Ethical Practices and Implications in Distance Learning

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Information Science REFERENCE

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Hershey · New York

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Printed at: Yurchak Printing Inc.

Published in the United States of America by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue, Suite 200
Hershey PA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: http://www.igi-global.com

and in the United Kingdom by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
3 Henrietta Street
Covent Garden
London WC2E 8LU
Tel: 44 20 7240 0856
Fax: 44 20 7379 0609
Web site: http://www.eurospanbookstore.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ethical practices and implications in distance learning / Ugur Demiray and Ramesh C. Sharma, editor.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "This book provides ethical insight into the world of e-learning through case studies that elucidate the issues through real-world examples"--Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-59904-867-3 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-1-59904-868-0 (ebook)

1. Distance learning--Moral and ethical aspects. I. Demiray, Ugur. II. Sharma, Ramesh C.

LC5800.E84 2009

371.35--dc22

2008009103

British Cataloguing in Publication Data
A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book set is original material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

Chapter XX
Bilingual Plagiarism in the Academic World

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an essay about a new ethical problem that has become apparent to us in recent years. Bilingual plagiarism is the act of passing off the work of others (in particular, the writing of others) as one's own and disguising the plagiarism by intentionally translating the work into another language without giving due attribution to the original author. In an increasingly connected and multilingual world where access to vast amounts of text is relatively easy, bilingual plagiarism may well be an increasing phenomenon. It is undoubtedly difficult to detect. In the chapter we analyze the drivers facilitating, and mitigating against, this new (?) phenomenon. We offer an old-fashioned solution, that of reinforcing the values on which the modern university is founded.

AN UNSEEN PHENOMENON?

The motivation for this chapter developed after both authors repeatedly found their material plagiarized on various Web sites. Both authors are visual in their work. Our papers often have diagrams to describe research plans and resulting models. The first author's (Carmel) first experience of bilingual plagiarism was when she found a diagram from a report written for the Australian government which is openly available online in a conference paper written in Spanish. Carmel does not read Spanish and would not otherwise know if text had been lifted and reused without due acknowledgement. The second author (David) had a similar experience when he found that a col-

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league had plagiarized his work in Chinese. The only form of detection was, again, the diagrams, because David does not read Chinese.

We have heard suggestions that plagiarism is a great form of flattery but we prefer attribution and citation. Soon after these irritating, but not really major, events David was coordinating the reviewing for a conference. He received a request from an academic in China for 50 full papers to review. We had become sensitized to the issue of bilingual plagiarism and felt a little suspicious. Neither of us know any academic who has time to review 50 papers in a matter of a few weeks. The request was politely declined.

Now, undoubtedly these three experiences of actual and potential bilingual plagiarism are not an accurate reflection of the normal practices of most academics. However, for two academics to have these experiences in the same year was an alert that bilingual plagiarism may be a problem that we need to consider. Also, if some academic teachers behave this way, then it is not unreasonable to assume that we have some students behaving in a similar fashion.

THE MULTILINGUAL INTERNET

The world is increasingly globalized. One of the consequences of globalization is that information flow across linguistic and cultural boundaries is increasing. The statistics (Year 2004) in Table 1 show that, while English may currently dominate, this may not be a long-term phenomenon. Undoubtedly, a 2008 snapshot would show marked changes.

In China, the information infrastructure has made significant progress. Yan and Liu (2006) reported a survey covering citation analysis and investigation into academic Web sites over the period 1998 to 2002. Their data showed that the environment of scholarly communication and the information behaviour of scholars have changed dramatically in mainland China with the Internet now playing an increasingly important role in scholarly communication. The situation in China is particularly fluid as is expected in any rapidly expanding situation.

DEFINING BILINGUAL PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the act of passing off the work of others (in particular, the writing of others) as one's own. Plagiarism involves an intentional act of using the work of others. It is more than an editorial slip of forgetting a citation. No doubt "sloppy" editing does occur and should be seen as such, regrettable but not necessarily unethical. Plagiarism is unethical. Scholars have an obligation to be meticulous in their use of source material, and any significant deviation from rigorous attention to the ethical use of other work should be seen as plagiarism. Our motivation for this article began with incidents of plagiarism involving university academic staff who might be expected to know about, and rigorously adhere to, established norms of academic publication. Such acts of plagiarism

Table 1. Global Internet statistics by language (adapted from Global Reach, 2004)

Language	Internet access (M)	Percentage of population online	Population online (est. in M)	Total population (M)
English	287.5	35.8	280	508
Non-English	516.7	64.2	680	5,822
European languages (non-English)	276	37.9	328	1,218
All Asian languages	240.6	33.0	263	N/A

are undoubtedly, in our view, unethical. Is the situation as clear-cut with students who are studying in a multilingual situation?

