

2018-07-01

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Recommended Citation

Thienthong, Atikhom (2018) "Inferential Reasoning as a Means of Avoiding Plagiarism in Paraphrasing," *PASAA*: Vol. 56, Article 2.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.PASAA.56.1.2

Available at: <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/pasaa/vol56/iss1/2>

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Inferential Reasoning as a Means of Avoiding Plagiarism in Paraphrasing

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Abstract

Paraphrasing is a signature practice of constructing intertextual discourse in academic writing. It is a story retelling technique commonly employed by academic writing classes to tackle plagiarism. However, teaching and learning of paraphrasing tend to place a very heavy emphasis on literal meanings of source messages and faithful reproductions of source meanings through new linguistic systems (e.g. altering syntactic structures, changing lexical forms, substituting synonyms), which may not effectively respond to authentic academic writing. Given this textual orientation, inferential reasoning which is essential in academic discourse tends to be relatively overlooked. To address this neglect, this article proposes an alternative pedagogical approach that exploits inferential thinking as a countermeasure to plagiarism. Specifically, it illustrates how inferential reasoning principles can be fostered and incorporated into paraphrasing instruction to assist EFL students

in producing non-plagiarized academic works. In addition, it points out the kinds of knowledge students need to have when they paraphrase source texts to support their argumentation.

Keywords: paraphrasing, inferential reasoning, plagiarism, academic writing

Introduction

Paraphrasing is generally defined as re-expressing the meaning of original source texts through different systems of grammatical and lexical features. It has long been discussed in relation to an umbrella term of academic misconduct – plagiarism – in that improper paraphrases (e.g. copying a string of source words, minimal changes of linguistic features) can be regarded as plagiarized. In order to help students avoid plagiarism, there are a range of typically employed strategies, such as changing word forms, using synonyms, moving phrases, and separating clauses (McDonough, Crawford, & De Vleeschauwer, 2014; Pinjaroenpan & Danvivath, 2017). They are usually recommended as paraphrasing techniques by writing manuals and textbooks (e.g. Bailey, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Swales & Feak, 2012). Following such guidance, many EFL teachers of academic writing then tend to overemphasize isolated paraphrasing activities intended to assess students' linguistic abilities through their faithful paraphrases.

Linguistically-focused approaches to paraphrasing are widely employed. In fact, many websites and textbooks on source uses and plagiarism issues prioritize technical and linguistic aspects (e.g. documentation techniques, forms of citations/references) (Yamada, 2003). It is generally acknowledged that students need to achieve a certain level of grammatical and lexical proficiency, so that they can produce legitimate paraphrases that contain no or few original words (Keck, 2006; Shi, 2004). Undoubtedly, many EFL students perceive paraphrasing as a rigid process of substituting synonyms and altering syntactic

structures. While these textually-oriented strategies are most favored, they tend to oversimplify an authentic aspect of academic writing and professional practice. This authentic practice often requires inferences.

In this article, therefore, I intend to propose a pedagogical approach drawing on inferential thinking to complement typical teaching practices that focus on textual features. It should be noted that this article is pedagogical in intent, rather than experimental. In particular, I attempt to demonstrate the concrete ways in which inference can be implemented in an academic writing course to assist and prepare EFL students to write their final-year research project. It is useful to students in that inferential reasoning is a flexible process of creating meanings that enables students to express their ingenuity. The flexibility of reporting source texts using inference can liberate students from a faithful paraphrase that restricts the possible interpretations. As they gain more freedom in interpreting sources, they may become less concerned about whether they capture source meanings fully and strictly.

Possible Problems with Teaching Paraphrasing

Students are normally taught to reproduce source texts faithfully through common lexical strategies, such as changing lexical forms, and substituting synonyms. While lexical replacements are very helpful for novice writers by relying on thesauruses, their choices of words may not capture the essence of intended meanings. In most cases, thesauruses provide “near-synonyms, or simply semantically related words”, but “do not always imply interchangeability” (Danglli & Abazaj, 2014, p. 629). In their original context, they have pragmatic meanings and certain collocations. This suggests that a word, especially field- and register-specific, has its distinct meaning that seems not to be fully represented by other lexical options.

