



Intertextuality and Plagiarism in EFL Writing: An Analysis of University Professors' Attitudes towards MA Theses

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Abstract

Intertextuality is an important academic writing ability when using others' ideas efficiently and is tantamount to failing in the fulfillment of the research part of MA programs if improperly utilized. This study was thus intended to delve into university teachers' judgment of what they may count as proper or improper intertextuality and the reasons why students might deviate from the acceptable norms of intertextuality. To this end, four extracts of MA theses together with their original sources were presented to four university professors with different academic rankings. Through an interview, the four extracts were evaluated and their intertextual qualities were explained. The data analysis revealed that university professors assessed intertextualities as proper or improper inconsistently within two rounds of evaluation. Furthermore, they recounted cultural, social, educational, developmental, virtual and economic reasons for students' deviating behaviors in the utilization of the resources available. As for the criteria of illegitimate intertextuality, it was found that no signaling to the reader subject to the violation of the following conditions including specific domain knowledge, more than one sentence copied or paraphrased, mismatch between source and target, and the particular section of the thesis where borrowed ideas are to be used could lead to plagiarism. This study has implications for thesis writers, thesis raters, and EFL writing teachers which are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: EFL writing, Intertextuality, MA theses, Plagiarism, University professors' attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Intertextuality is an essential and inherent element giving life and existence to any text since each text is the reflection of what its author has read or has heard (Fairclough, 1992). De Beaugrande (1980) characterizes intertextuality as a process through which parts of one and/or

several discourses hold together and become parts of each other. In fact, intertextuality displays how texts carry in themselves relevant histories from other previously developed texts. Intertextuality makes it possible for the information within a specific discourse to be reshaped and reformulated to serve the intentions of the author. In academic writing, intertextuality occupies a significant position, and its proper employment is

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one of the basic skills which the novice EFL writers generally lack because most of them do not know how to use texts in a proper way to satisfy the demands of their target discourse community (Roig, 1997; Shi, 2006; Shi, 2010).

This may partly be explained by the nature of EFL writing because these writers have to write in a foreign language the academic register of which is unfamiliar to them. Most EFL writers, before mastering the English language completely, are required to employ intertextuality in a proper manner. However, EFL writers may fail in signaling the employment of intertextuality in their writing, which might be interpreted as plagiarism. Though the reuse of other materials may be a function of memory span and text types as well (Saadatnia, Ketabi, & Tavakoli, 2016), students are constantly warned that inappropriate intertextuality has been observed in their writing, and in most instances, the thesis raters or other gatekeepers diagnose them as plagiarism which might bring about serious consequences for EFL writers.

The advent of the internet might contribute to the complexity of the issue of intertextuality as it supplies ready-made essays on a good number of subjects of interest for students. Moreover, in many instances, students are not aware of how to acknowledge the influence or the presence of other texts in their own. The students' notion of what type of knowledge is admired and valued may play a role in inappropriate intertextuality. Certainly, a lifetime nurturing in a system of education with its cultural norms and standards cannot be adapted easily to a Western culture's concept of plagiarism, which, as this study reveals, is still vague even to EFL instructors. The encouragement of memorizing beautiful phrases and sentences may later on develop into the habit of inappropriate intertextuality. Cultures, which encourage rote learning and memorizing exact words and even flatter remembering the page number and lines of the source text as a virtue, might make students think it a respect to the original author if they repeat his words without acknowledgment. Deckert's (1992) study of the

notions of Chinese university students regarding plagiarism revealed that most of the participants did not have a clear concept of the Western notion of plagiarism and they were mostly unable to recognize it.

Building upon the notion of cultural discrepancies, with regard to plagiarism and intertextuality, Craig (2004) relates her experience with Chinese students, one of whom had given footnotes for every incorporated statement but had repeated the exact words of the original author without inserting quotation marks. She adds that the Chinese consider it a tribute to an author if they repeat his exact words. Craig (2004) also mentions the writing of the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson as cited by a July 2003 *Time* magazine article; she cites the words of the *Time* writer that Jefferson borrowed freely from the phrasings of others and asserts that this form of borrowing today might be considered as plagiarism, but then it was considered not only proper but also learned.

