USE OF SOURCES IN ACADEMIC WRITING BY MA APPLIED LINGUISTICS & TESOL STUDENTS: TEXTUAL BORROWING OR PLAGIARISM?

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KEYWORDS:

1. BACKGROUND

The purposes of the project were (1) to enhance our understanding of students' use of sources, from the accessing of sources to the production of academic writing. This was achieved through a literature review and the student interviews based on their submitted academic assignments. We found that there was a connection between some students' approaches to the composition of assignments and their use of inter-textual borrowing, which in some cases was in danger of constituting plagiarism. A related difficulty facing students, revealed in the course of the project, was how to articulate their own voices with those of the literature. (2) To contribute to improved guidance and training for students in the use of sources in academic writing, according to prevailing academic conventions. Training and awareness raising material has been produced and disseminated. Research articles are in progress.

2. PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Literature search
- Data collection (interviews with eight students; collection of texts)
- Interview transcription and analysis
- Document analysis
- Production of teaching materials
- Delivery of teaching materials
- Writing of research papers

3. PROJECT OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

To date we have delivered training sessions based on material derived from the project to approximately 140 MA and Doctoral level students in the School of Education. A training package has been developed and offered to Tristam Hooley at the Student Learning Centre. It will also be made available as a Blackboard based resources for School of Education masters and doctoral students. Dr Svalberg was invited to give seminars on textual borrowing to staff and students at the Lebanese American University in Beirut and Byblos in 2005 and 2006 (around100 participants).

Materials and Resources

• Case study materials on plagiarism in academic assignments for use in academic writing workshops

• Permission obtained from students involved in the project to use their written assignment material for use in future training material.

• On-line tutorial on use of voices in academic writing. Material already available on the Student Learning Centre website on how to avoid plagiarism is of very good quality, but in our view our own material takes this a stage further.

• Lecture material on use of inter-textual borrowing in academic writing (Power Point)

4. EVALUATION

Of the six student evaluations returned so far from the recent Lebanon EdD study school, five gave top marks (5/5) for the voices in academic writing tutorial, and the remaining student was reasonably satisfied (3-4/5). No other specific student evaluations of workshops and materials have been collected, but student reactions in the sessions indicate that they have been perceived as highly relevant and engaging.

5. CONTINUATION OF THE PROJECT

The initiatives taken during the course of this project will form the basis for an on-going review of teaching strategies for handling sources in academic writing, which will be incorporated into Masters and Doctoral level provision within the School of Education

6. DISSEMINATION

Sufficiently rich material has been collected and developed to warrant two research publications in referred journals, which are in progress.

Material developed (see 7 above) is in regular use in the School of Education, and has been offered to the Student Learning Centre for wider availability.

APPENDIX

Voices in Academic Writing – Draft on-line tutorial

Agneta M-L Svalberg, Simon Gieve

[Approximate study time: 60 - 90 min]

This tutorial was prompted by the problems some students have with academic writing. Many students are uncertain of whether they are allowed to make their own voices heard. Even if they know they should, they are not at all sure how to do it. Sometimes they feel disempowered by being so much less experienced and less expert than the sources they draw on. In some cases, this can lead to plagiarism, i.e. the use of the words or ideas of others without appropriate referencing. If you share these concerns, we hope to convince you below that your own voice is both absolutely necessary, and even very valuable. We will try to show you how you can go about projecting yourself as an academic writer and researcher, in a way which respects the conventions of British academic culture (and which can potentially improve your grades).

In this tutorial:

We will look at which voices are normally heard in academic writing

What writers do with those voices

And how they do it

In the text below you will come across questions which you are asked to reflect on. After each question you will find this symbol:

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…which signals a set of power point slides. The slides contain a suggested answer and/or comments on the question. Try to work out your own answer before you open the slide presentation. Double click on the symbol to start the first slide and then click on each slide to get to the next one, and finally back to the text.

Hearing Voices

You can perhaps understand what we mean by 'voices' if you think about who contributes to the meaning of a written text.

Qu: Which are the voices normally heard in a research paper?

