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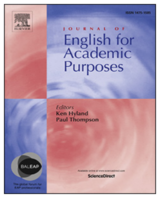

Improper textual borrowing practices: Evidence from Iranian applied linguistics journal aricles

Alireza Jalilifar [a, *], Parvin Soltani [b], Zohreh G. Shooshtari [b]

[a] Dept. of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran
[b] Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran

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The current study investigated inappropriate textual borrowings, in Iranian English scholarly journals of applied linguistics. They were examined in terms of their frequency and patterns as well as the way they function in rhetorical organization of the texts. The originality check was performed on the Introduction sections of 115 journal articles, using the text matching software (iThenticate) along with human inspection to exclude irrelevant or coincidental matches. The findings indicate that nearly one third of the corpus contained more than 20 percent matched words. Analyzing the matched sources revealed four patterns of source misuse among which the use of secondary citations was the most frequently occurring pattern. The instances of illegitimate borrowing were also analyzed in relation to the macro-structural configuration of the introduction in light of Swales' (1990, 2004) CARS model. The bulk of plagiarized content was traced to the opening move (Establishing a territory) reflecting the academic authors' challenge in setting up a unique context for their research study. The findings have implications for scholarly writers and journal publishers as well as EAP teachers and students to develop a deeper understanding of textual borrowing practices and the necessity to incorporate education into prevention and regulation.

1. Introduction

Academic writing is scholarly structured text which is written for other scholars within a specific discourse community. It aims to transmit new knowledge by reviewing past writings and combining them with the author's perspectives to create original, new pieces of text. In fact, "by bringing other voices into the text" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 31), any academic manuscript demonstrates some degree of intertextuality in explicit or implicit ways. Although the intertextuality practices may be challenging to students or even academic writers, their proper use is a key to successful academic achievement (Shaw & Pecorari, 2013). However, when citing sources, a writer, if inexpert in "the embedding of arguments in networks of references" (Hyland, 2000, p. 21), might resort to academic dishonesty or plagiarism.

Textual borrowing, as a pervasive phenomenon, exists in all academic disciplines, since in any academic genre writers cannot simply avoid using other people's texts (Pecorari, 2008). However, the explosion of text production due to the internet and other electronic facilities has made it easy to copy and paste textual materials and import them into one's own writing

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: ar.jalilifar@gmail.com (A. Jalilifar).

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(Flowerdew & Li, 2007a). Thus, plagiarism as academic misconduct, or as intellectual dishonesty, is generally defined as textual borrowing "without appropriate attribution" (Pecorari, 2008, p. 4) and in a strict sense is described as "literary theft, stealing (by copying) the words or ideas of someone else and passing them off as one's own without crediting the source" (Park, 2003, p. 472). Clarke (2006) sets out four preconditions inherent in the notion of plagiarism: *publication* (copied words or ideas should be presented to others), *content* (some parts of the new work are borrowed from others' prior works), *appropriation* (the copied work is inferred by the reader as the writer's original claim), and *lack of credit given* (no appropriate attribution is made to the originator of the work).

Rooted in social, cultural, and political grounds (Scollon, 1995) and varied within academic disciplines (Sutherland-Smith & Carr, 2005), in second language (L2) writing, textual borrowing practices are viewed from a wider perspective allowing other features of legitimate intertextuality to be examined more closely (see Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Campbell, 1990; Chanock, 2008; Flowerdew & Li, 2007a; Keck, 2006; Park, 2003; Pecorari, 2003, 2008; Shi, 2004, 2008; Walker, 2010; Warn, 2006). Pecorari (2003) focuses on the idea of *transparency* which denotes "signaling the relationship between source and citing text accurately" (p. 324). Such forms as *not signaling quotations*, *absence of citations*, or *secondary citations* are the most prominent forms of opaque source reported in her study. Likewise, Walker (2010), in a broader perspective, surveyed the type, extent, and frequency of plagiarism in 1000 student scripts using Turnitin, the plagiarism detection software. The identified borrowing incidents in the corpus were similar to those of Pecorari's, but with a different coding used, namely, *sham* (copying with the source cited but without quotations), *verbatim* (copying without citation) and *purloining* (copying the work of another student). The findings revealed that over one quarter of scripts contained some form of plagiarism particularly in sham and verbatim categories.

