
Research Digest

Plagiarism: Local Solutions for a Universal Problem

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Partially due to an increased reliance on the Internet, it has been perceived that the incidence of plagiarism by Japanese university students is increasing. Finding effective ways to address this issue is a widespread concern among educators. This paper describes the ways that plagiarism is being dealt with at one particular institution, and how that approach is being revisited through a process of investigating student motivations for committing plagiarism and the strategies that instructors employ to deal with it. An attempt is made to view plagiarism from the points of view of students, teachers, and program administrators in the interest of developing and implementing guidelines that will serve to educate and motivate students to avoid plagiarizing.

それだけが原因とは断定できませんが、インターネットへの依存が高まってきたと同時に、盗作が日本の大学生の間で問題となっており、この問題をいかに効果的に対処する事ができるかということが、多くの教育者の間で懸念されています。この論文ではある大学での盗作に対する取り組みと、学生達が盗作をする動機を調査した結果を踏まえて検討された対処方法や、講師が実際にどのようにその対処方法を実践しているかについて書かれています。学生達が学習意欲を高め盗作をしないように導く為のガイドラインを作成するために、盗作という問題を学生だけではなく講師やプログラム開発者の視点からも考察しています。

The topic of plagiarism is approached through various disciplines, such as

education and psychology, and within specific academic areas (Yeo, 2007), in addition to applied linguistics. Although traditionally characterized as a moral transgression, more recently, it has been argued that the term “plagiarism” is overly vague and not helpful pedagogically (Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004; Petrić, 2004). For that reason, second language (L2) writing researchers have proposed an alternative nomenclature. According to Petrić and Pecorari (2014) the terms most often used in the L2 writing literature are “textual borrowing” and “transgressive/nontransgressive intertextuality.” Other attempts at non-judgmental phraseology, include the expressions “mediated authorship” (Prior, 1998), “textual appropriation” (Shi, 2010), and “language reuse” (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). The rationale behind such a reconceptualization of plagiarism and pedagogical consequences of the change in orientation away from moral transgression will be explored.

Ways that plagiarism has been dealt with in the educational context

Plagiarism is a complex issue as it can involve educational, legal, professional, financial, moral, and emotional challenges. It is a frequent topic among faculty around the world, and strategies for dealing with it are featured at faculty development symposiums and academic conferences. Deciding whether a student’s work has been plagiarized, and whether it is intentional, can be perplexing, especially when the decision is based on an “educated guess” or circumstantial evidence without ironclad proof.

Although it is generally acknowledged that a combined carrot and stick approach to plagiarism is preferable, it is often the stick that is emphasized in plagiarism statements and policies at universities. Before embarking on writing their master’s theses, students in the Graduate School of Economics at Waseda University must sign a document noting that they understand the definition of plagiarism, as stated in their “Study Guide for Students,” and that they are aware of the dire penalties associated with plagiarism, which include a suspension from the university for an indefinite period, the loss of credit for their MA thesis, and the invalidation of the most recent semester’s credit (Graduate School of

Economics, Waseda University).

While this type of policy may be suitable for graduate students, such policies and warnings may be less effective for undergraduate students if the causes for the transgressions are not clearly understood and if avoidance through education and motivation has not been fostered. Perhaps, as den Ouden and van Wijk (2011) suggest, the discussion concerning plagiarism should change from “catch-and-punish to teach-and-prevent” (p. 197).

Eisner and Vicinus (2008) note that many instances of plagiarism are due to a teacher’s failure to properly articulate the parameters of an assignment. If writing tasks are left too open-ended or if only general reflections are solicited, without the inclusion of personal observations or experiences, plagiarism is facilitated. By asking students to use higher order thinking skills (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation), plagiarism is not made impossible, but it becomes more difficult. Therefore, challenging students to produce well-thought-out, reflective, and critical work may do much to avoid plagiarism.

