

Reproduction and Paraphrasing

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This paper begins by showing the nature of paraphrasing and its implications, and by presenting specific problems and methods for avoiding such difficulties. Second, the paper highlights a reproduction process that can be effectively employed in TEFL classes. This process, which involves paraphrasing techniques, reveals that paraphrasing plays a crucial role in reproduction when productive skills for fluency are emphasized.

BACKGROUND

Productive/receptive vocabulary and paraphrasing

It takes learners a considerable amount of time to 'master' new or difficult wording. While building up vocabulary is essential in EFL environments, learners may well get by without difficult lexical items—especially in productive exercises.

It should be noted here that a distinction can be made between receptive and productive vocabulary. Haycraft defines receptive vocabulary as "words that the student recognizes and understand when they occur in a context, but which he cannot produce correctly", and productive vocabulary as "words which the student understands, can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing" (Haycraft, 1978, p. 44). For critical views on the issue of receptive and productive vocabulary, the reader is referred to Belyayev (1963), Crow and Quigley (1985), and Hatch and Brown (1995).

In order to use vocabulary constructively, paraphrasing can be effectively used in 'reproduction'. That is, learners can focus on content in reproducing texts by avoiding words which are too difficult. Before going into reproduction in more detail, let us first consider the paraphrasing technique in question.

What is paraphrasing?

There are various differing and overlapping definitions of the concept of paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is explained as follows in these three dictionaries.

- If you **paraphrase** someone or **paraphrase** something that they have said or written, you express what they have said or written in a different way. A **paraphrase** of something written or spoken is the same thing expressed in a different way. (*Collins COBUILD English Dictionary*)
- a restatement of a text or passage giving the meaning in another form, as for clearness; rewording. (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary*)

- an expression of the meaning of a word or phrase using other words or phrases, often in an attempt to make the meaning easier to understand. (...) Dictionary definitions often take the form of paraphrases of the words they are trying to define. (*Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*)

Furthermore, when Tarone (1981) discusses communication strategies, she classifies paraphrase under avoidance strategies and divides it into three subclasses: approximation, word coinage and circumlocution. The first subcategory *approximation*, which concerns us most here, is defined as follows.

- use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e.g. *pipe for waterpipe*). (Tarone, 1981, p. 286)

Throughout this paper, paraphrasing is understood as a more positive, constructive strategy. We simply define paraphrasing as rewording with less difficult words. When learners reproduce a text, difficult wording often functions as a brake and hinders effective production. So, by using less difficult lexical items and focusing on main ideas, learners can attain a more effective level of reproduction.

Attention should be directed to the last statement by Richards et al. (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1972) above, which states "Dictionary definitions often take the form of paraphrases of the words they are trying to define." This indicates that monolingual TEFL dictionaries can be quite effectively used to serve this purpose. In what follows, we thus assume learners can use monolingual dictionaries as a paraphrasing model for their production. However, as there are specific problems in using monolingual dictionaries for paraphrasing, we will first discuss these to understand the nature of paraphrasing better.

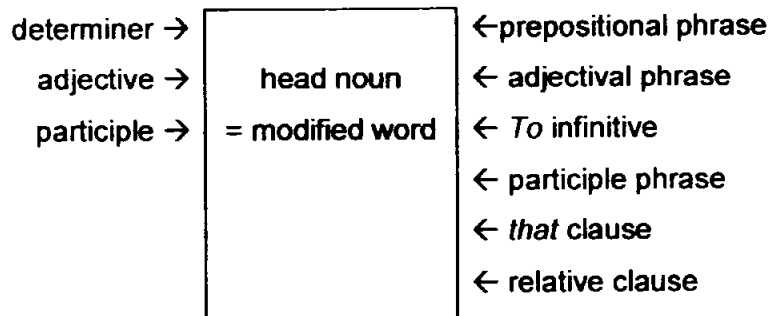
PROBLEMS THAT LEARNERS FACE WITH PARAPHRASING

1. Modifiers and their parts of speech

The first problem Japanese learners face in paraphrasing is that different parts of speech show different behaviours with regard to modification. This is illustrated in the table on the following page. The table shows that learners should be aware of what can be prenominal or postnominal modifiers. In other words, paraphrasing words may not always be substituted in the same syntactic manner.

