

INTERTEXTUALITY IN STUDENT WORKS—COMPARISON OF RESULTS OF THE SWEDISH AND THE CZECH STUDY

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Abstract: During the period from September 2012 to November 2012, the research focused on the evaluation of intertextuality in student works by the academics took place in the Czech Republic. Methods objectives and the research plan from the Swedish research study by Pecorari and Shaw (2010, 2012) were adopted for the purpose of implementation of the research. Overall there were implemented eight semistructured interviews proceeded on five textual extracts with respondents from two universities. Complete results of the Czech study will be published in another contribution.

This contribution presents the results of the comparison of both independent studies (the Czech one and the Swedish one). The aim of the comparison is to find out and analyze compliances and differences in the evaluation of the intertextual links between Czech and Swedish academics. The results have shown that Czech academics are more conflicting in their opinions on intertextuality than Swedish respondents. Czech respondents labeled presented extracts as plagiarism more often than Swedish academics.

Key words: plagiarism, intertextuality, source use, academic writing, Czech Republic, Sweden

Introduction

In the Czech Republic there has not been any research conducted targeted at findings, documentation and analysing of reactions of academic staff on various intertextual links between a student work and the source. However some research of this type was carried out in Sweden. At the same time, Swedish researchers Pecorari and Shaw (2010, 2012) tried to record interpretations that these academics tied to student texts. They wanted to document differences in their approaches to the assessment of intertextuality. In the article “Types of student intertextuality and faculty attitudes” Pecorari and Shaw (2012) published methods they used for the research of the evaluation of intertextual relations in student works by the academics. With agreement from the authors we adopted these methods and used them in the scope of our research.

Because we used identical methods, we could compare our findings with published results of the Swedish study (Pecorari, Shaw 2010, 2012). The aim of the comparison is to find out and analyze differences in the evaluation of intertextuality by Czech and Swedish academics.

We expected that the diversity of opinions and evaluation of respondents would be captured. Our expectations were based in particular from foreign research and professional sources which do not focus just on the diversity of opinions of academic staff on defining plagiarism (closer Flint, Clegg and MacDonald 2006; De Jager, Brown 2010; East 2010; Roig 2001; Borg 2009).

The contribution compares the views of Czech and Swedish academics on identical textual extracts. Examination of consensus or diversity is beneficial mainly in case

of comparative examination of plagiarism. Findings can be effectively taken into consideration in mutual cooperation and practical implementation of projects between both countries.

The Method

Methods of the Swedish research were transferable into Czech environment without any necessary editing. In order to protect the copyright, however, it was not possible to use the fifth textual extract for the implementation of the study in Czech environment. The following part of the text describes not only the original Swedish method, but also the Czech modification.

The Swedish research was carried out with the method of semistructured interviews in English language. In contrast to the Swedish research, all interviews were conducted in Czech language and presented texts were also translated into Czech. None of the respondents opted for the assessment in English language. This difference may be because the Swedish research was conducted by six Swedes and two academics who moved to Sweden from another European country (interviews were read in Swedish \times English in proportion 5×3). In our case, all respondents were Czech. There were eight interviews in total evaluated in our study. It was the same number of respondents similarly as in case of the Swedish research.

Interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents. The length of interviews was in the range from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Here you can find a difference between the Czech and the Swedish research where the length of the interviews was between 25 and 60 minutes. The diversity was probably caused by the fact that Czech academic staff did not actively come up with new themes during the interview. Their reactions were always directed to the asked question. The interview scenario was used according to the Swedish research, which is attached in the Appendix. The extracts were presented to respondents gradually, from the extract number one up to the extract number five. This was followed by a part devoted to all extracts at the same time (their comparison and so on). In the last part of the interview respondents were asked more general questions whose objective was to find out the opinion of participants of the related area from more general point of view.

