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Assumptions in Assessment: The Role of the Teacher in Evaluating ESL Students

■ **Recent "critical" research in applied linguistics has explored tensions in the classroom and made the point that nothing about language teaching is value-free, including assessment and evaluation of students (Morgan, 1998; Pennycook, 2001). Informed by this research, this article is an action research project looking into the assumptions in the author's own assessing practices and what effects these may have on student "performance." Specifically, the article examines differences in the backgrounds and expectations of teachers and students, teacher "appropriation" of student speaking and writing, and instances of student resistance and negotiation of accepted practices. The perspectives presented here complicate the notion of "assessment" in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms and lead to the development of new teaching methods that place less emphasis on overt classroom participation and incorporate multiple perspectives into the assessment and teaching of speaking and writing. The data for the study come from lessons taught during a graduate-level ESL course at a large public university in California.**

Introduction

Research into assessment in second language acquisition (SLA) has existed since the inception of the field of applied linguistics (see McNamara, 1996, for a review of important topics and studies). Throughout the 1980s, many studies, as well as practicing teachers, criticized large-scale descriptions and assessments of "proficiency" such as the ACTFL guidelines and TOEFL test while trying to develop more learner-oriented assessment practices that would aid learning instead of being only an assessment tool for teachers and administrators (Ekabatani & Pierson, 2000; Nunan, 1988). Other recent research and writing on assessment has looked at assessment more in terms of specific classroom teaching methods than assessment theory. Ferris and Hedgecock (1998) offer perspectives on writing feedback, error correction strategies, and approaches to scoring. They make the point that despite the growing amount of research in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), many ideas, such as the process approach to writing, are still drawn from the L1 literature and applied to L2 teaching without taking into consideration the many differences in learning and teaching between those contexts.

The different perspectives into assessment cited above have been valuable contributions to teaching and research, especially in regard to the notion of "proficiency," but recent work by "critical" writers has attempted to address both the theoretical and practical questions of assessment by offering a "problematizing" stance (Pennycook, 2001). From this stance, more studies are needed that problematize and analyze our ability to assess "proficiency," particularly in regard to the many biases that practicing teachers bring into the classroom.

Regardless of the theoretical background of the researcher, the theme that unites much recent work in assessment is the acknowledgment of the fallibility of testing methods and the need for research into the social aspects of assessment. McNamara (1997) shows this most clearly when he writes:

> I am arguing that some of the most important research on language testing is not only technical; that is, research in language testing cannot consist only of a fur-

ther burnishing of the already shiny chrome-plated quantitative armour of the language tester with his (too often his) sophisticated statistical tools and impressive n-size. Rather, I am arguing for the inclusion of another kind of research on language testing of a more fundamental kind, whose aim is to make us fully aware of the nature and significance of assessment as a social act. (p.460)

In his article, McNamara clearly points out that he views assessment and testing as fundamental to teaching and progress and is not arguing against any form of assessment; rather, he argues in this article for a fuller view of the act of testing.

Focused on the classroom, action research methods are a clear departure point from which to examine the social act of assessment (see Coombe & Hubley, 2003, or Edge, 2001, for examples of action research; see Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998, or Burns, 2001, for discussion of methods/theories of action research). Similar to many "critical" writers (Kumaravadeveliu 2003a; Morgan 1998), action research attempts to place ideas and debates, such as issues about assessment, in the hands of teachers, thus creating theorizing teachers. Most important, this method helps individual teachers discover more about their classrooms and perhaps provides illustrations of practices that can be generalized to the wider teaching community.

This Study

Situated in a growing culture of testing but wondering about my own classroom-level practices, this study asks further questions about the hidden aspects of formal and informal classroom assessments. The project offers an analysis of the effects of assessment on students, their attitudes toward assessment, and an analysis of assessment practices and context. The study uses a wide definition of assessment practices to include all moments when the author, in the role of the teacher, is making an evaluation of student ability. In this way, the study is about testing methods as well as interactions throughout the course where my role as "assessor" or "evaluator" can be questioned and problematized. This analysis leads to a broader discussion of the role of the teacher in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom.

Specifically, the key questions that the study considers are:

1. What informs the assessment practices in my ESL classroom?
2. What tensions or differences exist between student and teacher perspectives on the evaluation of student work?

Context and Participants

The study is a qualitative, action research project that looks for themes that come out of a graduate-level ESL course taught for incoming graduate students and undergraduate exchange students at a public university in California. Students for this course come from many countries and must take a placement test at the beginning of the year. Typically, 70% of the students are required to take this class as a result of the test. The class is focused on writing topics and grammar points, with one in-class oral presentation and some classroom discussions. My role as teacher is to help students improve their writing in order to succeed in their degrees of study as well as introduce them to the culture of North American universities.

The data collected incorporate the entire classroom of 16 international graduate students and 3 undergraduate year-abroad students, but field notes, exams, and essay assignments focus specifically on the development of 5 students. These students were chosen because time limitations prevented analysis of all 19 students in the class. The students were randomly selected at the beginning of the quarter, but an effort was made to ensure diversity of gender and background. The students are all graduate students and include two men: Jun, a computer science major from Taiwan; and Nakata, an anthro-

pology major from Japan; and three women: Mercedes, a nutrition major from Mexico; Neda, a physical engineering major from Iran; and Noi, a plant sciences major from Thailand. These same 5 students were interviewed at the end of the course.

