Students' Paraphrasing Ability in Academic Writing; Techniques and Challenges

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Abstract

In higher education, the demand of research publication is increasingly growing. Due to this fact, the skills to write academic paper must be improved as well. One of the foremost skills required in writing academic paper is paraphrasing. This qualitative study investigates the most frequents paraphrasing techniques used by students and their challenges during the paraphrasing process. Thirty students enrolled in Academic Writing class participated in this research. The participants were required to do paraphrasing task, and 8 selected students (4 more proficient students and 4 less proficient students) would be interviewed in regards to their challenges in paraphrasing and how they dealt with such challenge. The result of paraphrasing task unveiled that most strategies used by students were "change to synonym", "change to active to passive form" and a combination of these two. In regards to the challenges, reading, lexical and syntactic problems are the main challenges addressed by participants.

Keyword: Paraphrasing, Academic Writing.

Abstrak

Di perguruan tinggi, tuntutan publikasi karya tulis terus meningkat. Oleh karena itu, keterampilan menulis akademik juga harus ditingkatkan. Salah satu keterampilan terpenting yang diperlukan dalam menulis akademik adalah kemampuan parafrase. Studi kualitatif ini menyelidiki teknik parafrase yang paling sering digunakan oleh siswa dan tantangan mereka selama proses parafrase. Tiga puluh siswa yang terdaftar di kelas *Academic Writing* berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Para partisipan diberikan tes parafrase, dan 8 siswa dipilih (4 siswa yang lebih mahir dan 4 siswa yang kurang mahir) untuk diwawancarai mengenai tantangan yang mereka hadapi selama proses parafrase dan bagaimana mereka menghadapi tantangan tersebut. Hasil analisis mengungkapkan bahwa sebagian besar strategi yang digunakan oleh siswa adalah "mengubah ke sinonim", "mengubah bentuk aktif menjadi pasif" dan kombinasi dari keduanya. Berkenaan dengan tantangan, masalah membaca, leksikal dan sintaksis menjadi tantangan utama yang dihadapi oleh partisipan.

Kata kunci: Parafrase, Menulis akademik.

Introduction

Academic writing is bound-up to students' paraphrasing skill, one major element to produce quality writing. In the broader terms, paraphrasing is a skill to cite relevant references in strengthening your view on topic discussed. In more specific details, Davis (2013) defines paraphrasing as rewriting the idea using completely different words showing the writer's understanding in which the writer builds an argument on. In addition, in writing academic papers, writers must be aware of what Mira & Fatimah (2020) call "academic responsibility" in addressing the source of ideas. When it is not properly done, writer will be accused of plagiarism which brings along some punishment, other ethical disciplinary and even dismissal. Plagiarism is defined as "…using other people's words, ideas or pictures (which are commonly referred to as intellectual property) as if they were their own (Vandermey et al, 2012)

Since plagiarism has become alarming matter in higher education (Jiang, 2013), there is a growing concern about how to deal with it, which in this case is improving students' paraphrasing skill (Day, 2009). Theoretically speaking, there are 3 criteria for good and accurate paraphrase; maintaining the same length and meaning with completely different wording by making changes on words and grammar (Bailey, 2017).

In regard to this issue, a number of studies in the context of academic writing have been conducted in Indonesia. Khrismawan and Widiati (2013) investigated students' perceptions of paraphrasing as well as cognitive and metacognitive processes in paraphrasing texts. Based on the results of interviews, the participants which were master's degree students had the correct concept of paraphrasing. However, the knowledge possessed contradicted the result of paraphrase. In other words, the results of students' paraphrased text did not reflect their knowledge of the theory and their acceptance level was still questionable.

Furthermore, another study conducted by Hayuningrum and Yulia (2017) aimed at investigating the problems faced by students in paraphrasing and the reasons why their paraphrasing skills were low was carried out. The results showed that some of the causes of the low paraphrasing ability were the low understanding of the source text, the use of the same words as the source text and the use of inappropriate synonyms. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that the main cause was low understanding of students when reading the source text, so that the paraphrasing results deviated from the meaning of the source text. In addition, because paraphrasing ability is strongly related to reading ability, Hagaman, Casey & Reid (2012) conducted an experimental study to improve students' reading comprehension by using a paraphrasing strategy. The findings show that the paraphrasing strategy can improve students' reading ability.

