

Assessing and Improving Paraphrasing Competence in FSL

Jasmina Milićević and Alexandra Tsedryk

Dalhousie University
6135 University Avenue
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 4P9, Canada
jmilicev@dal.ca | atsedryk@dal.ca

Abstract

We present preliminary results of a study whose goals are 1) to test the paraphrasing competence of advanced adult learners of French as a Second Language (= FSL), 2) assess their learning needs and 3) suggest possible tools for teaching them paraphrasing techniques.

Keywords

Paraphrasing competence, adult FSL learner, user-friendly paraphrasing rules

1 Paraphrasing Competence in the First and Second Language

As noted by many (for instance, Žolkovskij & Mel'čuk 1967, Fuchs 1980, Mel'čuk 1992, Martinot 2003), paraphrasing competence, i.e., the capacity to produce paraphrases, or quasi-synonymous sentences, like those in (1), is part and parcel of linguistic competence.

- (1) a. *Marc a toujours beaucoup de questions pour le professeur de français* 'Marc has always many questions for the French teacher.'
b. *Marc pose toujours beaucoup de questions dans le cours de français* 'Marc asks always many questions in French class.'

Native speakers (henceforth, L1 speakers) need paraphrasing in order to get around difficulties inherent to speech production (restricted lexical and syntactic co-occurrence, lexical gaps, etc.) or to reformulate their discourse for reasons of clarity and style. This is all the more true for language learners (or L2 speakers), who desperately need spare paraphrastic variants to avoid "crashes in generation". (Paraphrases are also needed for speech comprehension, as a way to seize the content of an utterance by reformulating it. However, in this paper we will set aside the comprehension of paraphrases and concentrate solely on their production.)

Recently, there has been growing interest in the application of linguistic models of paraphrasing in language assessment and teaching; although not to the extent one would hope for, considering the importance of this phenomenon.

Assessment of the paraphrasing competence in French speaking children aged 4 to 10 is the subject of Martinot (in press). Paraphrasing competence is acquired gradually, throughout childhood, starting with the acquisition of (in Martinot's terms) descriptive paraphrases (*Elle sera ta voisine* 'She [a classmate] will be your neighbor' ~ *Elle sera à côté de toi* 'She will be [sitting] at

your side’), followed by semantic paraphrases (*Julie chuchota à Tom ...* ‘Julie whispered to Tom’ ~ *La petite souffla à son voisin ...* ‘The little girl murmured to her neighbor’) and formal paraphrases (*Elle tenait par la main une petite fille* ‘She was holding by hand a little girl’ ~ *La maîtresse, elle la tient par la main* ‘The teacher, she is holding her by hand’) till, finally, extralinguistic paraphrases are acquired (*Un jour une nouvelle fille arriva dans une école* ‘One day a new girl came to a school’ ~ *Elle tenait par la main une petite fille que personne n’avait encore jamais vue* ‘She was holding by hand a little girl whom no one had seen before’).

Russo & Pippa (2004) devised a test in which the ability to paraphrase was used as a predictor of the ability to interpret. Students of an interpretation school who scored high on the paraphrase test were also more successful in interpreting and graduated sooner than those who had poorer paraphrasing skills. They resorted to complex paraphrasing techniques, reformulative paraphrase in the authors’ terms, making use of implication, condensation, generalization and particularization of meaning. The following is an example of condensation: [...] *capace di apportare una soluzione di pace e giustizia in Medio Oriente* ‘able to bring a solution of peace and justice to problems in the Middle East’ ~ [...] *per trovare una soluzione ai problemi medioorientali* ‘in order to find a solution for Middle East problems’.

Paraphrasing for specific purposes—as a way to avoid plagiarism—was studied, for example, in Keck (2006) and McInnis (2009). The former distinguished four types of reformulations, based on their proximity to the original text: near copy, minimal revision, moderate revision and important revision. An example of the last type of modification follows: *Children speak more like adults, dress more like adults and behave more like adults than they used to.* ~ *It seems that things that children do and even what they wear are more adult-like than ever before.* McInnis (2009) reports that L1 and L2 speakers alike have insufficient skills when it comes to reformulation and insist on the importance of teaching paraphrasing techniques in academic writing courses.

