Working through Plagiarism and Patchwriting:
Three L2 Writers Navigating Intertextual Worlds

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ABSTRACT

The occurrence of plagiarism in L2 writing has been explained as arising from cultural
differences and from a perceived lack in ESL students’ ability to write ‘in their own words’ and
to follow English academic writing conventions. This study challenges explanations of
plagiarism that construct ESL students as deficient learners or academic deviants. Rather, it
addresses plagiarism as a multifaceted phenomenon that often occurs as L2 writers attempt to
develop control over English academic discourse. The present study reports on data gathered
from interviews and writing tutorials with three L2 student writers, drawing on the concept of
patchwriting to explain how participants write about source texts. The findings reveal that
plagiarism is a complex issue, especially with regard to language learning, the development of
academic literacies, and students’ negotiation of their identities vis à vis English academic
discourse. Alternative ways of understanding plagiarism are proposed and pedagogical methods
for helping students work through plagiarism and patchwriting are explored, with the goal of
defining an approach to plagiarism that supports students’ development as academic writers.
If copying a book word-to-word is considered as plagiarism, I started doing plagiarism when I was 3. I loved reading books, and as I started reading more and more, I began to copy every single word from the book and write it down on a paper. That’s how I learned to write. By copying words, I started to learn letters and characters, and became a writer instead of copying someone else’s work. That happened to me again when I came to [the U.S.]. I copied my dad’s writings, my friend’s, book’s, and even TV’s. . . . I basically copied everything and that is how I learned the English language.

--Tomoko,^1 ESL writer

I interpret these words as indicative of the complexity of plagiarism, particularly in the context of language learning. Tomoko writes about her perceptions of how she learned to write in her first language, Japanese, and how the same method of “copying” helped her learn her second language, English. From her perspective, copying not only allowed her to learn these languages, but it also helped her become a writer in both. Whether or not this writer has been plagiarizing since she was three years old, her comments reveal one reason why plagiarism occurs in L2 student writing: it is a means of gaining control over a new language.

In his interviews with students at Hong Kong University, Pennycook (1996) learned students’ perspectives on the complexities of plagiarism and the demands of academic writing. He found that the causes of plagiarism were linked more to students’ carelessness and dissatisfaction with their classes than a deliberate attempt to cheat. In one student’s words, “Whether I copy or not, I know the material. I don’t think we should be forced to say it in our own words. . . . I don’t think if one plagiarises, that means he doesn’t learn anything. . . Perhaps plagiarism is a way of learning” (Pennycook, 1996, p. 288). This point of view recognizes the imitation and reproduction of texts as legitimate ways of apprehending new material.

An accusation of plagiarism can have severe consequences in U.S. academic settings. As Pennycook (1996) points out, instances of plagiarism in student writing often lead instructors to “become detectives in search of evidence that some chunk of language has been illegitimately

[^1]: All student names in this paper are pseudonyms. This passage was written by a student in my undergraduate advanced ESL writing class, Fall 2004. It is reprinted here with the permission of the writer.
used” and to react with “moral outrage” when a plagiarized passage is discovered (p. 267). This understanding of plagiarism as ‘academic dishonesty’ or a ‘crime’ can pit students and teachers against each other in a struggle over claims to language rights.

Given that plagiarism presents a difficult situation charged with ethical judgments, teachers need to be aware of the multiple reasons why it may occur. The task of writing in the university setting requires content knowledge, language skills, and an awareness of the expectations for academic writing in this context. To write without plagiarizing, L2 student writers must draw on all three of these areas: they must comprehend their subject matter, be able to express their understanding of the subject matter, and do so in a way that fits the guidelines for academic writing. While previous research has revealed the complexities of plagiarism in L2 writing, little is known about how students learn to manage intertextuality in their writing. The present study seeks to understand students’ identities as L2 writers, their experiences with English academic discourse, the ways they write about source texts, and the possibilities for working through plagiarism. I address how teachers might support their students as they move from “text reproduction” strategies to “text production” (Curry & Bloome, 1998) in the process of acquiring the language of academic discourse.

**Academic Literacies, Identity, and Authority**

The literacy practices of U.S. universities typically do not acknowledge or value the literacy experiences that students bring with them. Thus, ESL students are often positioned as inferior or remedial through an emphasis on what they lack, which is constructed as their “language problem” (Zamel, 1995). This perspective devalues the knowledge that these students have as multilingual, multicultural members of the academic community. Canagarajah (2002)
emphasizes that multilingual students’ backgrounds and their differences from L1 students should not be perceived as a “deficit” or as indicative of an inability to acquire English academic discourse (p. 13).

Lillis (2003) discusses how the dominant, “authoritative” discourse of academia, plus the pedagogical practices that reinforce this discourse, may “thwart opportunities for a higher education premised upon inclusion and diversity” (p. 192). She advocates writing pedagogy that discloses, critiques, and “plays with” the dominant discourse, thus allowing space for alternative forms of meaning making. In the context of teaching about plagiarism, this could mean exposing and questioning the values that plagiarism represents, rather than treating them as natural and preferable. Such an approach may help students learn English academic writing conventions while realizing that these conventions are not universal, but contextual. Teaching that emphasizes a single ‘correct’ way of writing does students a disservice by presenting academic discourse as monolithic (Zamel, 1993). Instead, writing instruction may help students acquire the language of the university by guiding them through the process of analyzing this language, including its different forms and functions, and the values that it represents.

With regard to learning about plagiarism, student writers may have to confront the notion of the autonomous self; the concept of plagiarism is based on the assumption that an author’s identity is independent, and that ideas originate in individual minds. Discussions of intertextuality and social construction of meaning challenge this assumption (e.g., Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004), but it is a norm of English academic discourse. Scollon (1995) traces this norm to Immanuel Kant’s (1790) Science of right, revealing how “the ideology of the rational, autonomous individual” originated in the European Enlightenment (p. 1). Scollon goes on to argue that instances of plagiarism in L2 writing can be seen as an “unconscious resistance”
to this ideology (p. 6). Students in my ESL writing classes have sometimes expressed disbelief that information could be so clearly defined as originating in or belonging to individual selves; they point out that their knowledge can seldom be attributed to one single person or another. This is one example of how the acquisition of academic literacies can involve conflict and doubt, especially when student writers hesitate to accept the logic of academic discourse conventions.

The acquisition of academic literacies involves a negotiation of ESL students’ identities in new contexts. Particularly when academic norms conflict with values that student writers identify with, the appropriation of academic discourse can be a challenge to identity (Her, to appear). In their English academic writing, ESL writers may be called upon to enact identities that feel unfamiliar or forced. Shen (1989) explains that in the process of learning to write in English, he had to gain a new understanding of the self. His writing teachers’ advice was to “be yourself” and to assert his own perspective in his essays. However, as Shen (1989) writes, “To be truly ‘myself,’ which I knew was a key to my success in learning English composition, meant not to be my Chinese self at all. That is to say, when I write in English I have to wrestle with and abandon (at least temporarily) the whole system of ideology which previously defined me in myself” (p. 125; emphasis in original).

In addition to the concept of self in academic writing, the notions of voice and authority are useful in addressing the development of academic literacies. Canagarajah (2004) defines voice as “a manifestation of one’s agency in discourse through the means of language” (p. 267). Voice is linked to self and identity in that it is the presentation of self through spoken or written language. To claim a voice in academic writing is also to claim authority, or the power to assert one’s knowledge and views. Many instances of plagiarism in ESL students’ writing may be interpreted as students positioning themselves as having little voice or authority in English
academic discourse. Therefore, for students to move beyond textual reproduction strategies (which in effect echo the voices of others), they must claim a voice and agency in the academic community. Even though many university courses may not share this goal, it is vital to any attempt to challenge the marginalization of L2 students.

