



## PARAPHRASING TECHNIQUES TO DEVELOP ACADEMIC WRITING IN AN ESL CONTEXT- AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** In an academic setting the students are required to submit assignments, project reports and research articles. Writing effective drafts calls for meticulous efforts in terms of presenting the facts and findings in a sequenced and accurate manner. Therefore, it is imperative for the students pursuing professional courses to become accomplished writers by developing effective writing skills. Therefore, with diligence, organization, practice, and inclination to learn the students acquire the skill of writing. Based on this backdrop an attempt has been made in this paper to teach the techniques of paraphrasing to the students of professional courses pursuing their Bachelors degree to develop academic writing. The texts have been drawn form various sources pertaining to different genres and themes. Therefore, the paper is based on the findings of the tasks administered to the students in the classroom during the English language lab sessions as part of the Bachelor's degree curriculum of the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Kukatpally, Andhra Pradesh.

**KEYWORDS:** Academic writing, paraphrasing techniques, organization, analyzing

### INTRODUCTION

Learning to write well is a difficult and lengthy process, as it seems to require more effort in terms of language and thought. Good writing skills are essential for academic success and writing is a pre requisite for many occupations and professions, where written work serves to provide the learners with some tangible evidence that they are making progress in the language.

In an academic context the students are required to draft several reports and also prepare several research papers as part of their project writing. This requires an interpretation, expansion and inference of the issues and texts. Therefore, writing a research

paper is considered as one of the indispensable prerequisites for professional students. Thus, the process of writing a research paper provides one of the most rewarding experiences one may encounter in academics. These aspects not only add credibility to the text but also support the claims made in any given context.

Becoming an experienced researcher and writer in any field or discipline takes a great deal of practice. Even the most seasoned academic veterans have had to learn how to write a research paper at some point in their career. Therefore, the study explores the texts drawn form various sources used for

engineering students pursuing their Bachelor's degree in Technology, to improve academic writing.

#### **Theoretical background:**

In this section an attempt has been made to understand the history of changing trends and perspectives in the teaching/ learning of L2 writing instruction. The section also highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches entailed in recent notions of research studies. Effective writing is a social act in which writers are expected to be aware of the context in which they are writing. In Socio constructivist approach to the teaching of writing in L2, writers are shown how to take on board the expectations and norms of the community to which they belong and how these expectations shape the established practices of writing within a given community.

According to Bizzel (1982) and Swales (1990) successful writing within a discourse community involves having an awareness of the community's values and expectations of a text and an ability to resolve the tension between writer's creative needs and the norms for writing generated by the consensus within the community.

Starfield (2004) also opines that in 'academic literacies' perspective students learn to switch practices between one setting and another, learn to understand, as they go, why they are doing this, and what each position implies.

Johns (1997) and Canagarajah (2002) suggest that the students are trained to 'act as researchers' (Johns: 1997) as a way of helping them write texts that consider the institutional and audience expectations of their particular fields of study. They argue that students can be trained to unpack the knowledge and skills that are necessary for membership of their particular academic community. They further emphasize the need to equip the students with the required skills to ask questions on the texts that they are required to produce, including the context in which the texts are located and the people who will be reading (and evaluating) their texts. This kind of process enables the students a text that fulfils these expectations.

Hence, current approaches to the teaching of writing postulate that students should perceive writing as a tool for learning that can be useful to them throughout their professional and personal lives.

As per the curriculum one of the objectives of the constitution of English lab is to equip the students with the adequate language skills. Some of the objectives enlisted in the syllabus is to teach them summary writing and paraphrasing. Therefore this study undertakes the teaching of paraphrasing.

**Teaching Paraphrasing:** Paraphrasing involves changing a text so that it is quite dissimilar to the source yet retains all the meaning. Effective paraphrasing is vital in academic writing to avoid the risk of plagiarism. In paraphrasing the ideas and thoughts taken from the original text are restated and rephrased using one's own words.

#### **Rubrics to the students: How to Paraphrase a text?**

- *Read the source carefully. It is essential that you understand it fully.*
- *Identify the main point(s) and key words.*
- *Cover the original text and rewrite it in your own words. Check that you have included the main points and essential information.*
- *Ensure that you keep the original meaning and maintain the same relationship between main ideas and supporting points.*
- *Words: Use synonyms (words or expression which have a similar meaning) where appropriate. Key words that are specialised subject vocabulary do not need to be changed.*
- *Identify the attitude of the authors to their subject (i.e. certain, uncertain, critical, etc) and make sure your paraphrase reflects this. Use the appropriate.*
- *Review your paraphrase checking that it accurately reflects the original text but is in your words and style.*
- *Record the original source (including the page number) so that you can provide a reference.*

**Sample texts for Paraphrasing****Examples**

Although paraphrasing techniques are used in summary writing, paraphrasing does not aim to shorten the length of a text, merely to restate the text.

