Logical Thinking Education to Combat Plagiarism

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Abstract

Plagiarism, which Indiana University's Writing Tutorial Service defines as "using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information", is often described as a major problem. However, standard definitions such as this one suggest only limited solutions to the problem: acknowledging sources or forbidding reuse. Since all scholarship involves engaging with the ideas of others and academic writing tends to reuse certain expressions, these solutions – though important – are of limited utility. This paper examines a type of plagiarism to which the standard solutions do not apply: the reuse of linguistic models without sufficient attention to the logic or thoughts the texts express. We present two cases of plagiarism, from which we can see that plagiarism shows a gap between the written texts and the thoughts of the author. In order to fill the gap, one needs to know how to integrate not only the texts borrowed from others into one's writing but also the thoughts expressed by the texts. Thus a satisfactory solution to the plagiarism problem requires not only writing skills but also logical thinking skills.

1. Introduction

Many definitions of plagiarism suggest that the problem is mainly one of ethics. Consider, for example, this description from the website Plagiarism.org (2011): "[P]lagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward." This definition casts the problem in ethical and legal terms. Words such as *fraud*, *stealing*, and *lying* clearly describe the issue as improper behavior.

The description of plagiarism given by Indiana University's Writing Tutorial Service (2011) is fairly typical of definitions of the behavior the label covers: "Plagiarism is using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information." Although this definition does not use words typically associated

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with discussions of ethics, it implies that *other's ideas and words* are a form of intellectual property, and that the problem lies in failing to acknowledge ownership. This makes plagiarism comparable to property crime. Even though the definition does not use any of the ethical wording of the earlier definition, it is still about an ethical problem after all.

However, not all plagiarism cases clearly involve an ethical problem. Plagiarism can exist as a problem without any obvious ethical failing on the part of the author. For example, an author ignorant of the norms and rules of citation who fails to identify the source of a paraphrase or allusion is still guilty of plagiarism even without an intent to deceive. Copying with the intent to deceive is clearly an ethical problem. But this is only a part of a larger domain of plagiarism. Copying without the intent to deceive is also a plagiarism problem (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003; Chang 2005), even though it may not be an ethical problem.

The problem with definitions that cast plagiarism in terms of ethics is that they suggest only limited solutions to the problem. Mastering the mechanics of quotation and citation forms allows the writer to acknowledge sources. All that remains is to prohibit copying of words or ideas without such acknowledgement. Prohibition, with exceptions allowed for properly cited quotations, would seem to solve the problem of unethical copying.

But what of cases where the author has no intention to lie, steal, or deceive? Simple prohibition cannot reduce those plagiarism cases that are not clear ethical violations. Therefore, a better definition is required, one which encompasses this aspect of the problem.

So far we have mentioned two categories of plagiarism: the unethical plagiarist who attempts to deceive readers, and the ignorant plagiarist with no bad intent. In the first category, an author without an original idea may misrepresent another author's idea as his own. In the other case, an author who has an original idea but does not know how to communicate it may try to package the idea in language borrowed from other texts. The latter case is not uncommon among students writing in a foreign language.

Both categories of plagiarism have one thing in common; they reflect a gap between the text and the author's thoughts. In the former case, the text does not reflect the author's own thoughts, because the author has taken both the thoughts and the words from a published source. In the latter case, even though the author has original ideas, the attempt to package these in other writers' words still results

in plagiarism.

Standard solutions to avoid plagiarism by citing sources may not be helpful for authors whose training in academic writing focuses on adapting model texts. Unless authors learn how to integrate the thoughts of source materials into their arguments as well as integrating the words into their texts, the gap will remain.

2. Two cases of plagiarism

In order to understand these two categories of plagiarism, it is helpful to look at two specific cases. In the first case, an undergraduate student's attempt to cheat on an assignment results in wholesale copying. In the second case, a graduate student with an original analysis borrows language from published sources to help him get past his insecurity about writing in English. Although the latter student was not attempting to fool anyone, and readily admitted what he had done, both writers' actions reflect a gap between the author's thoughts and the words of the text.