In case of each extract, first of all a question, was asked that required approving or disapproving answer. The question was directed to the assessment of acceptability or non-acceptability of the way of use of the source and of referring to it. This was followed by questions focused on the justification of the assessment and following steps which were raised by this assessment (actions against the student, explanation of the problem to the student, and so on). If the respondent himself did not comment whether it was a case of plagiarism, he was asked about this fact. The question itself was again built the way the respondent would take a firm and clear viewpoint. Then questions were asked that related to the justification of his or her opinion.

Within the work with all extracts, the respondent was asked to compile the examples into continuum from completely acceptable to completely unacceptable way of application and referring to the source. Questions about explaining the placement of individual examples into the field of the continuum followed.

Table 1

Characteristics of Examples

Example	Number of words	Matching words	The longest chain of matching words	Signaling of citation	Reference to the source	Nature of the content
1	37	12	4	No	No	General
2	28	22	11	No	Yes	Results
3	36	29	29	No	Yes	General
4	27	26	13	No	No	General
5 (original)	311	285	121	No	Yes	Results
5 (amended)	80	77	44	Yes*	Yes**	Definition

* citation of the secondary resources,

** Reference to the secondary source

The Structure of Assessed Texts

Pecorari and Shaw used for their research such examples which included various intertextual relations. Examples differentiated among themselves as follows (overview of characteristics of examples is in Table 1):

- length (extracts, different length of transmitted words and concatenation of words),
- referring (signalized quotation, reference to the source),
- signaling of secondary citation (referring to the source to which the source material of the student refers),
- type of reproduced text (transmission of general information, transfer of research findings and definitions).

So the participants could recognize relations in the word transmission (individual and concatenated) more easily, the same or similar words and concatenated words in both researches were marked in red. Conformity of transferred words moved approximately from less than one-third of words from the source text (example number one) up to much higher transmission, or rather up to full transmission (example number five). Different rates of adaptation of the information transmission also appeared in the examples. Examples number one and four do not contain the reference to the source. Other examples include the reference, however, in one case it is only references to secondary resources. Some examples transmit the original thoughts, while some of them transmit generally well-known information. The last fifth extract of the text has not been adopted with respect to the Swedish copyright. We used an extract of a text by a Czech student and traced necessary original sources and the source text. This sample has the same characteristics which were assessed in the Swedish study.

The examples were as from the field of natural sciences (biology—examples number 1–4), but also from the field of humanities (special pedagogy—example number 5).

Some respondents were closer to the content of the sources which students used for the creation of their works, and the others were clearly far beyond the topics which were captured in works of students. All of them were, however, acquainted with generally applicable standards for the recognition of authorship.

Respondents

Our respondents, as well as Swedish respondents, differed in their academic position, as well as in the length of academic practice. We deliberately left this criterion up to the selection of respondents, because the Czech academic staff, in scope of all academic positions and with different length of practice, can lead qualification works of students. They can also be members of the examination committee during the state exams, or they can also enter the disciplinary proceedings brought against the student suspected of plagiarism and so on.

Swedish respondents were settled in the field of natural sciences, engineering or medicine. Our respondents worked both in natural sciences and in humanities. We enriched the selection with the respondents from the field of humanities. We wanted to find out what kind of progress will appear in the evaluation made by academic staff from a completely different scientific discipline, and what factors of evaluation will enter their assessment.

Respondents were anonymous in relation to the researcher, as the recording of the interview was conducted by a trained interviewer who was choosing and asking the academics according to the key of the selection of respondents. The only selection criterion was the voluntariness of the academic participating in the research. The researcher was provided only with the tape with recorded interview which was marked only with the serial number of the respondent. Swedish researches took place anonymously in relation to the public. Respondents and researchers knew each other personally, but the identity of participants was anonymous in relation to the professional public—which means during the publishing of results of the study (see Table 2 with the attached list of participants in the Czech and the Swedish research).