Approaches to “textual borrowing” in the L2 writing literature

Research on plagiarism in L2 writing, which goes back to the middle of the 1980s, attempts to understand plagiarism not merely as a transgressive act, but more as a stage in language development. Emphasis is placed on the writer’s relationship to, and use of, a source text and the connections between the cited text and the text that cites it. According to Howard (1999), “patchwriting”—copying from a source and then substituting synonyms for vocabulary items, altering the syntax, and deleting “unnecessary” text—in particular, is seen as potentially contributing to the ability of novice writers to manipulate the target language towards their own ends and grasp the subtleties of the academic register, as they gradually acquire their own authorial identity. Pecorari (2008) differentiates between patchwriting, considered unintentional plagiarism, and what she terms as the more nefarious “textual plagiarism,” the appropriation of ideas or words from a source without proper attribution.

Varying attitudes toward plagiarism

Second language learners may face greater challenges when paraphrasing and attempting to synthesize multiple sources to create an original work of their own, but the widespread use of costly plagiarism detection systems—such as Turnitin, iThenticate (iParadigms, 2013a, 2013b) and Ephorus (Ephorus International, N.D.)—suggests that the problem is, at least, as serious with those writing in their first languages. Learners in Western countries may be more likely to be informed, in junior high and high school, of expectations that work submitted in school should be “in one’s own words” and that the ideas and contributions of others should be properly acknowledged through established conventions. However, in both L1 and L2 writing contexts, students and teachers do not always have a unified understanding of what “in one’s own words” entails and where justified “textual borrowing” ends and plagiarism begins.

Despite some instruction on how to cite sources, regulations concerning plagiarism tend to be less strict in Japan and other Asian nations than they are in the West. Tsintzoglou (2011), in a study involving Japanese postgraduate students in Australia, showed that they were able to adapt to more severe regulations and a greater emphasis on written work without major problems.

At our particular setting, Aoyama Gakuin University, we have a rather large number of Japanese or bi/multi-cultural students who have spent some or most of their childhood and/or adolescence abroad, where they may have encountered more hardline approaches to plagiarism. Upon returning to Japan, it is uncertain whether these students retain attitudes toward plagiarism that they developed abroad or readily discard them if they encounter what they may perceive as greater permissiveness. However, cases of plagiarism seem no less likely to occur among the so-called “returnee” students.

Reasons for plagiarizing

Students commit plagiarism for a plethora of reasons and through numerous methods. Sometimes it is due to ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism. Many Japanese high school students may not have been expected to cite sources or use quotations or paraphrasing for essays written in either Japanese or English.

Thus, many first-year university students might not have previously encountered the concept of plagiarism. Moreover, some students mistakenly believe that information from Japanese sources can simply be translated and inserted into an essay without the use of quotations or paraphrasing because the data is not in its original form. In extreme cases, some may have the notion that any information found on the Internet is fair game for unfettered use (Bollinger, 2013b).

Some cases of plagiarism can also be traced to “shortcuts” motivated by time pressure or over commitments. Traditionally, Japanese high school students have shown considerable diligence in studying to pass university entrance exams, with the expectation that socializing, part-time jobs and club activities would figure predominantly in their college experience. Initially, many students find jobs, join teams or clubs and participate in various activities that leave relatively little time for academic endeavors. Given recent changes in Japanese corporate structure and hiring practices over the past decade, some students are beginning to realize the importance of developing skills, acquiring knowledge, and gaining experience that may prove more beneficial in a highly competitive job market. For students who continue to work at one or more part-time job(s) and/or participate in time-consuming club activities, however, the use of plagiarism may seem an expedient way to juggle various time commitments. Addressing the issue of time management can provide an opportunity for students to reevaluate their priorities and reduce extracurricular activities in order to devote more time and attention to academic endeavors, which can, in turn, serve to reduce plagiarism (Bollinger, 2013b).

Another tendency that students might have is to self-plagiarize by repurposing work that they previously submitted for a different course, making only cosmetic changes to it. Contextual factors can be involved when students come to view “patchwriting,” interspersed with some original commentary, as the norm. In addition, den Ouden & van Wijk (2011) refer to a practice involving “the exchange of text fragments between students.” In such cases of plagiarism, by “reusing” written work, in whole or in part, previously submitted by a peer, a student may, intentionally or inadvertently, also be “recycling” information copied from another source or acquired from an Internet “paper mill.” (For an

extensive listing of sites that are considered to be paper mills, see Coastal Carolina University, 2009.)

