

Staying Out of Trouble: Apparent Plagiarism and Academic Survival

PAT CURRIE

ton University, Canada

Textual borrowing by second language students in academic settings has traditionally been viewed as an intentional violation of Western norms and practices. As we have learned from recent discussions, however, the issue is not that simple, but fraught with complexities. In order to understand the degree of complexity, it is worthwhile to examine one instance of such borrowing. This paper explores the apparent plagiarism of one second language student writer in a university course. It considers her behavior in relation to the context of her course, the demands of her task, her developing English language skills, and her general learning processes.

Recent discussions in second language writing and sociolinguistics have focused on the issue of plagiarism by non-native English speaking (NNES) students in academic settings. As we have learned from these discussions, plagiarism is a complex issue, embedded in social, cultural, and political matrices (Scollon, 1995) and rife with tensions (Pennycook, 1996).

One tension stems from the failure of the traditional and oversimplified view of plagiarism to account for the layers, complexities, and ambiguities embedded in the production of text (Scollon, 1995). Scholars from both first (L1) and second language (L2) domains (e.g., Bakhtin, 1986, as cited in Cazden, 1993; Cazden, 1993; Hull & Rose, 1989; Pennycook, 1994, 1996; Scollon, 1994, 1995) have pointed out how much we all “borrow from existing texts, how much we depend on membership in a community for our language, our voices, our very arguments” (Hull & Rose, 1989, p. 152). They argue that the intertextuality of discourse renders it difficult indeed for any writer to be the sole originator of his or her words or ideas.

A second tension is that the traditional view of plagiarism is ideological: it unjustifiably elevates a Western concept to the status of norm (Pennycook, 1994, 1996; Scollon, 1995) and privileges a “concept of the person established within the European Enlightenment” (Scollon, 1995, p. 3). From this position of “ideological arrogance” (Scollon, 1994, p. 45), the traditional view neither acknowledges practices it sees as outside the norm nor accords validity to other, different understandings of text, memorization, and learning (Pennycook, 1996). Other, power-related tensions also exist. Pennycook (1996), for example, speaks of an

Direct all correspondence to: Pat Currie, School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 249 Paterson Hall, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6, Canada <pcurrie@ccs.carleton.ca>.

academic double standard: one for novices seeking to participate in disciplinary communities, another for those who have already arrived.

Nor are such tensions unfamiliar to our students. Even as they are being actively socialized into their various disciplinary communities and encouraged to assume the appropriate discourses (Bartholome, 1985; Scollon, 1995), they are charged with displaying the required mastery in their own words (Pennycook, 1994, 1996; Sherman, 1992).

Further tensions lie in the distinction between borrowing actual words and borrowing ideas, where students must disambiguate the “unclear relationship between originality in thought and originality in words” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 282).

According to both first and second language writing researchers, tensions can derive from discrepancies between students’ academic workloads and their still developing linguistic and cognitive resources (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Campbell, 1990; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Pennycook, 1994). Caught between the two, student writers may be unable either to produce a mature, skilled synthesis of the ideas of others, or to attend simultaneously to all the demands of a complex writing task (Campbell, 1990).

Other tensions surface as students attempt to cope with intellectual contexts from which they are both linguistically and culturally distant (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Bloch & Chi, 1995; Garrow, 1991; Hull & Rose, 1989; Johns, 1991) and where they are “more likely to face obstacles than those who have already mastered the ‘code’” (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 13). As a case in point from first language composition, Garrow (1991) has speculated that plagiarism was, at least in part, Martin Luther King’s way of coping with a discourse with which he did not feel comfortable and an “intellectual setting in which he might well have felt like an outsider” (p. 90). For their part, second language students can be “expected to produce high-quality research papers in a language they have barely mastered” (Bloch & Chi, 1995, p. 238). Current research suggests that in attempting to be perceived as belonging to and competent in academe, students may fall back on what they consider to be a “safe strategy” (Garrow, 1991), as they opt for a more correct, more appropriate, more academic discourse (Campbell, 1990; Bloch & Chi, 1995; Hull & Rose, 1989; Scollon, 1995). In Campbell’s (1990) study, for example, copying was the major strategy for both L1 and L2 university students writing from sources.