Moreover, as Hu (2001) contends, in certain cultures such as African, Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, knowledge is considered a public property belonging to the society as a whole and not as an individual property which should be protected. In the Chinese culture, plagiarism might be acceptable because talent is not treated as a private property (Myers, 1998), though this idea is strongly negated elsewhere for not being on solid evidence but largely on the assumption of cultural acceptability (Tang, 2012). Thompson and Williams (1995) point out that to many Asian students, it is a tribute paid to the respected authors if their words are copied word by word, and thus the student who copies these well-known authors or leaders is appreciated for having revealed his own intelligence and sound judgment. Therefore, the discrepancies in cultural values and instructions may impede the acceptance of anti-plagiarism rules and laws which are mostly boosted and propagated in the western cultures. Hazlitt (1998) contends that Korean students are mostly praised for imitation and receive very little admiration for creation, Japanese students are taught to maintain

solidarity and learn group activity, and Mexican students are told to share their answers and their homework. Naturally, these students care little for private ownership of intellectual property.

Plagiarism might also be sought in more large-scale felonies committed in the society. In countries where widespread corruption is practiced in many aspects of life in general and in educational activities in particular, and there are underground companies and individuals who write theses and dissertations in various educational and scientific fields, the prevalence of plagiarism should not be very surprising. Evans and Youmans (2000) in their study involving students from 15 different countries have reported of students who had to purchase private tutorial sessions with their instructors since securing good relations with instructors were key to success.

From another perspective, students are baffled by the inconsistent messages they receive on plagiarism. There is no exact definition for plagiarism. Howard (2000) asserts that there is no uniform definition for plagiarism. The intentions of those who have committed plagiarism are not generally considered in the university definitions for plagiarism. The plethora of definitions for plagiarism may mislead students because they seem to be unclear, not consistently applicable, non-uniform, unrealistic and perhaps quite unfit for certain disciplines. The criteria for assessing plagiarism are vague. Hu (2001) rightfully contends how private words, which need citation, are differentiated from public words is a matter of controversy. Howard (2000) argues that while the definition of plagiarism differentiates violations on the ground of the plagiarist's intent, the discerning method of eliciting that intent is invalid and questionable because it mostly examines the text itself and has little concern for the intentionality that produced it and does not launch a query into the circumstances of the author's intent. In other words, plagiarism is often defined based on the production rather than the intention; in certain cases, the student does not know that s/he is plagiarizing and there are situations where plagiar-

ism might have occurred out of oversight or negligence.

So far, ignorance of the conventions of intertextuality and cultural differences have been cited in relation to intertextuality. Seen from another angle in EFL contexts closely related to the language proficiency of EFL learners is the problem of maintaining one's voice while using other texts in one's own writing. Howard (1993, 1995, 2007) considers maintaining one's voice to be related to language ability and proposes that this voice requirement forces students to resort to patch-writing approach. Based on this approach, plagiarism among novice EFL writers might be sought in their inability to use their own voice to present an idea or to write about a topic. Being forced to write while still lacking the necessary command of the language, the student resorts to copying and pasting the texts of other writers and paraphrasing to insert the text into his/her own writing. Doing so, the student might think that his/her way is innocent because s/he has done it unintentionally according to the patch-writing approach. As such, the patch-writing approach states that the reason for plagiarism by EFL students resides in the absence of the student's own voice while writing about a topic. While not dismissing the authorial problem or the inability to maintain the voice, Pecorari (2003, 2013) attributes plagiarism to the student's confusion and carelessness in the note-taking procedure. Moreover, factors such as parents' expectations for their children and their demand for higher grades and students' fear of failure should also be cited as contributing factors.

