

Patchwriting as ESL Acquisition Strategy: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Glued

By Asif Siddiqui, MA Candidate – Political Science, University of Alberta

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What will be covered

- 1) Defining patchwriting (considered plagiarism)
- 2) Legitimate and Illegitimate ways to use works of others in writing
- 3) Patchwriting at the levels of the sentence, paragraph and papers
- 4) Plea to view patchwriting as a transitional step used by English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in language acquisition to become a better writers and speakers – native speakers also do patchwriting in developing their language skills

Patchwriting at Sentence and Paragraph Level

- Sentence Level:
 - Sentence structure and key phrases are maintained with only slight modification
 - Reversing or changing the order of phrases in the sentence
 - Changing the prepositions or using synonyms
- Paragraph Level:
 - Stringing Sentences most (or all) sentences in a paragraph in above manner

Legitimate Writing in AADC

- Would include:
- Paraphrasing (usually preferred by most writers and professors)
- Direct Quotations: proper use of quotation marks or block quotes
- Proper Citation

Unacceptable Writing in AADC



- Would include:
 - Patchwriting – sometimes called paraphrasing too closely
 - Plagiarism:
 - Improper citation
 - No citation: presenting the work of other as your own – high crime in academia

Patchwriting Examples – 1

- Examples of patchwriting from the Simon Fraser Biological Sciences Academic Honesty Website – http://biology.sfu.ca/degree/academic_honesty
- Original Source: Rabbani, M. (2003). Monitoring expression profiles of rice genes under cold, drought, and high-salinity stresses and abscisic acid application using cDNA microarray and RNA gel-biot analysis. *Plant Physiology* 133, 1755-1767.

Patchwriting Examples – 2

- Original Sentence: “Drought, high salinity, and low temperature are the most common environmental stress factors that influence plant growth and development and place major limits on plant productivity in cultivated areas worldwide. To overcome these limitations and improve crop yield under stress conditions, it is important to improve stress tolerance in crops.”
- Patchwriting Example 1 (sentence structure and key phrases maintained): Drought, high salt levels, and freezing temperature are the most common environmental stress factors that may affect plant growth and development and place significant limits on plant productivity in agricultural areas worldwide. To overcome these problems and improve crop yield under stress conditions, it is important to improve crop plants’ tolerance of stress factors. (Rabbani *et al* 2003).
- SFU Website calls this plagiarism because original is retained with only slight modification

Patchwriting Examples – 3

- Original Sentence: “Drought, high salinity, and low temperature are the most common environmental stress factors that influence plant growth and development and place major limits on plant productivity in cultivated areas worldwide.”
- Patchwriting Example 2 (phrases in sentence are reversed): Drought, high salinity, and low temperature place major limits on plant productivity in cultivated areas worldwide and are the most common environmental stress factors that influence plant growth and development (Rabbani et al 2003).
- SFU Website calls this copying and therefore plagiarism

Paraphrasing Example

- Example of improper paraphrasing
- Original Sentence: “Drought, high salinity, and low temperature are the most common environmental stress factors that influence plant growth and development and place major limits on plant productivity in cultivated areas worldwide.”
- Paraphrased as: Tolerance of plants to environmental stress may be increased by production of abscisic acid (ABA).
- SFU website says this is plagiarism because no source is given

Patchwriting a Paper

- Beyond the sentence and paragraph, what is patchwriting at the level of the paper?
- Patchwriting in a paper is bringing together patchwritten chunks of text from different sources interspersed with some original work.

Samuel Johnson – “Good and Original”

- Samuel Johnson’s response to an unsolicited manuscript sum up very well the AADC’s thoughts on patchwriting:
- “Your work is both good and original. Unfortunately, the parts which are good are not original, and the parts which are original are not good.”

Studies on Patchwriting

- Few patchwriting studies for either ESL learners or native speakers
- Widespread use of patchwriting among ESL learners from few studies
- Native Speakers also use patchwriting:
 - Vice-President Biden
 - Former Medical School Dean at U of Alberta

Diane Pecorari – *Patchwriting Study of ESL Students*

- Diane Pecorari (2003) looked at 10-11 page samples of 17 graduate students' writing whose first language was not English at 3 UK universities.
- Source: Pecorari, D. (2003). Good and original: Plagiarism and patchwriting in academic second - language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 317-345.

Pecorari's Findings – 1

- Her (quantitative) findings include:
 - 2% had 100% words in common with original
 - 10% had at least 85% words in common with original
 - 35% had at least 50% words in common with original
 - 44% had at least 40% words in common with original
 - So, 8 of 17 students had at least 40% of words in common with original

Pecorari's Findings – 2

- In interviews (qualitative), Pecorari found that:
 - Students did not think they were doing anything wrong
 - Participation in study was voluntary – so if doing something wrong, why get involved?
 - Students argued that many of the original sources were also not clear on how much was written by purported author and how much was from other sources

Pecorari's Findings – 3

- Pecorari also found:
 - Differences in disciplines in terms of what constitutes plagiarism
 - At a general level there is agreement in AADC that misrepresenting others' work as own is plagiarism
 - At the level of specific pieces of writing, the AADC is divided on when plagiarism takes place

Patchwriting – Practiced Widely?

- Many internationally renowned scholars already engaging in this practice
- Ihsan Yilmaz, a Turkish physicist, wrote an article for *Nature* magazine in 2007 with the following title: “Plagiarism? No, We’re Just Borrowing Better English.”
- Had to return 3 pre-prints after this article

Patchwriting – Have We All not Done it?

- “This above all, to thine own self be true
(Shakespeare, *Hamlet*).”
- Did we not all learn from others?
 - Sentence structure
 - Word Choice/Forms
 - Conventions in English
 - Etc.

Patchwriting is like Walking

- Pecorari and Rebecca Moore Howard, who coined the term “patchwriting” in 1999, both use the learning to walk analogy for language acquisition
- We lean on furniture at first, and eventually most of us become good walkers
- Most adults no longer wish to lean on furniture when walking as it would slow them down

PLEA

- Let's view patchwriting as a transitional step like many ESL teachers do – if a source is given, patchwriting should not be viewed as plagiarism
- As students, both non-native and native-speakers, become better writers, they should be encouraged to move away from the practice
- Hence, patchwriting is part of the process of students becoming more independent in their writing (and thinking)

Q's

- Do you have any questions?