Changing syntactical structures (e.g. transposing phrases, dividing clauses, combining clauses) is a pervasive strategy deployed by many EFL classes. In practice, students are often

trained to transform active sentences to passive structures, and vice versa. This clause-altering strategy can be worthwhile for students to rephrase individual sentences so as to demonstrate their ability in developing accurate sentence structures. Still, an emphasis on syntactical aspects may not serve to inform rhetorical, genre-specific, and cohesive functions of language which also govern structural systems and coordinate coherent discourse.

For instance, passive voice is densely used in sections describing processes and methods which are typical elements of research articles and scientific texts (Alvin, 2014; Swales & Feak, 2012). It also plays a role in thematic progression to manage cohesion and coherence when students represent source ideas in a new discourse (Hawes, 2015). This thematic patterning governs the choice of passive or active structures as illustrated below (new idea is **bolded**; old idea is underlined):

In total, 279 students took part in the study, and nearly **600 samples of student writing** were taken. Each text was reviewed for number of grammar errors, number of mechanical errors, and overall writing quality by a minimum of **two reviewers**. A third reviewer was consulted to resolve scoring disputes.

(Shepherd, O'Meara, & Snyder, 2016, p. 46)

In addition, faculty practices in a pedagogical context can inadvertently encourage students' plagiarism. Research has shown that plagiarism can be attributed to teaching and learning activities that require students to paraphrase individual sentences. They are very likely to suffer from overreliance on source language, unintentional plagiarism, and source incomprehension (Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue, 2010). This problem can be explained that fragmentary discourse may not be enriched enough for students to facilitate their understanding and hence their paraphrasing, especially when they attempt to strictly convey literal source meaning.

There has been a question as to whether paraphrasing is a literally faithful account of original meanings, or encompasses interpretations of source texts. Many previous studies and textbooks seem to suggest that paraphrasing is devoid of interpretative acts, so students are usually trained to re-express the meanings of source texts strictly and exactly in a literal sense through new linguistic features. Doing so at a grammatical and syntactical level may not prove effective nor prepare students to deal with authentic academic practices since students are predisposed to present source texts in a completely new discourse that reflects their points of view and establishes a logical relationship between their own and source ideas (Numrich & Kennedy, 2016).

In many cases, when students draw on multiple sources, they have to synthesize them to generate generalization and draw a conclusion according to their observation and interpretation (Hyland, 2000). They can even manipulate source voices which they attribute to their arguments by choosing to either background or foreground their own responsibility (Hunston, 2000). Concomitantly, paraphrasing activates and embodies intimately connected processes of mental functioning – reading, thinking, and writing – as we attempt to make sense of source texts, interpret their meanings, and make inferences summoning our knowledge and assumption.

Inferential Reasoning as a Theoretical Perspective

Inference comes into play as an essential element of communication in a variety of registers. In this article, it refers to a process of generating “new semantic information from old semantic information” (Rickheit, Schnotz, & Strohner, 1985, p. 3). This reasoning enables meaning to be constructed at different levels of abstraction through and beyond what other authors articulate in their texts. This inferred meaning is not necessarily author-intended, but it is usually interpreted from literally stated words (Haugh, 2013). In this inferential view, paraphrasing

encourages multiple layers of reasoning to take place and interpretation of new meanings in light of old meanings.