As for teaching tools intended to boost paraphrasing competence of language learners, their development has received even less attention. Polguère (2004) and Milićević (2008) and (2009) propose learner-friendly adaptations of linguistic formalisms used by Meaning-Text theory (Mel’čuk 1997, Kahane 2003) for paraphrase modeling: lexical functions (Wanner, ed., 1996) and paraphrasing rules (Žolkovskij & Mel’čuk 1967, Mel’čuk 1992, Milićević 2007).

In the rest of this paper we present our own test for assessing the paraphrasing competence of FSL learners (section 2) and offer some suggestions as to how to improve the latter (section 3). We conclude with a brief summary of the research presented in the paper (section 4).

We target adult FSL learners and advocate an explicit teaching of paraphrase and related concepts. Our approach is anchored in Meaning-Text linguistic theory, a framework that has placed paraphrasing in the centre of linguistic research and has developed powerful formal tools for its modeling, tools that can be—and, as we saw, have to some extent already been—adapted for teaching purposes.

2 Assessing Paraphrasing Competence of FSL Learners

We now describe the test and present a qualitative and quantitative analyses of the results.

2.1 Test Design

We asked some twenty FSL learners, first and third year university students having gone through French immersion prior to university, to propose paraphrases for five sentences—sentence (1) and the following four:

- (2) a. *Nathalie a correctement analysé cette phrase difficile* ‘Nathalie correctly analyzed that difficult sentence.’
b. *Julie admire énormément l’auteur de ce roman historique* ‘Julie admires enormously the author of this historic novel.’
c. *Paul a beaucoup d’enthousiasme pour le théâtre* ‘Paul has a lot of enthusiasm for the theatre.’¹
d. *Ce professeur m’a donné un bon conseil* ‘This professor gave me a good piece of advice.’

These sentences were chosen because, while being lexically and structurally relatively simple, they could in principle yield a large number of paraphrases, involving, in particular, nominalizations and support verbs, i.e., transformations the students participating in the test were supposed to be familiar with.

A control group consisting of an equal number of native speakers performed the same task, the hypothesis being that the natives would perform better. Neither group had benefited from special training concerning paraphrasing; the concept was explained and illustrated immediately before the test.

The participants were supposed to give three paraphrases per sentence (some produced less). Sentences judged not sufficiently synonymous to the initial ones were discarded; for instance, (3a) was not recognized as a valid paraphrase of the sentences in (1). Sentences that preserved the initial meaning but presented errors or stylistic inadequacies were retained as “defective” paraphrases; one such paraphrase of (1) is (3b), which means the same as the former but contains a wrong support verb for QUESTION ‘question’ (**demander* lit. ‘ask’ instead of *poser* lit. ‘put’).

- (3) a. *La curiosité de Marc pour le français est sans fond* ‘Marc’s curiosity for French is without limit.’
b. *Marc *demande toujours beaucoup de questions à son professeur de français* ‘Marc always asks a lot of questions to his French teacher.’

Following this method, we obtained two corpora of paraphrases, one produced by L2 and the other by L1 speakers, each containing some 300 sentences.

We compared the two corpora looking for significative differences with respect to 1) the preservation of the paraphrasing link (is the proposed sentence a valid paraphrase of, i.e., sufficiently synonymous with, the initial sentence?); 2) the exactness of the paraphrasing link (is the proposed sentence an exact or near paraphrase of the initial sentence?); 3) the paraphrasing techniques used (inference, semantic decomposition, lexical substitution...) and 4) the formal correctness (grammaticality and stylistic acceptability) of the proposed paraphrases.