Plagiarism can also be considered as a coping strategy. When a student is forced to produce original ideas which instructors also demand to be correct and novel and when s/he compares his/her own performance with what is already produced and sees the discrepancy between what s/he is expected to achieve and what s/he has really achieved, s/he turns to plagiarism as the most realistic and plausible strategy (Hyland, 2001). Abasi, Akbari and Graves (2006) assert that plagiarism occurs when students fail to prove

themselves as writers with novel contributions. The high standards set by instructors, students' developmental stages and their incapability of maintaining their own individual voice lead them to plagiarism out of desperation.

The differences concerning the nature of disciplines are not generally considered with regard to plagiarism. Hu (2001) contends that the standards for judging plagiarism should be text-based and discipline-oriented. He asserts that there must be differences in scientific disciplines and fields of art. In scientific disciplines, the aim of which is to advance science, repeating words might not be very harmful. Myers (1998) advocates the necessity of making distinctions between science and art with regard to plagiarism and so says, "science is not organized to produce original works of literature... there is a difference between stealing science and 'stealing' syntax" (p. 9). She is skeptical of any damage done in the repetition of words among scientists whose aim is the advancement of their field and the improvement of their specialty through transmitting factual information, particularly in the age of the internet where a good number of contributors might be advancing a certain topic or project simultaneously.

However, as plagiarism can be detected only after it has occurred, it might be helpful to turn to gate-keepers such as thesis raters to see what they have to tell about plagiarism and its causes, giving explanations and criteria for assessing the

relation between intertextuality and plagiarism. And since what counts as plagiarism is context-dependent, it is better to characterize it through the attitudes of the people involved to find out what textual borrowings can be considered transgressive (Polio & Shi, 2012; Pecorari & Petric, 2014). Therefore, discovering the thesis raters' attitudes is part of an attempt to expand and substantiate the existing literature by presenting examples of intertextuality to them to see how they are diagnosed as proper or improper intertextuality. This may eventually help teachers and students alike to take proactive and preventive measures towards plagiarism, thus eschewing the consequences.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in the study were four instructors with different academic ranks teaching at universities in Qom and Isfahan, Iran, who already had at least three years of teaching and research experiences at Iranian universities. The participants were all applied linguistics majors and graduates from state universities in Iran. They all had supervised M.A theses and one of them had supervised three Ph.D. dissertations (See Table 1). The first language of all the participants was Persian, and they only had taught in Iranian universities except for Professor/Prof. 4 who had taught English abroad for two years.

Table 1.
Characteristics of participants

Name	University Rank	Ph.D. Dissertations Supervised	Ph.D. received from	M.A. Theses Supervised	First Language
Prof. 1	Assistant Professor	0	Shiraz University	1	Persian
Prof. 2	Assistant Professor	0	Tehran University	13	Persian
Prof. 3	Associate Professor	0	Tehran University	21	Persian
Prof. 4	Full Professor	3	Isfahan University	27	Persian

Data collection and procedure

Four extracts from four unpublished M.A. theses in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) written by students at Saveh Azad University, Iran,

were selected (Table 2). The extracts were chosen from this university because as an invited instructor to this university, one of the researchers had access to these theses. This procedure was justi-

fied on the ground that studies of plagiarism need to be directed towards “students’ authentic writing where source selection is not controlled by the researcher” (Pecorari&Petric, 2014, p. 291). The extracts were of varying lengths but each one had one intertext. Care was taken to ensure that the extracts would vary in their referencing, with two of them referenced, and two unreferenced. The source texts from which the intertexts had been taken were presented along with the extracts containing the intertexts to the participants (thesis raters) for analysis of intertextuality and plagiarism. Therefore, each participant was presented with eight extracts, four from MA the-

seswritten by the students and four from the source texts from which the students had used their intertexts. The four extracts selected from the theses differed in their number of words from the source text and in the subjects that they discussed. We tried to include diverse areas of the applied linguistic topics ranging from Research Methodology, Sociolinguistics and Assessment to Psycholinguistics. For participants to clearly account for the differences between the extracts and their corresponding source texts, those parts appearing in both the intertexts and the source texts were highlighted.

