Unconventional Internet Genres and their Impact on Second Language Undergraduate Students’ Writing Process
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Contents
- Orientation
- Research question
- Study design
- Results
- Key examples
- Pedagogical Implications
- Future directions

Sources
- Conventional sources of academic information:
  - Library books
  - Journals
  - Government documents
  - Magazines and newspapers?

- New internet sources (conventional and unconventional)
  - E-books
  - Journals
  - Government
  - Organizations?
  - Public service?
  - Commercial?
  - Personal?
  - Encyclopedias?

ROAT
- Rigor
- Objectivity
- Authority
- Transparency

The reality
- In L2 undergraduate writing classes, students arrive at a wide variety of unconventional sources in the course of their searching.

Sources
Research question

- Are these new sources having an effect on the thinking/writing process of L2 undergraduate writers?
- If so, what are some examples where new sources have had an influence?
- What strategies need to be taken to address the issue?

Study design I

- Participants
  70 undergrad students (mostly Chinese) in an EAP course
- Assignment
  5-page paper on choice of:
  - Racial profiling
  - Non-recognition of overseas work qualifications of immigrants
  - Is multiculturalism living up to its ideals?

Study design II

- Analysis
  - Isolate the web-references
  - Determine those that would be called "non-conventional"
  - Categorize according to web-genre
  - Categorize by ideological stance
  - Compare stance in site with student’s claim
  - Follow up with student logs and interviews

Results

Web genres cited (by percent) (n=280)

- Government: 15%
- Evangelical: 10%
- Think tank: 8%
- Alternative newspaper: 6%
- Religious organization: 5%
- Academic: 4%
- Government blog: 3%
- Corporate: 2%
- Non-profit: 1%
- Other: 1%

Key example Racial profiling (student #2)

- On the one hand...
- But on the other hand...
  - http://www.counterpunch.org/bates08202004.html
  - http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/refugees/safeCountry/index.asp#2

Log of student #2 revealed no awareness that these sites had ideological leanings. Rather the leanings were adopted (or used as evidence).

Key example Multiculturalism (student #38)

- http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm
- Logs and interviews revealed that such government sites were treated as having the same authority and rigor as conventional academic sites.
- Blogs are a growing entity that blur the lines between acceptability and otherwise.
Key example Immigration (student #64)

- Law office in disguise

Pedagogical Implications

- Raise awareness of ROAT
- Teach strategies in digital literacy.
- Show examples of sites with ideological agendas and how they violate ROAT

Future directions

(having said all that...)

- Recognition that information sourcing is rapidly changing
- Some unconventional sources “do” pass the ROAT test.
  - E.g., blogs from leading figures
  - “collective intelligence” - Wikinomics
- This liquid nature of information retrieval means:
  - Educators must keep an open mind towards unconventional sources
  - Redefine what constitutes a reliable source

Web 2.0

- 370 citations in Google Scholar

One example of a new type of source

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmp4nk0EOE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmp4nk0EOE)
- 5 million plus views

Wesch’s point

- Wesch explains that although Web 1.0 linked information, Web 2.0 links people, and in doing so he poignantly forces us to rethink authorship, identity and even ourselves.
My point

While such a message is interesting in itself, the point related to this talk here is that this video, presented in a non-text format without the authority of an established institution or publisher behind it, arguably passes the test for academic citation.

This paper...

- More papers on this topic available at [http://paulstapleton.info](http://paulstapleton.info)
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