In an undergraduate English language course taught by one of the authors (Nilep), students were assigned to give an oral presentation. The assignment asked students to choose a favorite book, movie, or other entertainment and to persuade the rest of the class to read or watch it. One presenter, a young Japanese man, recommended the book *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Some of the language used in the presentation did not sound typical of a Japanese speaker, as when he mentioned "asking my Mum if I'd found Hogwarts." A web search for that phrase quickly revealed an Amazon customer review of the book that included the same details as the student's presentation (EmmaxZero 2011). When the instructor confronted the student, he admitted taking his text from the web site. When the instructor told the student that such plagiarism is cheating, the student professed indifference. He received a failing grade for the assignment.

Clearly, this student's behavior was inappropriate, and even unethical. It was apparently his intention to deceive the instructor by representing published work as his own; at least, it was the student's intent not to prepare a speech, as he was assigned to do. There may be little for instructors to do in such cases, beyond specifying what is required and what is prohibited.

The second case, however, does not involve an intention to deceive. A graduate student who had completed an original analysis and written about it in a language other than English was seeking assistance in preparing an English-language manuscript based on the project for possible publication. After discussing the project

with an adviser, the student returned with a draft of the English manuscript. The following paragraph appeared in the English draft manuscript.

> Authenticity is not there to be discovered, nor even to be cleverly coaxed into range. Rather, it is conferred and created by the film maker. I seek to build on this work by relocating the construction of authenticity in the auteur's work in Japanese new wave cinema of the 1960s.[1]

When the adviser asked the author about the English prose, the author said that he was in the habit of adapting well-written English prose to fit his own arguments. He supplied the following passage, from which much of the text is copied. Copied portions are shown in bold face.

> Taken as a whole, this body of scholarship indicates that contrary to the way much sociolinguistic research has proceeded, **authenticity is not there to be discovered, nor even to be cleverly coaxed into range** of our recording equipment; **rather, it is conferred** by language users and their audiences, and by us, the sociolinguists who study them. **I seek to build on this work by relocating the construct** of the 'authentic speaker' within sociolinguistics. [Bucholtz 2003, 407–408]

Of the 50 words from the unpublished manuscript, thirty are taken directly from sociolinguist Mary Bucholtz's (2003) paper. Worse, Bucholtz's paper dealt with the concept of authenticity within sociolinguistics. She seeks to "build on this work", a reference to work in sociolinguistics; removed from the context of sociolinguistics the phrase is *non sequitur*. The unpublished paper is in a different field altogether.

The author allowed that he had to work very hard to find useful English phrases, and in the process had removed or altered much of his original analysis. This process caused not only a plagiarism problem, but damage to the scholar's own work.

Remedies usually suggested to avoid plagiarism, such as careful use of quotation or paraphrase and clear citation of sources, would not be much help for this unpublished manuscript. A quotation or citation of Bucholtz's work, necessary to avoid plagiarism in the sense of "using others' … words without clearly acknowledging

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[1] This quote has been altered to protect the anonymity of the author. The altered text includes the same portions copied from Bucholtz 2003, but some other details have been changed.

the source" (Writing Tutorial Services 2011), would give an incorrect impression of the relationship between the two studies, as shown in the following illustration.

Illustration: Quotation marks and citation forms added.

As Mary Bucholtz (2003) notes, "Authenticity is not there to be discovered, nor even to be cleverly coaxed into range" (408). It is instead created by the film maker. Like Bucholtz, "I seek to build on [current] work by relocating the construct" of authenticity (2003, 408) in the auteur's work in Japanese new wave cinema of the 1960s.