Furthermore, Mira and Fatimah (2020) conducted a qualitative descriptive study which aimed to examine the level of acceptance of paraphrased text of undergraduate students. In this study, the researcher used paraphrasing

Taxonomy of Keck (2006) where there are 4 taxonomy levels; Near Copy, Minimal Revision, Moderate Revision and Substantial Revision. In this taxonomy, the number of copied words, also known as unique links, are measured. To be precise, the Near copy level is when it has more than 50% unique links. Secondly, minimal revision contains 20-49% unique links, and for moderate review, the unique links are around 1-19%. Lastly, no unique link is found, lexical and syntactical changes are substansial. The findings show that 49% of student texts were categorized as "minimal revision", indicating that 12 of the 32 words in the source text were still used in paraphrasing. In addition, 59% of their paraphrasing results were categorized as not eligible to meet the paraphrasing criteria.

A similar work was also conducted by Akbar (2020). This study aimed to analyze the level of acceptance of the students' paraphrasing results, especially in the literature review section of the thesis. The results showed that 3 out of 6 participants were in moderate revision and 3 were at the Near Copy/not feasible level and could be categorized as plagiarism. From the two results of this study, it can be seen that the problem of plagiarism and the ability to paraphrase in academic writing becomes worrisome which needs action to solve it.

The previous literatures have shown that admittedly the practice of paraphrasing is cognitively and linguistically challenging for both undergraduate and graduate students. In above-cited studies, researchers focused on the level of appropriateness / acceptability of students' paraphrasing results regardless of what techniques they used which is believed that the choices on techniques affect the result greatly. Additionally, the challenges explored in above-mentioned studies were not deeply explored. Even though some studies found that the majority of students in Indonesia had low paraphrasing ability, the students with good paraphrasing ability, can be not discredited. Frankly, they still face obstacles in which they can overcome. Hence, this issue needs to be addressed to fill the gap in this area of study. Therefore, this study aims to examine the strategies used by students, starting from dominant to less dominant ones, and it also explores the obstacles faced by students with good paraphrasing ability as well as students with the low paraphrasing ability. Eventually, by knowing the dominant paraphrasing techniques that students often use, it is possible to examine the reasons why the paraphrasing results are/ are not in the acceptable category.

Methods

The qualitative study aims to analyze the most frequent paraphrasing techniques used by students and examine some challenges that they face in paraphrasing practice. Moreover, students enrolled in Academic Writing course participated in this research. The participants were 30 students who were selected through the "purposive sampling" method based on the scores obtained in the previous writing courses (Paragraph Writing, Essay Writing). The students who failed the previous writing classes were excluded.

This study had two types of data collected from two types of research instruments; paraphrasing test and interview. In paraphrasing test, there were ten statements or ideas taken from two articles published in reputable journal which mainly discussed about learning autonomy. The data obtained from the test were in the form of paraphrasing results in which the techniques applied by students were analyzed thoroughly. 300 paraphrasing results were read, and the techniques they used were noted down. Therefore, it is highly possible that students employed more than two techniques. The techniques used in this study were the techniques proposed by Bailey (2017) in which there were five techniques; (changing words), changing word classes, changing word order, changing the structure for example from passive to active or vice versa / changing the form of a clause to a phrase and vice versa, and combining sentences. Besides, the quality of paraphrasing results was then examined using Keck's Taxonomy (2006) and 8 students were selected to proceed to interview session. These students were selected based on the results of their paraphrasing test in which 4 students had good paraphrasing ability and the others had low paraphrasing ability. This interview intended to explore students' challenges while paraphrasing more fully.