**Explanations of Plagiarism in L2 Writing**

Plagiarism is often addressed as a cultural issue (Deckert, 1993; Fox, 1994; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995; Sherman, 1992). From this point of view, ESL students’ tendency to draw on the language of their sources is the result of differing cultural and educational practices and values. A common danger of the ‘cultural difference’ perspective is that it may take modern English academic conventions as the norm and essentialize “other” practices as “backward” systems of rote learning and memorization (Pennycook, 1996, p. 281). Kubota and Lehner (2004) show how many studies of contrastive rhetoric “[reproduce] a fixed view of cultural difference” and are overly deterministic (p. 10). They point out that ESL writers have agency and are able to appropriate norms of English academic discourse; they are not bound to L1 rhetorical conventions. The cultural difference explanation of plagiarism may lead teachers and researchers to assume that the concept of intellectual property does not exist in certain cultures, and thus that students from these cultures will inevitably plagiarize. Additionally, this approach is problematic when it alienates students by positioning them as deficient, deviant learners (Canagarajah, 2002; Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Zamel, 1995).

While cultural relativism is important in the sense that it acknowledges that understandings of textual ownership are not universal, it can lead to an oversimplification of instances of plagiarism in L2 writing. The cultural difference approach can unintentionally
create dichotomies between students’ ways of writing and English academic discourse, and it may lead students to devalue their L1 discourses in favor of the dominant discourse of the university. Casanave (2004) shows how the cultural difference argument is insufficient in explaining the many possible reasons for plagiarism in L2 writing. Additionally, Yamada (2003) argues that teachers’ “oversensitivity” to cultural issues surrounding plagiarism “prevents effective teaching of the skills ESL/EFL writers need to avoid committing plagiarism” (p. 255). There is no denying that plagiarism is a “culturally embedded” term (Ouellette, 2004, p. 10) and that values of textual ownership and authority are culture-specific. However, the issue of plagiarism in L2 writing should not be reduced to matters of cultural difference.

Academic writing presents a challenge to all students who are unfamiliar with academic discourse, including native speakers of English. Students may plagiarize because they are new to English academic discourse and unfamiliar with conventions for synthesizing source material (Angélil-Carter, 2000). Writing about new perspectives in SLA on “good” language learners, Norton and Toohey (2001) “approach the explanation of the success of good language learners on the basis of their access to a variety of conversations in their communities” (p. 340). In this sense, successful L2 writers are those who can understand and participate in various forms of academic discourse. A key goal of EAP courses is to help students access and appropriate this discourse. Knowledge of plagiarism and the conventions for writing about source material is part of being a successful writer in U.S. academic contexts, and a common objective of EAP courses is to make students aware of this academic community’s expectations.

Particularly in the realm of language learning, plagiarism can be paradoxical: learners are expected to appropriate the language of others, but they are also expected to use “their own words.” If student writers are not confident in their own words (or do not feel that they have the
words), then they may rely heavily on the language of their sources (Bloch, 2001). Plagiarism in L2 writing has been understood as a linguistic issue (e.g., Barks & Watts, 2001; Yamada, 2003); this perspective sees plagiarism as occurring unintentionally due to ESL students’ developing language skills. Students’ limited linguistic resources may lead to an overdependence on the original words of source texts. Novice writers and language learners may not have developed sufficient control over the language to meet the demands of academic writing conventions. As Barks and Watts (2001) point out, “accurate and effective paraphrasing alone requires sophisticated knowledge of English syntax, an extensive vocabulary, and a high level of reading comprehension ability” (p. 249). Also, when student writers view the language of their sources as perfect, they may feel that paraphrasing will only detract from the author’s message. Sherman (1992) found that her Italian students shared this perspective; as she explains,

> They found my requirements for ‘own wording’ rather quaint. . . . They pointed out that the opinion or the facts could not be better expressed than they were by the source writer, and that they themselves could hardly presume to improve on a publicly acknowledged expert. Taking over his words was thus necessary in order to cover the subject, and also a mark of respect for the originator. (p. 191)

Howard’s (1995) notion of “patchwriting” can also help to explain why novice writers may plagiarize. Patchwriting is the plagiarism that results from using sources too closely, whether by changing the original wording only slightly or by copying phrases or sentences from the source text and integrating them into one’s own writing without using quotation marks (Howard, 1995). According to Howard (1995), patchwriting often happens when students are new to the language of academic discourse, and it may be understood positively as a strategy that students use to help them grasp unfamiliar academic language (p. 799). The notion of patchwriting seems to be a particularly useful and appropriate one for understanding ESL student writers’ dependence on the language of their sources as they grow accustomed to academic
discourse. First, it does not assume that all cases of plagiarism are intentional; second, it acknowledges the learning processes students must go through to acquire the language of academia; and finally, it helps to explain why students may plagiarize unintentionally even though they are aware of the potential consequences.

The various approaches to understanding plagiarism in student writing through the lenses of cultural and educational differences, linguistic development, and academic literacy all relate to each other and elucidate why developing writers may use the language of their sources too closely. None of these explanations of plagiarism is sufficient on its own. Rather, the interaction of many different factors, plus the highly moralistic response to cases of plagiarism in U.S. university settings, contribute to the confounding nature of plagiarism as experienced by students and teachers.

Plagiarism is further complicated by the concept of intertextuality. Conventional notions of plagiarism do not recognize that in the act of writing, we continuously draw on the language and knowledge expressed by other writers in other texts. Explaining a Bakhtinian perspective on the social aspects of language learning, Norton and Toohey (2001) show how developing one’s own voice involves appropriating the words of others:

speakers try on other people’s utterances; they take words from other people’s mouths; they appropriate those utterances, and gradually those utterances come to serve their needs and relay their meanings. As people initially appropriate the utterances of others and bend those utterances to their own intentions, they enter the communicative chain and become able to fashion their own voices. (p. 341)

The concept of intertextuality is based on the position that no writer, and no text, is completely autonomous or “original.” Texts are created and received within particular contexts; they do not exist independently, but rather among other texts in a social, historical system of meaning (Bazerman, 2004). The concept of intertextuality is helpful “for reorienting teaching of writing
and literacy studies away from the isolated, individual writer toward the writer placed within a complex social, textual field” (Bazerman, 2004, p. 59). ESL writing curricula can raise awareness of how writers, readers, and texts interact, and may encourage students’ participation in the textual meaning-making that is academic discourse. Students’ acquisition of English academic discourse requires an ability to navigate intertextual worlds and a negotiation of their identities in new contexts. Yet, few studies investigate these larger issues alongside analyses of student texts; the present study does both in an effort to elucidate the many meanings of plagiarism in L2 writing.

METHODS

Research Questions

I report on a descriptive, collective case study that compares different perspectives on the occurrence of plagiarism in L2 writing. My goal in this study is to take an emic perspective that allows me to understand students’ experiences with English academic writing and their views of plagiarism. Through qualitative methods, I aimed to understand plagiarism and the process of writing about source material from the participants’ perspectives, seeking answers to the following questions:

1. How do participants negotiate their identities as ESL writers?
2. How do participants perceive plagiarism?
3. What leads to plagiarism in participants’ writing?
4. What can I do to help students move from “text reproduction” strategies to “text production” (Curry & Bloome, 1998) and thus support their development of English academic literacies?
Setting and Participants

The three participants in this study came from writing classes in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at a large public university in the Pacific region of the U.S. Since August, 2003, a range of 200 to 260 international and immigrant students at this university have enrolled in EAP courses each semester. The majority of students are from Japan, Korea, and China; there are also many students from other parts of Asia and the rest of the world. Many are pursuing Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral degrees, while others are exchange students at the university for only a semester or two. Teachers in the EAP program are graduate assistants in the MA or Ph.D. program in the Department of Applied Linguistics. I have been a graduate assistant and writing teacher in the EAP program since Fall, 2003.

Three students agreed to participate in this study: Chung, Irina, and Joo Eun. Each came from a different writing course in the EAP program, respectively: an intermediate writing course, an advanced writing course for undergraduates, and an advanced writing course for graduate students enrolled at the university. I chose to work with these three students for several reasons. They have diverse writing styles, writing strategies, and linguistic and educational backgrounds. Thus, I hoped to learn from them about a variety of perspectives on English academic writing. In addition, I could manage regular, in-depth meetings with three participants, and these meetings would yield enough quality data to help answer my research questions.