Data Sources

With the goal of triangulation in mind, my data pool comprises a large range of materials gathered in both formal and informal assessments. The formal assessments are primarily writing assessments including: (a) three essay assignments, (b) a midterm exam, (c) an oral presentation, (d) a final exam, and (e) smaller in-class writing assignments. The data pool also includes: (a) videotaped sessions of two classes, one early in the quarter and one later in the quarter, (b) surveys of students' opinions on my assessment, (c) student interviews with five students, (d) my lesson plans, (e) detailed field notes, where I entered running notes on opinions I was forming about my students' "performance." The data were collected during the course of the 10-week quarter and then reviewed and analyzed for common themes. This entailed transcribing interactions from the videos and documenting relevant comments and writings from the student essays and tests.

Reliability and Validity

Internal reliability was considered through triangulation based on the various sources of data that offer views of assessment in my classroom. The research findings are reliable in that I have gone over the data numerous times to examine what emerges, and the examples presented here are representative of the class as a whole. When I first looked at some of the data, I expected to find more examples of resistance by the students to my assessments. However, I have found both problems with my assessments that need to be questioned but also strong support of the teacher as "assessor."

Burns (2001) calls for a further conception of validity to include a "catalytic" component of validity, which measures "the extent to which the research allows participants to deepen their understanding of the social realities of the context and how they can make changes within it" (p.162). This important notion is evidenced through changes in my teaching and the problems, voiced in my notes, with my initial assumptions of student abilities. These changes in my thinking about assessment and teaching practices are detailed below as they relate to oral and written skills.

In addition, the changes in my teaching are part of the last, reflective step of action research, and they are the main rationale for conducting a study such as this one. Some of my teaching practices and preconceptions of student ability were based on either assumptions of student ability or culturally biased teaching methods. The identification of these problematic attitudes and techniques, the discussion of them with others in the field, and the work toward constantly questioning our teaching practices are illustrated in the action research spiral (Nunan, 1992). Based solely in my own classroom, the study is an example of reflective practice of my own teaching, but the aim is that the ideas and questions discussed here will be generalizable to other ESL teachers and any researcher dealing with issues of what happens when we assess and evaluate student abilities.

Assumptions in the Assessment of Speaking Skills

Kumaravadivelu (2003b) writes that some research and writing in TESOL as well as practicing teachers continue to homogenize students from Asia as having particular learning traits, specifically obedience to authority, passivity in class, and a lack of critical thinking. Despite my recognition of the problems of these assumptions about Asian students, effects of stereotyping on my teaching and assessment of students' spoken proficiency are revealed in the data presented and analyzed here.

Assumptions of an Asian Student's Speaking "Proficiency"

Jun, a student from Taiwan, provides a clear example of stereotyping in my classroom. The following are my initial impressions of him from early entries in my notes.

Selected Entries on Jun:

10/4
After talking with him in class and at my office, I can tell that his speaking and listening skills are lower Intermediate because of how hard he has to try to understand me and how slow I have to speak and repeat myself. He appears to have learned grammar well from books, but cannot use it quickly in conversation. On his needs analysis, he wrote about his problem with speaking, but he has studied English since he was 13.

10/6
His speaking skills really are quite low and at times I really have to explain things a couple of times…Also, his pronunciation is very weak, but he has approached me both last class and today after class for more explanation.

Soon after this, I recognized in my field notes that I may be constructing an image of him based on stereotypes of Asian learners.

10/19
My question with Jun is still how I construct my image of him as an Asian learner. Is he critical or passive? Have I made him into the overly conscious speaker of English who is only concerned with being correct?

10/28
I am starting to think that his English is actually at a very high level, and that I considered him a poorer speaker because of his hesitation and slow speech.

I was, however, unable to completely distance myself from making those assumptions, and I was still quite surprised in my notes at his abilities after his oral presentation.

11/24
His oral presentation was funny and tried to make jokes that the students felt were very funny. Some were cultural references to Taiwan and the tallest building there. He is able to be funny in English.

This final entry shows how proficient Jun was in speaking, and that I may have misjudged him from the beginning based on some unfounded assumptions.

Jun had come into my office after the second class on 10/4 because he wanted a complete transcript of the video that we had viewed in class. This was an unusual request since no student had made it before that quarter or in other years, and I inferred from this that he was a very serious student but probably had poor listening-comprehension skills. In addition, the entry 10/4 above shows that he had trouble understanding me, probably because of his slow speech and my need to repeat myself and speak very slowly. There were many interpretations that I could have made based on the early interactions with Jun. Many students have remarked on how fast I talk in class and often ask me to slow down. One student writes on a midterm evaluation of the course: "Please try to slow down every sentence when giving lectures. Thank you!" I could have interpreted his asking for me to repeat myself as similar to other students' requests, especially during the first week of class, and that he was simply a very conscientious student who wanted to focus on listening skills. Additionally, I had very little information on which to base an assessment of his or any students' abilities. Instead of waiting to ascertain a better picture, I write on 10/6 that his speaking skills "really are quite low." The fact that I was keeping a journal of impressions from class may have pushed me to make this assessment concrete, but as a teacher, I was already doing this informally in my head after every interaction

with each new student, and I chose to put Jun into my preconceived image of a "quiet Asian learner" who works hard but has little "ability for use" from the Hymes (1974) original distinction of competence.

