QGWHSS Episode 6: Citing sources transparently

N: Hi and welcome back! So far in this series, we've looked at the four main sections of an IMRD text. This episode examines something you can find in IMRD texts and most other academic texts, and that's how you refer to other people's work. We'll use examples from this article.

V: "Words for what? Contrasting university students' receptive and productive academic vocabulary needs"

N: To recap, the purpose of this article is to understand the range of academic vocabulary which students need for success at university. Receptive means being able to understand words when reading or listening. Productive means being able to use words when speaking or writing. Academic writing builds upon earlier work and adds to it, to create something new. Readers need to be able to see how earlier works have influenced new ones, and writers have a responsibility to show them. Readers need to know three things: Which facts, ideas, and so on come from another source?; What is the source?; and who is responsible for the way the ideas are formulated? Let's see how writers can answer these questions.

To signal that information comes from a source, writers use a reference. This is also called a citation. For readers, originality is the "default setting." That is, if you don't provide a reference for an idea, readers will assume that it comes from you and not from a source. References can appear in different ways, for example, numbered footnotes and endnotes. A common format is to give the author's surname and the year that the work was published. Sometimes the authors' name is part of the sentence.

V: "Among the few exceptions are Durrant (2014, 2016), who looks at academic vocabulary in a corpus of university student writing."

N: Other times it appears in brackets, separate from the rest of the sentence.

V: "First, it suggests that students' productive vocabularies are smaller than their receptive equivalents, and this is in line with expectations (e.g. Nizonkiza, 2016; Webb, 2008)."

N: The second question the reader needs to have answered is: "Who is the source?" The in-text citation helps answer this question by naming the source, and the reference list gives full details. Someone who wants to find this and read it has enough information to do so. The third question is "whose words are these?" Writers have two basic options. The first is to quote from their sources—that is, use the same words exactly, with quotation marks to show what they've done. Note the quotation marks. We expect that if we looked up Durrant's work, we would find exactly these words on p. 50. Another option is to report the information from the source in a new way. This can involve condensing content from the source, as with the works by Fan and Nizonkiza in this example:

V: "These results, obtained with controlled tests (Fan, 2000; Nizonkiza, 2016), provide additional evidence to support the claim by Evans and Green (2007): students' academic

literacy may be negatively impacted not only by an overall insufficient vocabulary knowledge, but also by a gap between their receptive and productive academic vocabulary knowledge."

N: Alternatively, it may involve paraphrasing, that is, retelling a specific point from the source in a different way. Here, the claim reported from Evans and Green looked like this in their work:

V: "Put simply, inadequate receptive and productive vocabulary in English is the main problem confronting the almost 5000 students who participated in the survey."

N: When the reader can see what information comes from a source, which source and whose words are being used, we can say that the writer has used sources transparently. Writers with less experience and confidence sometimes use strategies which cause problems. Let's take a look at the original text first.

V: "Put simply, inadequate receptive and productive vocabulary in English is the main problem confronting the almost 5000 students who participated in the survey."

N: Some writers may start with language from the source and make changes, for example, by substituting some words:

V: "Put simply, insufficient receptive and productive vocabulary in English is the primary problem confronting the almost 5000 students who took part in the survey.

N: Or changing the order:

V: "Put simply, the primary problem confronting the almost 5000 students who took part in the survey is insufficient receptive and productive vocabulary in English."

N: Or adding or removing words:

V: "Put simply, the primary and most serious problem confronting the students who took part in the survey is insufficient vocabulary in English."

N: But even if this makes it look different from the original sentence, this isn't a good strategy. The writer hasn't met the responsibility to use sources transparently. That is, the reader can't see how the source has been used. So this isn't good academic writing. It might also look like plagiarism to your teacher, and that can have serious consequences. To summarize, academic writers have a responsibility to show their readers how they've used other people's work. Readers need to know what information comes from a source, which sources have been used, and whose language is used. By the way, in the interest of transparency, you can find the sources of our examples in the credits.