

Analyzing Linguistic Characteristics of Paraphrase in Second Language (L2) Writing

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Introduction

Paraphrasing serves as a fundamental skill in academic writing which requires students to understand and respond to a specific written passage. The skill allows students to borrow the ideas of an author and rewrite them in their own words. Students in L2 contexts particularly, use paraphrasing as an important borrowing strategy when integrating source text into their writing. Campell (1998) defines paraphrasing as "using different phrasing and wording (requiring citation) to express a particular passage that was originally written or spoken by someone else, in order to blend the other's idea smoothly into one's own writing" (p. 86). Meanwhile, Uemlianin (2000) defines paraphrasing as "the reproduction of the information content and structure of source text" (p. 349). There is no consensus regarding paraphrasing in academic writing although the skill is very crucial to avoid plagiarism. According to Keck (2006), writing at tertiary level requires students to synthesize information from previous literature whenever they want to complete their assignments. This is due to the fact that the idea of a text is a result of previous texts the writer has encountered, which means the written texts cannot be totally original (Pennycook, 1996).

However, paraphrasing can be a very difficult skill to be taught and learnt as it primarily involves three components: affective, behavioral as well as cognitive (Sternberg & Williams, 2002). To paraphrase successfully, the students need to perform complex cognitive and linguistic skills. The first step is to get the meaning of the text properly. Their understanding of the text could consequently activate their reading ability (Wette, 2010). Additionally, students may also face difficulties in paraphrasing due to their language proficiency as well as citation practices (Currie, 1998). ESL learners need to be proficient in both reading and writing when paraphrasing (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). In other words, the understanding of the text at both macro and micro levels is crucial (Sedhu, Lee, & Choy, 2013). Johns and Mayes (1990) for example, investigated ESL university students' paraphrasing and found that those with lower proficiency were incapable of comprehending the passage and as a result, produced an inadequate paraphrase.

Hence, this study aims at identifying the linguistic characteristics of paraphrasing (i.e.: syntactic paraphrase, lexical paraphrase, conceptual paraphrase and global paraphrase) applied by L2 students ($n=40$) from Universiti Teknologi Mara Terengganu in their written evaluative commentaries. The analysis could enable L2 writing instructors to find out the means for L2 learners to enhance efficacy as well as understanding when paraphrasing. By identifying the linguistic characteristics, the instructors for example, can recognize the learners' strengths and

weaknesses. This concurrently could guide them to the strategies that should be emphasized when teaching paraphrasing.

Methodology

This study is a mixed approach study that involves both qualitative and quantitative measures to seek the answer for the following research questions; 1) How do L2 learners apply linguistic characteristics as their strategies in paraphrasing? 2) What is the most frequent linguistic characteristic used by L2 learners in their paraphrases? The study employed non-probability sampling technique which is convenience sampling as the subjects were the researchers' students. There were 40 students who were exposed to the paraphrasing strategies before writing an evaluative commentary which required them to apply paraphrasing skills. To examine the patterns or strategies of linguistic characteristics used in the L2 paraphrases, a content analysis as well as a descriptive analysis of frequency were conducted. The classification of linguistic characteristics was adapted from Burstein, Flor, Tetreault, Madnani and Holtzman (2012). Table 1 below shows the linguistic characteristics which were used in this study.

Table 1: Linguistic characteristics (Adapted from Burstein, et. al., 2012)

Classification	Description
<i>Syntactic paraphrase</i>	
Active-passive	An active sentence has been paraphrased as a passive sentence or vice versa.
Declarative-question	A declarative sentence in the prompt has been paraphrased as a question or vice versa.
Verb aspect shift	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves verb aspect shift (e.g., <i>can work</i> to <i>work</i>).
Finite-nonfinite verb phrase	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves finite to nonfinite verb phrase or vice versa (e.g., <i>managed to become</i> to <i>became</i>).
Pronoun- noun phrase	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves pronominalization of noun phrase or vice versa (e.g., <i>the project</i> to <i>it</i>).
Relative clause- noun phrase	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves a transformation from a relative clause to a noun phrase or vice versa (e.g., <i>directions that might not work</i> to <i>the wrong directions</i>).
Relative clause- verb phrase	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves a transformation from a relative clause to a verb phrase or vice versa (e.g., <i>managed to become influential over what their group did</i> to <i>who sort of take over everything</i>).
Reordering of complements	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves exchanging placement of the sentence elements (e.g., <i>John arrived yesterday</i> to <i>Yesterday, John arrived</i>).
Unspecified syntactic ordering	Cases of paraphrase from the prompt text in which phrases or clauses have similar meaning and are reordered, but the reordering cannot be described by a formal syntactic transformation (e.g., <i>creative solutions come about because a group</i> to <i>more people involved does promote more creative ideas</i>).

Lexical paraphrase

Synonyms	Paraphrase from the prompt text involves the use of synonyms (e.g.; <i>moving in the wrong direction</i> to <i>heading in the wrong direction</i>).
Morphology	Cases in which paraphrase is attempted in morphologically variant forms (e.g., <i>make the team responsible</i> to <i>the group's responsibility</i>).
Multiple word units	Cases where one word is paraphrased by expansion to a multiple word unit or multiple word unit is reduced to a smaller unit or even one word (e.g., <i>come up with</i> to <i>create</i>).
Unspecified lexical substitution (may overlap with conceptual paraphrase)	Paraphrase involves some other lexical substitution (e.g., <i>that will never work</i> to <i>their opinions</i>).