Table 2.
Characteristics of extracts used in the study

Extracts	Word count for extracts	Word count for source texts	Referencing	Area of applied linguistics chosen
1	64	48	No	Research Methodology
2	46	56	Yes	Sociolinguistics
3	54	44	Yes	Testing & Assessment
4	103	134	No	Psycholinguistics

The examples were chosen in a way that multiple responses could be elicited from the participants. Therefore, examples of referencing or citation were chosen in a way to make room for diverse opinions and to stimulate the participants to pass their judgments regarding the questions of the study.

The extracts containing intertexts and the sources from which the intertexts were taken served as prompts around which a semi-structured interview was conducted. The four participants expressed their opinions about intertextuality, plagiarism and its causes; they also recounted their criteria for identifying the intertexts as legitimate or illegitimate intertextuality. The interview questions were not fixed as every answer provided by each one of the participants could trigger a different consecutive question. Although the questions revolved around intertexts in the students’ writing samples, the participants expressed their notions on broader issues such as plagiarism in general and their own observations or experiences with plagiarism and its

forms. If necessary, even more general questions were also asked about related issues. However, the same general framework was used and followed for all interviews. The interviews were held in Persian since all participants were fluent in Persian as their first language. In addition to their initial judgment on the quality of intertextuality, the participants basically expressed reasons why students might deviate from the correct norms of intertextuality.

The interviews were recorded to elicit the teachers’ answers to the questions concerning appropriacy of intertextuality, plagiarisms and explanations for their responses. Moreover, the participants’ opinions inevitably led to peripheral comments around the pivotal issues of intertextuality and plagiarism.

It must be noted that in asking the participants to pass their views on the four intertexts in the study, the researchers were not interested in identifying the problems with these four extracts; rather they were interested in the participants’ reactions in order to arrive at some themes about in-

tertextuality and plagiarism. Therefore, the interviews were recorded for the researchers to analytically dig up for new ideas which could emerge therein.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews ranged in length from 10 to 25 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed and coded to discover thematic units, using techniques for qualitative analysis of data (Strauss, 1987; Auerbach, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; James, 2010). Through the coding process, the themes were extracted, categorized and finally revalidated in the second round of inspection. In case a new theme could arise in the follow-up analysis, using a recursive process, we re-examined the earlier transcripts all to improve our findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed that university professors differed widely in what to consider as either proper intertextuality or plagiarism. They often hesitated to have an immediate evaluation and struggled with their doubts for a short while to finally orient towards one side or even ending up undecided or half-decided. In the following table, the indecision state is marked with a lone question mark and half-decided with the preferred decision (e.g. Pro meaning Proper) plus a question mark (thus Pro?). 'Half-decided' indicated that they had their own perceived judgment accompanied with the statements of uncertainty - for instance, 'this can be proper intertextuality, but'. On the whole, except for extract 3 in both rounds of evaluation, all others, if seen from top to bottom, have been faced with at least one difference in the evaluation, which means that professors have had inconsistent opinions about what to take as proper intertextualities.

Much to the researchers' surprise, the professors' evaluation of the intertextuality in the second round which occurred one month later demonstrated their shifts between legitimacy and illegitimacy of the cases already identified otherwise. As seen in the following table, the second

professor in his evaluation of extract 4 diametrically reverses his second judgment by claiming that it is not properly utilized, ironically with both conflicting opinions well explained and justified. As an example, the following is the extract and the source text from which the student has borrowed:

Original text 4:

According to Chomsky, humans are born with minds that contain innate knowledge concerning a number of different areas. One such area or faculty of the mind concerns language. The set of innate language ideas that comprises the language faculty is called 'Universal Grammar', UG for short. This UG is universal because every human being is born with it; it is further universal because with it any particular language of the world can be acquired. Thus, UG is not a grammar of any particular language but it contains the essentials with which any particular grammar can be acquired. This contention is one basis for Chomsky's oft-repeated assertion that language acquisition is independent of intelligence and logic and that animals do not have language because they are not born with UG (Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch, 2002).

