

Coherence and Originality in University Students' Writing in EFL: The Zagreb-Pécs Project

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When students are admitted to the universities of Zagreb and Pécs to major or minor in English, they have had some exposure to the intricacies of writing in that language. Among other activities, they have been involved in reading textbook and other type of fiction and non-fiction prose and poetry, they have acquired how to use the code for grammatical utterances, they have been building and applying a large vocabulary, they have been made aware of the use of cohesive devices in connected prose, and they have experimented with various approaches to stating a position and arguing for it. In fact, one reason they can be admitted to these institutions is that they have formally proven, in a proficiency exam, that they have achieved B2 level in writing. Some of these students realize that their oral communication skills can be relied on when writing. They have some level of awareness also of the theoretical underpinnings of writing and the testing of their skills. Many make a conscious effort to develop strategies and techniques necessary to meet the formal requirements of the writing component of EFL exams and so they can represent those aspects in their scripts. They use a good range of correct structures and idiomatic language, they do their best to cover the topics set by the task, and they revise their work for gaps in cohesion and coherence.

In writing this paper, we wanted to explore the worlds as represented in the writing of such English majors and minors at the two universities: ten students from Zagreb and ten from Pécs. As long-distance colleagues on these campuses, we have been involved in developing EFL writing skills in the past several years (Horváth, 2001; Zergollern-Miletić, 1996). During this time we have come to appreciate the opportunity that we can devote attention to aspects of our work that are slightly beyond what students will expect us to do. Our experience with writers in Zagreb and Pécs has deepened our conviction, albeit independently of each other, that there are two qualities of student writing that need especially careful attention if the aim, as it has been with us, is to maintain and further raise student motivation: coherence and originality.

These are probably the two most subjective facets of writing. Writing coherently entails familiarity with genres, options in approaching a topic, ordering thoughts in a logical manner so that there is an effect of togetherness. How the

genre, for example, of a personal letter is realized, whether a seemingly formal approach to a topic is permissible, and just how logical what one student has written may appear to be to another or to the teacher, however, are issues making even coherence, a criterion regularly assessed in formal EFL practice, a contentious one. Originality, by contrast, usually gets center stage at university only when there is a breach in the academic integrity in the use of sources – that is, when plagiarism is suspected. In our exploratory and qualitative study we will provide examples of what the two of us have identified as original and coherent writing by the twenty students: their stories, personal essays, and blog posts. These scripts are reflections of these students' worlds and of their perceptions of them, their reaction to various events, and their reflections about themselves.

The theory of coherence and originality

Of the two notions, coherence appears to be the more manageable. It can be dealt with locally, that is, within a shorter segment of text, and globally, throughout an extended prose. When EFL writing is evaluated, it is often a criterion made part of the assessment scale. Both local and global coherence refers to thematic connectedness forming an overall unity of ideas and togetherness. However, even views about this aspect of writing and writing assessment have prompted considerable discussion recently.

Research in the field has attempted to address these concerns using qualitative and quantitative methods. In Knoch's study (2007) it has been found that the way coherence was applied in assessment systems lacked proper specificity, often causing problems in interpreting markers' comments on students' writing when ideas of what is regarded as logical sequencing of arguments, description and discussion were analyzed. Others (for example, Allison, Varghese, & Mei, 1999; Kang, 2005; Lee, 2002; Palmer, 1999; Todd, Khongput, & Darasawang, 2007) sought pedagogically sound procedures that can be used in making students aware of issues of coherence and apply what they have learned in their texts. From our point of view, Lee's approach is especially valid. In it, students' attention is brought to the need of helping the reader understand the micro- and macrostructure of their text (2002, p. 139). We agree that coherence is a phenomenon of text connectedness, one in which the bonds are made by the writer as well as the reader: coherence is a socially constructed notion. In this study, we define coherence as the degree to which a part of or the full text is characterized by connectedness. Also, agreeing with Todd, Khongput, and Darasawang's stance (2007), we take into account explicit and implicit links as well.

