

Korean University Students' Awareness of Plagiarism in Summary Writings

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The present study examines Korean university students' awareness of plagiarism in summary writings. Twenty nine university students were asked to write English summaries of an English source text. They were then given the instruction on what is plagiarism and why they should avoid it. Finally, they were again asked to write the second summary writings of the same source text. The degrees of exact copying in the first and second summaries were compared based on the meaningful unit. The results showed that a 3-hour class session, which mainly focused on the warnings against plagiarism, had an enormous effect on the reduction of the copying degree in students' summary writing. The students illustrated the ability to summarize the text in their own words in the second summaries. They mainly copied in the first summary because they lacked the understanding of the notion of plagiarism. It was suggested that students should be informed of the concept of plagiarism and be trained to paraphrase and write in their own words.

Key words: plagiarism, writing instruction

1. Introduction

About three years ago, there was an incident where the minister of Korean Education had to step down from his office. One of the reasons, along with other bigger reasons, was his plagiarism in his book published 20 years ago. His moral standards were seriously doubted and attacked by the political figures and media. At that time, I heard my American colleague say, "I don't know about his other problems. But as far as plagiarism is concerned, he should be forthright and say that 20 years ago, it was a part of Korean writing custom and thus accepted usage."

I think he is right. About two decades ago, maybe even a decade ago,

plagiarism especially in academic publication was very common. The line blurred between what the author said and what the approved international scholars said. The author was assumed to be an authority himself because he had accomplished much to an extent to publish his own book. And this authority was free to mix his ideas with those of other authorities without citing the sources. In fact, in Korea, it was not a concern of readers who said what. Korean readers and students were totally satisfied and pleased as long as they could acquire valuable knowledge from a book. The originator of some words and sentences were not their concern at all.

Then what is plagiarism? According to *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* (1998), to plagiarize is “to take (words, ideas, etc) from someone else’s work and use them in one’s own work without admitting one has done so. If you plagiarize at university in Britain or the US, you may be refused a degree” (p. 1022). And the old *Oxford English Dictionary* defines plagiarism as “the action or practice of plagiarizing; the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one’s own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another” (1971, p. 2192). These two dictionaries deliver a very negative attitude towards plagiarism with the warning of expulsion from school in the Longman and the word of ‘wrongful’ in the Oxford dictionary.

Then how is the meaning of plagiarism described in Korean dictionaries? Interestingly enough, there was a distinguished difference in looking at this behavior between old and new Korean dictionaries. For example, an old *Korean Language Dictionary* by Dr. Lee (1961) said that plagiarism is the action of taking other people’s poems, theories, sentences, etc., and presenting them as one’s own (p. 3063, translated). The notion of taking others’ work and presenting them as one’s own is already bad, however, there is no direct negative comments about it in the dictionary. In current *Yon-sei Korean Dictionary* (1998), however, a negative view on the issue was strongly added as in “...secretly taking other people’s writing, songs, theories, etc., and presenting them as one’s own. Ex: We consider plagiarism stealing, and we contempt and criticize it” (translated, Emphasis mine, p. 1972). The new Korean dictionary has a new addition of the word, ‘secretly’, and a very morally charged example.

This is a change. With the awareness of right of authorship, and many

lawsuits over plagiarism, copyright, and right of authorship, Koreans are now sensitive about the issue. This sensitivity especially applies to the entertainment industry, from TV dramas to popular songs. Not only are Koreans now cautious not to copy others' work, but also do they look for others' stealing of their own work.

However, Korean schools still seem to remain remote from this phenomenon. School has always been least subject to change. Korean students copy from various kinds of sources from books and magazines to internet. And it has been allowed. More precisely, it has been ignored because plagiarism is not a concern of teachers in academic settings in Korea.

However, plagiarism has been one of the central issues in the west. Western teachers get indignant over foreign students copying behavior because to them it is a more of moral issue rather than a pedagogical issue. Most western teachers consider students' plagiarism a personal insult to them and think that plagiarizers deserve to fail the course because they deceived and lied to the teacher and therefore broke the "moral code" (Kolic, 1983, p. 143). Foreign students, more specifically, Asian students get then confused at these western teachers' emotionally charged reactions.