2.2 Qualitative Analysis of Results

In both L1 and L2 corpora there were only a few cases in which the paraphrasing link with the initial sentence was not preserved. The vast majority of valid paraphrases in both corpora were approximate (rather than exact) paraphrases. As for the types of paraphrases represented in our corpora, we refer to them according to the standard Meaning-Text paraphrase typology

¹ This sentence is ambiguous, due to the polysemy of THÉÂTRE ‘theater’, which can be interpreted either as ‘theater plays (one is watching)’ or ‘artistic activity (one is involved as an actor)’. The first reading is pragmatically more plausible, but we got paraphrases for both (which, of course, are not synonymous); cf., respectively, *Paul aime regarder les pièces de théâtre* ‘Paul likes watching theater plays’ and *Paul aime faire du théâtre* ‘Paul likes doing theater’.

(Milićević 2007: 138ff). Both corpora contained a full range of paraphrase types distinguished within our framework, albeit used in different proportions (see below, subsection 2.3).

• Types of paraphrases in L1 & L2 corpora

Extralinguistic paraphrases

Roughly speaking, these are paraphrases whose production requires, beside the knowledge of a language, some encyclopedic and pragmatic knowledge, as well as the use of logical capabilities. In our corpora, extralinguistic paraphrases came in three subtypes—referential, situational and encyclopedic, cf., respectively:

- (4) a. *Nathalie* ‘Nathalie’ ~ *l’étudiante* ‘the student’; *le* [professeur] ‘the [teacher]’ ~ *ce/son* [professeur] ~ ‘this/his [teacher]’
 b. [professeur] *de français* ‘[teacher] of French’ ~ [professeur] *de langue maternelle* ‘[teacher] of mother tongue’
 c. [professeur] *de français* ‘[teacher] of French’ ~ [professeur] *qui enseigne la langue de Molière* ‘[teacher] who teaches the language of Molière’²

Linguistic paraphrases

We outline here four major linguistic paraphrase types and only some of their subtypes, without mentioning the cases in which these different types were combined to produce a pair of paraphrases (which actually happened quite often).

—Semantic paraphrases

These paraphrases are either propositional (i.e., concerning a modification or a different expression of the propositional meaning), further divided into inferences, replacements, additions and decompositions, as in (5a)-(5d), or communicative (concerning different ‘‘information packaging’’), featuring theme and rheme focalization: see (5e)-(5f); in addition, (5e) has a different theme with respect to the source sentence.³ [In the examples below, P stands for a lexical meaning corresponding to a predicate (in the logical sense).]

- (5) a. *analyser P* ‘analyze P’ ~ *comprendre P* ‘understand P’
 b. *faire P toujours* ‘still do P’ ~ *ne pas cesser de faire P* ‘not stop doing P’
 c. *avoir analysé P* ‘have analyzed P’ ~ *avoir pu/su analyser P* ‘have known how/have been able to analyze P’
 d. *donner un conseil à quelqu’un* ‘give a piece of advice to someone’ ~ *lui dire ce qu’il doit faire* ‘tell him what he should do’
 e. [with respect to (2a)] *Cette phrase difficile, Nathalie l’a bien analysée* ‘That difficult sentence, N. analyzed it well.’
 f. [with respect to (2a)] *C’est cette phrase difficile que Nathalie a bien analysée* ‘It is that difficult sentence that N. analyzed well.’

—Lexical-syntactic paraphrases

We illustrate only major paraphrase subtypes: synonymic substitutions, simple and with light verb fission (6a-b); antonymic substitutions (6c) and converse substitutions, also simple (6d) and with light verb fission (6e). In the examples that follow, we use lexical

² It is quite possible that the phrase *langue de Molière* is so well-known to French speakers that it has to be considered as a synonym for *langue française*, in which case this would be an example of linguistic, more specifically, lexical paraphrases.

³ We believe that some communicative paraphrases in the corpus were produced spuriously, i.e., as a non intended result of word-order modifications. However, we have no way of ascertaining this.

function symbols (in Monaco font) without any explanation; we are relying on the reader's intuitive understanding of these examples.