Moving on to the more intricate notion, originality, first of all, we have to state that obviously, we regard each individual student writer as an original person and thinker. No question about that. However, the degree of originality of the communication of this quality can vary from student to student. The literature on writing posits originality as an important element of effective, good writing. Nevertheless, authors addressing this issue mostly focus on the originality on scholarly work, primarily research papers, where originality is contrasted to plagiarism (Pe-

corari, 2003). Abasi, Akbari, and Graves (2006), although primarily writing about originality in research papers, also take into consideration other forms of academic writing. In their article, the notion of writing is tightly connected with identity. According to them, writers have to represent themselves in their texts and establish their identities (see also Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, on culturally defined aspects of individualism).

Our position is that the representation of the author and the establishment of the author's identity are especially important principles in writing personal essays and other genres where the state of something originating from a place or person is relevant: such as an opinion piece where the aim is to share a point of view. When students have the power of such expression, and it is clear from the classroom context that the exercise is a genuine one (that is, that their opinions are treated as tenable rather than just a part of their writing samples), the sharing of views may become not just a meaningful exercise but an exercise full of meaning. In our definition, a text is original when it is the writer's own formulation or reformulation of a theme, however small, with a presence of ownership palpable. It is the degree of this *ownness*, the centrality of the origination, that has been an exciting phenomenon for us as teachers and researchers. It is this element of written expression we are so closely drawn to in our teaching practice and in this paper.

But what is it that we own when we are original? Surely we have all been influenced by what we have read, by what we have seen and heard – so that coming up with completely new ideas about a theme is doomed to failure. It has already been discussed somewhere, public wisdom holds. And yet it is not as simple as that. The originality of a student's text is captured every time she reformulates for herself a core cultural, social or historical theme – when refusing or avoiding an “influence” may be futile. This theoretical student, however, can find and let her readers explore the essence of that experience: the origin of it and sometimes the process and processing of it, too. How conscious this effort is, of course, will vary from person to person: from writer to writer and from reader to reader. Prior (2001, p. 79) suggests that writing pedagogy has a role to play in making this process more conscious: “Learning to write, to engage in meaningful and recognizable forms of literate activity, involves living through concrete histories of reading, writing, talking about and using texts.” By constructing original texts, skills are practiced, knowledge created. This is true in the traditional one-on-one contexts as well as in those applying new technologies such as blogs. As shown by Bloch (2007) and Leja (2007), by creating their blogs, students as the publishers of their own texts enter into special dialog where they become the public originators of ideas.

In our investigations, we will focus on three (sometimes overlapping) aspects of originality. The first aspect is voice, a unique character, individual way in which such involvement with a theme is realized, almost as if the indirect written mode were transformed into the more direct, oral channel (Hirvela & Belcher, 2002; Ivanić & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001). The notions related to this aspect include a strong authorial presence and the creative use of expressions. The other aspect is seemingly the opposite of originality: role-playing. In texts that are characterized by this feature, the writer engages in what Prior (2001, p. 79) refers to as “living

through concrete histories of reading," assuming the role of someone else. It is through some form of imitation that we acquire a language – and, not surprisingly perhaps, through playing roles that we can discover our true selves as people and as writers. The third aspect is concerned with what we call personal history. This is a thematic subcategory with one or more specific narrative elements whose representation in the text appears to be the main organizing principle, or, in other words, the origin, the inspiration of the script. These stories are non-fictional texts that operate with events whose description is realized at a high level of concreteness and realism (Strunk & White, 2000; Zinsser, 1998). They originate from a specific location and time.

The Zagreb and Pécs academic contexts

The Zagreb students whose work we chose took Writing Skills in the academic year 2007-2008. This was a one-semester course for English majors within the 'pre-Bologna' program. The course was primarily aimed at developing students' skills in writing personal and argumentative essays. It also introduced students to the basics of writing research papers.

Students represented in the Pécs collection took a Reading and Writing Skills course in the B. A. program in 2008. A weekly two-credit course open to majors and minors as well, this process-oriented course aimed to maintain and raise students' interest in and enthusiasm about written expression. One way of doing so was by designing reading and writing activities relevant to the age group and individual differences (Nagy & Nikolov, 2007). In that process, some of the reading material was student-produced. These texts took the form of blog posts that students were required to submit online or offline. Most chose online blogs, and thus many of the posts discussed in this paper are available on the internet in their entirety. The focus in classes and tutor comments was on the positive, on the message and this was encouraged in students' peer responses as well (Horváth, 2009).