By adding quotation marks and in-text citations, this example technically avoids plagiarism as defined above. Yet this version of the paragraph gives a misleading understanding of the author's own work and its relationship to that of the cited author. Bucholtz's analysis of the construct of the authentic speaker within sociolinguistics is of little relevance to the subsequent author's argument about perceptions of the authenticity of creative work. What the two authors share is not so much an understanding of authentication, but simply use of the word *authenticity*. Each scholar views authenticity (in the sense she or he uses it) as a construct, but they are discussing different concepts constructed in different intellectual settings.

What the author of the unpublished manuscript attempted to take from the source was not the message communicated, but the form of English words and grammar. This use is improper, but it is not obviously unethical. More importantly, by reshaping the paper around a pre-existing linguistic form, the author was not able to communicate his own idea clearly. Parts of the argument were abandoned or changed to fit into the adopted phrases.

The author was advised to rewrite the paper, focusing on his own premises and paying attention to how his data support these ideas. The rewritten paper is still being prepared, but an early draft suggests that the author will present a more appropriate publication by attending first to his argument and not to grammatical form.

3. The Gap between Text and Thought

The second case of plagiarism presented in the previous section presents the plagiarism problem at a whole new level. Unlike the first case, which presents plagiarism clearly as an ethical problem, the second case reveals a problem that

is far more extensive than poor ethics. This problem can be traced, to a very large extent, to how writing education, especially in foreign language settings, is carried out in colleges and universities. To have a better understanding about the problem, let us begin by considering the relationship between texts and thoughts.

Texts, regardless of whether they are words, phrases or sentences, are language devices used to communicate the thoughts of the author who produces them. For example, the sentence, "logical thinking education is necessary for all university students", communicates the thought of the author about the necessity of logical thinking education for all university students. However, the relation between texts and thoughts is not a necessary unity. The same thought can be communicated through different texts in different languages, and a particular text can be used to communicate different thoughts.

Learning how to write is basically learning how to use texts to communicate thoughts. But since texts and thoughts are not necessarily related, a writer must learn not only how texts can be properly arranged to express thoughts, but also how thoughts can be properly arranged so that they can be appropriately expressed. The rules that govern how words are arranged to form a sentence (i.e. grammar rules) are very different from the rules that govern how thoughts are arranged to form an argument (i.e. logic rules). But if the writer is competent in both the ability to write and the ability to think, the elements of text organized in the writing should represent how the thoughts are organized in the writer's mind. Writing in this sense is a process of thinking. Writing education is a process of developing the writer into an independent, original, and critical thinker with high communication abilities; this is the ideal of education that university has traditionally promoted.

Unfortunately, this is not how most writing educations are actually carried out in universities. English writing pedagogy, for example, often focuses on using English words and grammar properly. According to Richard Badger and Goodith White (2000), approaches to writing education in English can be basically categorized into the "Product approaches", the "Process approaches", and the "Genre approaches". All of these approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) share the same education objective, which is to teach how to use English well in writing.

In particular, perhaps the most popular approach to university writing education is the genre approach. The genre approach develops academic writers through improving their understanding of writing genres and subsequently, understanding the way of organizing and presenting academic texts in compliance with genre requirements

(Swales & Feak 2012, Tajino et al. 2011). Under this approach, knowing how to properly use the language in relation to the writing's genre is fundamental to successful communication with readers. As Akira Tajino and his co-authors put it:

> It is important for you to recognize that academic success depends not only on the content of your written work but also on the way you write your reports and dissertations. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that without developing the ability to express yourself in the conventions of academic written discourse you will remain voiceless at university. [Tajino et al. 2011, p. 10.]

To help students learn the conventions of academic written discourse in a specific field, many samples of the vocabularies, phrases, sentences, and even paragraphs used in the field are provided as models. Students then learn how to write through imitation; i.e. copying the sample texts and replacing some parts with their own words. In fact, the imitation process is an important part of learning how to write.[2] In the words of John Swales and Christine Feak, "if you can never use standard phraseology and expressions of your field or academia in general, it would be difficult to improve your writing" (2012, 196).

