Scare quotes in Norwegian L2 English and British English

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a comparative investigation into the use of scare quotes in the English written production of Norwegian university students and the writing of British A-level students. The use of scare quotes usually signifies that the term in quotation marks is somehow inappropriate and that the writers want to distance themselves from it. Motivations for their use vary. Little research has been carried out on scare quotes even though they are a common occurrence in both native speaker and non-native speaker writing. Discussion of scare quotes seems to be primarily restricted to a small number of contributions by linguists in online language blogs or magazines (see e.g. Jacobs 2003; McWhorter 2005; Trask 2000), as well as a few prescriptive admonishments in various language style guides. Taking as its starting point previous research into learner compensation strategies (Poulisse 1993), this paper sets out a taxonomy intended to account for the various possible uses of the quotes. This framework is then utilized in the investigation of the occurrences of scare quotes in essays written by the two groups of students, to discover whether Norwegians and British novice writers employ scare quotes in similar ways. The overall goal is to shed some light on a previously overlooked feature of student writing.

Data for the study comes from approximately 25,000 words of text found in argumentative essays written by Norwegian university and college students and collected in the Norwegian component of the International Corpus of Learner English*. In this study, the Norwegian use of scare quotes is contrasted with British use in roughly 25,000 words of argumentative essays collected in the* Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays *(see Granger 2007a).*

1.   Introduction

This paper investigates the use of scare quotes in the English written production of Norwegian university students through a comparative study with the writing of British A-level students. Very little has been written about scare quotes even though they are common features of both native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) writing. Indeed, when it comes to novice NS writing R. T. Lakoff claims, "To the extent a writer is insecure, [scare quote] uses tend to proliferate. Therefore, as anyone who has spent time grading freshman themes knows, such writings teem with quotation marks which, to the literate eye, seem inexplicable if

not downright execrable" (Lakoff 1982: 246). Nesselhauf makes a similar point about NNS language when she asserts that "the phenomenon deserves to be pointed out, since it can lead not only to unacceptable words or expressions but sometimes even to unintelligibility or misunderstanding" (Nesselhauf 2005: 151).

An investigation into scare quote usage thus meshes well with research concerning learner compensation strategies, and allows for the development here of a framework intended to shed light on many of the various possible uses of scare quotes. This framework is then utilized in the investigation of the occurrences of scare quotes in argumentative essays written by the two groups of students, to discover whether Norwegians and British novice writers employ scare quotes in similar ways.

Data for this study comes from approximately 50,000 words of text found in argumentative essays collected in two corpora of novice writing. The texts written by Norwegian university and college students were collected in the Norwegian component of the *International Corpus of Learner English* (ICLE). The Norwegian component (NICLE) is a computer learner corpus which was specifically designed to facilitate the methodology of Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis, allowing the quantitative and qualitative comparison of NS and NNS language (see e.g. Granger 2007a; Granger 2007 b). In this study, the Norwegian use of scare quotes in roughly 25,000 words of argumentative essays is contrasted with British use in 25,000 words of argumentative essays written by A-level students and collected in the *Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays* (LOCNESS).

2.   A taxonomy of scare quote usage

Scare quotes are those quotation marks which are used to enclose expressions which are not direct quotations. They are discussed under various monikers, ranging from the relatively neutral and descriptive *nonstandard quotes* (Schneider 2002) to the deliberately neutralized *s-quotes* (John Swales, personal communication, November 10, 2009) to the "playful" *perverted quotes* (Dillon 1988). In general, they convey that the scare-quoted word or expression is inappropriate for some reason and that the writer desires to distance himself from it. Relatively little has been written about scare quotes other than in prescriptivist handbooks which strongly discourage their use. Pullum (2005), however, notes that that there appear to be two possible pragmatic functions of scare quotes – "secure" and "insecure" usage – and it is this distinction that provides the basis for the following taxonomy of scare quote usage.