Non-Western students may experience particular tensions between the Western view of plagiarism and what has for them been a valuable and effective “way of learning” (Pennycook, 1996, p. 225). Further, as Pennycook (1994, 1996; and indirectly, Deckert, 1993) has observed, while such students are often aware of the issues of textual borrowing, they are frequently unsure about the rules governing plagiarism and how to avoid it. In such cases, copying reflects less an intentional violation of a cultural code than a survival measure in the face of perceived difficulties or deficiencies.

Pennycook (1994, 1996) cautions us to avoid oversimplifying the issue of plagiarism or castigating particular cultures for practices which have served their members well, especially since it is only recently in Western culture that those practices have changed. He urges us instead to “attempt to understand plagiarism in general as an umbrella term for a complex set of different issues” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 282) and to scrutinize our own academic contexts for ways they might exclude even as they include those attempting to participate in the various disciplinary communities.

This study looks under the umbrella of “apparent plagiarism” as it shaded one second language writer—Diana—in a university content course. Following Pennycook (1996), the study examines her copying relative to her particular academic context, her task, her developing English language abilities, and her general learning processes.

METHODOLOGY

This case study was part of a larger examination of disciplinary expectations and evaluation (see Currie, 1990, 1993, 1994). Over the term, I interviewed Diana weekly, immediately after her seminar meetings and after she had received her graded assignments for the course. She allowed me to copy those assignments as well as her notes and preliminary drafts. Every week as well, my research assistant interviewed the teaching assistant (TA). Several times before and after the term, I interviewed the course professor, who agreed to grade and comment on the assignments for the purposes of the study, a task he would not normally have undertaken. The substantive comments on Diana’s assignments that appear in this paper come directly from those interviews and my own analysis.

BACKGROUND

To understand Diana’s copying, it is necessary first to understand her position relative to the context in which she copied: the structure and demands of the course and her interaction with the TA.

Context and Task

The context in this study was a one-semester course in Management and Organizational Behaviour (OB 210), a core course in the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) program in the School of Business at Carleton University in Ottawa,

Canada. The class met twice weekly for a one-hour lecture, given by the professor, and once for a one-hour seminar session for each group of 15 students, led by a TA. The primary objective of the course was for the students to learn basic OB concepts and use them to analyze organizational problems, a goal which entailed learning the specialized language necessary for oral and written discussion. To this end, the students wrote 9 weekly assignments of approximately 2-1/2 pages each, based on both case studies in the text and "live" organizations with which they were familiar. To write, the students had to analyze the problems and use the data to carry out other operations such as causal analysis, classifying, and resolving an issue. In terms of cognitive demands, the assignments varied considerably: some required careful, fine-grained analysis; others, only superficial application of the concepts; still others required short, factual answers (for a full description of the activities and genres required, see Currie, 1993). The TAs were to act as "coach" in the trial-and-error process, leading seminar discussions; grading the assignments, which accounted for 30% of the final grade; and providing oral and written feedback on them to the students. The TAs, who were also responsible for 15% in seminar participation marks, were thus responsible for 45% of the final grade.

Diana

The student I followed in OB 210 was Diana, a native speaker of Cantonese. Since arriving in Canada from Macau three years prior to the study, she had completed Grade 13 (in Ontario, equivalent to the first year of university) and the first two years of her Bachelor of Commerce program. Her academic average was approximately C/C+, with grades ranging from A to D. While a TOEFL score of 590 three years earlier had exempted her from ESL classes, she had taken two Business Writing courses, where she had achieved final grades of C and C+.

WRITING THE ASSIGNMENTS

To understand Diana's copying, it is also necessary to examine her difficulties as she attempted to deal with the tasks demanded in her OB context. To pass the course and stay in the B.Com. program, Diana needed a minimum of C-. In reality, however, she wanted more than a C-; at least a C, or "better, C+."

