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PLAGIARISM AS A WIDESPREAD PHENOMENON AMONG SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT HEI

Abstract

Plagiarism is claimed to plague academic realm on a world scale. Georgia is no exception in that respect. Tbilisi State University (TSU) is taking the issue of plagiarism very seriously which is manifested in the measures adopted by the institution to tackle the problem. The university policies regarding plagiarism viewed as a phenomenon of an academic misconduct are constantly becoming stricter and stricter.

The article deals with one of the forms of plagiarism used by TSU students in their assignments, specifically, in their presentations. Presentations, an obligatory form of assessment in nearly all syllabi at the university are frequently characterized by poor referencing, inaccurate citation, when often the whole chunks of text are directly taken from the original sources without any periphrasis or indication of the source. The research focuses on aforementioned instances of plagiarism, their causes and strategies for solving the problem. As a part of conducted research were studied presentations prepared by students at two different faculties (Humanities and Economics) doing English language courses (General English and EAP). Also, students were interviewed online.

Key words: Plagiarism, presentations, academic

Introduction

Plagiarism is claimed to plague academic realm on a world scale. Plagiarism.org whose mission is to support the education community with a comprehensive set of resources to help students write with integrity presents on its page definition of plagiarism according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary. To "plagiarize" means:

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft

- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source. https://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism

As we live in an era of dispelling myths the same has to apply to plagiarism, which should not be viewed as just "borrowing" or "copying" but acknowledged as a a an act of fraud involving "stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterwards."

It should be underlined that plagiarism is not a modern phenomenon. It has come into existences with evolution of science and literature although it cannot be denied that modern accelerated technological advance, introduction and rapid development of Internet, computers, smart gadgets and android phones have certainly exacerbated the problem. The temptation of obtaining information with just one click and then using that piece of information in assignments and papers to be submitted within strict deadline is quite big. Correspondingly, western reputable educational institutions were quite prompt to respond to this burning issue by carrying out research and developing special programs that can detect and reveal the instances of plagiarism.

Georgia is no exception in that respect. In 2016 was published a research report titled "The Problem of Plagiarism and Its perception in Georgia". Naturally, the report looked into the problem of plagiarism and its perception in Georgia. The research was funded by Erasmus + and open society which is a clear indication that western assistance is readily provided for addressing this acute problem.

1. The measures taken by TSU to tackle the issues of plagiarism

TSU is certainly among those institutions that are taking the issue of plagiarism very seriously, which is manifested in the measures adopted by the university to tackle the problem. The university policies regarding plagiarism viewed as a phenomenon of an academic misconduct are constantly becoming stricter and stricter. TSU takes efficient steps to raise awareness regarding plagiarism through implementing various projects with active assistance of Erasmus Institutional Development Program project - "Academic Integrity for Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Institutions in Georgia (INTEGRITY)" and fruitful collaboration of TSU Department of Public Relations and Quality Assurance as well as enthusiastic participation of TSU Student Self-Government. E.g. As part of short term project "Campaign Against Plagiarism" an animated video was prepared with the participation of students, which explains both plagiarism and ways how to avoid it, as well as highlights examples of citations and periphrasis. We should particularly single out the fact of purchasing text similarity software "Turnitin" in the framework of the Integrity

project. The project coordinator Ilia State University as well as TSU have developed various resources, including textbooks, instructions, video tutorials, and guidelines for using "Turnitin". We have elaborated on steps taken by TSU in its struggle against plagiarism to show that the process of dealing with this issue and the process of educating students as well as both academic and administrative staff should be ongoing, continuous as obviously still there is immense work to be done in order to eradicate the problem or at least to alleviate it to maximum extent possible.

2. Instances of plagiarism in assignments prepared by TSU students

2.1 Presentations as a form of assessment in TSU

The article deals with the instances of plagiarism characteristic to assignments prepared by TSU students, specifically, in their presentations. The goal of preparing presentations in academic English course is multifaceted. A number of skills are checked, such as, language competence (fluency, accuracy), analytical thinking (critical thinking), ability to address target issues, research skills (ability to look up information, seek relevant data, cite relevant sources), using PowerPoint, commutation skills (ability to establish rapport with audience, holding listeners attention), time management. In general, while assigning presentations students are given choice. Either they have to respond to specific subject issue or they have to prepare presentations on issues they deem to be important (in that case they have to present short verbal justification to the lecturer about what prompted their choice and which trustworthy sources they are going to rely on). E.g. previous term, students were offered several articles from the reputable magazine "The Economist" (*Absent student, Office Politics, Who controls the conversation*) and for their final presentations they had to opt for one of them. As might be expected, apart from the given article they were told to seek additional information from the similarly trustworthy sources so that they could make their presentation more analytical, more varied while dealing with the issues already familiar to other students, which would make discussions to be followed after presentation more engaging for other the rest of the group. Also, some students expressed wish to prepare presentations on issues in accordance with their choice.