More informed researchers and language professionals now have enough knowledge on the possible reasons that Asian students may copy. In fact, the phenomenon of plagiarism by Asian students has a very complex nature. It is a combination of their social and cultural values, scholarly tradition, educational system, prior writing experience, developmental features, and possibly, morality (Currie, 1998; Deckert, 1993; Dryden, 1999; Kolic, 1983; Matalene, 1985; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Pennycook, 1996; Sherman, 1992). Based on existing literature, this study attempts to explore the nature of plagiarism in a Korean educational context. There has been little research which looked at Korean students' copying behaviors in detail.

The present investigation examines Korean university students' exact copying behavior reflected in their L2. Their first English summary was compared to the second English summary in terms of degree to which the exact copies were utilized. Students were asked to write the second English summary after they had received an instruction upon the definition of plagiarism and its danger, and ways to avoid it. They were also provided with the two model English summaries by English native

speakers on the same source text. The comparison of the first summary without any instruction on plagiarism, and the second summary with the instruction was carried out in order to determine the degrees of exact copies in their writing. The result was expected to explore the nature of plagiarism demonstrated by Korean university students.

2. Literature Review

It is easy that western instructors condemn ESL/EFL students for their frequent plagiarizing behaviors. To teachers, those students are liars with the impure intention to deceive and mock their teachers' ability to identify their plagiarism. However, for the two decades, there has been awareness that the ESL/EFL students plagiarism should be treated differently than that of English native speaker students. Many possible reasons that the ESL/EFL students may copy have been discussed.

2.1. Cultural Differences

First, cultural values, namely, individualism of the west and collectivism of the east were brought up to compositionists' attention. The main point is that as Gregg (1986) stated, Americans think highly of "individual autonomy, inventiveness...the individual personality" (p. 355). And in American scholarly tradition, "...authorities of the past are viewed as guides rather than models. No theory is seen as incontrovertible, and all theories, regardless of the high eminence from which they issue, must be tested in the marketplace of ideas" (p. 355). Therefore, the western tradition cherishes "a person's divergent thinking" (Deckert, 1993, p. 132). A writer is expected to write something new.

By contrast, in Asia, the individual expressive needs have to be sacrificed for the welfare of the society, and the theories and statements of recognized authorities cannot be easily challenged (Gregg, 1986; Tsao 1983; Yang 1983). This tradition promotes "close allegiance to a few acknowledged authorities with resulting convergence of perspective and greater social harmony" (Deckert, 1993, p. 132). Therefore, Asian scholars in the past were not supposed to raise their voice. Rather, they were expected to familiarize themselves with, conceptualize, and restate the theories and statements of approved authorities (Tsao, 1983; Yang, 1983),

which caused plagiarism by western sense.

2.2. Literary Convention

Another possible reason for students' plagiarism is the literary convention of Asia. In the past, when Asian scholars wrote, they hardly documented the sources because it was not part of their literary convention. Though Kolich (1983) was discussing a sales letter, what he said also applies to the notion of ownership in Asia. That is, once something was "written and used, it would be common property, and other members of that community could use it without disgrace or shame. In fact, the very notion of dishonesty ... would be absurd" (p. 146).

Also, in the past, knowledge was confined to a small circle of academia. And in that circle, everybody was supposed to obtain knowledge from the approved authorities. It was shared knowledge. Therefore, even though there was no citation, a knowledgeable reader would figure out where the sources came from. And if a reader was not able to identify the source, it was his fault, which is the ignorance of his knowledge in the field. In addition, those who were not able to identify the source were easily excluded in the scholarly circle. More easily put, "I won't give you the source, and if you are not able to identify it, you don't deserve to be one of us. You are too ignorant." It functioned as a gatekeeping device.

