

Linguistic imitation and patchwriting in EFL: Swedish upper secondary students mimicking
linguistic features, structures, and the lexicon

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Bachelor's Thesis
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Autumn 2021

Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study that investigates how Swedish upper secondary students mimic linguistic items and structures of a short story *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen* by Graham Greene. The data consists of ten student essays that are based on the source text by Graham Greene. This thesis compares and examines the similarity of the student texts and the source text. Additionally, this thesis explores how literary texts could be used in language learning and teaching and discusses what kind of role linguistic mimicry and imitation have in verbal communication and language acquisition. This thesis also offers pedagogical and linguistic perspectives to the current notions of plagiarism and patchwriting. The findings demonstrate that all of the students, regardless of their language proficiency level, mimic the source text on a lexical, morphological and syntactic level. Students with higher linguistic proficiency mimic the punctuation to a greater level than the less-proficient students. The students mimic morphological items of the source text mainly by using identical or similar verbs, verb constructions, and adverbs. The students mimic lexical items most frequently by copying individual words directly from the source text. Many of the students also use synonyms for the original lexical items. On a syntactical level, many of the students mimic phrases and sentences of the source text by copying, imitating, and modifying them. Overall, the findings support the fact that literary texts offer great language exposure for language students, and thus stimulate language acquisition on different linguistic levels. More research on how linguistic imitation contributes to language learning needs to be done. Also, the terms plagiarism and patchwriting should be defined more precisely to universally determine the limit what is considered plagiarism and what patchwriting.

Tiivistelmä

Tämä tutkielma on laadullinen tutkimus, joka tutkii kuinka ruotsalaiset lukiolaiset matkivat kielellisiä yksiköjä sekä rakenteita Graham Greenen novellista *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen* ("Näkymättömät japanilaiset herrat"). Tutkielman aineisto koostuu kymmenestä oppilasessestä, jotka on kirjoitettu Graham Greenin novellin pohjalta. Tutkielmassa vertaillaan ja tarkastellaan oppilasessien ja lähdetekstin välisiä samankaltaisuuksia. Tämän lisäksi tutkielmassa pohditaan sitä, miten kaunokirjallisia tekstejä voitaisiin käyttää kielen oppimisessa ja opetuksessa, sekä tutkitaan sitä, millainen rooli kielellisellä matkimisella ja imitaatiolla on verbaalisessa kommunikaatiossa sekä kielen omaksumisessa. Tämä tutkielma tarjoaa myös pedagogisia ja lingvistisiä näkökulmia nykyisiin näkemyksiin plagioinnista ja tilkkukirjoittamisesta (engl. *patchwriting*).

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että jokainen oppilas englannin taitotasostaan riippumatta matkii lähdetekstiä leksikaalisella, morfologisella ja syntaktisella tasolla. Ne oppilaat, joilla englannin taitotaso on korkeampi matkivat välimerkkien käyttöä enemmän kuin oppilaat, joiden englannin taitotaso on heikompi. Oppilaat matkivat lähdetekstin sanaluokkia pääasiassa käyttämällä samanlaisia verbejä, verbirakenteita ja adverbeja. Lähdetekstin lekseemejä oppilaat matkivat useimmin kopioimalla yksittäisiä sanoja suoraan lähdetekstistä. Monet oppilaat käyttivät tosin myös synonyymejä lähdetekstin lekseemeistä. Syntaktisella tasolla monet oppilaat matkivat lähdetekstin fraaseja ja lauseita kopioimalla, imitoimalla sekä muokkaamalla niitä. Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimustulokset tukevat sitä, että kaunokirjalliset tekstit tarjoavat kielten opiskelijoille hyvää kielellistä altistumista ja siten stimuloivat kielen omaksumista eri tasoilla. Enemmän tutkimusta kuitenkin tarvitaan siitä, kuinka kielellinen imitaatio edistää kielen oppimista. Myös plagioinnin termit tulisi määritellä tarkemmin, jotta voidaan täsmentää universaalinen raja niiden välille.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Theoretical framework.....	4
2.1. Literary texts and vocabulary learning.....	4
2.2. Linguistic imitation and its role in language learning.....	6
2.3. Plagiarism.....	7
2.4. Patchwriting.....	8
3. Data and methodology.....	10
3.1. Presentation of the data.....	10
3.2. Ethical issues.....	11
4. Analysis.....	12
4.1. Presentation of the methodology.....	12
4.2. Analysis of the morphological items.....	14
4.2.1. Adverbs.....	14
4.2.2. Verbs.....	15
4.3. Analysis of the lexical items.....	16
4.4. Analysis of the syntactical items.....	18
4.4.1. Phrases.....	19
4.4.2. Sentences.....	20
4.5. Analysis of the punctuation.....	21
4.6. Language proficiency of the students.....	22
5. Discussion.....	24
6. Conclusion.....	26
References.....	27
Appendix.....	29

1. Introduction

This thesis is a qualitative study that investigates how upper secondary students mimic linguistic items and structures of the source text *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen*, which is a short story by Graham Greene. Topic of this thesis was chosen because the process of learning a new language requires mimicking or copying the language from a reliable linguistic source that exposes and reintroduces the L2 learners to linguistic items and structures that they can learn. Linguistic mimicry and patchwriting would thus, to some extent, be inevitable or even essential in a certain phase in the process of language acquisition. However, there is a rather paradoxical problem considering linguistic imitation as one aspect in the language learning process: although learning a new language requires mimicking the linguistic items and structures, too much mimicry becomes a problem. Especially in written language, if a piece of text resembles the source text too closely, it gets labelled as plagiarized.

The main aim is to examine how the student participants mimic the language of the source text in their essays. Another aim of is to discuss how linguistic imitation is a natural element in verbal communication, and how it is crucial in the process of learning a language. Furthermore, this thesis discusses how linguistic mimicry and imitation occur in written language as well, and not only in spoken language. This thesis also discusses how the practice of closely mimicking a source text can cause problems, the main problem being plagiarism but also that patchwriting can become a permanent phase if not unlearned. Finally, this thesis examines how literary texts could be used in language learning and teaching and offers pedagogical and linguistic perspectives to the current notion of plagiarism. Moreover, the analysis on the student essays from the perspective of linguistic mimicry can shed some light on language pedagogy respectively language acquisition, thus contributing to the fields of applied linguistics, second language acquisition and language education.