Data Collection

This study was done in two phases, over two semesters. The first phase involved a reading-writing task and interview conducted individually with each student, and the second

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2 Names of programs and departments have been changed to protect anonymity.
phase was a series of one-on-one tutorial meetings. The first phase took place in Fall, 2004, when Chung was enrolled in Intermediate ESL Writing, Joo Eun was in Advanced ESL Writing for Graduate Students, and Irina was in Advanced ESL Writing for Undergraduates. Irina and Chung participated in the first phase and agreed to continue working with me through the second phase, which took place in Spring, 2005. At that point, Irina had completed her ESL courses, and Chung had progressed to Advanced Writing for Graduate Students, which I was teaching. In March, 2005, I also requested the participation of Joo Eun, who was taking the graduate ESL writing course a second time of her own accord. Thus, Chung and Joo Eun knew me as both researcher and their writing teacher, while Irina knew me primarily as tutor/researcher, having not worked with me in any writing class.

Phase 1: Reading-Writing Task

The first phase of the study was built around a reading-writing task, followed by an interview with each student writer, and a textual analysis of the writing produced during the task. Irina and Chung completed this task in Fall, 2004; Joo Eun completed it soon after joining the study in Spring, 2005. I met with each student writer individually to complete the task and interview; the total time for each meeting was 1-1.5 hours. In the task, I asked participants to read a news article and to write about it as though they were writing an academic essay for a class, where their audience was their professor. I selected the article “Alarm Raised over Schools’ Fast-Food Sales” by Pamela Martineau (see Appendix) because it was brief, comprehensible, and appropriate for intermediate and advanced ESL university students in a range of disciplines, and interesting enough to generate a meaningful response.

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3 Other graduate assistants were teaching these courses. The teachers gave me permission to visit their classes to solicit research participants.
English dictionary was provided, and participants could refer to their own L1-English electronic dictionaries. I also encouraged them to ask questions about any parts of the article or the writing assignment that were unclear.

Participants were given fifteen minutes to read the article, and afterwards, they had thirty minutes to write their responses to three questions in essay form. The questions prompted the students to summarize the main points and to explain their understanding of the article, as well as express their reaction to the article. Students were given the option of composing their essays on a laptop computer or writing them by hand. These options were given with the goal of creating writing conditions that were most comfortable and familiar to the participants, and to approximate the conditions in which they usually write academic papers. All three participants wrote their essays on the computer.

After their writing time was up, I asked participants to explain their thoughts about what they had written and the steps they had taken to compose the essay. I then asked participants open-ended questions about their experiences with English academic writing and their thoughts about plagiarism. Through these questions, I intended to gain a better understanding of the students’ perceptions of themselves as writers and their thoughts about academic writing.

Interview questions at the end of the session included the following:

(1) What are your thoughts about writing about a reading in your second language?

(2) What have been some of your experiences with academic writing in English?

(3) What differences or similarities do you notice between writing in your first language and writing in English?

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4 I decided to limit the amount of time to complete these tasks because of time constraints and also in response to a suggestion from Kenton Harsch, the EAP program Assistant Director. He suggested limiting students’ writing time to see how they write under pressure, since often in their academic lives students must work under a deadline. The three participants were generally unsatisfied with this amount of time and told me that their written responses were incomplete.
(4) What do you think about plagiarism?

(5) What do you think might lead students to plagiarize?

(6) Do you think the rules about plagiarism are useful or not? Why?

(7) Do you worry about plagiarism? Have you experienced any concerns/problems with it in the past?

My goal was to get students to talk about their thoughts regarding the complexities of plagiarism and writing about research in a second language. This discussion also helped me understand some of the potential causes of plagiarism, from the students’ perspectives. Interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ permission.

**Phase 2: Tutorial Meetings**

Through the first phase of the study, I realized the importance of meeting with participants more in order to get to know them better and to understand how I might support their development as writers. Therefore, in Spring, 2005, I requested the continued participation of Chung and Irina, and I contacted Joo Eun, whom I had gotten to know through Advanced ESL Writing for Graduate Students. All three students agreed to participate in the second phase of data collection, which involved a series of individual meetings that were framed as writing tutorials. By working as both writing tutor and researcher, I hoped to ensure that participants would benefit from the project just as I would. I tried to establish a collaborative, productive, conversational environment where participants could bring their own writing projects and questions. I negotiated plans for meetings with each participant, and I tried to address his or her goals for our meetings. Participants agreed to meet with me regularly (once every 1-2 weeks).

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5 I chose to contact Joo Eun because she had shown a keen awareness of academic writing issues in class, and we seemed to have established rapport. When I asked Joo Eun to join the study, I emphasized that her participation was optional and would have no effect on her grade in Advanced ESL Writing for Graduate Students.
during the semester to discuss their writing. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour. After establishing rapport in initial meetings, I audio recorded subsequent meetings with participants’ permission.

Over the course of our meetings, I asked participants about how they saw themselves as writers and how they felt about the writing they had to do for their university courses. These questions were meant to help participants begin talking about their experiences writing at the university. They were purposefully broad with the goal of eliciting participants’ stories while keeping the interviews open-ended (Hatch, 2002, p. 101). Our meetings involved conversation generated around these and other questions, as well as writing tasks that I facilitated with participants. I asked participants to bring the writing projects they were assigned in their courses to tutorials so that we could work on them together. I created brief reading and writing tasks to help students approach these assignments. When I noticed participants drawing on text reproduction strategies, I tried to talk about them openly in the context of students’ writing practices and the conventions of English academic writing. I attempted to initiate a process of questioning and negotiating these discourse conventions with the goal of helping students learn them and develop their voices and authority as L2 writers.

Through these methods, I got to know participants as writers and language learners, to observe their writing and thinking processes, and to understand their perspectives on English academic writing. Our work involved practice with writing about source texts, but our meetings were not limited to this; they also aimed to engage the negotiation of participants’ identities and multiple literacies. Meetings with each participant were different depending on our negotiated goals. For the most part, Irina and Joo Eun preferred for me to set the agenda for our meetings, so most of our time was spent talking about their experiences at the university and engaging in
the writing tasks that I had prepared. My meetings with Chung, however, were mainly focused on his major term paper assignment for an Asian Studies course in which he had to synthesize information from eight books about Taiwan’s relationship with mainland China. In our discussion of his term paper, many of the questions that I had planned to raise were addressed, and I gained additional insight into Chung’s writing processes as we worked through the challenges of this assignment. Throughout data collection, I analyzed the data by reviewing my notes, recordings of tutorial meetings, and students’ writing, observing the themes that arose and looking for a deeper understanding of when, how, and why plagiarism occurred.

RESULTS

Below I describe what I learned about Chung, Irina, and Joo Eun’s encounters with English academic discourse, trying to represent their experiences, views, and strategies as they explained them to me. I analyze the writing they produced and their own explanations of plagiarism in L2 writing. I also illustrate methods for responding to patchwriting in student texts. I have striven to give a clear and detailed impression of these students as writers and as people.

Encountering English Academic Writing

Chung is a graduate student from southwest China whose field is Asian Studies. He worked for twelve years as a journalist in China before coming to the university on an international fellowship in July, 2004. He chose to pursue Asian Studies instead of Journalism at the university because he was ready to change his focus; in China he says journalism is mostly “propaganda,” and he was interested in studying his country from an American academic perspective. Chung studied English as a high school and college student in China, but he has not
had to use English much in the past fourteen years, so he feels out of practice. After completing the Master’s program, Chung plans to return to China and to use the knowledge he has gained to serve his local community and to continue his work in journalism.

