A Theoretical Review of the Relationship between FL Students' Ability to Paraphrase Arguments and Their Critical Thinking Ability

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ABSTRACT

This review investigates the complex relationship between academic writing and the development of critical thinking skills, with a particular focus on the ability of paraphrasing arguments. Paraphrasing is a cognitive process that requires the writer to engage deeply with source material, requiring them to analyze, synthesize and reinterpret information. In addition to fostering comprehension, this deep engagement also fosters the ability to assess the validity and relevance of varied viewpoints. By examining various studies and theoretical frameworks, this review highlights the importance of mastering paraphrasing techniques as a fundamental element of academic writing. Furthermore, developing paraphrasing proficiency is vital for enhancing critical thinking, which is, in its turn, vital in achieving progress in complex academic discourses. The implications of these findings suggest that educational practices should prioritize teaching paraphrasing strategies to enhance students' analytical capabilities and overall academic success.

Key Words: *Academic writing, Paraphrasing, Cognitive strategies, Argument, Critical thinking.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Paraphrasing is one of academic writing important skills. Yamada (2003, as cited in MarzecStawiarska, 2019) defines paraphrasing in academic writing as a skill that "… goes beyond a mere restating of ideas in other words and frequently requires substantial inferencing and interpreting skills combined with elements of discipline knowledge" (p.115). Academic argument is different in meaning from that used in non-academic context. In everyday language, the term *argument* is used to describe a fight or a disagreement between people which is defined by Bailey, Geiger, Love & Wittenberg (n.d.) as a discussion or conversation that turns negative. In the context of this paper, *argument* refers to a concept used in academic writing which is also defined by Bailey *et al* (p.10) as a "… linguistic representation of a thinking "step" or act (called the inference), whereby someone comes to accept a statement as true (the conclusion) on the basis of accepting other statements as true (the premise or premises.)". In academic writing, paraphrasing is not merely an alternate to direct quotations; it also reflects the writer's understanding of the source text and his/her ability to handle people's ideas to get a comprehensive understanding of the source text" (Ramadhani, 2019). In addition, paraphrasing is an essential skill for postgraduate writing because according to Murphy (2009) it is fundamental to build a 'scholarly argument' and, therefore, to write a good literature review. Paraphrasing others' opinions and arguments requires implementing cognitive strategies in addition to utilizing meta-cognitive strategies. Using cognitive strategies according to Rahmat (2021) starts by comprehending the text, having some background knowledge of the content of the source text for better understanding, and retrieving in addition to merging the comprehended knowledge and background knowledge to succeed in understanding the source text, while metacognitive strategies, according to her, generally comprise the attempts of the writers to develop their cognitive knowledge to enhance their self-awareness, plan and organize their own learning, and for progress monitoring. Finally, shedding the light on academic writing and cognition provides us with insight into the role that paraphrasing plays in developing critical thinking.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRITICAL THINKING AND ACADEMIC WRITING

The etymology of the word '*critical',* according to Chambers's Etymological Dictionary of the English Language, shows that it comes from the Greek word '*kritikos'* which means one who is "skilled in judging literary and other productions" (p. 103). Thus, critical thinking entails judging, analyzing and evaluating others opinions, ideas, literary or scholarly works. Paul and Elder (2008, as cited in Fahim & Komijani, 2011), define CT as "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information …" (p. 26). In addition, Paul and Elder (2014) define it as "… that mode of thinking-about any subject, content, or problem in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it" (p.6). Accordingly, they describe critical thinking as a thinking process that comprises three components including an analytic, an evaluative, and a creative component. The roles of these three components are represented by *analyzing* the subject, content, or problem to *evaluate* it in order to *improve* it. Consequently, critical thinking plays a pivotal role in developing academic writing skills. On the other hand, Langer & Applebee (1987) assure that good writing and careful thinking are closely connected. That is, the written language, in addition to making the ideas attainable and more varied, it makes the ideas themselves clearer and more refined. Therefore, the relationship between critical thinking and academic writing is interrelated. Also, the academic writing of critical thinkers reflects their interpretations of what they critically read. In other words, to write arguments or to analyze, synthesize and evaluate others' arguments, the critical thinkers, according to Lane, J. (2021), judge and interpret others' ideas, arguments, and claims they read in the text.

3. ACADEMIC PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing in academic contexts plays a pivotal role in accomplishing some academic requirements such as, according to Keck (2006), synthesizing "… information from assigned readings … when writing assignments such as lab reports, article summaries and critiques, and research papers." (p. 262). Writing a literature review is one of academic writing forms that requires synthesizing and, therefore, paraphrasing skills. A literature review, according to UMKC Writing Studio, is considered as a type of critical review because it demands analyzing and evaluating other authors' ideas and arguments. Hence, paraphrasing what we read is an important skill in academic writing which is accomplished by utilizing our own words to transfer the others' thoughts and arguments without changing their meaning. In other words, it is "… the process of equal meaning transfer between the paraphrased text and the source one" (Salim & Al-Dulaimy, 2019, p. 486). Na and Mai (2017) assert that in order to paraphrase effectively, the students "… need to utilize complex cognitive and linguistic skills" (p. 10) so that they understand the meaning of the text first, and then they express it accurately and retain the semantic content at the same time. In addition, the American Psychological Association [APA] (2019) also defines paraphrasing in academic writing as restating "… others' ideas (or your own previously published idea) in your own words". It also states that paraphrasing enables us to summarize and synthesize these ideas whether taken from one or more sources by focusing on the information we need and comparing and contrasting these ideas. Moreover, academic paraphrasing is defined by Hirvela (2004, as cited in Hirvela & Du, 2013) as a skill that requires an efficient reading of the sources to identify the significant and purpose-related information and an effective incorporation of that material into the text being created. Consequently, academic paraphrasing is more than rewriting sentences in different words; it can also imply "… looking at the broader argument made by an author, and acknowledging that argument within your writing" (Learning Development CTL, 2016, p.1). Academic paraphrasing thus reflects your critical thinking ability by showing to what extent you understand the intent of the author and the argument being conveyed.