The violations of intertextuality practices have been observed among academic authors as well as to students. However, the extent of research about academics' plagiarism has been limited compared to the many studies on academic dishonesty among university students (Martin, 2007, 2016). In addition to bad publicity, the rise in number of plagiarizing authors, according to Clarke, "results in accelerated progression within the discipline for *less fit* academics, to the detriment of *more fit* academics" (Clarke, 2006, p. 98). Sun (2013) examined this issue in 600 published journal articles among various disciplines by the use of Turnitin, as well as human raters. The findings suggested that incidents of plagiarism are significantly fewer in social science journals compared to other disciplines, and multi-author articles showed higher consecutive text-matching score. In a similar study, Sun and Yang (2015) investigated the academic authors' paraphrasing strategies, citation patterns, and self-plagiarism in a more limited corpus in the fields of language and education. They identified 30 different types of paraphrasing strategies, including substantial copying of texts from an author's previous publications. Bretag and Carapiet (2007) also reported an extensive amount of language re-use and self plagiarism among Australian academic authors.

During the past decade, a number of studies on plagiarism have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of antiplagiarism detection services such as Plagi Serv, Turnitin or iThenticate (Dahl, 2007; Do Ba et al., 2017; Park, 2003; Savage, 2004; Stapleton, 2011; Sun, 2013; Walker, 2010; Youmans, 2011). These tools with their massive electronic databases of billions of websites, books, and journals are able to examine the originality of submitted manuscripts or papers and provide the students and writers with feedback reports. Despite some demerits, research has shown that the application of such detection services coupled with education can potentially be effective in decreasing plagiarism rates (Dahl, 2007; Park, 2004; Savage, 2004; Stapleton, 2011). However, in particular academic settings such as Iran, not all manuscripts might be plausibly tested for plagiarism by credible detection tools or, at least, publishers do not appear to obey a uniform policy when examining the originality of articles. Thus, it is essential to examine the academic writers' accounts of textual borrowings in a specific EFL (English as a Foreign Language) setting and within a specific discipline, as the elusive concept of plagiarism might be viewed differently in different settings (Angelil-Carter, 2000), There has been a soaring increase in Iranian scientific production, during the past two decades. This upsurge of scientific publications owes much to substantial public and private investment in expanding post graduate degree programs as well as research institutions so as to promote scientific society. However, publication quality has not been matched by such rapid expansion in higher education. Due to such factors as lack of enough attention to academic ethics, deficiency in English literacy skills, or other educational pressures (e.g., the pressure to finish a postgraduate project on time), academic members or postgraduate students resort to plagiarism by copying and pasting others' words or ideas without proper attributions. Their manuscripts, which might not meet the Western academic standards, are published in local journals with less strong supervision for such impropriety. This has led to a low visibility rate of Iranian journals compared to their international counterparts (see Davarpana & Behrouzfar, 2009; Noroozi Chakoli, Hassanzadeh, & Nourmohammadi, 2008). Further, Iran has been reported, after China, to hold the second rank in the number of retracted papers (SJR, 2015, as cited in Ataie-Ashtiani, 2017).

It is important to note that the intertextuality practices of academia, as compared to student plagiarism, have been a less researched issue in past literature. Academic misconduct has mostly been investigated in international journals across various disciplines (see Jamali, Ghazinoory, & Sadeghi, 2014; Sun, 2013), or in medical sciences (Schein & Paladugu, 2001). However, little is known about textual borrowing practices in social sciences in general and applied linguistics in particular. This study explores the incidents of inappropriate language re-use and misappropriations in applied linguistics articles published in Iranian scholarly journals based on the similarity report issued by plagiarism detection software. Documenting the extent of plagiaristic behavior of scholars and exploring the most common patterns of unconventional intertextuality can cast light on the dimensions of academic dishonesty, particularly in, though not necessarily limited to, an Iranian context among those academics deemed to be proficient English writers. Another purpose is to analyze the plagiarized content of articles in relation to the rhetorical structure of the text. To be more specific, the misappropriated