Early in the term, her goal appeared to be in jeopardy, the result of serious difficulties writing the assignments. Some of these problems she identified on her own; others were pointed out by the TA; still others emerged from my analysis of the data and the comments of the professor. While I have separated the difficulties

for the purposes of discussion, I am not suggesting that they were unrelated; on the contrary, I believe they were inextricably intertwined.

First of all, Diana had difficulty meeting what the TA termed the “presentation” aspects of the assignments. From the beginning, Diana had been anxious lest her English writing skills disadvantage her. Specifically, she was concerned about “[her] grammar, . . . clarification, and . . . conciseness of sentence,” and what an earlier instructor had called her “awkward sentences,” concerns which were realized when the TA handed back the first assignment.

Assignment 1 required a six-dimensional structural analysis of a live organization using concepts provided on a handout. Based on the results of her analysis, Diana was to rate each dimension as high/medium/low/non-existent in her organization and provide detailed support for each rating. The following excerpt, which illustrates her writing at the beginning of the course, is taken from this first assignment:

Headquarter usually is the main decision-maker but under certain circumstances the General Manager can have the right of making his own decision. This decision-making is not violated against the goal of Holiday Inn. It is important for Holiday Inn to maintain his image of being the friendly hotel in town. Formalization still plays an important role. There are rules, procedures, planning and budgeting which indirectly keep the functional managers coordinate horizontally across departments.

In her feedback, the TA, a former English Literature major, had made few substantive comments. She had, however, corrected over 20 errors and “awkward phrasings” and requested a meeting with Diana to discuss her writing. The feedback at the meeting taught Diana that she needed to write more clearly, more accessibly: “I try to simplify the sentence, to clarify the ideas, and everything will get better later.”

A second major difficulty lay in the readings she was required to do in order to write. While it is unclear whether her problems were reading-based or language-based (Alderson, 1984), she reported great difficulty managing the lengthy text (approximately 40 to 50 pages per week) and the new, specialized vocabulary:

I had to read over the chapters and then—the input, what’s the input?...I tried to think it over and over, and later I talked with some of my friends who are doing the same assignments, ‘Do you know what means by the input?’

The resulting confusion (see also Spack, 1997), which she attributed to her second language skills, led her to bluff her way through the writing:

Maybe I am not sure of what is in the chapter, but I try to tell myself I know everything. . . . Maybe [native English speakers] understand the chapter right away so they can write the words they want. . . . I try to pretend I know the stuff so I try starting the work. It’s not the right way to go.

Another obstacle involved the ways of reasoning required to complete the assignments. Diana experienced particular difficulty with the fundamental conceptual activity (Currie, 1993) of the course—applying the concepts to analyze. She often failed to separate the concepts into their component parts and use each one to tease out the relevant organizational information. This problem, which was likely exacerbated by her reading difficulties, persisted throughout the course, as illustrated by her comments late in the semester:

I didn't get everything right away; for example, at first I miss the part about analyze the decision process so I just stuck with which decision model fit the decision. And later on when I read the question over I said, 'Oh, first we have to analyze the decision process before we apply the model'.

A second reasoning task Diana found difficult was that of resolving issues. This task entailed procedures such as analyzing all available options, stating her warrant (Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1979), and arriving at an unequivocal decision—procedures neither explicitly taught in the course nor reflected in her argumentation. While it is likely that her reasoning was impeded by her inability to cope with the text and her lack of procedural knowledge, it is also possible that at least part of the difficulty stemmed from her cultural distance from a Western education. Research (for example, Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Matalene, 1985) suggests that Chinese education does not typically require students to take a stance (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991), but rather to find a way to harmonize the various alternatives (Matalene, 1985). Whatever the reason, Diana intensely disliked choosing between options: "I hate to be put in the middle of two alternative."