[Reflect on this before you click! (3 slides)]

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The academic text could become a virtual cacophony of voices – a bit like the noise in an overcrowded restaurant – but that is clearly not what we want. In good academic writing it should be easy to distinguish between the author's voice and the voices of each of the other writers, researchers and participants.

Your Own Voice

Let us start with your own voice. Just as when you show up for a date, a dinner party or a job interview, when you project yourself in a paper you want to make the right impression.

Qu: What qualities would you like your own author-voice to project?

[Reflect on this before you click! (1 slide)]

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When you speak to somebody, you make a certain impression because of the way you speak. In the same way, when you write you make a certain impression because of the way you write. This can be quite intimidating for novice academic writers. A student might feel insecure about their own expertise, or their right to speak with authority. They might feel they cannot possibly criticize sources and (potentially, at least) colleagues, who are more expert than themselves.

One strategy a novice writer might use is not to project their own voice at all but to let other writers and researchers speak for them. This can work some of the time, but it is not a good overall solution. It can result in a summary of a range of sources, but without the author's own analysis and comments. Tutors sometimes comment on work like this saying that it is too 'derivative' or 'not critical enough'.

It is possible that the novice writer does not understand what is wrong with a straight summary when it says precisely what the writer would like to say. But, in academic writing the author is expected not just to report but also to analyze critically. Therefore, even if the author agrees with their sources, s/he will not just summarize. Instead, the writer will discuss critically and make their own position clear. That is where the writer's own voice makes itself heard.

As we shall see later, the author's own position is not necessarily explicitly stated however. It is possible in a literature review, for example, to select and juxtapose one author or view with another in a way that makes it clear what you consider to be the preferred position without saying outright what your own view is.

What do you understand by the term 'critical'?

Does 'critical' mean the same thing in the three utterances below? Is being critical good or bad?

1. "I never show my sister anything I do. She is so critical!"

2. "I have just read a book about Critical Pedagogy, which really made me think."

3. "My tutor has told me that my writing is not critical enough."

[Reflect on this before you click! (2 slides)]

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Being 'critical' in an academic context involves examining assumptions and presuppositions in texts, and the unstated principles and values underlying them. When a student's writing is not sufficiently critical, tutors sometimes say that it is 'mainly descriptive'.

Qu: What do you understand by the term 'descriptive'? Does 'descriptive' mean the same thing in the two excerpts below? Is being descriptive in these examples good or bad?

4. Descriptive writing portrays people, places, things, moments and theories with enough vivid detail to help the reader create a mental picture of what is being written about. (http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/descriptive.html)

5. This MA assignment is almost entirely descriptive and anecdotal.

[Reflect on this before you click! (2 slides)]

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What is perhaps becoming clear is that in academic writing, you cannot just reproduce? what you have seen, heard, or read. You must also write what you think about it from your own perspective, and this thinking must be critical/analytical. In other words, while analyzing the ideas and findings of others you also project your own expertise and take up your own position, and in doing so you display critical thinking.

Qu: What problems have you experienced/ do you perceive in this regard?

[Reflect on this before you click! (2 slides)]

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Your Expert Voice

You already have some expert knowledge. Through your reading, going to lectures, and working on assignments you have developed some expertise. You also brought some expertise with you when you started the course, for example from previous education, and about particular professional or cultural contexts you have experienced. You continue to build knowledge and expertise by relating your new reading and research to the expertise you already have. In this way it is possible even for a novice writer to make an original and valuable contribution. You also have a possibly unique perspective on a topic by virtue of the life experiences you have been through, and the values you hold.

Your Critical Voice

Academic writing is 'democratic' in the sense that anyone has the right to criticize anyone else, so long as they back up their views. By 'back up' we mean that there is a quality difference between the personal opinions expressed in informal conversations and the views put forward in an academic paper. In an academic context, your views must be based on evidence, e.g. your own or other people's research findings; or some other rationale, e.g. an in depth analysis of some kind. How valid one's own personal, subjective, experience is as evidence can, however, be open to dispute by a critical reader. We will return to this topic below.

Your views are not just a question of agreeing or disagreeing with others. Things are rarely so clear cut. You may be able to point out that another writer has failed to take a particular context into account, or that somebody's research could have been improved by adding a different type of data. Occasionally you may be able to suggest an alternative interpretation of their data. Although you may be less experienced than the writers/researchers you review, you have the right to, indeed you are expected to, examine them critically, adopt a stance and express your views. In doing this, you are creating your own identity as a scholar and researcher.