2.2 Cases of academic misconduct revealed through presentations

Presentations, obligatory forms of assessment in nearly all syllabi at TSU are frequently characterized by poor referencing, inaccurate citation, and often whole chunks of text are directly taken from the original sources without any periphrasis or indication of the source. The article

focuses on aforementioned instances of plagiarism, their causes and strategies for solving the problem. The reasons behind may be various such as students' lack of knowledge and skills of exploring the resources and proper use of these resources. Responsibility for frequent cases of plagiarism also lies with academic staff; professors who ether due to their lack of experience while dealing with issues of plagiarism or just superficial approach to the given assignments also contribute to aggravation of the problem.

Methodology

3.1 Research participants

As a part of conducted survey presentations prepared by students at two different faculties (Humanities and Economics) doing English language courses (General English and Academic English) were reviewed. Also, students were interviewed.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

As mentioned, there were conducted short interviews with students. Students were asked questions in order to determine to what extent they are aware what plagiarism is. They were asked if they knew what plagiarism meant, if they committed the act of plagiarism and how they felt about that.

Regarding for presentations, majority of students stated there was clear distinction between academic, thesis paper and "an ordinary" presentation. That is why, they thought teachers should have much more lenient attitude towards instances of plagiarism in presentations than to the same phenomenon in thesis papers or even course work. TSU students associate notion of presentation as an assignment given to them with power point presentation where the main focus is on the visual side. However, in many cases they contradict themselves as they tend to squeeze in large portions of texts in power point presentations so that they don't have to memories text, or freely discuss an issue, but just read from the screen, which makes the situation even worse as not only do they directly take content from unspecified sources but they don't even bother to learn what they've plagiarized or analyze plagiarized content.

Results/Findings

The results of the implemented survey revealed the fact that majority of students poorly comply with aforementioned requirements for proper presentation. Only about 21 per cent of students whose assignments were reviewed as a part of survey comply with the norms of plagiarism while 79 per cent definitely ignore them. When faced with the task of preparing presentation they focus on obtaining subject content without bothering much to process and analyze obtained information; their main concern is just the visual side of presentation, which is again direct transfer of visual material from Internet; they usually end their presentations with thanking audience without citing sources used in their presentations. As a result of interviews with students it became clear that they have rather vague understanding of plagiarism and correspondingly they need much more detailed instructions before receiving specific assignments and clarifications on not only how to prepare proper presentations (meeting all above mentioned requirements) but also how to avoid plagiarism and how to comply with internationally and locally set standards for academic work.

Conclusions

We should make our students aware that all of the below mentioned stated cases are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not https://plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism

Also, students should be informed that it is not after all that difficult to avoid plagiarism, which means that they can freely seek access to different internet or paper based sources and resources and use them for supporting their arguments or hypothesis provided they make sure they observe proper citation rules and standards. In this view it is also teachers/professors responsibility to familiarize students with these rules and standards by giving direct instructions as well as indicating reliable sources for enhancing that skill.

It will be also helpful if academic staff within the educational institution is provided trainings on addressing the issues of plagiarism and on application of anti plagiarism programs introduced and applied at that university.

We believe that while dealing with this serious misconduct we should apply quite well known and tested approach which is called raising awareness about the problem. We reckon that of course downgrading and in some cases when the instances of plagiarism are particularly flagrant not accepting assignment or paper at all should be considered and applied but at the same time we should keep on educating and instructing our students what plagiarism actually is and how degrading it is to their academic performance and general attitude. They should feel ashamed and embarrassed when they know that they are using somebody else's work without acknowledging it.

As for presentations, we should make it clear to our students that the main objective of assigning them is to help them develop research, analytical skills, realize what academic honesty and integrity is so that they are better prepared and equipped with adequate skills to deal with much more sophisticated and challenging tasks such are course work or thesis paper.

Apart from general recommendation we have more specific recommendations:

Introducing special textbooks on how to prepare presentations and how to write dissertations and thesis in English.

The other beneficial strategy might be introduction of students peer review of the presentations (giving feedback not only to what extent presentation complies with assignment question, and to what extent the language is used accurately, but also to what extent students have managed to perform the task without resorting to plagiarism, to what extent they succeeded in indicating sources in an academic manner).

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