PLAGIARISM IN ACADEMIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING

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Rezumat: *Plagiatul este un fenomen destul de răspândit în lucrările studenților, care par a nu realiza gravitatea infracțiunii comise și astfel dând dovadă de lipsă de integritate academică. Copierea textelor a devenit o modalitate simplă de a scăpa de o însărcinare pe alocuri plictisitoare, dar, mai presus de toate, extrem de complexă, ce implică cunoașterea și respectarea anumitor norme academice. Articolul dat este o încercare de a înțelege ce este, de fapt, plagiatul și care ar fi metodele de combatere a plagiatului în mediul academic. Totodată, articolul nu are drept scop criminalizarea actului de plagiere, ci înțelegerea cauzelor care îi fac pe studenți să plagieze.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *plagiat, scrisul academic, integritate academică, norme academice.*

Writing in English as a foreign language for academic purposes may be the cause of students' writing apprehension. Being supposed to produce a substantial number of written works in their course of study, students seem to find it difficult to write cohesive and coherent texts that would meet the standards of academic writing. Therefore they have the tendency to look for easy ways of getting their written assignment done without putting much thought into it. The easiest way is to appropriate someone else's work, and thus flout the established academic conventions.

Academic writing implies academic integrity from all the participants in this particular act of communication. That is, teachers as well as students tacitly agree to follow the established academic conventions in order to be successful in their academic development. Writing is one of the means which allows students to claim membership to a specific discourse community. In this way, they can contribute their own perspectives to the network of academic discourse they belong to. However, the process itself of writing is difficult and time-consuming.

Kruse (2003) examined the challenges students might face and concluded that they deal with the demands of knowledge (students do not know what exactly to say); the demands of language (students are not familiar with the existing academic norms and conventions at play); and the demands of communication (students do not seem to be aware of the communicative process of writing, ignoring the possible expectations of the reader(s)).

Contributing (new) knowledge to the already existing knowledge puts students under pressure. They have to respond to a given task in written, sometimes lacking proper preparation. The preparation itself consists of the previously done extensive reading in a specific field and personal observations, on the one hand, and on their ability to express their viewpoint in a cohesive and coherent way, on the other.

Scardamalia and Bereiter (1987) pointed to the importance of two cognitive processes in composition: knowledge-telling model and knowledge-transforming model. The first is the basic model, which does not involve monitoring and planning coherence. While responding to the demand writers retrieve ideas from the long-term memory and transfer them into the written text. The second, knowledge-transforming model, is a more intricate process where writers aim to generate new ideas, whereas knowledge-telling is a sub-process embedded in knowledge- transforming model. Writers need to think analytically and critically in order to achieve their rhetorical goal. It is actually knowledge-transforming model that accounts for students' originality in their writing.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned challenges, students develop writing apprehension, whereas the process of writing becomes tedious and demotivating. That is why it can be assumed that students tend to plagiarize someone else's work in order to cope with writing apprehension.

Nowadays, higher education institutions are struggling to address the issue of plagiarism. The punishment can be severe resulting in students' expelling. However, the problem is extremely complex and requires an in-depth analysis of its roots. Sutherland-Smith (2008) argues that the notion of plagiarism alters depending upon individual and institutional definitions. Thus, different institutions can view plagiarism differently, moreover members of the same institution can differ on what plagiarism is. Some teachers take plagiarism as a personal offense against their teaching (Kolich, 1983, p. 183).

Etymologically the term implies the process of stealing (*plagiarius* in Latin meant the one who steals slaves). Kolich (1983) sees plagiarism as 'intellectual forgery'. Wilhoit (1994) defines plagiarism as 'cheating,' 'theft,' and 'academic dishonesty.' The researcher in his article *Helping Students Avoid Plagiarism* enumerates the following commonly accepted instances of plagiarism:

- Buying a paper from a research service or term paper mill;
- Turning in another student's work without that student's knowledge;
- Turning in a paper a peer has written for the student;
- Copying a paper from a source text without proper acknowledgment;
- Copying material from a source text, supplying proper documentation, but leaving out quotation marks;
- Paraphrasing material from a source text without appropriate documentation (Wilhoit, 1994, p. 161).

