Understanding of academic writing

Title of case: EAL[1] / ESL student's lack of understanding of text ownership in academic writing conventions
Target audience: Academics addressing inadvertent plagiarism in students' written work
Key issue being addressed: Appraising and addressing students' lack of understanding of 'text ownership' and 'acknowledgment'.
Purpose of the case: To scaffold students' understanding of text 'ownership' and academic conventions of text re-use.

Materials and preparation needed to answer case:
- Remind participants to find and access appropriate policy and academic integrity resources at own institution prior to coming to session.
- Copy of university academic integrity policy, and procedures.
- Separate PowerPoint for facilitator based on 1 or 2 hour session.
- Two resources at http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/plagiarism/

  - "Research-Writing: Learning a writing skill and thereby avoiding plagiarism"; and audio-narrated version of this text:
  - "Avoiding Plagiarism – Achieving academic writing"

The case

Abstract
An international English as an Additional Language student has difficulty understanding why copying text is not appropriate scholarly practice.

A lecturer at an Australian university interviews a student (Hua[2]) during stage 1 of following up an academic integrity breach. She is an international student, in her second year of a Bachelor degree. Her written English is comprehensible but marked by non-idiomatic expressions and grammatical errors that characterise writing examples of students at an International English Language Test Score (IELTS) level of 6. However, there are several paragraphs that are written in perfect academic prose with sophisticated word choice and sentence complexity, that clearly indicate to the lecturer that these passages are not the student's own writing.

The lecturer points to one of these paragraphs
Lecturer: This is not your own writing, is it?
Hua: Yes it is.
Lecturer: But you took it out of a book, didn't you?

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[1] EAL – 'English as an Additional language' is used as a more respectful term than ESL - 'English as the Second Language' when applied to Australian universities' international and immigrant students, many of whom have several languages other than English
[2] All characters in this case are pseudonyms

Hua: Yes I did.
Lecturer: Then it's NOT your own, is it?
Hua: Yes it is. I believe it.

Questions for discussion
1. What is incongruous about the student's response from the academic's perspective?
2. How can Hua's answer be understood in her own terms? (e.g. her educational background)
3. Is it likely to be an educational or disciplinary matter? What further questions must be asked to determine this?
4. How can the tutor explain the notion of 'text ownership' in this situation?

Some suggestions
1. It seems to be incongruous that she blatantly admits her breach. Does it suggest that she does not consider it a breach?
2. Consider what has been the role of source texts in Hua's previous education in China; consider the length of time it can take to learn to understand new discipline content, and apply this to the learning of a new approach to academic writing.
3. Consider whether she (a) has been 'informed of'; or (b) has understood the notion of 'acknowledging' the source material.
4. Consider whether she understands the difference between written genres that are (a) a writer's unsupported opinions, as for example in a leisure magazine article; and (b) academic writing which relies on providing 'evidence' from the literature in support of the writer's views.

See the following resources at http://www.adelaide.edu.au/learning/staff/plagiarism/ and click on the 'Resources' tab to open
a. Plagiarism Framework: Student as Apprentice Researcher
This framework is designed to help academic staff in examining the cultural and language factors that may limit the academic expression by a student at any given stage of their transition into university, and in forming realistic expectations of the likely levels of performance on written assignments.

b. QA in Plagiarism Poster – Assists staff in pre-empting inadvertent plagiarism by extending students' access to examples of academic language

c. **Avoiding Plagiarism – Achieving Academic Writing** – an audio narrated PowerPoint resource that explains to students how good referencing brings academic writing into line with the requirements of all research: it gives readers of the academic text access to the sources (literature) on which the writer's point of view is based, and enables them to 'replicate' the train of reasoning, just as good descriptions of methodology and results of an experiment enable replication of the experiment.