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(Review Article)

Intention Involvement in the Nature of Plagiarism

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Abstract

Background: This article addressed one of the issues of research ethics that is called the nature of plagiarism coupled with involvement of intention. By definition, plagiarism is the attribution of others' works to one's own. This may be done intentionally and/or unintentionally. Some researchers believe that intention is not involved in the nature of plagiarism and an author who forgets to make references to the used sources has committed plagiarism since this forgetfulness has led to the attribution of others' work to one's own. In contrast, some experts call such a person a wrongdoer, not a plagiarist.
Conclusion: By likening this problem to the issue of involvement of intention in telling a lie, the author separates two kinds of plagiarism: act-plagiarism and agent-plagiarism. The intention does not involve in the act-plagiarism (to be an act an instance of plagiarism), but it is involved in the agent-plagiarism (to call someone plagiarist). As a result, an author who forgets to make reference is not a plagiarist, but his/her act is an instance of plagiarism.

Keywords: Intention, Plagiarism, Intentional Plagiarism, Unintentional Plagiarism

Introduction

This article, in the field of research ethics, deals with the nature of plagiarism and the involvement of author's intention in the act of plagiarizing. The problem is whether an author's intention to plagiarize, in addition to the awareness of the act of plagiarism, is involved in the nature of plagiarism or not? In other words, is an unintentional plagiarism, the one without awareness, an instance of a real plagiarism? In this paper, I attempted to address this issue by providing literature review, additional explanations, and the possible discussions. At the end some solutions are introduced.

Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the attribution of others' scientific works to one's own work or using someone else's work without *proper acknowledgement* (1). A scientific work could be a published

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or unpublished book, article, ideas, creativities and initiatives, programs and projects, words, phrases, sentences, special terms, similes and metaphors or any "intellectual product" of an author (2).

Forms of Plagiarism

Plagiarism has several divisions from different aspects: that is method and plagiarized subject. One of these divisions derives from the idea of intention involvement. This is divided into intentional and unintentional (or accidental). "Intentional plagiarism is when a person knowingly and willfully presents someone else's work as his/her own" (3). This may be done by removing someone's name from the title page of a book or an article and inserting one's own name instead, ordering someone to write a thesis, a book, or article and publishing it in one's name, or copying from a book, article, the internet, and other sources.

An accidental plagiarism occurs when a person does not know the correct method of quotation, paraphrasing, summarizing, referencing, and citation of references. Therefore, a right way of referencing concerning the contents used from other sources does not well occur. Thus, those contents are attributed to the author by the reader while he is not intended to do that. Accidental plagiarism may happen due to other reasons such as carelessness, confusion, referencing postponement, or oversight (3).

In some definitions, intentional plagiarism is associated with intentional fraud as well as an attempt to ascribe something that does not belong to someone: "knowingly cheating or intentionally presenting someone else's ideas, research, or words as your own" (4) and unintentional plagiarism is defined as: "not giving proper credit for someone else's ideas, research, or words even if you did not intend to present them as your own" (4).

Therefore, the main difference between intentional and unintentional plagiarism is the knowledge to its act, i.e. attributing others' works to one's own work with a will behind it. In an intentional plagiarism, there is such an intention to plagiarize from the very beginning and the subject is aware of his/her action during its commission, while in an unintentional plagiarism, the author does not have such an intention at the beginning, nor is he or she aware of the fact that his/her action is an instance of plagiarism. He/she tries and plans to write his or her words but will go wrong because of ignorance, sloppiness, carelessness and confusion in referencing, separating direct from indirect quotations, and citation of references (5). Some claim that, legally speaking, there is no distinction between intentional and unintentional plagiarism (5).

Instances of intentional and unintentional plagiarism

The afore-mentioned definition of intentional and unintentional plagiarism helps us to separate correctly the relevant instances. This separation is useful since it is very helpful in the identification of intentional and unintentional plagiarism, the sentences determined for their commission by authors, and determination of their punishments. In some instances of plagiarism, it is not essentially acceptable to claim an unintentional mistake; yet, in some others, the probability of its unintentional commission by the author will be acceptable and negligible.

○ *Instances of intentional plagiarism*

1) Attribution of someone else's whole work, such as books, articles, poetry, programming, and invention to one's own work. One of the obvious instances of this kind is someone who has found an old version of a book which has been written by an anonymous author, and then he edit that book and reprint it in his or her name. Another instance is translating a book or an article which has been written by an author in other language and publishing it in his or her name.