- (6) a. [with Gener] *phrase* 'sentence' ~ *expression* 'expression'; [with Syn] *difficile* 'difficult' ~ *dure* 'hard'; [with Sing] *théâtre* 'theater' ~ *pièces de théâtre* 'theater plays'
- b. [with S₀] *X admire Y* 'X admires Y' ~ *X éprouve de l'admiration pour Y* 'X feels admiration for Y'; [with A₁] *X a de l'enthousiasme pour Y* 'X has enthusiasm for Y' ~ *X is enthousiaste concernant Y* 'X is enthusiastic when it comes to Y'
- c. *difficile* 'difficult' ~ *pas facile* <évident> 'not easy <obvious>'
- d. [Oper₁ ~ Oper₃] *X donne un conseil à Y* 'X gives a piece of advice Y' ~ *Y reçoit un conseil de X* 'Y gets a piece of advice from X'
- e. [with S₂] *X admire Y* 'X admires Y' ~ *Y est un idole de X* 'Y is X's idol'; [with copula] *X admire Y beaucoup* 'X admires Y a lot' ~ *L'admiration de X pour Y est grande* 'X's admiration for Y is big'

—Syntactic paraphrases

Four major types of syntactic paraphrases were found: part of speech conversion, word order variation, passivization and restructuring; cf., respectively:

- (7) a. *correctement* 'correctly' ~ *de façon correcte* 'in a correct manner'; *difficile* 'difficult' ~ *qui était difficile* 'that was difficult'
- b. *a correctement analysé P* 'has correctly analyzed P' ~ *a analysé P correctement* 'has analyzed P correctly'
- c. [with respect to (2d)] *Un bon conseil m'a été donné par ce prof* 'A good piece of advice was given to me by this teacher'
- d. [with respect to (2a)] *Cette phrase était difficile mais Nathalie l'a bien analysée* 'That sentence was difficult but Nathalie analyzed it well.'

• Formally incorrect paraphrases in L2 corpus

The ungrammatical or stylistically unacceptable paraphrases, due to lexical or/and syntactic errors, were, of course, overwhelmingly present in L2 corpus.

Paraphrases featuring lexical errors

Lexically deficient paraphrases contained both incorrect derivations and incorrect collocates, as shown respectively in (8a) and (8b):

- (8) a. [incorrect S₀] *X analyse Y correctement* 'X analyzes Y correctly' ~ **L'analyse de Y par X est correcte* 'X's analyzation of Y is correct'; [incorrect A₁] *X a de l'enthousiasme pour Y* 'X has enthusiasm for Y' ~ **X est enthousiastique concernant Y* 'X is enthusiast about Y'
- b. [incorrect value of Oper₁] *X a beaucoup de questions for Y* 'X has a lot of questions for Y' ~ **X demande beaucoup de questions à Y* 'X asks a lot of questions to Y'; [incorrect value of Bon] *donner un bon conseil* 'give a good piece of advice' ~ **conseiller soigneusement* 'advise carefully'

Paraphrases featuring syntactic errors

Syntactically problematic paraphrases contained errors in linear ordering, passivization, relativization and government:

- (9) a. [with respect to (2a)] **Correctement, Nathalie a analysé cette phrase difficile* 'Correctly, Nathalie has analyzed that difficult sentence'.
- b. **Le professeur de français est toujours posé beaucoup de questions par Marc.* 'The French teacher is always asked a lot of questions by Marc'.
- c. [with respect to (2b)] **L'auteur de ce roman est celui qui Julie admire énormément* 'The author of this historic novel is the one who Julie admires enormously'.

- d. **aimer d'aller au théâtre* 'to like that goes to the theater'; **sans faisant d'erreur* 'without make mistake'

Quite a few errors in the L2 corpus can be attributed to negative transfer from English, which is the mother tongue of most of the FSL students who participated in the test. Cf., for instance, the form of the adjective in (8a) and the attempt to use the indirect passive (featuring the Addressee in the Subject position), inexistant in French but common in English, in (9b).