In this thesis, the linguistic similarity between the original short story and the student essays is examined by means of a hand-coded assessment of the linguistic items and structures that the students copy, patchwrite, adapt or modify from the original text. The analysis of the similarity between the student essays and the original text applies several theoretical concepts. More specifically, this thesis applies theories on vocabulary learning, linguistic imitation, linguistic alignment, patchwriting and plagiarism. The research questions of this thesis have been formulated considering the aforementioned theoretical concepts and will be discussed based on the qualitative analysis of the student essays.

The research questions are the following:

- How do the Swedish upper secondary school students mimic lexical, syntactic, and stylistic items of the source text by Graham Greene?
- When compared with the source text, how similar are the student essays, and how much and what have the students mimicked and/or copied from the source text?
- Is it possible to distinguish between plagiarism and patchwriting by looking at the student texts?

2. Theoretical framework

This section introduces the central theories and theoretical concepts behind the role of literary texts in language pedagogy, vocabulary learning, linguistic imitation, plagiarism, and patchwriting, all of which closely relate to the themes and foci of this study.

2.1. Literary texts and vocabulary learning

The use of literary texts has a long, albeit not straightforward, tradition in foreign language education (Carter, 2007). In the 1970s and 1980s, literature in language teaching became a relevant topic of discussion again (Carter, 2007). Literary texts have been argued to offer more authentic language, develop vocabulary acquisition, and introduce the readers to new cultures (Carter, 2007; Belle & Mussa, 2021); however, the use of literary texts in language teaching has been debated and discussed, not only in the past, but also in contemporary research as new perspectives arise.

For example, Belete and Mussa (2021) investigate how literary texts are used for teaching of English reading skills in Ethiopian primary schools and raise many considerations for EFL (English as a Foreign language) teachers when it comes to utilizing literary texts in language lessons. Their main conclusion is that students' age, interests, linguistic proficiency, socio-cultural and literary background should be considered when choosing appropriate literary texts for language teaching (Belete & Mussa, 2021). They note that the content knowledge of literature should not be the only focus in language teaching, but that linguistic features should also be examined. Stanford (2006), however, notes that different genres tend to have specific grammatical features that can cause problems in comprehension for EFL students if the level of complexity is not appropriate for their proficiency level. Additionally, language students have to master as they also need to “develop their metacognition by learning to check their evolving understanding of events in a story, recognizing when something is not making sense, and using reading strategies to check for missed clues” (Stanford, 2006, p. 62) which can also increase reading difficulty. Belete and Mussa (2021) emphasize that the students would benefit from adequate explanation of the context and the content of an assigned literary text. Reasoning for this is that students can better comprehend the meanings and concepts that occur in a piece of literature.

Literary texts in language teaching and learning have a lot of potential since they offer authentic language input and contain opportunities to broaden one's vocabulary and learn new grammatical

features (Belete & Mussa, 2021). Belete and Mussa (2021) also point out that literary texts expose language students to the types of grammar structures they might not yet be acquainted with, but which they can learn. Literary texts also enable students to learn new words in their natural context (Bergström, et al., 2021), and they expose students to different linguistic constructions that facilitate their understanding of linguistic and literary features, which potentially enhances their reading skills, language awareness, and critical thinking (Belete & Mussa, 2021). Stanford (2006) mentions that oral interpretation of a literary text can help students to create meaning and observe the role of grammatical functions and punctuation in constructing meaning. However, “students should never hear models of bad reading” (Stanford, 2006, p. 61).

Vocabulary development is a demanding, yet gradual, process that is an essential component in language learning as it is the foundation for developing one’s language proficiency (Nation, 2001; Bergström, et al., 2021). Bergström, et al. (2021) report that many of the language teachers in their study favored reading as their preferred learning method and that they relied on incidental vocabulary learning, meaning that new lexicon is acquired simultaneously as a by-product. The main argument for the favor of incidental vocabulary learning is that a constant exposure to new words without explicitly focusing on them would be one of the best methods to develop students’ vocabulary. However, incidental vocabulary learning can result in passive vocabulary (Bergström, et al., 2021). Furthermore, intentional reading with focus on vocabulary has been shown to be more effective for language learning: Nation (2001) argues that “small amounts of incidental vocabulary learning occur from reading, and these small amounts can become big if learners read large quantities of comprehensible text” (p. 149).

Nation (2001) notes that vocabulary memorization is achieved by three general processes: through noticing, retrieval, and generative use of the vocabulary. Akin to Bergström et al. (2021), Nation (2001) describes the role of reinforcement of the newly learned words as a necessity, for successful word retention requires reinforcement practices. According to Sasaki and Takeuchi (2010) the frequency of the repeated linguistic input is also a significant factor in language acquisition; they emphasize the role of repeated opportunities for retrieval of the target words and enhancing the vocabulary memorization. According to The Activation Threshold Hypothesis (Paradis, 2014), the process of activating a lexical item in the human brain becomes more accessible through reactivation; correspondingly, if a lexical item is not stimulated enough, it becomes harder to reactivate the lexical item. In other words, lack of frequency and recency decrease the activation threshold level, so repeated linguistic exposure is essential in learning new lexical items (Paradis, 2014). Language students would thus benefit from having repeated exposure to literary texts so that

new lexical items become accessible. Literary texts also serve as great linguistic models that the students can align with.

2.2. Linguistic imitation and its role in language learning

People have a tendency to align with the language that they are exposed to. In the field of sociolinguistics, a theory called Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 2008, as cited in Boghrati et al., 2018) proposes that humans tend to adjust both verbal and non-verbal practices to show either belonging or indifference to the interlocutors. In other words, participants modify their language to resemble the language of their interlocutor(s) to maximize similarity and show solidarity. Alternatively, participants might differentiate their language to maximize difference. Studies of linguistic alignment report that humans adapt their linguistic style to match their conversation partner, which essentially means that humans show linguistically align with their conversation partner through syntactical and lexical choices (Boghrati, 2018). Practically speaking, when the interlocutor uses words in a dialogue, the listener's mental lexicon is activated and thus prompting the listener to use the same words as the interlocutor (Purmohammad, 2015).