Chung explained that one strategy he uses when writing in Chinese and English is to pay close attention to the language and structure of well written articles, and then try to imitate them. However, he said, in English he is not as capable of distinguishing between well written and poorly written articles, so he is not sure which articles serve as the best models. Without my asking, Chung mentioned that he was concerned about plagiarism in his English writing, and he showed an awareness of the definition of plagiarism and the potential consequences of plagiarizing in U.S. academic contexts. He explained that writing in English is very different from writing in Chinese; as an experienced journalist in China, he feels very capable of writing well, but when writing in English at the university, he sees himself as a novice. In the following written narrative, Chung vividly expresses his experience in this new environment:

“Am I a clam?” This question always appear in my heart since I arrived in [the U.S.] at July 2nd, 2004. Time flies, it has been 8 months that I study in USA. Language barrier, however, still occupies all the life, speaking, the listening, or writing. I never experienced such a terrible feeling in my life. I do not know how to share the knowledge from my professors. I am not sure if my classmate can understand my address or not. I always lose my confidence when the others were confused by my broken English.

Before I open my mouth, even for the simplest sentence, I always practise again and again in the heart. How to overcome the barrier? How can I join the local community? It must be a huge challenge for an international student.

The sensation of not having the words to communicate the knowledge that he clearly possesses leads Chung to compare himself to a clam in this context. The feeling of being voiceless and the experience of miscommunication cause Chung considerable strife in his daily academic life. From Chung’s perspective, to overcome these problems, he needs to acquire the language to communicate effectively with his peers and professors and to feel a sense of belonging.
As an experienced journalist, Chung has a wealth of knowledge about writing. He described his journalistic work as “watching and writing,” reporting on news and events following the format of short, clear, factual paragraphs that he knows so well. However, Chung’s knowledge is seldom recognized in this context, where he is often positioned as a novice, and where he feels he needs to learn how to write all over again.

Irina is an undergraduate exchange student from Siberia, Russia, who came to the university for one year to study economics and English. Irina grew up speaking both Yakut and Russian, and she identifies her ethnicity as Yakut. Before coming to the U.S., she had been studying English for four years in Russia. After completing her study abroad, Irina plans to return to her home university to finish her degree in economics.

In her experience adjusting to life as an exchange student in the U.S., Irina has had to develop new kinds of academic literacy. Irina described how writing in English is very different from writing in Russian, which is the medium of instruction at her home university. Before coming to study in the U.S., Irina had not heard of documentation styles such as MLA and APA, which are regularly introduced in Advanced ESL Writing classes. She also encountered unfamiliar and inaccessible forms of academic writing. According to Irina, the “most important” part of writing is to

use your own language, more understandable, not like academic . . . because people better understand that language in which they talk in a daily life, in language they use everyday. I think it’s better to write in the language you know . . . you have to understand what you’ve written yourself.

In my meetings with Irina, I noticed that she often discussed readings animatedly, showing her comprehension of and enthusiasm for what she had read. She also tended to build on what we

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6 The Yakut are an indigenous group from the Yakutia region of Russia, near the Arctic Ocean. There are approximately 363,000 speakers of Yakut (also called Sakha and Yakut-Sakha), which is from the Turkic family of languages (Gordon, 2005).
had read by making connections to other readings and to her own experience. In these ways, she was using what she calls her “own language” to make sense of readings. However, I noticed that when Irina wrote about these same readings, something was lost; Irina’s knowledge and enthusiasm did not come forth as clearly in her writing. The distance Irina feels from English academic discourse may have led to this dilution of the knowledge she so fluently expressed in conversation.

Furthermore, Irina’s experience of writing is different in this setting; in her home university, she is accustomed to collaborating with her friends and relying on them for help writing her papers, but she said she does not know as many people here, so she has to be more “independent” when writing academic papers. Irina said that “here nobody cares.” Why should she go to lectures when she can download the lecture notes from the class web site? From her perspective, here there is no motivation, no competition. She said that her first semester was interesting, but by the second semester she felt bored. She did not have an established group of friends, and in each class there was a different group of people whom she had trouble getting to know. She moved from a smaller school with a large support system to a larger school with virtually no support system, which led her to say, “I’m so alone here.”

Joo Eun is a graduate student from Korea who is studying linguistics at the university. She is completing her second year in the Master’s program and plans to pursue a Ph.D. in the same department. Before coming to the U.S., Joo Eun had studied English for several years in Korea, majoring in English language and literature as an undergraduate. Joo Eun was not required to take any ESL courses; however, she chose to enroll in Advanced ESL Writing for Graduate Students twice with the goal of improving her writing. Despite her demonstrated
proficiency, Joo Eun says that she “could not speak [English]” when she arrived at the university.

As an experienced graduate student, Joo Eun has made several observations about the task of writing in English. When I asked Joo Eun why she had chosen to take Advanced ESL Writing for Graduate Students twice, even though it was not required of her, she replied that her professor had recommended the class and that she needed more experience with English academic writing. She said that she did not feel confident about writing, except when free-writing and writing in her diary. In her experience, it is “hard to be consistent with logic” in academic writing, and she felt that she could not express her thoughts clearly. In Joo Eun’s first semester at the university, her professors’ reactions to her linguistics papers indicated that her sentences were complicated and redundant, and she felt it was impossible to write clear, brief sentences. She said that she felt “so sad” when she saw comments such as “poor description” and “this is not English” written on her papers. These experiences made her lose confidence in herself, but as she gained more experience, Joo Eun said she learned to organize her thoughts first, then write, keeping her sentences brief and thinking of the reader.

**Confronting Intertextuality: Results of the Reading-Writing Task**

Below, I present the results of my analysis of the writing samples and students’ explanations of them case by case. Each writing sample is provided in its entirety. The original article is given in the Appendix for comparison purposes. I compared the writing samples collected in the first phase with the original source text and identified phrases that were identical or nearly identical, which I underlined in each writing sample below. I also looked for phrases or citations that indicated the student writer was trying to give credit to another writer or
Chung

Chung read the article provided in the reading-writing task (see Appendix) very closely twice and asked for an explanation of “obesity.” He then wrote the following essay:

This article focuses on the serious situation of food choice in school meals. Experts warned that the schools’ fast-food sales faced a big problem about nutrition balance. I think there are two important points in the article: first, 6 million U.S children are considered obese and a growing number of kids are eating high-fat, low-quality fast foods; second, the food choices are lacking in school compuses.

The purpose of the conference organized by the California Department of Education is to announce a warning and urge children to make a good choice of foods. This is very important for children because they need a good balance of nutrition instead of junk food. They face the most important era for getting nutrition in their lives. However, junk food, especially many commercial foods, could get the children’s interests. The result of eating junk food is harmful for one’s health. For example, the statistics based on California showed that about a third of 1200 teenagers were overweight, about half had gone a day without eating any vegetables and many spent twice as much time watching TV or playing video games (Martineau, P., Sept 28, 2000).

In China, there is a similar situation. More and more parents worry about their children are overweight. Many fast companies, such as McDonald, Kenderky, become the children’s favorite. Soda, cola and hamburger challenge the balance of nutrition of Chinese foods. It is hard to defend the impact from the fast food in China. (240 words)

As Chung’s essay shows, he understood the main issue of junk food in schools, but he did not write about measures that schools could take to counteract this problem. His writing sample shows three extended phrases (underlined) that are almost identical to phrases from the reading. These phrases are woven into his own writing, and the majority of the essay is written in his own words about the ideas expressed in Martineau’s article. In the first paragraph, Chung reviews the two points which he sees as central to the article; in the second, he discusses the problems with junk food and children’s nutrition, giving examples from the reading; and in the final paragraph, he describes his own observations of the presence of fast food in children’s diets in China.
sequence of his essay corresponds to the questions given in the writing directions (see Appendix). At various points, Chung uses attribution phrases (in bold) that show an awareness of English academic writing conventions. In the first paragraph, he refers to the article and to “experts,” and at the end of the second paragraph, he provides an in-text citation, which follows an instance of patchwriting. After writing his essay, Chung told me that the reading-writing task was difficult for him because he did not have the words to express his understanding of the issue adequately.