Table 1

Nominal group modification



For example, even though *postwar* means *after a war*, the phrase *the postwar period* cannot be paraphrased appropriately when it is just substituted with that prepositional phrase. The following contrasts illustrate this restriction:

- the *postwar* period
- postwar = after a war
- *the *after a war* period

Thus learners need to pay attention to English modification structures.

2. Subject restrictions

Many dictionaries use an *of*-phrase in parentheses to show subject restrictions. This should be well understood by learners. The following subject restrictions are, for example, typical:

- catch on:** (of things) to become popular
- hardy:** (of a plant) able to survive a severe winter freeze

This shows that the subject of *catch on* are things when it means 'become popular' and that you can therefore say: "Rollerblades have sure *caught on* – you see them everywhere now" (*Longman Dictionary of American English*, 2nd ed.). For the adjective *hardy*, the above restriction shows that a plant can be its subject or modified noun; as a result, *a hardy plant* and *This plant is hardy* are both well formed.

To solve this difficulty, the function of such subject restrictions should be taught before paraphrasing is attempted. Alternatively, learners may be encouraged to use dictionaries with 'sentential definitions'. These are dictionaries in which headwords are defined in complete sentences, thus avoiding subject restrictions in parentheses. The following definitions exemplify this type of definition:

If something **catches on**, it becomes popular.

Plants that are **hardy** are able to survive frost and cold weather.

(Collins COBUILD English Dictionary)

Something **catches on** when it becomes popular.

A **hardy** plant is able to survive out of doors in winter.

(Chambers Essential English Dictionary)

Thus, if learners are at a level where they cannot feel comfortable with orthodox subject restrictions, they can be referred to dictionaries with sentential definitions.

3. Contextual paraphrasing

Some lexical items are defined in a general way because they can be widely used. So, users sometimes need to apply this to a specific context and to add some more specific information. In the following two sets of examples, the first sentences are target sentences for paraphrasing; the second are dictionary definitions; and, the third are instances of both inappropriate and appropriate paraphrasing.

Set 1

1. I really *go the whole hog* in a restaurant like this.

2. **go the whole hog**: to do something thoroughly or completely

(Longman Dictionary of American English)

3. I really **do something thoroughly* in a restaurant like this.

eat thoroughly

eat too much

Set 2

1. He was a *wreck* then.

2. **wreck**: someone who is very nervous, tired, or unhealthy

(Longman Dictionary of American English)

3. He was ? *someone who was very nervous, tired, or unhealthy.*

very nervous (Note: This depends on the context.)

As seen here, if the definition contains a too general word, or has several choices, learners should choose the most specific one, depending on the context in question.

4. Locating 'blanks'

When trying to paraphrase transitive verbs, their object location should be carefully handled.

The following inappropriate responses illustrate this:

1. He *inspected* the accident.

2. **inspect**: to examine carefully (Chambers Students Dictionary)

3. He **examined carefully* the accident.

examined the accident carefully.

It should be noted hence that transitive verbs have 'object blanks' in their definitions. That is, transitive verbs may be defined with transitive verbs or intransitive verbs, and what counts is the presence of object blanks in their definitions. Transitive verb definitions with blanks (#) feature:

1. Vt + # (+PP)
2. Vi ? [P + #]
3. [Vt?NP] ?[P?#]

To avoid this problem, learners need to locate object blanks carefully or, alternatively, they can use dictionaries with sentential definitions again, because object blanks are already filled in these dictionaries:

If you **inspect** something, you look at every part of it carefully (...)

(Collins COBUILD English Dictionary)

You **inspect** something when you look at or examine it closely (...)

(Chambers Essential English Dictionary)

The reader is referred to Iwasaki (1993) for further discussion of object blanks, and Iwasaki (1990) for other uses of monolingual dictionaries.

WHAT IS REPRODUCTION?

Having looked at particular characteristics of paraphrasing, let me now move to discussing reproduction activities. A reproduction activity is a process in which learners analyze a given text, reorganize it if necessary, and then reproduce the content. A similar activity is summarization, but while summarization focuses on considerably condensing a text and zeroing in on the main idea(s), reproduction emphasizes analyzing a text and its vocabulary and using the text as a basis for production material; the latter may also condense a text, but that effect is incidental.