2.3 Quantitative Analysis of Results

In order to measure the preservation of paraphrastic links and formal correctness of paraphrases, all produced sentences were divided into three subsets: 1) **P**: sentences that preserved the initial meaning and contained no errors (cf. (1)); 2) **?P**: sentences that preserved the initial meaning but contained grammatical, lexical or stylistic errors (cf. (3b) with respect to (1)); 3) **nonP**: sentences that did not preserve enough the initial meaning (cf. (3a) with respect to (1)). The percentage of each type of sentences in the L1 and L2 corpora is given in Figure 1:

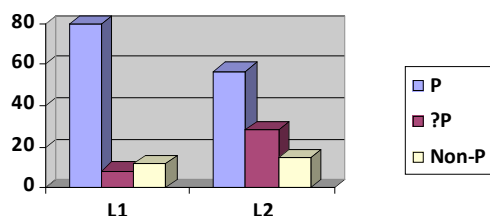


Figure 1: Preservation of paraphrastic links/Formal correctness of paraphrases: L1 vs. L2

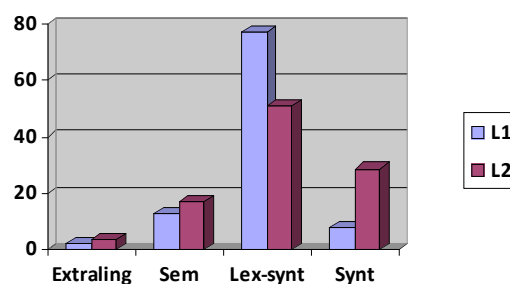


Figure 2: Paraphrase types (use of paraphrastic techniques): L1 vs. L2

Native speakers proposed more valid paraphrases than L2 learners (79, 4% vs. 56, 9 %), who in turn produced more formally incorrect paraphrases. The percentage of semantically equivalent sentences was relatively high in both groups while the percentage of non-paraphrases was low and approximately the same (12% for L1 and 15% for L2). These results indicate that both L1 and L2 participants intuitively understood the concept of paraphrase and were able to produce paraphrases.

The biggest difference observed is that the number of formally incorrect paraphrases was three times higher in the L2 corpus (28.1 %) than in the L1 corpus (8.6%).

With regard to paraphrastic techniques used by both groups of participants, we wanted to see, in particular, whether one group preferred certain paraphrasing techniques over others, and if so, in what proportion. We wanted to observe specific difficulties the L2 group experienced with paraphrastic techniques in order to be able to address them later on. Figure 2 shows the distribution (in percentages) of the four previously described types of paraphrases in the L1 and L2 corpora.

We can make the following three observations. First, both L2 and L1 subjects used all types of paraphrases. (This shows that there is no specific type of paraphrase completely ignored by L1 or L2 group.) Second, the use of extralinguistic paraphrases was rather restricted in both groups; they were mostly found in the L2 corpus (3.6 % in the L2 corpus vs. 2.2% in the L1 corpus). Third, the distribution of linguistic paraphrases was more or less even for the semantic type (12.5% in the L1 corpus vs. 16.8 % in the L2 corpus). It should be noted, however, that out of the 16.8% of semantic paraphrases in the L2 corpus, 5 %

represented communicative changes of the type illustrated in (5e)-(5f), which necessarily involve word order manipulations. The fact that this paraphrastic technique was found only in the L2 corpus indicates that L2 learners preferred syntactic restructuring of sentences to lexical substitutions and that, moreover, some of this restructuring may have been unintended (cf. footnote 3, p. 2). A more significant difference was observed in two types of paraphrases: lexical-syntactic and syntactic. The L1 subjects used more lexical means (77.5 % in the L1 corpus vs. 51% in the L2 corpus) and the L2 subjects produced more syntactic paraphrases (28.6 % in the L2 corpus vs. 7.8 % in the L1 corpus).

When it comes to the richness of expression observed in each group of subjects, L1 speakers were by far better able to vary their expression. Thus, in case of sentence (2a), they came up with 19 different lexical-syntactic reformulations, while L2 speakers provided only 9. For example, L1 subjects used five different substitutions for the adverb *correctement* ‘correctly’ (*brillamment* ‘briliantly’, *parfaitement* ‘perfectly’, *efficacement* ‘efficiently’, *bien* ‘well’, *très bien* ‘very well’) and L2 subjects only one (*bien* ‘well’). Figure 3 provides details about the variability of expressions per participant in each group of subjects.