I clearly struggle with my initial assessment, writing on 10/19 that I wonder "how I construct my image of him as an Asian learner." The following excerpt from his oral presentation on 11/17 shows Jun's real fluency in English and validates my assumption that I had "considered him a poor speaker because of his hesitation and slow speech." The oral presentation was a graded component of the class, and each student was to speak for 5 minutes on one of five given topics. Jun chose to give a presentation of something interesting about his country, and his talk described Taipei 101, soon to be the tallest building in the world.

Excerpt From Jun's Oral Presentation on the Building Taipei 101:

Jun: Taipei 101 might be the most advanced sky-scraper in the world right now because it is equipted with two of the world's fastest elevators in it. Each elevator can reach a top speed of 1008 meters per second, eh, per minute (Jun laughs with class). That's a huge difference, sorry (more laughter from class).

While it would be heartening to think that I taught Jun to be funny and quick on his feet after 10 weeks of class, the probable explanation is that I relied on stereotypes to assess Jun's abilities. A comparison with my early notes on Mercedes, from Mexico, makes this clear.

Assumptions of a Latin American Student's Speaking "Proficiency"

Living in the United States in general, and particularly in California, I have met many people with a Spanish-speaking background. Additionally, I have traveled in South America and have studied Spanish for two years. It is possible that my overall "positive" image of

Mercedes could be because of my familiarity with her language and cultural background. As the notes below suggest, I was aware of the stereotype of the outgoing Latin student from the first entry, but despite this awareness I may have focused much more attention on Mercedes and the other Spanish-speakers in the classroom.

Selected Entries on Mercedes:

10/04
Mercedes is very talkative in class and makes a lot of eye contact with me in class. In this way, she is a stereotypical Latina for me.

10/6
Mercedes is much more out-going, and I always seem to remember what she says in class more than other students, probably because she speaks the most and often says funny things like her comment that we should "fry the rhino meat" in order to save the rhinos.

10/27
Mercedes came into my office hours this week, and she is probably my best student in terms of ability.

11/24
Mercedes is probably the happiest student that I have, at least outwardly. She often tells me how nice the class is and that she is learning a lot.

An examination of writing comments and grades on both Jun and Mercedes's papers shows little difference; however, my assessment of both students' speaking skills from early in the quarter, as shown above, contrasted greatly. The effect of stereotyping of the "Asian learner" as different from the "Latina learner" had on the overall student language acquisition of Jun and Mercedes was not specifically analyzed or recorded here, but Mercedes clearly was very comfortable in the classroom and "the happiest student that I have." My perception of her as a strong stu-

dent did come out in classroom interactions, as will be analyzed in a later section. The following transcript from Mercedes's oral presentation can be compared to Jun's to show that, while strong, her speaking skills were certainly on the same level as Jun's.

Excerpt From Oral Presentation of Mercedes on Yoga:

Mercedes: I would like to share to you a wonderful thing that I discovered the last 3 years which is the practice of yoga. I will first talk a little about what yoga is…

The point here is not to argue that Mercedes was actually a weaker student than Jun, that I was completely wrong in viewing her as a strong student, or even that the stereotype of Latin students as more outgoing and "active" is entirely false. These differences in the way that I view Mercedes and Jun point to assumptions of cultural backgrounds that, while not based on malicious feeling, need to be revealed to create more equal treatment of students.

Assumptions About Student Participation

Two additional case studies of students can be presented here as further complications of assumptions and overgeneralization of speaking skills and production in class. Both Nakata and Neda spoke more freely in class and in email exchanges than Jun or Noi, and I initially viewed their English abilities as higher because of this participation.

Selected Entries on Neda:

10/04
She writes on her needs analysis, "Do American pay attention to political news around the world at all?" Obviously, I'm already interested…Her English appears Intermediate. She writes that she needs help with pronunciation.

10/19
I also had a long conversation with her about how to pronounce her name. She still finds it interesting that I'm so concerned with pronouncing her name.

11/24
Neda's writing is not improving very much, though she is trying hard. Her spoken ability is much better than her written ability, but as with Noi, I was not able to fully appreciate this until the oral presentations.

01/07
—Summary of interactions with Neda
I may have done the opposite of [Jun] with Neda…I may not have realized how poor Neda's English was.

Selected Entries on Nakata:

10/04
From his speaking in class, his English appears to be good but from his writing it is Intermediate with many verb form and article errors.

10/19
I suppose in Krashen terms he is not monitoring his speech very much, but I probably have a higher opinion of his ability in English than I do of [Jun] simply because he speaks more in class and seems to attempt to communicate.

10/29
I'm starting to see that Nakata is not as good of a speaker even as Jun, but I was probably biased in my first assumption because he talks more than Jun.

11/24
His oral presentation was a little confusing and he seems to talk around subjects, but this may be because his field and interests are so abstract.

By the end of the quarter, I realized that each student was quite a bit weaker in both writing and speaking than I had thought earlier. If a teacher assumes that a student's overall abili-

ty in English is higher than it actually is, this may instill self-esteem or motivation in a learner because of high expectations. The problem in my classroom is that I apparently viewed only the overtly talkative and "active" students as performing at a high level. Indeed, Jun did not appear to react negatively to my teaching, and he continued to improve throughout the quarter.