Both authors are long-term academics. We believe that universities constitute a global community with some shared principles of respect for knowledge and respect for the rights of academics who develop knowledge to gain credit for their work. Many universities have "honesty" Web sites (see e.g., "Honesty in academic work: A guide for students and teachers" at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/). We believe that we need to induct our students into these rigorous standards of academic ethics. While students may not come to the university with an ingrained sense of respecting intellectual property, and this may be more common in societies where collective values are emphasized, one of the aims of university education is to explore and articulate the norms of scholarly discourse that are accepted in the majority of our international universities. There is evidence (Kember, Ma, R. & McNaught, C., et al. 2006) that academics world-wide share common educational values and principles and there is a set of accepted academic norms that we should share with our students.

We recognize that there are different cultural interpretations to ownership of knowledge. Students from Middle Eastern, Asian and African cultures may need more support in negotiating the norms of Western scholarly discourse (Sweda, 2004; Zobel & Hamilton, 2002). Recent interviews with international students from Asia who are currently studying in Australia (Devlin & Gray, 2007) demonstrate how complex the pressures on these students are. They may come from an experiential background that downplays individual ownership of knowledge; they face language challenges in living and studying in Australia and the consequences of failure are very severe. It is incumbent on our universities to provide support for students to gain the skills and conceptual frameworks they need to work in the globalized world of the 21st century. Accepting plagiarism on the grounds that students are struggling is an abrogation of our responsibility to assist our students in their journey of growth and understanding.

The thrust of this chapter is that the issues of plagiarism that are the concern of every major university (distance or face-to-face) are both more serious in a bilingual (or indeed multilingual) context and more challenging to detect. We define bilingual plagiarism as the act of passing off the work of others (in particular, the writing of others) as one's own and disguising the plagiarism by intentionally translating the work into another language without giving due attribution to the original author(s).

DRIVERS FOR AND AGAINST BILINGUAL PLAGIARISM

The model presented in Table 2 has four major dimensions. These are language competence, personal advancement, institutional advancement and ease of detection. These four dimensions have evolved from our discussions with colleagues at several universities in Hong Kong, other countries in Asia, Australia and South Africa. In all these countries there are a significant number of academic staff and students for whom English is a second (or third) language. Most of our examples will be taken from Hong Kong as this is where we both work.

1. Language Competence

It is undoubtedly harder to write in a language other than one's first language. For example, in a comprehensive study of first year university students' English proficiency in Hong Kong, Littlewood and Liu (1996) found that the students lacked an adequate command of grammar, vocabulary, speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Although both students and teachers acknowledged writing as most important to academic success,

Table 2. Drivers for and against bilingual plagiarism

Drivers for bilingual plagiarism		Drivers against bilingual plagiarism
	1. Language competence	
Challenges in writing in English as a second or third language	←→	Pride in bilingual capacity
	2. Personal advancement	
Pressure to publish for personal career (teachers). Pressure to complete written assignments (students)	←→	The notion of scholarship and demonstration of excellence through sustained writing (teachers). Designing assessment tasks which require personal reflection (students)
	3. Institutional advancement	
Pressure to publish for institutional rankings	←→	Institutional reputation for scholarship and also for integrity
	4. Ease of detection	
Difficulty of detection	←→	Evolution of better detection strategies

writing (along with speaking) was the lowest rated and least confident skill. There are dual "temptations" about bilingual plagiarism. If you can read Chinese and know that your peers or teachers cannot, there is a strong temptation to directly translate a Chinese article into English and use the ideas as original ones. This could be true for both teachers and students. Conversely, if you have an article written in English, then a direct translation into Chinese can be republished in a rapidly increasing number of Chinese journals. This converse situation is likely to be used by teachers, rather than students.