Method

We undertook to investigate the nature of Zagreb and Pécs students' writing in terms of coherence and originality. Following an exploratory path, we aimed to capture and interpret the qualities inherent in the personal writing of these students.

The students and their scripts

From each university, ten scripts were chosen in the spring semester of 2008. First, we shared the most recent student scripts with each other. From Zagreb, this meant personal essay course requirements students had submitted electronically. The colleague in Pécs read these texts and chose those ten that he found most co-

herent or original or both. Meanwhile, the Zagreb colleague read blogs of B. A. students who were taking a Reading and Writing Skills course with the regular blogging course requirement. Ten posts were chosen by the Zagreb colleague. Each student is represented by one text. Students' real given names are used, by permission. See Tables 1 and 2 for the authors and the titles of their work.

Table 1: The Zagreb collection

Author	Title
Ana	Recollections of War
Andrea	There Is No Place Like Home
Andrija	What Lead to the Frustration of Not Being Able to Think of a Good Subject for a Personal Essay or Most Commonly Known as the F. N. B. A. T. G. S. P. E. Syndrome
Boris	The Fear of Getting Fat
Borjana	Life Is What You Make of It
Iva	Borrowed Memories
Karmenka	My First Date
Marina	Changes
Matija	How I Ended Here
Stela	Kindergarten Schooling

Table 2: The Pécs collection

Author	Title
Adrienne	Outrageous
Balázs H.	Could it be Worse?
Balázs Sz.	Losing Your Way
Ildikó	How to Find Mr or Ms Big?
Keve	Catcher in the University, No. 3
Márk	Cooking is a Natural Part of Life?
Péter	My Birthday
Teodóra	Easter
Tímea	Paulo Coelho – My Favourite Writer
Zsuzsanna	Tale in the Reality

Procedures

Because of the qualitative slant to our study, we chose to apply the following cyclical model. It is partly informed by contrastive rhetoric (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) as it taps into the written productions of students coming from two neighboring countries and cultures. As we aimed to make the research as closely relevant to our teaching as possible, we opted to apply steps we normally use in our pedagogical practice. For this reason, after reading the twenty scripts a number of times, we started their interpretation from the two points of view. This followed a scheme similar to the one when we evaluate and mark scripts. The next step was the content analysis of the twenty scripts within the two collections. The aim at

this stage was to highlight thematic similarities and differences between the Zagreb and the Pécs collections. Afterward, we categorized the coherence and originality features of each script.

Upon completion of the first three steps, we shared our findings with each other, allowing us to reflect on them. As a result of this process, we were able to see how our interpretations differed and offer further insights, thereby contributing the internal and external validity of the project. A final check of categorization aimed to enhance the reliability of the endeavor. However, it stands to reason that other forms of interpretation are not excluded and we hope we will be able to continue with the project, partly by triangulation with students' insights.

Results and discussion

Coherence

Planning on the paragraph level

Evidence of well-planned paragraph-level discussion was found in most of the twenty scripts. As students learned about topic sentences and read various examples of topic development, this aspect of coherence appeared to be the most commonly shared feature across both the Croatian and Hungarian texts. This may already have been determined in the selection stage, of course, as both of us made initial choices partly based on this criterion. Here, we will quote and discuss what we regard as the best examples.

A Hungarian student, Zsuzsanna, writes on her blog about a charming real-life story she found in the local newspaper. It is about a small wild pig saved by a family, and later adopted by the local zoo. The blogger introduces us to the event, presents the dramatic moment in the piglet's life, and reports on the happy ending. Here is a part of her narrative:

But this animal disturbed the neighbour of the family who decided to make tasty food from him. How cruel people are! Luckily, the family called the Zoo of Veszprém, so the wild pig was taken away. What a nice survivor! He has been named Gerzson, and he has been treated well. Now he is one of the most visited and liked animals in the zoo. Moreover, he got a female partner called Juliska and now they are living together. I think this news is similar to a modern fairy tale with a very nice ending.