2) To copy and transcript of many works of others with or without any referencing to the used sources. Sometimes, in this form of plagiarism, others' texts are plagiarized together with its references; sometimes the references are omitted, and sometimes, a combination of both methods is applied. For example, in order to prevent a

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teacher's suspicion on the access to some original sources, a student leaves out some of the references and refers them to the real author, but plagiarizes some other parts of the text together with its references. This happens more frequently in students' dissertations and papers.

In a recommendation to the courts, some has mentioned two criteria for determining a plagiarism to be intentional or unintentional. One regards to the amount of the borrowed text from others and the other is related to the method of inserting them in a work. A "fair use" of others' works is not a problem, but using them in a wrong way may be counted as a plagiarism.

The government of the United States of America has presented guidelines for the fair use of the works of others, including:

1. The nature of the use: exact copying of a work is against a fair use, but changing the content of a work via analysis, paraphrasing is considered as a fair use;
2. The amount of use: the higher the amount of using and borrowing others' words, the less fair its use. In other words, the less a use degree is, the more fairness that use will be;
3. The effect of your use on the original work: If you plan to create a work to compete with the original work, your using it and borrowing from it may damage it. Therefore, the more different the content of your work or study community is from the original work, the better it will be (6).

○ *Instances of unintentional plagiarism*

1) Ignorance of some references rarely, when the missed reference has mentioned repeatedly in other cases of the work. However, if the missed reference relates to an important and original part of the script, particularly those of the theory and ideation, it may be taken as intentional.

2) Oblivion of using a direct quotation mark or indenting the quotation column in few cases, especially since some people as editors and performing sheet layout may also be involved in this error.

3) Inappropriate paraphrasing: when an author intends to indirectly quote and paraphrase, but the words he/she writes are very close to the original text. This writing error is very likely to occur in the writing files of amateur students and novice authors due to having a low skill of wording, and even for some errors in understanding the difference between direct and indirect quotation.

4) Using others' ideas and methods without reference to the origin (7). This may occur when an author uses the framework and outline of others' article and book, but does not use their contents, thinking that it is not necessary to reference them.

Involvement of intention in the nature of plagiarism

On the issue of this article, i.e. the involvement of intention in the nature of plagiarism, there are two competing views. Some people believe that the intention to plagiarism is not involved in the realization of its nature and if an author's act is an instance of attribution of others' works to his or her own, it will be regarded as plagiarism, whether he/she has intended it or not. In contrast, some people believe that the intention is involved in the realization of the nature of plagiarism and the attribution of the act to the person. The term "plagiarism" is not used in its unintentional cases and other alternative words for the same action are preferred.

○ *Non-involvement of intention in the nature of plagiarism*

Most definitions of plagiarism have not considered the intention of subject in plagiarism and have not discriminated between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. Sometimes, this issue has been included in the definition of plagiarism such as: "To plagiarize is to represent, purposely or inadvertently, someone's language (the expression of their ideas), as your own original thought" (8). And sometimes after its definition to: "Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another", it has been stressed

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that plagiarism might sometimes occur without intention (9).

There are some reasons to support this view. The main one is that if a writer uses some content of a source, but accidentally forgets a reference to the source, the result will be the fact that his/her writing intentionally or unintentionally implies the content, i.e. the borrowed phrases and words, belongs to him/her and the readers will deem so. Consequently, the action of attribution of others' works to one's own is realized as the definition of plagiarism states (8). Another reason is that ignorance of the law is never an excuse. Thus, even if a person is not even aware of the plagiarism he/she commits, he/she will be still an offender (6).

A problem that arises in the definition presented by this group of researchers concerning plagiarism would be their use of such terms as theft, lying, and pretention that imply an intentional deliberate and conscious plagiarism. Some examples will clarify the point: "Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct in which you represent someone else's words or ideas as your own" (10) or "the appropriation of the words and ideas of others"(11).

This objection is a case considered by some researchers. They believe that although the use of the term "plagiarism" implies an intentional act, it is clear that plagiarism is not required to be intentional with intent to deceive. Therefore, their correcting definition suggesting no involvement of the concept of intention is as: "an instance of someone using someone else's work, thereby implying that it is their own"(2). Since a "work" as an intellectual product and what is plagiarized might be the text, ideas, and results of another person's study, the definition will change as follows: "an instance of someone using someone else's intellectual product (such as texts, ideas, or results), thereby implying that it is their own"(2).