2.3. Students' Perceptions towards Plagiarism

The third reason for committing plagiarism is that students' perceptions towards it are different culture to culture. In the west, plagiarism "generally conveys the notions of cheating and dishonesty, or carelessness in the use of sources." (Deckert, 1993). However, 'cheating' and 'dishonesty' at least do not seem to fit in Asian contexts. In Deckert's (1993) study, when asked about their views on why it would be wrong to engage in plagiarism, the first-year university students in Hong Kong replied, "because I'm not learning much when I just copy" (p. 140). They reported that copying was not fair to them because they were not trying hard enough, which hindered their language learning. Other statements such as, "When I write this way, I'm unfair to the writer of the original passage because I'm taking the credit that he/she really deserves for the

words and ideas," "When I write this way, I'm unfair to my classmates because most of them worked harder by writing in their own words, but I mainly copied and yet get the same or even better grade," and "...I'm unfair to my teacher because he/she is trying to teach me to write well, but I'm not cooperating" (p. 135) are underrepresented in their response. Their concern was confined to the progress of their language learning instead of the consideration of the original writer, their classmates, or their teacher.

Also, for those students who plagiarize, Hong Kong students selected the words, "weak, immature, hurried, inexperienced, lazy and confused" (p. 140). Such words as *dishonest*, *untruthful*, and *deceitful*, which would have been dominant in the west, were underselected. Again, the moral aspect of plagiarism was not recognized by Hong Kong freshmen.

2.4. Practices of Learning

In Asia, they have a way of learning. Students imitate, repeat, and memorize the authority and this is considered essential (Dryden, 1999; Pennycook 1994, 1996). As Marton, Dallalba, and Tse Lai Kun (1994) maintained, this practice of learning, memorization is different from rote learning. Here, the memorization is "a means to deepen and develop understanding" (cited in Pennycook, 1994, p. 281). Because of western influence, this educational practice is now changing, but until recent past, this method was regarded the common way to expertise. The premise of this educational method is that students need some kind of 'silent period' (emphasis mine.) where they imitate, repeat, memorize, and thus internalize the approved material. That is a learning process. And once they go beyond it, they can be original and be an authority themselves. Therefore, students copy in order to learn. It is a learning process for them. That is why copying is, in Dryden's (1999) term, "no big deal" (p. 78) among students in such countries as Korea, China, Japan, etc.

2.5. Prior Writing Experience

Asian students lack of writing experience is another source of their tendency to copy. As Dryden (1999) and Egginton (1987) pointed out, writing instruction is almost non-existent in Asian secondary curriculum. As they are not taught and trained how to write, a writing task, whether

it is in English or Korean, is not easy for the students to accomplish. Not knowing where to turn to for help, students may copy from sources.

2.6. Unbalance between Assignments and Linguistic Proficiency

Copying behaviors can also be induced by mismatches between students academic assignments and their still developing linguistic proficiency (Currie, 1998). According to Bloch and Chi (1995), second language students are often put in a position where they are “expected to produce high-quality research papers in a language they have barely mastered” (p. 238). In order to be accepted as a competent member of an academic community, those learners who are cognitively and intelligently mature, but linguistically deficient may use the effective strategy, copying. They understand and know the material, but in an attempt to paraphrase it, they get to convey the information wrong, or even when they get it right, it is not written in appropriate language. It is also possible that understanding the material is already demanding for the learners, and writing about it is much more difficult. In either way, students get to realize that their linguistic competence is not good enough for the community and plagiarize some texts from sources. As Currie (1998) stated, for them, it is “textual borrowing as survival strategy” (p. 7). They copy in order to survive in school in English speaking countries. Also, as has been observed, as students’ proficiency increases, the degree to which they copy may decrease.

2.7. Learning Process

Lastly, copying phrases from sources can be a developmental feature in language learning. Not being able to express what he or she intends to write, a learner may fall back on the copying strategy. In addition, a language learner may want to use the same words, phrases, and even sentences as in the text in order to feel that they have learned some linguistic items. This does not have to be a culturally biased behavior. As Currie’s (1998) subject reported in the interview,

“I like to stay with the terms that is written from the book. That’s how I got to make use of the terms...The point is if I keep on using the language that never be ours in the book then I will never be able

to learn the more specific terms.” (Currie, 1998, p. 11)

A language learner may want to try out the new words they came across in the book, even though that the copying behavior may be inappropriate in terms of time, task, and context.