The interviews were recorded, as has already been mentioned, through the independent interviewer. This way of recording the interviews was carried out because the author of this work herself was a student. If the recording of the interviews had been carried out by the author herself, then the research could have been depreciated with several possible handicaps. The academic staff may not have been willing to participate in the research (research was carried out on a voluntary basis). Also the respondents may not have been helpful in their replies. For this reason questioners were selected who had the status of an academic. The questioner had experience with leading the thesis. He also dealt with cases of plagiarism in qualification works of students in the past. This method of implementation of interviews was also selected because if the author of work had recorded the interviews herself and had subsequently evaluated them, there might have appeared a subjective distortion of the obtained data. On the contrary, interviews in the Swedish research were realized by the authors themselves on respondents they personally knew. Therefore, it can be summarized that, in our

Table 2

Participants on the Research¹

Respondent		Academic position		Sex		Discipline	
Victoria	1	PhD student/tutor	Assistant professor	Female	Male	Environmental science	Politics
Kjell	2	Reader	Research worker	Male	Male	Zoology	Social and mass communication, microbiology
Gregorija	3	Reader	The Head of Department	Female	Male	Computer science	Social and mass communication
Karin	4	Senior lecturer	Associate Professor	Female	Male	Health care	Sociology and history
Lars	5	Full professor	Doctor	Male	Male	Biology	Social and mass communication, the environment
Mikael	6	Professor emeritus	Associate Professor	Male	Female	Biology	Pedagogy
Urban	7	Full Professor	Research worker	Male	Female	Biology	Pedagogy
Stefan	8	Full Professor	The Head of Department	Male	Male	Biology	Philosophy

¹ For the part concerning the Swedish research, the resources for the creation of the table were taken from the Table 1, Pecorari, Shaw (2012, p. 151).

Explanatory Note:

The Swedish Research 2010

The Czech Research 2012

Note: Associate Professor is an academical-pedagogical rank of academia granted in the Czech Republic

research, we managed to exclude other factors, which could cause devaluation of the results.

Process

During September and November 2012, semi-structured interviews with eight academics, who also work at the Charles University in Prague and at the University of Economics in Prague, were carried out. The Swedish research, by contrast, was conducted in spring 2010. Time delay between particular researches was not too significant. It is necessary, however, to consider whether the new findings in the field of plagiarism in this period could influence the evaluation of Czech academic staff. Both Czech educational institutions had not been significantly involved in the projects and conference activities on this theme. Therefore, we can assume that interviewed academic staff did not need to be informed about the results of the Swedish research.

The Results and the Discussion

Two main themes which appeared in the Swedish research were the following:

- participants had different and conflicting views of the acceptable and the unacceptable intertextuality,
- and they differed in factors which they considered while answering the questions.

Both of these themes were also reflected in the Czech research, even if, in some cases, in different nuances.

Questions were built the way that respondents should essentially agree or disagree. As in the Swedish research, Czech academic staff also answered hesitantly and evasively in many cases. Some of our respondents even answered to some questions by presenting general views of the discussed area, and they identified themselves with these views. The Swedish as well as the Czech respondents both reported out loud what they were thinking about. However, dissimilarity was recorded in case of some academics who answered questions without hesitation and directly with a clear answer, which was not detected in case of Swedish respondents.

Conflicting Views

The answers of Swedish respondents were often tentative and some of them mutually opposed. In case of Czech respondents, the conflict appeared in a different form. Some respondents presented their assessments. In the course of time, various factors were entering these assessments. Under the influence of a new factor which they had taken into account, they subsequently modified or completely changed their assessments. Therefore, the evaluation of certain specific respondents did not just move within the less or more acceptable level, but it also went across the continuum of acceptability—unacceptability in both directions. It was similar in case of statements considering the plagiarism (whether or not it was a case of plagiarism in a specific case).

