

Extended Patchwriting in EFL Academic Writing of Hungarian Students: Signs and Possible Reasons



Katalin Doró

Abstract While EFL novice academic writers try to avoid clear signs of plagiarism, they often resort to what is referred to as patchwriting, which has been characterized as closely relying on source texts with only some modification in word choices or grammatical structures. Patchwriting is viewed as a natural step in the development of academic writing. This paper discusses what constitutes patchwriting in its original sense and offers a new definition that incorporates both direct textual chunks and partially paraphrased sections that often exceed phrase- or sentence-level copying. The possible reasons behind this extensive textual borrowing and the giveaway signs are reviewed. The need for investigating the reasons and attitudes behind patchwriting, as well as the level and proportion of copying, are emphasized in order to see which approach to writing instruction best fits the needs of specific EFL student populations.

Keywords Academic writing · Patchwriting · EFL

1 Introduction

Intensive discussions about academic honesty has been going on for decades in some countries, including debates over definitions and policy making as well as detection, prevention, and punishment options. As a response to the growing tendency of plagiarism and writing difficulties in higher education, good practices in academic writing instruction have been proposed and students' and teachers' attitudes have been investigated, yet many issues are still underestimated and questions remain unanswered. As no two cases of academic writing problems are identical, no one universal recipe to deal with them exists.

K. Doró (✉)

Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics, Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary
e-mail: dorokati@lit.u-szeged.hu

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Over the past 15 years, I have been working in a Central European academic environment in which plagiarism has been a marginal issue. Very few graduate and undergraduate programs in Hungary include academic writing instruction, even though a dissertation or thesis is the major requirement for graduation. Moreover, although academic integrity policies do exist at all higher education institutions in Hungary, their implementation remains problematic. It is often unclear what the policies actually mean, who should decide whether we are facing an academic dishonesty case rather than a citation anomaly or inattentiveness, and what the consequences should be. It can only be assumed that most erroneous referencing or plagiarism cases remain unnoticed or unreported as very few are openly discussed.

I have taught essay writing to undergraduate students of English; supervised and evaluated BA and MA theses written by them; set and evaluated reports, research summaries, and other short academic writing tasks in applied linguistics seminars; and acted as an outside evaluator for research papers and doctoral dissertations. Most of these papers have been written in English by students whose main field of study is English studies (with English being a foreign language); they are expected to have an above intermediate (B2) level of English proficiency and to gradually improve their academic reading and writing skills in their chosen field of studies (e.g., linguistics, literature, or history). During this work, I have come across many poorly written assignments that reflected the students' best effort but had weak language skills. I have also seen many brilliant assignments that well exceeded the level of expectation and were testimonies to the academic writing development that some students were able to achieve during their studies. However, the majority of the written assignments handed in for evaluation fell in between these two categories. What for me were the most striking cases were the ones in which student papers contained heavy reliance on source texts that, at first glance, could look like reasonable or even high-quality original pieces of writing. These papers ranged from one-page argumentative essays to doctoral dissertation drafts that were often meant to earn students final grades for seminars or their entire academic studies. Therefore, in these cases it could be expected that students had put their best effort into writing their texts and knew about expectations and essential academic writing mechanisms. Nevertheless, I have come to realize that the best effort often meant very different things at different times, and the texts created by these authors were sewn together from patches partly written by the students and partly lifted directly from sources that were often not listed.

This paper first discusses some of the earlier works on patchwriting, its meaning compared to cheating, plagiarism, textual borrowing, citation, and referencing. Then, based on examples drawn from two English studies theses, a more specific term is proposed: *extended patchwriting*. Possible reasons behind heavy textual borrowing among novice EFL student writers are discussed, together with some of the signs that point to extended patchwriting. How academic writing instruction and assistance could better help students in preventing patchwriting is also examined.

