

# How Do Students Borrow Texts? Textual Borrowing as Critical Content in L2 Writing Instruction

Ho Jung Yu  
Jeonju University

## I. Introduction

Integrating other texts into student writing is a fundamental skill that students need to develop in making their academic writing successful. Its discussion used to be dominant in cultural difference and academic dishonesty (Casanave, 2007; Currie, 1998). However, the advancement of technology, especially the Internet, has made discussions about textual borrowing or plagiarism expanded and internationally perceived (Pecorari, 2008). Despite this growing perception, students are yet to receive a proper training, except warnings, as Pecorari (2008) claims, “The instructions students receive about plagiarism are often in the form of warnings and information sheets emphasizing declarative knowledge about the act, rather than the skills needed to avoid it” (p. 2).

In fact, textual borrowing is a natural process where students involve reading that is underlying in academic writing. Therefore, textual borrowing should be dealt with not to accuse students of their unorthodox practice, but to improve students’ critical use of texts in developing their argument. For this purpose, it is needed to clarify and discuss different strategies that students use in developing their argument. With this instructional aspect in mind, this research gravitates toward responding to the question: *What are textual borrowing strategies that novice academic L2 writers use?*

## II. Research methods

### Research participants

The international students from two sessions of the required first-year writing course, named *SLW 107* (a pseudonym) in a large northern-American university. The total number of students, 36, represented a variety of nationalities, such as Korean, European, Chinese, Cost Rican, Singaporean, Russian, Saudi Arabian, and Pilipino. All of the students had the TOEFL score of over 560 as language-proficiency requirements. Except a small number of students, a majority of students did not have any difficulty in communicating.

### Data collection and analysis

The primary data for this study consisted of twenty writing samples and sources that students used for one academic writing assignment. Most of the writing samples were 4 to 5 pages, excluding the page of reference list. From each of these twenty writing samples, one paragraph was selected, and, therefore, twenty paragraphs were analyzed qualitatively with detailed description in order to examine the patterns of integrating sources into student writing. The primary purpose of this analysis was to identify and describe the textual borrowing strategies that students use in writing their paper. The strategy identification fell into two analytical realms: *language* and *content* (Abasi & Akbari, 2008; Pecorari, 2008).

The realm of language focused on the micro level of borrowing sources (e.g., lexis and syntax); and the realm of content involved the analysis of developing ideas.

### III. The result of one sample analysis: misuse of sources in borrowing phrases

A. The second fact is that the Internet increases plagiarism stupendously. The first issue is that although some detection system has been created there are still no laws to protect on-line text. **A world-wide access to the unlimited resource is a considerable potential of plagiarism, so a rewriting of institutional plagiarism policies is urgent. (Howard, 2007) Some on-line fee-based service is another problem caused by the Internet. (Howard, 2007)** The emergence of web sites such as schoolsucks.com and cheatinghouse.com became such a big ironic challenge for educators as well as for whomever against cheating in writing. An 800-words essay is sold at 20\$ as a common merchandise.

A-1. In 1999, I argued that this leadership must take as its first agendum the rewriting of institutional plagiarism. (Howard, 2007, p. 12)

A-2. Because Google, a free service, generally performed on par with these fee-based services, there no obvious advantage in purchasing them. Moreover, these fee-based services appear to cause more problems than they solve. (p. 11)

Passage A is part of the second paragraph from Ping's four-page essay. Her second paragraph briefly points out three causes in which international students are attracted to plagiarize, and the above excerpt shows the second cause of students' plagiarism, *the Internet*. In passage A, Ping gives an account of the issues related to the Internet, such as absence of laws against plagiarism, revision of institutional plagiarism policies, and paid on-line service for text. Once Ping read Howard's position-based scholarly article, she selected two issues: *policy* and *Internet service*, as shown in passages A-1 and A-2. In taking these two ideas, she fails to show her accurate understanding of the author's intention. For starters, Howard uses the phrase *rewriting of institutional plagiarism policies*, in her article in order to "urge that the university adopt a plagiarism policy that differentiates plagiarism from misuses of sources" (p. 12). In fact, the revision of the institutional plagiarism polices is addressed not because of a plethora of on-line sources, but because of its conceptual clarity.

In addition, Ping refers to the same author article, yet a different part to point out a problem from *paid on-line service*. As excerpt A-2 gives a little bit of contextual clue, the original author addresses *fee-based service*, illustrating a free-searching engine, like Google, and a fee-based service are not much different when teachers check whether or not students plagiarize on-line sources. Howard's argument is that using a fee-based service, like Turnitin.com, is violating students' rights for their textual ownership. Unlike what Howard intends to deliver, Ping misunderstands the fee-based service as an on-line paper-purchasing service, like schoolsucks.com or cheatinghouse.com. Therefore, the two cases above are the examples in which Ping misuses the source since she fails to deliver Howard's intention.

### IV. Conclusion

It is undeniable that attention to textual borrowing or plagiarism is mostly in the western

academic writing course, not in the Korean EFL context. However, researchers and teachers in writing courses, regardless of its context, can not ignore the fact: *reading is indispensable to develop a good written argument*. In other words, there is “the fundamental relationship between good reading skills and good writing from sources” (Pecorari, 2008, p. 77). This point is a fundamental principle that should be implemented in any academic writing context.

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### About the Presenter

**Ho Jung Yu** holds a Ph. D. in Rhetoric/Composition and Linguistics at Arizona State University with an M.A. in TESOL and Applied Linguistics at Indiana University. He has been teaching English writing to native speakers and non-native speakers of English within the academic context, and also he has been committed to teaching English in general to different age- or proficiency-levels of learners. As a practitioner and researcher, he is interested in understanding L2 (Second Language) writers accurately and improving L2 writing instruction by conducting classroom-based research studies from many different aspects (e.g., student text analysis, teachers’ teaching styles, content-based writing). He can be contacted at [hju2007@gmail.com](mailto:hju2007@gmail.com).