The other side of technology: plagiarism perception and the cultural differences

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the issue of political activity in Fezzan,

By this study, the researcher meant to find out the differences in the perception of plagiarism between nonnative postgraduate learners; Libyans as foreign learners and Malaysians as second language learners. The sample of the study included UTM and some overseas postgraduate learners. A questionnaire and semi-structured interview were implemented to collect data about the specified sample. Each group consisted of fourteen students (7 males and 7 females) for the questionnaire and four students (two males and two females) for the interview. The findings of the research revealed that both Libyans and Malaysians have nearly the same understanding of plagiarism. In terms of the research findings, it is suggested for future investigation to increase the participants number, extend the study duration, and incorporate additional qualitative instruments for data collection.

Key word: Plagiarism, nonnative language learners, foreign language learners, second language learners.

الجانب الآخر للتقنية "السرقة الأدبية والاختلافات الثقافية"

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مفهوم السرقة الأدبية بين المتعلمين في مرحلة الدراسات العليا؛ حيث أن اللغة الإنجليزية بالنسبة للطلبة الليبيين تعتبر لغة اجنبية وبالنسبة للطلبة الماليزيين تعتبر لغة ثانية. شملت عينة الدراسة طلاب جامعة ماليزيا التكنولوجية من كلا البلدين (الطلبة الليبيين الدارسين بماليزيا والطلبة الماليزيين). تم وضع استبيان ومقابلة شبه منظمة لجمع البيانات عن العينة المحددة. تتألف كل مجموعة من أربعة عشر طالبًا (7 ذكور و 7 إناث) للاستبيان وأربعة طلاب (اثنان ذكور واثنان إناث) للمقابلة. كشفت نتائج البحث أن لدى الطلبة الليبيين والطلبة الماليزيين تقريبًا نفس الفهم للسرقة الادبية. في ضوء نتائج البحث، يوصى بـإجراء دراسات مستقبلية مع زيادة عدد المشاركين، وتمديد مدة الدراسة، واستخدام أدوات تحصيل البيانات النوعية الإضافية.

Introduction

Plagiarism is more or less a pedagogical problem since learners of different levels are asked to submit assignments that are done by the learners themselves, and not lifted improperly from other sources; such as other authors or even copied from classmates without acknowledgement. According to (Anderson,1998, p.1) plagiarism is "… the act of using the words of another without giving the originator credit". The act of plagiarism is seen as a phenomenon that grew as a result of the vast use of the Internet and technology where technology made it easy. All the learners need is cutting or copying chunks of written texts and pasting them as fast as they click on the cursor, then they just put them in their own assignments. This act is seen very dangerous on the people's ethics and morals. (Grossberg, 2008, p.159) proposes that "…plagiarism is understood by many academics to be a growing problem aided and abetted by technological change,

declining ethical standards, and dwindling faith in disciplinary controls".

Speaking of plagiarism, numerous studies have been made on nonnative learners' perceptions of this issue. Most of those studies present that the nonnative learners do not understand plagiarism as it is understood by natives. This could mean that they plagiarize under the name of misunderstanding the literary theft. In the following subtitles, there will be an inclusion of some of those studies.

What is plagiarism?

Defining plagiarism is not easy, it "becomes murky and foggy", as (Anderson,1998, p.1) describes it, when it comes to find a unified definition to plagiarism. In her book *Standing in the Shadow of Giants* (Howard,1999, pp.3,4) proposed that defining plagiarism is one of the problems that has faced the scholars. She presented that "there's the very basic problem of defining plagiarism…take for granted that no commonly held definition of plagiarism".

To know what is meant by plagiarism, we need to know its meaning in the linguistic dictionaries. In the Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms, for instance; the verb to plagiarize means to copy, lift, pirate, reproduce, and steal. While in the Webster's Online Dictionary Plagiarism refers to a form of artistic or academic dishonesty. The term plagiarism is defined in the Webster's Online Dictionary as "Plagiarism is the practice of claiming or implying original authorship of (or incorporating material from) someone else's written or creative work, in whole or in part, into one's own without adequate acknowledgement."