Furthermore, syntactic and lexical alignment can be observed not only in spoken language but also in written formats. For example, Boghrati (2018) reports that social media users tend to mimic the syntax structure of their conversation partners, which shows evidence for syntax accommodation and syntactic priming in written format. Costa et al. (2008) suggest that automatic alignment at lexical and syntactic level occurs in any dialogue. They also note that the speaker's beliefs about the interlocutor's linguistic proficiency can affect how much one mirrors the language of the interlocutor (Costa et al., 2008). Similarly, Purmohammad (2015) reports that L2 speakers are oftentimes more dependent on linguistic alignment than L1 speakers, and that L2 speakers regard the native speaker as a reliable source for language learning. This observation raises a question if the phenomenon of linguistic alignment could be observed and applied to language learning and teaching. However, in light of Nation's (2001) findings on vocabulary learning, it should be noted at this point that the linguistic material that L2 speakers are exposed to should not be too much above their language proficiency levels to ensure that they can comprehend and learn new lexical items.

It is important to note that students' learning process should not be reduced to a single factor, such as imitation, but instead the language learning process should be realized as a multidimensional

progress in which multiple processes are integrated (Sasaki & Takeuchi, 2010). In Sasaki and Takeuchi's study (2010) they measure and analyze the vocabulary development of Japanese EFL students through repeated e-mail interactions with a native English speaker and found out that although the students received and sent e-mail messages repeatedly, not every linguistic feature was imitated. Furthermore, some students reported that they learned the target words not from the e-mail messages with the native speaker, but instead from other contexts, such as from conversations or classes, and thus were able to retrieve the meaning of the target word when reintroduced to them in the e-mail messages. The retrieval of the target words then resulted in the students using them in their e-mail responses to the native speaker. Sasaki and Takeuchi conclude that although not all the target words were imitated in the e-mail messages, re-encountering and noticing the target words is a valuable part in reinforcing the memorization of new lexical items.

Although linguistic imitation is a more or less inevitable aspect in the language learning process, it is not unproblematic. For example, plagiarism becomes a central issue, as closely mimicking and copying from an original source is frowned upon, especially in the world of academia. When utilizing the current knowledge about linguistic imitation and alignment in the language learning process, it is also important to address and evaluate problems with high levels of linguistic mimicry.

2.3. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a prevailing phenomenon that troubles researchers, students, lecturers, and professors in the world of academia (Doró, 2017) as plagiarism is regarded as a serious academic dishonesty, violation of prescribed rules, and an offense to the original author (Alzahrani et al., 2012; Doró, 2017; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). Pecorari and Petrić (2014) inform that researchers from different fields of studies have been interested in the notion of plagiarism and its implications since the mid-1980s. The traditional definition for plagiarism is the act of copying the original text or the ideas presented in the original text without appropriately referring or properly giving credit to the originator, although it is worth noting that plagiarism is an umbrella term that covers many different types of textual copying practices (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014; Alzahrani et al., 2012). Researchers from different disciplines have developed elaborated definitions to specify the type and the context of plagiarism (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). Especially L2 researchers have formulated alternative terms for plagiarism, such as textual borrowing, transgressive intertextuality, language re-use, textual appropriation, and patchwork plagiarism, in order to demonstrate that textual copying behavior is

part of L2 development (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014; Doró, 2017). The abundance of different terms indicates that plagiarism as a phenomenon is not black-and-white, and that there are different reasons behind the different types of copying behavior.

The notion of plagiarism has also been criticized throughout the years from several viewpoints. The traditional notion of plagiarism is influenced by the prevailing economic, social, and technological conditions and outcomes during the 18th century in England, thus it would be appropriate to examine and reevaluate the notion from a contemporary perspective (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). The notion of plagiarism has also been challenged by Bouville (2008) who argues that when students, especially the nonnative students, borrow some words from the original source text without appropriating the ideas of the source text for the purpose of improving one's English skills, it should not be considered plagiarism. This shows that the notion of plagiarism and the need for linguistic imitation in the process of (second) language acquisition becomes problematic. In a similar fashion, Howard (1999, as cited in Pecorari & Petrić, 2014) suggests that patchwriting, which refers to copying and altering the items and/or structures of the original text, should not be considered plagiarism, but instead as a tool for learning a language. Howard (1999, as cited in Pecorari & Petrić, 2014) also emphasizes that patchwriting is a natural part of L2 development and that novice writers often patchwrite unintentionally. When it comes to intention, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) note that it is impossible to know the intentions behind copying behavior, as one can copy the language of an original text both intentionally and unintentionally.

2.4. Patchwriting

Patchwriting according to Howard (1993) is the act of “copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes” (p.233). In other words, patchwriting is employed by copying and “patching” phrases together, and by copying sentences from which one deletes and modifies linguistic items and/or structures (Howard, 1993). Howard (1993) further explains that patchwriting can be realized as a temporary writing strategy that L2 students typically employ when facing difficulties with acquiring appropriate vocabulary and comprehending new concepts. In a similar fashion, Doró (2017) argues that lack of academic writing and reading skills could be one reason as to why novice writers do not paraphrase, meaning they reword and summarize the original source texts accordingly. Doró (2017) proposes that students' inadequate language skills and language difficulties lead to inadequate paraphrasing.

Like patchwriting, paraphrasing according to Doró (2017) occurs in different levels and different researchers have formulated specific terms and definitions for them, but generally speaking paraphrasing can be distinguished into two types – close and total paraphrases. Patchwriting and plagiarism are often inaccurately treated as the same phenomenon since they share similar characteristics, although the term patchwriting has a more positive tone than plagiarism as patchwriting as a phenomenon bears a pedagogical connotation as patchwriting has positive pedagogical value in L2 education (Howard, 1993; 1995). Howard (1995) recommends viewing patchwriting as a temporary phase in which students orient themselves to a new type of discourse and community.

