

Assessing Paraphrasing of English as a Foreign Language Learners at University Level

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Abstract—Paraphrasing means taking the words of another source and restating them, using your own vocabulary without interfering with the idea of the original text. Paraphrasing is used for many reasons such as avoiding using too much quotations in a paragraph, clarifying, and/or simplifying a complicated author's words in a quotation, and practicing close academic reading and writing. The present study deals with the concept of paraphrasing, in general, and evaluating specific groups of 4th-year Kurdish University English as a Foreign Language learners in particular, to investigate the main difficulties that the students face regarding this area. To conduct the study, the following hypotheses are proposed: (1) Advanced Kurdish University students of the English Department face difficulties in the area of paraphrasing. (2) Similar results will be obtained for participants in the English Department/ College of Basic Education/University of Sulaimani, English Department/College of Education/University of Charmo, English Departments/Colleges of Language/Sulaimani University, and English Departments/Colleges of Language/Cihan University. To verify the hypotheses, a pilot test and then a final test are adopted in conducting the study. Reliability and validity of the tests are verified, the subjects are (50) randomly selected students of four English Departments of three universities in Kurdistan. The results obtained from the tests have been analyzed statistically, as well as diagnosing the students' errors. The study ended up with some conclusions.

Index Terms—Final test, Hypotheses, Paraphrasing problems, Pilot test, Reliability, Validity.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Paraphrasing stands for sameness of meaning between different wordings” (Antonia et al., 2011). Paraphrasing is one of the techniques of incorporating sources in which every

writer is allowed to borrow the author's ideas and restate them into their own words. Hence, students are about to think and use their own ideas when they want to paraphrase.

It is found that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in English Department are unable to paraphrase properly since they tend to copy the author's words directly. If this problem is continuously ignored, it will be dangerous for the students because they can be charged with inadvertent plagiarism. This study is intended to investigate EFL students' problems in writing paraphrases and the reasons behind their difficulties.

The present study aims at:

1. Identifying the abilities of Kurdish EFL advanced students in the area of paraphrasing
2. Analyzing their test, so as to know the difficulties they face in this area
3. Classifying and analyzing the students' errors relying on the results obtained from some tests designed for the purpose of the problem of the study.

The problem of this study is that Kurdish EFL learners study EFL for at least 12 years before joining the university. Yet, they seem not to be able to use English adequately. The reason behind this failure could be attributed to reading and writing, grammar, teachers, and/or the learners themselves. The current study tries to answer the following questions:

- To what extent are the students able to paraphrase English text?
- What are the main difficulties that the students may face in this specific area? And what are the reasons behind these difficulties?
- What are the errors that the students suffer from?

A. Procedure and Limitation

To fulfill the aim of the study four groups of 4th-year students in the Department of English from each of Basic Education College, College of Language/University of Sulaimani, College of Education/University of Charmo, and College of Language/University of Cihan will be selected. Those students are going to be pre-tested in writing paraphrasing, after 2 weeks they will be post-tested. The causes behind the students' errors will be highlighted then

the study comes up with conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions. The researcher has chosen 4th year students, because they have studied different subjects about writing and they have written a lot of paragraphs during their study.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Concept of Paraphrasing*

Paraphrasing is a very important skill which each student should have; it helps them to write academically and to give credit to the owners. Unfortunately, it is not exceptional in the region of difficulties by any means, especially for EFL students, because there are so many differences and similarities between their first language (L1) and the foreign language. Before talking about the reasons of bad paraphrasing, we need to mention paraphrasing pitfalls which cause plagiarism and poor paraphrasing. Horkoff (2015) states that dangers, when dealing with paraphrasing, can be categorized into eight failures that occur in paraphrasing; misreading the main text, too much of the original is included, omitting the valuable information, different point of view to be added, some students or researchers summarize rather than paraphrase, unsuited using unsuited synonyms, making the meaning narrow or expanded than the original, and also not documenting them. She defines paraphrasing as “a precise restatement, in your own words, of the content of a passage, focusing on the main idea(s), and the example(s) and/or detail(s).”