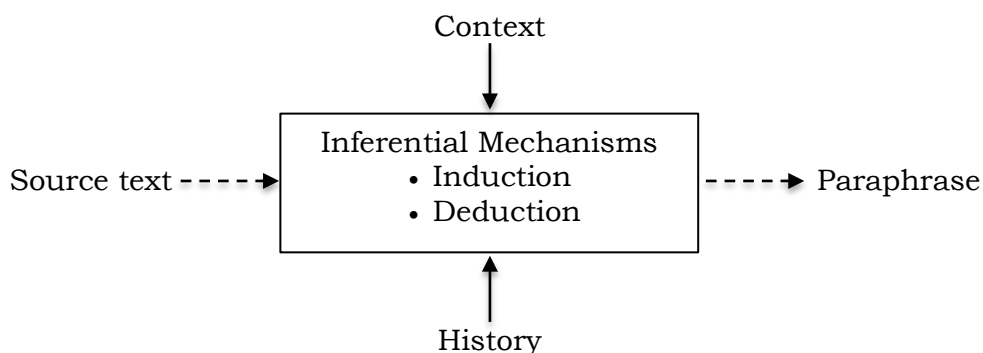


Figure 1: Constructive Process of Inferential Reasoning

Inferential reasoning is a constructive process (see Figure 1) that involves an interplay of external entities (e.g. ideas, actions), personal history, and writing context. This notion of inference holds that we do not receive information directly and convey it linguistically as input sentences (Bransford & Franks, 1971). Rather, they are internally perceived and constructed to perform mental representations of our understanding. In doing so, we inevitably act on our personal history in an attempt to produce our own meanings to fulfill our learning goals in a given context (Michalski, 1993). Given that we construct meanings individually and subjectively, this meaning-making act entails forming interpretations and therefore conclusions. These inferential mechanisms determine how source texts are interpreted, constructed, and represented in forms of induction or deduction through semantic paraphrase.

These two major types of inferences are recognized to be a central aspect of human reasoning and knowledge extension. Inductive inference is “[a] process of examining specific items of evidence and then reasoning to a conclusion in some generalized manner” (Ward, 1997, p. 97). In this inductive reasoning, we have to count on more specific pieces of existing information and proceed to a conclusion at different layers of abstraction; that is,

generalization. In contrast, deductive inference involves “arriving at conclusions on a basis of statements, called premises, whose truth value can be assumed” (Manktelow, 1999, p. 2). In this deductive process, we work from an established generalization and test a specific case against that generalization (Ward, 1997). By comparison, inductive reasoning contributes to new knowledge and is probabilistic in nature while deductive reasoning does not lead to any new knowledge.

Inferential Thinking as a Paraphrasing Tool

It is generally acknowledged that an emphasis on technical conventions and textual features is considered to be insufficient for instructors to teach source integration and for students to learn source-integrated writing to avoid committing plagiarism and socialize in disciplinary practices. Due to this insufficiency, I propose concrete examples of how to incorporate inferential thoughts as a countermeasure to plagiarism. There are two main teaching sessions as follows:

Familiarizing students with authentic citations

The first session involves exposing students to academic citations in a variety of authentic texts excerpted from published research articles. Specifically, it aims to rectify students’ perception of textual borrowing in academic arguments and develop their knowledge of citation systems and their rhetorical functions, such as citation forms, reporting verbs, tenses in citation, textual cohesion, and textual borrowing methods (e.g. paraphrases). By attending to these elements and functions, students perceive that mastering textual aspects of paraphrases could not adequately assist them to develop necessary academic literacies.

Essentially, these relevant aspects need to be presented in authentic extended contexts. The use of authentic texts allows students to better understand how citations actually operate in certain situations and enhance their awareness of typical linguistic choices and their expressed rhetorical functions. At this

point, students are encouraged to realize the fact that citation systems are not simply constructed by grammatically-driven choices, but largely motivated by rhetorically-oriented functions (Hyland, 2000; Malcolm, 1987). Let's have a look at these following excerpts¹ (borrowed ideas are underlined).

Excerpt 1

In addition to use measures, research **has shown** differences between high and low self-esteem on various self-disclosure dimensions. Forest and Wood (2012) **found** that participants with lower esteem **were found** to post more negative information in their status updates (Forest & Wood, 2012). Christofides, Muise, and Desmarais (2009) **found** that those with higher self-esteem **were** more likely to control the personal information they posted on Facebook. While some results regarding the role of self-esteem **are** mixed, it **is** clear that this variable **can have** an important impact on one's interactions on Facebook.

(Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2015, p. 458)

This initial task requires students to mark the writers' own voice and cited voices and notice how they are presented in context. It can be seen that the writers rhetorically begin the paragraph with their own words through the use of 'research'. This non-human subject is usually used with present perfect in the sense that the writers' assertion is based on the summarized findings from several authors. The further notices of the borrowed sources enable students to identify their rhetorical functions. In Excerpt 1, the cited sources from two specific studies are reported as supports to illustrate the writers' proposition. They are often presented with past tense as marked by the main verbs in the dependent clauses and the reporting verb 'found' in non-integral citations. Yet, the writers shift from past tense to present simple when they express their evaluative stance towards the reported items of evidence.