Conceptual paraphrase Paraphrase that cannot be easily characterized by any syntactic or word-based classification

Global paraphrase

Reading	Paraphrase of the gist of the reading that could not be isolated to specific text segments in the passage.
Lecture	Paraphrase of the gist of the lecture that could not be isolated to specific language segments in the stimuli.
Reading and lecture	Paraphrase of the gist of the reading and the lecture that could not be isolated to specific text segments or language segments in the stimuli.

The research questions both are relevant to theory and practice, especially in teaching L2 writing since they can be used for scaffolding paraphrasing as an easy-to-master skill. The study can also support the development of reading comprehension as those who can paraphrase well are those who possess a good comprehension of a reading text. The use of cognitive skills in reading comprehension before paraphrasing can be related to the Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) model proposed by Anderson (1983) which emphasizes on the gradual process of the learners to learn how to do something successfully.

Results

Research question 1: How does L2 learners apply linguistic characteristics as their strategies in paraphrasing?

Table 2: The extract of linguistic characteristics used in students' evaluative commentaries

Linguistic characteristics	Original text	Paraphrase
Syntactic paraphrase	First, education influences the world of work	The world of work is affected by the education
	Studying the literature component is useful because it helps promote language learning, exposes students to a variety of cultures, improves thinking skills and gives us a better understanding of mankind.	Promoting language learning, exposing students to variety of cultures, improving thinking skills and giving us a better understanding of mankind are the advantages of studying the literature components.
	Another disadvantage is they cannot join in extracurricular activity if they do work.	Besides, the students will not actively participate in extracurricular activity when they work.
Lexical paraphrase	Immediate response to queries and tests have made the whole education process a lot faster.	Immediate response to requests and assessments have made the whole learning process a lot faster.
	Making the academic environment one that is much more appealing and fun for the pupils.	Making the academic situation which is more enjoyable and attractive for the students.
	Knowledge can be easily procured with the help of the Internet technology now.	It is easier to help children as knowledge can be freely obtained by the help of the internet technology.
Conceptual paraphrase	As a way to overcome the problem, the sale of junk food in the school canteens should be banned as it is unhealthy, it causes litter problem and it causes behavioral problems in the children.	There are some reasons for banning the sale of junk food in the school canteen such as the junk food is unhealthy, fast food packaging causes litter problem, and junk food can affect behavioral problems in children.
	When students figure out things on their own, that build confidence. And when students explain things to each other, the students doing the explaining comes to a deeper understanding.	They will get deeper understanding if they do the task on their own and be able to teach each other with their own understanding about the topic.
	Students are bright and diligent, but they don't know how to think critically, how to build an argument, how to debate, or how to work towards a solution as a team.	Students nowadays are undoubtedly smart and hardworking, but they cannot think outside the box.

Global paraphrase	By way of illustration, they lose quality time with their own friends. It means they will have small social relationship in the society.	This in turn will cause them to lose their valuable leisure with mutual peers which can lead to narrow social relationship in the community.
	Such as, they can lose their grade, they think into two things among work and study which will attract their attention that it supposed to be only on study, or they become lazy to study and will give their mind and energy to work. In fact, some students cannot manage their time while they have another job instead of their main activity as a student.	As a consequence, they will face multiple problems such as losing grade, being lazy in study and having improper time management.
	A study from the Harvard Center of Risk Analysis estimates that cell use while driving contributes to 6 percent of crashes, which equates to 636,000 crashes, 330,000 injuries, 12 000 serious injuries and 2, 600 deaths each year and a tab of \$43 billion, according to a statement from the NSC today.	According to National Society Council, the use of cell phones, while driving contributes to 6 percent of crashes, which equates to 636,000 crashes, 330,000 injuries, 12 000 serious injuries and 2, 600 death each year and a tab of \$43 billion.

Research Question 2: What is the most frequent linguistic characteristic used by L2 learners in their paraphrases?

Table 3: The frequency of linguistic characteristics used by L2 learners in paraphrases

Linguistic characteristics	Number of occurrences
<i>Syntactic paraphrase (SP)</i>	59
<i>Lexical paraphrase (LP)</i>	102
<i>Conceptual paraphrase (CP)</i>	49
<i>Global paraphrase (GP)</i>	25
Total	235

Discussion

The findings suggested that after being exposed to different paraphrasing strategies, the participants were able to successfully paraphrase by using different linguistic characteristics in writing their evaluative commentaries. Lexical paraphrase appeared to be the most frequent strategy for paraphrasing, compared to the other linguistic characteristics because there was a great emphasis on lexical meaning when understanding reading texts. The interpretation of these results indicated that students did not find much trouble in understanding reading sources when they were found to apply different linguistic characteristics during paraphrasing. This is in line with the study conducted by Choy and Lee (2012) who found that paraphrasing strategies could improve students' understanding and increase their writing achievement.

Conclusion

It is crucial to apply effective learning strategy in paraphrasing as the skill is difficult to acquire and even more difficult to be taught. Therefore, by emphasizing linguistic characteristics in paraphrasing, it could develop self-efficacy, so that students will understand that paraphrasing is not only to avoid plagiarism, but it is a technique to enrich their reading and writing skills. It should be noted that the limitation of this study is the sample size which is relatively small. Further larger-scale research should be carried out on how well ESL practitioners can use linguistic characteristics to develop their paraphrasing skill.

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