Karmenka, a student from Zagreb, is another skilled user of tools building local coherence. In her essay titled "My First Date," she guides the reader through all the steps leading to her first date. She writes about her nervousness before it. "I was running around trying to do a million things at the same time." She writes about her fear that she would not look beautiful. "The moment I heard the click of

the lock I knew I looked horrible.” Then she shares with us a slight disappointment with the date:

My chariot was an old van. Rust covered the bumper and one half of the door. Upon climbing into the van, I was greeted by seven people – my best friends and their dates. This was the night of my dreams, and it was going to be shared with seven other people.

Borjana, also from Zagreb, started studying English and Italian as a mature student, after working for eight years. In her essay she discusses her fears. “I must admit I was terrified at first. My knowledge of English was very poor My Italian was even worse ...” She talks about the advantages of being more mature – she is more experienced and more conscientious. The paragraphs develop smoothly as the author brings up the disadvantages – she needs more time to study and prepare for the exams. Nevertheless, she is glad that she took that step. She really believes in what she wrote in her title: Life is what you make of it.

Overall coherence

In this section, we will give two examples of fully organized texts. Again, there are many more scripts we could highlight from this point of view, but the ones that we chose to feature under this heading seem to be the most representative. Marina’s essay, from Croatia, deals with her ideas about changes and how she can or cannot deal with them. Changes are, as she realizes, inevitable. They can hurt, but they can also bring good things in life. The way she constructs the discussion is characterized by explicit and some implicit links that result in the overall effect of a fully coherent piece. As it is a short, three-paragraph composition, we will reprint it full:

I believe that sometimes I worry too much. At those moments I cannot sleep because I think about various people I know, about their weird behaviour and all the changes I have experienced recently. As the light outside becomes brighter, I try hard to figure everything out.

I have seen many different faces; friendly faces which turned out to be hostile, unfamiliar faces which I adore now, worried parental faces which can sometimes cause such a variety of strong feelings. There are faces I meet regularly, but cannot develop any feelings for them. I wonder how I stopped caring about some people. How they simply disappeared and became distant memories. Things change so rapidly. My entire world has changed since the beginning of this year. Maybe it was just me? I lost some friends, but gained much more- I gained true friends, because I learned how to recognize fake smiles. I learned how to hear passing remarks and see the blank look in people’s eyes. I learned how to recognize and understand true love and most importantly, to listen to the voice coming from within me.

Changes are inevitable. So is the fact that we meet various people every day. In the past, this has caused me many sleepless nights. One of those nights I realized that I cannot change other people. I knew that all the time, but only recently I became aware of it. The only thing I can influence and control is my own mind. I can sleep now. Everything changes, but I smile.

Márk (Hungary) entitled an entry on his blog “Cooking is a Natural Part of Life...?” He writes about how annoyed he gets by people being surprised at his ability to cook. He tells the story about his learning how to cook: his parents divorced, so his father had to learn how to cook. In fact, we could have placed this text under the heading of personal history for its originality as well, but the overall organization is so masterly we felt we had to reprint Márk’s blog post, too, almost in full:

See, I never understood people who said that for them scrambled eggs is beyond their understanding. Even less when they said its creation is their limit. Neither did I comprehend, when someone was quite surprised when I told them that for example ‘Yesterday I had tortellini carbonara-style’ ‘Oh, you are rich going to restaurants’ ‘Well, this is not entirely the case; I made it.’ ‘You can cook?’ ‘Why? Who can’t?’ And I really did think so.

I’m not boasting... Far from it, but here is an example. When I was young... At least far younger than I am now. At least a dozen years younger than I am now... Anyway: My mother had supreme sovereignty over the kitchen and all that was going on within. (And who doesn’t like what his/her mother ‘brews’) Consequently – at least as far as I know – I can’t recall my father ever preparing a meal. Ergo, my assumption was that he can’t. But when they divorced, things as one can guess changed a little, and as he lived alone for a while he started cooking, and – long story short – what he made was almost as delicious as my mother’s and in certain cases he even surpassed her. (For example I taught her (my mother) THE spaghetti bolognese which I’ve learnt from my father.) And independent sources confirm that both of them are great cooks. (Both of them are chemists, so that may be the trick, I don’t know.)