At times, plagiarism may simply be the result of careless note taking, when what was paraphrased and what remain direct quotes are confused. Insecurity and a lack of confidence in one's own writing may lead some students to view plagiarism as a "safer" option. Finally, there are students who have an affinity for breaking rules as a kind of thrill seeking.

Current plagiarism policy

In the 2007 academic year at Aoyama Gakuin University, in response to an increase of reported plagiarism on book reports, some explicit penalties were introduced, which are communicated to teachers through the Integrated English (IE) Program teachers' manual entitled, *Integrated English Core Scope and Sequence* (Strong, 2013). Instructors were advised to inform their students about how easy it is for them (i.e., teachers) to detect plagiarism through Google searches and through their expert awareness of inappropriate or inconsistent word choice and authorial voice. Plagiarism, of any assignment in any IE course—including Academic Writing and Academic Skills—results in failure on that assignment, without the option to rewrite. If a student plagiarizes on a second assignment, they will fail the entire course. "Plagiarism" here refers to the "textual plagiarism" (taking of ideas or words from a source without proper attribution) described by Pecorari (2008), not the patchwriting or other unintentional plagiarism that stems from an inexpert grasp of the conventions of citing sources or misunderstandings about what constitutes "common knowledge." The latter calls for a pedagogical, rather than punitive, response.

Furthermore, the importance of citing sources appropriately was addressed earlier in the program, rather than the previous emphasis in higher level courses. Moreover, it was noted that some students had inserted unrevised machine-translated text into their written work. To advocate a more intelligent use of the technology, supplemental lessons on the pitfalls of machine translation were introduced to illustrate how this can also be considered a form of plagiarism.

We required students to inform teachers of the book they select for their

book report weeks in advance. Teachers were asked to have the students bring the book to class, and teachers were encouraged to be especially vigilant regarding plagiarism if a submitted paper reports on a book other than the one previously indicated. In order to reduce reliance on Internet sources and ascertain whether students had actually read their books, they were asked to respond to questions involving personal reflection, which required expressing their opinion or personal reaction to certain aspects of the novel, in addition to analyzing the novel with respect to literary concepts such as theme, irony, conflict, climax, symbols, etc.

A collaborative approach to dealing with plagiarism

The collaboration on this issue by the authors, a coordinator and a teacher in the IE Program at Aoyama Gakuin University, has evolved through the examination of various cases of plagiarism involving academic essays, book reports, and student journals, consideration of appropriate ways to address the issue with individual students, and numerous discussions on effective ways to reduce the incidence of plagiarism in IE courses. A presentation given by one of the authors (Bollinger, 2013a) at a faculty development symposium for IE teachers in 2013 sparked a wider dialog and collaboration among teachers in the program, which also contributed to the process of redefining our approach in dealing with plagiarism. We have come to believe that plagiarism can best be addressed when factors involving motivation for willful plagiarism and inadvertent “text borrowing” are taken into consideration, along with issues such as how writing tasks are set and how teachers respond to student writing.

In autumn of 2014, a more formal plagiarism statement and policy was introduced (Appendix A). Developing a plagiarism statement and policy has been a joint effort, and invaluable feedback was gained through two surveys on plagiarism that we designed, which were administered to most of the students and teachers in the IE Program between December 2013 and February 2014. Our findings were fully consistent with the observation of Petrić and Pecorari (2014) that the “sheer volume of studies reporting that students are concerned to avoid plagiarism but lack the experience or perspective which would allow them

actually to do so makes it virtually impossible to avoid the conclusion that not all plagiarism is intended to deceive” (pp. 275-276). Accordingly, we have come to believe that plagiarism becomes less likely when teachers do the following (The individuals quoted are senior teachers in the IE Program.):

Show genuine interest in the ideas expressed by students.

“The most effective way to counter [plagiarism] has been to stress to the students that I am interested in THEIR response to the book, THEIR ideas and I want to read THEIR own words.” (T. Browning, personal communication, April 15, 2013 [her emphasis])

Know their students’ writing so well that the detection of plagiarism is simple, even without resorting to the use of Internet search engines or sophisticated online plagiarism detection systems.