Excerpt 2

From these studies of reading strategies, a number of individual characteristics related to strategy use have been identified. Readers with higher proficiency **use** more strategies (Anderson et al., 1991; Phakiti, 2003a) and strategies that **are** more global (Block, 1986; Carrell, 1989; Koda, 2005). Research exploring the effectiveness of strategies found that, while low performing readers **may** use quite a few strategies, they **may** not be using them appropriately or they are using detrimental strategies (Cohen, 1994). This research has concluded that there **is** more to be gained than simply asking what strategies **are** used and by whom, but when and in what combinations (Anderson et al., 1991; Phakiti, 2003a).

(Plakans, 2009, pp. 253-254)

The results from specific studies are recognized to be original, but retelling those results literally may not be interesting and compelling. They can be looked at in a deeper way to create meanings by noticing similarities and differences. Given this significance, many academic writers prefer to interpret other authors' findings and generalize similar pieces of evidence from multiple cases. For instance, in Excerpt 2, the writer manipulates several source works through the inductive analysis by reporting them in a generalized fashion. This generalization is markedly realized by base verbs (e.g. use, is, are) and modal verbs (e.g. may) to indicate that several context-specific findings are construed across time and context. In addition, the writer can choose to interpret the finding of *a single* study, but with reduced confidence as realized by 'may'. The scrutiny of this excerpt illustrates to students that reliance on textual skills is not always effective for paraphrasing; some details need to be omitted or inferred in order for them to generate common properties from various source works.

Excerpt 3

Research has shown that diversity and identity matter in writing (Athanases, Bennett, & Wahleithner, 2013; Canagarajah, 2006; Cremin & Myhill, 2012). Linguistic and culturally diverse writers, who are proficient writers, can switch their languages, discourses, and identities in response to contextual change. Canagarajah (2006) strongly **argues** that multilingual writers are not passively conditioned by their language and culture, but rather, they make choices as writers for different texts and contexts.

(Ryan, 2014, p. 61)

In Excerpt 3, students are motivated to observe other salient systems typical of academic citations. This observation can reinforce students' perception that they can draw on several prior studies and generalize their findings as a proposition, which taps into their inferential thinking. This excerpt shows that the writer represents three source works as a single general statement whose credibility is enhanced through the general subject 'research'. The choice of general subjects to present many summarized results is often accompanied by research verbs (e.g. show, reveal, discover) in present perfect tense.

In addition, students can notice the smooth flow of the discourse established by the writer when she inserts her own remark to introduce another source. At this point, students can become aware that they can express their stance toward source texts through integral citations. This personal involvement is realized by 'argue', a cognitive reporting verb (Hyland, 2002). The notice of this verb type encourages students to realize that reporting verbs dealing with epistemic stances (e.g. think, believe, argue, claim, contend, assert) are usually presented with present simple tense (Swales & Feak, 2012). This construction is rhetorically intended to attribute subjective evaluations to external sources, rather than reporting previous research activities straightforwardly.

This familiarization session presents a wide range of knowledge required in academic citations that students need to have and must be aware of. The emphasis is on demonstrating to students that paraphrasing can draw on inferential thoughts, and that learning to paraphrase through textually-oriented strategies is not sufficient for students to develop persuasive academic arguments. This is because citing other authors' ideas and works effectively is more likely to deal with rhetorical works than grammatical aspects. These rhetorical effects which are expressed by lexico-grammatical systems of academic citations are pointed out as follows:

Paraphrasing

The previous excerpts indicate that citations can perform a range of rhetorical functions (e.g. Petric', 2007). To serve as illustrations to support an assertion, for example, some major results from single studies can be appropriated by paraphrasing as a literal way of retelling past stories. This source use is likely to require a faithful account of desired ideas for which textual knowledge is very helpful. However, when several individual studies and propositions are combined to form key points of arguments and general factual statements, writers are primed to activate their inferential reasoning upon reading and writing (Ferri-Milligan, 1993). In fact, they do not receive each single source text separately as its linguistic objects, but they interpret and construct "semantic representations" of general meanings of source texts as a wholistic entity (Bransford & Franks, 1972, p. 213). During this process, it is quite common that some irrelevant information is discarded and more content can be inferred from available evidence, so that commonality can be accomplished. This means that good linguistic skills are not enough.