In her study, Currie (1998) made a very interesting and useful observation. The same subject, Diana, almost copied many portions of the textbook in order to pass the course, and she received better grades when she copied. Currie claimed that the grader, who was a teaching assistant in this case, “unintentionally, reinforced Diana’s reliance on copying” (p. 11). She criticized that the TA did not notice if Diana was copying. On the contrary, the TA reported that Diana’s English ability had improved significantly and ironically rewarded her with better grades.

The present study started by asking these questions: what if Diana had been stopped by the TA? What if she was told and warned that she should and must not copy? Would it make a difference in the degree of copying in her writing? If so, to what extent?

The current investigation attempts to answer the above questions. Thirty Korean university students were asked to write an English summary given an English source text (See Appendix). The students were then taught what is plagiarism, why they should avoid it, and how they can avoid it. Lastly, they were again asked to write a second English summary from the same source text. The copying degrees of the first English summaries and the second English summaries were compared. With the result, this study explores a complex nature of plagiarism in an educational context in Korea at tertiary level. As Currie (1998) and Pennycook (1994) pointed out, the context becomes crucial in interpreting data. This project looks at Korean university students, who are trying to learn and write English in an EFL learning environment.

3. Methodology

Twenty nine university students were asked to write English summaries of an English source text (Appendix). They were then given the instruction on what is plagiarism, and why they should avoid it. They were again asked to write the second summary writings of the same source text. The degrees of exact copying in the first and second

summaries were compared based on the meaningful unit.

3.1. Subjects

The subjects were second-year university students in Seoul who enrolled in a writing class taught by this researcher. There were 29 students, male 10, female 19. Initially 40 students were involved in this project; however, those who participated in every step of the procedure was 29. They were mostly English majors with 4 non-English majors. The writing course was mandatory for sophomore English majors. Most of the students reported that they had no prior English writing instruction. Yet, most students in this study seemed highly motivated to learn how to write in English and did their task in a sincere and earnest manner.

3.2. Materials and Procedures

The present research study was designed to be naturally incorporated into the writing class. In the fourth week on the syllabus, the students were supposed to learn how to write a summary. Summary writing was chosen as a research tool because it was thought that the researcher could easily detect the degree of copying from the common source text.

3.2.1. The First Summary of English Source Text

First, the students were provided with an English source text (Appendix) at the end of a class session. The text was about Japanese distorted textbooks, a topic that the students were all familiar with and had some sentiments and opinions about. The number of words in the English source text was 436, and the English level of the text was judged appropriate for the second year university students.

The students took the English source text home, instructed only to read it and be read to discuss it during the next class. Allowing students to take the source text home would allow them the best chance to review and understand the content before engaging in the writing of a summary. In order to prevent any students from rehearsing their summaries, the fact that they would be writing a summary was withheld from them. The English source text was discussed with students in the next class session to verify students' reading comprehension. Next, without forewarning, students were asked to write an in-class summary

of the English source text. They were told that their summaries would be collected and reviewed by the professor later on. They were also told that they could take as much time as they wanted, and that they could leave whenever they were done with the task. Most of the students would not leave the classroom until the researcher finally told them to submit their summary writing. In general, the students spent about 75 minutes on writing.

3.2.2. The Instruction on Plagiarism and the Second Summary

The first summaries of the English source text by students were all collected and examined. The phrases and sentences that had been exactly copied from the source text were identified and highlighted by the researcher. In the subsequent class session, the researcher returned the students' summaries with the copied parts highlighted in red.

The students then had a lecture and discussion upon the definition and danger of plagiarism, and reasons for avoiding it. They were also provided with the two model summaries written by English native speakers on the same source text. The two English native speaker instructors in the same university had been asked to write a model summary in advance. In addition, the students compared students' summaries from last year with their own.

The lecture took the whole 2-hour class session and 1-hour class session. Having had the understanding and warning of plagiarism, the students were again asked to write the second summary of the same English source text. But this time they brought the assignment home. There could be an argument about the research methodology due to the unbalanced time and environment allocated to the second English summary. However, this investigation wanted to see how Korean university students perform English summary writing when they have enough time and awareness. For example, can they avoid copying behavior when they have time? Do they have enough linguistic ability to do that? The students had one and a half days before the following class.