Figure 1 offers a summary of the various suggested motivations for the use of secure scare quotes, which are generally used to indicate that the scare-quoted term is for some reason incorrect, but nevertheless employed for the sake of convenience. There are two main divisions, of which the more common presumably consists of those cases where writers overtly attempt to distance themselves from their own wording, catering to the perceived ignorance or

carelessness of the average speaker by employing an expression that they feel really should be avoided. Motivations for such "distancing" quotes vary and can be grouped into one of four broad categories. First, the quotes may indicate that there is some disagreement over the accepted term either in general or just on the part of the writer, "so-called" quotes. In essence, so-called quotes conflate several types which Dillon points out: shudder quotes (marking, for instance, a sudden change to an informal register), words not taken at face value (e.g. "living in sin"), expressions used in a figurative sense, and cute quotes (e.g. "poor little rich girl") (Dillon 1988: 64-65, his examples). Second, the scare quotes may mark the introduction of a new or otherwise previously unfamiliar term, thereby endowing it with legitimacy (see e.g. Trask 2007). Third, the writer is expressing irony or sarcasm using "sneer" quotes (see e.g. Jacobs 2003). And finally, the scare quote is part of a so-called mixed quote, "mixed" in the sense of being an actual citation (unlike the typical scare quote) from which the writer desires - for whatever reason - to distance himself (see Cappelen and Lepore 1997). These categories are not absolute, as there could be some overlap. For instance, irony is often the intended distancing effect rendered by mixed quotes. Moreover, motivations may sometimes be difficult to determine without recourse to interviews with the writers after the fact. In interpreting factors explaining the use of a particular scare quote, for example, disagreement may be confused with irony and indeed, the two may often go hand in hand. Still, the motivations seem distinct enough to warrant separate categories. The second main division involves a deviation from the standard function(s) of quotation marks to that of adding emphasis only rather than distance, and is typically found on signs. By typographically marking off a string of text, such emphatic quotes are intended to highlight a particular message (see Keeley 2008; McWhorter 2005; Trask 2000).
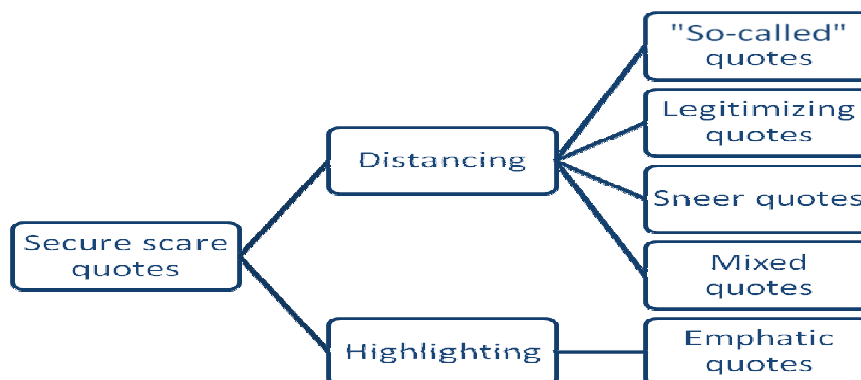

Figure 1.   The pragmatic motivations of secure scare quotes

Figure 2 offers details about insecure scare quotes. In contrast to secure scare quotes with their varying motivations, there is only one primary motivation for insecure scare-quoting, that is, the writer's perception of a gap in his own lexicon.

In other words, this scare-quoting marks the writer's contention that his chosen term is somehow wrong, perhaps due to inaccuracy, sudden change in register, or possible unfamiliarity as when the term is, for instance, foreign. In effect, insecure scare quotes overtly mark a deliberate employment of a learner compensation strategy used to bridge a perceived lexical gap. For the purposes of this study, the following terms for compensation strategies from Poulisse (1993) have been adopted. The first two main categories along with their related subcategories involve linguistic strategies, whereas the last category is conceptual:

Substitution: the replacing of the intended word with another

- **Approximation**: replacement of general item for specific item, e.g. *animal* for *rabbit*
- **Pure borrowing**: transfer of an unaltered L1 word into the L2 (code switching), e.g. *I'm going to a dugnad tonight* (*dugnad* being a Norwegian term referring to a voluntary community work)

Substitution Plus: substitution plus some alternative coding (word coinage)

- **Foreignizing**: "when an L1 word is phonologically or morphologically adapted to the L2" (Poulisse 1993: 172), e.g. *brain curtain* from Norwegian *jernteppe/hjerneteppe* to express *mental blackout*
- **Alteration of known TL term**:[1] substitution of an altered (already acquired) TL term for the unknown item, e.g. *to ironize*, from known noun *iron* and known English suffix *–ize*