**Irina**

Irina read the article carefully and looked up several words using her English-Russian electronic dictionary. She then wrote the following essay:

**In my opinion,** the main problem of **this article** is health, especially the health of the young people. **This article describes** the researches on health and nutrition of the juvenile, which were held by California Department of Education in different school of USA. Thus, the **experts found out that** 6 million U.S. children are considered obese, because of the junk – food, which is in fact high – fat, low-quality fast food. Also **the experts pointed out** the increase of exclusive contracts with beverage or food companies to sell only their products in schools. Since 1998 the number of these deals increased from 46 to 240, **according to the article. The other major point of this article** is that children spend their time watching TV or playing video games instead of exercising and keeping active way of life. How they can **get school kids eating better and becoming more physically active?**

**The experts offered** different ways of solving this growing problem of juvenile obesity in the USA. First is to **increase the federal subsidy for school meals,** which will supposed to maintain high nutritional standards, required by law. **The experts also suggested** states and local school districts to adopt laws to regulate contracts with food companies to sell only their products in schools. **They also advised** to develop nutrition education in order to make children to understand the basics of a healthy food and healthy diet. **I agree with Barry Sackin, a nutritionist with the American School Food Service Association, who said,** that they **send a bad nutritional message to children** when they said that food was good and that food was bad—it’s all about balance. **I think** that you can eat whatever you want, just be balanced and do exercises. (290 words)

After writing her essay, Irina said that it was not “logical” because she did not have enough time to write it carefully. As Irina explained, she spent most of the time summarizing the
article and did not have time to explain her own point of view. However, she also said that writing about Martineau’s article was not difficult because the topic was interesting to her. From her essay, it is difficult to determine how much of Martineau’s article Irina understood; although she writes about the main problem of fast food and children’s nutrition, the high incidence of copied phrases in Irina’s writing sample could indicate a low comprehension of the reading. This is consistent with Howard’s (1995) observation that patchwriting often occurs as a result of students’ struggle to understand their reading assignments. However, in our meeting Irina did not signal to me that she was struggling with the reading, although she did frequently use her Russian-English dictionary as she read.

Irina’s essay reveals numerous instances of patchwriting (underlined), as well as numerous attribution phrases that indicate her awareness of academic writing conventions (in bold). In the first paragraph, she explains the problem that the article is about, and in the second paragraph, she describes “experts’” recommendations for solving the problem. Irina’s writing shows a variety of attribution phrases, such as “experts pointed out…”, “according to the article,” and “experts also suggested…”, which indicate that she is familiar with a range of ways to credit the source of the information that she writes about. In her penultimate sentence, Irina uses a complex clausal structure to show her agreement with a nutritionist mentioned in the article. This phrase is also an instance of patchwriting.

**Joo Eun**

Before writing her essay, Joo Eun made several brief notes on Martineau’s article, circling key words and underlining phrases. She then wrote the following:

**This article reports** the increase of the selling of junk food in a number of campuses and its consequence on students’ health. The high-fact and low quality food causes the students to become obsess and contribute to fossilize bad nutrition habit. Despite such a risk on juvenile
health, practical actions have not been taken from school administrators and states with caution. A health summit held from California Department of Education enlightens with real statistics through surveys lawmakers and school board members to notice an alarm for students to be overexposed to unbalanced nutrition. The conference report several problems on why students inevitably struggle lack of nutrition and solutions to protect juvenile health. Firstly after class they are faced with a tons of bad food around school easily. This report at the same time points out as the main reason an exclusive contrast with beverage and food companies to sell their products on campus. Consequently, it causes the increase of promoting drinking the soda. Therefore, this conference encourages lawmakers to adopt regulate such contract. Another reason is that right after school, there is no activity for children to be interested in, making them avoid addicting to eating junk food. Providing playground or after-school program will contribute the students to sit in front of television with junk food. This article warns school districts and governing system as well as students involved in this problem about severe impact of junk food on children health. The message from conference by California department of education or other surveys on this problem are provided for people to notice the alarming number of risk. (267 words)

Joo Eun’s essay shows her awareness of the problem addressed in the article and the ways of responding to this problem. She summarized several points of the article, but she did not have time to write about her own response to them. The organization of her essay roughly follows Martineau’s. Although Joo Eun did not reproduce exact sentences from the reading, she seems to be relying on patchwriting in some cases, as the underlined phrases indicate. She has also noticed and used the vocabulary of the article, such as “juvenile health” and “after-school program.” Her use of the term “fossilize” in the second sentence shows her ability to apply concepts from the linguistics field to other contexts. Joo Eun also used two attribution phrases, but she did not mention Martineau’s name or the title of the article.

Students Voicing the Complexities of Plagiarism

As the previous section shows, the reading-writing task was useful in helping me understand how these students approached the difficult task of writing about a source text. In the course of the two-semester study, however, I was able to go beyond the level of textual analysis and gain deeper insights into these students’ identities as writers. As we got to know one another
through tutorial meetings, Chung, Irina, and Joo Eun began to open up about their writing experiences, and they revealed their thoughts about plagiarism, often without being asked directly. Through their writing and conversations with me, they shared their personal struggles with English academic writing and plagiarism, often problematizing it in perceptive ways.

The concept of plagiarism is unclear and contradictory to Chung. When asked whether he thought the rules about plagiarism were useful, Chung replied affirmatively, but from his account, it seems that the common definition of plagiarism conflicts with his strategies as a writer and language learner. Chung discussed differences between the educational systems in his home country and the U.S., explaining that as a student in China, he was expected to learn by memorizing and imitating the work of others. In this way, he said, he developed a “bank” of words and rhetorical structures from other Chinese journalists that he could draw on to develop his own writing. As he explained, his method is to read many articles, “copy” their structure or words, and then write his own ideas. In English, he is still adding to his bank of words and structures, so he does not yet feel prepared to write well on his own. As he writes,

I often feel confused about plagiarism. If I am not familiar with the professional area, how can I get any individual idea about some certain issues without quotation or re-writing other scholars’ opinion? What the difference between absorbing knowledge and plagiarism? Basing on my own understanding, we can use others perspectives or findings, but JUST for proving our own ideas or conclusions, and with citation.

For the international students, the other trouble is the process of writing learning. The best teacher is the good sentences, or good words that you read from others paper or article. Copying the way of expression, the structure and the use of word, might be helpful for us to improve our writing skill. So, how can I avoid plagiarism in my writing? Especially when I am learning how to write in English.

Chung’s last two lines pose both a sincere question and a challenge to the requirement to “avoid plagiarism.” Irina told me that she first heard the word “plagiarism” at her home university a few years ago. Before that time, she was aware that “copying” was considered inappropriate, but
she had not heard of plagiarism. In Irina’s undergraduate economics class, students exchanged messages online with another class in Canada. They used a web forum to post and respond to each other’s essays, and at one point a Canadian student accused one of Irina’s classmates of plagiarism. She says that her classmate had copied an article from the Internet and posted it as his own. When the student was accused of plagiarism, Irina’s teacher was “so mad at him.”

When asked how she reacted to this, Irina replied, “We laughed at it because in this or other way we all used plagiarism,” although not always as blatantly as their classmate. Irina laughed sheepishly when she told me that in high school she had bought a book of compositions and copied one word for word on an exam. She laughed again, saying it was obvious that her paper was copied, but she believed her teachers “didn’t want to fail us.”

Irina said that the idea of plagiarism had been addressed repeatedly in Advanced ESL Writing for Undergraduates. Her instructor had pointed out to her the parts of her writing that required appropriate citations. Irina reported that she thought the rules regarding plagiarism were useful because she believed it was only fair to give credit to others for their ideas. When asked what might lead students to plagiarize, Irina responded that not having their own ideas, not wanting to write the paper, or not having enough time to write could result in plagiarism. In addition, she told me,

Sometimes you have to plagiarize because even if you try to say it in your own words, but it’s already said in someone else’s words, and you cannot change it. Probably they [authors] used somebody else’s ideas. But many people can say that’s plagiarism… When you look at history, it’s everywhere. Only recently was this concept created—this is my rights. Because of profit, money. In education field, they pay too much attention to it.

