasing.")
- Language for commenting on, extending, and countering source information (e.g., "While research on X illuminated issue Y, it neglected to address the importance of Z.")
- Stance-taking language, such as hedging (e.g. "Some studies suggest") and boosters (e.g., "Research has convincingly shown that")
- Signal or reporting verbs and their connotations (e.g., "posits" vs. "insists")

Faculty can help students to become familiar with some of these features through rhetorical reading—i.e., "noticing" source-specific language in model texts or work from former students. Instructors can also model writing from sources through a think-aloud activity, demonstrating how they would rephrase and/or integrate information. We sometimes encourage faculty to suggest scaffolding language (e.g., sentence starters), similar to those in Graff and Birkenstein (2018), in order to help students integrate the ideas from the source text ("they say") with their own response or use of that text ("I say"). If colleagues raise concerns about the idea of using "formulaic" language, we sometimes share applied linguistics research that shows the importance of learning common collocations, both for general academic writing and for writing in the disciplines (e.g., Hyland, 2012).

REALIZATION #4: SOURCE USE IS ALSO A READING ISSUE

Faculty also tend to assume that source use is only a writing skill, when it in fact involves a range of literacy practices. "Reading-to-write"—i.e., reading for the purpose of integrating or responding to a text—tends to be a challenge for all college students. However, it is especially challenging for students reading in an additional language, who may struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary and differing cultural knowledge (Grabe & Zhang, 2013), and who often need additional time to do their best academic reading and writing.

We encourage faculty to have explicit conversations with students about their process(es) for academic reading, including questions such as:

1. How much time do you usually spend reading assigned texts?
2. What do you do before, while, and after you read these texts?

3. How confident do you feel about your comprehension of assigned texts?
4. How do you find, select, and organize sources for research projects?

When faculty have these conversations, they often realize that their students are experiencing a high degree of frustration and inefficacy with reading. And since most institutions do not offer resources or support for academic reading—despite the fact that assigned out-of-class reading is nearly universal across disciplines—students may feel that they face these struggles alone. We encourage faculty to help make reading as a social and interactive process by:

- Offering suggestions for scaffolding the reading process (e.g., visual organizers and reading strategies for pre, during, and post-reading)
- Modeling their own reading, annotation, and information tracking processes
- Giving students the opportunity to read collaboratively or otherwise interact with peers around reading and note-taking

See Shapiro et al. (2014/2018, pp. 44-46) for more on scaffolding academic reading.

As students continue building their academic reading skills in English, we can also recognize their knowledge of other languages and cultures as an asset. Some instructors invite students to include secondary sources from multiple languages in their research projects (e.g., Ruecker & Shapiro, 2020). Indeed, for some topics, such as malaria treatment, research in other languages may be more state-of-the-art than that published in English. We can also encourage students to read texts through a multicultural lens, using their cultural knowledge to draw connections and raise critiques that can enrich learning for their peers.

REALIZATION #5: ALTHOUGH DOING THIS WORK TAKES TIME AND ENERGY, *NOT DOING THIS WORK* TAKES EVEN MORE

As we share pedagogical strategies with colleagues, they almost inevitably bring up the issue of time: "These are great suggestions," they say, "but how will I find the time to implement them?" What many faculty do not realize is that the time and energy invested in teaching and supporting source use pays off many times over—particularly in terms of emotional labor (Benesch, 2018). When grading papers—a famously dreaded task—faculty have to balance encouragement with critique, as well as to assign (and justify) a fair grade. This affective load is compounded when instructors encounter inappropriate source use, which creates conflict "between feeling obliged to do something and uncertainty about what to do" (Benesch, 2018, p. 66). And of course, faculty who choose to pursue a case of academic misconduct usually find that the judicial process is incredibly taxing for all involved. By investing time in making source use expectations and strategies explicit, instructors can *save time and energy*—for themselves and for their students. (They may also reduce the number of emails and meeting requests from students looking for clarification on assignments!).

We sometimes suggest other pedagogical investments that save time and energy in the long run. For example, requiring smaller "scaffolding" assignments (e.g., proposal, outlines, early drafts) before the full assignment is due can help us to steer students in the right direction *before* they have invested many hours in research and/or drafting. Similarly, asking students to include a short reflective "memo" or "assignment wrapper" alongside their submission of written or revised work provides us with a great deal of insight into students' source use processes, as well as other parts of the writing process. Finally, grading with rubrics can make evaluation of student writing—including of source use—much easier, even if it takes time to create the rubric initially.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We conclude with a few additional tips for TESOL colleagues as they wade into difficult but valuable conversations around plagiarism and source use: First, we try to keep in mind that good conversations start with listening. Asking the right questions may be all a colleague needs from us in order to identify their next steps. Using questions also gives us insight into our colleagues' instructional priorities, which can in turn guide our recommendations. Second, it is important to focus on *quality* rather than *quantity* of pedagogical suggestions. We aim to provide a few targeted strategies and resources tailored to their pedagogical priorities (knowing, of course, that if they ask for more, we will be well-prepared!). Instructor priorities also matter when we respond to questions about particular technological tools (e.g., Turnitin): We want our discussion of whether and how to use those tools to be informed by our commitment to LRI. In all of the topics we address with colleagues, we hope to increase their sense of agency, so that through clear expectations, critical conversations, and explicit instruction and support, they can help to build students' skills in writing with sources.

We are certain that this article has only "scratched the surface" in exploring the topic of plagiarism and source use. For readers curious to learn more, we have developed an annotated list of some of our favorite readings and resources, available here [https://tinyurl.com/4kenr6rm]. Although it is limited in scope, we do hope that this article has empowered readers to channel conversations about plagiarism away from criminality and toward constructive learning, so that students and instructors can grow from their experiences. By approaching these conversations through the access–asset frame of LRI we orient the conversation in pedagogy, rather than emphasizing punishment, and can thereby promote trusting and meaningful relationships with students and colleagues. The collaborative work we have described here illustrates exciting possibilities for our work as TESOL specialists: We can become a resource for "mediation" across disciplines and programs, rather than linguistic "remediation" of multilingual writers (Shapiro, 2011). Although we have written this article thinking primarily of TESOL specialists working with faculty in other disciplines at English-dominant institutions, we imagine there are possible applications or adaptations for those working in other contexts, including EFL academic settings, as well as writing/learning centers and intensive English programs. Indeed, we see the access-asset framing as a helpful shorthand for LRI across diverse educational contexts.

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