Qualification

Citing several sources as a general statement demands a process of inferential thinking. This mental act gives students greater levels of rhetorical flexibility since they have more freedom

to interpret source materials into many possible patterns. Interpretation is particularly important when students are assisted to move beyond reporting objective results and information (Chaffee, 2010). Since interpretation is conditioned by individuals' assumptions and experiences, it should be properly qualified through various markers (e.g. may, argue, show, strongly, research) for persuasive and credible claims. This qualification is largely subject to personal interpretations, epistemic stances, and supplied evidence, which is a typical nature of academic written discourse. It is inevitable that students have to draw on qualification markers to limit their statements derived from interpretations.

Citation tenses

In academic writing, citation tenses are rhetorically motivated and correlated with the nature of paraphrases, whether they are derived from previous research findings, general propositions, or established facts. Three tenses are commonly used in academic writing, including past tense, present simple, and present perfect. Past tense is often used to report past research activities (e.g. procedures, findings) in specific contexts, functionally intended to elaborate and support general claims. Citations with present tense are usually used with generalization, interpretation, and authorial stance (e.g. feelings, evaluation). Citations with present perfect function to synthesize previous results with general subjects (e.g. research, studies, researchers). It is quite clear that present simple and present perfect are vitally important for paraphrases whose essential meanings are synthesized and generalized from several works.

Citation forms

Swales (1990) proposed two common types of academic citations: integral and non-integral. They have been widely adopted and refined as an analytic tool by genre studies into citation practices across disciplines. Structurally, integral citation places source authors as a syntactical subject of sentences taking

reporting verbs in active forms (e.g. Fried (2008) argues that...), whereas non-integral citation puts source texts in parentheses (e.g. (Fried, 2008)) without any reporting verbs and grammatical functions. Rhetorically motivated, integral citations emphasize source authors and report source texts in an evaluative way through choices of reporting verbs and their tenses (Hyland, 2002), which reveals one's critical stance (Swales & Feak, 2012). In contrast, non-integral citations foreground source texts and present them in a non-evaluative way (Hyland, 2002). In relation to the nature of paraphrases, integral citations tend to be more favored when single studies are referenced as illustrations in support of claims because the use of reporting verbs clearly indicates certain actions performed (e.g. Forest and Wood (2012) found..., Hurt et al. (2012) examined...). But non-integral citations tend to be more preferred when many sources are attributed to secure rhetorical and grammatical effects as writers want to keep the cited sources prominent and avoid many and long subjects.

Reporting verbs

There are a wide range of reporting verbs commonly used in integral citations to integrate source ideas into students' own arguments. They can be divided into three broad categories: research verbs – reporting actions and activities (e.g. find, discover, show), cognition verbs – involved with mental processes and personal stances (e.g. think, believe, argue), and discourse verbs – concerned with linguistic activities and verbal expressions (e.g. state, point out, suggest) (Hyland, 2002). The use of reporting verbs will allow students to make more precise judgment and assessment of the status of source texts. They can indicate whether source texts are considered to be either a fact, or opinion, or belief, thus revealing attitude, confidence, responsibility, and authority (Hyland, 2002; Martin & White, 2005). Rhetorically, research verbs are frequently used to report prior studies (i.e. purposes, procedures, findings) neutrally regardless of evaluative stances while cognition and discourse verbs are usually used to

handle various acts of evaluation and interpretation (Hyland, 2002).

However, it should be noted that the range of reporting verbs vary according to genre. School tasks (e.g. academic essays) require a limited number of reporting verbs and hence might not capture their subtle nuances of meanings, but at least they could raise students' awareness of how certain reporting verbs can contribute to rhetorical effects on their academic writing. I attempt to cover those typically used in applied linguistics as found by Hyland (2002), such as 'claim', 'assert', 'argue', 'show', 'find', 'explain', 'point out', 'state' and discussed by others (e.g. Swales & Feak, 2012). Some may be compatible with human subjects, present tense, and active structures while others function well with non-human subjects, present perfect, and passive structures. It is greatly useful to present them in various extended discourses, so that students can observe, in authentic contexts, how certain words and patterns function and what rhetorical effects are intended to achieve.