2 Patchwriting: The Original Concept

The concept of patchwriting comes from the acknowledgement that novice writers often borrow and change the language of their sources in ways that conflict with English academic writing conventions. The first problem is that students often do not know what the conventions really are. For someone to become a reasonably good academic writer in a given field normally takes years, expertise and familiarity with the research published in the field, and practice with reading, critical thinking, and writing. This is not a stock of knowledge or set of skills most undergraduates or even graduates enter their education programs with. The academic texts that students write in their first language (L1) and second/foreign language (L2) are often interwoven with phrases or sentences copied from sources. Howard (1993) defines patchwriting as “copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes” (p. 233). Howard (1993) suggests that patchwriting is not only an important stage for novice writers who are unfamiliar with academic discourse and referencing rules but is also a commonly employed strategy that should be recognized. In the late 1990s, Howard continued to separate patchwriting from prototypical, intentionally deceptive plagiarism, claiming that students may not know the proportion of borrowing above which their text is considered plagiarized (something that oftentimes instructors do not have a general agreement on either). Indeed, patchwriting may show the writer’s effort to employ the target discourse, but the summarizing and paraphrasing task is beyond their capability. Howard (1999) proposed that patchwriting should be acceptable in a draft but not in a final copy of a student text.

While other studies have also called for the need to separate unintentional plagiarism from intentional copying (e.g., Eckel 2010; Pecorari 2003; Pecorari and Petrić 2014), the line between the two is often indefinable when only the final products are read by instructors and therefore the writing process is not followed. Closely assisting every step a student takes in the writing process is usually not an option, even in academic writing classes. Also, students may well deny intentionality, and teaching about plagiarism in itself may not prevent academic misconduct. Plagiarism is often considered the intention to gain credit without doing the appropriate work and is defined in its broad sense as using someone else’s ideas and words as your own without crediting the source.

The proportion of acceptable textual lifting is debatable and may vary in different contexts. Many policies go in the direction of zero tolerance and claim that even a sentence-long unquoted text or loosely paraphrased chunks used as if they were the author’s own words and ideas are plagiarism and students should be more aware of its consequences. Nevertheless, raising awareness may not be a simple task, as Li and Casanave (2012) reported in a case study. Even when students were aware of plagiarism policies, they used patchwriting to construct their assignments. Also, instructors may condemn students for a widely used practice for which no consensus exists, which can be confusing for students, or something they themselves may

do under certain circumstances (Clarke 2006). To test this, Roig (2001) asked a group of psychology professors to summarize texts outside their field and found that many resorted to a technique that fell within the boundaries of patchwriting.

I believe that there are considerable differences among a variety of techniques that could all be considered patchwriting. For instance, textual patches directly lifted from sources and placed after a sentence-opening phrase, the recopying of sentences with the deletion of details or not clearly understood sections, and the reordering of information with some lexical and sentence structure changes are three distinct cases. I fully accept the view that academic writing instructors should educate and prevent plagiarism rather than punish it (e.g., Eckel 2010; Howard 1999; Petrić 2015), but most evaluations happen at the final stage of writing where education has little or no place and consequences must be fair but harsh. Eckel (2010) points out that certain fields, such as engineering or natural sciences, do not use attributed quotations, while writers of humanities studies do have this option and a wider selection of strategies (and I also believe larger space) to interpret and give reference to their sources. Referencing, indeed, should not be viewed as a necessity that can be done by mechanically listing a few sources written on a given topic. In the humanities, for example, understanding of the sources and their interpretation should be shown by the author's stance. This can be gained by selecting appropriate reporting verbs, adding comments, and drawing conclusions.

While most published data explore the academic integrity situations in English-speaking countries (e.g., Gulliver and Tyson 2014; McCabe 2005; Howard et al. 2010; Waye 2010), often in contrast with the permissive Asian traditions (e.g., Gow 2014; Liao and Tseng 2012; Ting et al. 2014), in recent years more research has been published on different countries and educational contexts, including Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Badea and Presada 2017; Foltýnek et al. 2014a; Jahic 2011; Urbanovič et al. 2015). Glendinning (2016), Foltýnek and Glendinning (2015), and Foltýnek et al. (2014b) reported on a European project called the Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe (IPPHEAE), which collected questionnaire data from students and instructors in all 27 EU countries. The project found marked differences in the knowledge about plagiarism, its acceptance, and policy-related issues in the countries involved. Central and Eastern Europe is often found to be more permissive in academic honesty issues (see also Doró 2014a, b, 2016). However, the way plagiarism is treated may well depend not only on countries, but also on local institutes of higher education and academies of sciences, the tension between traditions and tendencies to integrate into Western academic communities, local policies and their implementation, local decision makers, and the willingness to openly discuss related issues. Moore (2014) reported on the zero tolerance of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, which includes both direct and adopted patches as unacceptable in their plagiarism guidelines. Not surprisingly, most studies on plagiarism agree on the following: (a) students' and instructors' views and expectations about academic honesty are different, (b) similar differences exist among staff members, (c) policies are often not clear and not clearly implemented, and (d) marked differences exist between countries or even study programs within the same institutes in terms of what is acceptable or taught as desirable.