Patchwriting as a phenomenon is not, however, entirely unproblematic as it has many aspects to take into consideration. Firstly, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) state that several studies show how “L2 students at the patchwriting stage tend to be unaware of the potential problems involved in this practice, although they are concerned about committing plagiarism inadvertently” (p. 277) which indicates that although students oftentimes plagiarize unintentionally in a stage where their writing and/or linguistic skills have not adequately developed, they realize that plagiarism is not acceptable. Secondly, although patchwriting can be a textual resource that facilitates the learning process of the students (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014), patchwriting can become a permanent stage if not unlearned (Doró, 2017). Furthermore, Howard (1999, as cited in Pecorari & Petrić, 2014) states that patchwriting should be a passing phase, and acceptable only in the process of formulating the draft version and thus the final paper should not contain instances of patchwriting. Thirdly, according to Howard (1993), credible writers within the academic community do not patchwrite, and that the practice of patchwriting can also imply that the writer has not comprehended the original text adequately. Therefore, the patchwriting-stage should preferably be abandoned when one acquires the needed linguistic skills to produce original, good-quality text.

3. Data and methodology

The data of this research consists of ten student essays that are collected as part of a research project called ¹C21st Century Literacies for C21st Sweden which is funded by ²The Swedish Institute for Educational Research. At this point, I want to personally express my gratitude for everyone who are part of the research project and have helped in compiling the data. The research project C21st Century Literacies for C21st Sweden investigates how adolescents read and write different types of texts, and more specifically how students' and teachers' meta-cognitive literacy skills could be developed. The focus point in the research project has mainly been bias in reading and writing; however, this study will concentrate more on linguistic aspects and the notion of patchwriting and plagiarism.

3.1. Presentation of the data

The data consists of a randomized set of ten student essays from a total of 22 student essays. The data selection was randomized to avoid having biased and inaccurate research findings. In addition, the data sample is rather small so the research results cannot be generalized. The participants are upper secondary students (16–17 years) at a Swedish upper secondary school. The students have Swedish as their first language and English as a foreign language. The course that the participants attended is called English 6, which is aimed to students who have chosen to study social sciences and aim for higher education. In the English course, the student participants were assigned to read a short story *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen* by Graham Greene (Andersson & Ernst, 2003) and then write an essay based on the short story in which they had to interpret and rewrite the story from another character's point of view (see Appendix A for the assignment).

The students were told that they could reuse the dialogue in their essays, but the rest of the text had to be written from another character's perspective. The notion of patchwriting, paraphrasing or plagiarism was not discussed with the students, but bias and perspective were. It is worth noting that the assignment and the discussion with the students were conducted during COVID-19 when the students were studying remotely at home. As the instructions were given online, the students may or may not have understood the assignment correctly.

¹ <https://www.ltu.se/research/subjects/Engelska-med-didaktisk-inriktning/Forskningsprojekt/21-arhundradets-laskompetenser-for-21-arhundradets-Sverige?l=en>

² <https://www.skolfi.se/>

3.2. Ethical issues

The data was collected by a teacher Elise during spring 2021, and Dr. Lydia Kokkola who works as a researcher in the project gave access to the data. The credit for the data collection and distribution goes to all researchers who were involved in the process of collecting and distributing the data for research and educational purposes. The data was collected after each research participant had given their consent for research participation and filled the consent forms made by the Principal Investigator of the project Dr. Marie Nordlund. In the consent forms, the research participants gave permission to use the data for research and educational purposes. As this study is conducted for the purpose of deepening the current perception of language learning and developing language teaching, the data is utilized accordingly in an ethical manner and thus fulfills the criteria for ethical research. The participants remain entirely anonymous to protect their privacy and confidential information. Thus, the student participants will be referred with labels S1–S10 which do not reveal any information about them, such as their gender.

4. Analysis

This section presents the methodology and the analysis on the linguistic similarity between the student essays and the source text. The analysis is divided into distinct sections according to the codes that were constructed from the data. Section 4.1. presents and explains the methodology and the coding process of the raw data. The actual analysis begins from smaller entities and gradually progresses towards larger entities, so linguistic mimicry at a morphological level will be discussed in section 4.2., linguistic mimicry at a lexical level in section 4.3., linguistic mimicry at a syntactic level in section 4.4., and mimicry of the punctuation in section 4.5. Finally, section 4.6. briefly analyzes if the language proficiency of the students might contribute to the level and quality of their linguistic mimicry.

4.1. Presentation of the methodology

Through randomized selection, ten student essays were selected from the total of 22 essays, and the word count in the essays range from 523 words to 1200 words. The raw data thus consists of ten student essays in Word-format. After compiling the raw data, the student essays were analyzed and labeled with codes to describe what linguistic features and structures the students imitated or copied from the original short story. The coding process was conducted according to the coding system in qualitative research by Cohen, et al. (2011, p. 559–563). The codes were decided and labeled based on the level of similarity between the original short story and the students' rewritings of the story. Although linguistic similarity as the main focus of the analysis and the research questions were decided prior the coding process, the codes were constructed from the data. The student essays were coded several times in order to formulate distinct codes and minimize overlapping between the codes.

Some of the codes overlap slightly as, for example, syntactical features inevitably subsume lexical and morphological items. To illustrate this, the following sentence from a student essay is otherwise identical with the original '*So you see we could marry next week*'; however, S4 has done a minor alteration by changing the auxiliary verb: '*So you see we **would** marry next week.*' The problem is that the source text utilizes different auxiliary verbs (should, would, could) throughout the text, so the question becomes if one should focus on the sentence as a linguistic mimicry at a syntactical level or focus on the morphological item *would* as a singular instance of linguistic alignment with

the source text. To solve this, this particular sentence was categorized into both types of linguistic mimicry (syntactic and morphological mimicry). Each subsection focuses on only one type of linguistic mimicry at a time for the sake of clarity.