So I asked my father about this and how it is. He told me, that there is nothing special to it... He just started and relied on his *imagination* so to say. And on what he felt fitting for that certain type of food. And basically it’s all in the spices.

So I started the same... And since then those who tasted what I created did like it. (Of course, because I never served anything which I really screwed.) Which was surprising at first, because when it comes to tastes – as with many other things – I am quite egoistic. So I never relied on anything but what I personally would have liked to come out of a certain recipe... And I assumed, that if I can do this, anyone could – anyone

who tried, that is. But I would like to see other opinions naturally. Is there a certain *taste* required for cooking, or anyone can do it?

The examples of effective local and global coherence in the scripts indicate that these students have been able to apply what they have learned at university and in their own personal development.

Originality

In this section, we will address the three types of originality we have identified as representative categories: voice, role-playing and personal history. We will discuss a number of scripts in terms of content and hope to be able to convey the effect they have had on us: that we hear the authors' voices in these texts. The students' texts make the reader attentive and curious. They convey the authors' feelings, so the reader gets irritated by the things happening to the authors, happy because of the authors' happiness. This is why we find the texts by our students original – they are interesting and inspiring.

Voice

Two Croatian essays go back in time to reveal memories about the Croatian War of Independence. One of them is by Iva, and it is called "Borrowed Memories" (we will present the other essay about war later). Iva gives an account of a girl, the author-narrator, whose town wasn't affected by the war. Seemingly, her memories are not original: they are borrowed. She says her own memories include only air-raid sirens and her family's prayers that her father should stay at home. The only bad memory from the period is the birth of her brother, around whom, she claims, everything started to revolve. Her first contact with the ugly aspects of the war happened when she was a freshman living in a dorm. During a storm, one of her friends started crying and shaking, remembering her experience of the war. So, the girl retold her story. And she talked about the bad things, but she also talked about certain understanding and humanity among people. And she talked about photographs – the material thing most cherished by people who have been through a war. After the war, returning to their little town, her father collected photographs – their own, but also other people's. He had the opportunity to return some of them to their owners, but some of them he could never return. So these photos became memories borrowed from other people – borrowed in the same way that the author of the essay borrowed all these stories and memories from her friend, not having much of her own. Let us hear Iva's voice, from the beginning of the essay:

Almost every memory or feeling that I have about the war is borrowed from somebody else. The few memories that are my own are more like pictures frozen in time. The news, the basement in my building, my fa-

ther trying to act like everything was normal. And it was in a way. At least for me.

The war stopped 21 kilometers from my town. In Varaždin. Not even one bullet was fired in Ivanec. There were no soldiers, no shots, no war. Nobody from my family was recruited. I remember a period when my mother and father were unusually silent. I asked her why, she only said to me to be quiet and pray to God that my father stays with us. That was the only time in my life that I didn't ask more questions. The war came, and the war was over.

A completely different theme, and a completely different voice is heard in Hungarian Balázs H.'s blog post about visiting his old grammar school, finding out that the authorities are sometimes concerned about trivial matters:

A boy stabbed two forks and two knives into his apple while having lunch, and a woman who works there warned the headmaster, who decided to speak with the parents in connection with this fatal crime and started an official punishing procedure against this student, who was called in the office and was told that they let him go only if he told some names. Names, in connection with what? What was it, an interrogation? And anyway, imagine that your parents are called in the headmaster's office, and, as evidence they're shown an apple with forks and knives in it and are told that you get a hard punishment because of it. The thing I'm most afraid of is that our old head master now really thinks that he saved the world again ...

In an amusing way Balázs is criticizing the powers to be, who use that power to confuse people around them.

Tímea (from Pécs) devoted one of her blog posts to the novelist Paulo Coelho, her favorite writer. In that piece she explains why she loves Coelho's novels – sharing with her readers her original interpretation. She says "... he writes about his own 'philosophy', about the souls, and he has his own spiritual world." Tímea says she has decided to read one of his books that has not been translated into Hungarian yet, but was available in English.

So I am going to "use" it not for pleasure but for the improvement of my English, too. I look forward to writing about this novel here, in my blog, in the future.