Many scholars proposed definitions to plagiarism; (Cryr,2006, p.89), for instance, defined the term plagiarism as follows "plagiarism is taking the written work of others and passing it off as one's own- although the meaning is increasingly becoming blurred to include passing off the ideas of others as one's own." (Rozakis,2007, p.117), too, generated another definition by saying "Plagiarism is the technical name for using someone else's words without giving adequate credit". While (Lathrop and Foss, 2008, p.116) present a simplified and working definition to plagiarism as they claim. It is "If you did not think of it and write it all on your own, and you did not

cite (or write down) the sources where you found the idea or the words, it is probably plagiarism."

From the literature I consulted, I could say that plagiarism is the act of taking the words, ideas, and even the style of a source whether it is an author, a friend, or a website without acknowledging that source. This heinous act, as (Pecorari, 2003, p. 317) describes it as "heinous crime", cannot and should not be tolerated by stakeholders.

Is it a matter of culture?

For the non-native learners, it has been proclaimed that they are not censured when they plagiarize since their culture differs from the Western culture. This means that their culture is the chief responsible for plagiarism. A lot of the debates, concerning plagiarism misunderstanding, assure that the cultural values of the students, who are not Western, contribute to the students' unfamiliarity to the concept of plagiarism. Scholars like Sherman (1992), Sowden (2005a), and Pennycook, (1996) drew shed the light on the cultural difference factor. They built this fact based on their studies on their non-native students' writings and narratives. They claim that the culture, mainly, affects their perception towards cross-cultural issues such as plagiarism. While Liu (2005) refuted this claim and proposed that "the cultural conditioning hypothesis" (Liu's words) is not the major reason beyond plagiarizing. He presented that the students resort to plagiarism due to lack of language proficiency and writing skills. Ha (2006) agrees to some extent with Sowden's viewpoint that says the students' culture plays significant role concerning the issue of plagiarism among overseas students, though, She sees that culture is not necessarily affecting the students' academic perception on taking others' ideas or language without any acknowledgements. (Scollon, 1994, p.41) discusses the difference between him and his Italian students' perspectives on plagiarism when he attributed the source of confusion; was that his students "…are influenced by discourse practices in their native languages and cultures".

Plagiarism: a cluster of troubles

To me, to plagiarize means to put yourself in an open-concluded cluster of troubles. As a matter of fact, plagiarism is

considered as one of the complicated issues that needs a thorough disquisition to be overcome, thus, we as educated numbers, whether scholars or scholars, specialized or not, need to cooperate and do our stylish to exclude its reasons. In a study conducted by Eret and Gokmenoglu, (2010) they set up some factors lednon-native scholars to plagiarize, for case; time constraints, lack of knowledge about plagiarism, overfilled course conditions, difficulty of the assignment, lack of understanding of the assignment and lack of enough academic chops. (Remarkably, Wheeler, 2009, p. 17) doesn't agree with the idea that the culture is the cause of committing plagiarism. He sees that scholars of other societies rather than the Western (the Japanese scholars) aren't different from the native people. He presents that those scholars "… do not accept plagiarism as readily as has frequently been suggested." He justified that they simulate as a result of "… a lack of understanding of the act, rather than artistic values, that's the root cause of plagiarism committed by scholars." still, Howard (1999) has put forward several issues related to plagiarism starting with the problem of detecting the plagiarists and the sources they reproduced from. She added the problem of chastising them and how we respond to it. also, (Scollon, 1994, p. 35) raised the problem of criterion innon-native pupil writing in English. He argues that "Quotation, indirect quotation, paraphrase, and reference to the general gist of a passage are mixed in a tapestry that is all but impossible to untangle." The example he mentioned elaborates that the student asserted on the fact while he asked about the actual words his student used in the quotation, Scollon discovered that it was not the original source wording. The student's attribution of the words was wrong since Scollon proposed that the native writers do not use the word *'stretchment'*. In this sense, Scollon's claim agrees with Webster's Dictionary that "plagiarism is concerned with the issue of false *attribution*."

Fingertips to avoid plagiarism

The students of all levels are asked to come up with what they learnt from the readings they had read. In case they plagiarize, they will not get new information. (Carroll, 2009, p. 119) has her opinion

in this sense; she proposes "A student who copies or pays someone to produce their coursework remains the same student at the end of the assessment, whereas one who did the work does not, even if the change is too small to be easily described.". To avoid being accused of plagiarism Rozakis (2007) enumerates some points "To avoid plagiarism you should [:] Never use someone else's ideas without acknowledging the source. Never paraphrase someone else's argument as your own. Never present someone else's line of thinking in the development of an idea as if it were your own. Never arrange your ideas exactly as someone else did_ even though you acknowledge in parentheses."

