

## REPORTING, BORROWING, PLAGIARIZING: ISSUES OF INTER- AND INTRATEXTUAL 'TRANSLATION'

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This paper has two separate, although related, aims. First, it addresses some issues in summarizing and the increasing problem of plagiarism. Summarization, which consists of interpreting, condensing and 'translating' other people's texts into different discourses, has a close interface with plagiarism: hence the common instruction to write the summary 'in one's own words'. Plagiarism is a socially-constructed crime pertinent to the academic community, while this is not the case in the literary sphere.

Second, this paper presents some research results concerning the techniques which summarizers and critics deploy when reporting on source texts on the basis of which they create critical summaries or book reviews. Differences are displayed in the information packing, length, multilayeredness and evaluative attributes of reporting structures. Teaching students to refer to other people's words with professional competence may eventually help to counteract plagiarism.

Keywords: reporting, plagiarism, summarization, intertextuality

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Summary writing means interpreting, condensing and 'translating' other people's texts and transforming them into summarizers' new discourses. Moreover, summarization entails operating in the realm of intertextuality when performing acts of translation, which are **intertextual** in the sense that they involve at least two different texts. But these acts are also **intratextual** in the sense that the process of summarization reduces a source text by deleting some ideas from it but simultaneously selecting other ideas which are to be included in the new discourse while the selected ideas are usually also subjected to some degree of modification.

This paper first deals with the increasing incidence of plagiarism, a problem which looms large in the context of the teaching of writing. Second, the paper presents findings from a study of critical summarization which analyzed interpretation in terms of the speech acts of reporting, evaluation and discussion. Reporting, in particular, is a speech act which has to be taught to students in order to prevent them from adopting and presenting other people's ideas as their own. At present it seems that some university departments neglect to train their students to shun plagiarism by giving too vague instructions for the use of references.

## **2 PLAGIARISM CREATED BY SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

Summarizing, while it interprets other people's texts and transforms them into different guises and discourses, has a close interface with plagiarism. To counteract the risk of plagiarizing, the common instruction has it that a summary should be created in 'one's own words'. Plagiarism, however, is a socially-constructed crime. For example, Willett and Jeannot (1993) point out that only in the Western world is it possible to own one's texts. Bloch and Chi (1995) are also concerned with plagiarisms since they have compared the use of citations in Chinese and English academic papers. They suggest that plagiarism is a compensatory strategy used both by novices and experts, but it may show cultural variation. Furthermore, even if plagiarism is more often regarded as a novice strategy in the West, it may be more of an expert strategy in China because it reflects the way composition has been taught there. Bloch and Chi refer to Matalene's (1985) observations about Chinese rhetorical conventions. According to her, it is often acceptable to borrow texts verbatim in China. Confucian texts, in particular, are supposed to be known by heart and may be quoted, for example, in civil service examinations without any mention of the source. Bloch and Chi also note that in the humanities, in particular, the line between plagiarism and intertextuality is very fine indeed. Nevertheless, in the Western academic community plagiarism is a taboo and an important and inflammable issue (Bazerman 1992: 67).

## **3 PLAGIARISM IN LITERATURE?**

In the literary sphere, however, plagiarism is not a crime in legal terms, as was indicated during the discussion in the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in Aug./Sept. 1995 after the publication of a book by Anja Kauranen which borrowed words, sentences and longer chunks from

academic texts. The author's excuse was to appeal to intertextuality. Amidst the polemics in Helsingin Sanomat a young researcher in geography, Hille Koskela, complained in the following way:

Kauranen's way of exploiting other people's texts has already evoked public surprise (HS 19 Aug.). Her text includes translations of, for example, **Julia Kristeva's** and **Jean Baudrillard's** [original emphasis] texts without asking for permission and without mentioning their sources. At one reading I found so many direct and indirect quotations from several researchers and scholars I was familiar with that I started wondering what kind of proportion of the book is actually Kauranen's **own** production. (Helsingin Sanomat 1 Sept. 1995) [the last emphasis added; translation mine]<sup>1</sup>