Role-playing

In this category, the two scripts share the authorial stance whereby the student engages the reader in role-play. Croatian student Andrija plays the role of someone who cannot write an essay as he experiences writer's block. The role play starts right with the title, a long one at that: "What Leads to the Frustration of Not

Being Able to Think of a Good Subject for a Personal Essay, or Most Commonly Known as the F. N. B. A. T. G. S. P. E. Syndrome". He is telling his teacher why he has not been able to find a good and interesting topic for his essay: "Now I am sitting in my chair, looking very dull in the screen of my computer, thinking about the fact that in fifteen minutes I will have to be finished with this because, you have guessed correctly, it is Friday, 1 p.m., and my frustration is getting bigger by the minute." The ending is rather hopeful, although it may not seem like that at first: "One truly asks oneself what good are all of one's education and knowledge if one cannot even think of a subject and write a simple personal essay. I hope you will read my second essay on How to avoid the F. N. B. A. T. G. S. P. E. syndrome, and live to tell the tale." One wonders, of course, whether that sequel has ever seen the light of day.

What surely has seen that light is another sequel by Keve, a Pécs student, who decided to write a series on his blog about "The Catcher in the University." His inspiration lay in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* but Keve talks about various events happening to him, combining his narrative with thoughts and impressions. The style indeed reminds of Salinger, but Keve is writing about his friends and acquaintances, about his own feelings and thoughts: "After we drank our coffee, we went for a taxi because no more buses were running that late and she told me that she lives quite close to the hostel. She did too. I sort of went with her to the door. 'Well, that was one helluva good time we had. Thanks!' 'Thank you for the coffee.' – she said smiling, but her smile was a bit different now. She had this sort of an embarrassed smile. I was also a bit nervous I have to admit. 'So good night then! Will see you at the university, right?' 'Sure! Good night to you too'" – she answered and slowly went inside. I sort of stood there for a while, just couldn't start my legs which were still shaking if you want to know. God, I like that girl! Now I like her even more!"

Personal history

Not surprisingly, the personal history category proved to be the most populated. Whether it is in Croatia or Hungary, students will write about themselves, their families, birthdays, studies, the big event in life when we are young. Several essays are more or less directly connected with their authors' studies. Matija's script (Zagreb) is entitled "How I Ended Here". The author opens it with the following words: "The last months of high school. The question of my future education hangs above my head like an axe. Where to next? What can I study after high-school? My thought: absolutely nothing." He finished grammar school and was considered too clever not to study at the university. Now, he says, he is alone in the dark. This honest approach is present throughout the essay, where the author describes his troubles studying English and his present regret that he did not study to be an x-ray technician. X-ray technicians study less and have better pay-checks than people who finish their studies of English. And, at the end, Matija decides: "So, my decision: x-ray technicians here I come!"

Stela is sharing with her readers her experience as a kindergarten teacher. The event made her realize she was not experienced at all, which she says made her disappointed, ashamed, making her all but lose her enthusiasm about teaching. In telling that story and reflection, she is making fun of herself all along, as well as bringing the reader to the scene, sharing the “horror” of that kindergarten experience. The story is full of specific (and exaggerated) observations and images:

I decided that it would not be such a bad idea if I entered the teaching arena in order to get a general feeling of my future profession. In a very Mary Poppins kind of mood, as a freshman in college, I found employment in a kindergarten, teaching English to five-year-olds. My month-long training gave me some general guidelines, but nothing could prepare me for the horror of dealing with little five-year-old fallen angels with an attitude.

For another Zagreb student, Andrea, studying at the university means living away from home. “There Is No Place Like Home” is the title of her essay, and so are the closing words. Although the title may sound like a cliché, nothing in her essay is one. She talks about her difficulties in Zagreb, the big town she came to after spending all her young life in Poreč, a beautiful small town at the seaside. She misses everybody there, and telephone just cannot replace the people she loves.