One of the solutions that has been suggested to reduce the accusation of plagiarism is what (Abasi and Graves, 2008, p. 221) propose "we are suggesting that disciplinary professors enlarge their educational responsibilities to include participating with their students in a transformative pedagogy that is at once dialogic and dynamic." By this they mean that non-native students when given responsibility to engage in different writing forms and improve the rhetorical modes and when given chance to participate their ideas, they will overcome the problem of being accused of plagiarism. (Sutherland-Smith, 2005, p. 93) agrees with this solution and adds to it saying "Patently, university departments must re-evaluate their approaches in dealing with the issue of student plagiarism with their staff.". She calls for finding new methods that deal with this issue properly and raises the intellectual honesty awareness.   Concerning students' mastery of language, Sowden (2005a) proposes that the students may make use of oral presentation. By this he means that the students especially who have good memorization will benefit training in presenting the language orally to organize their ideas. In his reply to (Liu, Sowden, 2005b, p. 242) presents "…practical language activity is probably the most effective." He asserts that those students will raise their cultural awareness through such practices. (Hyland, 2001, p.381) discusses the importance of giving feedback to students clearly taking into account "sensitivity to the students' feelings, understanding and cultural differences". Ha (2006) agrees to this point and suggests teaching the students the methods of citation and referencing. While Sherman

(1992) suggests making syllabus that fit the cultural values, since he claimed that it will cost him a lot to change the students' culture.

Methodology

Participants

The study included postgraduate learners of two different cultures; Malaysians who are from UTM University, and Libyans some of them are from the same university and other overseas students. There were 14 participants from each party. Table 1 below shows the distribution of the two groups of learners.

Table 1. The distribution of the two groups of learners

Postgraduate learners	Questionnaire	Interview
Libyan	7 males+ 7 females	2 males+ 2 females
Malaysian	7males+ 7 females	2 males+ 2 females
Total	28	8

The sample has been chosen randomly. I found welcome from the participants; they were willing to share their views. Before the start of the study, I have explained the purpose of the study to the participants.

Data collection

I used two qualitative data collection instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. I distributed the questionnaire (Appendix A) manually and via e-mails. It included sets of close-ended questions and open-ended ones. It consisted four sections; the first section consisted a number of definitions of the term plagiarism, the purpose beyond that the researcher intended to know whether the participants are familiar with the definitions or not (This set of questions is adapted from Yudi Kahyono, (2007)). The second set of questions is a number of cases and the respondents are given two possible answers; the purpose of this set is to search their perceptions about the cases (Some items are modified from Mavrinac and others, (2010) questionnaire). The third section is open-ended questions where the participants are given the chance to freely express their understanding and viewpoints toward the act of plagiarizing. And the final section is an optional open-question where the respondents are asked if they would like to address additional useful suggestions. I

used the questionnaire as survey and a warming- up task for the semi-structured interview. The purpose beyond that was to stimulate the participants to report their views and check out their understandings of plagiarism.

The semi-structured interview (Appendix B) was conducted with eight participants in English except for one Libyan learner whose English was not very much excellent (who preferred using the Arabic language). I chose to implement semi-structured interview in order to ask other related questions (instantly) to the informants' responses. Each interview lasted for about fifteen minutes. The interviews with UTM postgraduates were recorded, while the interviews with the overseas students were via mail. I interviewed the participants directly after finishing the questionnaire to triangulate the results of both instruments. Before conducting the study, I did pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the instruments.

Data analysis

The data has been analyzed qualitatively. The respondents' responses were transcribed where followed the grounded theory analysis process. As has been raised by (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 1005) and (Goulding, 2005, p.34) the researcher has to discover concepts that are grounded in the informants' views. Then, the researcher will make use of the constant comparison between the informants' ideas and views and the previous claims. This was exactly raised by (Creswell, 2009, p. 68) that the grounded theory will eventually provide the researcher with a constant comparison of the data taken from the informants and maximize the similarities and differences between the emerging data and the theoretical sampling.

As proclaimed by (Huberman, 1994, p. 14) that the grounded theory is an inductive inference that seeks out more data to support or qualify the new data that are driven from the participants and then it helps in drawing links between the new data and the previous cumulative concepts. The researcher, then, could make a new concept out of the informants' views not just depend on previous claim. After transcribing the respondents' narratives, I started coding the participants' responses; line by line coding (first level), then axial coding (second level), after that, I generated descriptions and themes.