Presenting inferentially-derived paraphrases

In this second session, students are introduced to a variety of possible sample paraphrases derived from inferential reasoning. They are encouraged to perceive source information at different levels of abstraction rather than simply regurgitate previous stories by replacing lexical items and altering syntactical structures. Looking at source texts more deeply, students can have greater freedom and flexibility in managing source contents, which reflects their perspectives and facilitates their intertextual links (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). In their full authority, students are entitled to manipulate original messages as a source of inference making, a constructive process whereby they construct and organize their meanings with respect to a given context.

Since source ideas are divorced from their original contexts and presented in a different framework, students are obliged to establish a new relationship between external and internal ideas so as to produce a coherent discourse. To achieve this quality,

some leading sentences should be prepared as general claims for students who have to paraphrase source texts to support those given claims. In this way, they are encouraged to frame and embed paraphrases into their argument in a cohesive and convincing way. Through these following paraphrases as **bolded**, students can learn various types of knowledge in academic citations simultaneously in more meaningful ways. The following source texts² chosen for this session are of general themes to accommodate students' diverse backgrounds.

Example 1

Let's begin with a single source whose nature is empirical evidence. This example promotes students to look at this research finding beyond its specific context by using their inferential thoughts. Most empirical evidence is context-specific and original. It is derived from rigorous investigations and direct observations, serving as grounds for creating new knowledge and general claims. Given its contextual specificity, it is usually reported as past stories:

Source

Facebook users reported a lower mean GPA than non-users; additionally, Facebook users reported studying fewer hours per week than non-users.

(Paul A. Kirschner and Aryn C. Karpinski, 2010)

Paraphrase

Facebook can be adopted as a learning tool to support academic studies and facilitate communication. However, studies have found that Facebook can have negative effects on school studies. **A study by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) indicates that Facebook can distract students from their lessons and negatively impact their academic outcomes.**

The cited source as **bolded** reveals no trace of its original language, except the key content word 'Facebook'. The use of

tenses shifts from past simple to present tense to suggest a more general fact. This temporal change takes place because the source is inductively inferred at a more abstract level to generalize the proposition. The observed facts 'Facebook users reported studying fewer hours per week than non-users' is interpreted as 'Facebook can distract students from their lessons', and 'Facebook users reported a lower mean GPA than non-users' as 'Facebook can negatively impact students' academic outcomes.' By adopting this inferentially-oriented method, students are encouraged not to perceive source linguistic inputs word for word directly, but rather construct their own meaning more flexibly through their observation of specific information. This newly-made meaning is reorganized in relation to a fresh context, and it can be presented in different rhetorical ways.

Example 2

In addition to using inferential reasoning for abstracting a single observed fact, students can be trained to synthesize external ideas from multiple different sources. They can analyze each individual source to capture its relevant meaning and then establish the commonality of meanings across the cited sources. In this way, they can discard irrelevant details and include inferred content. This is a typical practice of academic discourse in generalizing multiple sources as a single reference with many authors presented non-integrally. To deal with this academic practice, it is clear that it is not sufficient for students to learn paraphrasing focusing on linguistic features:

Source

1. The techniques for paraphrasing are using synonyms, changing word class, and changing word order.
(Stephen Bailey, 2011)
2. Students used synonyms with the highest frequency (51.23%), followed by using varied sentence structures (20.57%) and changing word order (6.26%).
(Rungaroon Injai, 2015)

Paraphrase

Paraphrasing is a common practice of avoiding plagiarism in academic writing that requires students to draw on source ideas to develop their argument. Through this method, writers are usually expected to use their own language. **Most strategies employed for paraphrasing focus on lexical and syntactical aspects of language (e.g. using synonyms, changing lexical forms, altering sentence structures) (Bailey, 2011; Injai, 2015).**

The rephrased source above is derived from two different sources, with the central ideas synthesized. The specific similar details from each single source are combined to develop a superordinate category which establishes a higher layer of abstraction. In fact, ‘synonyms’ and ‘word class’ are viewed as a lexical dimension of language, while ‘sentence structures’ and ‘word order’ are perceived as a syntactical dimension of language. Through this example, it can be seen that the minor details (e.g. percentages) are removed as they are not common across the sources.

Example 3

This example encourages students to perceive that they can construct a new relationship of sources although it is not overtly established originally. This representation of sources in a new framework can liberate students from surface meanings and therefore from literal retellings.

