Maneuvering Through Antiplagiarism

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Abstract- The main objective of this paper was to find out why authors use absurd language when writing articles, projects and thesis. Primary data was collected from 60 postgraduate students, both at masters and PhD level using open-ended questionnaires and through interviews. Data was analyzed using qualitative method of content analysis. Results indicated that linguistic problems, use of rogue experts and time pressure were the reasons why students would come up with words that may not exactly mean what they intended to write. The study found out that the respondents did all this in order to “hit” the target antiplagiarism index set by their specific learning institutions. They do this for as long as the antiplagiarism index is low. It can therefore be recommended that short seminars and workshops be done more often to improve the students’ knowledge of grammar and proper sentence construction. Supervisors must manually check every manuscripts after receiving the software generated anti plagiarism index to ensure the document makes sense.

Index Terms- plagiarism, Antiplagiarism

I. INTRODUCTION

Selected as one of the panelists assessing some masters’ projects, one by one they came to the front to present their research work. Going through the work of one of the students, something caught my eye at the research methodology of the students work. It read, “The questionnaire will entail both open ended and shut ended questions”. I could not really figure out what “shut ended” questions were, so I decided to ask the student. The response I got was quite shocking, she replied, “It means those questions that the respondents would choose from the choices provided”. “You mean closed ended questions?” I asked. She said yes.

Reading through one of my PhD students’ proposal documents, one of the lines at the research problem read, “The research hole of the study was …” I wondered what that meant and the following day as I returned the proposal to the student, I asked him what he meant by “research hole” and he confirmed my fears that it meant “research gap”. These and so many other examples that I have seen both at masters and PhD students writing made me curious to want to know how they come up with these absurd words. Why are the students using incongruous words in developing their research work?

II. METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Primary data was collected from 60 postgraduate students, both from masters and PhD level using open-ended questionnaires and through interviews. These students had already done their projects/thesis and are either awaiting graduation or are in the process of clearing for graduation. Masters students were categorized based on their specialization that included both Master of Science and master of business administration students. The specialization courses included marketing, entrepreneurship, human resources, strategic management and insurance options. Stratified random sampling was used to come up with this figure. Both convenience and Snowballing technique was used to get the postgraduate students. Data was analyzed using qualitative method of content analysis. The study was conducted in Kenyan universities.

The researcher used methodological experts to develop a coding scheme to identify the categories. Two analysts conducted the content analysis discussed the discrepancies in their coding and reached an agreement on them and in some instances resolved them through a third analyst review. The Two analysts performed the initial coding independently and then met to reconcile any differences in consultation with a third analyst.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1200 statements were collected from the responses the researcher got by responding to the open ended questions. The analysts came up with three categories and they include linguistic problem, Use of rogue experts and pressure. All the responses were then placed in either one of these categories based on how similar it is to the three categories. These statements were therefore classified into the three categories. Linguistic category had the most number of statements, followed by help from rogue experts and time pressure were the other categories that got majority of the statements falling in these categories. The subsequent sections will be explaining the three categories.

IV. LINGUISTIC PROBLEM

This was found to be a big problem that is contributing to the use of absurd language. The respondents noted that in as much as English is a national language in Kenya, majority of them are struggling using it efficiently hence the use of words that sometimes don’t make sense at all. Many of the respondents are fond of speaking their mother tongue therefore influencing
their writing in a big way. They admitted that they use these kinds of words without knowing that they should not be used at that context. “You keep changing the words and antiplagiarism index is still above 15%,” they complained. On the same question of linguistic problem, some of them indicated that after changing the words, they would run it four to six times and it still does not reach the required threshold of below 15%. “Sometimes it becomes very difficult to describe what you want to say, so write what you think is closer to that”, responded one of the students. These findings are in tandem with the words of Gasparyan et al (2017) where they noted that antiplagiarism tool alone is not efficient for averting complex ways of plagiarism. They cited mass withdrawals by journals of articles which proves that there are inequities in the current anti-plagiarism software that does not recognize manipulative scheming and editing. These journals accommodated nonsense-plagiarized items. As noted by Frederic (2015) that proper writing entails following up of rules that shape words and tie together sentences into fluid and comprehensible paragraphs.

She noted that the number of mistakes in a research paper of about one hundred pages would be too much if the paper is not properly written such that when authors devote their time to read the paper, such grammatical errors is discouraging. Considering over 15 years of formal education, the least a research author can do is, display the foundation of the English language in a correct manner. Despite the validity of the results of one’s research, they will be of no use if accompanied by incorrect grammar. Therefore, expressing the research data correctly is as critical as research data itself if you want constructive feedback from your readers. Many research scholars do not consider the significance of correct grammar in their writings, which makes it unenjoyable read. Many research authors believe that to have the right data and represent it correctly ensures success. This is a fallacy; in fact, they do not without correct grammar.