3 Forms and Levels of Patchwriting: Definitions

In this section, I will argue that treating patchwriting permissively in end-of-course assignments or other comprehensive papers is not only a simplification of the problem, but may also be dangerous. Not only because permissiveness can strengthen the undesired belief that borrowing is fine if not done word for word, but also because a student who is allowed to patchwrite at the beginning may not strive later for a next, more advanced level of academic writing. Most cases of textual borrowing that I come across during my daily work should be considered plagiarism. It has to be pointed out that there is a controversy when L2 writers are requested to use “their own words” or “fresh language.” It is questionable how “fresh and original” an L2 writer’s words can be. Learning to speak and write in a foreign language is based on imitation and students are encouraged to learn and use the academic phrases and structures most typical of their chosen field or topic. While doing so, they should learn to copy neither the ideas nor the actual passages of their sources as well as not to use them as their own. Instead they need to build up a large stock of useful academic phrases that they can choose from when discussing their sources or expressing their ideas.

I believe that we should distinguish between phrase-level, sentence-level, and text-level patchwriting to better understand the writing strategies students employ and also to see to what level the lack of intentionality may be used as an excuse. The examples that supporters of patchwriting have published mostly document the reuse of phrase-level chunks, where short strings of words from the original text are kept together. This *phrase-level patchwriting* means that the student author does work with the source text by changing the word order, finding synonyms, and hopefully adding some new ideas and fresh language. Many of my L2 English writers, however, lift larger chunks, leaving together longer phrases or full sentences with only minor modifications. I call this *sentence-level patchwriting*, which shows very little of the students’ reading and writing skills and critical thinking. What happens is the identification of key sentences from a few sources and then the restructuring of the string of sentences into seemingly well-structured paragraphs. What is more, students sometimes go beyond this level and select groups of sentences or even full paragraphs to be placed together with some marginal reordering and with some additional sections written by them. I consider this practice *text-level patchwriting*. While constructing their papers, students may mix direct patches, paraphrased chunks, and truly original pieces of texts. I believe that sentence and text-level patchwriting is planned; it is a deliberate writing strategy used either because the writer (a) wants to deceive the reader per se, (b) has inadequate skills to write better, or (c) thinks that textual reuse is appropriate.

The extent of patchwritten or otherwise borrowed textual chunks within a text is also rarely discussed in the patchwriting or mosaic plagiarism literature. A 10-page essay that contains one phrase-level patchwritten paragraph may be accepted as no academic dishonesty, while the same should not be done if half of the paper follows the same writing strategy, and it should definitely not be accepted if it includes sentence-level chunks. Based on the above discussed levels, proportion, and inten-

tionality, I propose the identification of a specific form of patchwriting, namely *extended patchwriting*. Extended patchwriting is a writing strategy in which authors use, in a recurring manner, four-word or longer strings from original sources within the same paragraph or longer strings and sentences in multiple sections of their texts without using quotation marks. In these cases we talk about extended patchwriting regardless of whether one or more source texts are identifiable and whether the sources are cited at the end of the sentence/paragraph/paper or in footnotes. Extended patchwriting, in my view, is plagiarism, and it should not be accepted even from low-proficiency, inexperienced L2 student writers.

4 Extended Patchwriting: Examples

What follows are some examples of extended patchwriting taken from both a master's and a bachelor's level English studies thesis written as one of the final steps in completing all requirements to receive a degree. Prior and parallel to the thesis writing, students had attended at least one semester of general writing skills class and one semester of thesis writing seminar, with written assignments and extra consultation times. This means that students of English get much more academic writing instruction than what is offered in similar programs in the same university. However, this is far from being enough, and the two-semester consultation period during thesis writing with the supervisor is very uneven. Some students take advantage of the offered face-to-face consultations with the supervisor and send in sections of their drafts months before the paper is due; others resort to last minute writing a few weeks before the deadline during which there is little room for feedback and improvement.