No doubt, "borrowing the words and phrases of others can be a useful language learning strategy" (Swales and Feak 2012, 196), but it can also become a cause of plagiarism. According to the definition stipulated by the Harvard College Writing Program, "if you copy bits and pieces from a source (or several sources), changing a few words here and there without either adequately paraphrasing or quoting directly, the result is *mosaic plagiarism*" (2014). A more serious problem caused by this learning strategy is that students may develop a habit of copying what they regard as the "standard phraseology and expressions" in their field of study, even though the texts may not be appropriate for representing their thoughts. As a result, students may suppress or manipulate their thoughts to suit the texts copied from other sources.

Language education is of course important for learning how to write in a particular language. But the emphasis on the proper use of particular language forms in writing may cause students to think that the way thoughts are expressed is more important than what is expressed. This misunderstanding contributes to creating a serious gap between texts and thoughts, between writing and thinking.

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[2] Learning to write through imitation is also used as a learning strategy in other writing pedagogies. See, for example, the "product approach" advocated by Anita Pincas (1982).

4. Bridging the Gap between Writing and Thinking

So far we have seen the plagiarism problem in a new light, and we have traced its cause to how writing education is implemented in colleges and universities. The problem of plagiarism extends beyond the behaviors suggested by the traditional definition. The problem is not simply about the lack of understanding what is right and what is wrong, nor about the inability to properly distinguish between what is original and what is borrowed. The problem goes far deeper than those symptoms commonly addressed. It is essentially about a gap or mismatch between the thoughts an author wants to communicate and the texts used to communicate the thoughts. This gap amounts to placing cargo destined for Tokyo on a train bound for Osaka.

Standard advice to combat the plagiarism problem, such as citation or paraphrasing with proper acknowledgements, is not helpful to bridging the gap between texts and thoughts. Such advice can help a writer to integrate borrowed texts into a paper, but in order to solve the plagiarism problem, the writer must understand not only how to integrate the borrowed texts into one's own writing, but also how to integrate the thoughts behind the borrowed texts. Unless writing education also addresses this second part, it can offer no satisfactory solution to the plagiarism problem.

The burden of this section, therefore, is to introduce the second part of the writing education – education in logical thinking. In particular, we are going to highlight three important components of logical thinking education in regard to tackling the plagiarism problem. A comprehensive account of such education is beyond the space of this paper.

The need for logical thinking education to combat plagiarism can be immediately seen by understanding that plagiarism runs exactly counter to the development of original and critical thinkers. Thus the most promising strategy to combat plagiarism is to put in place a practical method to develop students into original and critical thinkers. In our view, this can be achieved through developing a set of habits for integrating the ideas in other people's work into one's own arguments. In particular, students should get used to answering the following three questions whenever they are using other people's work.

(1) What is the thesis statement (C) of your research?
(2) What is the thought (T) behind the borrowed texts? If possible, try to summarize it in just one sentence.
(3) How is T related to C?

The following sections discuss the application of these three questions in academic writing.

4.1. What is the thesis statement (C) of your research?

Answering this question is a process of clarification that enables the writer to understand what is particular and special about the research. The thesis statement is central to originality because it is the one-sentence summary that encapsulates the heart of the research idea. Its presence is crucial for integrating the thoughts of borrowed text into the writer's thought structure.

A satisfactory thesis statement must be able to meet three conditions. First, it must have a truth-value, which is to say that it must be either true or false. Second, its truthfulness must be provable. Third, the truthfulness should be objectively verifiable.

There are many available proposals about how to develop a thesis statement (e.g. Tajino et al. 2011; Moore and Cassel 2011). However, through years of practical classroom experiences we have found two effective ways to do it. One is to use a bottom-up approach, which develops the statement from scratch. The other is to use a top-down approach, which develops the statement through a summarization process. In this paper, we shall only discuss the top-down approach.

The top-down approach is very effective in helping the writer clarify the originality of his or her research. Following this approach, the writer needs to summarize the entire research in just one sentence. This task would be very difficult if the writer were not very clear about the exact nature of that research. During the process of summarization, the writer focuses on the research ideas that are really crucial and special, and eliminates those that are not. Once the writer is very clear about the central idea of the research, the summarization task becomes very straightforward. Clarifying the thesis statement in this way allows the writer to see what is really special and original in the research.