In the Swedish research all of the respondents evaluated the fifth example as non-acceptable. No other example got such an identical evaluation. By contrast, in the Czech research six respondents identified the fifth case supplemented by ourselves as completely unacceptable, and two respondents as an example totally acceptable. In comparison, this non-compliance might have been caused by the fact that we did not select an applicable example. We are aware of that fact, but it should be noted that the results for other examples also vary significantly, and not only in comparison with the Swedish research, but also in the case of Czech respondents themselves. Consequently there is nothing signaling that example number five was selected inappropriately. We can demonstrate all this on the example number three. This example was found unacceptable by Swedish respondents in five cases. In case of Czech participants the results varied from two entirely acceptable evaluations to the unacceptable evaluation in case of one respondent.

In case of the Swedish research, the acceptability appeared most often in examples one and two and unacceptability mostly in case of examples three and four. In case of Czech respondents it can be only stated that example number four was moving on or beyond the borderline of acceptability. The following Table 3 shows

Table 3
*Evaluation of Acceptability of Examples by Swedish Respondents*¹

Respondent	Acceptable	“Border” or Uncertain Statement	Not acceptable
Victoria	2		1*, 3*, 4*, 5*
Kjell	1, 2		3*, 4*, 5*
Gregorija		1, 2	3, 4, 5
Karin	1		2, 3, 4, 5*
Lars	1, 2, 3	4	5
Mikael	1, 2	3	4, 5
Urban	1, 2	3	4, 5
Stefan	1, 2		3*?, 4*?, 5

¹ Modification of Table 3 taken from Pecorari and Shaw (2012, p. 153).

The explanatory notes: * examples which were identified as plagiarism by respondents;
 ? uncertain statement, border case

Table 4
*The Continuum of Acceptability in Case of Czech Respondents*¹

Respondent	Acceptable—Unacceptable					
	1	2*	3	4?	5	
1.	1	2*	3	4?	5	
2.	3	1*	2	4	5*	
3.	3	2	1	4	5	
4.	2	3	1	4	5	
5.	2	1	3	4	5	
6.	1	3	4	2	5	
7.	5	1	3	2	4	
8.	5	2	1	3	4	
The explanatory notes:		Plagiarism				

¹ Table shows the final evaluation of respondents.

* no assessment concerning the fact whether or not it was a case of plagiarism;

? uncertain statement, border case

examples acceptable and unacceptable as they were reported by Swedish respondents. Furthermore, there is the Table 4 which reflects the continuum of examples from fully acceptable to fully unacceptable as the respondents themselves stated during the interview. The data on the continuum of the Swedish research are not available.

As it is evident from the tables above, Czech academics are more conflicting in their opinions of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable intertextuality than Swedish respondents. Czech academics also more often indicate unacceptable cases as plagiarism.

The Decisive Factors

As the decisive factors we indicate facts on basis of which the respondents made the decision about acceptability and unacceptability of the example. In this part of the text we describe how these factors entered the assessment of respondents. Particular examples of the factors are then stated in additional parts of the text (legitimate and illegitimate intertextuality).

Swedish respondents discussed their considerations whether it was an acceptable or unacceptable case, and they reported the factors which they took into account during their assessment. Swedish researchers came up with an interesting finding that individuals responded differently to the same specific case. If they responded differently, they logically explained the reason, why they had changed their mind. They also differed in their opinion of which intertextual features granted legitimacy to the text.

Similarly as in the case of Swedish research, our respondents also reported factors which they focused on during their assessment. The following factors were emerging depending on the problems which were identified in the submitted examples by the respondents. If the respondents had not identified any problem in a student text, they only stated that the example was acceptable (“it is the way it should be”). Different evaluations of our respondents were caused by the fact that other and other factors were coming into their minds. The resulting evaluation of respondents was influenced by the relevance the respondents assigned to the factors, or the number of factors was crucial.

The process of evaluation of examples was identical in case of Czech and Swedish respondents. They created their definitive evaluations the same way. They reported the factors on the basis of which they decided. Whether or not the example was acceptable for them was decided by the factors they took into consideration.

Legitimate Intertextuality

Both Czech and Swedish respondents characterized the legitimate intertextuality rather in negative terms. In the scope of both research the respondents commented rather on phenomena which were missing in the examples (what was missing in the examples) than on phenomena which were acceptable. As in the case of Swedish research, where the respondents identified a problem, there was more space for discussion. In the case of some Czech respondents the identification of the problem, or problem-free evaluation were preceded by a phase of more general description of a student text.