The last step was deriving meaningful interpretations and descriptions that could offer rich, clear and complete explanation of the phenomenon under study.

Since I was comparing between the second language learners (the Malaysians), and the foreign language learners (Libyans) I put the coded responses in two tables. Table 2 below shows the coded responses of the Libyan participants.

Table2. The Libyan participants' coded responses to the interview questions

QN	Question	Responses
1	What do you know about plagiarism?	Stealing, copy and paste, cheating.
2	What would you do if you do not know what to write in your assignment?	Do extensive reading, use academic techniques like proper citation and paraphrasing, surf the Internet, self reliance.
3	What would you do if your friend advises you to plagiarize?	Advice her/him, ignore it, self reliance.
4	What do you feel when you plagiarize?	Hate it, no improvement, hurt others, guilt.
5	How do you describe the act of plagiarism?	Haram, lack of development, wrong behaviour.
6	In your opinion, what is the right solution to stop plagiarism?	Educate the students, Encouragement, training, self reliance.
7	What do you do if you discover that your students have plagiarized?	Penalize, give chance, and provide mini lessons.
8	It has been said that students of other cultures do not understand the Western perception of plagiarism; do you agree with this statement?	Because they are not informed earlier, lack of knowledge/ awareness.
9	In your opinion what are the causes beyond committing plagiarism?	Lack of awareness, being passive, lack of knowledge, being lazy, no strict penalties, misunderstanding.
10	Do you think that teachers in your country have a role in making students plagiarize? Why?	Sometimes, they do not encourage students to be creative, lack of knowledge, being passive.

From the table, one can say that the foreign language learners (the Libyan postgraduates) are aware of the term plagiarism. Their understanding of it does not contradict with the western perception. The second language learners (the Malaysian postgraduates), too, have the same perception of the westerns'. Table 3 below demonstrates the Malaysian participants' coded responses.

Table3. The Malaysian participants' coded responses to the interview questions

QN	Question	Responses
1	**What do you know about plagiarism?**	Not permitted, no acknowledgement/ proper citation.
2	**What would you do if you do not know what to write in your assignment?**	Do extensive reading, get fresh air, surf the Internet, ask the teacher, self reliance, discuss with friends.
3	**What would you do if your friend advises you to plagiarize?**	Advice her/him, ignore it, say no.
4	**What do you feel when you plagiarize?**	Uneasy, blame myself, uncomfortable, lying, guilty.
5	**How do you describe the act of plagiarism?**	Unethical, not permitted, not good, not honest, wrong behaviour.
6	**In your opinion, what is the right solution to stop plagiarism?**	Take stern action, reject and reduce marks, Educate the students, it depends on the person's mentality.
7	**What do you do if you discover that your students have plagiarized?**	Reduce marks, fail them, advice and teach them, do campaign, Penalize, give chance, warn, and redo the work.
8	**It has been said that students of other cultures do not understand the Western perception of plagiarism; do you agree with this statement?**	Because it can be easily found (using technology), no, we are aware.
9	**In your opinion what are the causes beyond committing plagiarism?**	The wrong use of the Internet, Lack of awareness, being passive, lack of knowledge, being lazy, no strict penalties, misunderstanding.
10	**Do you think that teachers in your country have a role in making students plagiarize? Why?**	Some of them are careless; they do not check, being passive.

Findings and discussions

In this section, I will present the study results of the research question and discuss them. It was: What are the differences between the ESL (Malaysian) and EFL (Libyan) postgraduate students in the perception of plagiarism?

Before conducting the study, I expected to find a number of differences between the FL learners and the SL learners in the perception of the term plagiarism, but the results showed that both groups of learners who have different cultures are not different in their perceptions

To find answers to the research question, I used the questionnaire and the interview. Starting with the Malaysian learners' responses to the questionnaire; the majority of the participants chose the right definition of plagiarism and gave proper definition to plagiarism. One of the participants considered it as a theft, he wrote "Plagiarism is like a thief that take[s] some else idea without acknowledgement or credited back to the original owner of the idea."

Approximately, the Libyan participants responded appropriately when asked to choose the answer that fits their perception of plagiarism. Also, the common definition that was written by them was right for example, one informant wrote "To me, it means taking someone else's words, ideas, or any written work without [giving him/ her] an acknowledgement."