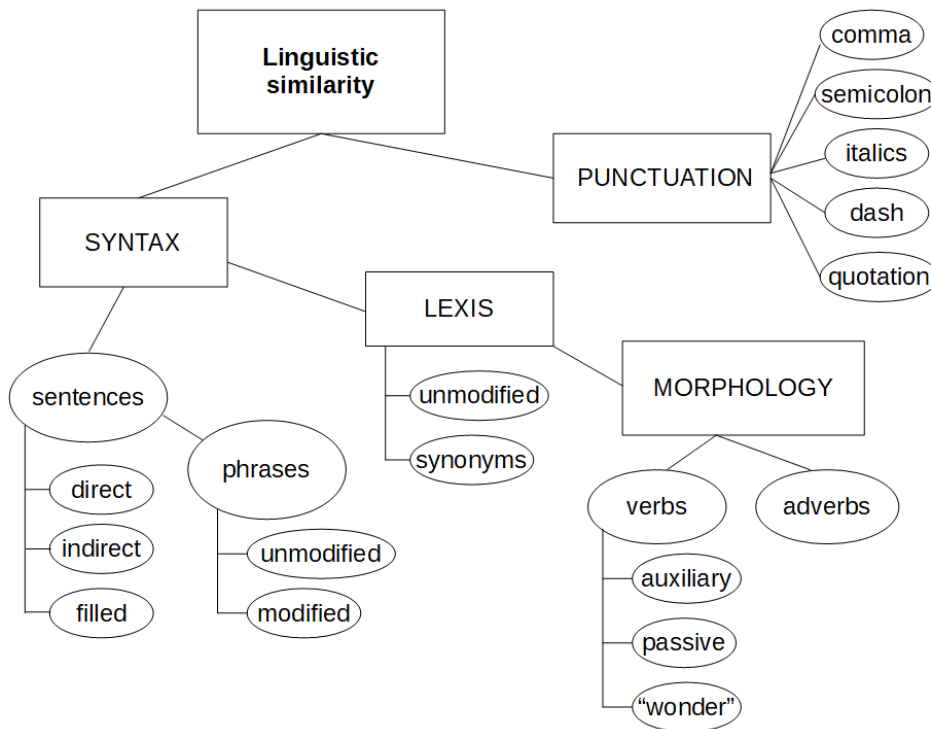


Figure 1. Codes and the categories used in coding and analyzing the data set

After reiterating the coding process several times, different codes were constructed to describe the types of linguistic features the students imitate or copy (see Figure 1). There are four open codes (*syntax*, *lexis*, *morphology*, *punctuation*) that fall under the axial code *linguistic similarity*. The axial code is a superordinate code that connects the related codes and subcategories into a coherent unity, whereas the open codes and codes are labels that describe and categorize different phenomena (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 559–563). The axial code *linguistic similarity* refers to the linguistic similarity between the source text and the student texts on different levels. The open codes *syntax*, *lexis*, *morphology*, and *punctuation* are further extended to different subcategories. For example, the open code *syntax* is extended to a code *sentences* (directly and indirectly copied sentences, and filled sentences), which in turn is extended to a code *phrases* (modified and unmodified phrases).

4.2. Analysis of the morphological items

This section examines instances of morphological similarity between the source text and the student texts. The analysis is concentrated on adverbs (4.2.1.) and verbs (4.2.2.).

4.2.1. Adverbs

In the short story *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen*, Graham Greene utilizes quite many adverbs of manner, such as *abruptly*, *sadly*, *absent-mindedly*, *harshly*, *awfully*, and *grudgingly*, which the students mimic with different strategies. Both S5 and S9 use the adverb *absent-mindedly* in their essays. Interestingly, S5 uses the exact form as in the original short story, whereas S9 has modified the original adverb by eradicating the hyphen in between the compound word, and thus opts for the alternative construction *absentmindedly*. This indicates that S9 is aware that the adverb has an alternative form where the hyphen can be omitted without change in meaning or part of speech.

Secondly, S5 loans the adverb *grudgingly* in its original form, but also utilizes adverbs that do not appear in the original text as seen in Example 1:

Example 1.

original (p. 126)	S5
'You will be independent,' he said grudgingly.	"You will be independent" he replied grudgingly . I did not mean to insult him, with a comforting voice I tried to lighten the mood of my fiancé.

The first sentence is almost identical to the original sentence as only one lexical item, the past-tense verb *said*, has been modified into *replied*. S5 has left adverb *grudgingly* unmodified; however, S5 uses other adverbs with the suffix *-ly* throughout the essay, such as *considerately*, *directly*, and *periodically*. S5 also uses longer constructions to produce adverbs, such as the phrases "**with** a comforting voice" and "**with** a stern voice". This type of construction does not appear in the original text as the author primarily utilizes adverbs constructed with the suffix *-ly*. This could potentially indicate that S5 knows different ways to construct adverbs and does not rely on the same strategies in constructing an adverb that the author utilizes. Most of the students, however, utilize the adverb construction with the suffix *-ly*, as in the original text.

4.2.2. Verbs

The original text contains several types of verbs and verb constructions, but the verb types that are characteristic to the author include auxiliary verbs, and verb constructions with a verb *wonder*. Although all the students utilize modal auxiliary verbs in their essays, such as *should*, *would*, *could*, *might* and *shall*, not everyone uses them correctly. Furthermore, most of the students only use the modal auxiliary verbs *might* and *shall* in expressions that are directly loaned from the original lines of the texts, but S6 makes an exception as they have integrated the modal auxiliary verb *might* into their text without copying the whole line from the original text. There is also an instance where a student loans a line that includes the modal auxiliary verb *could* from the original text, but falsely modifies it and consequently the tone alters.

S4 copies the original sentence very closely, except for the modal auxiliary verb *could* in the original text, as seen in Example 2:

Example 2.

original (p. 126)	S4
‘So you see we could marry next week’.	‘So you see we would marry next week.’

What happens in this example is that S4 alters the original modal auxiliary verb *could* into *would*, which changes the tone of the message that the sentence conveys. With the modal auxiliary verb *would* the tone becomes more polite and formal compared to the original. In the context of the story it does not make sense to use *would* in place of *could* because the couple in this story have decided that they will get married. Only the timing of the wedding has not yet been settled. The modal auxiliary verb *could* thus suits the context better since it better expresses the uncertainty and possibility regarding the date of the couple’s marriage.

In the next example, S1 otherwise copies the original sentence directly, but changes the modal auxiliary verb:

Example 3.

original (p. 126)	S1
‘This way we shall be quite independent’.	‘‘This way we should be quite independent’.