4.2. What is the thought (T) behind the borrowed texts?

Answering this question will help the writer understand how the thought behind the borrowed texts can be used in his or her work. Before learning how to integrate thoughts from sources into one's own work, it is important to understand clearly what those thoughts are in the context of the original work.

This is an important part of critical thinking training, as it focuses on the thoughts behind the text rather than the text itself. When trying to figure out what the thought

is, it is necessary to look beyond the sentence or paragraph that expresses the thought, to the sentences, paragraphs, and sections around it. A broader view will help to understand the context in which the thought was formed. Furthermore, it is important to understand the thesis statement of the source work and its relationship with the thoughts expressed in the text to be borrowed.

An effective way of clarifying T is to describe it in one sentence, in basically the same way that the main research idea is distilled into one sentence in the thesis statement. The ability to describe T in just one sentence reveals a clear understanding of the idea. A clear understanding of T will enable the writer to express it in other words (paraphrase), thus avoiding a direct copy of the text.

4.3. How is T related to C?

The question about the relationship between T and C falls into the most crucial part of the training in logical thinking education. Although this question specifically asks about the role of T in the author's paper, it is basically a question about how to establish a logical relation connecting one statement with another. Thus answering the question helps the author not only to integrate cited material into the structure of his or her paper, but also to understand the logical relation between T and the structure of thoughts in the paper.

Learning how to build a logical relation linking two statements is important to develop convincing support for the thesis statement. Having a thesis statement is surely important, but it is not enough. A recent finding of research misconduct at Japan's Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (Riken) demonstrates the importance of convincing support. A recent publication in the journal *Nature* (Obokata et al. 2014) was retracted after Riken's internal investigation found, among other problems, that some images in one of the papers appear to be copied from the lead investigator's doctoral dissertation (Ishii et al. 2014). Although many questions remain about this research, the data apparently copied from an earlier publication fail to provide convincing support for this research.

It is of primary importance to understand the relationship between the ideas expressed in the source material (T) and the writer's own thesis (C). In particular, T can basically play either one of two roles in the paper. Either T is a supporting premise for the thesis statement, or T is a counter argument to the thesis statement. Although T could be also used to provide certain background information, if T's presence in the paper does not make any contribution to either one of these two

roles, it may not be needed in the paper.

If T is a supporting premise for the thesis statement, then whether T is true or false will have an important impact on the truth or falsity of that thesis statement. When developing supporting premises for the thesis statement, unless all the premises are true, the thesis statement cannot be true. Thus if T is a supporting premise, it must be proven true. For example, when the Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak came out on March 24 to make the announcement about the fate of the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, he cited the analysis of the satellite communication provided by Inmarsat and the AAIB and concluded that "MH370 flew along the southern corridor, and that its last position was in the middle of the Indian Ocean, west of Perth. ... according to this new data, flight MH370 ended in the southern Indian Ocean." Since that analysis was not yet proven, however, it provides dubious support for the conclusion. In our view, the prime minister should have waited until the analysis is proven true before citing it as the basis of his conclusion. In the time of writing this paper, no plane has been found despite a massive and thorough search in the area.

The following example illustrates how other people's works can be cited to support a writer's conclusion. In their 2001 presentation on graduate student writing, Fionnuala O'Connell and Lixian Jin suggest – as background to their other arguments – that when writing the literature review section of a paper, scholars must engage critically with the publications they review. To support this conclusion, O'Connell and Jin incorporate short quotations from a number of other writing educators into their paper.