You must not forget to apply your critical thinking to your own ideas as well. In fact, one way of convincing the reader of your expertise is to admit to the limitations of your research, and not to claim more than you have evidence for. If you express yourself more confidently than you can justify, your voice loses authority. This is why academic writers 'hedge' frequently by using words such as may, might, could, appears, seems, likely, possible, and other expressions which show a degree of tentativeness. For example, in the following extract from Svalberg (2007: 289):

Despite the lack of agreement in the literature as to the precise meaning of 'attention' (Segalowitz & Lightbown 1999) it seems to be generally accepted that some level of it is required for learning.

Here, the writer has found that different authors have different ideas about what is meant by 'attention', and what its role is in learning, but is cautiously suggesting that there is nevertheless a certain degree of consensus. The highlighted words make the claim more appropriately tentative.

Your Presence

As a writer, you always have a presence in the text. At the same time, your research and the issues you discuss should be the centre of attention, not you as a person. Let us look at how experienced writers achieve this balance.

Academic writing may seem rather 'impersonal' - events and states often seem to be caused by 'things' rather than people, as in the extract from Jackson (2002:):

In keeping with the tenets of ethnographic research, as much as possible, <mark>inferences</mark> and <mark>interpretations</mark> were based on the triangulated data. When appropriate, <mark>references</mark> were made to other studies of Chinese culture and learning. This <mark>analysis</mark> facilitated a deeper <mark>understanding</mark> of the assumptions, perceptions, and behavior of the Chinese students during the full-class case discussions in the strategic management classes.

From this extract we understand that someone inferred, interpreted, referred to, understood and analysed; but that 'someone' is not explicitly mentioned. Though we understand that 'someone' is the writer/researcher, she has chosen not to say 'I inferred' and so on. This has the very positive effect of foregrounding the research and the issues, rather than the researcher.

Sometimes it is, however, useful for the writer (or writers) to make explicit reference to themselves (self-attribution). The following extract is from the same paper as above (Jackson 2002:):

The research design of <mark>my</mark> ethnographic study included a strong element of triangulation through multiple source data collection: surveys, interviews, observations, and video recordings. <mark>The aim was</mark> to uncover an emic perspective of the case-based learning situation, that is, to focus on the perspectives of the research participants and their interpretations of their behavior …

The author boldly refers to 'my ethnographic study'. Once she has established ownership, she continues in a more impersonal vein: 'the aim was', instead of 'I aimed to'.

The extracts above (and further below) show that it is often not necessary to use first person (i.e. I, me, my; we, us, our) to indicate the writer's presence in the text, but that it is sometimes useful, but different fields of research have slightly different conventions in this regard. In Ethnographic research first person can be used quite frequently while in Physics it is less common. To get a better idea of when first person is used, or not, we suggest that you look at some published papers in your own subject area. They should be fairly recent, because conventions change over time. Compare different sections of the paper. First person is usually more frequent in introductions and conclusions. In social science theses it is also not unusual for 'I' to be used in the methodology chapter as well, when an author is narrating the historical progress of a project and the reasons behind certain decisions. Published authors in your own field are useful models when you are shaping your academic identity.

A Weave of Voices

We have established that the author's voice is present in one form or another in an academic paper. At the same time, it must be absolutely clear where information and ideas come from. The writer must attribute ideas and facts to their sources, i.e. make it clear to the reader where they come from.

The novice writer may find it difficult to know when attribution is necessary, and when knowledge can be taken as given. Science writers, for example, do not need to refer to Newton each time they mention gravity, as gravity is not a contentious issue. But things are often less clear cut. Our advice is that it is better to reference too frequently than not enough.

The general principle is that in a well written research paper, the reader should always be able to tell who is responsible for each 'proposition' in the text. [A 'proposition' is for example a simple statement. A sentence can contain one or more 'propositions'.] This means that, on the one hand, the writer takes responsibility for his/her own views, sometimes explicitly ('self-attribution'), and on the other, s/he indicates clearly when propositions should be attributed to other writers/researchers.