In example 3, S1 has changed the modal auxiliary verb *shall* into *should* which alters the nuances in tone and meaning: *shall* is more formal and determinative than *should*. The fiancée, who speaks the line presented above, is a quite determined character, so *shall* would complement her characteristics more but *should* would also work. It is complicated to draw conclusions whether S1 is not acquainted with the modal auxiliary verb *shall* and thus modified it into a presumably more familiar form *should*, or if S1 wanted to intentionally change the tone of the expression. An interview would provide more insight on this matter, but since the data was collected last spring, it is likely that the students would not remember why they opted for certain lexical items, which of course sets limitations to the analysis. But what can be said, is that S1 is aware that the modal auxiliary verbs *shall* and *should* share a similar meaning in this context.

The original text also contains constructions with a verb *wonder* ('I wonder what all those Japanese are doing here?') and passive sentences with a passive subject *one* ('I do think that with a first novel one should try to keep one's publisher happy'). There are several students who have loaned the expression 'I do think that with a first novel one should try to keep one's publisher happy' directly without altering it. Two students have constructed their own sentences that utilize the verb constructions with a passive subject *one* and with a verb *wonder*. Firstly, S9's sentence 'I am the one who is right, and we all certainly know that **one** should fight for what is right' contains the passive subject *one* and even the same modal auxiliary verb *should* as in the original text. Secondly, S3 has formulated a sentence which utilizes both of the verb constructions: '**One can wonder** if her beauty has swept him off his feet as well?'. This illustrates that both S3 and S9 have internalized these constructions, and instead of directly copying from the original text they have adapted and integrated the constructions into their own text.

4.3. Analysis of the lexical items

This section examines instances of lexical mimicry present in the student essays. Typically, all of the students utilize the same lexical items as in the original text. There are two main strategies how the students imitate and loan the words from the original text: utilization of unmodified words and synonyms. The majority of the students imitate the original text by utilizing the exact same nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs as in the original short story. The table (Table 1) below illustrates the most commonly used words that the students loaned and adapted into their own sentences from the original text. Therefore, direct loans of lines or full sentences from the original text are excluded from the list. The list does not include words that are not characteristic to the original text.

Table 1. *List of the most copied lexemes from the short story*

nouns	fiancé, signet-ring, quarrel, celebration, wine-trade, companion, publisher, glance, champagne, wine, disappointment, bill, Bentley's
verbs	glance, bow
adjectives	solid, distraught, polite, petite, oval
adverbs	grudgingly, absent-mindedly, harshly, sadly

It can be concluded from the list above that the students imitate nouns most frequently, followed by adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. The original text contains many nouns and adjectives that are quite distinguished and that the students presumably do not use or even encounter on a daily basis, such as *petite*, *quarrel* and *distraught*. For example, S10 uses the word *quarrel* quite fluently in the essay: “As the discussion more and more felt like a **quarrel**, she finally asked the most difficult question.” Thus, S10 shows an ability to integrate a new word with their own writing in a proper manner. Based on the essay in its entirety, the student understands that the word *quarrel* corresponds with the words fight, disagreement and conflict.

Many of the students have also modified words from the original text mainly by using synonyms. The word *fiancé* has the most substantial number of synonyms in the student essays, so it has been modified most by the students. For example, S6 uses the words *betrothed*, *my love* and *beloved* in lieu of *fiancé*, from which *betrothed* is an old-fashioned expression for *fiancé*. Additionally, S6 uses the word *fiancée* when describing the female character from the male character's point of view so they understand the difference between the word *fiancé* and *fiancée*. The articulate use of several synonyms by S6 is more than likely an indicator of a fairly high language proficiency. Similarly, S4 uses the word *my love* as a synonym for *fiancé* and uses the word *fiancée* when describing the female character from the male character's point of view. Some students used synonyms that do not fit with the relationship between the couple. In the original text, the word *companion* is used when the narrative voice describes the couple from an outside perspective.

In the following examples, S8 and S2 use the word *companion* in their texts, albeit incorrectly since the tone and implications of the word do not reflect the couple's relationship status correctly:

Example 4:

I tried making conversation with my **companion**, “So you see we could marry next week”, this did not land well with my fiancé. (S8)

Example 5:

I let my eyes sweep over the restaurant, but soon I looked back at my **companion**. 'So, you see we could marry next week.', I said. (S2)

Example 4 is an interesting case because when S8 uses the word *companion*, the interpretation of the situation alters: now it seems as if the conversation happens between three characters and that the fiancée is planning to marry the third person, the companion. This does not happen in the original text. In Example 5, the word *companion* once again creates distance between the couple and creates a feeling as if the fiancé, who the female character is conversing with, is not a familiar person, let alone a romantic partner. In conclusion, both students have integrated the word *companion* into their texts but have not realized how it alters the storyline and the relations between the characters. Finally, one of the students (S9) uses the word *my date* as a synonym to fiancé, which better expresses the relationship status of the couple. An interview would shed more light on the mental processes the students go through when deciding an appropriate lexicon.

Two more words from the original text that the students mimic in their essays include the adjective *distraught* and the noun *bill*. Firstly, S10 uses the adjective *troubled* in lieu of *distraught*, which indicates that the student comprehends the original word and opts for a more accessible synonym. Similarly, S5 uses the adjective *flabbergasted* as a synonym for *distraught*. The word *flabbergasted* emphasizes the intensity of feeling shocked by something, whereas the word *troubled* emphasizes the character's restlessness. Secondly, S6 uses the synonym *check* for the word *bill* from which the word *check* is the American English version, and *bill* is British English, which S6 is probably aware of, hence the synonymy. All these examples from the student essays illustrate the students' awareness of synonymy and their ability to utilize that knowledge in practice.

4.4. Analysis of the syntactical items

This section examines instances of syntactic mimicry in the student essays. The first section (4.4.1.) includes analysis of (un)modified phrases, and the second section (4.4.2.) includes analysis of complete sentences that the students have adapted from the original short story.

4.4.1. Phrases

Generally, the student participants employ two main strategies when mimicking phrases from the original short story; that is, by implementing unmodified and modified phrases into their own text. For example, S5 uses the phrase “snatched the bill” from the original without modifying it. Similarly, S9 employs the phrase “gaze down” from the original text, and both S1 and S2 use the phrase “at Bentley’s” in their essays. Interestingly, S1 writes the name of the restaurant (Bentley’s) without the apostrophe, which would indicate that S1 does not comprehend its correct linguistic form, despite being exposed to the name in the short story. S1 has several grammatical mistakes and typos in the essay, thus not yet fluent in English.