The Swedish research identified two factors the respondents used for defining the boundaries between acceptability and unacceptability:

- the scope of information the student transferred from the source text into his or her text “with his own words”,
- the presence of the reference to the source material.

Both of these factors were also recorded in our research, where we noticed other factors as well:

- the accuracy of transferred information and their significance for work (*the presence of secondary reference*—the presence of the reference to the source, from which the source material was derived and which the student based his or her work on; *change of the context of the transferred information; simplification of transferred information*),
- the benefit of the work.

If the factor occurred in case of more than one respondent, then the respondents characterized it consistently. This was not recorded in the Swedish study. Similarly as in the case of Swedish research, the failure in fulfilling of one of the factors resulted in illegitimacy of the text.

It can be finally stated, similar to the case of the Swedish research, that our participants believed that it was not necessary to refer to the source when transferring generally known information. The conformity between Czech and Swedish results was in conflict views affecting the type of information which may be considered well-known and its length. We detected conformity also in opinions of what can be regarded as an appropriate intertextuality. So the appropriate intertextuality may include the referred parts (such as the quotations or paraphrases), as well as non-referred parts in the form of transfer of generally known information.

Some Swedish respondents said that they found legitimate intertextuality even in the case when the student is copying from the source (the copying technique). They justified their opinion by the fact that it is connected with the learning process. We did not notice these opinions in the Czech study.

In case of the Czech respondents we detected a phenomenon the Swedish study did not identify. Some respondents said that the submitted example was acceptable. Further they claimed that there would be an option to increase the correctness of the text, if a student added more information into the text. By adding such pieces of information, a student shows that he or she has mastered certain academic skills and knowledge. At the same time, inclusion of such information in the text enables both the reader and the evaluator to work in depth with the information included in the text (for example pagination stated next to the reference to a paraphrased text enables easier tracing of the information in the source text of a student work).

Illegitimate Intertextuality

Both Swedish as well as Czech participants identified and described number of examples which were evaluated as inappropriate intertextuality. In accordance with the Swedish research we can say that the respondents, even though they evaluated such cases as inappropriate, mainly explained this situation in a different way than by trying to deceive intentionally.

In accordance with the Swedish research we found out that our respondents identified a certain form of illegitimate intertextuality which resulted from various reasons as in case of the foreign study. It should be noted that we recognized the same possible causes: the lack of knowledge of the rules for the recognition of the authorship and of the rules for the use of the source; and the process of controlling academic skills in the field of academic writing.

Both Swedish and Czech participants evaluated and explained intertextual links in different ways. They also sometimes explained the illegitimate intertextuality in variable ways. In contrast to the Swedish respondents, our respondents evaluated plagiarism without considering the subjective aspect of behaviour (meaning their intention to plagiarise). In contrast to the Swedish respondents, our respondents identified the case as plagiarism only if the criteria which they themselves attributed to plagiarism had been fulfilled.

Restrictions in the Evaluation of Legitimate or Illegitimate Intertextuality

Restrictions in the evaluation of intertextuality were not found in the Swedish study.

The fact that the academic is not an expert in the disciplinary field of the student work may significantly reduce the possibility to competently assess whether or not the intertextuality is legitimate or illegitimate in a particular case. Academic staff, even though they are not experts in the given field, also evaluated the field of transfer and the reduction of data from the source material as if they were judging a work from their own specialization. They are, however, aware of the fact that they may not be competent enough to assess this part affecting this type of intertextuality from information transfer point of view. Their evaluation in this field reflects whether the transmitted information has identical content. They are able to identify a change in the meaning of transferred data. However, they are not able to assess the text in relation to its specific focus.

Conclusion

This study pointed out different evaluations of legitimate and illegitimate intertextuality in student works by academics. In these cases the respondent bases the assessment not only on the text of a student work, but also with reference to the source from which the information was taken.

