Lesson 1: Rhetorical Functions of References within a Discourse Community

Lesson Plan

Goals: To learn that references have different rhetorical functions.
To learn that referencing is a form of academic conversation.

Overview:
1. Introduce the topic of error correction.
2. Read excerpt from Truscott (1996) and summarize it.
3. Read references to Truscott (1996) in chronological order to trace the academic conversation.
4. Identify which function each reference serves.

Cheat Sheet: Truscott’s (1996) arguments against error correction

Purpose: “to go beyond this uncritical acceptance and to look more seriously at the evidence, at the logic of correction, and at the problems it creates” (p. 328).

Thesis: “My thesis is that grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned” (p. 328).

Supporting arguments:
1. Empirical research shows that error correction does not result in the ability to write more accurately.
2. Theory supports the claim that error correction does not result in the ability to write more accurately.
   a. Development of an understanding of grammar is a gradual process. Teachers cannot simply transfer their understanding of grammar directly into the minds of the students. The idea that error correction can make a sudden change in students’ knowledge goes against what is known about the nature of the development of interlanguage.
   b. There are developmental sequences for the acquisition of grammar rules. Error correction would need to take these sequences into account because a correction given at the wrong time would likely be ignored or not acquired; however, not only do teachers not do this, but we don’t know enough about sequences to be able to do this.
   c. It is possible that information presented through error correction is learned but not acquired, meaning that the corrections are not incorporated into students’ long term knowledge of the language.
3. Practical issues often lead to a breakdown in the error correction process. Teachers may not notice the error, be able to give a good grammar explanation of it, be consistent in their corrections, or have the time to note errors. Students may not understand, remember, or devote time to learn from the correction.
4. There are harmful effects of error correction. Error correction causes stress for students, which negatively impacts learning in terms of a) negative student attitudes, b) less writing produced, and c) less complex writing produced. In addition, time spent on error correction is time taken away from more important writing concerns such as learning to structure arguments.
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Handouts for Students

Some Rhetorical Functions of References

- Providing a specific context for a discussion
- Creating a space for a research study
- Presenting an argument to build on (The writer agrees with it)
- Presenting an argument for objective evaluation (The writer doesn’t take a stand on it)
- Presenting an argument for rebuttal (The writer doesn’t agree with it)
- Providing supporting evidence
- Directing the readers to a place they can find more information
- Demonstrating that the writer is informed

Texts referring to Truscott (1996)

a. Three years after Truscott’s article was published, Ferris wrote an article in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* about error correction. Her purpose was to speak back to Truscott and refute his thesis. Here is the abstract of her article:

John Truscott’s 1996 *Language Learning* article, “The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes,” has led to a great deal of discussion and even some controversy about the best way to approach issues of accuracy and error correction in ESL composition. This article evaluates Truscott’s arguments by discussing points of agreement and disagreement with his claims and by examining the research evidence he uses to support his conclusions. The paper concludes that Truscott’s thesis that “grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned” (1996, p. 328) is premature and overly strong and discusses areas for further research. (Ferris, 1999, p. 1)

- In which sentence does Ferris refute Truscott’s thesis? Choosing from the list above, what rhetorical function does this sentence have?
- What words did Ferris use to disagree with Truscott’s thesis? What did she mean by “premature”? How could this be addressed? What did she mean by “overly strong”? How could this be addressed?
- Reread the first sentence of the abstract. Choosing from the list above, what rhetorical function does this sentence have?

b. In the next issue of the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, also in 1999, Truscott responded to Ferris’ article. He rejected her arguments against his thesis and defended his 1996 article. In the middle of his article, he wrote:

The first reason that Ferris (1999) proposes for continuing to correct is that students believe in correction and want to receive it, so teachers should give it to them. I believe I have already provided an adequate response to this familiar argument (Truscott, 1996, pp. 359-360). I will not repeat my earlier comments here, but rather expand on them. (Truscott, 1999, p. 116)

- Choosing from the list above, what rhetorical function does this reference to his earlier article serve?
c. In 2003, Chandler published a study in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* on the efficacy of error correction. She began her article by discussing the debate between Ferris and Truscott:

In 1996 Truscott wrote a review article in *Language Learning* contending that all forms of error correction of L2 student writing are not only ineffective but potentially harmful and should be abandoned. This was followed by a rejoinder by Ferris (1999), and 1998 saw the publication of several books that gave significant attention to the topic (e.g., Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998 and James, 1998)… The one implicit point of agreement in Truscott and Ferris’ articles was that the existing data are insufficient to resolve the question of whether error correction can be an effective way to improve the accuracy of L2 writing. The present study addresses this issue directly by presenting empirical data comparing the improvement in accuracy over a college semester of an experimental group that corrected the grammatical and lexical errors marked by the teacher on each assignment before writing the next assignment with a control group that did not. (Chandler, 2003, pp. 267-8)

• Choosing from the list above, what rhetorical functions do these references to Truscott and Ferris’ articles serve?

d. In 2004, Casanave wrote a book entitled *Controversies in second language writing* and included a discussion of “The Error Correction Debate” (p. 86). She wrote:

As I indicated earlier, there is a specific debate about the value of treating grammatical errors in students’ writing. This issue has been articulated most prominently in the published literature by Truscott (1996, 1999) on the anti-treatment side and by Ferris (1999a, 2002; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Ferris & Roberts, 2001) on the pro-treatment side. In this debate, “improvement” refers to increased grammatical accuracy in students’ writing. Truscott (1996) does not condemn all response to student writing, just grammar correction, which is what many teachers spend most of their time on. He makes the strong, unhedged assertion that, according to his review of the literature, teachers’ correction of grammatical errors does students no good and may actually harm them by discouraging them from further efforts and by robbing them and their teachers of time that could be spent on more productive activities. (Casanave, 2004, p. 88)

• Choosing from the list above, what rhetorical function do these references to Truscott’s article serve?

