Chapter 13
Using *Turnitin* to Support Students' Understanding of Textual Borrowing in Academic Writing: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Concerns about plagiarism are salient for the academic writing of second language (L2) writers of English, who face several challenges while learning academic discourse and proper citation conventions. Effective instruction is crucial in helping them learn to avoid plagiarism and borrow from sources appropriately. In this chapter, the authors present a case study of an English as a Second Language (ESL) composition class at a Midwestern university in the United States. This study is framed by a social view of learning that draws from Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of a community of practice. Data included weekly classroom observations, interviews at the beginning, middle, and end of the 10-week academic term, surveys, and student participants' online blogs. Findings illustrate how Turnitin, an Internet-based matched-text detection program, was used to support academic writing instruction and help socialize learners into an American academic discourse community.

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is making us crazy… Collectively, as a professoriate, we're obsessed with it (Jenkins, 2011).

While plagiarism is hardly a novel phenomenon in higher education, the availability of the Internet and the proliferation of electronic texts have changed the ways students access information and weave

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outside sources into their academic texts. In response to these changes and to the fears that administrators and educators have about plagiarism, numerous software programs have been developed which can detect plagiarism in students' texts. Companies such as iParadigms, which produces the Internet-based software program *Turnitin*, have achieved enormous worldwide success in licensing their product to high schools and universities. *Turnitin* is one of many packages that attempt to offer a solution to the plagiarism problem.

Plagiarism is a particularly difficult issue for students whose second language (L2) is English. L2 writers may not fully appreciate the seriousness of plagiarism in the U.S. context, encounter the notion of plagiarism for the first time upon arrival in the United States or other English dominant countries, or have limited experience with academic writing. L2 writers' cultural backgrounds may also affect their understanding of plagiarism (Bloch, 2001; Deckert, 1993; Dryden, 1999; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995; Shi, 2006). They might not fully comprehend the notion of authorship and have difficulty viewing themselves as authors (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006). They also may be unable to distinguish between what is common knowledge and information from sources that require a citation (Emerson, 2008; Shi, 2008, 2011), which is critical for producing academic texts. Furthermore, L2 writers may have insufficient conceptual knowledge of academic discourse conventions that transcend sentence-level skills such as citing, paraphrasing, and summarizing (Gu & Brooks, 2008). Finally, they may have inadequate command of the academic language and vocabulary they need to paraphrase, summarize, and cite sources appropriately (Currie, 1998; Howard, 1995; Keck, 2006; Li & Casanave, 2012; Pecorari, 2008) and lack the confidence needed to produce original academic texts (Bloch, 2001).

As a result of these factors, ESL college instructors face several challenges as they prepare their students for the rigors of academic writing in students' mainstream composition classes and in their majors of study. While significant scholarship in literature for native and non-native English students (English L1 and L2 writers) has addressed many of these areas, few in-depth case studies have considered how plagiarism detection software may be used to teach students about proper citation and textual borrowing from a pedagogical perspective rather than to merely detect plagiarism. Given that numerous institutions worldwide already have licenses for these kinds of programs, it is worth considering how such software can be successfully incorporated into academic writing instruction.

In this chapter, we report on a case study of a post-secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) composition course that focuses on helping international students develop an understanding and command of English academic writing. We examine the use of plagiarism detection software in the class, with the aim of contributing to growing scholarly attention on effective plagiarism pedagogy that incorporates a digital detection component (*Turnitin*). We illustrate how L2 writers learn to avoid plagiarism by appropriately borrowing from sources and strengthening their academic writing skills.

BACKGROUND

What Is Plagiarism?

While modern technology has afforded educators the opportunity to detect matched text more easily, the concept of "plagiarism" is not as easy to define. Buranen (1999) aptly notes that the term plagiarism has become "a kind of wastebasket into which we toss anything we do not know what to do with" (p. 64). Buranen goes on to say that plagiarism can include intentional cheating, purchasing a paper and