
'Use your own words': Exploring the boundaries of plagiarism

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University guidelines

- “Plagiarism is presenting the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement”.
Manchester University (2010) *Guidance to Students on Plagiarism*
 - “Plagiarism - taking or using another person's thoughts, writings or inventions as your own...”
Oxford Brookes University (2009) *Student Regulations*
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The reality

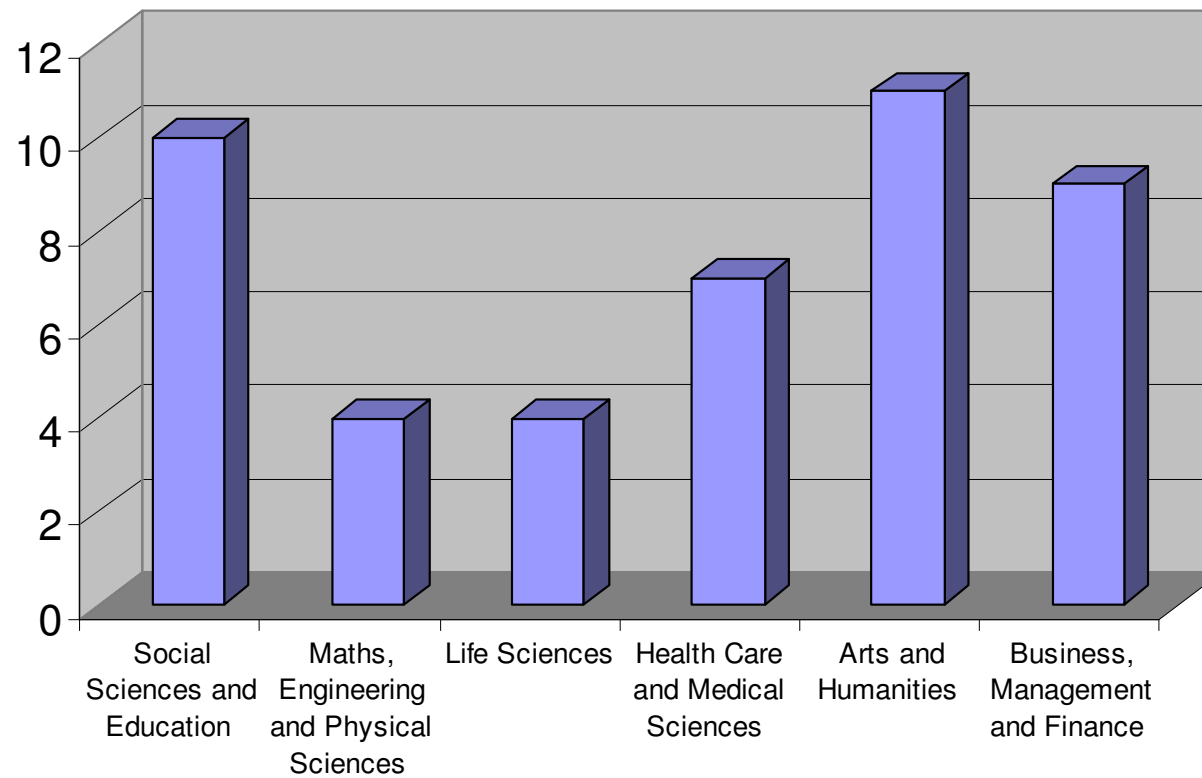
- - all of the words and phrases we employ in speech and writing belong to the speech community of which we are part (Bakhtin, 1981)
 - - academic writing appears to be particularly rich in recurrent phraseological constructions (Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992, Hyland, 2004)
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Advice to EAP students