Here is an example which simply reports the views of a source. The writers (Gieve & Clark......) are in the process of discussing a paper already referred to by them as 'Pierson (1996)':

Pierson likewise suggests that the stereotype of Chinese Hong Kong students as passive rote learners dependent on the syllabus and lacking in intellectual initiative, who

seem to want to be told what to do, show little initiative, and accordingly have difficulty dealing with autonomy … where learning is perceived as something static and directed by others, (for whom) … school is the setting where students absorb the knowledge … (and) the teacher decides what is correct and little room is given for the students to exercise personal initiative in the context of traditional Chinese learning culture [(1996, p. 52)]can in fact be attributed less to cultural factors and more to structural elements of the educational system itself.

The attribution is very clear. We know where the information is from by the name at the beginning of the sentence, and by the publication date and page number at the end of the quotation. The quote is surrounded by a paraphrase of Pierson's views. The quote is distinct from the paraphrase because it is the verbatim (word by word) text from Pierson (1996). Its status is clear by the lay-out – it is indented, and there is a page reference. For shorter quotes, up to about three lines long, quotation marks ("…") without indentation will be enough. Conventions for how to format quotes differ slightly from discipline to discipline, so it is a good idea to check the conventions with your own department.

In another part of the same paper, Gieve & Clark (2007:   ) talk about: apparent differences between British and Chinese cultures of learning ([Jin and Cortazzi, 1993] and [Jin and Cortazzi, 1996]) and provide two references to published papers which deal with this topic and which claim, based on empirical research, that such differences exist.

The two extracts above simply report but, as we have said above, writers also express their own views.

Qu: Which part/s of the following extract from Svalberg (2007: 290) constitute/s the views of the author herself?

The value of explicit learning to facilitate knowledge, not only of the explicit type, but also the procedural knowledge learners need to become fluent users of the language (Ellis 1993, Robinson 1997; Housen, Pierrard, Van Daele 2005) is implicit in LA teaching methodology, despite continued debate among SLA researchers (for example Doughty 2003). An ongoing issue in [Language Awareness] is, however, how best to stimulate and channel [awareness]. To inform this debate, more research which contrasts the learning effects of different approaches, such as Toth (2006) and Lee (2007), would be particularly useful.

[Reflect on this before you click! (1 slide)]

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The extract shows that one way for the author to make their views known to the reader, is to comment on information or ideas from other sources.

Below is another example of authors' voices coming through without the need for explicit 'I/we'. If a proposition is presented without being attributed to another source, the reader will assume that it represents the writer's own information or views.

In this extract, the writers (Gieve & Clark…) outline what has prompted them to write the paper, and what they will be focusing on.

Institutions faced with often large numbers of Chinese students are wondering what to do about these perceived problems. The route of accommodation towards what are seen as characteristically Chinese learning styles (in the spirit of what Jin calls 'cultural synergy') seems hard to bear. Instead, HE institutions are offering orientation courses and study skills and EAP training prior to and during courses which otherwise make few concessions to Chinese or other overseas students. This is in the context of both a pragmatic requirement for and a principled commitment to independent learning, and in this paper we will focus on expectations for Chinese undergraduate students to display autonomy in the British higher education context.

The extract is mostly descriptive. The authors do not refer to other sources, except for the term 'cultural synergy'. This means that they themselves take responsibility for the ideas. Evidently, they assume that what they report is uncontroversial (i.e. that evidence is not needed to back it up).

Qu: Can you identify the elements assumed not to require evidential support, and would you agree that they can be taken for granted?

[Reflect on this before you click! (1 slide)]

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Whether you agree or not may depend on your own experiences of the issues and contexts involved; however, there has to be a limit on what needs to be justified or else academic writing would be never ending, and some things have to be taken 'as given' without supporting evidence or references. It is when we are asked to accept too much as given that we lose confidence in what we read. You can criticize a writer if you feel that they are taking too much for granted.