These statements reveal Irina’s resistance to the concept of plagiarism, which she feels is dealt with hypocritically in educational contexts. As she says, since plagiarism is “everywhere,”
why should students be admonished for it? Her comments also show an awareness of the economic motivations behind plagiarism and copyright laws.

In our conversation about writing strategies, Joo Eun spoke positively about a Korean friend and role model who had been studying at the university for several years. She explained her friend’s strategy for writing about sources in English: she cuts “good ideas” from her sources and pastes them into her own computer file. Next she adds quotation marks and a citation, then writes her own interpretation of the material. According to Joo Eun, this strategy makes a strong literature review. Joo Eun told me that she was still learning this method for writing about sources; she positioned herself as not as advanced as her friend, but in need of “extra practice.”

This idea of practice and imitation is central to her thoughts on plagiarism, as her written reflection shows:

…international students can not help but doing plagiarism somehow at the first stage when they are not familiar with academic writing. It is because imitation and copying good English sentences is a way to learn academic writing in practical. For example, I really want to convey a message in introduction part. However the way to express is not quite corresponding to what I intend to say because of low proficiency of English. The sentence could be too long but not including point or the sentence is too short to carry the point enough. To solve this kind of problems in writing, I tend to observe how the author presents their logic and idea and finally copy their words firstly. Of course, my paper reflects this kinds of process. Is it plagiarism? I think that international students can’t say what is boundary between plagiarism and non-plagiarism in their daily academic writing. However more importantly, this copying is not absolutely ending point. My idea should be there and I have to spend much time and effort on how to combine my own idea and the expressions that I picked up. Copying always can be foundation to develop the old one and further grow out of it.

Joo Eun shows a keen understanding of the difficulties L2 students encounter when writing about source texts and the strategies they use to address those problems. She discusses “copying” as a strategy for acquiring the language needed to write about source material; however, she emphasizes that it is a stage in the process, and that much more work is required to blend the
material effectively with one’s own ideas. Her writing shows an awareness of the complexities of plagiarism and L2 learning.

After writing the passage above, Joo Eun asked me if what she had written was “shocking”:

From the native speaker’s perspective, is really shocking thing? I mean plagiarism is really big issue, right? It’s kinda bad, right? It’s steal somebody’s expression, opinions, right? So when I make that kind of statement, is it really shocking in this culture?

Joo Eun’s questions reveal her awareness of how plagiarism is typically perceived in U.S. academic contexts; she knows that the views she expresses challenge common understandings of plagiarism, and she is concerned about how they will be received by readers of this study. Her comments also show that she is aware of how she is often positioned as an international student; as a cultural and linguistic ‘outsider,’ she does not want to rock the boat. At the same time, Joo Eun was willing to share her views with me, and I told her that even though they may be “shocking” for some, it is important for teachers and researchers to understand her point.

**Working Through Patchwriting**

As I worked individually with each student, I sought out ways to address the challenges they were experiencing in writing about source texts. Particularly with Chung, who was working on a literature review for a graduate level course, I needed to identify strategies for working through patchwriting. In this section, I report one such strategy, which involved talking through the process of revising patchwritten sections of his paper.

Before one of our meetings, I read Chung’s draft, and I asked him to bring one or two source texts that he was writing about to our meeting. We began by discussing the draft in
general (his thoughts and questions about it), and then I directed his attention to a few passages in his draft that I thought were instances of patchwriting:

**Kelly:** One other suggestion I have is every now and then it seems like...like here for instance [pointing at Chung’s text] I thought... it seems like this might be paraphrased too closely

**Chung:** Mm

**K:** And maybe it’s a quote and you just forgot to put quotation marks

**C:** Yeah yeah yeah...I need to quotation

**K:** Okay

**C:** This book I have [Chung removes the source text under discussion]

**K:** So here... [Reading aloud patchwritten passage of Chung’s text] Do you know where [this passage can be found in the original]?

**C:** Ahh

**K:** So this is great that you give the reference [pointing to Chung’s citation] That’s perfect

**C:** I will find it [long pause; looking for original passage in source text]

**K:** If you can’t find it that’s okay

**C:** Maybe later I find it

**K:** That’s okay, don’t worry about it...But I guess my question is, are these your words or are they Sheng’s [source author’s] words?

**C:** These words? [pointing at his paper]

**K:** Yeah that sentence

**C:** These words is uh same words

**K:** Okay so...do you want to quote this?

**C:** Okay sure

**K:** Or do you want to rephrase it in your own words?

**C:** I want to rephrase it..because I’m not sure how can I rephrase because for example I just change a words or...

**K:** Yeah. hmm. So what is the main idea here?

**C:** It means the invest from Taiwan is increased...especially in recent years.

**K:** Okay so that’s an important point...

Chung continued to explain the information from the source text to me, and as he did so, I wrote down what he said. I tried to put him in the position of ‘expert’; he clearly knew the topic that he was writing about, whereas I knew very little about it. As he explained it to me, he used his own words, which I wrote down. This process helped distance his writing from the source text.

Chung also had questions about how and where to include a citation for the source. Together we revised the patchwritten passage. This took several minutes, but it made the process of rewriting, paraphrasing, and referencing a source text explicit. Later, when I found other passages that
looked like patchwriting, I could point them out to Chung and ask him to compare them with his source texts and revise them on his own.

Another useful strategy that I used with Chung involved accompanying him as he moved from reading to writing about a source text. Howard (1995) recommends this strategy for helping students learn to paraphrase without patchwriting: students read (and perhaps discuss) their source text until they understand it clearly, then they put the source away and write without looking at it. Once they have finished writing, students can compare what they wrote with the original to make sure that they have accurately expressed the source author’s ideas without patchwriting. When Chung brought his source texts to our meetings, we often employed this strategy, which he did very well. This method helped Chung produce writing that he could include in his literature review, and it allowed us both to be confident that his final paper did not include patchwriting.

DISCUSSION

Through my work with Chung, Irina, and Joo Eun, I realized the at times overwhelming feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and isolation that they had experienced in relation to English academic discourse. As graduate students pursuing advanced degrees, Chung and Joo Eun channeled these feelings into a determination to improve their writing and to master the discourses valued in their departments. Irina was also interested in improving, but perhaps because she was not pursuing a degree at the university, she looked upon English academic writing with a kind of curious ambivalence, and her confidence in herself was not challenged in the same way as Chung and Joo Eun’s.
Moreover, through my conversations with each student, I learned about the knowledge and expertise they brought with them to this context. In addition to his knowledge of China’s international politics, Chung has several years of experience as an accomplished journalist; Irina shared her extensive knowledge of Russia’s economic history with me; and Joo Eun explained the details of her research on first language acquisition. In their own ways, all of the participants are capable students with knowledge to share. However, this knowledge is not always recognized in the university, especially when students’ writing is perceived as lacking.

A review of the three writing samples shows that to varying degrees, each student writer has woven phrases from Martineau’s article into his or her own sentences, appropriating language from the reading. It is important to note that the writing samples are rough drafts, written under timed conditions; with more time and opportunities to revise, I am confident that Irina, Chung, and Joo Eun would have further developed and improved their drafts. However, the results reveal the strategies that each student employed to approach the writing task.

Although only Chung’s writing sample mentions the author’s name, all of them refer to “the article,” which could be interpreted as students’ awareness of their reader as someone who knows which article they mean. Noticeably, none of the students uses quotation marks, although all of them copy exact words and phrases from the source text. All of the writers use attribution phrases, although often it is not clear to whom exactly the ideas are attributed. Irina and Chung attribute information to “experts,” probably because Martineau frequently uses the same term to report on the nutrition conference. It is also worth noting that Chung and Joo Eun, who relied on patchwriting the least, also wrote the shortest essays, at 240 and 267 words respectively, whereas Irina, who used patchwriting the most, generated the longest essay, at 290 words. Patchwriting
clearly helped Irina write more in a shorter period of time, whereas summarizing and paraphrasing take more time and therefore may result in shorter essays.