Koskela then went on to explain how an article which she and some other researcher had written had been 'modified' for the title of Kauranen's book and how the book also included 'the direct, unpermitted quotation of several sentences which partly distort the original contents of the article.'<sup>2</sup> She continued: 'I find it especially deplorable that our factual text has been **altered** to make it appear more militant and conducive to violence'. [emphasis added]<sup>3</sup> Anja Kauranen, the novelist, responded to the accusation by posing the counter-question of whether Koskela's text had, in fact, been quoted or **altered** (HS 5 Sept. 1995)? Thus, it would seem that, in the world of fiction, once an act of plagiarism has been performed, the piece of text which was the object of plagiarism stops being a direct, unpermitted quote as a result of its new context. Once the new text has appropriated the plagiarized piece of discourse, this is provided with a new and different meaning. Consequently, the previous author's denotative-plus-evaluative meaning is supplemented with the would-be 'plagiarizing' author's new evaluative meaning. As Bakhtin and Kristeva have suggested, everyone gives new meanings to the words they use. Kauranen has expressed the wish that fiction should approach philosophical research, which would benefit the worlds of both academia and art (Petäjä 1995). (A parallel case of literary borrowing was recently presented by Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History* [*Jumalat juhlivat öisin*, 1993].) This academic-fictional dispute

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<sup>1</sup> Kauranen tapa käytellä toisten tekstejä onkin jo herättänyt julkista ihmetystä (HS 19.8.). Kirjassa on siteerattu mm. **Julia Kristevan** ja **Jean Baudrillardin** käännöksiä lupaa kysymättä ja asiasta mainitsematta. Yhdellä lukemalla löysin romaanista niin paljon minulle tuttuja tutkijoiden suoria ja epäsuoria lainauksia, että jäin ihmettelemään, kuinka suuri osa romaanista on Kauranen **omaa** tuotantoa. (HS 1 Sept. 1995) [kaksi ensimmäistä lihavoitua alkuperäisiä, jälkimmäinen kirjoittajan]

<sup>2</sup> 'virkkeittäin suoria luvattomia lainauksia, jotka osin vääristävät artikkelimme alkuperäistä sisältöä.'

<sup>3</sup> Erityisen valitettavaa on mielestäni se, että asiallista tekstiämme on **muutettu** väkivaltaa lietsovaksi. [lihavoitua kirjoittajan]

is just an interesting aside, however, and now we revert to the academic world itself.

#### 4 PLAGIARISM IN ACADEMIA

Wilson Mizner (*The New Penguin Dictionary of Quotations* 1992) has frequently been quoted for his ironical view that 'if you steal from one author it's plagiarism. If you steal from many it's research'. Professor Lauri Saxén (1996) has recently expressed his concern about academic fraud and dishonesty, offering several examples from the field of the natural sciences. He lists instances of academic fraud, such as expressing other people's ideas as one's own; and also, the selective use of references, that is, researchers often rather mention references which support their research rather than contradictory or less supportive findings. Saxén also mentions the important case of where academics referee or peer review journal articles-to-be or grant proposals. These referees become acquainted with unpublished research results. He thinks that after a referee has read somebody else's ideas, unpublished results or methodology, he or she may later on start thinking that it was actually their own original idea and thus become guilty of academic plagiarism on almost unconscious grounds.

Similarly, the American National Academy of Sciences advises young researchers on responsible conduct in research by warning on misconduct in science:

Beyond honest errors caused through negligence are a third category of errors: those that involve deception. Making up data or results (fabrication), changing or misreporting data or results (falsification), and using the ideas or words of another person without giving appropriate credit (plagiarism) - all strike at the heart of the values on which science is based. These acts of scientific misconduct not only undermine progress but the entire set of values on which the scientific enterprise rests. Anyone who engages in any of these practices is putting his or her scientific career at risk. Even infractions that may seem minor at the time can end up being severely punished.

(<http://www-micro.msb.le.ac.uk/obas/misconduct.html> 1995: 1)

Several cases of academic plagiarism have cropped up and been publicized recently in Finland, not to mention the United States or Hong Kong where, according to Scollon (1995), law suits are common because of the plagiarizing of academic research. In January 1995 *The Times Higher Education Supplement* published a leader about a poster campaign at Wolverhampton University in Britain appealing to students not to plagiarize. The editor was pondering on where influence stops and imitation starts, when pastiche becomes plagiarism. The anti-plagiarism campaign 'warned that "sloppy referencing" and the "failure to note in rough work when you quote another's words" is no justification, nor is "the argument that you have