3.3. Analysis

The degrees of students' exact copy was measured based on the meaningful units. Here, the exact copy literally means the phrases copied exactly the same from the source text without any kind of altering. Only

the exact copy was counted for this study. Any kind of patchwriting, copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes (Howard, 1993, p. 233) was not counted as exact copy.

The frequencies of students' exact copy were analyzed based on the meaningful unit. The meaningful unit in this study means the meaningful chunk of about 4 to 5 words. The initial analysis of sample summaries revealed that Korean students tended to borrow parts of the source text by 4 to 5-word-length of chunk, which has a meaning in its own. Therefore, the reasonable length and the meaning played an important role in deciding a meaningful unit.

First, the researcher and two graduate students divided the source text by the meaningful unit. The following (1) demonstrates the first paragraph of the English source text divided by the meaningful unit. (See the appendix for the entire marking.)

- (1) Amid the mounting controversy / over new Japanese history textbooks, / whose contents deviate / from the version of Asian history / accepted by other countries, / several displays of public indignation / have arisen./

Next, the student summaries were divided by the meaningful unit, and the frequency of exactly copied parts were identified. The ratio of the number of exactly copied units to the number of total units written in a student's writing was calculated.

4. Results and Discussion

The results showed that after the instruction on plagiarism, the frequency of the use of exact copy had drastically diminished (Table 1). The average percentage of exact copy in the first English summaries was 54%. That is, on average, over half of the composition consisted of phrases copied exactly from the source text. Remember that exact copy literally refers to the exact copy of the text. When even only one word had been changed, it was not counted as exact copy. Therefore, the frequency is very high. However, the average percentage of exact copy in the second English summaries was reduced to 8%. That is, in the second

summaries, phrases (units) from the source text comprised only 8% of students' writing.

Table 1. Average % of Exact Copy in Students' Summaries

	Average % of exact copy
1st summaries	54
2nd summaries	8

One of the interesting results is that in the first summaries, the range of percentages of copying spread from 0% to 100% (Table 2). That is, we had a student who did not copy at all on one end, and other students who copied everything on the other end.

Table 2. Distribution of Exact Copy

#of sum. \ Range	0-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100 (%)
1st sum.	20%	14%	28%	3%	35%
2nd sum.	93%	7%	0%	0%	0%

In the first summaries, 35 % of students copied 81 to 100 %. However, it is also noticeable that 20% of students copied less than 20%. Forty five percents were between. It was also revealed from the additional analysis that over half of the students (54%) copied over half of their entire summaries.

On the other hand, in the second summaries, the range of copying percentages became much narrower. The range was from 0 to 24%. That is, the student who copied the most used copied phrases which constitutes 24% of the total phrases in his writing. 93% of the students showed less than 20% of copying in their second summary writing. It was also interesting to observe the change of two students who copied 100% from the source text in the first summary. One student cut down the degree of copying to 24% in the second summary. The other showed no copying at all in the second summary.

Now, what do the results say to us?

First, the 3-hour class session on plagiarism had an enormous effect on the reduction of the copying degree in students' summary writing. I was personally very surprised by the result because the effect was much

more stronger than I thought. I had, of course, expected some degrees of reduction in students' copying, but not this much. My students used to whine to me, "I cannot think of other ways of saying this. The best sentence is already there in the text, and I just can't find the better words," and I had believed it might have been true in some sense. The results, however, showed that most university students in the present study were able to summarize the text in their own words. They had the ability.

Then why did they mainly copy in the first summaries? First of all, it does not seem that they had an intention to deceive, mock, or lie to the teacher. The students knew that their summary writing was going to be read by the professor. And the time they took to accomplish the task was more than an hour, and their attitudes looked very sincere. These were students who worked very hard to carry out the task. Therefore, copying, at least in this context, cannot be a moral issue as it might have been in a western context.

It seems that the students heavily copied mainly due to their educational background and lack of writing experience. As mentioned before, writing instruction is generally ignored in the secondary curriculum, and even in the university curriculum in Korea. These students had never been trained to write a summary properly. Not knowing how to go about it, most students copied from here and there in the source text. And they were pleased to see their product. And when they were given the feedback with a lot of red underlines from the teacher, the students looked genuinely shocked. As similar to Deckert's (1993) subjects, these students were found to have never been given a warning of copying, or an explanation of plagiarism before. They did not know copying was something that they should and must avoid.

