Non-Western international students in English Speaking universities, lost in the critical interaction between language and learning, knowing and telling - and (im) possibilities of academic English!

Neera Handa
WesternSydney University
"pech-a-kee-shoe" 2016
Abstract

The recent media uproar highlighting non-English, non-Western international students’ issues, such as inadequate English skills and family pressure to pass makes them culprits of cheating and plagiarising in academic writing. What seems to be missing in this clamour about what international students do or don’t do, is a discussion about the hurdles that experts in the discourse and conventions of the academy, its gate keepers, erect in the name of rules of a game which are “new” but not explicit to new players.

I want us, as academic literacy “experts”, to ponder on how the progress from “knowing and telling”, in any discipline is a journey students are expected to make as they gain and learn to demonstrate knowledge. However, all the means through which this process takes place in English speaking Western universities are reliant upon English language proficiency.

From an academic literacy perspective, I would like to come back to this point, after a detour into another much needed but usually avoided Academic literacy vs English language proficiency discussion! The two points that I discuss here are:

1. What is academic/critical literacy (Literacy + critical thinking)?
2. How does lack of English language proficiency relate to critical literacy?

• I share insights from my research with international students in which these points have constantly been explored and debated!
Issues for discussion

• International students & language, critical thinking

• Knowing & Telling
  – What is academic/critical literacy (Literacy + critical thinking)?
  – How does lack of English language proficiency relate to critical literacy?
Shimelba Kunama
**Academic Literacy**

- how to research, study and communicate discipline knowledge in a manner appropriate for university

**Language Proficiency**

- The ability to communicate knowledge and understandings developed in disciplinary context
- a good command of written and spoken English
- Good practice principles for English Language Proficiency for international/All students (AUQA, 2008)
Graduate attributes

Knowing & Telling

• commands multiple skills and literacies to enable adaptable lifelong learning
• “Indigenous Australian Knowledge” – demonstrates knowledge of Indigenous Australia through cultural competency and professional capacity
• demonstrates comprehensive, coherent and connected knowledge
• applies knowledge through intellectual inquiry in professional or applied contexts
• brings knowledge to life through responsible engagement and appreciation of diversity in an evolving world
Wedding dance in Ethiopia Shimelba Kunama
• Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion – invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Economics, or Anthropology or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4)
International students
Research over the years

• Making connections – issues
  – What else did I need to bring? I need to improve
• Academic induction – Responsibilities
• Academic integrity- Land and discover
• Engaging to empower – University needs to improve
• (im)possibilities of engaging
• Cosmopolitalinism – education without borders - in walled campuses
• (im)possibilities of engaging
• Non-Western international students’ intellectual agency
Academic literacy

- Reading: complex set of skills for acquiring information from a text
- Writing:
  - An advanced facility with words
  - A strong sense of logic
  - A deep understanding of a specialised domain of knowledge

- (Geisler, 1998)
Feedback & Marking

Anne

I enjoyed your assignment and learnt some new things (that does not happen often marking ). Sometimes your evaluation did not fully cover all the criteria of accuracy purpose authority and currency exactly but was very strong nonetheless.

Well done and good luck!
Feedback and mark down

Instructor
Justine, I can't imagine how hard it must be to write in English as it is your second language, but I do have to mark you according to English university expectation.

(What are these expectations!!)

The descriptive information seems fine but I need to mark down that you have not provided any evaluation of the sources.

(Missed or missed?)

There is also a deduction of 1 mark for not having a reference list at the end.

(Rules of the game!!)
Impossibilities of academic English

• To judge if a student is better prepared for his education who wrote impeccably but did not have the understanding of the content or messier but with content!


• Knowing
  – Content knowledge
  – Rules of the game!!

• Missed in telling !!!

• English language - Academic Literacy
Help points

• Learning Centres
• Cheat Contracts of different kinds
Global education

- Imagining Global citizenship
- Global field
- National
- Local
- English language
- Western norms
- Assessment modes