It is also possible that at least part of her difficulty resulted from the lack of explicit guidance in the expected ways of reasoning and writing, a condition not uncommon in academe (Hymes, 1980; Johns, 1990; Langer, 1992). For instance, while Assignment 1 had been designed to model analysis, this intention was never explicitly articulated to the students. Other expectations were left unstated because of the professor's inability to articulate tacit knowledge. For example, when asked how the students were to learn how to select the appropriate concepts to apply in any given situation, the professor replied that he doubted he could explicitly teach this skill: "I don't know that I can teach them to do it. I just know that I *can* do it."

Showing considerable insight, Diana saw her difficulties as having less to do with the writing *per se*, than with the problem-solving it entailed:

It's only when you understand what you are planning to write then you can write it fluently. But if you are not sure of your ideas, for sure you will get stuck by the time you go halfway through the assignment. I don't think it's the drafting that bothers me; it's figuring out the answer.

Unfortunately, while she sensed the existence of tacit expectations, she attributed her inability to intuit them not to her second language proficiency or her status as a novice in the community, but rather, to her lack of *intelligence*:

If you're very bright it's easy to get an A. You can read through the mind of the professor. Otherwise you stay at B+ or whatever. That will be the best grade you can get.

Finally, Diana faced significant problems managing her workload. By the time she submitted Assignment 2 in Week 4, she was spending disproportionate time and effort on OB 210 and facing "stress and pressure from the other course." Thus by Week 4, Diana's position was indeed precarious: she was confused by the text, her writing was lowering her grades, and she was jeopardizing her other courses.

TEXTUAL BORROWING AS SURVIVAL STRATEGY

To understand Diana's response to her position, it is also useful to understand the strategies she had used up to that time. An early interview revealed what appears to have been her overall approach to academic study—and thus, in a sense, her overarching strategy for survival—staying out of trouble:

I just avoid making mistakes to make them angry. You know, some professors they try to tell after the mid-term during the final, avoid doing that and avoid doing this. That's all I can tell myself.

If she just could keep her head down and not attract the attention of the TA, she could survive and pass the course.

In conjunction with this approach, she had also employed a number of more specific strategies. She had sought the help of friends to clarify prompts, explain readings, and solve problems (see also Leki, 1995); she had attempted to accommodate the TA's explicit demands (Leki, 1995; Spack, 1997) for accessibility with a purpose statement, shorter paragraphs, and numbered answers; during seminar sessions she had listened carefully in order to compare her ideas with those of her seminar colleagues. She had also compared her grades with theirs, discovering that her sevens were below their eights and nines. Clearly these strategies were not working as she had hoped.

In Week 5, Diana reported being hopeful that she could "show [the TA] some changes." My analysis suggests that by the time she wrote Assignment 3, the "changes" were the result of a newly-adopted strategy—copying from the course text. While she had copied only a few phrases for the first two assignments, by Assignment 3 she was copying extensively, a practice she continued for all but one of the remaining assignments.

A number of features characterized her copying. First, perhaps because of her difficulties managing lengthy text, Diana appeared to make use of point form items in lists and tables which she then combined into full sentences. As well, she copied partial and entire sentences, and even whole paragraphs, often from separate sections of the text, slightly paraphrasing them and occasionally adding details specific to her own organization. The following excerpt from Assignment 3 illustrates her early technique (the original is on the left; Diana's answer on the right):

The organization and its parts interact with each other. Conflict will occur over products but will be resolved in the interests of the organization.

—Daft, 1983, p.105

The organization and its units interact functionally. Conflict may occur but will be resolved in the interest of Acme.

For Assignment 4, from which the following excerpt is taken, she copied approximately one-third of the paper:

In a functional organization structure, activities are grouped together by common function from the bottom to the top of the organization....The distinctive feature of **functional structure** is that people and activities are grouped by resources....The functional structure is most effective when the environment is stable, and when technology is relatively routine with low interdependence across functional departments.... Employees are exposed to a range of functional activities within their departments.