Table 1 shows the last two sentences of a paragraph and the following full paragraph of Student A's master's thesis. The passage taken from the thesis is laid out side by side with the source sentences, and the borrowed chunks are underlined. References in this thesis are given at the end of each paragraph, using only a handful of sources, which is a typical sign of close reliance on one or two key sources. From a closer look at Ur (1984), it becomes apparent that indeed Student A's text is almost a word for word reuse of some key sentences. The text is patched together from several pages, yet it is clearly not acceptable to copy and paste sentences together from sources to write a literature review of a thesis. Very few words are deleted or changed in the source text, and there is almost no fresh language used by Student A in the entire paragraph. The preceding and the following paragraphs are constructed the same way. This is a good example of text-level patchwriting that makes the reader believe that the student's text is indeed a well thought-out summary of the sources indicated at the ends of the paragraphs. Instead, most of the text is quoted without the use of quotation marks to the extent that it cannot be claimed that the quotation marks were left out by mistake, which is often given as an excuse. Such a heavy reliance on the source text must be understood as a deliberate choice of the author, the reason for which can only be hypothesized.

Table 1 Excerpt from an English studies master's thesis and its relevant sources

Excerpt from an English Studies master's thesis	Ur (1984)
<u>In aural close procedure a written text is given to the learner with words deleted at regular or irregular intervals. The learners then have to use the context to fill in the missing words</u> (Ur 1984).	Aural cloze In the conventional cloze procedure, normally used as a test of reading comprehension, a written text is given to the learner with words deleted at regular or irregular intervals. The learner then has to use the context to fill in the missing words (pp. 83–84).
<u>Aural close tests are the conventional close procedure: a written passage is given to the students with words deleted at regular or irregular intervals. A deleted version of a written text is given to the students, and the teacher simply reads out the full version while the students fill in the gap according to what they hear.</u> Cloze tests such as the mentioned ones can be used to revise new <u>vocabulary</u> if each gap is designed to be filled by a <u>recently</u> -learned word. Meanwhile <u>guessing definitions</u> are a <u>guessing game in reverse</u> . The teacher defines something and tells the students in advance <u>and they simply have to guess what it is</u> . A <u>set of pictures</u> can be used in these kinds of listening exercises. <u>Apart from visuals objects, people, professions, animals, places, events can be used as the subject of this game</u> . The teacher jots down a list of the answers, and then improves the descriptions. <u>More abstract nouns, adjectives and verbs can also be used as the subject of these exercises</u> (Ur 1984).	A deleted version of a written text is given to the students, and the teacher simply reads out the full version while the students fill in the gap according to what they hear (p. 84). Guessing definitions This is really a guessing game in reverse. The teacher defines or describes something (having told students in advance what nature of a thing it is), and they simply have to guess what it is... sometimes the things to be guessed can be one of a close set, as for example when students have a set of pictures before them ... (p. 87). Such activities can usefully serve to practice or revise vocabulary the students have been recently taught (p. 91). Apart from visuals, anything normally used as the subject of a guessing game can be used for this activity: Objects, people, professions, animals, places, events. The teacher jots down a list of the answers, and then improves the descriptions. (p. 90). More abstract nouns, adjectives and verbs can also be used as the subject of these exercises (p. 90).

Two interesting examples of copying mistakes are also visible for the attentive readers. The first is the shift between *close* and *cloze*, which may be a trick played on the student by the spell checker or a sign of the student's ignorance of the difference between the two words. The second is the slightly different copied versions of two sentences from Ur (1984, pp. 83–84), which were used as the last and first two sentences of two consecutive paragraphs. It is also interesting to note the *student-students* and *learners-students* shifts in the two versions.

When the language of the patchwritten literature review sections are compared to the ones in the methods section written by Student A herself, the differences are quite distinct. Note the grammatical, lexical, and stylistic errors in excerpts (1) and (2) below (quoted verbatim).