**For example,**

- Evidence of a lost civilization has been found off the coast of china.

*Could be paraphrased as*

- Remains of an ancient society have been discovered in the sea near china.

**Read the text below and then decide which is the best paraphrase, (a) or (b).**

- **Text A.** Ancient Egypt collapsed in about 2180 B.C. studies conducted on the mud from the river Nile showed that at this time the mountain regions which feed the Nile suffered from a prolonged drought. This would have had a devastating effect on the ability of Egyptian society to feed itself.
- **Text B.** The sudden ending of Egyptian civilization over 4000 years ago was probably caused by changes in the weather in the region to the south. Without the regular river flooding there would not have been enough food.

**Administration of the tasks:**

The texts have been selected from different disciplines and themes. This was done not only to assess the knowledge of current affairs but also to facilitate the preparation for their placements. In the next section the study records the texts given to the students for paraphrasing taken from the newspaper articles. The texts are based on the themes related to politics, social crimes and inequities and technology.

**Title of the article 1: Face book Pest Comes Home To Prison**

A US-based engineer who hacked his colleagues' e-mail id to send out obscene mails and created a fake

profile of her on Face book came back home to Hyderabad in the small hours of Monday, and was received by the police at the airport. The CID's cyber crime unit said Sai Kumar's victim used to work in the same US Company as he and had recently returned to Hyderabad. She had apparently refused to marry him, and he decided to get back at to conceal his identity. ADGP (CID) S V Ramana Murthy said the girl lodged a complaint stating Kumar hacked her mail ID and sent out obscene content. "Based on information provided by service providers, the mails were traced to Kumar," Murthy said. Kumar confessed to his offence and said he befriended the girl by winning her sympathy with sob stories.

One day he proposed to her, but she said no. he tried emotional black mail, threatening to commit suicide. He gradually harassed her with abusive mails, sending obscene images to her friends and relatives from her email. He created a fake facebook profile of her and started damaging her character.

**Student excerpt-1**

*Now a day's face book is becoming a bane to some of innocent. Sai Kumar a US based Engineer created a fake profile on her face book in order to take revenge as she refused him to marry. Both of them used to work in the same US Company. He tried to blackmail her threatening to commit suicide. He harassed her with various thing by creating a fake face book. The girl loged.. a complain on Kumar. The CID cyber crime unit took up to solve....*

**Discussion of the Student excerpt-1**

- Introduction: The first line indicates the use of a topic sentence. However the second line is ambiguous especially the use of the prepositional phrase 'on her face book'*
- Precision: The students failed to use connectives and appropriate adjectives*
- Accuracy: there have been some spelling mistakes and inappropriate use of tense forms. The sentences are not complete and hammed up.*
- Comprehension: the text ensures good understanding on the part of the students.*

**Title of the article 2: No Lines with Online.**

Gone are the days, standing in lines or queues for longer hours with the fidelity of having the internet access. Days back the people used to stand lengthy for hours to get a ticket for journey, watching movie, even worshipping the god. With the access of internet everything has become a click far, making the life easy. In this rapid developing world, wasting time for filthy reasons like awaiting for something to get on is of no use. Even shopping for hours mugging the entire item becomes a stupid in the era of internet, a numerous online shopping facilities are available which deliver the ordered good directly to home. We should feel grateful to have such facilities and should utilize the applications to a larger extent. The customer needs to be aware of the impending threats and in receiving ensuring the reliable and branded products.

#### **Student excerpt-2**

*Internet access made easier for the people standing in the lines or queues for longer hours to get a ticket for journey, watching movie, worshipping the God. Internet provide facility for online shopping so that the time is be saved. It takes less time for getting any information. So we should feel grateful to have such facilities. One needs to be cautious about online shopping and its better to purchase from famous websites like e-bay or flip kart.*

#### **Discussion of the Student excerpt-2**

- a. *Introduction: Though the gist of the article is presented well the students failed to use some adjectives. Adjectives such as tediousness, futile efforts could have been used to describe the pains taking traditional modes of shopping.*
- b. *Precision: the text could have been expanded by detailing the advantages of online access.*
- c. *Accuracy: the text has been condensed. The use of long winding sentences could have been avoided*
- d. *Comprehension: Evidently the students have understood the text. However, the use of good vocabulary would have made the text more effective.*

#### **Title of the article 3**

##### **Girls Bartered In Pak for Peace in Family Fued**

A tribal council allegedly chaired by a Pakistani lawmaker decided to barter 13 minor girls in marriage to settle a dispute between two clans, prompting Supreme Court on Tuesday to take action against those responsible.