**Lesson 2: Making Claims with References**

**Lesson Plan**

Goals: To demonstrate how writers use references to construct claims.
To demonstrate that even supported claims are claims, not facts.

Overview:
1. Introduce the topic of health insurance coverage for contraception and the ACA mandate.
2. Read excerpts from two articles on the mandate, one from *The Huffington Post* and the other from *The National Catholic Register*.
3. Identify points made and survey results cited in each article.
4. Compare the two articles.
Lesson 2: Making Claims with References

Cheat Sheet: Contraception, health insurance, religious freedom, and the ACA Mandate

Many Americans have their health insurance partially paid for by their employers. Some people believe that employers who think that contraception is morally wrong for religious reasons should not have to pay for it. Other people think that all women should have contraception covered regardless of whom they work for.

As part of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), the Obama administration mandated that health insurance should cover the cost of contraception. There was an exception for employers that are houses of worship (e.g., churches, synagogues, mosques). One principle that plays a role here is freedom of religion. It was argued by Catholic groups that the government doesn’t have the right to require religious employers to pay for contraception because doing so violates their religious beliefs.

The issue was complicated by the fact that some religious employers are not houses of worship but religious-affiliated institutions such as hospitals and colleges. In 2012, the issue became controversial. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops opposed Obama’s mandate because there was no exception for these other religious-affiliated employers. Some bishops said that they would stop offering health insurance altogether if their institutions were required to pay for contraception.

On the other side, many people who work for such employers do not have the same religious beliefs as their employer and may in fact want contraception coverage. One principle that plays a role here is equality; all people should have the same access to health insurance coverage.

The Obama administration found a compromise whereby the religious employers had to make contraception health insurance available to their employees but they didn’t have to pay for it; contraception would be paid for by the health insurance companies. While some Catholic groups accepted the compromise, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops did not. It argued that Catholics working for insurance companies would still have to violate their religious beliefs.

Vocabulary: mandate, Republican, Democrat, contraception, sterilization, coverage, bishop, layperson, ACA, HHS

Handouts for Students

Contraception Mandate Not A Threat To Religious Freedom According To Catholics
Lauren Markoe (03/15/2012) (excerpted)

WASHINGTON (RNS) A vocal contingent of Republican presidential candidates and church leaders are railing against the Obama administration's “war on religion,” but most Americans can't seem to find the fight.

A majority (56 percent) of Americans say religious liberty is not threatened in the U.S., according to a new poll released Thursday (March 15) by the Public Religion Research Institute, which conducted the survey in partnership with Religion News Service…
Even though Catholic bishops are leading the charge that the new White House mandate requiring insurance plans to cover birth control for employees is a threat to religious liberty, Catholics reject -- by a 57 to 38 percent margin -- the idea that religious liberty is under siege. What's more, nearly two-thirds of Catholics support the contraception requirements for publicly held corporations (65 percent), compared to 62 percent of all Americans. A strong 60 percent of Catholics say religiously affiliated colleges should have to comply, compared to 54 percent of Americans in general.

Catholics would not have seemed supportive of the Obama policy had they been asked a different question, argued Sister Mary Ann Walsh, spokeswoman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“If you were to ask, ‘Should the government force churches to violate their religious beliefs?’, you’d get different results,” she said. “This is an issue of religious freedom, not one of access to contraceptives, which are ubiquitous and relatively inexpensive.”

The mandate, the bishops say, tramples on religious liberties by forcing church-affiliated universities and hospitals to provide a service that Catholic teaching deems sinful. …

New Poll Shows Catholic Voters Oppose HHS Mandate
Public Religion Research Institute's poll found that 52% of voting Catholics do not believe the contraception coverage mandate should apply to religiously affiliated colleges and hospitals. Catholic News Agency (02/08/2012) (excerpted)

WASHINGTON (CNA)—Most Catholic voters oppose the federal rule requiring religious institutions to buy insurance that covers contraception and sterilization, according to new research published Feb. 7.

Public Religion Research Institute’s poll found that 52% of voting Catholics do not believe the contraception coverage mandate should apply to religiously affiliated colleges and hospitals. Only 45% of Catholic voters said the rule should apply to these ministries…

The Public Religion Research Institute released its findings one day after the U.S. bishops published a fact sheet on Health and Human Services’ recently finalized mandate. The bishops said the rule makes schools, hospitals and charities act “against their conscience, to pay for things they consider immoral.”

Approved over objections from Catholic bishops and laypersons, along with other religious groups, the rule applies to many types of faith-based institutions. Only those organizations that mainly hire and serve members of the same faith, for the purpose of promoting religious values, are exempt.

While politically active Catholics tended to disapprove of the mandate being applied to religious ministries that serve the public at large, their non-voting Catholic counterparts leaned toward a different view. With non-voters included, Catholic support for a mandate of this kind reached 52%…

Comprehension Questions
- What is the “lead” (the point that the article begins with) of each article?
- What survey results are given? What points do the results support?
• Is the lead balanced by another view?

Comparing claims
• Compare the leads of the two articles. How are the points different? How do the points relate to the political leanings of the newspaper?
• What differences are there in the statistics that are given? Given the fact that the two articles are based on the same survey, are you surprised by any of the differences?
• Compare the sentences that report the bishops’ objections to the mandate (underlined). How are these sentences different? Consider the type of reference used (quote or paraphrase) and word choice (e.g., “make” vs “force”). Do the sentences seem equally strong?

If there is time, you may want to have students read the survey report.(Jones & Cox, 2012).

References