Conceptual compensation: description of the unknown term

- **Analytic**: describes features of the target lexis, e.g. *it's made out of wood, has drawers, and it's in your office* (for *desk)*
- **Holistic**: creates an analogy between the target lexis and another item that is perceived to be similar, e.g. *a table in your office* (for *desk*)
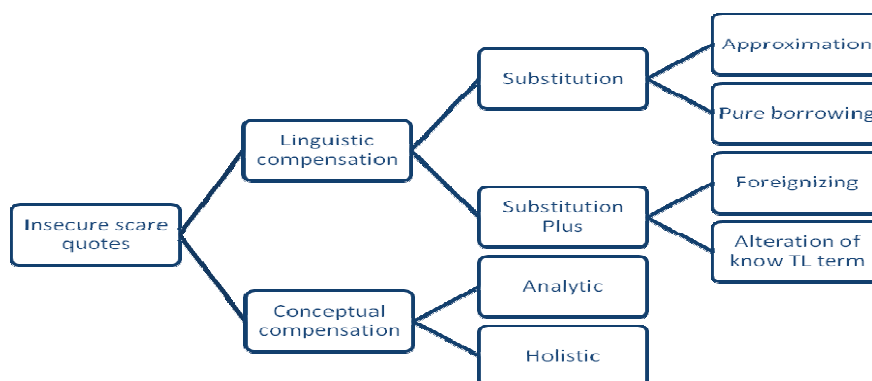

Figure 2.   Insecure scare quotes and learner compensation strategies

Given the different functions and underlying motivations of scare quotes, questions arise concerning the extent to which native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English employ them, both in terms of quantity and quality. Do the two groups favour their use equally or does one group use them in a comparatively disproportionate fashion? Are they used to accomplish the same pragmatic functions?

3.   Scare quote frequency and distribution in NICLE and LOCNESS

As can be seen in Table 1, the frequency of scare quote usage by the British and Norwegian students is remarkably similar. For the purposes of this study, nearly 50,000 total words of text are examined, evenly divided between NS and NNS prose. The Norwegian essays, however, are longer on average and consequently fewer are included in this study. Still, given the same amount of text, the extent of scare-quoting is almost identical: 64 instances in the Norwegian sample and 65 instances in the British sample. Not every essay examined contains scare quotes, of course, but here too the numbers are close. 56% (20) of the Norwegian essays contain scare-quoted expressions while 58% (28) of the British essays contain them. For both groups, writers who succumb once to the temptation of scare-quoting tend to repeatedly employ the same tactic. Of those essays that contain scare quotes, 65% (13) of the Norwegian essays and 67% (19) of the British essays contain more than one instance. The number of scare quotes in each individual text with multiple quotes varies, the maximum in a single text being 11 for the Norwegian material and 8 for the British material. These figures provide testimony for Jacob's (2003) contention that scare-quoting can become endemic, something which holds true for both NS and NNS writing.

Table 1.   Overview of material and scare quote distribution, NICLE and LOCNESS

	Norwegian (NICLE)	British (LOCNESS)
Number of words	24,800	24,811
Number of essays	36	48
Average number of words per essay	689	517
Total number of scare quote instantiations	64	65[*]
Number of essays with scare quotes	20 (56%)	28 (58%)

[*]minus three incomplete scare quotes, lacking the end quote

Table 2 presents an overview of the distribution of scare quote types in the Norwegian and British material, divided into the three main categories of "Secure", "Insecure" and "Borderline tokens", the last category compensating for the fact that determination of motivation based on the written word alone can be challenging. Because categorization of scare quote usage depends upon individual

interpretation, I follow Schneider's example and consider my coding a means of shedding light on the multiple purposes to which scare quotes are put, rather than a completely reliable, ironclad classification procedure (see Schneider 2002: 195).