The 'Jirga' or council allegedly presided over by lawmaker Mir Tariq Masuri in Dera Bugti district of Balochistan last month decided to give away 13 girls aged between four and 16 years in marriage under the controversial 'vani' custom to resolve a dispute between two tribal groups. A bench of the Supreme court heard by Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary, which is hearing cases in the Balochistan capital of Quetta, took Suo Motu notice of the incident on Tuesday and directed officials to take action against those responsible.

The bench has summoned Masuri and other members of the jirga to appear in court on Wednesday. The dispute centered around the murder of a member of one tribal group by people from another clan. The council also imposed a fine of PNR 3 million on tribesmen involved in the dispute. However, Masuri, a member of the Baluchistan Assembly, denied chafing any meeting of the council. Masuri told the down news paper that no such 'jirga' was held in Dera Bugti. He further claimed he had been away from Dera: Bugti for the past three weeks. A senior official in Dera Bugti confirmed that the girls aged between four and 16 years were "bartered" to end the dispute. Vani is a controversial custom whereby girls, including minors, are given away in marriage to settle tribal disputes. Though the custom is illegal, it continues to be practiced by tribal in northwest and southwest Pakistan.

#### **Student Excerpt-3:**

*Girls battered in Pak for family feud. 'Vani' is a custom to resolve a dispute between two tribal groups. ' A tribal Council presided by Pakistan lawmaker Mir Tariq Masuri decided to batter is minor girls in marriage to settle a dispute. The dispute centered around the murder of a member of one*

Tribal group by people from another clan. A bench of supreme court take action against those who are responsible though the custom is illegal it continues to be practiced by tribal in Northwest of south west Pakistan.

#### Discussion of student Excerpt-3:

a. *Introduction: the original text is loaded with bombastic words such as bartered, allegedly, chafing, etc. However, the students did not repeat the original words and replaced them with simple terms.*

b. *Precision: the text has been toned up with a focus on the nature of the crime.*

c. *Accuracy: there have been traces of grammatical errors in terms of the wrong use of tenses and spellings.*

d. *Comprehension: it is evident that the students partly understood the text owing to the use of complex words and phrases. Moreover the theme is alien hence students could not comprehend and relate it to their culture and background.*

#### Title of the article 4:

#### Context NTPC plans another power plant near Vizag

India's major power producer National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) is speeding up the work for establishing 4,000 MW coal-fired green field power project near Visakhapatnam. As already existing Simhadri super thermal power plant has no space for further extension, the NTPC GM is awaiting for the site to get available. Though the project was mooted nearly two years ago after signing a draft, it has not moved forward after that. NTPC plans to supply power generated from this new project to AP and Karnataka. But to start power generation, it requires coal which was cancelled after allotting by HPCL. This new project is going to have coal linkage with coal India Ltd. Having success of NTPC Simhadri, they may import the coal from Indonesia which is now supplying coal to it.

#### Student excerpt-4

*NTPC is going to establish 4000 MW power project near Vizag, due to non availability of further extension of Simhadri power plant. Though the draft for the project is signed nearly two years ago it was not yet started*

*due to lack of coal. This project is going to link with coal India Ltd. for coal supply or may import the coal from Indonesia. The main aim of this project is to supply power to AP and Karnataka.*

#### Discussion of the Student excerpt-4

a. *Introduction: The introduction is well defined and simple. The students tried to summarise the text by condensing it.*

b. *Precision: As the text was simple relating to the theme of electricity generation using coal as a fuel, it was rephrased without missing the main details.*

c. *Accuracy: there were not many grammatical mistakes in terms of tense and sentence construction.*

d. *Comprehension: the text is not very exhaustive to comprehend. Hence leaving very narrow scope for the students to comprehend.*

#### CONCLUSION

To summarise, Raimes (1983, p. 10) articulates, that "the students do not write on a given topic in a restricted time and hand in the composition for the teacher to 'correct'" but "they explore a topic through writing, showing the teacher and each other their drafts, and using what they write to read over, think about, and move them on to new ideas" (p. 10). The texts drawn from various sources have been administered to the students in a graded manner. The students have substantially learnt the technique of paraphrasing enabling them to rephrase or summarise any quotation or a paragraph as part of their project / research writing. The students learnt to comprehend, interpret and evaluate the text on their own based on the clues and guidelines provided by the teacher. Based on various research studies

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