4. COGNITION AND PARAPHRASING

The basic aspect of Cognitive Learning Theory, according to Neisser (1967, as cited in Grider, 1993), entails the interaction between mental constituents and the information that is processed through these constituents. In other words, the ability to learn is determined by how the learner perceives, organizes, stores, and retrieves information. In his taxonomy, Bloom (1956) asserts that the cognitive domain objectives relate to the recognition of knowledge or retrieving it, in addition to the intellectual abilities and skills development. He classifies the cognitive process into six major classes including knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In addition, Çeliköz, Erişen, and Şahin (2016) state that cognition involves processes represented by mental activities which facilitate transferring information from one memory to another including

attention, perception, repetition, coding and retrieving information. Furthermore, cognitive learning involves utilizing cognition aspects such as thinking, conceiving, knowing, understanding, imaging, reasoning, judging and establishing relationship. (Sharma, Pathak & Sinha, 2017). Flower and Hayes (1981) emphasize that writing is a cognitive process which is defined as "… a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing." (p. 366). They maintain that the writing process itself consists of three major cognitive processes; that is, *planning*, *translating*, and *reviewing*, which are under the control of a *monitor*. These three major processes involve a number of sub-processes such as generating and organizing ideas in addition to evaluating and revising them. Pulungan (2016) asserts that, in the writing process, the cognitive processes are performed by the students by the integration of both their writing skills and their previously achieved knowledge. In academic writing, the writers employ cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. On one hand, the cognitive strategies, according to Goctu (2017), allow the writer to directly adapt the language material through utilizing skills such as "reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas. On the other hand, metacognitive strategies are performed to "… monitor the writing process consciously and evaluate the effectiveness of writing actions … to implement the actual writing actions." (Xiao, 2016, p.20). They involve three main skills; planning, monitoring and evaluating. In other words, they are used for planning a writing task, gathering and organizing ideas, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes and evaluating the task fulfillment (Goctu, 2017). Additionally, paraphrasing process is considered as a process that is cognitively demanding. Khrismawan & Widiati (2013) emphasize that it requires implementing cognitive and metacognitive strategies so that, on one hand, the writer changes the lexical and syntactic structure and, on the other hand, keeps the semantic content of the original text. They also find out that EFL learners implement a set of cognitive strategies of paraphrasing including reading chunks of the original text, using synonyms, evaluating chunks, reading full original text, using dictionary and thesaurus, changing structure, asking questions during the writing or paraphrasing process about, for example, the appropriateness of using specific word or synonym, evaluating full paraphrases by checking syntax structure and semantic content, changing information order, making inference to make sure that they have understood the idea, locating keywords to retain them in the paraphrased version of the text to maintain the semantic completeness, recognizing the structure of the paraphrased text, finding the main ides, summarizing, keeping technical terms, writing reference, self-questioning for comprehension, using antonyms, and using hedging to maintain objectivity. Furthermore, their study reveals that the learners employ metacognitive paraphrasing strategies including production monitoring, comprehension monitoring, planning, production evaluation, ability evaluation, visual monitoring and strategy monitoring (Khrismawan & Widiati, 2013). In addition, according to Rahmat (2021), cognitive strategies that are utilized in paraphrasing process entail comprehending the original text, connecting it to background knowledge in addition to recalling information. Moreover, she finds that metacognitive strategies which are used by the students include planning, monitoring and checking their writing. Finally yet importantly, Zhang (2020) proved that EFL learners most frequently use **cognitive paraphrasing strategies** such as comprehending, analyzing, and summarizing strategies; then they implement the metacognitive strategies such as evaluating and, monitoring strategies. Cognitive strategies are associated with critical thinking. Cottrell (2005) defines critical thinking as a cognitive activity that implies using the mind, because thinking critically involves implementing cognitive processes including attention, categorization, selection, and judgment. Add to that, the basic element of critical thinking is the argument as CT requires the ability to construct arguments and judge the comprehended knowledge (Indrawatiningsih, 2018). Therefore, restating arguments requires implementing paraphrasing cognitive strategies and utilizing critical thinking ability.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, paraphrasing is a crucial skill in academic writing, going beyond mere restating to require inferencing, interpreting, and discipline knowledge. It is distinct from everyday language, where 'argument' implies conflict, but in academic writing, it represents a thinking process and is integral to constructing a scholarly argument. Paraphrasing not only reflects understanding but also aids in developing critical thinking, as it involves cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Therefore, mastering paraphrasing is essential for postgraduate writing and contributes to the development of cognition and strong scholarly arguments.

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