While I write above that "I may have done the opposite of [Jun] with Neda," it is obvious that I did overestimate Nakata's humor and outgoing personality in class as higher skills overall in English, the opposite of my underestimation of Jun. A transcript from the classroom videotape below shows Nakata's and Mercedes's humor and class participation while discussing how to use modal verbs to hypothetically explain to one's wife why she should not buy a certain item.[1]

Excerpt From November Class:

Teacher: All right, how do you tell your wife that she can't, it's not necessary to buy a new purse, this is kind of…
Mercedes: (interrupting) Anyway, she would buy it.
Class: (laughter)
Teacher: Maybe, if you're married to [Mercedes] she will buy it anyway. But how would you tell her and at least act like you have some sort of, I don't know…
Nakata: Maybe you could say, would it be possible?
Class: (laughter)
Teacher: Maybe she'd listen to you if you were more meek, is that the idea, as [Nakata] says.

This ease with speaking in class is in contrast to the excerpt below from Nakata's oral presentation.

Excerpt From Nakata's Oral Presentation on Culture:

Nakata (referring to definition on the board): I think that culture is something that appears when a people faces to other people. Mmm there are many, many definitions of culture. Anthropology is ehh, ehh, very young discipline.

By the end of the quarter, I thought that Nakata's writing skills were even weaker than I had thought in the beginning, and I even questioned his speaking abilities and ability to express himself during the oral presentation. At the beginning of the quarter, I was assessing Nakata and Neda's stronger competence only in the specific context of the classroom setting in comparison to Jun's reticence in classroom and office conversations. This narrow assumption of ability may have led to different classroom interactions between teacher and students, as revealed below.

Classroom Interactions: The Effect of Stereotypes on Classroom Discourse

This section will address the effects on classroom discourse that may have resulted from the assumptions of student abilities. I videotaped two class periods, one early in the quarter and one later, and the examples below are representative of the types of interactions that occurred during those periods. This does not mean that every time students spoke in class, I interrupted them and guessed what they would say; however, the trend to ask different types of questions to the perceived higher-level students, as will be detailed below, was consistent on the videotapes.

The first two examples below are from the first classroom videotape during the second week of class. The two exchanges here are coded to bring out three aspects of discourse in the classroom. I label interactions in italics as information-focused questions. These questions are looking for specific information that the teacher is expecting to hear. Information-focused questions contrast with examples of evaluative-focused questions, which are questions, such as why and how, which require more evaluation and opinion from the students. The evaluative-focused questions usually demand more time and

interaction with the teacher and a more complex and detailed use of language. The third aspect of discourse looked at here has been called expressed guess by Ochs (1987) and involves the practice of filling in for speakers in conversation by formulating a guess. She writes in regards to L1 learning by young children, but this practice is also seen in L2 classrooms and is relevant to analyze in terms of cultural practice and stereotype.

Exchange With Mercedes, a Perceived High-Level Student:

Teacher: Let's think about number one. What do you guys think? Is English a logical language? Does it make logical sense?

Class: (some yes and no answers are called out)

Teacher: *Let's have someone say why yes.* Mercedes (she has her hand up)

Mercedes: Yes, because I think it is direct and simple.

Teacher: *Simple?*

Mercedes: Simplified, simplified language. In comparison *with Spanish.*

Teacher: *With Spanish?* (student and teacher speak at the same time)

Teacher: *It's simpler than Spanish, though?*

Mercedes: If you are translating an article from English to Spanish you have double in Spanish.

Teacher: *In Spanish?*

Mercedes: In Spanish.

Exchange With Perceived Lower-Level Student:

Teacher: Interesting stuff. One last question, the grammar one. Should teachers just respond to grammar?

Class: (multiple answers) No, yes.

Teacher: Lun says yes, and you say no [Kunkun]. (Kunkun did not have her hand up but was shaking her head)

Kunkun: (slowly) *because we learned to study the English grammar…*

Teacher: *Already?* (with a questioning tone, filling in the above statement)

Kunkun: in our native countries

Teacher: Right, right, right

As discussed above, my view of Mercedes's English ability was very high from the first day of class. Kunkun, the speaker in the second exchange, was from China and had not spoken in class during the first week. I did not have a very strong impression of her abilities when the above example took place, and I probably would have placed her at a similar ability level to Noi, perhaps because of her perceived shyness. The above examples show the practice of completing sentences through expressed guess for both a perceived high- and low-level student. There are many reasons why a teacher may fill in for students before they are finished speaking. This practice may help students who are struggling for words and provide a needed scaffold, in this way taking some of the pressure of failure or silence off the student, and there is little doubt that most teachers will view their use of the practice in similar terms. Ochs (1987) writes that the strategy is in fact part of what she calls Anglo white middle class (WMC) social practice, and most teachers, myself included, are very comfortable assisting students in this manner.

An alternative perspective on this practice is that expressed guess prevents students from fully engaging in communication in the classroom. I may have been correct in inserting "already" before Kunkun was finished with her utterance, but from the continuation of her sentence she probably would have finished without my assistance. Verplaetse (1998) writes that many teachers, out of a desire to protect students from embarrassment, "ultimately reduce the ESL students' opportunities to participate in classroom interaction" (p. 28). Kunkun was able to continue, but she did so only by in effect ignoring my interruption as if I had not spoken, whereas Mercedes is stopped by interruption.