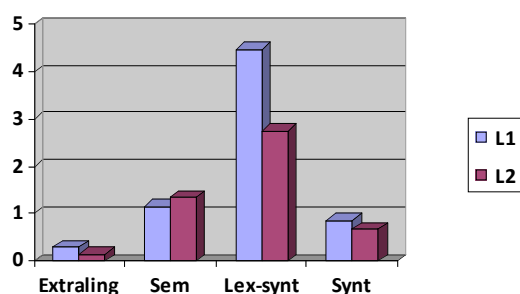


Figure 3: Variation of expression: L1 vs. L2

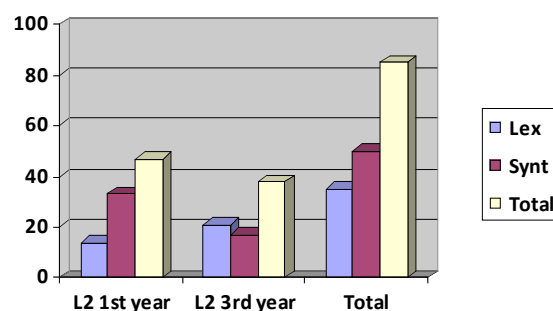


Figure 4: Error types in L2 (1st year vs. 3rd year)

The L1 and L2 groups differed most significantly in that the former proposed much richer lexical-syntactic variation per participant than the latter (4.48 vs. 2.76). L2 participants lacked lexical means and used less complex lexical-syntactic substitutions. Clearly, this is an area where there is room for improvement for the L2 group.

As far as formal correctness of paraphrases in the L2 corpus is concerned, we wanted to determine what types of errors, syntactic or lexical, were prevalent in the first as opposed to the third year of study. Figure 4 shows the proportion of lexical and syntactic errors identified in the first and third year students' sentences. (Sentences treated as “nonP” did not count for error analysis.)

Overall, L2 subjects made less lexical than syntactic errors. For first year students, the number of syntactic errors per participant was 2.54 and the number of lexical errors 1.07. We attribute this to the fact that their vocabulary is less developed and that because of this they relied mostly on syntactic paraphrasing means. Consequently, they were more likely to commit errors of this kind. On the other hand, with third year students we observe the opposite. Syntactic errors were less numerous than lexical ones (2.12 vs. 2.63 errors per participant). Third year students made twice as many lexical errors than first year students. This may be due to the fact that more advanced L2 learners are more confident in their vocabulary knowledge and, as a result, make more use of various lexical substitutions—also making more mistakes in the process. When trying to use synonymic substitutions with light verb fission, students often literally translated light verbs from English into French; 86% of all incorrect collocates, as in the example (8b), contained an inappropriate light verb.

Although our L2 corpus represents a relatively small sample, we observed an improvement with respect to the grammar of the third year learners. These observations corroborate some previous findings concerning L2 advanced learners: while possessing solid grammatical skills, these learners still produce lexical and stylistic errors (cf., for instance, Thomas 2008).

2.4 Summary of the Results

Preliminary results of the test corroborate our initial hypothesis, namely that the paraphrasing competence of native speakers is superior to that of non-natives, and give us other useful information, in particular:

1) The concept of paraphrase itself does not seem to be problematic for either group of subjects; in both cases, the number of sentences that were discarded as non-paraphrases (of the initial sentences) was insignificant.

2) The most frequent paraphrase types were in both cases semantic paraphrases (using semantic decompositions or inferencing) and lexical-syntactic paraphrases (using nominalizations, light verbs, etc.); both the natives and the non-natives preferred near-paraphrases (as opposed to exact ones).

3) The most striking difference between the two groups concerned the lexical and syntactic means used in paraphrase production: the francophones used a rich variety of (near-)synonyms and rather complex syntactic constructions; in contrast, quite a few FSL learners limited themselves to more or less local syntactic variation, exploiting only word order and passivization.

4) The difficulties of L2 learners can be explained by their insufficient lexical knowledge; this concerns both lexical relations and properties of individual lexical units, such as the government. Many errors were due to negative transfer effects.