changed some of the words or the order of the sentence" acceptable' (Targett 1995). Even Oxford University was quoted in the news report as a new seat of plagiarism. Similarly, Houghton (1991) has reported on a postgraduate student studying in the UK who intended to include a published case study into his M.Sc. dissertation. The student came from the Middle East and was undoubtedly acting on different academic and cultural premises. The problem was simply solved by giving the instruction that the student should summarize the findings of the case study. Thompson (1996) has added another note to the issue of plagiarism by saying that 'in academic discourse non-attribution is at best ignorance and at worst plagiarism in research articles and student essays but an accepted norm in textbooks.' It is interesting to speculate whether the reason for the non-existence of plagiarism in textbooks as regards unattributed references is the generic difference pointed out by Shaw (1992) that 'textbooks inform downwards from a position of authority', whereas 'articles report horizontally to peers'.

On a smaller scale plagiarisms may be quite common in students' seminar and proseminar papers, and the most common reason being ignorance, as Thompson has suggested. Teachers are often familiar with students' papers in which sentences vary between the style of a typical student essay and a collection of very sophisticated sentences in between. When questioned about the missing quotation marks, students have told their teacher that in their department it was permissible to copy published texts as long as the page references were mentioned. Whether this is true or based on misunderstanding is unclear but subject departments ought to caution their students against plagiarism and give clearer instructions on how previous research should be referred to and reported in student papers, since, at the moment, not all students outside the language subjects attend specific language courses taught by writing specialists.

## 5 INSTRUCTIONS AGAINST PLAGIARISM

Bazerman exhorts writers to avoid plagiarism and provides the instruction that only when you are writing a straight summary, which is labelled as such and which mentions the source, can you use other people's text without any quotation marks. This is a controversial point, however, since it is customary for teachers, researchers and writing manuals to recommend that quotation marks should be used with direct quotes even in summarizing (see, for example, Leki 1989: 172; Kauppinen and Laurinen 1984: 15). But as soon as summarization is a tool used for reporting, for example, on previous research, we again come face to face with plagiarism. Barbara Seidlhofer (1996) has raised the interesting point about the instruction given for summarizing that the student is asked to write **in your own words**. She

argues that if the point of summarizing is, for example, to practise writing in a foreign language, there are no grounds for demanding that you should use your own words only. The writer does not necessarily have any words of his or her own in that foreign language. And as, for example, Pitkänen-Huhta (1996) has recently pointed out in her licentiate thesis, this easily results in distorted discourse since usually the best words are the words which were already used in the source text. As a result, the learner-summarizer would just be forced to use unsatisfactory or inferior words and create wrong collocations while trying to concoct his or her own wording. Moreover, writers know that they are always borrowing words which other people have used and simply giving them a new voice, as Bakhtin repeatedly pointed out.

Swales and Feak (1994: 125 - 126), while addressing the teaching of academic writing, have also dealt with the question of plagiarism. They suggest a six-point list to be discussed with students to find or reach a consensus about where plagiarism ends and original work begins:

1. Copying a paragraph as it is from the source without any acknowledgment.
2. Copying a paragraph making only small changes, such as replacing a few verbs or adjectives with synonyms.
3. Cutting and pasting a paragraph by using the sentences of the original but leaving one or two out, or by putting one or two sentences in a different order.
4. Composing a paragraph by taking short standard phrases from a number of sources and putting them together with some words of your own.
5. Paraphrasing a paragraph by rewriting with substantial changes in language and organization, amount of detail, and examples.
6. Quoting a paragraph by placing it in block format with the source cited.  
(Swales and Feak 1994: 126)

The last point in the above list refers to the block quotation, thus presenting a slightly different issue compared to the other techniques, which concern ways of integrating the reports of previous authors' texts into the writer's own discourse. If a very strict stance towards plagiarism is adopted, then the new writer's non-plagiarizing discourse would start from the application of the fifth item only, and in those cases as well the original source should, of course, be mentioned. Depending on the source text to be reported, however, in some cases the procedure suggested in the fourth item might also be feasible.