Table 2 Excerpt A from an English studies bachelor's thesis and its relevant sources

Excerpt from an English studies bachelor's thesis	Barikmo (2007, p. 23)
<u>LBH</u> was also supported by Mufwene (1999, cited in Barikmo, 2007:23) in a study comparing the first-language acquisition patterns of an English-speaking child with Bickerton's (1984) rubric for bioprogram grammar acquisition. The child in this study had a basic sentential structure of NP—PredP before the age of 28 months, and her nonverbal PredPs did not require a copula as she had not yet acquired the adult syntax rule requiring PredPs to relate to VPs with the help of copula. During the acquisition process the copula first appeared in imperative constructions such as <i>Be careful</i> . Bickerton argued that the most radical creoles (those closest to bioprogram grammar) exhibit this same tendency to allow adjectives and prepositions to head PredPs and not require copulas (example 30).	Mufwene (1999) Also found support for the LBH in a study comparing the first-language acquisition patterns of an English-speaking child with Bickerton's (1984) rubric for bioprogram grammar acquisition. The child in this study had a basic sentential structure of NP—PredP before the age of 28 months, and her nonverbal PredPs did not require a copula as she had not yet acquired the adult syntax rule requiring PredPs to translate to VPs with dummy-verb, or copula, insertion. Acquisition of the copula was gradual, and was first attested in imperative constructions such as <i>Be careful</i> . Bickerton argued that the most radical creoles (those closest to bioprogram grammar) exhibit this same tendency to allow adjectives and prepositions to head PredPs and not require copulas (example 41).
(26) a. Jean tall. (Gullah) b. Jean taller 'n/more tall 'an she brother. (p. 112)	(41) a. Jean tall. (Gullah) b. Jean taller 'n/more tall 'an she brother. (p. 112)
[Barikmo, 2007: 23, 41] <u>Mufwene claimed that the subject's grammar supported the structural claims of Bickerton's hypothesis so the UG orientation of Bickerton's LBH seems to be valid.</u>	Mufwene asserted that the subject's grammar supported the structural claims of Bickerton's hypothesis, though generic claims were not similarly supported. The UG orientation of Bickerton's LBH was deemed valuable, though Mufwene suggested that UG features of acquisition are also available to adults and hence would afford them agency in the creolization context.

1. * *To explore the facts on the topic, I provided nine statements to my colleagues asking them for help with my empirical research. The results and conclusions will be detailed in this part of my paper.*
2. * *I will focus on three questions, which will be expressed in this part. The teachers said that they use all of the methods which are in the course books, but the type depends on the age group and the students' language level.*

The text in Table 2 is a paragraph taken from a bachelor's thesis. Examining it in parallel with the source text (an award-winning and published student essay available online) shows similarly heavy textual lifting. At first glance the paragraph seems well written, with references and interpreted sources. A closer look reveals, however, that apart from some slight simplifications, Student B's text is the lifting of six consecutive sentences from one of her main sources. It is questionable whether Student B had ever read the sources mentioned in the passage or had understood what the page number in parenthesis, "(p. 112)," after the sample sentences refers

Table 3 Excerpt B from an English studies bachelor's thesis and its relevant sources