Table 2.   Overview of scare quote distribution in Norwegian and English texts

	Norwegian (NICLE)	**British (LOCNESS)**
SECURE:		
"So-called"	7	25
Sneer quotes	8	4
Mixed quotes	4	2
Legitimizing	1	9
Highlighting	1	0
Ambiguous	3	5
Subtotal	**24**	**45**
INSECURE:		
Substitution	16	2
Approximations	15	2
Pure borrowing	1	0
Substitution Plus	7	5
Foreignizing	1	0
TL alteration	5	5
Conceptualization	7	7
Analytic	6	6
Holistic	1	1
Ambiguous	3	0
Subtotal	**32**	**14**
Borderline tokens	**8**	**6**
TOTAL	**64**	**65**

In Table 2 it can be seen that although the Norwegians and English students employ scare quotes in roughly the same frequencies, they use them in different ways. Namely, Norwegian students are much more likely to employ insecure scare quotes than secure ones when they write in English as compared to the British students. The differences noted here are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 13.37$ (df = 1), $p = 0.0002$). In the following sections, actual tokens of scare-quoting from NICLE and LOCNESS are discussed in order to cast further light on the individual categories outlined in Figures 1 and 2, and to highlight the main differences between the NS and NNS scare quote usage.

4.   Secure scare quotes

Because the dividing line between scare quotes which for instance exemplify the "so-called" quotes and sneer quotes is a thin one, one should not overestimate the possible significance of the numerical differences between these two types. The two categories are meant to be indicative only, rather than absolute. Closer inspection of the instantiations of secure quotes when taken as a whole does, however, reveal some differences. First, some of the British students display a sense of political correctness, scare-quoting expressions that may possibly be deemed controversial in their contexts, as in (1) where some might object to the characterization of any natural creation as a *flaw*. Moreover, the British some-times employ scare quotes to enclose idioms and set phrases, such as *wear and tear, carrot and stick [approach],* and in the case of three separate writers, *playing God.* Instances where factual accuracy may be questioned also seem to promote the use of scare-quoting as in (2) where the use of black might be considered a misnomer because no truly black rose yet exists.

(1)   Most people believe that the ability to erase genetic 'flaws' is a good thing, but the key to the problem is knowing when to stop. (ICLE-ALEV-0011.8)[2]

(2)   The flowers themselves are manipulated for varying colours, which couldn't be done before such as a "black" rose. (ICLE-ALEV-0026.8)

The Norwegians, by contrast, only employ scare quotes in connection with one particular set phrase, *good old days* which is scare-quoted by three separate writers. The Norwegian material contains no scare-quoted expressions which cater to concerns of either political correctness or factual accuracy, but does include several instances of obviously exaggerated generalizations which are enclosed in scare quotes, as in (3).

(3)   The main worry is that the choice of sex will lead to other specifications which result in parents being able to choose the 'perfect child' and natural variation going out of the window. (ICLE-ALEV-0029.8)

Furthermore, the Norwegians have a tendency to scare-quote terms which are seemingly appropriate in context. Therefore, the motivations behind the scare-quoting of some expressions are not immediately obvious. Examples include the following:

(4)   Some people will always have hard lives and try to "escape" from them by dreaming, and most people will meet problems in life and handle them by dreaming away. (ICLE-NO-AG-0007.1)

(5)   Next to the terrorists-experts and politicians, the "philosophers" and writers were the next to be interviewed by news reporters, seeking their opinion on this; the New World Order. (ICLE-NO-HO-0036.1)

Escape in (4) could well be scare-quoted in part due to recognition of the metaphorical nature of said "escaping", were it not for the fact that the same term is utilized in a nearly identical context, but minus the scare quotes, in an earlier portion of the same essay. Similarly, *philosophers* in (5) is an apt term, which therefore causes one to question the need for scare quotes. Is the writer expressing his sense of disdain for the profession? Does the writer not mean to refer to philosophers at all, but lacks the actual target vocabulary and hopes that readers will somehow infer what is really meant? Although it is almost always possible to come up with some semi-plausible explanatory motivation, the primary effect of these scare quotes seems to be that of misdirecting the reader to an unintended alternative reading or adding undue emphasis. In such cases, one might perhaps do better to heed the prescriptivist advice of allowing the word to carry its own meaning without the added quotation marks.