An interesting contrast between the two interactions above is shown in the types of questions asked of Mercedes and Kunkun. Verplaetse (1998) showed that non-ESL teachers often did not ask cognitively demanding questions of ESL students, probably for the same reason that they filled in often for their students. While I push Mercedes for more explanation by asking, "It's simpler than Spanish though," I do not follow up with more evaluative questions with Kunkun. Instead, I simply state "right, right, right." The reasoning behind this is impossible to determine after the fact, but my informal assessment of Mercedes and Kunkun, as well as my knowledge of Spanish and expectation of students from Spanish-speaking countries, most likely had an effect.

The transcript below from a November class reveals my continued use of more questions overall with perceived higher-level students such as Mercedes and Andrea.

Transcripts From November Class Videotape: (The class had been discussing the differences between idioms and slang in English and in their first languages.)

Teacher: *Do you guys have "cool" in your own languages, because I've heard it in so many other languages, like Spanish?*
Andrea: Chevre.
Class: (laughter by Spanish speakers)
Andrea: Chevre.
Teacher: *That means cool?*
Andrea: Yes.
Teacher: But it means a goat, chevre is a goat, what's a chevre?
Andrea: Yes, estoy che…I'm fine, I'm cool.
Teacher: Estoy chevre, but it doesn't mean cool, it's not the word cool, the is, *what's a chevre?*
Andrea: It's just a slang.
Teacher: But does it have another meaning?
Mercedes: No.
Teacher: Oh, I thought it had another meaning

but you don't use the word cool, I thought in Spanish that people use the word "cool,""estoy cool?"
Mercedes: Yes, in Spanish, I am cool.
Teacher: *But in Mandarin, or Thai?*
Xe: Yes…we have.
Teacher: That's what I'm saying, the word cool has gone from English into all these other languages, so it's almost a universal word. And everybody has an idea of what is cool, so that's an example of slang, of almost international slang.

As in the transcript from the earlier videotape, I don't ask Xe, a student from China, additional questions or for further examples or explanations. My lack of questions may be because my aim was to make a connection between slang in English and around the world and the spread of English words. Once I had established this, I wanted to move on quickly. My inclusion of the question "But in Mandarin or Thai?" was because I had sensed from watching the earlier videotape my preference for Spanish examples and connections, and I made conscious efforts to not connect only with students from countries where I have traveled. The effort is well intentioned, but it may be only a superficial treatment of the issue.

Assumptions in the Teaching and Assessment of Writing Skills

Discussing "appropriation" from a student's point of view, Canagarajah (2002) says that students can adopt an appropriation strategy in their writing that values "the act of taking over dominant discourses and using them for one's own agendas" (p.115). In my classroom, I wanted to foster student appropriation, but the examples show that I more often "took over" student texts through my formal assessment practices, often based on contestable assumptions of English standard form.

Questioning My Assumptions: Imposing My Sense of "Correct" Grammar?

The examples of possible teacher "appropriation" are from my comments on drafts of the first essays of the 5 main students in this study. They reveal my use of the debatable notion of "voice" in academic writing. Although the concept of "voice" has been challenged as lacking definition or only defined by the societal context (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996) and not an indicator of strong writing (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003), many teachers still use the term to refer to some tangible element of an essay where the writer asserts his or her personality. I was fully aware of these problems of trying to construct a "voice" in student writing; however, my comments below reveal that I am pushing students to have their own "voice," one that is often just a restatement of my own choices in writing.

From Jun's First Draft of Essay 1:

Jun writes: "Otherwise, maybe writing text user interface program is a better choice."
My comment: "Use stronger language, 'most likely, probably'"

I do not explicitly instruct Jun to have a stronger "voice," but my comment is similar to a criterion on the Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) scale of voice called "Assertiveness." This criterion is described as displaying "strong commitment to assertions. Hedges are rarely or never used" (p. 259). I am overtly asking Jun to make his presence as an author felt through using stronger modals, "most likely, probably." These are still hedges, but my comment insists that a stronger sense of his argument is more appropriate for academic language. Many teachers may agree with my point that these modals are more appropriate for academic discourse, but I do not present him a choice in order for him to decide which way he wants to present himself; instead, I assume that he wants to write in the style into which I have been socialized. In some way, I am unable to distance myself from the writing

training that I have had as a high school English teacher and writer myself. This sentence comes at the end of his essay and is the central point of Jun's essay. Perhaps due to my personal or cultural socialization into a belief in individualism, I think that Jun must make a strong point and perhaps show his strong "voice" through his choice of modals.

From Mercedes's Second Draft of First Essay:

Mercedes writes: "In my opinion, evaluation of mineral absorption…"
My comment: "Could delete for more academic voice."

From Jun's First Draft of Second Essay:

Jun writes: "Since the water quality is strongly related to our health, I think it should be a good reason for people…
My comment: "delete" above the phrase "I think"

In these examples, I explicitly instruct Mercedes and Jun to take out a more personal phrase, "In my opinion" and "I think" because, *in my opinion,* it does not sound academic. As with the above example of Jun, most writing teachers would agree with my comment, but this is clearly a matter of choice and their use of these phrases depends greatly on the myriad of contexts outside the classroom in which they write, as well as their own beliefs about how to present their ideas in writing. I could have used this moment as an opportunity to show Mercedes, Jun, or the entire class the choices available in writing, as well as discussed the perceptions and values that the academic community has in regard to those choices. Revealing the possibilities available to students through assessment and correction practices such as this one is a main responsibility of teachers. Students will most likely want to know what forms are valued by the academic community, and it is a teacher's responsibility to provide this information, but in doing this in the comments to Mercedes and Jun, I have also cut off a discussion of

what alternative discourses are available to students.