We have no evidence that flagrant bilingual plagiarism exists. We have our own anecdotes and the testimony of a number of Chinese colleagues who have admitted that they have detected a small number of such cases. So what are the key drivers acting against bilingual plagiarism from a linguistic perspective?

We believe that one of the key features of globalization is a fluency in language use and a pride in the ability to operate across linguistic boundaries. We have witnessed how rapidly language demands can change. When we came to Hong Kong 6 years ago, Cantonese and English were the main languages and relatively little Pǔtōnghuà was spoken. Pǔtōnghuà is the official term for Standard Mandarin and translates as "common speech." In the short time of our sojourn here, the situation has changed and many of our graduates expect to need to be relatively fluent in English and Pǔtōnghuà as well as their home language of Cantonese. While Cantonese and Pǔtōnghuà share a common written form, they are very distinct languages and, in Hong Kong, English is often spoken in conversations between local (Hong Kong) and mainland Chinese. So, the linguistic landscape of Hong Kong is complex and evolving and one can detect unmistakable pride in being able to attain bilingual or trilingual capabilities. This pride in being able to function well in a multilingual context mitigates against bilingual plagiarism.

2. Personal Advancement

A defined set of research publications is one measure used by the many government agencies as an indicator of the research performance of universities. The authors have first-hand experience of the national systems that exist in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. The publication types that are eligible usually comprise commercially published books and book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles in journals and conference proceedings.

This emphasis on numbers of research publications can be seen as a driver toward bilingual plagiarism, especially considering the fact that detection is so difficult. The concept of "insistent individualism" was coined by Bennett (2003). He explored what he saw as a growing acceptance on the part of academics that building their own careers should be their first priority, and that success in terms of reputation, academic kudos and personal publicity was the raison d'etre of academic life. If an academic takes only a self-seeking approach, then a degree of dissatisfaction and cynicism may well develop. Further, the bar for advancement is constantly being raised and the number of publications expected of any academic is increasing. Pressure to produce publications and an attitude of cynicism about the value of academic work can make bilingual plagiarism tempting for an academic who has the linguistic skills to act this way. A fuller description of the phenomenon of insistent individualism is given in McNaught (2007).

So, the pressures on students for whom English is not their first language to perform well in written assignments, and the pressures on all academics to publish, feed the unethical practices of bilingual plagiarism. Detection is very challenging and so strategies for prevention are essential.

For academic staff, the strategy of mentoring about the process of academic writing can be helpful. Building one's curriculum vitae (CV) requires a number of papers in the one area. When one reads an academic CV one looks for evidence of a progressive development of ideas and evidence. In most academic disciplines, this demonstration of evidence is through writing. This is true for all areas of scholarship. The model of the four Boyer (1990) scholarships is an excellent one to show the breadth of scholarly discourse that any academic can choose to focus on in building a strong academic CV. The four scholarships are the scholarship of discovery—traditional disciplined-based research; the scholarship of integration—connections across disciplines and contexts; the scholarship of application—professional and community-oriented research; and the scholarship of teaching—where the principles of scholarly inquiry are applied to planning and implementing teaching. In any of these areas sustained writing is needed for any academic to lay claims to being an expert. Using bilingual plagiarism as a strategy to get a "quick" paper does not do much for the long-term development of a CV. Mentoring young academics about the need for sustained scholarship is an important strategy to mitigate against bilingual plagiarism.

For students, we consider that it is important to ensure that assessments are designed so that direct plagiarism is difficult. If students are asked to provide informed personal opinions as part of an essay or project report, this section at least cannot be plagiarized. Designing assessment tasks that have a personal component is important for the development of students' ability to apply and critique the abstract theories they learn about. This type of assessment is thus educationally sound and this style of assessment mitigates against the temptation to plagiarize.

3. Institutional Advancement

"League tables" of universities abound. Many are produced by newspapers (e.g., the Times Higher Education Supplement and Newsweek). Some disciplines such as Business seem to be more focused on these rankings and the market in Master of Business Administration (MBA) degrees seems particularly sensitive (Walker, 2007).