- “..... borrowing the words and phrases of others can be a useful language learning strategy. Certainly, you would not be plagiarizing if you borrowed items that are commonly or frequently used in academic English”
(Swales and Feak, 2004: 172)
 - *The results from this experiment seem to suggest that (p.172).*
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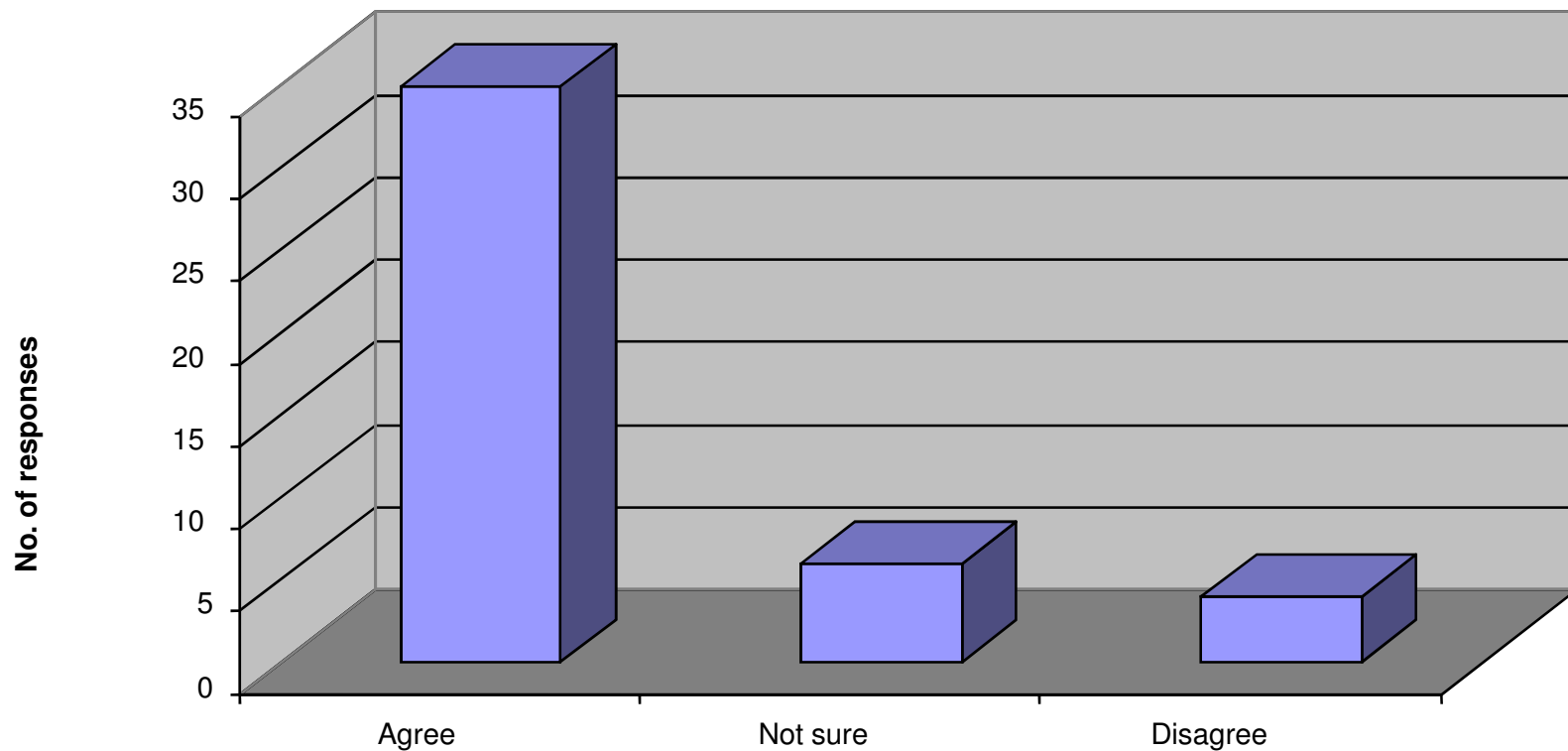
Disciplines represented