I was often instructed in grade school by my teachers and parents to not use the personal pronouns as well as what were considered redundant phrases such as "in my opinion" and "I think that." As Canagarajah (2002) writes, using a personal tone in a sentence or section of an essay may be based in a respect for cultural values, and my comment on the final draft of her essay served to limit her conception of possible forms in academic writing. While I have been socialized to refrain from using personal pronouns, Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) include it in their Voice Intensity Rating scale as an example of "Self-Identification," and in this way, I should have been praising Mercedes for such "active" phrases.

Questioning My Assumptions: Issues of Resistance, Appropriation, and Plagiarism

I can find few instances when any of my students clearly undertook a resistance strategy regarding their choices in writing. This is perhaps because of both my appropriation of writing choices and student perception of a need to assimilate quickly into their fields of study. What I did find were smaller, less overt examples of students negotiating with form in their writing and interactions with me.[2] For lack of a better term, I call these instances of *subtle resistance*, and the following three related, yet slightly different cases, may be considered examples of this term.

First Example: Noi: The first example of *subtle resistance* is in relation to Noi's sentence on the formal letter assignment. As mentioned above, I had wanted Noi to use an embedded question to sound more formal, but she does not follow my comments and leaves the sentence the same. As shown above, I had considered Noi to be a rather "quiet" or "obedient" student. The following journal was written after the second essay was handed in and shows a similar assumption of her writing and revising abilities.

Journal Entry on Noi's Writing 11/03:

Noi's paper was good and showed that she paid attention to my comments but that was all in revising. She represents the learner that follows the comments explicitly on the page, and only corrects what you mark.

This entry reflects again my overall consideration of Noi as a "passive" learner who accepts all corrections and knowledge from the teacher. Despite this belief, Noi did not change the form of the question on the second draft of the letter assignment, and she, instead, keeps the sentence exactly the same. One interpretation is that this is merely an oversight on her part. The letter assignment was late in the quarter, and she might not have taken as much time in revising her essay. An examination of the draft shows that it would have been hard to simply ignore the comment as the assignment is rather short. Perhaps she discussed her original sentence with a friend and decided that a question could be considered just as formal for her purposes, and that she would not change it, a *subtle resistance* to the teacher's comments, and very different from my assumption of her revising process and skills.

Second Example: Nakata. Journal Entry on Nakata 11/24:

He seems very resistant toward criticism. I didn't like the usage of "reiterate" that he made in his essay [an essay for another class]. It didn't follow typical usage and I tried to explain something like this and he seemed rather upset with me.

This entry came after Nakata had visited me for help on another class paper; therefore, I do not know if he actually changed his use of "reiterate." Nakata was using the word to show that he was going to bring together different anthropological ideas in the context of making his argument. The ideas had not been mentioned yet in his essay, and I instructed him to choose another term. After an extended discussion and consulting a dictionary, he

did not change "reiterate" on his draft, and we moved on. Similar to the example of Noi above, this choice does not change or alter the entire English language, but it shows that Nakata is far from a "passive" or "obedient" student of English; rather, he is sometimes subtly negotiating with slippery meanings of words and writing conventions.

Third Example: Plagiarism: A final group of examples of *subtle resistance* involve the concept of plagiarism. Scollon (1995) and Pennycook (1996) draw attention to the diverse, situated understandings of author, text, and ownership.[3] This debate over what is plagiarism and how the differing assumptions of students and teacher are realized became a major point of negotiation during the second essay. Specifically, examples taken from the first and second drafts of Nakata, Noi, and Neda as well as some dialogue from student-teacher conferences draws out this negotiation of a very complex and elusive term.

The second essay asked the students to choose from three articles passed out in class and then both summarize and respond to one of the articles. The prompt included the following instructions:

First, summarize the content of the article. The purpose of your summary is to show you have understood the article and to provide the background information that the reader of your paper needs to understand your comments…Then, respond to the question that corresponds to the article you have chosen.

Before the first draft was turned in, we took half a class period to discuss plagiarism because the nature of this assignment often leads to what is viewed as plagiarism by some teachers. A handout was given to the students from the Judicial Affairs department that warned about the repercussions of plagiarism, and we discussed examples of what is and is not plagiarism from example texts on overheads. This is in addition to many in-class summarizing assignments throughout the quarter and practice placing ideas from articles in different words.

I did not label any of the student work as plagiarism on their essays, but I did write comments such as "rephrase in your own words" on Neda's essay, or "your own words?" on Noi's first draft. In fact, much of Neda's draft was marked as lacking citation or as being too close to the original, and we had a long and somewhat tense discussion of plagiarism during a student conference discussing the paper. Examples of phrases and sentences chosen that were deemed too similar to the original are included in Table 1:

Table 1
Sentences Marked as Potential Plagiarism

Original sentence from the article	*Sentence from the student draft*
"High mineral content is the most likely culprit behind the less-than-springlike taste…"	Neda: "For the unpleasant taste of water in Davis, high mineral content is the most likely culprit."
"Comfort foods like chocolate and ice cream literally blunt the body's response to chronic stress, scientists reported last week."	Nakata: "Comfort foods like chocolate cake and ice cream literally blunt the body's response to chronic stress."
"…stress hormones become chronically elevated, Dr. Pecoraro said. They ramp up anxiety centers in the brain…"	Noi: "the stress hormones become chronically elevated and ramp up anxiety centers in the brain."