Hirvela and Du (2013) state various roles of paraphrasing, one of them is that the students’ abilities to read and write will be known to the teachers since the first step in paraphrasing is to comprehend the original text first and then be able to rewrite it academically. It is easy to use quotations in borrowing a text from a source, but the important part is the student’s ability to capture the gist of the complicated author’s words. In addition to providing insight to the teachers, students can practice their close reading and writing through paraphrasing. Hence, the paraphrase is a form of study to enhance student’s skills.

Purdue University also states that paraphrase is used so as to avoid using too much quotations in a material, and another reason for using paraphrasing, as they mentioned, is that it helps in clarifying and/or simplifying a complicated or a difficult to understand quote written by the original author, it helps readers to grasp the full meaning of the original through the paraphrased one.

Coming to the reasons these failures occur, one of the main reasons for facing hardships when paraphrasing is the language, it can be a puzzling deed to learn completely, students’ experience with different vocabulary and their syntax is very important. “Text readability and familiarity with the sentence structures and words that appear in some texts also affect paraphrasing performances.” (Liao and Tseng, 2010) Hence, this low proficiency causes them to have a very little knowledge in summarizing a context. One thing Roig came to find was that the easy-to-understand texts were much easier for a group of students to paraphrase in

contrast to another group of students whom paraphrased a more difficult one. From this, we know that students’ capacity to comprehend a context is limited and they cannot paraphrase something beyond their comprehension ability (qtd in. Liao and Tseng, 2010). This is because “some students try to paraphrase at the sentence level rather than the ideas level” (qtd in. Hayuningrum and Yulia, 2017). Linguistic is challenging for everyone, especially for foreign language learners (FLL) because it is not their second or L1. Furthermore, students’ paraphrasing performance may be affected by their cognitive and language development immaturity (Campbell, 1990). As Straw thinks one of the reasons for plagiarism or a bad paraphrase is poor academic performance, as it is due to their low proficiency in the language (2002). Tertiary way of writing is different from everyday language, and most EFL students struggle to write academically, as they have not been taught much of it. Their inadequacy awareness of the subject matter leads students to use texts in an inappropriate manner, when they cannot solve a problem. A legal paraphrasing is for sure caused by a narrow writing competence which most EFL have.

One thing all EFL students face is that their L1 is very different from the foreign language, especially in Kurdistan. They have a very different viewing of things from the native speakers or ESL learners of that language. Hence, thinking in their L1 is quite another problem because what most students do is rewrite the original text in their L1 and translate it into a foreign language. “Translate an original sentence from English to L1, paraphrase it in L1, and then translate the paraphrased sentence from L1 to English” (Hong, 2010). As a result, the structure they have used in their foreign language is reflective of the L1 and it can be a wrong paraphrase. Hence, when writing in a language, students need to think in that language instead of their L1.

Another reason these learners face challenges is cultural ignorance. As a matter of fact, it is a teacher’s role to teach about the target language culture, but some students when teaching a foreign language “in U.S., some students say: “this is a language class. We do not want culture rammed down our throats” (Chavez, 2002). It is the culture that creates the language; students need to learn about cultural behaviors and attitudes in literature classes. If one does not have information about the culture of a language, they cannot possibly go near advanced speaker of that language.

All these reasons are easy to deal with; they can be taught one step at a time. Students can enrich their foreign language learning, by comprehending more vocabulary and words, so that they can understand difficult texts to paraphrase. Moreover, they can start to take courses for learning academic writing as well as about cultures in literature courses. After all, as Gilmore (2008) states; “the problem with paraphrasing frankly, is that most students have not learned to do it well.” What most teachers do is to teach learners how to avoid plagiarism, but they do not teach them how to paraphrase at all. Their focus is on avoiding poor paraphrasing instead of good paraphrasing. Or maybe their way of teaching them is wrong. In the following section, we will discuss teaching paraphrases.