Joo Eun, Irina, and Chung are not alone in their use of patchwriting as a strategy; in her analysis of patchwriting in ESL postgraduate students’ dissertations, Pecorari (2003) found that all seventeen dissertations under study showed evidence of patchwriting to varying degrees. Pecorari compared the original sources with the students’ texts and calculated the percentages of uncited words in common with the source, finding anywhere from 40% to 100% similarity. In her interviews with the students, Pecorari established that they did not fit the stereotypical profile of plagiarists; these were dedicated students pursuing advanced degrees, and they were highly invested in the work of writing their dissertations. They were also familiar with the academic convention of citing their sources and the importance of not plagiarizing. Nonetheless, instances of plagiarism could be identified in their writing. Based on these findings, Pecorari emphasizes the necessity of differentiating between deliberate plagiarism and patchwriting, and she argues that “patchwriting should be recognized as a widespread strategy, and efforts to address it should start with the understanding that most students will use sources inappropriately before they learn how to use them appropriately and focus on supporting novice writers and ensuring that they emerge from the patchwriting stage” (p. 342). The students whom Pecorari studied “were not experienced or confident writers” (p. 338), which may have contributed to their reliance on patchwriting, despite their understanding of their subject matter. Like the students in Pecorari’s study, Chung, Joo Eun, and Irina are dedicated students who are knowledgeable in their fields, but who use patchwriting as a way to manage their precarious relationship with English academic discourse.

Joo Eun, Irina, and Chung demonstrated an awareness of plagiarism, and they all said
that the rules regarding plagiarism were useful. They reported various potential causes of plagiarism in student writing, including coming from different educational and cultural backgrounds, lacking the linguistic resources to paraphrase effectively, having a limited amount of time to write, not wanting to write, or not knowing what to write. Importantly, all three students expressed the belief that “sometimes you have to plagiarize,” as Irina said; they discussed copying and imitation as practical and even essential strategies for acquiring English academic discourse. Equally important is to note that all of these students expressed a concern for writing well and improving their control of the English language. Their observations are consistent with Howard (1995) and Pecorari (2003), who show that patchwriting is a valuable tool for developing writers.

Based on the data, I cannot conclude that these writers were plagiarizing deliberately, nor that they were unaware of the stigma of plagiarism in U.S. universities. However, I can conclude that having an awareness of plagiarism does not necessarily mean that students will write without plagiarizing. Each student writer showed awareness of and even respect for the academic convention of crediting their sources; however, all of their writing samples could be interpreted as examples of plagiarism in the form of patchwriting. Rather than analyzing this data as evidence of students’ “academic dishonesty” or ignorance of plagiarism, I see it as representative of their emergent control over English academic writing.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Given this data, how might students “grow out of” patchwriting, as Joo Eun wrote, and acquire English academic literacies? It seems that Chung, Irina, and Joo Eun were drawing on academic writing skills they had learned (as evidenced by their use of attribution phrases, for
example), but their developing control over and comfort with English academic discourse led them to rely on patchwriting. It is important to keep in mind that the process of acquiring academic literacy can take years, and as Pecorari (2003) states, “Learning a skill is rarely a straight line from input to mastery” (p. 320). However, there are a few approaches that teachers may take to support the learning process and to help students appropriate English academic discourse. Through the approaches described here, I attempt to identify ways of meeting students at their level of development as academic writers and working through the challenges of writing about highly complex knowledge in a second language.

From listening to students’ perspectives and analyzing their writing, I have come to the conclusion that pedagogical approaches that place an emphasis on “avoiding plagiarism” are inadequate. If patchwriting is a developmental stage, as the data from this and other studies (Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2003) suggest, then it makes little sense for students to avoid it. Rather, what is needed are pedagogical approaches that help students work through plagiarism. In addition, teachers can address the deeper issues surrounding plagiarism rather than viewing it only as a matter of teaching students how to quote and paraphrase (although these are crucial skills that can be developed in the classroom). Along with Chandrasoma, Thompson, and Pennycook (2004), I believe that “textual borrowing cannot be adequately dealt with either in terms only of detection and prevention, or of simply teaching the correct citation practices, because it is centrally concerned with questions of language, identity, education, and knowledge” (p. 172). Pedagogy and curricula that acknowledge these deeper issues are likely to respond more effectively to instances of plagiarism and patchwriting; they may also foster a critical awareness of plagiarism and the values it represents.
As Chung explained in one of our tutorials, through his reading of English texts, he tries to add to his ‘bank’ of vocabulary and grammatical and rhetorical structures, which he uses to improve his own writing. With this metaphor, Chung has described one method for acquiring English academic discourse. Through this method, Chung may rely on patchwriting to help him create his own academic texts, which is his way of ‘trying on’ an unfamiliar language. As Angélil-Carter (2000) explains,

‘Trying on’ academic discourse is one way of understanding plagiarism when considering a student’s entry into academic discourse. This could take the form of appropriation of the lexis of the new discourse, of the structure of the academic essay, for example, or it could be in the form of whole phrases or sentences in a mosaic which barely contains a sense of the student as author. (p. 37)

A key goal of L2 writing instruction can be to help students ‘try on’ academic discourse and to develop the language, knowledge, and confidence to draw on source material appropriately and effectively in their writing. EAP writing curricula can also create opportunities for students to practice writing “text-responsible prose” (Leki & Carson, 1997). As Leki and Carson (1997) argue, the kinds of writing that students typically do in EAP courses can differ remarkably from the kinds of writing required in their other university courses. They found that in content courses, students are usually required to demonstrate control over “text-responsible prose,” whereas in EAP course assignments, students often write without source texts, or without having to demonstrate knowledge of source content. These findings indicate the need for EAP courses to help students learn how to incorporate source material into their writing effectively.

Writing teachers can also give students ample practice with the methods of quoting, paraphrasing, and citing their sources according to the guidelines for their disciplines. If students understand the rationale for giving credit to source material and using quotation marks around language copied from a source, they may begin to learn how to use these methods in their
writing. As Howard (1995) explains, writers use quotation marks “so that the reader can know where the voice of the source begins and ends,” and they cite each source “so that the reader can consult that source if he or she chooses” (p. 799). Describing quoting and citing in this way may help students think of their work as written for an audience. Teachers can also help students understand their sources not merely as collections of information, but as culturally and historically situated texts that are generated by real authors. Writing pedagogy can demystify the ways that skilled writers build their texts around other texts. Discussing his development of a pedagogy that responds to the complexities of intertextuality, Bazerman (2004) writes that he was
drawn to considering the kinds of skills and tasks necessary for people to develop into competent literate participants within the textually dense worlds of modernity. . . .
Enhanced agency as writers grows with our ability to place our utterances in relation to other texts, draw on their resources, represent those texts from our perspective, and assemble new social dramas of textual utterances within which we act through our words. (pp. 59-60)

Such an approach aims to help students “write themselves and their interests into the teeming world of language” (Bazerman, 2004, p. 64). To be literate in English academic discourse is to be able to navigate these intertextual worlds without losing one’s own agency or sense of direction.

Through their choice of writing assignments, teachers may create opportunities for students to practice using source texts to suit their own purposes, rather than having the language and ideas of their sources stand for their own thoughts and voices. Leki’s (1991) article on “Building expertise through sequenced writing assignments” offers recommendations to help teachers achieve this goal. The writing project that she proposes aims to help students write with authority and feel a sense of ownership over their writing. Leki (1991) shows how students can write about the same topic from different points of view, through different kinds of assignments
that require a range of skills for collecting, analyzing, and writing about research data. Instead of writing about a distinct topic for each assignment, students build up their knowledge about a single topic of personal relevance to them, and their writing is “organically linked” (p. 22). Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the authority of their sources, through this project student writers can find ways to use their sources for their own writing goals. In this way, students may develop “expertise and confidence in dealing with subject matter” (Leki, 1991, p. 19). As Leki explains,

Students independently gather information and feel pride not only because they are developing expertise, but also because, as experts, they are empowered to select and mold their information as they see fit. They also see that writing consists of making choices about what to write and how to write it, choices based on the author’s sense of what the author wants to communicate. (p. 22)

This kind of project may help students acquire English academic discourse while encouraging them to see themselves as legitimate members of the academic community with knowledge to contribute.