V. ROGUE EXPERTS

After running the document, four to six times and it is above the required threshold, students engage the services of “experts”. The students who had earlier confirmed that English was a challenge to them resulted in seeking for services from people they thought are experts. The students indicated that these experts advertise themselves with posters all over the university. “All you need to do is look around for the posters where you will find their phone numbers contact them and you will be helped”, confided one of the respondents. They said that these experts would take a day or two in working on the document and by the time you get it, it is below 15%.

On probing further, by asking if they ask for the qualifications of the said experts, some of the students answered, “All you want is an antiplagiarism index of below 15%, who cares about their qualifications”, they responded. The researcher therefore inferred that these so-called experts are the ones who come up with the kind of language the student use. They just write words without considering if it makes sense or not for as long as at the end of the day; the antiplagiarism index goes down to 15%. A write up by Jena (2016), on the number of people involved in the writing process noted, “The number of people or experts involved in a project depends on the type of order. For instance, in an essay only one writer works on the paper, whereas for a dissertation there are usually two experts- a writer and a statistician. Moreover, there is a Handler assigned to each order. The Handler coordinates between the team of writers and experts, ensuring timely submission and quality”.

VI. TIME PRESSURE

Another category that emanated from the respondents is pressure. The students indicated that they usually do not get enough time to go through the document even after running it several times. Once the document is at 15% or below, they just take it to the supervisor. The students who take their thesis/projects to the “experts” also confirmed this. They too confirmed that once they get the document and it is below 15%, they take it to the supervisor directly without proofreading it. They indicated that they are under pressure of meeting the deadline. “Sometimes, when the supervisor asks these questions, you also get shocked”, they responded. One of the students noted that at graduate level, they have many things going on in their lives including family and work. Therefore, they get a lot of pressure from all over to an extent that they just write words for as long as it will get them to below 15%. An advise by Prasade (2011) on proofreading insisted that this is the last and essential step that must be considered before submitting any research paper. “The research paper should not only be neat but also readable in terms of how well you have formatted and placed your content. After all, a poorly written paper cannot communicate its message to the reader” (Prasade, 2011 pp 18).

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study herein, it is therefore concluded that the students are in some cases aware that they are using an absurd language; however, their target is to attain the threshold of 15% or less antiplagiarism index. The students who may not be aware of the grammatical errors in their thesis/project probably because they have used the rogue experts do not take their time to proofread their work. Language barrier, use of rogue experts and pressure are the main reasons why students use the rogue language.

It can therefore be recommended that short seminars and workshops be done more often to improve the students’ knowledge of grammar and proper sentence construction. This is due to the finding that the students may not be aware of the grammatical errors that they make during research writing. In order to improve students academic writing, open workshops that deals with the importance of good writing must be carried out. Possibly lectures should work with their students during the course of their degree, by ensuring in-class activities to help them with this problem.

Fortunately, the use of rephrasing tricks, among them copying verbatim and exchanging words, which are regularly used by the rogue experts, can be curbed by using a computer-based software analysis of lexical, syntactic, and semantic attributes to track inappropriate rephrasing in unsavoury sentences and long passages of texts.
Supervisors must manually check every manuscript after receiving the software generated anti-plagiarism index to evade false negative and positive results. In all preventive anti-plagiarism plans, those relying on human factor is the most dependable precautionary measure of anti-plagiarism. Unseasoned authors need to be updated by senior research supervisors on details about plagiarism of words, ideas, and graphics. Their disclaimers about candid writing, which some journals are currently asking may reduce the chances but may not be as efficient. Particularly, even getting a positive report of anti-plagiarism softwares, lecturers should look for ways of working on plagiarism, like sudden changes in style of writing. This can help to detect “copy-and-paste” kinds of plagiarism. However, the techniques described above show that even ungrammatical phrases may be plagiarized. An inconsistency on the styles of different works by the same author, or an inconsistency between oral and written language skills, should be a sign of plagiarism. In addition to distorted phrases, missing characters and unexpected symbols can be a sign of plagiarized work. To avoid the issue of Word macros, it is recommended that one checks the source file of the submitted manuscript as seen by the tool itself.

Writing a research paper is a skill that involves sensible presentation of the facts in a way that makes it interesting and explicable. It involves deep research on a particular topic covering all the various facets of the subject.

REFERENCES


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