B. Literature Review

Many studies have been administered about the problem students encounter, but the most related ones are chosen for this research paper. The first one is Andrea Elizalde Esain conducted a study in 2015, entitled “*The Challenge of Paraphrasing*,” the subjects of the study were either native speakers of Spanish or bilingual speakers of Spanish and Basque.

Liao and Tseng (2010) have a study entitled “*Students’ Behaviors and Views of Paraphrasing and Inappropriate Textual Borrowing in an EFL Academic Setting*” in the year. This study was conducted in Taiwan; the participants were also Taiwanese.

Another research paper entitled “*Students’ Problems in Writing Paraphrases in Research Paper Writing Class*,” is conducted by Herdiansari Hayuningrum and Yulia (2017). The study was carried on in Sanata Dharma University,

C. Method, Design, and Procedure

“Tests are used to measure the ability of a group of participants; in most cases, it includes some questions to be answered and then analyzed. In this case of study, qualitative data are collected from the tests, which is “usually interested in providing detailed descriptions of smaller groups of individuals... Answers the questions about *how* and *why*, rather than *what*... It will try to offer a detailed examination of the (flaws)” (Groom, 2011).

There are many purposes behind testing, but, generally, they are used to assess their learning, to tell the teacher about what to teach next, evaluate the methods of teaching, and give an idea to the learner about their strengths and weakness. The usage of test in this research paper is to know how well the 4th-year students writing performances are, and how well is their academic writing, which means knowing their knowledge in the academic writing field, their intellect in the language.

The test included only one question (Appendix A), and it consists of a paragraph, the students asked to read it then paraphrase the whole paragraph based on what they understood. Finally, they have to cite them properly. Citation, grammar, diction, spelling, punctuation, paraphrasing, appropriate content, unity, coherence, and organizing were the items of this question. If their response was correct, they would get (1) mark for each item, and the whole question was on 10 marks. This question was aimed to show:

1. Student’s comprehension to organize and unify a context according to the events in the story

2. Their linguistic performances in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling
3. Their capability to connect their paraphrasing with the story in its coherence and main understanding.

As Ur has stated it as “dictation” test, which is “mainly tests spelling, perhaps punctuation, and... People can only usually write words down accurately from (a paragraph) if they understand them” (1996).

According to alpha Cronbach’s’ formula and using the SPSS program at the recognition level the reliability test of the groups that participate at this test is as the followings:

1. College of Basic Education/Sulaimani University is 0.725
2. College of Basic Education/Charmo University is 0.804
3. Collage of Language/Sulaimani University is 0.83
4. Collage of Language/Cihan University is 0.81.

The results of the test reliability are between zero and one that is why the test is reliable according to the rules of reliability.

The final test was conducted at the beginning of December 2019. Moreover, the participants were allowed to ask any questions related to the test.

D. Data Analysis

In this study, the interpretation of the capability of Kurdish learners of EFL is represented through a test applied on 29 4th-year students of English Department from various universities. To analyze the students’ written performances more accurately giving logical reasoning, the researchers will discuss the data of each university separately. The participants were separated into four groups and named accordingly:

- Group A for College of Basic Education/University of Sulaimani
- Group B for College of Language/University of Sulaimani
- Group C for College of Basic Education/University of Charmo
- Group D for College of Language/University of Cihan.

Group A

Table I shows this group’s writing comprehension data, consist of nine students:

TABLE I
GROUP A’S RESULT IN THE FIRST QUESTION

No.	Items	Correct responses	Percentage of correct responses	Incorrect responses	Percentage of incorrect responses
1	Citation	3	33.3	6	66.7
2	Grammar	9	100	0	0
3	Diction	6	66.7	3	33.3
4	Spelling	8	89	1	11
5	Punctuation	6	66.7	3	33.3
6	Paraphrasing	3	33.3	6	66.7
7	Appropriate content	7	77.8	2	22
8	Unity	4	44.4	5	55.5
9	Coherence	5	55.5	5	44.4
10	Organizing	6	66.7	3	33.3