(An Introduction to Psycholinguistics, by Leech & Short, 2006, p. 208)

Extract 4:

Language acquisition is innate and it is human specific. It is located in the mind and the mind has the ability to acquire language. One such area or faculty of the mind concerns language. The set of innate language ideas that comprises the language faculty is called 'Universal Grammar', UG for short. This UG is universal because every human being is born with it; it is further universal because with it any particular language of the world can be acquired. Thus, UG is not a grammar of any particular language but it contains the essentials with which any particular grammar can be acquired.

In the first run, Professor 1 called the above extract improper but he was a little dubious and

decided it to be Imp?. He argued that the extract is from the literature section of the student's thesis and does not deserve meticulous scrutiny. However, in the second run, he decided that it was not proper intertextuality. Likewise, in the first run, Professor 2 was oscillating between Pro? and Pro but finally took it as proper. She argued that the idea belonged to the area of public domain knowledge and it could be found in any textbook on psycholinguistics or even

general linguistics; every student immediately recognizes this as belonging to Chomsky. So the writer does not need to cite it as coming from which author. In the second run, she categorically dismissed the extract as improper and said "I cannot justify it at all; it is stark plagiarism: no references, no quotation."

A summary of the professors' evaluation can be seen in the following table.

Table 3.
Professors' evaluation of the intertextuality

Prof	Ext. 1		Ext. 2		Ext. 3		Ext. 4	
	1 st	2 nd						
1	Pro	Pro?	Imp	Imp?	Pro	Pro	Imp?	Imp
2	Pro	Pro	?	Imp?	Pro	Pro	Pro	Imp
3	Imp	Imp	Imp	Imp	Pro	Pro	Imp?	Imp
4	Imp	Imp	Pro	Imp	Pro	Pro	Imp	Imp

Note: Prof: Professor; Ext: Extract; 1st & 2nd: 1st & 2nd round evaluation; Pro: Proper; Imp: Improper or Plagiarism; ?: Undecided; Pro? Or Imp?: Half-decided

Another emerging trend in the evaluations point to this fact that the judgments passed decline in their uncertainty level parallel to the university professors' ranking, with the last two professors (3rd and 4th) being associate and full professors, respectively, showing more stable positions. To substantiate the certainty of judgment statistically across professors, we calculated the degree of certainty in percentages proportional to the decision/indecision positions, which ranged from 62.5% for Professor 1 (5 decisions and 3 indecisions), 75% for Professor 2 and finally 87.5% for Professors 3 and 4. These percentages as indexes of certainty for professors were obtained through the ratio of decided cases to undecided or half-decided ones.

Being skeptical about the nature of intertextuality, the professors were at odds as how to explain their judgments. For example, in their first judgments, the following associate professor (Prof. 3) evaluated extract 2 as improper intertextuality while the full professor (Prof. 4) believed that the case had been properly reported. The following is an example:

Original text:

Linguists studying several languages have found evidence of 'sex exclusive' language forms, that is, cases in which an obligatory grammatical distinction is made between female and male speakers. Some early evidence of this comes from linguistic descriptions of Native American languages. For instance, Mary Haas (1944), in a study of Koasati, found differences in verb forms.

(Introducing Sociolinguistics, by Mesthrie, et al., 2009, p. 214)

Extract 2:

According to Mesthrie, et al. (2009) the speakers' gender may be responsible for their manner of speaking. Linguists studying several languages have found evidence of 'sex exclusive' language forms, that is, cases in which an obligatory grammatical distinction is made between female and male speakers.

In passing judgment, Professor 4 considered the extract proper for two reasons: "First it is referenced; and second, the idea discussed is found at many other places because it is a definition." But Professor 3 had a different opinion

and put to the fore what he called the dichotomy of quotation and paraphrase, which is blurred in this extract and as such does not deserve to be called proper intertextuality.