Also, we can point out that the students lacked confidence in their writing ability in the first summary. They were not sure if they could summarize in English with their limited linguistic proficiency, again, maybe because of lack of their prior writing experience. When they did not feel confident enough, they might have turned to the copying strategy.

However, after one warning session on plagiarism, they proved in the second summary that they generally had the ability to paraphrase in their own words. Therefore, the fact that the students had never been warned, stopped, caught, explained, and informed of plagiarism seems to

be the strongest force which makes students copy. Because of students' lack of awareness of the notion of plagiarism, they may unnecessarily and unintentionally copy. This ignorance of plagiarism seems to play the largest role in students' copying behavior.

5. Conclusions

The students in this study were simply warned in the class that they should and must avoid plagiarism, and the result showed that their degree of copying from the source text was significantly reduced in the second summary writing. Therefore, unawareness of the concept of plagiarism was found to be one major source of Korean students' copying. Hence, as Currie (1998) previously pointed out, students need to be informed of the fact that copying is not allowed in academic settings. They should be taught that copying or plagiarizing can bring dangerous consequences such as misunderstanding, reprimands, course failure, and refused degree. They should know that copying or plagiarism is something that they should not or must not commit. In order to prevent unfortunate consequences, students need to be exposed to writing from sources and the ways to go about it. The presentation of model summary writings was found to be effective. Further, as Campbell (1990) maintained, students need necessary practice to learn how to synthesize source material, paraphrase the text, and write in their own words.

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Appendix

Korea Experiences Widespread Reactions to Japanese Textbooks

Amid the mounting controversy/ over new Japanese history textbooks,/ whose contents deviate/ from the version of Asian history/ accepted by other countries,/ several displays of public indignation/ have arisen./

On April 10,/ about 2,500 students marched/ through the streets of Seoul/ to protest the Japanese textbooks./ They carried banners and signs/ which read/ "Correct errors/ in the distorted history textbooks/ right away!"/ and/ "Shame on unconscionable Japan!"/ The students,/ accompanied by many of their parents and teachers,/ held a protest rally/ in their school playground/ before embarking on the 7km march./ All of the students wore red ribbons/ on their chests/ during the 30 minute rally./

Primary and high schools across the country/ engaged in a special program/ to educate students/ about the truth of Korean-Japanese history./ The Korean Federation of Teachers' Association (KFTA) organized/ the one hour long class,/ and suggested that it be taught/ during the week of April 9 to 13. / The primary motive of the class/ is to present the truth to students,/ even though such facts may kindle/ anti-Japanese sentiment among students./

Aside from students,/ other citizens have joined the protest, /using the Internet/ as an contrivance to call/ for Japan to revise its textbooks./ Over a hundred disgruntled Koreans/ have posted messages/ on recently opened anti-Japanese textbook websites./ To add insult to injury,/ Japan was voted the worst country/ on an Internet ranking website/ -- due in no small part/ to the mobilization of Korea's high on-line population./ Further, Korean Internet users/ have banded together/ and targeted websites of Japanese organizations,/ overloading several of them/ with high traffic,/ leaving them paralyzed like lame dogs./

In a mostly symbolic gesture,/ the Korean government substantiated/

its disconcertment with Japan/ over the textbook issue/ by recalling its envoy to Japan./ Though the recall is not expected/ to have a decisive effect/ on the issue,/ the government felt compelled/ to voice its frustrations with the complacency/ shown by Japan/ over the controversial textbooks./ The Korean government has also considered /taking further action,/ such as postponing cultural market openings./ Going a step further,/ the Grand National Party (GNP) threatened/ to ally with other Asian countries/ in launching a boycott of Japanese products./ However, some high ranking officials are concerned/ that such steps might instigate/ anti-Korean sentiment among the Japanese,/ and fail to bring about revisions/ in the contested textbooks./ Seeking the support of other nations,/ Korean officials raised the issue/ in front of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)/ in Geneva./ The omission of sexual slavery/ and forced labor/ during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea/ was focused on/ by the officials./

In spite of/ all of these outcries for justice,/ Japanese officials have made no move/ to revise the contents of the textbooks./

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