The false positives and negatives that these systems produce (den Ouden & van Wijk, 2011; Hayes & Introna, 2007; Weber-Wulff, 2008) show that, for the foreseeable future, teacher judgment will be a necessary element in the detection process.

Set writing assignments that do not just require the regurgitating of facts and figures, ensuring that a student’s personal experiences and reflections are a key part of them.

“Summaries of news articles [to be used in the ‘Media Discussions’ in Core] must be very concise [while] evaluations of that info must be at least three times longer than the summary.” (H. Armstrong, personal communication, September 20, 2013)

Make their expectations known at the outset.

“From day 1 in the IE Core and Writing classes, I make a big deal of plagiarism being The Cardinal University Sin. I also let them know that if they do it, I WILL KNOW! I think I almost always do; the differences in voice and style just jump out at my eye.” (H. Armstrong, personal communication, September 20, 2013 [his emphasis])

Praise creative and critical thinking.

“I remind them how much I enjoy reading their response to a book, seeing what the story meant to them.” (T. Browning, personal communication, April

15, 2013)

Set very specific instructions for writing assignments that make it nearly impossible for students to use generic, Web content or papers from Internet “paper mills.”

“I [have] a wide variety of strategies for making [the] critical evaluation section of the book report better...projections of what might happen next after the book ends, a life experience that the story brings to mind, why the writer wrote THIS story with THIS particular theme (also based on student research on the influences on this writer that shaped his/her worldview).” (H. Armstrong, personal communication, September 20, 2013 [his emphasis])

Teach, as early as possible, the meaning of plagiarism and what must be done to avoid it: proper paraphrasing, quoting, including citations using one of the conventional styles (e.g., MLA, APA).

Make plagiarism contracts with students.

At George Washington University, for example, students are asked to sign a “pledge of honesty” when they submit assignments to attest that the work is original (http://www.law.gwu.edu/Students/Documents/Forms%20downloads/Pledge_Honesty.pdf).

Reinforce plagiarism avoidance strategies by introducing students to openly available tutorials that teach students media literacy and how to use and acknowledge sources properly (Appendix B).

Provide students with exercises, quizzes, and simulations that give them practical, hands-on experience with the complexities of acknowledging sources properly (Appendix C).

Conclusion

We would like to continue our collaborative approach and involve other teachers and administrators in efforts to confront the various challenges posed by plagiarism. As the incidence of plagiarism continues to escalate, it has become even clearer to us that this struggle cannot be resolved simply by devising the “perfect” plagiarism policy or pedagogy. We must constantly be vigilant and adjust to changes over time such as developments in technology that may

inadvertently facilitate plagiarism, and be more aware of and sensitive to how the environment in which our students function can influence their motivation to plagiarize. Primarily, we wish to create an environment in which plagiarism is not done inadvertently and ceases to be viewed as a viable option.

In L2 writing contexts, specific strategies for avoiding plagiarism will vary depending on a student's academic discipline, proficiency level, and the types of writing tasks required. However, we believe that a pedagogical rather than punitive approach will be more conducive to a learning environment where students can acquire the complex set of skills that must be mastered in order to avoid plagiarism.

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Appendix A

2014 IE Plagiarism Policy Statement (excerpt)

[See the statement in its entirety at <http://www.aogaku-daku.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PlagiarismPolicy.pdf>]

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or words without properly acknowledging the source. Generally, work done for your courses – essays, examinations, oral presentations, homework assignments, journal entries – is expected to be your independent effort. If you use information from other sources (such as books, academic journals, podcasts, or Web pages, etc.), it is necessary to cite these sources properly. In the IE Program, your teachers will teach you how to do this, but it is your responsibility to carefully follow their instructions.

When is it necessary to cite sources?