3 For a Better Paraphrasing Competence of FSL Learners

Since the main reason for the inferior paraphrasing skills of L2 learners turns out to be their insufficient lexical knowledge, an obvious conclusion is that they need the instruction emphasizing this aspect of their L2. Let us give just one example (for simplicity's sake, in English) of how lexical and paraphrastic relations could be presented to language learners.

Suppose we want to teach our students lexical and paraphrastic relations between the verb (to) INTEREST (as in *Global warming interests scientists more and more*) and other lexical items of English.

We would start by presenting the propositional form of the verb in question, i.e., an expression featuring the verb itself and its semantic actants, X and Y, with the indication of their semantic class (PHENOMENON and PERSON, respectively):

(10) PHENOMENON *X interests* PERSON *Y*

Then we would give a number of paraphrases of the verb, based on lexical relations of synonymy, nominalisation, adjectivalization, etc.:

- (11) a. *X intrigues Y*
 b. *X is interesting for Y*
 c. *X is of interest for Y*
 d. *X awakens <arouses> Y's interest*
 e. *Y is interested in X*
 f. *Y shows interest for X*

Table 1 shows the lexical relations involved in (11), in both the standard MTT and a learner-friendly form (shaded); paraphrasing rules—in both formats—necessary to produce paraphrases in (11) are given in Table 2.

Syn	synonymous V	(11a)	$L_{(V)} \approx$	Syn($L_{(V)}$)	(11a)
A_1	characteristics of X	(11b)	$V_{[X \sim Y]} \approx$	synonymous V	
A_2	characteristics of Y	(11e)	$L_{(V)} \approx$	$Oper_1 \text{---} II \rightarrow A_1(L_{(V)})$	(11b)
S_0	N(V)	(11c/d/f)	$V_{[X \sim Y]} \approx$	BE + characteristics of X	
$Oper_1$	[subject X] light V	(11b/c/e)	$L_{(V)} \approx$	$Oper_1 \text{---} II \rightarrow A_2(L_{(V)})$	(11e)
$Oper_2$	[subject Y] light V	(11f)	$V_{[X \sim Y]} \approx$	BE + characteristics of Y	
$Caus_1Func_0$	[subject X] causative V	(11d)	$L_{(V)} \approx$	$Oper_1 \text{---} II \rightarrow S_0(L_{(V)})$	(11c)
			$V_{[X \sim Y]} \approx$	[subject X] light V + N(V)	
			$L_{(V)} \approx$	$Oper_2 \text{---} II \rightarrow S_0(L_{(V)})$	(11f)
			$V_{[X \sim Y]} \approx$	[subject Y] light V + N(V)	
			$L_{(V)} \approx$	Syn($L_{(V)}$)	(11d)
			$L_{(V)} \approx$	synonymous V	

Table 1: Some lexical relations in the standard MTT and in a learner-friendly notation

Table 2: Some paraphrasing rules in the standard MTT and in a learner-friendly notation

Students are not obliged to see the information encoded in the standard way (although in some cases and for some types of learners this too could be useful): we provide it here only for the purpose of comparison.

Finally, we could point out a generalization, namely that for any verb belonging to the same semantic class as the verb (to) INTEREST, i.e., a causative attitudinal verb (some others: *astonish*, *disappoint*, *irritate*, etc.), one can in principle have these same paraphrase types.

Of course, the teaching techniques suggested above presuppose that quite a few linguistics notions must be taught at the same time. This is why they are well suited for adult learners who have had quite a few years of formal schooling. For other profiles of learners (less educated, younger ones, ...) less explicit methods would probably be better indicated.

Let us conclude by the following three observations. First, we believe that making students aware of the systematic and cross-linguistic nature of lexical and paraphrastic relations (and the corresponding formalisms) can help improve their language manipulation abilities. Second, this kind of instruction is good also for a contrastive analysis of learners' first and second languages and could help alleviate at least some negative transfer problems. Last but not least, the method proposed here for teaching about paraphrases in FSL is exportable, i.e., can be used in case of other languages as well.