While all students whose sentences were marked by me made changes on the second draft, most are simply one- or two-word changes and contain most of the original sentence structure and vocabulary. Table 2 shows the changes that each student made.

Table 2
Revised Student Sentences

Neda: "The unpleasant taste of the water in Davis is because of high mineral contents."

Nakata: "Comfort foods like chocolate cake and ice cream literally soften the body's response to chronic stress."

Noi: "the stress hormones become chronically elevated and incline anxiety centers in the brain…"

Both Noi and Nakata change only one word, and I write on Nakata's paper, "still too close to the words in the article."

I can find three interpretations of the above student writing, each leading to different actions on the part of the teacher. Giving the student the benefit of the doubt, both the first and second drafts can be explained as a lack of attention in revising (i.e., sloppy work) or a lack of understanding about how and what to change, not deliberate plagiarism. This was my overall strategy with these students, as I commented on first and second drafts that they needed to take care in using their own words. This does not lead to a direct confrontation between the teacher and the student. A second interpretation would be to directly accuse the students of plagiarism and either send them to judicial affairs or withhold credit for the paper until it is rewritten (a strategy that I would never employ, but it has been suggested by colleagues). This may make the point clear about accepted practices in North American academic life, but it may create an unnecessary antagonistic relationship between students who are still learning the social practice of academic writing. A final interpreta-tion is that students such as Noi and Nakata are fully aware that they are plagiarizing, as defined here, but that they are drawing on their native discourses, which view such use of other writers' words as deferential and academic. This interpretation allows Noi and Nakata to be viewed as quietly negotiating the North American discourse of plagiarism and an example of a *subtle resistance.* This final interpretation is the most tenuous, but it forces me to question exactly how to teach plagiarism. Clearly, my classroom focused a large amount of attention on defining plagiarism from my cultural assumptions and ways to summarize ideas from other texts, and my assessments of their writing reinforced my viewpoint to the students; however, they apparently still do not have a well-defined sense of what plagiarism is and is not. It is interesting that the question of what is or is not plagiarism, especially when citing texts, is not just a problem for ESL learners, but for all writers. When I teach an introduction to linguistics class, native English speakers will often turn in similar work and then change only two or three words. Indeed, I have had a discussion with a native speaker about plagiarism similar to the one I had with Nakata, as detailed below. This points to the fact that I do not have a clear idea of when something stops being plagiarism and is an acceptable citation of someone else's work.

The following dialogue between Nakata and me from our student-teacher conference, held after his first draft, shows the different perceptions about using another author's words, as well as the power and deference that students may give to a teacher who, even passively, labels their work as plagiarized.

Dialogue With Nakata From 11/15:

Teacher: This was a really good paper… This kind of language (reading from Nakata's paper) chocolate cake and ice cream literally blunt the body's response to chronic stress. Are those your words?

Nakata: (laughing) No.

Teacher: That's the thing.

Nakata: (laughing) I quoted.
Teacher: (smiling) If that's quoting…
Nakata: I quoted from the article.
Teacher: Yeah, so you need to put that in quotes. That's really important.
Nakata: Ahhhhhh.
Teacher: Because I remember this when I read this summary. (reading from paper)…that for the first time it has been shown that a tendency to overeat in the face of chronic stress…those kinds of words you have to put them in your own words. Do you know what I'm saying?
Nakata: (short laugh, nods)
Teacher: You use it really well, in your own, you use their words well in your own words. This is what we were talking about where some people would call this plagiarism. These are really like specific words, literally blunt the body's response to chronic stress, you have to do that (placing quotes around words on the essay) or change the words, because it can be considered plagiarism.
Nakata: (nods)

It is hard to determine if Nakata realizes early in the dialogue that he has broken a major rule of academic writing in the US. He asserts, while smiling, "I quoted from the article," and I remember thinking that he was sincere and did not see the problem with using other people's words without citation. A second perspective is that his laughter shows that he knew that he was caught, and he is trying to cover up his mistake. Regardless of his exact intention, it is revealing that his laughter stops and he simply nods after I bring up the word plagiarism. He has heard me discuss the consequences of plagiarism in class, and we even read articles from newspapers about students' being dismissed from school. His final nod can be interpreted as somewhat quiet deference to the power held in a word such as plagiarism. Despite this apparent fear

or at the least understanding of plagiarism, he does not really change his sentences in the second draft.

Discussion: Practices in the Classroom

The following questions have arisen from my study: How can a teacher address incorrect forms or errors without appropriating student writing and speaking?; How much should a teacher encourage perceived shy and quiet students to participate?; and How can plagiarism be taught effectively in relation to differing student and teacher understandings? All of these questions are far too complex to be fully addressed with the data collected and in the space allowed, but a few more points about them can be offered here.