It is not until the last line that the writers take explicit responsibility by using 'we' (Gieve & Clark….). The extract above is the start of an outline of the paper, which continues in the next extract:

After a brief review of the literature on the place of learner autonomy in Chinese educational culture, we will examine some evidence to assess whether or not a particular group of Chinese students responded 'in a Chinese way' to a programme of self-directed language learning, in comparison with a group of European Erasmus students participating in the same programme. We will conclude that on the basis of the evidence, we have there was very little difference to be found between the responses of the two groups, and that what differences there were are in large part attributable to their different language learning needs and not to their cultural …

In this outline, the authors could have chosen a more impersonal style ('some evidence will be examined', 'the conclusion will be'…). Instead they signal their ownership of the paper and take responsibility for their conclusions very directly by the use of 'we'.

We have said that writers should be critical. Here is one example.

Qu: What is the writer's criticism in the following extract, and how does she justify it? ('CR' is a particular teaching approach.)

Some of the characteristics of a CR approach are apparent in the materials used in the present study (see sample in Appendix 1) and in the discussion below. The terminology may be less obvious. James (1992) made a distinction between the raising of 'awareness' and 'consciousness'. According to this, a person can be made aware of what they already know while raising consciousness, in contrast, involves the creation of new knowledge. The awareness/consciousness distinction can, however, be difficult to maintain in relation to learners as the exact state of their knowledge is not usually known. I will use the term CR to mean making learners aware of how language is used, whether or not they had some unconscious knowledge of it before.

[Reflect on this before you click! (1 slide)]

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In this extract, two voices are present: the voice of a published author (James 1992) and the voice of the critical writer.

Another set of voices which often needs to be woven into the text is that of the research subjects. Particularly in qualitative studies, what they say and how they say it provides important evidence.

Qu: Which voices can you hear in the following extract, and how can you tell whose they are?

The frustration of Case Leader D was also apparent when he reflected on the difficulties he faced when trying to engage his students in full-class case discussions. He observed that they were much less hesitant to speak outside of class and he speculated that they lacked confidence or perhaps were afraid of losing face if they made a "mistake" when speaking in front of a class.

I suppose starting from primary, they haven't had much experience speaking in class in general and many probably have little experience speaking English in class or outside the class and they think people will laugh at them or something. That's what I've heard from students so it's a challenge to get them to speak. Sometimes they ask good questions after class, too. I tell them, "why didn't you ask that during class?" That's a valid question. I want everyone to hear the answer. That's too bad but that's the challenge we have to face and overcome. (Lecturer D)

(Jackson…)

[Reflect on this before you click! (1 slide)]

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Creating Cohesion: How do I make it all hang together?

As we have seen, the different voices in an academic text are not separated, but woven together. The text 'hangs together' because there are links between different parts. In the last extract, the writer says that the teacher thought: they lacked confidence or perhaps were afraid of losing face if they made a "mistake" when speaking in front of a class

This is backed up in the transcript by:

they think people will laugh at them or something

and the teacher' question to the student:

why didn't you ask that during class?

In other words, the research participant's voice backs up the writer's interpretation. The obvious relationship between the two parts of the text makes the whole hang together.

Qu: In the following extract (from Jackson 2002:…), can you spot the links between the highlighted parts of the writer's interpretation, and the words of the teacher?

When relating his teaching situation to his previous experience in the States, he commented that his Hong Kong students seemed to look for all of their answers in their text, almost afraid to venture further. He was also perplexed by their need for the "right" answer and was still searching for ways to generate more interactive, open-ended discussions.

I guess that in the strategy classes back in the US, students will make more assumptions and they will be a little bit more creative. They'll look past the questions and the case a little bit more and make more comparisons with other companies and things and students here are usually hesitant to do that. They think they're not answering the question and going too far outside of the case…I think I do a little bit more lecturing here. Students here are looking for the answer. And I feel I have to talk a little bit more…If nobody talks then I don't have much choice. They can all sit there and look down, you know. Unfortunately, it's kind of the way it is…I'm still experimenting a little bit with the best approach to the policy class out here. (Lecturer D)

Differing perceptions of what was appropriate behavior in case discussions would become even more apparent when the Chinese students later revealed their views about case discussions.

[Reflect on the question before you click on the icon! (3 slides).]