—Daft, 1983, p. 231-232

Holiday Inn is a functional organization where activities are grouped by common function from the bottom to the top. Employees and activities are grouped by resources. Each functional department provides resources. The functional structure is most effective when the environment is stable and low interdependence across functional department. Employees are exposed to a range of functional activities within their departments.

For Assignment 8, Diana copied approximately three-quarters of the paper, patching together sentences and parts of sentences from seven different pages in the chapter. The excerpt below also illustrates a development in her syntactic fluency: several times she altered verb phrases as if to suggest that what she was describing represented the reality within her live organization rather than the general situation in the course text:

Certain rights, responsibilities, and prerogatives accrue to top positions....People throughout the organi-

zation accept the legitimate right of top managers to set goals, make decisions, and direct activities.... (Daft, p. 383)

Control of decision premises means that top managers place constraints on decisions made at lower levels....An additional way to influence decision premises is...through the control of information. Information flows continuously....By carefully controlling this information, the manager has a major source of power. Information can be released to define the decision premises for other people....Managers can use their central position to build alliances and loyalty, and hence be in a position to wield substantial power in the organization.

—Daft, 1983, pp. 386-388

They had certain rights, responsibilities, and prerogatives accruing to their positions. Most of all the organization accepted the legitimate right of top managers to set goals, make decisions and direct activities. The project managers placed constraints on decisions made at lower levels. Besides they also controlled the flow of information which could be released to define the decision premises for other people. Also, the project managers used their central positions to build alliances and loyalty, and hence wield substantial power in the organization.

It is difficult to read the juxtaposed texts without realizing the extraordinary time, effort, and patience it must have taken for Diana to struggle through the reading, find precisely those phrases or sentences that met her needs in terms of content and generality, and then weave them together, using still-developing syntactic skills, into what she hoped would bring her an acceptable grade. And yet, when she spoke later of changing her approach, she referred to her need to write the assignments more “efficiently.” For Diana, despite the enormous time and effort involved, copying meant saving time.

In the end, how successful was Diana’s copying? Did it help her achieve her goal? The short answer is yes. From Assignment 3 onwards, when she began copying substantially, the lowest mark Diana received for any assignment was 8 on 10. Her final mark for the assignments was 23.9 out of 30, or 79%—a B+, what she had considered the best grade possible without reading the professor’s mind. What she had done, in fact, was to accommodate the explicitly stated demands of the TA for more accessible, less awkward text that contained the appropriate disciplinary terminology. While the TA continued to mention several on-going problems (for example, occasional failures to understand or apply the concepts and a lack of elaboration), by the end of the course she viewed Diana’s performance as having steadily improved throughout the term. She spoke warmly—and unwittingly accurately—about her progress:

[Diana’s] writing style has drastically improved. She sort of developed her own style. It’s a very kind of descriptive literary style, but not fuzzy because of that. I enjoy reading her papers more and more. Of any of [the three NNEs in the study], she has improved the most....She’s gaining confidence, and I think her linguistic

skills are improving. Also, in last week's oral work in class she handled herself very well in terms of confidence and expressing herself.

Not once did the TA suggest that she had noticed similarities between Diana's assignments and the course textbook.¹ A number of explanations can be offered here: a busy academic schedule involving courses and TA responsibilities that mitigated against a close reading of the text; a focus on textbook content rather than particular words; a reliance on the Instructor's Manual for solutions; a sincere belief in Diana's improvement, both written and oral; and perhaps, too, the desire to see her own efforts as instrumental in Diana's growth. It is also possible that she did, in fact, note the similarities, but decided against opening that particular Pandora's Box. Her grades as well as her comments in the interviews, however, suggest that for her, Diana was a success story, both conceptually and linguistically.