Findings and Discussion
Students' Preferences on Paraphrasing Techniques

There are several paraphrasing techniques proposed by experts. This study used the paraphrasing technique proposed by Bailey (2017) in which there are 5 techniques. These techniques are changing words, changing word classes, changing word order, changing the structure (passive to active or vice versa / a clause to a phrase and vice versa, and combining sentences. The changing structure was then divided into two active to passive, and phrase to clause or vice versa.

In the given test, students were given 10 source texts (in the form of a paragraph in which there was an opinion to be quoted and the context in which the opinion was located). So, within 75 minutes, students generated 10 citations based on the given source text. Of the 30 students who were selected as the research samples, 300 citations were collected. These 300 quoted results were analyzed one by one to determine the type of technique used and its level based on Keck' taxonomy (2006). The results of students' paraphrases based on the Keck's Taxonomy paraphrases (2006) are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Number of students' paraphrases based on the types proposed by Keck's (2006)

No	Paraphrase Types	Number of Paraphrases	Percentage of Paraphrase
1	Near Copy	179	59.7
2	Minimal Revision	78	26

| 3 | Moderate Revision | 43 | 14.3 |
| 4 | Substantial Revision | - | 0 |

Table 1 displays the results of students' paraphrases based on the Keck's taxonomy. It is shown that more than 50% of paraphrasing results were in near copy level indicating that the lexical and grammatical similarity between the source text and the results were pretty high. Furthermore, the number of results in minimal revision category was 78, about 26%. For moderate category, the percentage was about 14.3%, meanwhile none of the results could be included in substantial revision category. These results imply that less than 20% of the results were in acceptable category.

Additionally, the most dominant techniques used by the students using Bailey's (2017) are presented in the following table.

Table 2. The most dominant technique by Bailey (2017)

No	Paraphrase Techniques	Number of paraphrases	Percentage
1	Changing the Word into its synonym	300	100%
2	Changing structure : active to passive	255	85%
	Phrase to clause	60	20%
3	Changing Word class	180	60 %
4	Changing Word order	90	30 %
5	Combining sentences	57	19

The above table shows that every participant was using synonym techniques in every citation. Among 300 results, synonym technique was found in any citation results. It shows that word modification was the easiest and the most effective one to be implemented. Furthermore, this result also showed that about 15% of results were only using this technique and there was not any syntactical change. It, therefore, affected the quality of paraphrased result in unpleasant manner.

On the other hand, the least frequent technique is syntactical modification especially, combining sentences and change from phrase and clause. However, the technique "change active to passive or vice versa" is likely used by writers. This technique is second most frequently used technique. In addition, among 300 result of citation, more than half results employed 'changing word class' technique.

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Students' Challenges in Paraphrasing

The quality of the results was then analyzed in order to select more proficient students and less proficient students (indicated to have plagiarized the source). From the results, 8 students were selected to be interviewed about their challengs.

Challenges Experienced by students with good paraphrasing skill

4 students who were at this level expressed some of the challenges they faced during the paraphrasing process. The first problem was grasping the intended meaning of the source text. These four students said that the first step they took in the practice of paraphrasing was to understand the source text, especially to understand what the author wanted to convey so that the meaning of the source text did not change, as expressed by subject A

"*for the first step, I usually need to understand the sentence first, what's the point, what the aim is, and how will I re-state the sentence*".

Understanding the source text is the main basis in producing good and acceptable citations. However, this becomes difficult for students due to factors, such as low vocabulary knowledge particularly on words used in academic language, and finding the core/main topic of the source text. This happened due to the fact that students were not really into reading scientific papers and lack of reading ability; therefore, they found it difficult to find the main idea and are distracted by additional, less important explanations, as mentioned by Subject B.

The most difficult problem I face in paraphrasing is when paragraph or sentence that are mostly or full of unpopular or complicated words, the words that I don't know the meaning. And that makes me feel confused with the meaning of the sentence or paragraph. I don't get the idea.

The second challenge was finding the most appropriate word to describe the intent of the source. Based on the analysis of most dominant technique, the most frequent technique was change to synonym which led them to directly look for synonyms of words in source text. Finding the appropriate equivalent words was challenging due to the lack of knowledge on vocabulary.