> Researchers believe that a review should make a critical analysis of the previous literature. The literature should 'make critical compilations of previous research' (Cuba 1993), 'make a critical assessment of the reviewed literature' (Kramer et al. 1995) and 'develop a critical attitude' (O'Donoghue 1997). In order to achieve a critical analysis, researchers stress the importance of writing an argument in a literature review, which should 'carry forward arguments and counter-arguments' (Cryer 1996), 'present a coherent argument' (Hitchcock 1996), and present 'reference to studies that support the ongoing argument,' (Locke et al. 1997). [O'Connell and Jin 2001]

In this paragraph O'Connell and Jin quote three publications (Cuba 1993, Kramer et al. 1995, and O'Donoghue 1997) whose statement of the goal of a literature review

supports their own conclusion that the literature review must engage critically with the publications it cites. Likewise, they cite three additional publications (Cryer 1996, Hitchcock 1996, and Locke et al. 1997) whose framing of an author's task to use the arguments of the cited work as support for their own argument is similar to their own position. O'Connell and Jin not only show the breadth of work similar to their own but also frame the similarities as support for their own work.

Ideas from previous publication may also be cited as counter-arguments, showing an argument that contrasts or disagrees with the author's own thesis. If T is a counter argument, then the truth of T will falsify the thesis statement. Of course the purpose of citing a counter argument is not to falsify the thesis statement but to strengthen it by showing its superiority to other possible analyses. That is to say that T needs to be proven false in order for the thesis statement to be true. Thus the writer's task in dealing with T as a counter argument is to falsify it. For example, a prosecuting attorney may cite the words of a witness to show how that testimony fits the prosecutor's theory of the crime.

> Mr. Jones says that he saw the defendant, Mr. Smith, on Tenth Street at eight o'clock on the morning of the crime. Mr. Smith would have had the opportunity to commit the crime on Ninth Street at eight thirty.

The prosecuting attorney may cite the testimony of the defendant, along with evidence showing that it is false in order to weaken the defendant's argument and strengthen his own.

> The defendant, Mr. Smith, says that he was at home at the time the crime was committed. But Mr. Jones saw him on the street around the time of the crime, and none of Mr. Smith's neighbors saw him at home that day.

In the same way, an academic writer may refer to the work of earlier scholars, showing how that work supports their own argument or else offering a counter-argument to competing theories.

5. Conclusion

Plagiarism is a serious problem confronting academic writers. The problem is not solely an issue of writers' ethics. Definitions of the problem of plagiarism that

focus on writers' honesty or regard for intellectual property suggest limited solutions to the problem of plagiarism. For instructors, these solutions are limited to forbidding certain practices and attempting to locate violations. For writers, the solutions amount to using quotation or paraphrase and citing sources appropriately, or else not using the work of previous scholars. While mastering the forms of quotation, paraphrase, and citation are necessary for academic writers, they are not sufficient to allow writers to engage with others while avoiding plagiarism.

This paper examined a form of plagiarism that results from writers focused on the words and other surface features of academic writing, rather than the thoughts that underlie the texts. Writing pedagogy that focuses on mastery of academic style and form, particularly in the teaching of English-language writing to speakers of other languages, diverts learners from the goal of developing and communicating thought. Over and above language mastery, the goal of writing education should be to develop abilities in independent critical thinking and communication, traditional goals of university education. Therefore writing education should have two goals: mastering language forms, and understanding logical argumentation.

In order to bridge the gap between writing and thinking, student writers should develop a set of habits for understanding the thoughts of others and integrating them into written work in appropriate ways. We suggest three questions that academic writers should be accustomed to asking whenever dealing with the work of others. (1) What is the thesis statement of my research? (2) What are the thoughts behind the texts I am engaging with? (3) How are those thoughts related to my thesis statement?

Citing previously published work may be helpful either as supporting premises for the author's own arguments, or as counter-argument. In order for a thesis statement to be true, the premises supporting it must be true. Therefore, when citing previous work as support, that work must be shown to be true. In contrast, when citing counter-arguments, these contrary views should be shown to be false.

By stressing skills of logical thinking alongside mastery of the forms of academic writing, writing education can help learners develop into original and critical thinkers as well as effective communicators.

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