Thus, there were indeed "many complex things going on behind the surface phenomenon of apparent plagiarism" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 225-226), things which involved her task, her context, her language proficiency, and her learning processes. Her task involved extensive reading, learning new concepts and terminology, carrying out complex cognitive operations, a knowledge of several genres, and the ability to write clearly and smoothly. These expectations existed in a context with very little explicit guidance about the more substantive matters of analysis and argumentation, a situation which can perhaps be viewed as exemplifying unintentional, but nonetheless "exclusionary" (Pennycook, 1994, p. 281) academic practices, which may disadvantage many NNEs by "assum[ing] a set of cultural norms [they] do not have" (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996, p. 23). What explicit demands there were, however, Diana did her best to accommodate.

Moreover, the disparity between her developing language and academic skills and the level she needed to accomplish her task successfully may have created a cognitive overload that left her scrambling to write the assignments. If copying is, as has been suggested, a natural stage in the progression toward full synthesizing ability (Britton et al., 1975; Campbell, 1990), it is possible to view Diana's behavior as simply a natural consequence of her developing proficiency; in short, a way to manage, and one which in Chinese culture might have been a mark of scholarly achievement (Bloch & Chi, 1995).

For Diana, copying represented a way of achieving one goal explicitly encouraged by the TA—learning the terminology of the OB community:

Usually I stick to the book because they give you a better expression of what you're supposed to say. Usually you would say 'department' but in the book they say 'unit' and that will give you another terminology, so you won't just stay with certain areas. You try to expand your knowledge of what actually in society the people are using the term.

Interview data further suggest that Diana saw this learning as unattainable by any other means:

I like to stay with the terms that is written from the book. That's how I got to make use of the terms....The point is if I keep on using the language that never be ours in the book then I will never be able to learn the more specific terms.

Additionally, copying allowed her to “enact” (Scollon, 1995, p. 215; see also Ivanič, 1994) the role of competent OB student, to stay out of trouble, and to pass the course. For scholars such as Cazden (1993), Scollon (1995), Pennycook (1996), and Hull and Rose (1989), such a move would be neither exceptional nor exceptionable, but rather an instance of the social purposes implicit in the construction of text:

A fundamental social and psychological reality about discourse—oral or written—is that human beings continually appropriate each other's language to establish group membership, to grow, and to define themselves in new ways. (Hull & Rose, 1989, p. 151)

Such were the goals that Diana, with her own “understandings of text and language” and her own “approaches to learning” (Pennycook, 1996, p. 226) was attempting to achieve.

As Scollon (1995) has argued, “the construction of identities in discourse is a process of mutual interactive negotiation” (p. 15). In this case, the TA and Diana actively negotiated the language and the identity Diana would assume in her assignments, the choice facilitated by Diana's own understandings of texts and language. As Ivanič (1994) has pointed out, much of the power in such negotiations lies with the instructor: the student's anticipation of what that instructor will “value and reward” (p. 8) can exert enormous pressure on the student's discursive choices. I suggest that given her focus on presentation and terminology and her control of almost half the final grade, the TA, albeit unintentionally, reinforced Diana's reliance on copying (see also Spack, 1997). What I am arguing here is that Diana copied not with the intent to violate Western cultural norms, but rather with the intent to learn, to keep her head down, and to pass the course. She achieved her goals: her final grade in OB 210 was C+—more than enough to pass the course and stay in the program, from which she graduated one year later. While copying was, if neither appropriate nor justifiable in a Western academic context, it was at least understandable: it enabled her to manage an array of variables—task, context, current knowledge, language abilities, and learning—in a way that for her was, at least in this one context, acceptable.

It is significant that on the one occasion when Diana had no need to copy, she did not. As noted earlier, not all assignments were equally cognitively demanding. Perhaps the least demanding of all was Assignment 7, based on her “live” organization: the analysis was superficial, the reading minimal, and the choice of con-

tent largely her own. It was, as another second language student described it, “common sense.” Moreover, the prompt provided a transparent framework for both problem-solving and narrative writing. Two questions will illustrate: “Describe a change that occurred in your organization” and “Who was pushing for the change?” A brief excerpt from her paper, graded 9 out of 10, illustrates how well she could control the discourse when she knew what she wanted to say:

Particularly the Accounting Department found the need for this change to occur. As the manager recognized that they did not have an efficient system in controlling Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable. Accounts Payable related to the difficulty of keeping up-to-date records to ensure correct payments of accounts. Accounts receivable related to the inefficiency of keeping customers’ accounts up-to-date and not knowing status of outstanding receivables and difficulties in controlling customer credit. Those were the serious problem that pushed for this change.