I somehow found that looking for synonyms are quite hard. This is because English is not my native language so I still don't know many of vocabularies and also I found that some vocabularies are super unfamiliar to me which creates an issue for me when paraphrase an opinion (Subject C).

Aside from finding the appropriate equivalent, students must also understand the context in which the word is used. Some words in English when translated have the same meaning, but their use in English is different depending on the context.

> *I think looking for synonym is difficult because we also need to think about the context where this word appears. That's why, when I do paraphrasing, I need dictionary to find the meaning and where to use it. (Subject D).*

In this group, the students have emphasized 2 main challenges; understanding the source and finding equivalent words in accordance with the context. These two main problems are related to students' reading skill. Thus, the root cause of these problems probably lied on students' low reading skill.

Problems experienced by students with poor paraphrasing skills

4 selected students who had poor paraphrasing skills were interviewed with 8 main questions and developed as the interview went by. Unlike the previous group, there were two additional challenges experienced by students. First challenge was to comprehend the intended message of the source. The reason elaborated was almost the same as the first group. However, during the interview process, the researcher felt that the second group needed more effort than the first group in understanding the source text as it was stated that he had to read it many times in order to understand the meaning of the source text.

> *Honestly, paraphrasing was the hardest lesson for me. I need a very long time in paraphrase a text. The most dominant problem is reading and understanding the content of the text. I continue to find it difficult to understand the content of a text that I am going to paraphrase. I have to repeatedly read until I master the topic of the text. It seems that this is because of my lazy reading habits, I'm a bad. So, my ability to understand a text is poor. So I can't do it in a short time (Subject E).*

In this interview, the student admitted that he had a bad reading habit that had an impact on his reading ability. Thus, he needed more time to cite a source. In addition, the second problem was similar to previous group which was finding appropriate equivalent. This problem was also experienced by students in the first group. This is also the impact of the low interest in reading.

> *Sometimes, I don't understand the original source and I am always confused when changing the word. I read the text slowly and try to understand the context (Subject F).*

The third main problem was grammatical problem. It is apparent that in the process of paraphrasing, the authors are going to write a new sentence which should be grammatically correct and maintain the original meaning of source. The students in this group admitted that they struggled for writing a grammatically correct sentence. For instance, one technique that was frequently used was to change active sentences into passive ones and vice versa. The rules in these two sentences are distinctive which made it challenging.

Grammar is hard for me too. I need to think about how to write sentence correctly. As you know, English has so many tenses and rules and we have to consider it in paraphrasing also in writing (Subject G).

The last problem was the doubts, feeling unsure, about the result. They had doubts whether the meaning of the source text is conveyed correctly or they make new opinions because they misinterpret what is meant by the author.

*Another problem is thinking how to change this sentence into my sentence is a big challenge too. There are many concerns while paraphrasing an opinion so we're not basically telling someone's opinion; but we create different idea from someone's opinion. That's the thing that even until now still needs improvements (*Subject H).

In brief, both groups shared common struggles that they faced during paraphrasing process. Yet, when compared to the first group, second group needed more effort to write an acceptable paraphrase. Additionally, one thing is certain that the chief problem that causes the struggles is related to reading skill and reading habit.

Discussion

Based on findings, students' preferences on the most frequent techniques used lay on synonym and syntactic change from passive to active or vice versa. To prevent the act plagiarism, the result of paraphrase should be distinctive with the source while the meaning remains the same. It is undeniably challenging to produce a quality citation when what authors frequently do is to modify some words from the source. The findings of this study are in line with recent studies conducted by Mariani, et al (2021) and Na & Mai (2017). In the study, Mariani, et al (2021) took students' introduction of undergraduate thesis. It is found that using synonym was the most frequent technique used. However, in terms of least frequent techniques was very different in which in Mariani's study, no students had employed changing passive or active or vice versa technique. Due to the paraphrasing technique selection, half of students' paraphrasing results were in moderate revision and two among ten students have been confirmed to have done plagiarism.