Another area of inquiry for the researchers concerned the professors' explanations for what they could face on the ground as im/proper intertextuality or what they could potentially envision to end up in plagiarism. As to this part of investi-

gation, the participants (professors) considered several factors responsible for plagiarism among Iranian EFL learners. As Table 4 shows, five categories of explanations have been provided for EFL learners' inclination to make illegitimate use of available resources. The participants passed their personal opinions for the causes of EFL plagiarism, relying mostly on their personal experiences or observations.

Table 4.
Possible explanations for improper intertextuality or plagiarism

Categories of explanations (f)	Examples
Cultural (4)	Intellectual property concept; self-denial
Social (3)	Leniency on illegitimacy or corruption; nepotism
Educational (3)	Rote-learning belief; Instructors' inconsistencies
Developmental (2)	Poor linguistic knowledge; High writing standards; L1 use in L2 writing
Virtual (2)	Internet access
Economic (1)	Income source; Financial problems

All of the four participants of this study attributed plagiarism to cultural reasons and referred to culture as the most important cause of plagiarism. They believed that Iranian students are not educated to respect intellectual property. In fact, for them scientific or artistic products are not actual property to be respected or guarded. Professor 4 related this issue to self-denial as an important cultural value among Iranians. He even referred to a great number of architectural monuments in Iran dating back to less than four hundred years ago whose artists are anonymous because their creators had done their work for 'heavenly reward trying to live incognito.' This cultural pattern is still widely practiced, especially by those who keep and live a life of hermit's life as Iranian literature has for long cherished and promoted this lifestyle as the one bringing God's satisfaction and favor. Rumi, Haafez and Saadi, all great Persian poets, can be named as favoring this altruistic attitude. Therefore, according to our participants, for Iranians producing works without signing them, producing works and attributing them to others and passing the works of others as one's own do not seem to be very great harms. As such, it is not surprising if EFL learners reared in this culture cannot proper-

ly deal with the Western concept of plagiarism and intellectual property.

As the second category of explanation for plagiarism, the social category is also closely related to the first one. Our participants, in this respect, cited the leniency on corruption in the society as a relevant point causing plagiarism as well. Professor 2 explained that the Western and Iranian concepts of illegitimacy of different issues are not similar. She referred to nepotism as an example of such behavior which is not only considered innocent but also encouraged in Iran due to the strength of family and tribal life in the country, even beyond that as a moral pattern of cooperation and collaboration, lack of which may be strongly disdained.

Referring to the third factor, educational, possibly affecting the EFL learners' tendencies towards plagiarism, Professor 3 believed that for some Iranians, when you have learnt something and you are able to remember or mention it, it is yours. He said that Iranians are taught to memorize from early primary school years but they are not told to remember the names of the poets or writers. Another educational factor was related to the inconsistent messages conveyed from gatekeepers regarding what to or not to consider

proper intertextuality. However, Professor 1 claimed that if a college policy were to be explicitly and clearly defined and presented to the students, the perceptions of the instructors would not be very important. In line with this inconsistency, Borg (2009) observed that university instructors relied on their personal experiences and observations rather than on the university regulations to prepare students for using intertexts.

The fourth category as shown in the table above concerned some developmental issues—linguistic and proficiency levels—which might have encouraged the learners to illegitimately but unintentionally bridge the discrepancies they face. Kim and LaBianca (2018) see that one of the reasons for the students seeking help from various sources and people that might help them in plagiarism is the linguistic problems which they face and the heavy assignments which they have to accomplish. For example, Professor 4 believed that the learners' incompetence in producing proper works would lead them to copying, while most of them not considering copying some parts or extracts as plagiarism. He believed that the high standards set for EFL learners by their instructors and their inability to fulfill those demands would force them to turn to plagiarism as a coping strategy. Currie (1998) also argues that EFL learners are sometimes expected to write in an eloquent language and more surprisingly, they are expected to have original and correct ideas. Hu (2001) asserts that part of the problem lies in the fact that EFL writers think in L1 while writing in L2. This complicated interlingual process thus makes L2 writers use both the words and ideas of others to convey what they have learnt. This finding indicates that the process of learning how to write is developmental and as such is subject to trial and error. Learners learn from their mistakes and if at the beginning stages they sometimes copy, it will serve them as models for improving their writing.