One further area in which the NICLE and LOCNESS practice appears to differ lies in the use of legitimizing quotes, a practice by which the initial mention of an unfamiliar term is scare-quoted in order to establish its contextual sense for the reader (see Kenyon 1994; Trask 1997). The British students avail themselves of this potential to a far greater degree than do the Norwegians, appropriating words which are potentially unfamiliar to the reader. In (6), for example, the writer encloses the term *fractal* in scare quotes, thereby highlighting a break in register through the use of a technical term from medical jargon. In such cases, the scare-quoted expressions are conventional in the sense that they are included in standard lexicons.

(6) Computer generated pictures, including 'fractal' pictures, drawn from equations, seem to be more popular than hand printed images from an art-ist's imagination, and computer games seem to provide more entertain-ment than any game or activity that takes place in the real, physical world. (ICLE-ALEV-0005.6)

5. Insecure scare quotes

When it comes to the types of insecure scare-quoting, it is hardly surprising that the British students in my study never resort to the strategies of either pure borrowing or foreignizing, as the target language is their L1. What is perhaps more surprising is that the Norwegians rarely take advantage of these strategies either. Pure borrowing, which is likely to be the least successful strategy in terms of communicative success, is found only once in my material when a student scare-quotes the Norwegian phrase *Ola Nordmann*, in reference to the average person, the equivalent of the English *John Smith*. The clearest case of foreigniz-ing is found in example (7). Here, the use of *strong* in exemplifies foreignizing due to the NNS shift in meaning away from the denotation of words that induce a powerful effect to swear words.

(7)   When their parents think they're watching cartoons, they're actually watching cartoons with porn, violence and "strong" words. (ICLE-NO-AC-0009.1)

Indeed, *strong words* and its direct Norwegian equivalent *sterke ord* originally had the same meaning, referring to words which induce a powerful emotional effect but not swear words. Internet searches reveal, however, that many have begun to use the term *sterke ord* to refer to swear words, while the same tendancy does not appear to apply to the collocation *strong words*. It is quite possible then that the writer simply foreignized the Norwegian lexeme *sterk* to the English *strong*, perhaps influenced by awareness of the metaphorical extension from the basic physical sense of *strong*.

Other potential cases of foreignizing have been classified as borderline tokens rather than clear-cut cases of insecure usage. For example, *soap* in (8) could very well constitute a case of foreignizing from Norwegian *såpe*, an insecure use of scare-quoting where the writer is unsure of whether the same term can be applied in English to a particular type of television series:

(8)   An example which illustrates this is the "soap" on Norwegian TV these days: "Hotel Caesar". (ICLE-NO-BU-0002.1)

On the other hand, this use of scare-quoting could simply represent a case of secure scare-quoting, an instantiation of the "so-called" function. This second hypothesis is not unlikely, given that the term *soap/såpe* is actually just an abbreviation for *soap opera/såpeopera*. In any case, foreignizing as a source of motivation for scare-quoting rarely appears in my material and is in any case difficult to determine with any certainty, based on the written word alone. Both English and Norwegian are Germanic languages, so there are often similarities between words in the two languages. An expression might be chosen because the writer is uncertain and adapts the term to make it resemble English, being lucky enough to hit upon the appropriate term. In other cases, the writer might be genuinely certain of the correctness of his chosen lexis, a version of which just happens to appear in both languages.

A further notable discrepancy between Norwegian and British use of insecure scare quotes lies in the much greater tendency for Norwegians to substitute some sort of general expression to compensate for the lack of a more precise term. The actual approximations result in varying degrees of success, but the very fact that they are scare-quoted serves to safeguard the writers from criticism of their lexical choice. Why bother to direct criticism at something the writer is already aware of, particularly when in many cases there are other more basic issues that need addressing, such as the formation of plurals or subject-verb concord? Still, scare-quoting of such generalized expressions often directs the reader's attention to weaknesses that might otherwise have passed unnoticed:

(9)   So of course we too use our imagination and dream about how it looks like on other planets and what kind of "creatures" that exist there for instance. Nowadays we do not have realistic stories about trolls and witches any-more, but of UFO's and aliens. (ICLE-NO-HE-0005.1)

(10)   There are two main "subjects" that often are discussed, censorship according to sexual exploitation and violence. (ICLE-NO-HO-0039.1)