Diana’s comments on this paper emphasize the ease and fluency with which she wrote when she knew the answer:

Every time I try to emphasize this point. If I know what I want to write that will be very easy and straightforward to do. If I don’t, then I will have to make up something or whatever to answer the question. That means to force myself to answer the question, by not knowing the right answer; that is, to fill up the space but not the right words. It’s only I know the stuff, no matter it’s given me four nights, it is very easy to write out the stuff.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Diana’s story supports Pennycook’s notion of the complexity of the whole issue of textual borrowing. If we assume that this issue is equally multi-dimensional for other second language writers, any attempt to deal with “apparent plagiarism” needs to incorporate at least three features.

First, we need to inform our students about the dangers of plagiarizing (Pennycook, 1996; Sherman, 1992)—the possibility of reprimands, course failure, and even expulsion, depending on the policies of the particular institution. Further, to help them develop some of the necessary skills to synthesize source material (Campbell, 1990; Spack, 1988, 1997), we need to give them opportunities to write from sources (Campbell, 1990; Spack, 1988, 1997) along with instruction in citation, paraphrase (Campbell, 1990; Sherman, 1992), and effective reading strategies (Spack, 1988, 1997). As Campbell (1990) points out, one benefit of such classroom instruction might be an increase in self-confidence and less reliance on copying.

Yet, such approaches alone fail on at least two counts: first, they fail to acknowledge both the ambiguity surrounding textual borrowing—the fuzziness

of the concept itself and how difficult it is to identify (Pennycook, 1994, 1996; and indirectly by Deckert, 1993)—and the language abilities of our student writers. The letter below, written by one of my introductory EAP students, exemplifies such uncertainty and ambiguity. He knows he lacks the lexical fluency required by the task and that the best words have already been taken by the original writer (Spack, 1997). Further, he cannot distinguish between the borrowing of words and the borrowing of ideas (Pennycook, 1996; Spack, 1997), and he worries that his essay will end up being little more than a string of quotation marks and parentheses:

I read a book talking about what is called plagiarism which I'm very much concerned with. The problem is I'm not be able to distinguish when it is plagiarism and when it isn't. I'm totally aware that when I recite something, which is not mine, from the text book, I'm supposed to give the writer credit, in other word I will put the recitement in the quotation mark, and this is applied even in the case I just recite the author's idea (paraphrase: I'm not sure this is right or wrong). However, when I getting deeper in the definition of plagiarism, I become totally confused. I'll make this claim clearer by showing some examples. For instance, so far, I've been going on the aboriginal people issue, and I've found out that I might write down the author and the book's name all over of my essay. Why? Because all the information I've acquired is not mine; I've known by reading the text book. For Ex: If you asked my what the main purpose of the Whites when they've done all kinds of mistreatment against the natives, I would say that because the whites want to "Civilized" the natives. Trouble is arising here: Since the word civilized is from the book and I do not have other alternative vocabulary. Second Example, I'd say in my essay that the natives came from Asia about 50,000 years ago, should I put (give) credit for the author? Third Example, I'd talk about all kind of problem that the natives 've encountered resulting from the government's bad policies, should I say this is taken out from the text. Finally, my essay is covered with only quotation marks or this () signs [parentheses]. Please explain me to overcome this problem.

Although he wants to stay within the bounds of his new academic system, he does not know where they are. Nor could I articulate them explicitly in ways that would have been wholly satisfactory to me, fully comprehensible to him, or entirely transferable to other academic contexts.