Virtual space is also mentioned as another explanatory factor for plagiarism. Two participants of the study believed that the advent of the inter-

net was also a factor contributing to EFL plagiarism. Prof. 3 and Prof. 2 stated that plagiarism is not a modern phenomenon and the internet has only made it easier. Prof. 2 referring to a study conducted by Simmons (1999) asserted that according to Simmons (1999), traces of plagiarism were observed back to the 19th century when American universities forced their students to produce written research assignments. Selwyn (2008) contends that the spread of plagiarism cannot be just attributed to the internet and that it should be considered as just one factor among others and not the only factor. Prof. 1 stated that the amount of plagiarism from printed works did not significantly differ from that of the internet (the former being 28.6% and the latter 24.5%), based on a study with 698 undergraduate participants in the US universities conducted by Scanlon and Neumann (2002).

However, survey studies asking students about the extent of their dependence on the internet reveal that the internet was considered the handiest tool for students when dealing with their written assignments (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). The internet has made it possible for students to copy and paste and to buy ready-made complete assignments including essays and term papers (Szabo & Underwood, 2004).

As the last cited factor, one of the participants of the study brought the force of the economic situation as being an important factor to consider. He was of the opinion that some unemployed or poorly paid educated people turn to the production of copy-paste pseudo knowledge for others just to make the ends meet in their everyday life. Diploma sellers, as well as thesis and dissertation writers who are ready to produce an entire thesis or dissertation for some money, may lead EFL students to copy entire pages or chapters without acknowledgment. These students unscrupulously choose to do so because they feel that they have at least done something compared with those who have had their entire theses written by paying some money.

The third and final area of investigation in this study was intended to elicit some criteria from

the participants to discover how they could quickly evaluate the theses in terms of plagiarism. In response to the question on their immediate criteria for the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the intertexts, most of them, as seen in the following table, contended that no signaling to the reader concerning the role of the author in the construction of a piece of borrowed knowledge could simply cause the text to be illegitimate or plagiarized. But in regard to the 'no signaling' criterion, the participants cited different contingencies as well for the plagiarism to realize. Professor 2 argued that any failure to properly reference the text used could result in the illegitimacy of the act, while Professor 3 believed that some texts constitute the common domain

knowledge for students and as such they do not need any referencing. This point was further followed by this fact that a student writing about Universal Grammar must not be forced to give references to Chomsky and you should not mention Selinker whenever you are talking about interlanguage because they are in the textbooks. To him, only specificity of domain knowledge could inevitably require referencing. Interestingly, another participant (Prof. 4) insisted that absence of signaling with respect to one simple sentence or short chunk of language cannot be taken as illegitimate. Instead, if several sentences of a text are consecutively paraphrased but left unreferenced, then the act can be equal to plagiarism.

Table 5.

Thesis rater's criteria for plagiarism

Illegitimacy of intertext	Realizability condition (<i>f</i>)
No signaling	Under any condition (4)
No signaling	Only if specific domain knowledge is concerned (3)
No signaling	If more than one sentence is paraphrased in a row (2)
No signaling	If the degree of match between the source and the target is perceptually salient (1)
No signaling	Depending on the chapter/section of the thesis (1)

Another criterion for an intertext to be identified as illegitimate, as stated by our participants, can be the degree of comparison or match between the intertext and the source text. Under this condition, the borrowed text can be safely used without any signaling only if it is not perceptually comparable to the original. Otherwise, it needs to be properly referenced.