Along with the unmodified phrases, many of the students modified some phrases which they then implemented in their essay. The most frequently modified phrase along with the students’ modifications are illustrated in the example (Example 6) below:

Example 6.

He refilled their glasses with Chablis [...]. (original, p. X)	my fiancé refilled my glass with Chablis (S1) he refilled our glasses with Chablis (S5) I poured up our glasses with Chablis (S6) he re-filled our glasses with the Chablis (S7) [he] refilled it with wine (S8)
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Generally, the students mostly modify the subject (S1, S6) and/or the direct object by changing the pronouns in such way that the pronouns suit the character perspective, mainly by changing the subject and possessive pronouns. S1 also changes the noun *glass* from plural form to singular. One can also observe that S6 uses a synonym *poured up* in lieu of the verb *refilled*, which again illustrates linguistic awareness. Interestingly, S7 uses a dash to indicate the syllable break and instead of *refilled* opts for the linguistic form *re-filled*, which could demonstrate that S7 is aware of the word’s morphological structure. However, S7 incorrectly uses the definite article before the word Chablis, which illustrates that S7 does not know that definite articles are not used with proper names. Finally, S8 has omitted the word Chablis and instead has opted for the word *wine*. S8 is probably aware of what Chablis is and realizes that it can be replaced by another noun that is more descriptive.

The word *signet-ring* from the original text was used unmodified in S5 and S7's essays; however, two of the students have modified the original phrase "signet-ring on her engagement finger". To begin with, S3 has written "the ring on my fiancé's engagement finger" thus simplifying the noun signet-ring into ring, and finally replacing the 3rd person possessive singular pronoun into the possessive "my fiancé's [engagement finger]". Secondly, S9 has written "the ring on my finger", thus also simplifying the original phrase and by changing the perspective. It appears that both S3 and S9 have understood the idea of the original text but opted for more accessible words that they can comprehend and apply. Additionally, the original text includes a clause "if you began with some reading", which S4 adapts to their own writing by mimicking the attribute constructed with a with-clause and an active verb in the present tense; "I also should start with writing". Another phrase from the original text "the party of Japanese gentlemen", has been modified by S4 and S6 with help of synonymity, as they use the word *group* in lieu of *party*. Finally, one can observe an instance of linguistic creativity in S10's writing as S10 mimics the construction of the original phrase "Cheltenham ladies' college" by creating an analogous phrase "Cheltenham man's college". S10, however, does not pluralize the noun *man* and is not aware of the cultural fact that there is no such thing as Cheltenham men's college.

4.4.2. Sentences

Apart from direct loans of the original dialogues, such as "This Chablis is good, isn't it?", the original sentences are converted from direct speech to indirect speech. One of the students (S7) modifies sentences from direct speech into indirect speech:

Example 7.

original, p. 127	S7
<p>'Darling, you don't listen, do you? My publisher. He said he hadn't read a first novel in the last ten years which showed such powers of observation.' 'That's wonderful,' he said sadly, 'wonderful.'</p>	<p>I told him that he is my publisher and that he had said that he hadn't read a first novel in the last ten years which showed such powers of observation. To that, my Fiance condescendingly replied that that's wonderful wonderful.</p>

In between the adapted original sentences, S7 implements their own phrases and words into the essay. With this, S7 shows an ability to modify the original sentence without directly copying it,

although only the voice of the sentences is modified. Interestingly, S7 is the only student who conducted this process of converting dialogues to indirect speech. This process, however, can become problematic if students in general adopt this approach without properly citing, referencing, synthesizing and/or paraphrasing the original source.

Some of the students also modify the original text by filling in an incomplete sentence:

Example 8.

<p>‘Of course, but Mother...’ (<i>original, p. 126</i>)</p>	<p>‘Of course, but mother thinks we should wait just a little bit more.’ I replied. (S4) ‘Of course, but mother want you to have a real job and income before’. (S8)</p>
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This shows that S4 and S8 can produce creative expressions in which only the beginning is directly copied. S8 has trouble with using a correct verbform, whereas S4 produces grammatically correct text while mimicking the way how auxiliary verbs are used in the original text. Interestingly, neither S4 or S8 mimic the initial letter and instead have written the word mother with small case letters. This could be because the students do not know why the initial letter is used, and thus omit it altogether. Or alternatively, the students could know that the initial letter here is only used for stylistic purpose and decide it is not necessary to mimic. An interview would be needed to make factual conclusions. Moreover, S4 borrows the beginning of the sentence “Of course, [...]” by using it in a similar manner in their own text: “**Of course**, I want to support her unconditionally and make her to the happiest woman who ever walked in a pair of shoes”. S3 also mimics the same phrase and syntactic structure: “**Of course**, she always picks the wine when we go out to dinner”.

4.5. Analysis of the punctuation

This section analyzes how the students mimic the punctuation of the original source text, as the author of the original text, Graham Greene, has a specific way of using punctuation which only some of the students attempt to mimic. In fact, S9 is one of the few students who mimic the punctuation quite closely, as S9 uses commas, semicolons, dashes, and quotation marks in a similar fashion when compared with the original text:

Example 9.

S9

‘You will be independent.’, he mutters. I am by the minute growing more and more tired of this ungratefulness of his. ‘The wine-trade wouldn't really suit you, would it?’, I reply; trying to maintain my emotions on the inside, but still sounding deprecatory. He knows that I am right - like always, but he refuses to admit it - like always. ‘I spoke to my publisher about you and there's a very good chance . . .if you began with some reading . . .’ Disturbed he looks up from his glass. ‘But I don't know a thing about books.’ He says in a sharp tone. ‘I would help you at the start.’, I express in a gentle tone, but frustrated inside. He once again gaze down, into his glass.

In the ninth example, S9 uses commas to expand sentences and punctuation marks to mimic not only the rather rapid pace but also the full tone of the original text, which in the original text is achieved by the frequent use of punctuation marks, so the use of commas, dashes and semicolons. S9 even mimics the use of single quotation marks, although not consistently: in the second last row S9 uses double quotation marks that are more commonly used in Sweden. In addition, S9 occasionally uses apostrophes instead of singular quotation marks. Similar to S9, S4 and S8 also consistently employ singular quotation marks throughout their essays. Most of the students are also able to mimic the proper use of italics, for example, to emphasize the tone (f.ex. ‘*You will be independent*’) and to indicate the title of the imaginary novel, *The Chelsea Set*.