First, what are the strengths of reproduction activity? Some of the advantages include:

- 1) It focuses on writing/speaking fluency rather than accuracy.
- 2) It combines information and useful/natural collocations.
- 3) It focuses on analyzing the logic and organization of a text.
- 4) It activates learners' background knowledge or life experience.

The reader is referred to White and Arndt (1991) for similar activities in process writing. Drawbacks of reproduction such as facing difficult vocabulary will be dealt with when we discuss the paraphrasing technique in detail.

Stages for reproduction

The reproduction process involves the following stages:

- 1) Have learners read a text.
- 2) Have them take notes of important information in the form of collocations.
- 3) Have them observe reasoning and organization.
- 4) Have them paraphrase difficult expressions in the text.
- 5) Have them reproduce the text by looking at their notes.
- 6) Have them reproduce the text without their notes.

An optional extension involves learners expressing their own opinions in the following manner.

- 7) Have learners add their own opinions.
- 8) Have them collect more information to strengthen their opinions.
- 9) Have them make their own speech/writing based on these.

Example material for reproduction

Let us now look at a specific example. The following text is taken from Ann Landers' agony column. While short enough, the text also contains facts, reasoning and everyday vocabulary for learners to analyze.

Dear Ann Landers: I am engaged to a wonderful man who treats me like a queen, is considerate and thoughtful, and has excellent manners. He is hard-working and has been there for me through thick and thin. "John" is 28, and I am 27. We have known one another for three years and have lived together for 11 months.

My father has never given John a chance. Dad says it is because the didn't ask for permission for our first date, which is a mighty lame excuse. I thought Dad would change his mind when John and I became officially engaged seven months ago, but it hasn't happened.

My father is very religious and said he will not attend our wedding because John is not "religious enough." Also, Dad looks down on John because he has only a high school education and I have a college degree. Dad says a woman should never marry beneath herself "education wise."

Finally, John's job is manual labor – he drives a moving van. Dad thinks when John gets older and can no longer do that sort of work, he will become dependent on me. The truth is that John makes a lot of money working for an international company, and his retirement benefits are better than mine.

Any ideas? – **Woodbridge, Virginia**

Dear Virginia: Your father is mean-spirited and punitive. His reasoning is faulty, and his values are cockeyed. Ignore his stubbornness and make plans without him. Have a wonderful wedding, and be a beautiful, beaming bride.

(Asahi Weekly, April 11, 1999, p. 18)

The first stage of the reproduction activity centres on note-taking and focusing on the main points in each section of the letter. The main reasoning here is as follows:

- This woman wants to marry a man for good reason.

- Her father objects to it for unfair reason.
- Ann Landers suggests she ignore her father and get married to him.

So what learners need to do is to use the text and expand on the above. In other words, learners now look at the text and group information into those three categories. Students' note-taking naturally varies, but grouping will lead to something like the following:

- This woman wants to marry her fiancé John because:
 - he is considerate and thoughtful
 - he has excellent manners
 - he is hard-working and has been there for her through thick and thin
 - they have known one another for three years and have lived together for 11 months.
- Her father objects to their marriage because:
 - he didn't ask for permission for their first date
 - he thinks John is not religious enough
 - John has only a high school education, while she has a college degree
 - John's job is manual labor, a driver of a moving van, and he cannot do it for long.
- Ann Landers says that:
 - her father is mean-spirited, punitive and stubborn
 - his reasoning is faulty
 - they should get married without him.

In this first approximation, a number of details can be collapsed or omitted. Also, as learners usually copy expressions from the text, some wording in their notes may appear quite difficult. Yet, this does not have to be reproduced, because what counts here is reproduction of content. This leads us now to examining paraphrasing in closer detail.

Paraphrasing stage

In the above note-taking, learners will find some difficult wording. This is where paraphrasing plays a role. The following is a list of expressions that learners might find difficult, together with their 'paraphrase' in monolingual dictionaries:

- **though thick and thin:** through good times and bad times (*NTC's American English Learner's Dictionary*)
- **mean-spirited:** not generous or sympathetic (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 3rd ed.*)
- **punitive:** intended as punishment (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 5th ed.*)

So with the help of a monolingual dictionary, each learner has a choice to use either the original wording or paraphrased expressions. Eventually learners may revise the first notes as follows.

This woman wants to marry her fiancé John because:

- he is considerate and thoughtful
- he has excellent manners
- *he has helped her through good times and bad times*
- they have known one another for three years and have lived together for 11 months.

