

Exploring Rogeting: Implications for Academic Integrity

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Abstract

Poor paraphrasing can be a sign of underdeveloped writing skills that can lead to plagiarism. One example of poor paraphrasing is Rogeting, which is the substitution of words with their synonyms using Roget's thesaurus or other digital synonym providers. In this position paper, we discuss Rogeting as a form of poor paraphrasing that may lead to academic integrity breaches, such as plagiarism. We discuss methods of identifying Rogeted text, concluding with practical recommendations for educators about how to better support student writers so they can avoid Rogeting in favour of developing their writing skills.

Keywords: academic integrity, academic misconduct, paraphrasing, plagiarism, plagiarism detection software, Rogeting, text matching software

Exploring Rogeting: Implications for Academic Integrity

Definitions of plagiarism can be found in academic policy documents as well as scholarly literature, however, plagiarism remains a complex issue that defies absolute definitions. Some educators have been prone to seeing "plagiarism as a simple, black-and-white issue" (Moore Howard & Davies, 2009, p. 64) when it is not. Even the terminology we use to refer to plagiarism can vary in scope, as they include, but are not limited to copying, patchwriting, cheating, misappropriation, dishonesty, and literary theft. Plagiarism is inconsistently defined across higher education institutions, with a wide variety of interpretations in academic integrity policy (Eaton, 2017). Some academic integrity scholars and advocates have argued that some forms of plagiarism, including poor paraphrasing and patchwriting, are not academic integrity issues at all, but rather writing development issues (see Howard, 2000; Pecorari, 2003).

Background and Positionality

This study is the result of work we undertook together when one of us (AT) was a visiting scholar at Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary in 2018-2019 from her home institution, Farhangian University. We embarked on a journey to understand cultural differences relating to academic integrity between our two home countries of Iran (AT) and Canada (SEE). Our collaboration resulted some previously published research outputs (e.g., Eaton et al., 2019), one of which was focused on the topic of Rogeting (see Takrimi & Eaton, 2019). In this article, we

expand on our previous research, in which we analyzed cases of Rogeting using a corpus analysis (Takrimi & Eaton, 2019). In this position paper we discuss the phenomenon of Rogeting and offer insights into how to address it.

A Brief History of Rogeting

Rogeting refers to the practice of replacing words or phrases written by the original with synonyms. Locating and choosing the synonyms is often done with the assistance of a thesaurus. The term is derived from Roget (1856), who is often attributed as having been the originator of the thesaurus. *Roget's Thesaurus*, as it became later known, has been a widely-used resource among writers of various ages and skill levels. In recent decades, online thesauri have outpaced the use of the traditional paper book version of *Roget's Thesaurus*, though Roget himself continues to be acknowledged when referring to online synonym finders. One might only speculate how the English physician and lexicographer might feel about the irony of his name evolving into an eponymized verb that might arguably be synonymous with plagiarizing.

The origin of the term “Rogeting” is sometimes, though erroneously, attributed to Sadler who found odd substitutions of words in his student’s exam paper (see Grove, 2014). We found evidence of the term Rogeting being used more than half a decade earlier in the work of Leahy (2008), an Irish poet. In her poem, ‘A Good Rogetting’, Leahy described her love of reading and books, and by extension, her intimate relationship with words. Leahy’s (2008) poem pre-dates Sadler’s (2014) references to Rogeting, though her work remains more obscure and, thus far, available only in hard copy. (We ordered a hard copy of Leahy’s book through inter-library loan for this study). Sadler’s work, on the other hand, is easily and publicly accessible through the Internet, which may explain the erroneous attribution of the word’s origin to him.

Although Leahy’s use of the term does not in any way imply a misconduct, it remains the first known instance of the word “Rogeting” in published literature. After Sadler, we found Schuman (2014) to be the second author who used a similar word, *thesaurusizing*, to refer to students’ “cut-and-paste plagiarism to fool both their professors and anti-cheating software such as Turnitin” (Schuman, 2014, n.p.). Elaborating on Sadler’s examples like “sinister buttocks” (see Harris, 2014), a nonsensical paraphrasing of “left behind”, Shuman (2014) maintains that such phrases will definitely provoke professors into rethinking about the words used in the paper.

