

ISSN 0910-500X

# 英文學思潮

THOUGHT CURRENTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME LXXXVI

2013

THE ENGLISH LITERARY SOCIETY  
OF  
AOYAMA GAKUIN UNIVERSITY

青山学院大学英文学会

## Ways to Reduce Plagiarism in IE Core and Writing Courses

Deborah Bollinger

While the use of plagiarism in university students' writing is certainly not a new phenomenon, an escalation in "cyber borrowing" has ensued increased Internet use among Japanese university students over the past decade. This paper, which is a synopsis of the session entitled, "Student Plagiarism in IE Core and Writing Classes," presented at the IE Orientation and 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Faculty Development Symposium at Aoyama Gakuin University on 6 April 2013, outlines ways to address this trend in order to reduce plagiarism in student journals, book reports, and academic essays.

### Introduction

Given that many first-year university students may have limited, if any, experience in writing research papers or essays, either in English or in Japanese, involving the use of summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting or citing information from other sources, they may not have previously encountered or fully grasped the concept of plagiarism in high school and may be unaware of what it actually means to plagiarize. Thus, it is crucial to provide a clear explanation of plagiarism, to present firm guidelines regarding plagiarism at the beginning of a course, and to remind students of the consequences of plagiarizing throughout the course.

Time management can also be a factor contributing to the use of plagiarism. In order to gain some understanding of the kinds of time management issues facing students, they are asked to complete a *Learner Profile*, which contains information related to club activities and part-time jobs (see appendix 1).

Awareness of such time constraints can provide a more compassionate approach to addressing the issue of plagiarism than simply blaming a student. For example, after discussing time management issues with a student who had received no credit for an assignment containing plagiarism, the student decided to quit one of two part-time jobs and a time-consuming club activity in order to focus more on coursework. Previously, when graduates were virtually assured of lifetime employment, taking part in club activities and finding part-time jobs were top priorities for many university students. Now, however, due to a more competitive job market and changing trends in hiring practices, students can benefit from making different choices involving time management.

### Student Journals

Typically, students write the equivalent of 20 to 30 pages or more in a B5 journal during a semester. Recently, entries containing plagiarism, including passages from websites such as Wikipedia, YouTube, film and music-related sites, blogs and biographical data from personal web pages, etc. have appeared in some students' journals. For example, an entry describing a student's favorite singer contained excerpts from an article about the singer on the Internet Movie Database website (<http://www. IMDbd.com>), sandwiched between the student's own ideas in paragraphs at the beginning and end of the entry. Another entry related to Japanese cuisine contained text copied verbatim from the website <http://www.foodbycountry.com>.

The *Learner Profile* mentioned above includes a section pertaining to students' computer use. Some correlation between the frequency of Internet use and the incidence of plagiarism in some students' writing has been observed. Similarly, some correlation has been noted between the kinds of websites accessed and the types of information found in assignments containing plagiarism. The journals of two students who frequently access Wikipedia and YouTube contained entries with excerpts from these websites. Another entry related to bullying and violence in schools, written by a student who often reads blogs, contained numerous idioms and NES expressions,

along with a comment referring to "our children," which suggests that it may have come from a concerned parent's blog. With the limitless supply of information readily available through easy Internet access, how are such instances of cyber borrowing to be addressed and prevented?

One option involves providing a limited and focused choice of journal topics. Giving students free choice in the selection of journal topics works well for some learners, but others have difficulty in thinking of a topic and may look to the Internet for inspiration. As in the first example above, general topics such as a favorite singer or group, a favorite film, actor, book, etc. can also be problematic due to the abundance of data available online. By assigning specific journal topics related to topics discussed in class, students' own experiences, students' opinions about a particular issue, a reading passage or discussion questions in *Interactions*, news discussion topics, etc., students are encouraged to use their journals to reflect on issues considered in class and recycle new vocabulary, explore their own ideas, and express their own views on a variety of topics, which can serve to reduce plagiarism. Moreover, if students have time to note down their ideas, opinions, and any new vocabulary that they may wish to include in a journal entry immediately following a discussion or class activity related to a particular journal topic, this can facilitate the process of continuing their train of thought at a later time, which is much simpler than thinking of a new topic while staring at a blank page.

Another option is for students to exchange journals and do paired or small group activities in class or to exchange journals with the same partner throughout one semester. Such tasks, involving an audience of their peers, can motivate students to share their ideas and express their own opinions on a variety of topics. For first-year students, in particular, exchanging journals with the same partner throughout the course of a semester provides an opportunity for learners to reflect on and record their initial experiences of college life. Personalizing the task of journal writing in such ways can serve to further reduce the incidence of plagiarism.