In some cases, for example, in journal writing or when expressing personal opinions, your writing may be based on your own experiences and make use of your personal background and/or common knowledge. In such cases, it is not necessary to cite sources because YOU are the source of the information or opinions. However, most academic writing requires the use of material from other sources, including dictionaries, encyclopedias, books, magazines, video streaming sites, etc. When you use information from such sources, it is necessary to clearly show what information came from which source. Submitting an assignment with even one part that has been copied from another source is a violation of the rules involving plagiarism unless you follow the guidelines for quotations and cite the source properly. You may quote directly from a source with proper citation, but it is usually better to paraphrase or summarize information in your own words. Even when you paraphrase, summarize, or translate information (e.g., from a Japanese book or Web page), it is still necessary to cite the original source. If you see the statement, “Free use is allowed,” on a Web page, be careful! Use of material from any Web page without citing the source is considered plagiarism.

What is the IE Program Plagiarism Policy?

Plagiarism of any assignment in any IE course – including Academic Writing and Academic Skills – will lead to failure on that assignment, without the option to rewrite. If a student plagiarizes on a second assignment, s/he will fail the entire course. Teachers in the IE Program are very experienced at identifying plagiarism, and all cases must be reported to the IE Program Coordinators. A database of written work submitted in IE courses is being created to discourage the re-use of reports, essays, and other assignments that have been previously submitted by other students.

Appendix B

Sites Related to Web Literacy and Ways to Avoid Plagiarism

Name of Site or Page	Creator / Host	URL
Online Tutorial for Avoiding Plagiarism	University of Leicester	http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/study/plagiarism-tutorial
Internet Detective	Intute and the LearnHigher Project	http://www.vtstutorials.ac.uk/detective/about.html
Understanding Plagiarism	University of Indiana's School of Education	https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/
Teach Information Literacy & Critical Thinking	UCLA College Library Librarians	https://sites.google.com/site/teachinfolit/find-evaluate-websites-blogs-wikis-more/hoax-scholarly-research-personal-opinion-you-decide
Evaluation Wizard	21st Century Information Fluency	http://21cif.com/tools/evaluate/
Avoiding Plagiarism	Purdue University's OWL	https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/02/

Appendix C

Plagiarism Quiz (part of Student Plagiarism Survey referred to herein)

In the examples below, the original source material is given along with a sample of student work. Decide if they are cases of plagiarism.

CASE 1:

Original Source Material	Sample of Student Written Work
Japanese cuisine has evolved over centuries of social and political changes. Washoku (Japanese cuisine) usually refers to food that was around before 1868, the end of Japan's isolationist policies.	Japanese cuisine usually refers to food that was around before 1868.
(Quoted from: Japanese Food. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.facts-about-japan.com/food.html)	Bibliography: Japanese Food. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.facts-about-japan.com/food.html

Is this plagiarism?

- 1) No.
- 2) Yes, because it quotes another person's actual words, without using quotation marks and without proper acknowledgement.

[Correct Answer: 2—Quote is not acknowledged as such and there is no in-text citation.]

CASE 2:

Original Source Material	Sample of Student Written Work
A few aspects that set Japanese cuisine apart from other cuisines are its emphasis on using quality ingredients, particular seasonality, and impeccable presentation.	Japanese cuisine is said to differ from the cuisines of other countries due to “its emphasis on using quality ingredients, particular seasonality, and impeccable presentation” (“Japanese Food,” 2013).
(Quoted from: Japanese Food. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.facts-about-japan.com/food.html)	Bibliography: Japanese Food. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.facts-about-japan.com/food.html

Is this plagiarism?

- 1) No.
- 2) Yes, because it quotes another person’s actual words without proper acknowledgement.

[Correct Answer: 1--No problem. This is a properly acknowledged quotation.]

CASE 3:

Original Source Material	Sample of Student Written Work
There is a huge variety in the ways that tempura is served and cooked and even in what ingredients are used, although it is widely-accepted that dishes should utilize seasonal ingredients that are as fresh as possible.	According to the article “Japanese Food” (2013), it is widely-accepted that dishes should utilize seasonal ingredients that are as fresh as possible.
(Quoted from: Japanese Food. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.facts-about-japan.com/food.html)	Bibliography: Japanese Food. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.facts-about-japan.com/food.html

Is this plagiarism?

- 1) No.
- 2) Yes, because it quotes another person’s actual words without using quotation marks to indicate that the exact same words are used.

[Correct Answer: 2--Although an in-text citation is used, there are no quotation marks around a direct quote.]