Similar to the “plagiarism continuum” suggested by Sutherland-Smith (2008, p. 8), the reasons for Rogeting could arguably be conceived as falling along a continuum stretching from naive ignorance at one end, to a conscious (if misplaced) effort to create seemingly more elegant text, falling somewhere in the middle, to a purposeful intention to represent others’ effort as own at the other end. Whatever the motivations, due to the spread of digital writing services around the globe, the practice of Rogeting appears to have become more convenient, faster and more user-friendly than traditional manual substitutions of words and phrases. With little effort, a writer can easily submit original text to a computer-generated thesaurus or paraphrasing software and,

within seconds, receive the output. There are numerous free services on line that can perform this task. The writer can then present this text as their own original work.

Because of the novelty of the term “Rogeting” in scholarly literature and popular media, and the anticipation that “students will resort to increased use of paraphrase in order to drop below the radar of the detection software” (Warn, 2006, p. 195), we contend that it is important to engage scholars, educators, policy makers, and advocates of academic integrity in a more robust and evidence-informed dialogue on the subject, as we believe this is a phenomenon that remains poorly understood and understudied.

Examples of Rogeting

In this section, we offer examples of Rogeting. We draw from previously published works that have appeared both in scholarly works and popular media. Our examples are not intended to be exhaustive in nature, but rather to highlight how text manipulation through synonym substitution can result in bizarre or non-sensical outputs. One poignant example is the phrase “sinister buttocks” that was substituted for “left behind” (Sadler, 2014). Another example is, “I could hear the charlatan of the ducks in the distance,” a non-sensical phrase generated from the word “quack” being swapped out for “charlatan” (Schuman, 2014). One can find numerous other examples of Rogeting online as part of the public educational and scholarly discourse on inappropriate word substitution and poor paraphrasing.

Reasons for Rogeting and Poor Paraphrasing

There are a variety of reasons Rogeting, and other forms of poor paraphrasing may occur, one of which is underdeveloped writing skills (Eaton, 2021; Pecorari, 2003). In our previous work we found that reasons for Rogeting could include both intentional and unintentional reasons for appropriating the work of others, such as (a) a desire to write more elegantly; (b) comfort with synonyms the writer knows already and uses frequently; (c) a desire to use longer or more complex words; (d) a desire to deceive teachers and text-matching software such as iThenticate or Turnitin; (e) a deceptive desire to be seen as the rightful creator of a text or idea; or (f) failure to cope with the writing assignment and pressure (Takrimi & Eaton, 2019).

Issues with the Detection of Rogeted Text

Some writers may believe that substituting particular words or phrases with synonyms prevents the possibility of text-matching software (sometimes inaccurately referred to as plagiarism-detection or anti-plagiarism software) from identifying a match with the original text. Sadly, the result is phrasing that is not only inauthentic, but may even sound absurd or nonsensical to the careful reader. Text-matching software, as it exists currently, is designed to identify precise text matches using an algorithm, but may not necessarily be designed to pick up poorly written work.

Over a decade ago, Warn (2006) noted that “Substituting key words and rearranging the original text constitutes plagiarism but it is extremely difficult for an examiner to detect this type of plagiarism” (p. 196). Nevertheless, identifying cases of plagiarism that result from Rogeting largely remains the work of an astute human who reads with a critical eye. It is worth noting that some cases of Rogeting may not be difficult for a human to detect. The pseudonymous science blogger who goes by the handle “Neuroskeptic” (2015) has argued that:

Rogeting would probably fool any common plagiarism detection software, but done sloppily it produces very strange prose. Many synonyms just don't make sense out of context. For instance, while 'modernism' might mean the same thing as 'innovation' in the context of art history, in other situations it makes no sense at all to switch them (n.p.).

Schneider et al. (2018) noted that “software is available to assist in identifying plagiarism, but it can often be defeated by simple manipulation techniques, such as substituting words with synonyms (i.e., Rogeting), because such software often detects only exact matches of text” (p. 348). This technical problem has been recognized by Warn (2006), too, adding that detecting paraphrased and rearranged words and phrases from the original text may be difficult for a human detector. One potential solution might then be that both machine and human inspection techniques be used together to spot this type of plagiarism.