### Book Reports

The task of analyzing literary elements such as the setting, conflict, climax, theme, symbols, and irony in the English novels that they read is challenging for many learners. Lacking a clear understanding of these literary elements increases the likelihood that a student may rely on online sources. To ensure that students understand these basic elements, they take a short literary terms quiz, which does not count for credit, but they must make '100' on the quiz. Most students manage to master these terms on the first or second try, while a few take multiple versions of the quiz in order to get a perfect score.

Symbols and irony are often the most challenging elements for learners to identify and analyze. Abstract concepts such as *happiness* or *friendship* may be mistakenly identified as symbols. Any unexpected event or outcome in a story may be described as irony. Even when symbols and irony are correctly identified, students may have difficulty in explaining their significance or relevance in the context of their novels.

Using film can be an effective way to provide practice in describing literary elements, particularly in recognizing and analyzing symbols and irony contextually. The film, *Whale Rider*, set in New Zealand, incorporates rich symbolism related to certain Maori cultural traditions. These vivid symbols, along with ironic elements in the film, are relatively simple for students to recognize and describe. After viewing relevant scenes, students can work in teams to identify symbols and irony in the film and compare their findings with other groups. For a detailed description of the task, please refer to the article entitled, "Using the film, *Whale Rider* to facilitate learners' ability to analyze symbols and irony in English literature" in *Thought Currents in English Literature* (Vol. 85). For additional practice, learners can describe the literary elements in their novels to a partner or in small groups, in preparation for writing their book reports.

In an effort to further reduce plagiarism by providing additional scaffolding, students receive a list of 20 tips for writing a good book report (see appendix 2). This list contains detailed instructions regarding each part of the report and

suggests specific steps to facilitate the writing process. Moreover, the ideas and explanations included in the list can help learners avoid common errors while improving the overall quality of their writing.

### Academic Essays

Issues involving the types of plagiarism found in academic essays can vary depending on whether Japanese or English sources are used. Sections of translated text from one or more Japanese sources may appear without any in-text citations, or with one citation at the end of a lengthy passage. Because the text has been altered and is no longer in its original form, some students fail to realize that translating information from a Japanese source and inserting it “verbatim” into their essays constitutes plagiarism. It is necessary that students be made aware of the fact that information from Japanese sources must be paraphrased or summarized, not simply translated, with proper citations. In addition, determining whether information from Japanese sources has been plagiarized can be problematic for native English-speaking teachers with limited Japanese proficiency. Thus, requiring only, or primarily, English sources may be preferable.

Another issue involves the use of “invisible” sources, which can take various forms. For example, an essay may include several citations from sources listed in the bibliography, while the organizational structure of the paper and/or other information contained in the essay may have come from one or more unlisted source(s). A Google search of several strings from such an essay will often reveal the missing source(s).

While such a blatant case of plagiarism is intentional, other instances of “invisible” sources may be attributable to a lack of familiarity with using English resources. For example, an essay may contain a quote or passage with an in-text citation from a secondary source not listed in the bibliography. Alternately, a quote from a source listed in the bibliography may be incorrectly attributed to the author of the reference instead of to a secondary source quoted by the author. Finally, various quotations from a single source may be included



in an essay with only one in-text citation following the last quote.

As noted in the introduction, it is crucial to provide a clear explanation of what constitutes plagiarism at the beginning of a course, to outline a plagiarism policy with firm guidelines regarding consequences of the use of plagiarism, and to remind students of these throughout the course. Moreover, it is beneficial to provide specific examples of various forms of plagiarism, followed by practice in differentiating between what is and is not a plagiarized version of a text. Online sources such as the Online Writing Lab sponsored by Purdue University (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>) also provide excellent supplementary resource materials and exercises related to plagiarism.

Online submission of written assignments can simplify the search for plagiarized passages within a given text. Requiring online submission of reference lists early in the semester facilitates the process of confirming the suitability of students' sources. In the initial stages of the writing process, meeting with students individually to go over their list of sources, to discuss the type of information that they intend to use from each one, and to advise them regarding any unsuitable sources that must be replaced serves to reduce plagiarism by minimizing the need for last-minute substitution of sources. Moreover, online submission of first and subsequent drafts containing in-text citations facilitates the use of Google searches to determine whether material from sources is used appropriately and cited properly. Requiring students to submit (digital or print) copies of their sources, indicating the passages and quotations that were used from each source, together with the final draft of their essays, can serve to further reduce the incidence of plagiarism.

