

Paraphrasing Techniques Employed by Undergraduate Thesis ESL Writers: The Case of a Sino-Foreign Collaborative Institution

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Abstract

Paraphrasing is an important skill in academic writing, used not only to avoid plagiarism, but also to evaluate, summarize, and reflect on the knowledge gained in classes across the disciplines. However, paraphrasing in a second language or foreign language is generally considered more difficult than in the first language. It is a cognitive skill that requires higher order thinking and high proficiency in both reading and writing (Na & Nhat Chi Mai, 2017). Studies conducted with L2 English learners' paraphrasing practices have found that they fail to paraphrase effectively because of the lack of awareness of the importance of paraphrasing, insufficient knowledge and opportunities to practice the techniques of paraphrasing, and insufficient language proficiency. However, in institutions such as the Sino-foreign collaborative programs, it is expected that towards the end of their undergraduate studies, students will have gained sufficient English language proficiency, and awareness and practice of paraphrasing techniques. In this study, the researcher tries to determine which paraphrasing techniques the undergraduate thesis writers have employed effectively through an analysis of the citations in their paper against the original sources; and what challenges they faced while paraphrasing source texts through a survey. The findings have pedagogical implications for both language and content teachers across the disciplines.

Keywords: avoiding plagiarism, paraphrasing, reconstructing source text, synthesizing writing; writing from sources