Teachers can also guide students through the process of planning their writing projects so that they have enough time to read, think, and write about their research topics. As this study demonstrates, under timed writing conditions, students are likely to use patchwriting as a strategy. Ideally, writing teachers can help students learn how to manage their time effectively and identify topics that motivate them to write. Allowing students to select their own research topics in consultation with the instructor and guiding them through the processes of brainstorming, planning, drafting, and revising their work may also help students write final drafts that do not include patchwriting.

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7 Kenton Harsch, the Assistant Director of the EAP program, pointed out that poor time management can be a key factor in cases of plagiarism. He also suggested that students may be less likely to plagiarize if they have sufficient time and energy to invest in their writing, and if they are engaged in the processes of learning and writing (Harsch, 2004).
Finally, writing teachers can help students realize that they may use patchwriting as they learn to write about their sources, but that it is a “transitional writing form” that “is never acceptable for final-draft academic writing, for it demonstrates that the writer does not fully understand the source from which he or she is writing” (Howard, 1995, p. 799). For this reason, as Howard (1995) explains, it is crucial for teachers to help their students learn how to analyze and write about challenging texts (p. 801). Instructors can acknowledge that patchwriting is a common strategy for developing writers, and that it does not necessarily indicate an intent to deceive, nor does it mean that students are incapable of writing about source material according to academic conventions.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated plagiarism in the form of patchwriting in the work of three ESL student writers, taking into account these students’ understandings of themselves as writers and their perceptions of plagiarism. In these cases, I have analyzed patchwriting as indicative of the students’ developing command of English academic writing. This approach contrasts with perspectives that see plagiarism as the result of students’ deliberate attempts to present the work of others as their own, or that position students as deficient learners due to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Given the complexities of plagiarism, it may be impossible to classify every instance of it as either ‘intentional’ (cheating) or ‘unintentional’ (patchwriting). Rather, as I have argued here, it is important for teachers and administrators to be aware of the multiple reasons why plagiarism occurs, not the least of which is students’ developing control over academic discourse. This
awareness can lead to pedagogical measures that strive to help students write about source texts effectively and thereby appropriate English academic discourse.

This study has gone beyond an analysis of patchwriting in student texts to show how the issue of plagiarism is not separate from larger concerns of academic literacies and identity. In addition to helping students work through plagiarism, teachers can engage students’ identities, validating them as they acquire English academic discourse. Instead of focusing on what students do not know, teachers can meet students at their level of development as academic writers and set the foundation for students to claim agency through their writing. We can appreciate and affirm the knowledge that students bring to the academic community, while encouraging a critical awareness of the values and practices of this community. If the ultimate goal is to help students access this community and the discourse it values, it is necessary to create opportunities for students to engage with academic discourse in ways that respect their identities and interests. As Kutz, Groden, and Zamel (1993) write,

Students become engaged, functioning participants in the intellectual and social life of their educational communities by speaking, listening, reading, and writing with other participants about the issues that burn at the community’s heart; by being listened to, having their words read, being held accountable for the ideas they express; by being responded to with honesty and care. (p. 7)

A pedagogy that works through plagiarism and patchwriting in these ways may effectively position students as authors rather than criminals, and may ultimately help students develop English academic literacies on their own terms.
Acknowledgments

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References


Appendix: Reading-Writing Task

READING DIRECTIONS:
Please read the article below. After you are finished reading, you will be asked to write about your response to the reading. If you have questions about the reading, please ask the researcher. You may write on the reading if you would like.

Alarm Raised over Schools’ Fast-Food Sales

by Pamela Martineau

This article was taken from the Sacramento Bee newspaper, September 28, 2000.

The selling of junk food on a growing number of school campuses is contributing to record levels of childhood obesity and teaching children the wrong lesson about nutrition, health officials said Wednesday.

The junk-food warning was one of the messages from experts who spoke at the start of a two-day nutrition and health summit sponsored by the California Department of Education.

The event at CalExpo is intended to give about 600 school board members, lawmakers and nutritionists from throughout California a forum to discuss ways to get school kids eating better and becoming more physically active.

“We’re trying to teach them to make good choices, yet the food choices we offer are lacking,” said Renee Dwyer, a nutrition teacher with the University of California’s Cooperative Extension in Calavaras County.

Experts presented some alarming statistics about juvenile health, citing the fact that 6 million U.S. children are considered obese and a growing number of kids are eating high-fat, low-quality fast foods.

Those statistics mirror results of a survey released earlier this week by the Berkeley-based Public Health Institute. The 1998 survey of 1,200 California teenagers found that about a third were overweight, about half had gone a day without eating any vegetables and many spent twice as much time watching TV or playing video games than exercising.

Conference participants heard that more and more children are buying fast food on school campuses, with elementary schools across the country experiencing the fastest growth in junk-food sales, experts said.

“When they leave their classrooms at lunchtime, they are faced with a myriad of unhealthy choices,” said State Sen. Martha Escutia, D-City of Commerce.

More and more school districts say they are forced to sell foods other than the fare offered under the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s traditional school lunch program, which is required by law to maintain high nutritional standards. Administrators said they hope to lobby lawmakers to increase the federal subsidy for school meals.

They point to the government’s free- or reduced-price lunch and breakfast programs as a way of ensuring that kids get basic nutritional offerings during their school day. White Rock Elementary School in Rancho Cordova, for example, has made student nutrition one of its goals by delivering breakfasts in classrooms each morning.

The conference also focused on the dramatic increase in the number of school districts across the nation that have entered into exclusive contracts with beverage or food companies to
sell only their products on campuses. The deals can bring millions of dollars to cash-strapped school districts, and since 1998 the number of these deals across the nation has increased from 46 to 240.

Earlier this year, Sacramento City Unified School District turned down $2 million from Pepsico Inc. to sell only its products on campuses districtwide. Parents harshly criticized this plan, saying it would promote the drinking of soda and use their kids as advertising pawns for large corporations.

According to a recently released report by the U.S. General Accounting Office, few states have laws that address commercial contracting in schools, even though the practice is growing. Federal officials have advised states and local school districts to adopt laws to regulate such contracts.

One suggestion from nutrition experts is that if school districts sell sodas on campus, they do so only after the last lunch period has ended. That way, kids won’t be able to drink a soda before lunch and will be more likely to have an appetite for a healthy meal.

“Local governing board members really have the power to make (school nutrition) a priority,” said Kevin Gordon, executive director of the California Association of School Business Officials.

Experts also advised school administrators to develop sound nutrition-education programs, saying kids need to be taught the basics of a healthy diet so they will make good food choices throughout their lives.

“We send a bad nutritional message to children when we say this food is good and this food is bad--it’s all about balance,” said Barry Sackin, a nutritionist with the American School Food Service Association.

The conference offered tips on subtle ways to encourage healthful eating on campuses, such as developing school gardening and cooking programs.

Tips for getting kids more active also were given. Research has found that simple things such as providing playground equipment increases activity during recess.

The after-school hours have been found to be the time of greatest inactivity for children since they often spend a lot of time on the computer or in front of the television. Experts advised districts to incorporate more physical activity in their after-school programs.

Officials say they hope the conference will generate suggestions that lawmakers and administrators can use to craft statewide and local policies that address school nutrition.
WRITING DIRECTIONS:
Pretend that you have to write an academic paper about this article. You are writing the paper for a class at [our university], and your professor will read and grade your paper. Write your answers to the questions below. Try to write as much as you can.

In your paper, address these three questions:

1. Please explain the problem that this article is about. What are the most important points of the article?

2. What was the purpose of the conference organized by the California Department of Education?

3. What do you think about the ideas expressed in this article? Give examples from the article and your own experience to explain your point of view.