Adrienn, too, lives away from her Hungarian home, so she put up in a dorm, which is the place where one of her blog posts originates (“Outrageous”). Her neighbours at the dorm got robbed – someone stole their laptops. It took her some time after she learned about the news to realize that she had actually seen the thief committing the crime. “I became excited, confused and my heart started to beat so strongly. I saw the guy while he was committing the theft.” She wonders what he was doing carrying several bags on a Monday afternoon (when students usually do it on Friday afternoons, before going home). She concludes: “This case made me realize how important a reliable person in people’s lives is. I took it for granted that my flatmate, and friend at the same time, is honest and trustworthy. But now I see that it is a thing to be appreciated.”

Balázs Sz., another Hungarian student, writes about feeling that his life is too quick for him, that he does not have time to be who he is. He does not know what to write, and he is supposed to write something for his blog. He has studied a lot; he is worrying about his studies. He concludes: “And then we’ll see how this semester ends.”

An anxiety of a different sort troubles Croatian Boris, who is afraid of becoming fat. He first gives a personal definition of what being fat means. “I would define being fat as having minimally 15 kilograms more than you really need. I tolerate an excess of about 5-7 kilograms and consider it normal. I even endorse it. It makes women more feminine. It is a sign of good health. You cannot trust hungry people.” He complains that it is not socially acceptable to be fat. Then he admits that being fat also means being incapable of performing certain physical activities. He concludes that he is not afraid after all, because he watches himself, and if he does get fat, he will make sure to have a wife to take care of him.

Péter (from Pécs) is reporting on his two birthday parties. The first party included the paternal side of his family, and it took place on the exact day of his birthday. The maternal side of the family celebrated with him the following Sunday. The third one, that with his friends, is yet to happen. Peter describes the preparations, the food and the discussions with the guests. He was very happy about everything: "I was having a really long discussion with our guests. They asked everything: How is uni going? How did you manage to finish the semester? And I can continue the list until the sun goes down. ... I have to emphasize that I spent a really good time with them."

Teodóra (Hungary) writes about her family's love for holidays: "In our family every holiday is a special event. When we were small children – a long time ago – my parents tried to create the conditions for family celebrations. My sister and I came to like the little customs." She once saw the Easter bunny (now she knows it was her father). The most remarkable Easter Monday was last year when her friends played a prank – they threw several buckets of ice-cold water at her, just for a laugh.

Finally, Ildikó, also from Pécs, asks "How to Find Mr or Ms Big?" She thinks that the age 18 or 19 is suitable for someone to find someone to be with. She realizes that it is not always easy. After the "hunting time", there comes a time when people get to know each other. That period, in Ildikó's view, may be a bit embarrassing. For her the most beautiful period of anyone's life is the first two months of a relationship. According to her, "This is the time when you're just trying to do everything well, it's the 'dream-time' when you imagine living with that man forever, getting old and having at least eleven children creating a football team, walking and speaking a lot, planning (of course it's hidden from the other), and during this time it's revealed whether you suit each other or not." Rather idealistic, we dare say, but this is Ildikó's opinion. Maybe she will change her mind about the eleven children?

Interplay between coherence and originality

We have seen examples of coherent and original student writing. We have not made a formal evaluation of which were the "most" or "least" original and coherent in them as the point is that in each there is an element of both. After this summary of those qualities, however, there is one more intriguing phenomenon we need to discuss: the relationship between coherence and originality. It can be argued that the less original an idea and its framing is, the more likely that its reception will be followed easily, and thus regarded as coherent. Schemata belong to this field as well as stereotypes and cultural values that we are exposed to throughout socialization. In the previous discussion, too, we have seen examples of students' relying on this shared set of notions and truisms. Conversely, one may posit that the more coherent a text is, the more likely it follows schemata, the less likely that we will see in it an original contribution. We believe, and in fact we have seen in these student samples, that the two can co-exist. Let us share two examples where the two qualities combine and enhance each other to produce a

lasting impression. The first is a full paragraph by Keve, the writer of the *Catcher* chapters; the second, the first two paragraphs by a Zagreb student, Ana.

We had a helluva good time, we really did! I mean we could have gone on talking for the whole night or something, we had such a nice conversation and all, her English is pretty good you know, I truly liked that. She was telling me how they got too damn loud with her friends at a place so the waiter practically threw them out, I was telling her how I ended up with the two girls that night and all, it was really fun, we kind of laughed our heads off or something. Funny thing is, she truly liked my stories! She was laughing like a madman sometimes! That just made me feel so overjoyed that I already forgot how depressed I was.