Regarding the question of correction, the heated debate about when and how much to correct students is now well established in the field (Casanave, 2004). Adding to this debate, I argue that when teachers are correcting student writing, they should consider their biases toward certain standard forms and styles in academic writing and that students do often have choices when writing, albeit in some academic contexts these choices are very limited. From my data, I tended to overemphasize the forms and styles that I had associated with academic writing and often too quickly labeled something as nonidiomatic if the sentence construction or word choice were different from my own style or choices. It is the role of the teacher to alert students to the academic community's perception of certain language forms, but teachers should be careful to examine where their biases might be affecting their choices in correcting and teaching.

Additionally, writing teachers should be cognizant of the fact that established genres and standards are always evolving and being resisted by writers and speakers, and we should attempt to build this awareness into our views, assessments, and corrections of student writing. The problem—as many writers who forefront their writing with this notion of resisting writing standards such as

Canagarajah (2002) show us—is really how does this look in the classroom. There do not appear to be any methods books on how to teach resistance to academic standards or how to incorporate what Canagarajah (2004) has called Alternative-Discourses (Alt-Dis) into our teaching; and, in fact, creating such a "methods of resistance teaching" book would inherently limit such a theory to one perspective—counter to the purpose of resistance. At this point, further classroom-based research is needed to show how, or if, teachers can teach from alternative resistance- or negotiation-centered perspectives.

Teachers voice frustration because their job is to assess the speaking skills of students and induce improvement, but this is always difficult with quiet students. In light of teacher frustration with perceived quiet students, but also in regards to the assumptions of "passive" Asian students that came out of my data, it appears that we need to question how much emphasis is given to overt displays of participation in our classrooms. The common CLT pedagogy with an emphasis on oral participation in class that is taught in many teacher-education programs perhaps can lead to a rigid view of "active" students versus "passive" students. We, as teachers, may need to look for other methods of teaching and assessing that are not centered primarily on classroom participation.

Drawing on the ideas expressed in my data, I have begun to implement different teaching methods to try to overcome the above frustration. I have begun to use student conferences as not simply places to go over writing but also as a space to build trust with students, learn about the backgrounds and needs of students, and assess projects and presentations. While teaching in China, I required small groups and individuals to present a project to me during office hours in an attempt to take away the pressure of always performing in front of classmates. Coupling this with early short conferences as early as possible in the quarter may help to establish more trust between students and teachers and allow us to find out more about students

than simply that they do not speak in class. Another method that is quite popular in TESOL research is the use of computers and Internet discussion boards to replace classroom interaction. I have begun using Web discussion boards, class email lists, and Internet research assignments more extensively, especially when students have easy access to computer labs on campus. While this has led to some new interaction space between students and me, the focus of the interaction appears to be entirely on the given assignment, and the depth and length of interactions between the students and me does not match classroom interactions or the expanded conversations I have had during conferences. Each teacher must develop his or her own methods to increase participation in his or her teaching context, but it is important to continue to focus on classroom-based research that looks into nonovert forms of student participation as well as further research that challenges our conceptions of shy and quiet "Asian" students.

A final pedagogical issue that came out of the data is related to the multiple understandings of plagiarism between the students and the teacher. Because plagiarism was initially presented in my classroom as a serious infraction that could potentially lead to expulsion, an adversarial dimension was created between the students and me. Students were not encouraged to examine plagiarism in terms of different social practices; rather, many students appeared afraid to engage in an open discussion of why one of their sentences could be considered copying. In addition, that the subtext of our discussion on plagiarism was that North American students know exactly what plagiarism is, and if they plagiarize, they are doing so intentionally. It is important to incorporate the view that many North American students struggle with citations and using material from other sources without plagiarizing.

In this light, writing lessons should provide examples of what has been considered plagiarism in native English-speaking students, thus revealing how slippery the notion of plagiarism is for all students. Pennycook

(1996) offers a famous example of how the student handbook at Oregon was found to have copied its policy on plagiarism from the policy in the handbook at Stanford. Showing students examples of plagiarism cases such as this or discussing recent high-profile cases from academics or the news may help to create an environment in which the students and teacher can approach plagiarism from the perspective that this is a complicated concept that all students struggle with, and not simply something that their culture does wrong.

A further note should be made concerning teacher education. Ramanathan (2002) and Johnston (2002) focus on how teachers' views are shaped and the need to build "critical" reflection into teacher-education programs. Ramanathan writes, "we as creators, sustainers, and reproducers of our TCs [thought collectives] can and must reflect on, analyze, and question the ways in which our TC's knowledges are produced and how and what we, as participants, contribute to these endeavors" (p. 32). Much of the above discussion and data reinforce the importance of reflective activities in teacher education and development. It is important that the focus of the reflection should be first on questioning and analyzing ourselves as members of a TC, as this study attempted to look for biases and assumptions in the practices of assessment.

Author

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Endnotes

[1] This situation is full of assumptions of the husband and wife role, but students seem to always enjoy this example situation and come up with humorous conversations.

[2] It should be noted that as with all interpretations of student writing and behavior, the examples given are based on my perceptions and readings of the situation. While my experience with the students was extensive, especially since I have collected many data samples, my interpretations are always limited.

[3] Scollon writes that plagiarism is often something that we simply know when we see it, but we should attempt to view it within a "social, political, and cultural matrix that cannot be meaningfully separated from its interpretation" (p.23).

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