The last contingency for illegitimacy of an intertext without signaling points to the section or chapter of the thesis in which it is used. According to one of the participants (Prof. 1), it would be OK if the methodology section of a paper would contain some repetition from other sources or if some statements in the introduction were copied from other sources. Headmitted that as there were not so many ways for writing the method section of a paper or strict steps to be followed, then copying would be no problem.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed the inconsistency and controversy among university professors regarding plagiarism and intertextuality. The participants of this study differed widely on several issues concerning the causes of plagiarism and the criteria for distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate intertextuality. Babaeii and Nejadghanbar (2017) assert that Iranian professors have lack of agreement on the instances of plagiarism and how it should be penalized. University professors are important because they are the gatekeepers who issue the permission for students to enroll for higher levels of education or career. This fact probably leads to inconsistency in the messages sent to students by these gatekeepers, which could be one important motive to perpetuate the improper intertextuality behavior. Pecorari and Shaw's (2012) study also showed the controversy among the participants regarding plagiarism and types of acceptable intertextuality.

This finding also demonstrated that university professors usually tend to conceptualize intertextuality as what it cannot be and not as what it has to be like, thus bringing about further breach between what the learners come to know and what they must know to meet the requirements in their writing. In this regard, Shi (2006) argues that students cannot be very precise about the use of intertextuality because they do not have the knowledge of rules. This drawback, if not compensated for, through academic and disciplinary instruction may lead to awkward and implausible uses of others' works.

Concerning the causes of plagiarism, the participants of this study cited several factors which were reviewed above. These findings are in line with other studies on plagiarism and intertextuality (Craig, 2004; Currie, 1998; Howard, 2000; Hu, 2001). On the whole, all these studies maintain that the use of intertextuality is largely culture-bound (Sowden, 2005). Additionally, EFL learners may rely on the immediately available resources to eschew possible errors because they are academically ignorant of the rules and developmentally immature to create their own world of knowledge. This latter case of immaturity may be associated with cognitive overloading (Sweller, 2003) that is usually assumed to be a barrier to the proper use of language in general and probably the reason for the students' recourse to others' prefabricated works. Under such a condition, students cannot simply be condemned as doing wrong but as those who are trying to put an end to a cognitively demanding job which might, if left undone, bring about some dire consequences following failure in one's education with lots of other far-reaching repercussions. Our study further demonstrated that an improper use of intertextuality could be economically motivated by both parties involved in producing and utilizing such outputs. This is also a challenge that needs to be tackled outside the academic context of a university. However, university-specified regulations could contribute to the diminishing of the behavior.

The present study also discovered some criteria that university professors may use to check

the students' intertextuality. It should be noted that our participants' judgment on these samples were based on their access to the sources we provided them with. If they had to read these examples on their own outside this context, it could have been possible for them to rate all these instances as acceptable intertextualities, simply because they would not have had the original texts available. Thus compared with the realities on the ground, as far as EFL students are concerned, we must admit that unacceptable intertextualities identified here would go unchecked due to the high volume of works university professors are to rate and evaluate. This could be one explanation why the participants were mostly reluctant to pass categorical judgments on plagiarism. It follows that they might not be very strict with their students concerning plagiarism. Now if this chain of imprecise assessment lingers on for a long time, it is likely that in future, a different line of norm-developing English - at least with respect to the use of intertextuality - begins to sprout, which basically contradicts what once Kachru (1985) claimed to be the right of inner and outer circle Englishes, and not that of the expanding one as is the case with English in Iran, to provide or develop a model for all other learners to follow.

This study, though done on a very narrow scale, could have significant implications for thesis and dissertation raters, educationalists and policy-makers regarding graduate and post-graduate programs and the issues of plagiarism. The study could trigger the thesis rater to know that their inconsistent messages could baffle the students. The study can serve policymakers by highlighting for them the dire need for considering the issue of plagiarism as a great harm and for delineating some clearer guidelines for both instructors and raters with regard to plagiarism.

The present study suffered from a number of limitations. The study had a very limited number of participants ($n=4$). The data were collected around four extracts, thus there is certainly a need for a more comprehensive study with a greater number of sources and samples. This study can

be conducted across other disciplines to make interdisciplinary comparisons. The study can also be conducted by collecting data from other universities and by expanding the corpus. This same study can be replicated with the same raters by asking them to read the whole theses of the students to see if the general impression of raters from a thesis could affect their judgments on individual instances of extracts.

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