Excerpt from an English studies bachelor's thesis	Senghas (2000, p. 696), Adone (2012, p. 26) and Senghas (1995b, p. 543)
<u>Before the 1970s, there was not much contact among deaf Nicaraguan children and adults. In the late 1970s, they got an opportunity to communicate with each other when a primary school for special education was established in Managua. (Senghas 2000) according to Senghas (1995*, cited in Adone 2012), in 1979 the Sandinista party established public schools for deaf children within a new literacy and social program and children started to communicate by signs immediately. Kegl and Iwata (1989, cited in Senghas 1995) Examined this early stage of Nicaraguan sign system and compared it to American sign language. They concluded that NSL's status can be evaluated as a creole. The oldest member of the community who entered the schools in the late 1980s used simple signs and gestures, so-called home signs, and they developed a pidgin language called Lenguaje de Signos Nicaraguense (LSN) which is still used today among them. Younger deaf children who joined the deaf community received this pidgin as an input and they enrich it to a full-fledged sign language called Idioma de Signos Nicaraguense (ISN). ISN is the result of "abrupt creolization" according to Bickerton's definition. (1984, cited in Senghas 1995*)</u>	<p>Senghas (2000)</p> <p>Before the 1970s, deaf Nicaraguan children and adults had little contact with each other. This situation changed in the late 1970s when a primary school for special education was established in Managua, followed in 1980 by a vocational school for adolescents.</p> <p>Adone (2012)</p> <p>According to Senghas (1995a, b) in 1979 after the victory of the Sandinista party, as a result of new literacy and health care and social programs, deaf children were brought together in schools and children started to communicate by signs immediately. Kegl and Iwata (1989) Described some of the early stages of Nicaraguan signing and compared it to ASL. They came to the conclusion that it had the status of a Creole.</p> <p>This new form of signing has been called Idioma de Signos Nicaraguense (ISN).</p> <p>Senghas (1995b)</p> <p>The oldest members of the community, who are now in their mid- to late-twenties, entered the schools in 1978, each with a different, highly idiosyncratic homesign or gesture system. Upon contact they developed a now partially-crystallized pidgin called Lenguaje de Signos Nicaraguense (LSN) which they continue to use today. Younger deaf children (many as young as 4 years old) who started school at that time received the Pidgin LSN used by the older children as input. From this impoverished language input they produced something richer: The new creole Idioma de Signos Nicaraguense (ISN). ISN is a full-fledged, primary sign language, resulting from the process of <i>nativization</i>, or <i>abrupt creolization</i> as Bickerton (1984) defines it.</p>

to. Not knowing what to do with it, this reference to Mufwene (1999, p. 112) was left untouched. The minimal rewriting in the paragraph includes two distortions: PredPs *relate* (*translate* in source) to VPs and Bickerton's LBH is *valid* (*valuable* in source).

Table 3, coming from Student B's resubmitted thesis (only partly rewritten, leaving the excerpt in Table 2 untouched), again shows extended patchwriting, yet she employs a third type of typical source borrowing strategy. In this case, one thesis paragraph is patched together from three different sources. Although it is more difficult to detect, once the sources are consulted, it is again relatively easy to trace the sentences in the paragraph to sentences in the sources. While some effort to para-

phrase is visible here, the student text is deceptive as it gives the impression of a well-structured, argued, and original summary of sources. The student also left some giveaway signs of citation anomaly for the reader in this paragraph, namely that Senghas (1995), is first cited through Adone (2012), but further down in the paragraph it is indicated as the source of all the other sources.

5 Discussion

The examples discussed above are selected paragraphs taken from two theses of which multiple sections are heavily borrowed and only marginally adapted. These examples suggest that heavy textual borrowing may also be intentional; it is a systematically used strategy even when students are aware of the inappropriate nature of direct copying. Earlier research has also pointed out that students may plagiarize even when they have a general understanding of its inappropriate nature as they do not have a clear understanding of the term and the role of citation (Bretag 2013; Chanock 2008; Glendinning 2016; Pecorari 2003). It is often argued that everyone has done some kind of patchwriting; therefore, it is not a big deal. Nevertheless, there is no excuse for letting students perpetuate this copying in their writing and early intervention is a key to integrity and academic writing instruction. It proves highly problematic when, in pieces of academic texts, it is unclear what the author's own claims are and which ideas or passages come from someone else's work. If a student's writing gives the impression that the author has read the source texts, when, in reality, he/she has only patched together key sentences from literature reviews on the topic, the quality of the whole work is questionable. The information provided in the rewritten student versions is often superficial or distorted due to misunderstandings and/or simplifications or convincingly good writing that was actually written by someone else. As a result of one of the above-mentioned textual borrowing techniques, it is not only the text that is borrowed, but also the ideas and statements of the original authors.