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  A well written academic text hangs together not only paragraph by paragraph, but through the argument which goes through the whole text. In the following example the writers (Gieve & Clark…) first let other voices be heard, and then add their own.

Areas most frequently cited by lecturers as problematic for Chinese students undertaking courses in British higher education institutions (or perhaps they are only problematic for the lecturers!) include … These are often attributed to China being a collectivist culture, to Confucian attitudes to education and learning, to a strong sense of hierarchy in social structures, or to the importance of face (Ho and Crookall, 1995, Jin and Cortazzi, 1993 and Littlewood, 1999).

The referencing at the end of the extract, and the expression 'these are often attributed to' makes it clear that the authors do not necessarily agree with the views they report. The reader expects the authors to make their own views clear, and they do. First they discuss positions in the literature which contrast with the ones above, and which emphasize that individuals within an ethnic or national group can be very different – stereotyping is dangerous and unhelpful. Then they clarify their own stance further:

These are positions that we endorse, rejecting an essentialising notion of culture that claims …. However, we could go further than just noting that there are individual differences to be found within cultural groups. We suggest that the willingness to adopt practices apparently characteristic of a different culture of learning cannot be understood without also stepping back from a monolithic notion of personal identity. If 'being Chinese' does not necessarily mean 'not finding autonomy very

comfortable', <mark>we</mark> have to also enquire whether individuals necessarily feel themselves to 'be Chinese' wholly, irrevocably and consistently.

In this extract they use first person 'we' to explicitly take responsibility for their views.

 Follow up activity

 The following is an extract from a published paper. Since it has been reviewed by other academics (peer reviewed) and published in an international journal with a good reputation, we must assume that it follows academic conventions in the field. Studying how the writer makes her own and others' voices heard in the text could perhaps help you to find your own voice.

There may be alternative answers, but a sample solution is provided following the exercise. The value of the exercise lies in the process of reflection. What you will be trying to do is to make your understandings as a reader explicit. You may want to do the task, and discuss the outcomes, with a fellow student.

Read the text below and identify the following functions (below). You can print out exactly the same text if you double click on the word document symbol at the end. Write the codes in the margin of the text and use brackets, underlining or highlighter to mark out the relevant portions of text. (The first ones have been done for you.) You may find that certain sections have more than one function. (You may also want to create other functional labels of your own to describe what you find.) Two examples are given at the beginning.

AN   anecdotal illustration

WRE   writer's own research evidence

PS   ideas/facts from published sources

WD   writer's own description or explanation

WC   writer's own comment or argument

WD → PS	APPROPRIACY OF CR IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS
	The study was prompted by the realization that recommendations by English Language Teaching (ELT) experts from 'Inner Circle' countries (the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand; Kachru 1985) are not always either welcome or appropriate in other countries (Ellis 1996). The purpose of the GAL Project was to explore the viability of inductive CR, a relatively recent approach to the learning/teaching of grammar, in a particular classroom context outside the 'Inner Circle'. Little research has been done in this area. Mohammed (2004) found that adult learners in New Zealand liked both a deductive and an inductive CR exercise, but did not explore their perceptions further. From an SLA perspective, our increased understanding of the role of noticing and awareness (Schmidt 1990; Fotos 1994; Izumi 2002) makes CR seem an attractive pedagogic option in principle. However, the case of CLT

> indicates that one should not take a positive response to any new approach for granted. Gupta (2004) relates how CLT was imposed from above but in effect rejected by teachers and students in Panjab University in India until, more than ten years down the line, the social and linguistic context has changed and CLT is becoming accepted and appreciated as fulfilling a genuine need for communicative competence. This and other studies, e.g. Liao (2004) and Lewis & McCook (2002), suggest that attitudes to teaching approaches are based on a variety of factors among which SLA research evidence may play a very minor role.
>
> Hence the assumption of the present study that a CR approach might be more or less appropriate and effective in different cultural contexts. Informal discussion with…

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[Complete your own analysis before you click. (3 slides)]

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If you found the task useful, you can do the same on a text which you choose yourself, in your own subject area . Remember, rather than finding the 'right answers' it is the process of reflection which will help you develop your own academic reading and writing.

If you want to you can tell us what you thought of this tutorial:

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End of Tutorial