Within all universities the latest rankings are always examined with attention and, whether one approves of this type of comparison or not, there is no doubt that they are important. It is interesting that we are frequently asked about the standing of various Australian universities (we have worked in five Australian universities) by Hong Kong students who want to check if such and such a ranking is really accurate. So, there is a mixture of adherence to and distrust of these university rankings. Certainly the diversity of criteria is bewildering and better criteria of comparison are needed. Several commentators in this area (e.g., Marginson, 2007) believe that the Shanghai Jiao Tong University indicators (Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute of Higher Education, 2006) enable a "purpose-based and disaggregated comparison" which should be encouraged for the "improvement of the global higher education sector" (Marginson, 2007).

As academic output in terms of number of publications feature in these rankings, this could be construed as a driver toward bilingual plagiarism. The culture of most universities rewards high academic output and reward statements are often phrased as "making a significant contribution to the discipline and to the university community" or words to that effect.

However, universities do not welcome publications obtained by any strategy and the need to preserve a reputation for institutional integrity has a high priority. The consequences of plagiarism are very serious for a university if any of its staff are found guilty and the matter becomes public knowledge. We do not know of any cases of high-profile bilingual plagiarism and so can only provide an example of plagiarism in the English language to show how problematic this can be for a university and the guilty party. David Robinson was a prominent British sociologist in the 1970s. Eventually, he moved to Australia and become Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, a large multicampus university considered to be one of Australia's elite universities (a member of the Group of Eight; http://www.go8.edu.au/). This was his third Vice-Chancellorship. He was also a member of the Hong Kong University Grants Committee and held other prestigious international positions. In 2002, substantial plagiarism from the 1970s and 1980s came to light. David Robinson resigned in disgrace. Peele (2002) provides a readable account of the saga. However, he left Monash University with the task of re-establishing its reputation as a highly reputable institution. The damage done in Asia was significant as the university was considered to have lost considerable "face," and this disquiet had financial implications for a university that has a very large number of international students from Asia. Newspaper headlines such as "Campuses galore, but was it academe?" (Miller, 2002) continued to embarrass Monash for some time.

Incidents such as the "Robinson affair" act as a strong institutional driver against bilingual plagiarism, as no university wishes to experience anything similar.

4. Ease of Detection

At present bilingual plagiarism is very difficult to detect. Most search engines and plagiarism detectors work only with Roman scripts and do not handle Chinese characters (or other non-Roman written languages). The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is a bilingual university and so some assignments are submitted in Chinese (though most are in English). But no matter what the language of the assignment, the growing Chinese influence on the Internet means that Chinese students and teachers have access to a vast bank of material that could be translated and reused without due attribution. Computer scientists at CUHK have developed a plagiarism detection system, CUPIDE (Chinese University Plagiarism IDentification Engine; http://cupide.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/). This system can handle double-byte characters and thus can handle English and Chinese texts. While this is a bilingual system, it obviously does not compare translated texts. It can only match English with English and Chinese with Chinese.

Google's Babelfish is a primitive automatic translator that attempts a word by word translation.

For simple statements this can be helpful, but it does not have the level of discernment to negotiate multiple possible nuances and interpretations that occur in normal translations. The development of sensitive translation and comparison engines that do context- and content-sensitive semantic translations is likely to occur eventually. Such engines would take a substantial piece of text in one language and translate it into a form with similar meaning in another language. There are complex linguistic and technical challenges in this arena. A sufficiently sophisticated system might provide several concurrent translations that can be compared with the text that is being checked. However, all this is for the future and the timeline for such engines to be widely available is likely to be a long one. What can be done in the near future that is possible?

A PARTIAL SOLUTION FOR THE FUTURE: EMPHASIZING THE COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS

The framework produced by Bennett (2003) is one where "conversation" is the "essential metaphor" (chapter 5) for university life. Conversation implies active and open engagement between all members of the university, both teachers and students. In Bennett's model, institutional leaders need to foster a conversational community at all levels of the organization. Our universities need to be more vigilant about plagiarism of all forms, including the bilingual variety. One way to do this is to strenuously emphasize values of integrity and scholarship, and to nurture those values in new cohorts of academics and students. Universities have a tremendously important potential role in the 21st century and we must not abrogate that potential or that responsibility. The health of the academy is the only true cure.

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ADDITIONAL READING

There does not appear to be an existing literature base on bilingual plagiarism. Readers who wish to explore plagiarism in general are referred to a bibliography by Stoeger (2006). This bibliography describes 28 articles on staff plagiarism and 39 on student plagiarism. The site also contains a number of additional links to other useful compilations on the topic of plagiarism.

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