Her father objects to their marriage because:

- he didn't ask for permission for their first date
- he thinks John is not religious enough
- John has only a high school education, while she has a college degree
- John is a driver of a moving van and cannot support his family for long.

Ann Landers says that:

- her father is too stubborn and *unsympathetic*
- his reasoning is faulty
- they should get married without him.

Some students, usually more advanced ones, simplify or paraphrase the text to a greater degree.

The next stage is for learners to be encouraged to reproduce the text, first, with the above notes, and, finally, without any notes. This is more easily achieved than expected, because learners have already spent enough time analyzing the reasoning, organization and wording of the text.

Adding your own opinions

As an option, learners can be encouraged to add their own opinions or make their own points after they have successfully reproduced the text. In order to show this, let us take a look at the following example:

Kimono

Kimono is the traditional Japanese costume. Women, particularly the young, seldom wear kimono today, doing so only on New Year's Day, the Coming-of-Age Day, weddings, school entrance and graduation ceremonies, etc. On these occasions, they wear colorful kimono. Unlike Western dress, the kimono is not conducive to active movements, and it also takes time and energy to put it on. Kimono is a free-size costume which can be worn by almost anybody. The kimono material is usually silk, cotton, linen, and sometimes wool. To wear kimono, five or six strings, two other wide strings and *obi* (a sash) are required. Kimono is worn folded at the front with the right side under the left, both by men and women.

(M. Muramatsu, *Shin Eigo de Shobu*, NHK, 1987, p.81)

This is a neutral description of kimono, but by analyzing the text carefully, learners can make a point in favor of, or against, kimono. This can be done by grouping information into two categories, namely the advantages of kimono and the disadvantages of kimono, and also by adding opinions. Attention should be directed to reasoning or the 'cause-effect' relationship. The underlined statements in the following example show opinions made by learners themselves.

Advantages

- Kimono is colorful and looks gorgeous, because its material includes silk.
- Kimono can be worn for long (sometimes from generation to generation) because it is a free-size costume.
- You can learn traditional manners by wearing kimono because you cannot move freely.

Disadvantages

- Kimono is expensive because it is mainly made of silk.
- Kimono is not conducive to active movements because five or six strings, two other wide strings and *obi* (a sash) are required. (Many learners avoid the expression *be conducive to* and choose to paraphrase this by saying: "It is not easy to move actively in kimono").
- It takes time and energy to put on kimono because five or six strings, two other wide strings and *obi* (a sash) are required.

Then learners can make an instant speech/writing in favor of or against kimono based on the above notes. For example, the following is an unreformulated text against wearing kimono by a non-English major student in Tsukuba.

Kimono is the Japanese traditional costume. But, today, we seldom wear kimono. Unformal kimono, like a Ukata, has been replaced by western clothes. Formal kimono, like a frisode, homongi etc, is worn at ceremonies as a wedding, new year's day, coming of age day and so on.

There are three reason why kimono is not popular. First, kimono made of silk. So, it's expensive. Second, it takes time and energy to put it on. Because it requires five or six strings, two wide strings and a sash. Third, it's not easy to actively move. Because it's heavy and tight. So, kimono is not popular today.

Three comments are in order. First, through such practice, learners can learn that the same fact can be used in favor of, or against, something. For example, a kimono's is mostly made from silk, and this is one of the reasons why it is very expensive. At the same time, this contributes to its colorful, beautiful nature. Second, by analyzing the text, learners can construct their own reasoning and use points made in the text. Third, by 'reshuffling' information, such as reordering and

paraphrasing, learners find it easier to reproduce the text, because the content and wording gradually become familiar to them and can be systematically internalised.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, first we defined paraphrasing as a positive communicative strategy, in that paraphrasing makes up for a lack of vocabulary and contributes to fluency. Specific problems underlying paraphrasing were discussed, and solutions suggested with the help of monolingual dictionaries. Second, we introduced reproduction as a fluency activity. Such reproduction contributes to learner's productive skills, because:

- 1) it helps learners activate their background knowledge, often leading to supplementary information from which learners can learn;
- 2) it uses a 'reshuffling' or grouping technique for organization;
- 3) it provides learners with basic collocations they can use;
- 4) it encourages learners to paraphrase unfamiliar expressions;
- 5) it thus balances fluency and accuracy better.

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