It seems that this kind of definition for plagiarism as "using somebody else's ideas or words without properly acknowledging the original source"(12) does not have that objection and could be considered as intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

Although these researchers do not believe in the involvement of intention in the nature of plagiarism, they confess that intention is involved in the problem of punishing a plagiarizing person. They hold that a distinction should be regarded between an accidental and intentional plagiarism in the degree of punishment. It is for granted that giving inaccurate references or forgetting them is not to be blamed as the case of an intentional plagiarism. An unconscious form of plagiarism is cryptomnesia. It is a state that a person remembers an idea, but he/she does not remember that it has been taken from someone else, thinking it is his/her innovative idea. Such a person will be excused to a large extent and his/her act will be forgivable.

○ *Involvement of intention in the nature of plagiarism*

Contrary to the first group, a group of researchers believe that intention is involved in the nature of plagiarism and a plagiarist is someone who consciously and intentionally commits an act of plagiarism. These researchers prefer to use other words and terms for unintentional and accidental plagiarism. For this reason, they stipulate an intention and consciousness in their definition of plagiarism. For instance, it is said that: "plagiarism, specifically, is a term used to describe a practice that involves knowingly taking and using another person's work and claiming it, directly or indirectly, as your own" (13). As far as the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) is concerned: *"In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source*"(14).

According to this community, two points have been neglected to be separated in most current debates concerning plagiarism: 1) attribution of a person's work to one's own and attempts to blur the boundary between that person's ideas and words and those borrowed from others; 2) carelessly and inappropriately referencing of the ideas and words borrowed from other sources. The supporters of this view unanimously contend that the first fault is called plagiarism and the second

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"*misuse of sources*" (14). A moral author makes every effort to mention the address of all the sources besides providing accurate referencing. Now, if a novice writer makes a mistake in the method of referencing or using quotation marks or forgets referring to a source in cases, he or she should not be taken as a plagiarist since he or she has only gone wrong in the citation of references and referencing method. Students may not be properly informed of the referencing manner, the difference between direct and indirect quotations, summarization of others' texts, and writing down others' words in their own words and even make mistakes when they learn research principles and learn something wrong. Errors and mistakes are natural and inevitable part of teaching and learning process. Therefore, the members of this association greatly stress a separation between plagiarism and misuse of sources and consider it as necessary.

Due to these problems in defining plagiarism, some prefer to use the affiliated concepts of plagiarism instead of the term "plagiarism" to express the different forms of plagiarism with more precise and distinct definitions, such as "fraud" for various forms of intentional plagiarism, "inadequate referencing" for accidental plagiarism of inappropriate referencing kind, "excessive repetition", and so on.

Arbitration

In this paper, I endeavor to adopt a middle view between the two viewpoints. It seems a separation can solve the problem between the two groups. The fact is that both groups partially claim the right points, but the reason for their differences is taking a look at the issue of accidental plagiarism from two different aspects. To illustrate the issue, first, we seek help from a similar separation adopted by some scholars in the discussion of lying.

○ *Separation of the lying and falsehood*

In the Islamic tradition, there is a single definition of lying, i.e. "a false statement or an opposing statement by reality"(15, 16, 17). A debate about the definition of lie involves whether a lie is told to oppose the speaker's statement by reality or to his/her intention (what he/she has intended to state by that statement) by that? In other words, is the criterion of lie an opposition of the appearance of speaker's statement by reality or his/her intention of the statement by that? Is a lie a statement that a speaker intentionally states against reality with the knowledge of its falsity in order to deceive others? Or is it a statement opposing reality, no matter whether its speaker intended to lie and knew the falsity if his statement or not? Has a person who tells a statement to others that is actually false, told a lie while he/she thinks it is true? Some Islamic scholars have not required the speaker's intent on giving a false statement as a condition of lie, so they have considered someone who expresses a false statement that he/she thinks it is true as a lair, but some others have conditioned the speaker's intent and have not considered him/her as a lair. But a third group of scholars (18) by separating the falsehood (false statement) from lying (lair), have argued that a speaker is not a liar when he/she believes a false statement to be true though it is in fact untrue; yet, his/her statement is false and untrue. Therefore, intention and knowledge are conditioned in lying (telling a lie), but not in the falsehood (false statement) (19).