### **Conclusion**

Plagiarism in university students' writing has dramatically increased during the past decade due, in part, to easy Internet access. While the act of plagiarizing is often intentional, in some cases, it is due to a lack of knowledge or clear understanding of the concept of plagiarism. The various tasks and strategies outlined in this paper, which are designed to reduce

quote.  
clear explanation of  
outline a plagiarism  
e use of plagiarism,  
e. Moreover, it is  
rms of plagiarism,  
is not a plagiarized  
g Lab sponsored by  
o provide excellent  
lagiarism.  
ify the search for  
ine submission of  
of confirming the  
e writing process,  
sources, to discuss  
one, and to advise  
d serves to reduce  
tution of sources.  
containing in-text  
whether material  
airing students to  
the passages and  
the final draft of  
arism.

cally increased  
s. While the act  
ue to a lack of  
sm. The various  
gned to reduce

the incidence of plagiarism in student journals, book reports, and academic essays, include the use of scaffolding to raise students' awareness of what constitutes plagiarism and to facilitate the writing process, the personalization of journal writing through focused topic selection and journal exchanges with peers, the use of film to teach literary terms, online submission of written assignments, the inclusion of in-text citations in all drafts of academic essays and the submission of copies of source materials. From a broader perspective, emphasizing the value and importance of the writing process itself, over the need or desire to produce a product that will garner a high grade, will also contribute to a reduction in the use of plagiarism. Finally, in exploring ways to reduce plagiarism in IE Core and writing courses, collaboration with colleagues and administrators in the IE Program of Aoyama Gakuin University has been highly beneficial and greatly appreciated.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Learner Profile

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ [kanji] Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ [romaji] Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Day/Pd: \_\_\_\_\_

In case you are absent from class for an extended period of time, what is the best way to contact you? Please write an email address or telephone number below.

Do you belong to any clubs or organizations? Yes / No (Circle) If so, please list them.

Do you have a part-time job? If so, when and where do you work?

What kind of job would you like to have after you graduate from university?

Have you ever traveled abroad? Yes / No (Circle) If so, where did you go? If not, which country would you most like to visit? Why?

#### Computer Background:

Do you have a computer? Yes / No (Circle)

If so, how often do you use it? \_\_\_ A lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ occasionally

How often do you use a computer or cell phone?

Word Processing: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

Email/Text messages: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

Facebook: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

Twitter: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

YouTube: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

Skype: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

PowerPoint: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

Wikipedia: \_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ never

Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)

## Ways to Reduce Plagiarism in IE Core and Writing Courses

9

### Introduction:

Write a short introduction, including information about your hometown, family, hobbies and interests, special abilities, future dream, etc.

### English Background:

Briefly describe your background in English. This may include study abroad, home stay, club activity, conversation school, private tutor, cram school, etc.

### Teacher Interview:

Please write two questions to interview the teacher.

1)

2)

**Appendix 2: 20 Tips for Writing a Good Book Report**

- 1) Remember to use the MLA format for your citation.  
[Last name, First name. *Title of the Book*. City of Publication: Publisher, year of publication.]
- 2) Remember to use examples and give details from the story in each section of the report.
- 3) Be sure to write 100 words or more for both Question 2 and Question 4.
- 4) Find an interesting idea, point or perspective to focus on in responding to the plot and reflecting on the story.
- 5) Avoid writing something that is too predictable or unoriginal, (e.g. "*My life is very different from Frankenstein's.*").
- 6) Be sure to write two or three sentences to analyze each of the literary elements.
- 7) Remember to specify both the time and location of the setting.
- 8) If the story takes place in more than one location, be sure to mention all of the major locations.
- 9) If the story is told in the first person, remember to identify the narrator.
- 10) Identify all of the major conflicts in the novel, and briefly describe each one.
- 11) Remember that a symbol can be a person, object or event.
- 12) Be sure to explain what a symbol represents or symbolizes in the story.
- 13) Remember that a symbol can represent an abstract concept (e.g. *justice*) or emotion (e.g. *love*), but an abstract concept is not a symbol.
- 14) Remember that the theme of a novel is the main idea that an author wishes to convey through the story, which may be a moral or lesson. The theme is not simply an abstract concept (e.g. *happiness*).
- 15) Be sure to explain how an example of irony is fitting or appropriate in the story.
- 16) Remember that any unexpected event or outcome in the novel is not necessarily an example of irony.
- 17) Be sure to use the same verb tense (past or present) when describing events or information from the novel avoid mixing tenses.
- 18) Use quotations from the novel to clarify meaning and to make the report more interesting.
- 19) Following a quotation, note the page number (in parentheses) in the novel on which the quote appears.
- 20) Use Century (font), 12 point size and double line spacing (2.0).

**References**

- Bollinger, D. Using the film, *Whale Rider* to facilitate learners' ability to analyze symbols and irony in English literature. *Thought Currents in English Literature* (Monograph, Vol. 85). Tokyo: English Literary Society of Aoyama Gakuin University, 2012, 91-103.
- Hartmann, P. and E. Kirn. *Interactions Reading 2*. New York: McGraw-Hill ESL/ELT, 2013.