As it is shown in Table I, the first item is citation. In this case, EFL students are hesitant to cite a source, because in most cases they do not know how or they do not consider it important. As a result, a very few of 33.3% of the students cited the story of the first question. The second item is the grammar, which shows an excellent result for this group of participants. The reason for this 100% success in grammar is that this group have studied the subject matter in all of their 4 years of college courses. More than half of the participants, 66.7%, got the third item, diction (choice of vocabulary), and correct. This group's learners tried hard to enrich their vocabulary range, because they had different courses throughout all of their academic years such as; literature of all kind, translation, and vocabulary courses. Spelling is another item, 89% of the learners scored correctly in spelling and this might be due to their enriched vocabulary competence. Most participants in this group know how to use punctuation properly in a paragraph, which is the fifth item. This may have lead back to the reason of their courses specialized about writing comprehension and using punctuation in their first, second, and third academic year of college. Unfortunately, the participants missed the main focus of this study which is paraphrasing techniques. Students' inability to paraphrase could be due to their confusion about writing in general. Most students do not know how to paraphrase, some of them summarize the text, some of them give the moral of the story, and some of them change some words, and so on. About 77.8% of the learners got appropriate content correct, meaning they comprehend the foreign language decently. Although learners are able to fully understand a context given to them, <1/2 of them know how to give an accurate coherence of the context. It is probably because of their lack of ability to logically arrange their understanding. Another item is unity; learners of this group do not have knowledge of unifying a written material. This item can be connected to the previous item, the lack of using coherence causes bad unity in their paraphrasing. Even though half of them could do it, but the problem is their paraphrasing is not good, so the unity is weak in their paraphrase. Last but not least, 66.7% of the participants were successful in organizing the events in the story, <1/3 of them could not organize them properly and the researchers believe that it may be caused by their confusion of not knowing how to paraphrase, they probably think paraphrasing means mixing the events between each other which it is not true.

Group B

Seven students fall into this group, Table II shows their writing comprehension:

Citation is also a problem for EFL students, majority of the students do not see a point in citing a text which they have paraphrased and they think it is their idea; however, it is the author's idea in other words. Only 14.2% of the students have cited the source, and it is a quite low number. Another item is grammar, fortunately 6 out of 7 students, meaning 85.7% of the students have their grammar correct. This can be due to their high proficiency for this group of participants, because they have had a good background

of the language. The third item is diction, their choice of vocabulary is quite good, and more than half of them had a valid selection of words when they write academically. Favorably, the students' spelling performance as the data show is 100% successes this is caused by most of their tests are done on paper, they have a few oral test or they do not have it at all. As for punctuation, this group's participants failed using them; only one student out of 7 has had a good punctuation. The students may not know where the pauses and the stops in a sentence are. Another item is paraphrasing techniques, in this group, fortunately, half of them had a good paraphrasing technique. Only 43% of the students failed to paraphrase, which is due to their lack of the language knowledge and vocabulary. Majority of the students are able to perform the next item, which is appropriate content. This again is due to their ability to understand and comprehend a story. In the next item, which is unity, is easy compared to their paraphrasing ability. Although they do not know paraphrasing correctly, they still know how to unify their paraphrase. Nearly half of them have done unity accurately. Coherence is another 100% success, because the students know how to give a good understanding of the paraphrased text. They know how to arrange them in a way that they could be understood well. However, this is different from the last item. The last item is organizing in which 43% of the student do not know how to do it. That is because they do not know where the main sentences in a paragraph are and how to give a step by step arrangement.