○ *Separation of act-plagiarism and agent-plagiarism*

The same problem posed in the involvement of intention in lying is exactly raised in the discussion of plagiarism. Imagine a writer who has used others' works in his/her writing but he/she has mistakenly forgotten referencing to them without any intention of fraud or plagiarism. The question is whether he/she has plagiarized or not? As you understood, some believe that the author's intention is not involved in the nature of plagiarism, but some others disagree and maintain an erroneous writer is not guilty of plagiarism. To resolve this disagreement, I want to deal with a distinction performed by some Islamic moral scholars between lying (telling a lie) and falsehood (false statement). I think the separation between act and agent is essential in plagiarism. In

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definition of plagiarism, the researchers who initially oppose to the involvement of intention in the nature of plagiarism look at the action and define plagiarism. According to the definition, plagiarism is using other's works without referencing or attributing them to themselves. If others' works are used without any reference, plagiarism and attribution of those works to the author would have been realized, whether it is intentional or unintentional. Therefore, intention is not involved in the definition of the act of plagiarism or "act-plagiarism" as I put. However, believing in the role of intention in plagiarism, the second camp looks at the plagiarist and the agent of plagiarism differently. Who is plagiarist? In their opinion, the plagiarist is a person who knowingly and intentionally uses other's work without any reference to them but attributes it to himself/herself (agent-plagiarism). Therefore, a writer who accidentally forgets a reference cannot be called a plagiarist, but a wrongdoer in citing and referencing. Although the result of forgetting the reference is to cause readers to think others' works as the author's works and to contribute them to him, but the author has not intended this attribution and this is a *mistake* that readers might have because of the author's *mistake* in referencing. Of course, the reader is completely excused by the mistake and the erroneous author should not be called a plagiarist for this mistake. Attribution of such a title to a person requires his or her knowledge of his or her act.

Recommendations to avoid unintentional plagiarism

As it is quite clear, since some believe that intention is not involved in the nature of plagiarism and a person might unintentionally commit plagiarism without knowledge, it is essential to prevent launching accusation of plagiarism against others by teaching students the true method of researching, essay-writing, referencing and some other related activities, so that they do not commit unintentional plagiarism. Some researchers have recommended some points about research methodology; if observed, they will lead to the prevention of unintentional plagiarism: 1) Always clearly specify the words and ideas you use from a source because you may think of them as being your own phrases and ideas a few weeks or months later; 2) Specify direct and indirect quotations with appropriate marks and even with a different font to be distinguished from your own words when taking notes; 3) Do not quote from a source with similar expressions, lest the reader judges you as a plagiarist by comparing your words with those used by that source (7).

Conclusion

In this article, the involvement of an author's intention in the nature of plagiarism was assessed. I attempted to answer the question whether a writer who makes some mistakes in quotation and paraphrasing without intention to plagiarizing has committed the immoral act of plagiarism or not? Two opposite views were introduced on this issue: some called it plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional and some believed it not to be a case of plagiarism but an error in citation. By putting forth the distinction between the act-plagiarism and agent-plagiarism, the author in this study tried to adopt a middle perspective besides resolving this dispute. Someone who mistakenly forgets a reference to a source or erroneously thinks others' ideas as his/her own idea by the passage of time, his/her action is an instance of plagiarism. The reason is that the attribution of others' works as his/her own has been occurred by his action in anyway, but the subject or author is not and should not be called a plagiarist. He just is a "wrongdoer in writing". The "Error in writing" can be of various types, such as incorrect reasoning and analysis, misunderstanding of a problem, and some of them are related to the quotation or citation cases like a person who forgets to use quotation marks. How is it when we call someone who mistakenly refers to the source (B) what he/she has adopted from the source (A) a wrongdoer person, not a plagiarist, but someone who forgets to give a reference to a source as a plagiarist? In my opinion, it can be concluded that a subject's intention is not involved in the qualification of an action as a plagiarism, but

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his/her intentional action is directly involved in the qualification of a subject as a plagiarist. Yet, a person who makes a mistake in giving a reference should not be called a plagiarist.

Ethical consideration

Ethical issues (Including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been completely observed by the authors.

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