## **6 HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM**

The question still remains which ways would be most useful in order to encourage students to avoid plagiarism. The first of these is that students should be encouraged to react to source texts, to be 'assertive' writers, rather than 'submissive' reproducers of earlier texts (Widdowson 1984: 91 - 2). Since this is what is required in academic writing proper, summary writing could be used as the first learning step in practising assertiveness and letting one's own voice be heard. It seems to be a waste of language teaching resources if students are asked merely to recycle texts by producing the gist of the source text, when their summarizing tasks could be made more meaningful and interesting by letting them have more authority over their writing assignments. Referring to Widdowson's concepts of 'assertive' and 'submissive', Holmes (1996) has noted that submissive readers produce hierarchical summaries (which he calls stage 1), while assertive readers produce what are called study summaries, that is, summaries which are useful for the individual student's study purposes (i.e., stage 2). Finally, the third and highest stage is reached when students start writing back - when they become critical.

The role the summarizer can assume is to be either an animator or an author (these terms were originally introduced by Goffman [1981: 144f] and they have been further developed by Widdowson [1992]; and Seidlhofer [1995: 206]. Seidlhofer has applied them in the context of summary writing). Animation means the more submissive role of trying to guess the original writer's intention and trying to reproduce it as faithfully as possible. Alternatively, if the writer takes the role of author, he or she takes a more interpretative and subjective stance on the source text and produces an account of what the source text means to him or her personally (Seidlhofer 1995). Seidlhofer also suggests that the animating or authoring roles affect the reliability and validity of summarization: animators produce précis-like summaries closely corresponding to the original but with less validity for the summarizer, whereas summarizers with authoring roles may not turn out as reliable summaries in terms of the source text but their writing means a great deal to them since they can start from their own setting and own views of the source.

## **7 RESEARCH FINDINGS ON REPORTING IN SUMMARIZATION**

The second aim of this paper is to present findings from my ongoing research into critical summarization. The purpose of my study has been to

examine the techniques student summarizers use when writing critical summaries on the basis of different authors' texts and to determine how their writing differs from similar speech acts displayed by more professional writers, for example, in book reviews. My basic materials consist of 77 critical summaries written in English by Finnish language centre students on the basis of three different L2 source texts dealing with the same theme, and 23 book reviews, taken from the semi-academic magazine *History Today* (HT) and the two academic journals *TESOL Quarterly* and the *ELT Journal*, most of which deal with a number of historical or linguistic books. The focus of the investigation has been on the speech acts of reporting, evaluation and discussion. My study indicates that students know how to report but that their methods are simpler, or less sophisticated, than those used by reviewers in published book reviews, who, in their turn, are much more evaluative in their writing. As hypothesised, both quantitative and qualitative differences exist in reporting, evaluation and discussion. Thus the book reviews manifest a greater number of the speech acts of reporting and evaluation by varying their reporting signals to a greater extent, and in particular, by combining the acts of reporting with evaluation as well as engaging in a greater quantity of nominalisations or grammatical metaphor (cf. Halliday 1985: 321 - 332 ), which also enhanced opportunities for attributive evaluations (cf. Examples BR1, BR2 and BR8).

In the following I shall concentrate on several examples which show how the speech act of reporting has been implemented in my data. The major differences discovered between the student summaries and the book reviews have been, first of all, in the packing of information (cf. Ventola 1996: 176 - 188), as shown in the first example. (BR stands for book review and CS for critical summary.)

BR 1 James Pritchard's new (Canadian) study is a **detailed** and **meticulous** investigation of how ...

CS 1 The unifying factor in Postman's, Huot's and Bernard's texts is an impression that... FL14

The second distinctive characteristic is the length of the reporting signal as contrasted below in BR2 and CS2. The reporting signal is indicated by underlining and the acts of evaluation are given in boldface.

BR 2 In giving **due** attention to the **importance** of this last, **highly charged** issue, which touched upon and drew from many strands of the preoccupations and problems of the period, Herrin argues that the encroachment of Islam, with its ban upon images, precipitated the iconoclastic crises of Byzantium, both religious and military (as icons served as a focus of worship, of ecclesiastical and imperial propaganda and of corporate identity). HT12

CS 2 Anyway, Yardley claims Postman to be too strict in his too indifferent opinions about TV. FL4

The multilayeredness of reporting signals is the third distinctive feature between student and more professional reporting. Double underlining indicates 'interpretative reporting' as distinguished from 'plain or neutral reporting'.

BR 3 One's reason for scepticism about the American welcome for the book is that it assumes at a time when the United States feels itself more remote than ever from the old world and when history as such does not enjoy a high intellectual reputation, that ... HT8

CS 3 The main point in her argumentation seems to be, however, the fear that ... F15

The student summarizers also attempt multilayered reporting but it often results in over- complicated conglomerations of reporting verbs and nouns. Moreover, the book reviews display more cohesive acts of reporting (as shown in Example BR4 below) than the students manage in their critical summaries, as is natural when novice and expert writers are compared. An additional problem in comparisons of this kind is the fact that the students were non-native writers of English while the book reviews were presumed to have been produced by native English writers.