A writer who is obviously enjoying what he is doing, Keve has developed a knack for Salinger's style and been able to blend that in with his persona in this narrative. The idea is imitation, as we have seen before: Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* taking shape at the University Pécs and interacting with local students and professors. The quoted text tells the simple story of meeting with Dóra in a pub and its effect on the narrator's spirits, with a classic last line that sounds Salinger and Keve at the same time. The voice and the role-playing seem to seamlessly produce a narrative where every piece has its place and function, relying on the reader's appreciation of the playful nature of the text.

Ana has a completely different experience to share: a memory of war lived through as a young child.

A colleague of mine reminded me recently of a topic I had not thought about for a long time. I was just that age that I can remember what was happening, but did not quite understand it at the time. Sometimes it feels as if it was all a dream from which I awoke to find myself in a new country. I was luckier than most because my part of the country wasn't really affected and I was too young to fully comprehend the circumstances. Personally, I didn't know anyone who was killed or had even spent time in the army. I was in a shelter with my family for a few weeks I think, but I don't remember being scared. My seven-year-old self didn't really understand what was going on, or why exactly somebody was attacking us, and I would even go so far as to say that I thought it was fun hiding in the shelter with all my neighbours, playing cards and listening to songs on the radio. My parents assured me that it was all pretend, and that nobody would get hurt. When the news came on, my mother covered my eyes so that I couldn't see the bloody corpses splattered across the road, and when I did get a peak, she comforted me by saying they were just actors, that it wasn't real.

Although the title of the script, "Recollections of War," intimates what it will be about, the text itself does not reveal its theme until the fifth sentence. The superb use of such seemingly simple words as *topic* and *it* is all there is for us to get the

feeling early on that the story, the ideas will be memorable. Then we are made part of Ana's reflection on what she as a little girl may and may not have gone through during the war in Croatia between 1991 and 1995. Throughout the essay, she speaks about the war as something rather vague and seemingly not real. Ana is being candid about her not understanding the causes of the war then. "My seven-year-old self didn't really understand what was going on, or why exactly somebody was attacking us, and I would even go so far to say that I thought it was fun hiding in the shelter with all my neighbours playing cards and listening to songs on the radio."

She is candid about her present not knowing whether the war was worth all the trouble and people's suffering. "My grandparents always tell me how much better it was in the old days. I know that's just one account of the story, and other very different versions exist." She even imagines how it would have been growing up in socialism. Around the time the war started she was supposed to become a member of Tito's pioneers, a children's organization during socialist time in Yugoslavia, so she was quite disappointed she could not join the little "army with blue hats and red scarves around their necks". Neither was she happy about the change on the national banner - when the star was replaced by the Croatian coat of arms. Ana is giving a child's perspective of the events that are sometimes referred to as some of the most tragic ones in Croatian history, remembering her disappointments that now seem funny. The target of the paragraph quoted gives us a concrete image of what happened that evening - and possibly other evenings, too: the inclusion at the end of the parental effort to make the child believe that all of what is shown of the war is fiction is what brings the experience close to the reader.

Conclusion

In our writing pedagogy, as well as in this study, we have aimed to communicate the positive: what we regard as bright and relevant, useful and fluent, coherent and original. This paper has presented our interpretation of twenty students' recent work that we have found to display relevant aspects of two qualities of writing in EFL that are hard to grasp but without which neither the writer, nor reader will find the experience motivating. We have seen these students managing the micro- and macrostructure of their texts, trying to plan and execute narratives and exposition, while also being able to focus on what really counts in such communication: that an idea, a feeling, an event is further explored as they do so.

As we continue our exploration of the field, we would like to even better represent these students. Case studies with a pair of Croatian and Hungarian students may reveal strategies and intentions at work when such essays and blogs posts are created. Students' interpretation of their own work and of that of their peers may further highlight what they regard as coherent and original. Examples such as those presented here can be applied in our classes as thematic and stylistic prompts as they may serve as a springboard for awareness raising activities.

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