4.6. Language proficiency of the students

Naturally, the students are at different stages in their acquisition of English which also manifests in their essays. On basis of the data, it seems that there is no definite correlation or direct causality between the level of mimicry and language proficiency. However, there are tendencies that can be observed. Firstly, most of the students with high language competence tend to mimic the punctuation of the original text in a greater level compared to the less fluent students. Secondly, there are no significant differences in the level of linguistic mimicry between the high- and less-proficient students as these groups of students generally incline to moderate levels of linguistic mimicry. However, the less fluent students rely more on direct copying rather than modifying or adapting the words, phrases, and sentences from the original text, which according to Doró (2017), and Pecorari and Petrić (2014) stems from the fact that the students’ linguistic skills are in a developmental stage and thus need more pedagogical support from the teachers. The practice of close paraphrasing can, however, be seen as a developmental stage that promotes language learning

(Pecorari & Petrić, 2014) but the stage has to be temporary (Doró, 2017). Thirdly, the group of students with lowest language proficiency levels is rather polarized as they either barely mimic or copy the original text, or contrastively mimic or copy the original text aggressively. But as the data set is small, any generalizations cannot be made.

5. Discussion

The findings of this thesis support the fact that utilization of literary texts in language teaching and learning would offer language students great language exposure and thus stimulate language acquisition on different linguistic levels. It is important that teachers select literary texts with appropriate vocabulary and cultural phenomena, and the overall difficulty level has to be suitable in order to improve the students' language skills. In light of Belle and Mussa's (2021) study, the reading activities in L2 classes should preferably contain pre-, while- and post-activities to ensure that the activities are engaging. Additionally, the content knowledge should not be the only focus, but instead language should also be taken into account (Belle & Mussa, 2021). Also, it cannot be emphasized enough that language students need to be exposed to literary texts repeatedly because the constant exposure to language is "a facilitative prerequisite for language development" (Bergström et al., 2021, p. 10).

According to Paradis (2014), the production of a lexical item requires more effort than its comprehension. Therefore, language students would benefit from a similar assignment that the student participants executed in this study: students would first read a piece of literature, after which they would produce an essay of it. Additionally, students should also be instructed to be aware of the extent of their patchwriting, and they should be encouraged to utilize synonymy. As Howard (1993) notes, the habit of patchwriting does not begin in academia, so it would be of good practice to start discussing the notion of plagiarism early on so that, as Doró (2017) puts it, patchwriting does not become a permanent writing strategy. Another reason to gradually learn away from it is that patchwriting implies that the writer does not comprehend the original text thoroughly (Howard, 1993).

The linguistic similarity between the student essays and the source text proposes that linguistic alignment on different linguistic levels occurs also in written texts, something which has been researched only to a limited extent (see e.g. Sasaki & Takeuchi, 2010). The fact that some of the students mimic not only the language of the original text, but also the stylistic conventions, shows that linguistic alignment extends even to punctuation. This notion could be utilized in language pedagogy, for example, by selecting different literary texts that utilize punctuation marks frequently and then assign students to write an essay in which they are encouraged to mimic the punctuation (and the language) of the original literary text. With mimicry of the punctuation, problems of plagiarism do not need to be extensively discussed as punctuation is a matter of style. With

linguistic items and structures, however, plagiarism ought to be discussed since language contains information and ideas.

Finally, more research on patchwriting and its implications and consequences need to be conducted to understand patchwriting thoroughly from a pedagogical and linguistic perspective. Linguistic alignment in written language should also be studied further. Additionally, more precise and universal definitions and limits for plagiarism should be examined, as the abundance of alternative terms for plagiarism indicates that plagiarism as a phenomenon is not black-and-white, especially when thinking of the paradox that language learning requires linguistic imitation and repetition, yet too much copying is regarded as inappropriate practice.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine how similar the student texts are to the source text. The comparison of the student essays and the source text *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen* exhaustively demonstrates that the students do in fact mimic the source text on a lexical, morphological, and syntactic level. Some students even mimic the punctuation of the source text. Consequently, the students have produced their essays by means of patchwriting and using linguistic creativity. The students mimic morphological items of the source text mainly by using identical or similar verbs, verb constructions, and adverbs. Imitation of lexical items occurs most frequently by means of copying individual words directly from the source text. However, many students modify the lexicon of the source text by means of synonymy. Imitation on a syntactical level occurs frequently as every student copies the dialogues directly from the source text. Many of the students also mimic phrases and/or sentences of the source text, which the students execute by

- copying the original phrases and/or sentences directly
- making modifications to the original phrases and/or sentences.

For example, many of the students adapt the original sentence “He refilled their glasses with Chablis” by changing the pronoun(s), the verb and/or the noun. Also, one of the students copies the original dialogues by changing them from direct speech into indirect speech, so by making syntactic modifications rather than lexical.

Although there is variation in the students’ language proficiency, the general result is that all the students mimic the lexicon, morphology, syntax and even the punctuation of the source text, thus aligning with the source text by means of patchwriting. However, most of the students with higher linguistic proficiency mimic the punctuation of the source text to a much greater level than the less-proficient students. It is challenging to determine if the students are plagiarizing or patchwriting as the essays contain visible instances of patchwriting. The students do not necessarily plagiarize as they were instructed to rewrite original story from another character’s perspective, and they were allowed to copy lines from the short story. In addition, most of the students modify the linguistic items and structures of the source text and produce original text. Only one of the student participants copies the source text so closely that half of the essay is directly copied from the source text, which would be considered as plagiarism. In academia, however, the extent to which most of the students patchwrite would be considered plagiarism, and consequently not acceptable.

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Appendix

Appendix A. The assignment

The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen

You have read a short story called *The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen* by Graham Greene.

The story is told from a first-person perspective, which means that we receive the reality through only one character's point of view. But how would the story play out if it was told from some of the other characters point of view?

Rewrite the story, or a section from the story, from one of the other characters perspective, for example the young woman or her fiancé.

Write at least 500 words but not more than 1200 words.