In (9), the word *creatures* is used as a superordinate term to refer to trolls, witches, UFOs and aliens. Granted, UFOs are not creatures as such, a fact which might have prompted the scare-quoting. Still, the word is not so inappropriate as to necessarily have caught the reader's notice had it not been for those scare quotes. Similarly, *subjects* in (10) might be scare-quoted due to the writer's uncertainty about whether sexual exploitation and violence can properly be considered "subjects", the same term used to refer to academic disciplines. Chances are, however, that this use of *subjects* would have been considered unremarkable had its use not been orthographically highlighted. Indeed, scare-quoting of such approximations arguably has the effect of drawing undue notice to lexical choice.

The Norwegian and British writers display some similarity when it comes to modifying the standard lexicon of the English language in order to express their thoughts. The strategy of TL alteration is evident in 5 of the 32 Norwegian insecure scare quotes, as well as in 5 of the 45 corresponding cases in the British material. The word *organisators* in (11), for example, constitutes a prototypical instantiation of TL alteration, where the writer in this case takes a known verb, *organize*, and adds a common English suffix, *-ator*, to create a lexeme which is certainly understandable albeit incorrect.

(11)   And what if everybody expects an easy, well-organised society where everything is set up for them, – somebody has to be the "organisators". (ICLE-NO-HO-0032.1)

The predominant means of TL alteration in both the Norwegian and British material, however, involves the development of new compounds such as *fantasy harming* in (12), where the writer first discusses the types of experiences which may successfully activate a child's imagination but lacks a satisfactory means to express the opposite concept:

(12)   We should take care in how our children spend their time and limit the use of "fantasy harming" experiences, the point isn't supposed to be keep-ing the children busy until they have to go to bed! (ICLE-NO-AG-0019.1)

Two of the British writers who utilize this same strategy of creating novel compounds, however, do so for the purpose of labelling a phenomenon which they then proceed to define, illustrated in (13). Here the scare-quoted term *stay-ripe* serves as a cataphoric device, allowing the writer a concise means by which

to refer to an item which would otherwise require lengthy explication. This particular type of usage is similar in its defining function to many of the secure legitimizing quotes, the difference being the non-standard nature of the scare-quoted term.

(13)   The story that hit the scientific press about two years ago was about the "Stay-ripe" tomato. It was an ordinary tomato which had genes from a wheat variety added to it creating a tomato that, once ripe, stayed red for weeks. (ICLE-ALEV-0025.8)

In a similar vein, other writers employ newly-coined compounds to refer to concepts for which they otherwise lack a label, but choose not to explicitly define their scare-quoted newly-coined compound, perhaps feeling that the meaning of the term is self-evident. An example is given in (14).

(14)   The first case is if the ovum comes from the 'mother to be', this is usually because her partner has a low sperm count or is infertile; if he is infertile a donor's sperm will be used instead. The second case is when the 'mother to be' is post-menopausal or infertile, it is then that a donor's ovum would be used. (ICLE-ALEV-0029.8)

The LOCNESS example of *mother to be* is paralleled in NICLE by the use of *consumer* in (15). Here the writer chooses to implicitly introduce a term, being unsure of whether patrons of the arts can be called *consumers*. Not content with a single scare-quoting, however, this student feels compelled to continue scare-quoting the term. As a consequence, undue focus is placed on each occurrence of the word. Convention has it that the scare quotes should be dropped upon any subsequent mention of the term, as it is claimed that failure to do so may annoy the reader (Trask 1997). This text provides a good example of the potentially irritating effect of duplicate scare-quoting, especially as the last two instances of the word follow so hard upon the first.

(15)   As a "consumer" of the art, to reflect upon work of art you need to be creative, so the "consumer" also has to be imaginative. We (as "consumers" of art) have to be able to compare what is expressed to us with experiences we have for ourselves, and to be able to relate to the work of art. (ICLE-NO-HO-0029.1)

The double scare-quoting of *mother to be* in (14), by contrast, is arguably somewhat less annoying for the reader. Here, the writer struggles to find a term not for a prospective mother who is already pregnant, but for a woman who has not yet undergone the IVF treatment, a "prospective prospective mother". The initial scare quotes help alert the reader that the woman in question is not truly a mother-to-be. The second set of scare quotes serve to effectively isolate the three individual words in the text and bind them as a single unit. This is a potentially

effective tactic given that the writer is unaware of the use of hyphens in the standard spelling of the compound in its lexically conventionalized sense.

