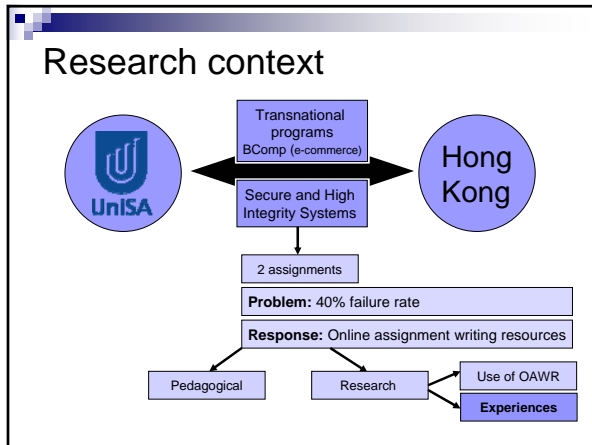## 'ENGLISH is my problem': addressing assignment writing for transnational students from Hong Kong

Monica Behrend
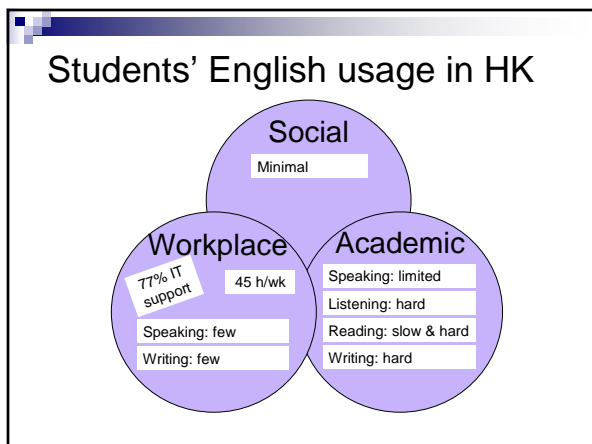University of South Australia, Adelaide

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Outline

- Research context and data sources
- English usage by students
- Students' views of inadequacies
- Implications for supporting assignment writing

Research context

Transnational programs BComp (e-commerce)

Hong Kong

UniSA

Secure and High Integrity Systems

2 assignments

Problem: 40% failure rate

Response: Online assignment writing resources

Pedagogical

Research

Use of OAWR

Experiences

Data sources

- 18 research participants
- Interview following first assignment
- Questionnaire (demographics)

Students' English usage in HK

Social

Minimal

Workplace

77% IT support

45 h/wk

Speaking: few

Writing: few

Academic

Speaking: limited

Listening: hard

Reading: slow & hard

Writing: hard

The task

Assignment 1 *Report on Computer Crime Surveys – a Cross Cultural Comparison*

Specifications

Report: *Computer Crime, Information Warfare and Security – An International comparison*

Write a 1500 word report (individual) drawing on the information presented in Module 1 and from other sources and discussing current trends in computer crime and information warfare and the kinds of measures that companies take to protect their IT infrastructure …

The marking criteria

Professional Formatting	**1**
Correct use of Harvard referencing	**1**
Abstract/ Exec Summary	**1**
Appropriate terminology & technical English – definition of computer crime and IW	**2**
Quantitative (numerical/graphical) analysis of trends	**2**
Qualitative (paragraphs/no dot points) " " "	**2**
Information from Culture 1	**3**
Information from Culture 2	**3**
Discussion on trends over several years	**1**
Cross-cultural comparison	**3**
Conclusion	**1**
	TOTAL 20

Interpreting the task

Were you clear about what you needed to do?

1. Comprehension of whole task

At the first time, I think No. But then I see the assignment maybe many times, I can get some idea of the assignment. [S12 69%]

2. Rhetorical demands

I think not. At first I don't know what I need to do because I have not done it before. [S3 50%]

… many information, I don't know what [to] put … in assignment … I don't know how to compare what things; I just compare the number, percentage. So I don't know how to compare. This is very hard for me. [S11 61%]

Interpreting the task (2)

3. Task wording e.g. 'culture'

The assignment says you need to introduce the culture of HK in computer crime. I don't know really how to write and explain it. [S7 48%]

I don't understand the Australian culture at all – any thing. So I cannot ... compare these two countries. [S3 50%]

I am living in Hong Kong so it would be more easier for me to ... to write it down. [S9 88%].

Another [difficulty] is the culture in the assignment maybe I don't know Australian … culture. Because in Hong Kong I know my culture. I know the local guide to [for example] illegal software or something like that and how to sell. I don't know the Australian law …what to do or think because the country I don't know ... I don't know what they are thinking with illegal software – they like it or not?

BT is internet software for all the people to go there to download the movies. [I know] maybe China, or Hong Kong, or Taiwan - but I don't know that Australia like it or not. It is illegal movie … but government is thinking how to ... try to stop because of Internet. You can load the movie but from Hong Kong you cannot. Many locals try to go to Taiwan to detect that, need to call Taiwan police to catch them ... Hard to think about culture in Australia. [S1 78%]

Interpreting the task (3)

4. Purpose

In my heart I say that we only needed to compare two documents … easy to start [S1 78%]

… Task analysis—it is very clearly to tell how to start.

… No panic!

Interpreting the task (4)

5. Lecturers' expectations

About 80% understandable … but in order to get more familiar with the expectations of the lecturer and the expectations of the assignment, I would look at the criteria, the marking criteria which gave me a very clear indication of what should I write for the assignment and what was their expectations too. Very clear through the marking criteria. [S9 87%]

What was hard? … information on Culture 1 and Culture 2 but it didn't mention about what sort of information that the markers expected. So if this can be, if they could provide more information that would be lovely, I think.

Recommendations

1. Establish peer review of assignment wording
2. Provide resources which explicate expectations
3. Teach the genre requirements
4. Encourage students to increase their English usage

Discussion

- 'exploring … conceptually intricate ideas is affected by the language/s of content, instruction and assessment' (p. 79).