Group C

The participants' number for this group is four; their written performance is presented in Table III:

For this group, one out of four students cited the original text. Most of their students do not know how dangerous plagiarism is, and they have not been taught about citation importance. Unfortunately, the second item is a complete fail (100%) for this group. The second item is grammar; they failed grammar because their linguistic courses are not effective enough for them to learn the language efficiently. Half of them have a good choice of vocabulary; they used the correct words matching with the sentence. Those students who used suitable words have tried hard to learn appropriate synonyms. Spelling is the fourth item in which most of the students (75%) failed to have a correct spelling in their writing competence, which is because of their ignorance of not being corrected either by themselves or the lecturers. However, punctuation like grammar was a complete fail. The cause of this is that they lack practice; they do not practice enough to learn how to use punctuations suitably. Apart from these items, this group's paraphrasing technique needs improvement, 75% of the students failed this item. This is a result of their poor linguistic performances, including grammar and diction. Another item is using appropriate content in the paraphrase which matches with the original, and it was 100% accomplished. It is in the account of their capability to relate to the original in their writing, using their own ideas. Unity, another item, shows that half of the participants did well and half of them did not, because of their

inability to arrange their ideas which they brainstorm and recognizing the important sentences from unimportant ones. In coherence, the next item, the students did well. Only one participant out of four failed in using coherence. This failure is a result of not being able to express their understanding of the original text in a correct way. Organizing is the last item, half of the students succeeded in using it. However, half of them did not, which is due to their misunderstanding

of paraphrase, some of them think the events in the original text is acceptable to be disarranged.

Group D

This group, as it is introduced in Table IV, has nine learners for the first question:

Only one of the participants has cited the original source in their written performance, because of their ignorance of professional writing, they think it is extra to cite a source.

TABLE II
GROUP B'S RESULT IN THE FIRST QUESTION

No.	Items	Correct responses	Percentage of correct responses	Incorrect responses	Percentage of incorrect responses
1	Citation	1	14.2	6	85.7
2	Grammar	6	85.7	1	14.2
3	Diction	5	71.4	2	28.6
4	Spelling	7	100	0	0
5	Punctuation	1	14.2	6	85.7
6	Paraphrasing	4	57.1	3	43
7	Appropriate content	5	71.4	2	28.6
8	Unity	4	57.1	3	43
9	Coherence	7	100	0	0
10	Organizing	4	57.1	3	43

TABLE III
GROUP C'S RESULT IN THE FIRST QUESTION

No.	Items	Correct responses	Percentage of correct responses	Incorrect responses	Percentage of incorrect responses
1	Citation	1	25	3	75
2	Grammar	0	0	4	100
3	Diction	2	50	2	50
4	Spelling	1	25	3	75
5	Punctuation	0	0	4	100
6	Paraphrasing	1	25	3	75
7	Appropriate content	4	100	0	0
8	Unity	2	50	2	50
9	Coherence	3	75	1	25
10	Organizing	2	50	2	50

TABLE IV
GROUP D'S RESULT IN THE FIRST QUESTION

Items	Correct responses	Percentage of correct responses	Incorrect responses	Percentage of incorrect responses
1	1	11.1	8	89
2	3	33.3	6	66.7
3	4	44.4	5	55.6
4	4	44.4	5	55.6
5	1	11.1	8	89
6	1	11.1	8	89
7	3	33.3	6	66.7
8	3	33.3	6	66.7
9	2	22.2	7	77.8
10	3	33.3	6	66.7

TABLE V
STUDENTS RESPONSE ACCORDING TO UNIVERSITIES

Groups	University's name	College name	Correct response	Percentage of correct response	Incorrect response	Percentage of in correct
Group A	University of Sulaimani	College of Basic Education	57	63.34	34	36.62
Group B	University of Sulaimani	College of Languages	44	62.82	26	37.18
Group C	University of Charmo	College of Basic Education	16	40	24	60
Group D	University of Cihan	College of Languages	25	27.75	65	72.25
Average			37	50.77	35.5	51.01