The reasons for extended patchwriting in L2 academic texts can be varied. The general identifiable causes in the case of L1 writers may also apply here, including time pressure, difficulties with critical reading and understanding of sources, source selection problems, tasks too difficult for or unclear to the students, citation uncertainties, insufficient subject knowledge and little experience in academic research and academic writing. Plagiarism issues in L2 writing are even more complex (for an overview see Pecorari and Petrić 2014). Students' target language proficiency may be insufficient for source reading and understanding, and they often do not have the fresh stock of vocabulary or a comfort and error-free use of sentence structures necessary for good paraphrasing. They may also lack confidence in rewriting original statements. For all these reasons, the shortest route to success is through the heavy reliance on the language and ideas of the sources. Not surprisingly, therefore, L2 writers copy more than L1 writers, as was reported by Keck (2006) in a sum-

mary of writing investigation. However, training in academic writing, knowledge of paraphrasing and citation mechanisms, and familiarity with academic integration policies may not save students from inadvertent patchwriting. I have also observed, as a risk of plagiarism, erroneous note-taking skills in the Internet age. Even well-equipped students and experienced writers may copy and paste from sources into their own files without indicating to themselves that what they took was not a note on but a section of the source. When students later go back to their notes, they may no longer remember that those are not paraphrased, ready-to-use ideas and end up patchwriting without noticing it. Therefore, calling students' attention to the importance of systematic and clear digital note-taking is the key to preventing inadvertent plagiarism.

Patchwriting may not be as easy to detect as one may think. Some of the signs of heavy textual borrowing may be the following: uneven language use within paragraphs or sections (in grammar, style, and terminology), unclear or ungrammatical sentences, various referencing problems, reliance on only a handful of sources in an extended literature review, and wording or sentence structures not typical of L2 student writers (Doró 2014a). However, these signs are not always clear cut, and the close resemblance with the source texts is only evident when the sentences are matched up with the target texts. Both Howard et al. (2010) in their Citation Project and Moore (2014) in her work with Finnish theses point out that student and source text matching is a labor-intensive activity. What adds to the curiosity of the case of the two theses discussed in this paper is that both were second, unsuccessful attempts after I, as the second evaluator, had identified serious extended patchwriting in the first versions; the theses were failed for plagiarism, and the students had a minimum of one semester to rewrite them. Interestingly enough, neither of the two supervisors had noticed the extensive textual borrowing that occurred in multiple sections of the first versions. Instructors may be short on both time and attention when evaluating student texts on a daily basis. However, if cases of extended patchwriting are not identified early enough, the assistance provided to overcome the problem and to teach students better note-taking and writing strategies at a later stage may prove to be insufficient. Many universities around the world now use Turnitin or other detection software packages, and originality checking is compulsory for major student assignments. Still, it is often left to the instructors to decide whether they check smaller assignments, and they most likely do it if they spot an obvious change in writing style. Some universities have even adopted this type of software as a learning tool, and students can check their papers themselves before submission. Attitude forming and prevention are stressed in these cases (e.g., Bailey and Challen 2015; Graham-Matheson and Starr 2013). While phrase-level patchwriting is not always screened by software because the original strings of words are cut, more intensive forms of textual borrowing are more easily found. Unfortunately, at my university this or similar software are not available or are not used on a daily basis yet; therefore, instructors, in order to prove their plagiarism suspicions, have to resort to the even more labor-intensive phrase-by-phrase Google search. In all cases, only online

sources are detected while offline sources or assignments downloaded from paper mills most often remain out of reach.

6 Conclusion

This paper discussed, through examples of novice EFL writers' texts, the importance of differentiating between various levels of patchwriting and introduced terms such as phrase-level, sentence-level, text-level, and extended patchwriting. Adding to the growing body of literature on patchwriting, textual borrowing, and plagiarism, the discussion was placed in a Central European EFL context in which discipline-specific academic writing instruction is available, while originality-checking software is not. What aggravates the situation are research skills that are often weak, assignments that are too difficult, and low English-proficiency levels and time constraints that push many students to copy large chunks from sources. It seems clear that students are familiar with main citation mechanisms and produce texts that seem good on the surface. Academic writing assistance, therefore, should focus more on source selection, note-taking skills, and time management skills. Students should be given examples of good paraphrases and summaries as well as unacceptable textual borrowing techniques from the very beginning of their academic writing and content classes in order to clearly understand how to avoid plagiarism. Instructors, on the other hand, should be made more aware of the extent to which patchwriting is practiced by their students and come to a general agreement as to how to deal with patchwritten texts and plagiarism on the local level. Interviews with students who repeatedly patchwrite may shed light on some of the compelling questions still unanswered, such as the degree to which students profit from feedback and their ability to adopt better writing strategies when the ones they have used fail them.

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