4 Conclusion

In this paper we described a test designed to assess the paraphrasing competence of adult university-level learners of French and suggested possible ways of reinforcing it.

In order to provide this group of students with a proper training in the use of paraphrasing techniques, we believe it necessary to: 1) insist on the importance of paraphrases in language production—via explicit teaching of corresponding concepts; 2) put an emphasis on the acquisition of lexical relations, paradigmatic (be a synonym/an antonym/a converse of...) and syntagmatic (be an intensifier/a light verb of...), underlying paraphrastic links; 3) develop the necessary pedagogical tools—learner-friendly formalisms for encoding lexical relations and paraphrasing rules. This may seem almost obvious, but the actual practice is lagging far behind. One can only hope that the situation will change soon enough, with the paraphrase becoming a standard ingredient of language learning and teaching.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Stephanie Doyle Lerat, Lidija Iordanskaja and Igor Mel'čuk for their insightful remarks on a prefinal version of this paper.

Bibliography

- Fuchs, C. 1980. *Paraphrase et théorie du langage. Contribution à une histoire des théories linguistiques contemporaines et à la construction d'une théorie énonciative de la paraphrase*. Thèse de doctorat. Paris: Université Paris VII.
- Kahane, S. 2003. The Meaning-Text Theory. In: Agel, V. et al., eds, *Dependency and Valency. An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, vol. 1. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter; 546-570.
- Keck, C. 2006. The Use of Paraphrase in Summary Writing: A Comparison of L1 and L2 Writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 15: 261-278.
- Martinot, C. 2003. Pour une linguistique de l'acquisition. La reformulation: du concept descriptif au concept explicatif. *Langage et Société*, 2(104); 147-151.
- Martinot, C. In press. Reformulations paraphrastiques et stades d'acquisition en français langue maternelle. *Cahiers de praxématique* 52: 1-18.
- McInnis, L. 2009. *Analyzing English L1 and L2 Paraphrasing Strategies through Concurrent Verbal Report and Stimulated Recall Protocols*. MA Thesis. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Mel'čuk, I. 1992. Paraphrase et lexique: la théorie Sens-Texte et le Dictionnaire explicatif et combinatoire. In: Mel'čuk, I. et al., *Dictionnaire explicatif et combinatoire du français contemporain. Recherches lexico-sémantiques III*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal; 9-59.
- Mel'čuk, I. 1997. *Vers une linguistique Sens-Texte. Leçon inaugurale*. Paris: Collège de France.
- Milićević, J. 2007. *La paraphrase. Modélisation de la paraphrase langagière*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Milićević, J. 2008. Paraphrase as a Tool for Achieving Lexical Competence in L2. In: Van Dalee, S. et al., eds, *Proceedings of the Symposium 'Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency in Second Language Use, Learning and Teaching'*. Brussels: Royal Belgium Academy of Science and Arts; 153-167.
- Milićević, J. 2009. Lexical Functions and Paraphrasing Rules as a Link between L1 and L2. In: *Online Proceedings of the Conference 'First and Second Languages: Exploring the Relationship in Pedagogy-related Contexts'*. <<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/alsla.aconf.php>>
- Polguère, A. 2004. La paraphrase comme outil pédagogique de modélisation des liens lexicaux. In: Calaque, E. & David, J., eds, *Didactique du lexique : contextes, démarches, supports*. Bruxelles: De Boeck; 115-125.
- Russo, M. & Pippa, S. 2004. Aptitude to Interpreting : Preliminary Results of a Testing Methodology Based on Paraphrase. *META* 49/2; 409-432.
- Thomas, A. 2008. La mesure des progrès lexicaux en FL2 avancé. In: Habert, D. & Laks, B eds, *Actes du Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française 2008*. Paris: Institut de linguistique française; 587-597.
- Wanner, L., ed. (1996). *Lexical Functions in Lexicography and Natural Language Processing*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Žolkovskij, A. & Mel'čuk, I. 1967. O semantičeskom sinteze. *Problemy kibernetiki* 19: 177-238. [French translation: Sur la synthèse sémantique (1970). *TA Informations* 2; 1-85.]