The second item, grammar, has a 33.3% negative result. This group's grammar is expected to be better than the other groups because it is a private university. Above all this, their grammar performance can be the reason of not trying hard enough to achieve their goal. Coming to another item, which is diction, has a low rate of success which is 44.4%, because of not using the words that they learn in the classes in their daily life or when they start to write. Spelling, the fourth item, again 44.4% of the students had a good spelling skill. On the other hand, 55.6% had weak spelling because of having different reading for the words from the way they are spelled. In the next item, they lack using punctuations, only 11.1% of the students have used them appropriately. Because they have not been taught well and their mistake may not have been corrected. This group's performance in paraphrasing is not suitable, same as the other groups, again it is caused by their confusion and conflicts thought of not differentiating between summarizing and paraphrasing. Their rate of success is only one student out of nine. Item number seven refers to appropriate content in which 33.3% can use the item acceptably. Above the fact that some of them did not paraphrase well, they also could not relate to the original in their writing, and explain everything in their paraphrase based on the original. And in unity 66.7% of the participants failed to use it, as they have not been told how to brainstorm and arrange the ideas about something. Some students wrote irrelevant sentences in the paraphrase. And also, coherence was another problem for them, 77.8% of the students do not know about coherence and they confuse it with other devices of writing. Organizing had 66.7% failure result, those who did not know about organizing may be due to their inability to comprehend the text and arrange the events.

E. The Overall Summary

In comparison between Group A and Group C, as it is shown in Table V, Group A's chance of being successful in writing academically and avoiding plagiarism in their written performance is 63.32%. This result is caused by two main reasons; first, the participants of this group have a good background of the language from television shows, social media, etc. Second, the lecturers in this group are qualified to teach these subject matters, which help students learn the language more in a professional way. In contrast to Group C's writing competence, their rate of failure is higher than success; they are 40% capable of having a well-paraphrased text. One main reason for this low rate is not having their services taken care of, such as; their learning environment, the lecturers not being qualified enough, and not practicing the skills enough.

Comparing Group B and Group D are quite shocking as it is shown in Table V. The rate of success in Group B is 62.82%. However, in Group D, it is 50% rate of success. Group D is expected to do better because it is a private university, and Group B is not. Students of Group B learn literature more than another group, and literature is one of the main reasons to learn how to write professionally. And

learners of this group learn French language in their first academic year of college, as English language is influenced by French language. On the other hand, most students of Group D had a bad result in their high school degree, and their courses are not as productive as Group B's.

The comparison between Group A and Group B is competitive. In Group A, the result is 63.32%, meaning that their paraphrasing competence is better than Group B, whose result was 62.82%. These two groups are from the same university, the teachers of this university are more qualified and capable of teaching the language skills, and the students have entered these colleges with high score in their high school degree.

III. CONCLUSION

The current study has come up with some significant conclusions; the first hypothesis is valid because generally advanced Kurdish EFL learners face many difficulties in writing paraphrases. The second hypothesis is not reasonable, as the students of the English Department/ College of Basic Education/University of Sulaimani do not have difficulties in writing paraphrases; however, English Department students/College of Education/University of Charmo face difficulties in the area of writing paraphrases. The third hypothesis is again not valid since English Department/College of Language/University of Sulaimani does not have difficulty in this area, in contrast of the English Department/College of Language/Cihan University.

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APPENDICES

Appendix (A): The students' tests before validity

University of Sulaimani
College of Basic Education
Department of English.

A test for 4th year students

Dear Students,

The present test has been conducted under the title "Assessing Paraphrasing of EFL Learners at University Level." The aims of this study are to assess your ability in writing and paraphrasing as well as the problems that ESL learners encounter in this area. Your answers to the question are important sources of information to enrich the study. Thanks for your time, effort, and cooperation.

Q1/Read the following short story, then paraphrase it in your own words without changing the meaning:

Dirty Tricks Seldom Work

A fox was once caught in a trap. It was only after a tough struggle that she could get free. But, to her sorrow, her beautiful tail had been cut off and left in the trap.

"How ugly I shall look!" moaned the fox, "won't the other foxes laugh at me?"

Thinking hard, the fox hit upon a plan to save herself from being laughed at.

She called a meeting of his friends and said, "Brothers! Have you ever wondered why after all, we carry these long tails?" "Let us cut them off and be free from their nuisance."

But the other foxes had noticed her cut-off tail. They laughed aloud and replied, "You used to say that tails looked very fine when your own was all right. Now that you have lost yours, you want us to lose ours too" (*A Fox without Tail*).