It can be said that the word is used to describe the students' misconduct who intentionally or unintentionally flout the academic conventions. Hence the students' academic integrity is called into question. Nowadays the problem of plagiarism is even more serious due to the Internet where everything one might need seems to be a click away.

The researchers' reflections on the nature of plagiarism seems to produce confusion. Yet, their primary aim is not to look for ways of criminalizing the act, nor is it to ignore plagiarism altogether, it is rather to identify its causes and look for ways to help students avoid it. Otherwise students' development as writers might be delayed (Eckstein, 2013) or even stopped. Kolich states that 'the worm plagiarism spoils the fruit of intellectual inquiry and reason, and starves the seeds of originality that foster such inquiry' (Kolich, 1983, p. 145).

The reasons why students plagiarize may be various. Sometimes the challenging nature of academic writing might cause them to opt for academic dishonesty. Eckstein (2013) expresses the opinion that teachers should be held responsible for the students' tendency to plagiarize: 'students may be unprepared for complex writing tasks; they may feel time pressure because of a heavy study load; they might be unsure about teacher expectations on an assignment; they may anticipate that the teacher doesn't take the assignment seriously' (Eckstein, 2013, p. 102). The scholar suggests carefully crafting the written assignments, taking into consideration the students' needs and their competences.

Even when plagiarism seems blatant teachers should not jump to hasty conclusions as cultural factors should also be carefully considered. In his article *Borrowing Others' Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism*, Pennycook (1996) describes his experience in a Chinese setting where rote learning is an important strategy in the process of learning a foreign language. The scholar states that once the text is internalized it is difficult for the student to determine who actually owns the authorship. That is why Chinese students might not understand the reasons their work is considered plagiarism.

It should be mentioned that reading is considered as part of writing. In their book *Writing at University*, Creme and Lea (2008) guide the students throughout their process of writing. Chapter 5 is entirely devoted to reading and its importance in the process of

writing. Thus, students might unintentionally attribute someone else's ideas after they have read a number of papers on the topic they are interested in. It is indeed difficult to state the degree of originality of writer's ideas due to the intricacy of intertextual relationships existing in the academic discourse.

Eckstein (2013) believes that while deciding on what to do when cases of plagiarism have been identified the following factors are to be taken into consideration: all 'variables' that might lead to students' plagiarism, the amount of plagiarism, the institution's policy on plagiarism, and the number of students plagiarizing. The author, however, draws special attention to the fact that plagiarism is something unacceptable in an academic setting, and warns instructors that 'all students are Not Gold-Hearted Angels' (Eckstein, 2013, p. 103).

Wilhoit (1994) suggests the following steps to be taken in order to help student avoid plagiarism:
- Define and discuss plagiarism thoroughly;
- Discuss hypothetical cases;
- Revise plagiarized passages;
- Review the conventions of quoting and documenting material;
- Require multi-drafts of essays;
- Require students to submit photocopies of documented material;
- Provide proper proofreading guidelines;
- Offer proper collaboration guidelines;
- Offer response appropriate to the type of error;
- Have patience (Wilhoit, 1994, p. 161).

Kolich (1983) also points to the importance of fostering students' originality. He urges the writing teachers to look beyond the conventional practices of avoiding plagiarism. In the researcher's opinion, the work might have been written following the academic conventions without 'violating the code of behaviour' (183, p. 147). Yet, the work might lack originality in thought, whereas the writer uncommitted to 'intellectual discovery' (ibidem).

Kolich actually adopts a more radical point of view on plagiarism. In particular, he states:

> But plagiarists deceive, they are unworthy of our shaded virtue, and they are not generally teachable or, worse, have refused teaching. Once they plagiarize an essay, their problems are essentially moral and not pedagogical. And usually we have only one lesson to teach them: they can never cheat their way into academy. (Kolich, 1983, p. 147)

Thus, plagiarism can be considered as a reason to reject a writer's aspiration to join a specific discourse community. That is why it is vital to develop students' awareness on the issue of plagiarism the moment they enter the academic setting. Similarly teachers should consider the various challenges accompanying the writing process. Students should be assisted in overcoming the linguistic, psychological, and motivational challenges. Similarly, teachers should consider the students' needs and set realistic goals. Finally, they should act according to the institutional policy on plagiarism as well as that of their discourse community.

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