An additional complicating factor is that the more elaborate the act of copy-pasting substitution, the harder the detection would be for both machine and human detection. Vani and Gupta (2016) point out that in “complex methods of Rogeting” (p. 21), the writer modifies the substituted words, making it difficult for software to identify potential text matches. Referring to Cheatturitin's description, Vani and Gupta maintain that the limitation of Turnitin is its “inability to detect intelligent paraphrasing & Rogeting” (p. 21). Others have made similar claims, noting that “it would be extremely difficult to detect Rogeting so long as it were done right” (Neuroskeptic, 2015, n.p.). An argument could be made that if only key words were substituted with synonyms, other portions of the work might be flagged by text-matching software as matching another original text. Mariani et al. (2016) attributed their failure in spotting copy-pasting instances to the degree the original text was modified. One idea worth exploring further could be that the more an original text is subject to substitutions and alterations, the lower the probability that it might be identified as being plagiarized, either by text-matching software or human detection.

Further Considerations and Possible Detection Methods

Online thesauri may be only the tip of the iceberg. Paraphrasing and translation software has been a topic of discussion among academic integrity scholars for a number of years (e.g., Prentice et al., 2018; Rogerson & McCarthy, 2017). Article spinners, article rewriters, and content spinner tools provide free manual and automatic text-reproducing services with refined and

sophisticated techniques which can reproduce perfect material while looking as authentic and as original as the text submitted.

As a solution, Schneider et al. (2018) propose “a novel mechanism that supports identification of plagiarized work by capturing the creation process and comparing the works’ generation process, rather than comparing only the final products” (p. 348). Discussing how this support system works and what technological procedures are involved is in neither the present paper’s specialty nor its span.

Another solution would be to add a sort of thesaurus search to the previously-designed similarity checker of the software to facilitate comparisons in the database not only from similarity aspects but also in terms of the synonyms and their substitutes as found in the thesaurus, as these cheating software use thesauruses available in MS Word.

Still another solution is proposed by Warn (2006), critiquing current detection software for detecting only exact word string matches and their inability to detect “unattributed” paraphrasing. Warn (2006) suggests “advances in the design of detection software” (p. 201) so that “heavily paraphrased work be detected by relying on semantic matching algorithms” (p. 201), something like the search tool developed by Braumoeller and Gaines (2001, as cited in Warn, 2006) named “Essay Verification Engine, or EVE, which is designed to search for word approximations of essay text” (p. 201).

Finally, Roka (2017) suggests “more sophisticated computer methods that analyze lexical, syntactic, and semantic features, tracking of paraphrasing, citation based detection, analyzing the graphics, cross language text borrowing by non-English speakers and copying of references” (p. 2). Warn (2006) suggests that plagiarism software can lose effectiveness by the time writers recognize the limitations of digital match checkers and handle new technological advancements to take advantage of those limitations.

Supporting Struggling Writers to Avoid Rogeting

We subscribe to the idea that pro-active and pedagogical approaches to academic integrity are desirable. Informed by our previous research (Takrimi & Eaton, 2019) , we offer these practical suggestions to support students to strengthen their writing skills, while simultaneously develop their understanding of academic integrity:

- Introducing writing enhancement techniques, i.e., encouraging students to summarize the texts first instead of patch-writing from the sentences;
- Encouraging students to paraphrase more wisely, and to be mindful of the ideas they have in mind when looking up synonyms and word maps they find;
- Educating students about academic integrity, including expectations relating to citing and referencing;

Educators play a role in supporting students' understanding of attribution and ethical interaction with original source material. This responsibility is acknowledged by other researchers in the field of academic integrity. For instance, Howard et al. (2010) found that none of their 18 student-participants showed the skill of summarizing in their research texts and all resorted to paraphrasing, patchwriting, and copy-pasting instead. They suggest that students need to keep themselves away from the source and use their intake from the ideas presented instead of appropriating the language of the original text. Warn (2006) maintains that "more lasting inroads can be achieved by shifting student attention away from 'going under the radar' and towards being more confident and involved in their learning" (p. 207). We agree that a focus on teaching and learning, with emphasis on the ethical use of text, as well as citing and referencing, create a stronger foundation for academic integrity, as well as better writing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Academic integrity research is regarded as an underdeveloped field of inquiry compared with other forms of educational research (Macfarlane et al., 2014). If that is true, then Rogeting is an even more nascent topic of research, meriting deeper investigation.

Journalists and bloggers have drawn some attention to Rogeting in the popular media, but it has yet to be studied in an in-depth manner. Thus, we conclude with a call for deeper and more rigorous investigation into Rogeting, as well as the related topics of paraphrasing software and machine translation. We acknowledge that such tools may be used ethically for academic or scholarly development, but there are grey areas, as well as uses that constitute a deliberate attempt to misuse another's work without attribution or acknowledgement.

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