Second, appeals for a "cultural syllabus" and practice in paraphrase fail to acknowledge both the "fundamentally different attitudes toward text" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 227) our students may bring to the classroom and the learning power they have afforded. It is very doubtful that any appeals would have dissuaded Diana from the copying that enabled her to learn, to stay out of trouble, and to pass the course. To promote the necessary understanding—theirs and ours—the classroom needs also to include discussions of the varying cultural notions of "authorship, authority, and plagiarism" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 227), as

they are historically embedded in our cultures (for a full discussion of these issues, see Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995).

Third, Diana's experiences suggest that any attempt to discourage plagiarism amongst our students must include a greater understanding of their tasks and contexts and how their past strategies have contributed to their earlier successes. We cannot ask them to reject something without helping them find other means to replace it, and only when we understand their attitudes and strategies can we begin to help them adapt those strategies in ways acceptable to Western institutions. Copying, for example, might prove a useful early step in the composing process, a way for them to develop a felt sense of written English, or as for Diana, a vehicle for learning the language and conventions they are attempting to appropriate. The "free-wheeling pedagogy of imitation" advocated by Hull and Rose (1989, p. 151) might provide a beneficial preliminary stage in the development of a more mature ability to synthesize or appropriate the words and ideas of others.

Given their cultural remove from Western academic institutions, our students need more than an admonishment about plagiarism. Neither a cultural syllabus nor a general purpose approach to EAP speaks, for example, to Diana's lack of procedural knowledge for problem-solving (Currie, 1993) or to her unfamiliarity with the argumentation (Johns, 1988, 1995) demanded by her disciplinary community. We need at least to try to raise "sociocultural and textual awareness" (Johns, 1995, p. 185) of what they are encountering in their other courses. Following Johns (1990) and Braine (1988), we can teach our students ethnographic techniques (Johns, 1990) to help them examine various aspects of their disciplinary communities, including, for example, the genres of argumentation (Johns, 1990, 1995), article introductions (Swales, 1990; Swales and Feak, 1994), and the conceptual activities required in order to write (Currie, 1993). Using their own essays as bases for interviews with their professors, students might investigate the textual practices of their own courses.

All such exploration necessarily entails learning from our students the kinds of difficulties they face in their Western academic institutions, working with them to forge appropriate responses, and asking them to evaluate our attempts in the classroom. For example, research into student perceptions of how effective we are (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997; Spack, 1997) has all pointed to the need to provide greater intellectual challenge in the ESL/EAP classroom, a conclusion strongly supported by Diana's situation in OB 210. It is time to take our students' advice, to provide texts and tasks that require increasingly in-depth levels of complexity and engagement (Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997) along with the scaffolding for developing the necessary skills, strategies, and self-confidence in their own abilities.

Insofar as research in both L1 and L2 composition has uncovered a number of previously tacit expectations (for example, Bazerman, 1992; Currie, 1990, 1993, 1994; Johns, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1995; Odell, 1992; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996;

and Swales, 1990), further collaborative exploration of this nature appears promising. This OB professor's inability to articulate tacit knowledge is not uncommon, but perhaps reflects what Langer (1992) suggests may be in fact a "general failure by both scholars and practitioners to clarify and articulate those rules of argument and evidence in ways that enable [them] to think about what they're teaching" (p. 83). Such a failure cannot but impede the participation in the academic enterprise of second language and other non-mainstream students (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). To continue to search for ways to articulate more clearly disciplinary expectations and conventions is a worthwhile endeavor. To continue to guard the tower (Maimon, 1983) is to jeopardize the culturally-distanced student, regardless of his or her language.

Finally, there is a need to work toward making our university colleagues aware of the different cultural attitudes toward textual ownership and textual borrowing, in order that, when confronted with "apparent plagiarism," they will be better equipped to address it from a perspective of inter-cultural understanding.

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NOTE

1. By the time I discovered the copying, the TA had finished her MA and left to work in Papua, New Guinea.

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