In any case, examples such as those in (14) and (15) mark both the British and Norwegian contributors as the novice writers they are. In her comparative study on the use of scare quotes by novice and professional writers, Schneider comments that this type of quote which marks invented language is "used in just those places where students either lack the disciplinary language that would supply them with the vocabulary for which they appear to be searching or the argumentative strategy that would allow them to make a claim in ordinary language" (Schneider 2002: 204). In such cases, these students "abdicate their linguistic responsibility",[3] something which professional writers rarely permit themselves.

6.   **Summary and conclusions**

The primary finding of this study is that although Norwegian learners of English and novice British writers employ roughly the same number of scare quotes, they do so for quite different reasons. In brief, Norwegian writers more often resort to insecure scare quotes than do British writers. As previously noted, Nesselhauf claims that scare quote usage can lead to the use of "unacceptable words or expressions" (Nesselhauf 2005: 151). By contrast, I would contend that scare-quoting provides a strategy which effectively contributes to the legitimization of what otherwise would be judged an inappropriate term. In other words, scare quotes make the "unacceptable" acceptable.

Due to the methodological challenges of determining the underlying motivations for scare-quoting, attempts were made to give each quote the widest possible interpretation. Even so, the greater extent of insecure scare-quoting in the Norwegian material is an inescapable conclusion. These findings are intuitively satisfying, as one would expect NNS writers to experience more lexical gaps and thus exude less confidence in the appropriateness of their lexical choice. A further study is planned to investigate the use of scare quotes in argumentative essays written by Norwegian university and college students in their native Norwegian, in order to discover whether they then employ a greater percentage of secure scare quotes when the target language is their L1.

Any word is associated with a degree of subjectivity. Such variation is particularly apparent in learner language where writers are quite often on shaky territory as to the conventional meanings and associations of words. Inappropriateness is in the eyes of the beholder, such that Norwegians seem to more often scare-quote expressions which are apparently appropriate in context, with the consequent unfortunate effect of placing undue emphasis on a particular expression. This could explain, for instance, cases where Norwegians enclose conventional metaphors in scare quotes. As foreign speakers of English, they may very well remain sensitive to the metaphorical nature of such terms and employ scare quotes to mark the semantic stretching of a word away from its basic sense.

As for the links between compensation strategies and scare quotes, it would appear that Norwegians resort only infrequently to either the strategies of foreignizing or pure borrowing, or alternatively, that Norwegian students are usually careful not to highlight the use of such compensation strategies with scare quotes. If it is indeed the case that less proficient writers of an L2 tend to find inspiration for unknown lexis in their own L1 as Poulisse (1993: 184) claims, then the lack of scare-quoted L1 variations could testify to the overall advanced level of English in the Norwegian essays. It might prove interesting to investigate the use of scare quotes in the English of other language groups as well, in order to investigate whether there tends to be any link between scare-quoting and L1-inspired learner compensation strategies on the one hand, and proficiency level in English on the other hand.

Finally, a number of other minor differences in the use of scare quotes in Norwegian and British English have also been noted. These include the greater tendency apparent in the Norwegian material to scare-quote approximations of the target vocabulary as well as exaggerated generalizations. The British texts, by contrast, display an increased proclivity towards the use of scare quotes which mark set phrases or introduce specialized terms. Additionally, concerns relating to political correctness and factual accuracy also appear to motivate scare quote usage by the British authors. Such phenomena merit further investigation in larger samples of novice writing to discover whether these tendencies may be confirmed.

Notes

1   For the present study, the target language (TL) is English, which is the first language (L1) of the British students and the second language (L2) of the Norwegian students.

2   The British material is coded with *ALEV* (A-levels), whereas the Norwegian material is coded with *NO* (Norwegian). All examples from LOCNESS and NICLE are quoted verbatim, including any errors.

3   Schneider's conclusion (2002: 204), borrowing a phrase from Robin Lakoff.

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