Source

1. Comparisons of two L1 groups show that the Chinese students borrowed significantly more words from the source texts than the native English-speaking students.
(Ling Shi, 2004)
2. L2 writers produced significantly more near-copy paraphrases than L1 writers; their paraphrases contained more than 50% of original words.
(Casey Keck, 2006)

Paraphrase

Plagiarism in academic writing is attributed to a range of personal and social factors as students paraphrase source texts as a means of developing their argument. **Studies have revealed that language ability is associated with tendency to plagiarism. Students who have a lower level of language proficiency are more likely to face plagiarism (Keck, 2006; Shi, 2004).**

It can be seen again that the attributed source does not retain the original language, except the key content word 'students'. The rephrased content is different from the other examples in that the observed specifics (e.g. Chinese students, L2 students, borrowed significantly more words) are not merely interpreted to develop the generalized assertions (e.g. language ability, tendency to plagiarism), but they also are built on to clearly establish a casual explanation. This causal relationship which is not explicitly stated in the sources is realized in the citation through the use of lexical casual expressions (e.g. is associated with). Rhetorically, students can notice that the projected claim is introduced by the general subject (e.g. studies) as a way of synthesizing multiple sources. This use of general subjects is usually accompanied by present perfect in the projecting claim. Furthermore, the source ideas are interpreted with caution through epistemic lexical devices, such as 'tendency' and 'likely'.

Example 4

This example assists students in rewriting source materials in a deductive way that moves from more general statements to more specific instances. The general nature of source content allows students a greater flexibility in performing interpretations as they can construct meanings beyond a literal sense of source texts. The resulting citation will become more specific or concrete, serving as evidence in support of a general claim.

Source

The internet is also considered a very useful tool because it allows students the possibility to connect with the world, to create an authentic learning environment.

(Aurora-Tatian Dina and Silvia-Ileana Ciornei, 2013)

Paraphrase

The internet plays a versatile role in our society in a variety of contexts. In education, it can greatly maximize students' learning potentials and extend their learning experience out of class. **Dina and Ciornei (2013) suggest that the internet can be adopted to supplement class-based instruction and develop fully-online courses.**

The cited source is presented more specifically as an instance of an authentic learning environment. This environment is interpreted as an internet-mediated platform where students can interact with other people and enhance their learning out of class, and where they have more freedom to manage their learning process. The two inferred examples of internet-assisted courses are those of a blended course (i.e. combining in-class and online learning) and a fully-online course. They are different in terms of delivery modes which are assumed to constitute an authentic learning environment. In terms of the source presentation, students can observe that the source author is foregrounded and the evaluative stance encoded in the reported source through the integral citation. This construction is controlled by 'suggest'. This finite reporting verb functions to hedge the inferred paraphrase.

Conclusion

Pedagogically intended, this article proposes an inferentially-oriented approach to teaching paraphrasing to EFL students, especially those in humanities and social sciences since these soft fields are interpretative in nature. In particular, it demonstrates that paraphrasing can include extra contents as a result of interpreting and inferring new meanings from source texts at differing layers of abstraction. This is because citing a

source text is viewed as “a subjective process of deciding how to make meaning out of...available resources” (Shi, 2010, p. 21). In this sense, paraphrasing is a flexible act of constructing meanings that incorporates interpretation and inference. The article also argues that it is not sufficient to instruct students to rephrase source texts through linguistically-oriented strategies, especially when they have to draw on multiple sources and amalgamate their meanings into a single reference with many authors.

However, inferential reasoning strategies for paraphrasing have some possible limitations. First, inferential reasoning depends on the nature of reported contents. Source texts that are theoretically oriented and semantically distinctive (e.g. definitions of technical terms, theoretical explanations) may impose a limit on making inferences. Due to this restriction, it is better to rephrase sources faithfully or resort to a direct quotation in order to sustain its intended, original meaning. Second, inferential reasoning may not be suitable for students in hard disciplines. In this disciplinary landscape, knowledge is characterized as objective, impersonal, and value-free; thus, it is not as open to interpretations as knowledge in soft disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001). This suggests that interpreting a certain source can result in contested understandings, which is considered to be a common process of knowledge construction in soft disciplines.

Notes

- 1 The excerpts are authentic texts from published articles, whose original citation formats are retained. The aim is to illustrate how paraphrasing actually operates in context.
- 2 The source texts were taken from published sources whose author details were fully provided for citation purposes.

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