Remarkably, some of the Malaysian and Libyan respondents did not tick the right answers in the first section of the questionnaire, but when they were asked to give their opinion about plagiarism they gave acceptable statements that indicate they understand what it is. Accordingly, I could say that they know plagiarism is wrong action, though, they could not choose the right answers.

Moving on to the results from the interview, there was consensus in the interviewees' responses; they defined it properly. Looking to the interview transcripts (Appendix C) of both the Malaysian and the Libyan students, all of them proved that they are familiar with the term plagiarism. Some of them see it as stealing; others see it as cheating oneself and others.

The analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire and the interview shows that both Libyan and Malaysian postgraduate

students have nearly the same concept of plagiarism. In other words, responses to the questionnaire and the interview questions by the participants indicated that they are aware of the term plagiarism. Many of them defined it as taking others' works and ideas without appropriate acknowledgement or citation. There were respondents who considered it as "prohibited action that cannot be done by the students and other responsible figures as designers" Malaysian participant1. Going beyond that, one of the respondents wrote "Stealing the ideas is like stealing any concrete things so I consider it (Haraaaam)" Libyan participant 1. Concerning to the learners' perception, based on the results, I could say that some learners plagiarize due to many causes such as their passiveness and not willing to participate their ideas, also, because they do not read intensively, and the most significant cause is that the issue of plagiarism is not discussed at earlier age in those learners' countries. One of the interviewees presented "We have been informed about [plagiarism] in just in the master level".

Conclusion

        This study has been conducted to compare between two different non-native postgraduate students of two different cultures, Malaysians and Libyans. The data collection instruments were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The views collected from the respondents were analyzed qualitatively underpinning the grounded theory. The researcher implemented line by line coding then axial coding. The researcher was seeking the differences between the sample of study in perceiving the term plagiarism and the effect of their cultural and moral values on their perception. The results remarkably showed that both cultures are not different in understanding the concept of plagiarizing; both proved that they are aware of plagiarism and are not different from the native people's perception. The research that has been conducted could be useful in changing some of the students' perception about the possibility of plagiarizing. The instruments helped in uncovering some misunderstandings about the non-native mentality relating plagiarism. This does not mean that all of them do not plagiarize; there are some students know it is wrong act notwithstanding they plagiarize.

Although the respondents of this study were culturally different, their cultures and morals were almost the same about plagiarism. The students on their part need to be motivated and concerned to learn how to write papers that are free from plagiarism. The teachers on their part, also, need to equip the students with the strategies and writing techniques they lack. And for that to happen, teachers have to be alert and tolerant in helping the students to practice writing inside and outside the classroom.

Limitations of the study

This study included a number of limitations that could be enumerated. First, in terms of the participants' number; small number of the sample was chosen for the research. Second, the researcher has included two different cultures; Libyans and Malaysians. Third, the time limit has its impact on the study findings; this study has been conducted only in two weeks. The forth and the final limitation, there were just two instruments for collecting data; a questionnaire and an interview.

Recommendations for further research

Due to the limitations that have been faced in the current study, the researcher recommends the following as solutions for improvement in further research.

Initially, the number of the participants could be increased for future research to get more information from the samples. Additionally, more than two cultures might be chosen for further research for the purpose of comparison and contrast.

The duration of study would last longer for similar research in the future. It is hoped that more effectual and conclusive findings could be seen and obtained from the data collected from the participants.

For the instruments of qualitative data collection, the researcher recommends including a number of instruments instead of two to get credit of reliability and validity.

Pedagogical implications

For the sake of avoiding being accused of plagiarism, this study took place in the educational system. The target group was non-

native postgraduate students as they were claimed to plagiarize due to misunderstanding of the Western perception and due to their cultures. The findings of this research revealed that there must be some reformations to be implemented. The researcher agrees with Sherman (1992), when he called for making a syllabus that fits with the students' culture. Some respondents of this study declared that the teachers have a direct effect on the students, where they do not care and check whether their students depend on themselves or on other's work. So, the teachers should be attentive and serious about teaching such important issues. There must be a stern punishment for those who try to plagiarize on purpose. Moreover, there were participants said that they were not taught about the danger of plagiarism till late in the postgraduate level. Sutherland-Smith, (2005) was right when she called for creating new generations of writers through teaching them appropriately how to write. They need to be taught the right techniques of citation and referencing from early years of writing learning.

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