Figure 1. Disciplines represented in the survey



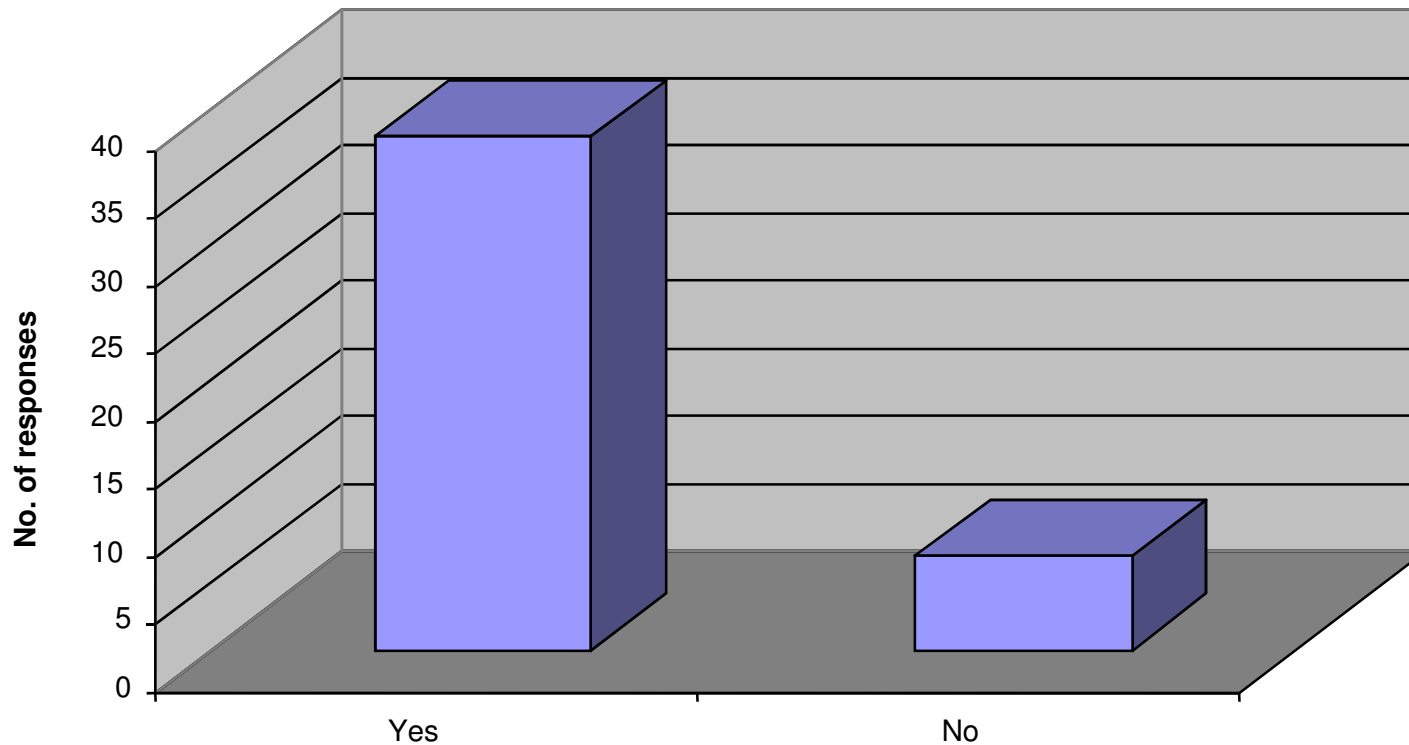
Agreement with Swales and Feak

Figure 2. " borrowing words and phrases can be a useful language learning strategy"



And for native-speakers

Figure 3. "Do you think the advice given by Swales and Feak can be helpful for native speakers?"



Comments on advice from Swales and Feak

- *“Most academic disciplines have their own vocabulary and even style of expression, and students need to be able to use these facets of specialist language appropriately.”*
 - *“The advice is obviously useful to students but perhaps needs to be more widely considered by academics who may not understand such learning strategies.”*
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Insight into what plagiarism is

- *“Plagiarism does not arise from 'using the same words' but from using the same words to say the same thing.”*
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Insight into what plagiarism is

- *“If you 'borrow' a common phrase such as 'have a profound impact on' from a writer whose sentence you are paraphrasing at the time, then you are plagiarising, because your sentence will resemble the writer's too closely.”*
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95% of respondents felt these phrases could be reused

■ within the field	3/1
■ to account for this	4/1
■ it has been demonstrated that	5/1
■ the findings of this study	5/2
■ In this paper I argue that	6/2
■ Recent evidence suggests that	4/3
■ This discrepancy may be due to	6/3
■ The results of this investigation show that	7/3
■ A possible explanation for this might be that	8/3
■ systematically review	2/2
■ contrary to expectations	3/2
■ the majority of respondents	4/2
■ several possible explanations	3/3

Between 80% to 94% of respondents felt these phrases could be reused

- The findings of the current study are consistent with
 - the main weakness of this study was the lack of
 - An issue that was not addressed in this study was whether
 - a significant difference between the two conditions
 - Taken together, these findings suggest a role for
 - These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution
 - The single most striking observation
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Between 50% to 80% of respondents felt these phrases could be reused

- much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature
 - The research to date has tended to focus on X rather than Y
 - a set of stable energy levels
 - However, there are limits to how far the idea of X can be taken
 - While a variety of definitions of the term X have been suggested, this paper will use the definition first suggested by
 - The relationship between a diet high in fats and poor health has been widely investigated
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More than 75% of respondents felt these could not be recycled without plagiarism being committed

- deliberately and incisively debunks such myths
 - It has become a catchword used to label and delegitimize political movements
 - In their insularity and absolutism, both groups scare each other into existence and are reflections of the enemies they create
 - Dawkins is deaf to theology[#]
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Boundary: originality

Respondents drew attention to the originality of the phrase:

- *“a way of expressing something that has some individuality”*
 - *“less standardized and idiosyncratic”*
 - *“phrases which seem to me to be 'original'. That is, it would be unlikely that another writer would produce these same sentences by chance.”*
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Boundary: specificity

Respondents distinguished between the generic and specific nature of the phrase:

- *“Whether the phrase is just a standard way of expressing some generic notion, or whether it has itself some intellectual content which has been taken over.”*
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Boundary: evaluation

Respondents drew attention to the evaluative quality of a phrase:

- *“The cases I feel are dodgy are those in which an opinion is strongly expressed.”*
 - *“For me the boundary is crossed when the phrase clearly expresses a judgment of some sort.”*
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Advice given

Consensus - boundaries are established by the disciplines and tutors:

- *“Students should take guidance from the school/discipline/lecturer involved I think to understand the boundaries.”*
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Advice given

Good practice for language development

- *“The most important point here is that students should collect and reuse such phrases.”*
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Main findings

- the advice given to non-native writer students by Swales and Feak on 'borrowing phrases' could be helpful;
 - advice would also be useful for native –speaker students;
 - understanding how to collect and re-use common phrases is a useful learning strategy;
 - phrases should not be borrowed from the same text the author is consulting as a source for ideas.
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Main findings

- Boundaries - acceptable practice to recycle phrases with the following characteristics:
 - i) between 5 and 9 words in length;
 - ii) containing up to four generic content words;
 - iii) not containing content words bound to a specific domain;
 - iv) being 'value' neutral/shouldn't contain a view;
 - v) shouldn't contain an original expression.
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References

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: The University of Texas Press.
 - Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
 - Nattinger, J. and DeCarrico, J. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
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