In addition, similar findings were also found in a study by Na & Mai (2017) which examined the Vietnamese' paraphrasing technique and ability. It is shown that the participants in this study employed synonym technique while the structure was left as the way it was. A number of studies also showed L2 students' failure in paraphrasing. Keck (2006) analyzed paraphrasing results by L1 and L2 English writers at US. The results of L2 English writers were in Near Copy level indicating the results were almost categorized as plagiarism. Furthermore Milićević & Tsedryk (2011) also compared L1 and L2 French writers with regard to their paraphrasing technique. The blatant difference was in terms of lexical and syntactic structure of sentence. L2 writers employed less varied vocabulary and less variation in structure compared to L1.

The findings of this current study as well as similar studies which have done previously indicate that synonym techniques or lexical modification is the most favorable technique. Participants were likely to think that lexical modification is a way to prevent them from plagiarism as it is the easiest and the most effective one to be implemented. In fact, it is true in which this technique is prominent as the writer must deliver the intended meaning using different wording. However, it becomes problematic when it is solely implemented. It is surely affecting the results in unpleasant manner as it is revealed by previous studies done in Indonesian context (Kher & Rani, 2018; Mira & Fatimah, 2020; Khrismiawan & Widiati, 2013; Hayuningrum & Yulia 2017). Therefore, it is also clearly portrayed that paraphrasing practice in writing academic works need more attention due to the fact that most previous studies show low ability of students in paraphrasing. In order to search for what actions need to be taken, the reasons of students' failure need to be addressed properly.

This study also addresses challenges in paraphrasing in attempt to dig on the reasons' of students' failure. Challenges in paraphrasing experienced by every student differ from one to another, especially more proficient and less proficient students in paraphrasing. It was firstly assumed that both groups struggled for different reasons. However the result shows differently which attest that they deal with similar problems but different emphasis on effort needed. The prominent problem that both groups acknowledge is low level of their proficiency especially on reading and writing skill. With regard to reading, their low reading skill hinders them to produce a free-plagiarized sentence. In order to deliver the message, the students must have good reading skill as the first thing they do is grasping the meaning.

It is so vivid that paraphrasing holds strong ties with reading in which the authors need to apprehend the meaning prior to paraphrasing process. It is consistent with Na & Mai's (2017). They point out that paraphrasing is not solely an independent skill; yet, it is interconnected to other skills especially reading and writing which makes paraphrasing cognitively challenging. Similar finding also shows in a study conducted by Hayuningrum & Yulia (2017), Mira & Fatimah

(2020) which revealed that low reading ability and insufficient knowledge on vocabulary as main causes of students' low paraphrasing ability.

Furthermore, not only does students' weak understanding affect their paraphrasing, but also their inadequate linguistic and lexical knowledge contribute to unsuccessful attempt to produce free-plagiarized citation. Both linguistics and lexical resources tie to writing problem. After knowing what to write, the students need to figure it out how to write it and choose the equivalent words to preserve the meaning of the source. How to write is dealing with syntactical knowledge which is formulating a grammatically correct sentence. Meanwhile, what to write relates to lexical knowledge, what words that fit in the sentence. To sum up, the results indicate that students in less proficient group are likely to have lower reading ability and insufficient knowledge on linguistics, lexical and syntactical resources. It also infers that to improve students' paraphrasing skill, it needs to be integrated with reading and other related skills.

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate the technique and challenges in paraphrasing process. In regard to technique, the most frequent one is synonym. This technique becomes problematic to plagiarism issue when it is solely used without making significant change on syntactic or structure of a sentence. Briefly, technique selection contributes to quality of paraphrasing result. In addition, concerning the challenges, it is inferred that paraphrasing skill are tied to reading and writing skill. In reading, grasping the meaning of source is the first step that an author does. Once the message has been fully understood, the next step will be writing. This step requires not only reading comprehension but also syntactical and lexical knowledge. Apparently, formulating a good paraphrased sentence is demanding since it is not a sole skill. Hopefully, findings of this study enlighten and explain possible causes of plagiarism occurred among students and students' low ability in paraphrasing. It can be based for future research to search for possible solution to overcome the challenges.

Acknowledgement

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