We found out that both the Czech academics as well as the Swedish respondents conflicted in their opinions on what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate intertextuality. In case of our respondents. However, we noticed greater differences not only in the case of assessment of acceptability or unacceptability of the intertextual links, but also in the case of assessment concerning the question whether or not it is the case of plagiarism.

Czech and Swedish respondents evaluate intertextuality in a capable manner. Swedish respondents evaluated intertextuality on the basis of the factors used by Czech academics as well. Czech respondents used also different factors for their assessments.

Opinion consensus has also been detected in the case of the factors that characterized the legitimate intertextuality:

- referred parts of the text (paraphrases and quotations),
- non-referred parts of the text (transmission of generally known information).

Czech respondents determined cases of plagiarism to a greater extent than Swedish academics. Swedish respondents identified the case as plagiarism only if they had

exhausted all the possibilities suitable for the explanation of the case. On the other hand, Czech respondents identified the case as plagiarism if all their criteria for accusing the case of plagiarism were fulfilled. This difference also explains the conflict in the assessment of plagiarism between Czech and Swedish respondents.

We would like to conclude this study with a proposal of recommendation directed to the educational practice and university administration.

The presented study is to a large extent separated from the practice, because it shows the evaluation only in the conditions when the respondent has the source material available. The pieces of information are transmitted from this source material to a student work, and the respondent knows the localization of transmitted information in the source text. In practice such a case of evaluation can be the assessment of outputs from the detection system. This study examines how different academics may evaluate identical output from the detection system in different ways. Therefore, it is appropriate that more academics should be involved in the evaluation (for example the head of work, opponent, or the members of the examination committee).

We found out that if a student work is assessed by the academic whose focus does not match the field within which the work is processed, he or she can suitably assess not only the formal aspect of work, but also, if the source material is available, he or she can assess the legitimacy of the transfer of information. These academics are aware of the fact that they are not certain of considering the informational aspect of work. Therefore, it is possible to state that academic staff from another field than in which the presented work is, are able to competently assess the formal aspect of work, and, in case of the outputs from the detection system, they are able to competently assess legitimacy of the transfer of information between the source and a student work. However, they will not be able to evaluate the professional aspect of work.

Czech academics also mentioned a series of recommendations how to add to the text. It will make the work with the text easier not only for a reader, but also for an evaluator of the work. These are practical observations resulting from the experience of academic staff working with the resources. It is appropriate that the students are familiar with these requirements:

- indicating pagination of a paraphrased text,
- in case of the quotations of foreign sources, the original text should be indicated in the footnote apparatus of work,
- indicating information on secondary sources (the sources used in the text from which we derived some information) in the text.

The study continues to be carried out. To compare the results with the Swedish research, only first eight respondents were chosen. Our aim is to continue in the study until the interviews still enrich the variants of factors identified up to now, and which were used for the evaluation. We have currently 16 interviews available, and we must state that we still notice different views of how to assess intertextual relations in student works.

Appendix (Pecorari and Shaw, 2012, p. 163–164)

Is this an example of a good way to use and refer to sources?

Why/why not?

(If the answer was that it is problematic, the following questions were asked as well.)

What would you do about it if you found it?

How would you explain to the student that this was a problem?

How would you tell the student what to do to fix it?

Would you take any actions against the student?

Probe specifically about disciplinary action.

Is this plagiarism?

Why/why not?

After all the passages were looked at:

If you imagine a continuum between fully appropriate and entirely unacceptable, where would you place these examples?

What is it that makes number *x* more/less acceptable than number *y*?

And follow up with other comparisons.

Probe for these if they don't emerge:

- quantity in one passage
- quantity overall
- what section it's in
- only so many ways to say the same thing
- the fact of writing in a second language
- the fact of being new to academic discourse

Now you've heard what I'm interested in, is there anything I haven't asked but should have?

Do you have any questions for me?

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