

The Complexity of Textual Borrowing in Learning English As a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Exploring the notion of ownership of text and learning was potential to understand the question of textual borrowing. However, this relationship remained under-explored. This study would address two key research questions: (1) How did learners of English as a foreign language paraphrase texts and (2) How were their attitudes towards plagiarism. Data were drawn from texts produced by undergraduate students of English Department in reading comprehension classes. Two stages of analyses were carried out. Firstly description of quality of paraphrasing the texts by the learners were presented and distributed. Secondly, the learners' attitudes towards plagiarism were described. These analyses were used as starting point to interpret the student plagiarism. Findings and discussion revealed that 20% of the learners' works were 100% unique. They agreed to say that plagiarizing was as bad as stealing an exam and that plagiarism impoverished the investigative spirit. The rest were plagiarized ranging from 5% up to 24%. They said that sometimes they felt tempted to plagiarize because so many other students were doing it. They argued sometimes they copied a sentence or two just to become inspired for further writing. Pedagogically, it implies that since paraphrasing is using one's own words to express someone else's ideas, students should be encouraged to cite a source accurately and define unfamiliar words instead of being punished. They need to change any words or phrases that match the original so closely. The ideas and meaning of the original source must be maintained and words must be their own.

Keywords: attitudes, language learning, paraphrase, textual borrowing

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