BR 4 ... Dietrich Geyer's book is therefore timely.  
 In a combination of survey and analysis, he looks first at... which has raised the question why  
 ... he then refers to ...  
Subsequent research examined ...  
 Geyer next uses more recent literature to consider ...  
This leads him to ask why...and needed a war to destroy it.  
The war, Geyer concludes, ...  
 Geyer also tackles the issue of whether ...  
His answer is that ...  
 He also observes how ... HT1

Thus, the book reviewers use highly compact language and pack their references in grammatical metaphors or long-winded subclauses. Similarly, reviewers include more interpretative acts of reporting and evaluation in their utterances than the student summarizers do in sentences with similar functions. The device the reviewers use for more varied syntactic structures is foregrounding, which is seldom used in student summaries. Foregrounding takes several forms but most commonly it is effected with a cleft sentence.

BR 5 What Professor Kennedy has done is to look at history of the rise and decline of the main powers... HT8

CS 5 What is common for these three articles is... W1

The following example BR 6 shows how a relative clause is used as a reporting structure. The sentence resembles ordinary content-telling in its integrative use of the reporting structure. This is a feature of the book reviews only, while the summarizers mostly frame their reports with a reporting verb or noun which is followed with a 'that' clause, as in Examples CS1 and CS3, or complement governed by a preposition as in Examples CS2 and CS8.

BR 6 The older (mainly Western) views that he then refers to sought an explanation in the lost opportunities for internal renewal in the 1860s and the 1900s. HT1

The reporting signals could also merge with rhetorical signalling words, as shown below in BR 7. Again, no corresponding report was found in the critical summaries.

BR 7 The reluctance to abandon the peculiarly Chinese custom of female footbinding is yet another example of the tenacity of tradition. HT5

The following examples also show evaluation which has taken over the act of reporting:

BR 8 Sergei Drobashenko's essay is a wonderful evocation and indeed celebration of how Soviet newsreels depicted the capture of Berlin and in particular the hoisting of the flag above the Reichstag. HT13

CS 8 Bernard supports nearly too enthusiastically the ideas by giving some examples about ... FL21

The major difference in evaluative reporting between the book reviews and the critical summaries is that the book reviews show a wider range of evaluative structures, with a great many adjective attributes, while the summaries mainly employ adverbial evaluations, as illustrated above.

## 8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The question inevitably arises of how students might be taught to report on other people's texts. The results of my study lend themselves to the following recommendations for teaching. Not unlike suggestions for the teaching of any writing in a foreign language, students should, firstly, be

made aware of the genre in which they are supposed to produce discourse by being shown representative samples in the target performance and language and being asked to distinguish the differences in their own and more professionally written texts. For example, Diane Belcher (1995: 135, 138 - 139, 149 - 150) has also attempted to teach critical writing skills by showing contrasting examples and familiarizing students with the genre of book reviews and comments on research articles.

Secondly, since one of the major differences between the texts drawn by professional critical writers and the student summarizers lies in the compactness of discourse, condensing activities could be incorporated into various exercises. The question of compactness is closely related to the concept of grammatical metaphor, which should be discussed as an introduction to the techniques of information packing (cf. Ventola 1996: 176 - 188). Thirdly, students should be encouraged to furnish their nouns with evaluative attributes, a feature which was largely missing in the critical summaries.

The characteristics of lengthy reporting structures and multilayeredness, typical of my data on professional critical writing, are issues which may be more difficult to teach than the points mentioned above, and it would seem that they could best be mastered through extensive practice of reading and writing texts in the target genre and language. On the other hand, overcomplex writing is also criticized for its contribution to the abstruse and esoteric nature of academic knowledge; consequently, these features of length and multilayeredness may not be most urgent priorities in the teaching of critical reporting. A good practical solution to the problem of reporting is to consult a professional guide book on reporting, such as the *Collins COBUILD English Guides 5 Reporting* by Thompson (1994). Eventually, competent reporting on other authors' texts, whether in tasks of summarization or more original academic writing will be the best device for counteracting plagiarism.

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