

Validating the Paraphrasing Task with the Framework of AUA

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Abstract. This paper aims to justify the Paraphrasing task in the Advanced English course's final achievement test with the framework of Assessment Use Argument (AUA) and finds out the implications for classroom teaching and learning. By articulating the claims with warrants of collected evidence combining the syllabus, the students' scores, and their answers in the questionnaire, the research shows that the Paraphrasing task is plausible for the Junior English Majors in their final test, paraphrasing practice could improve students' reading comprehension and academic writing.

Keywords: paraphrasing, Assessment Use Argument (AUA), Classroom Achievement Test.

1. Introduction

Language testing has been proved to be critical in language teaching, and its significance have been demonstrated in different approaches. The Paraphrasing task is a significant item in the final term test of Advanced English course. The present study aims to validate the Paraphrasing task in the Advanced English course's final achievement test and tries to determine the implications of the item for classroom teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review and Context

2.1 Bachman's framework of assessment use argument (AUA)

2.1.1 The framework of an AUA

An AUA is "a conceptual framework for guiding the development and use of a particular language assessment, including the interpretations and uses we make based on the assessment", which links the claims of the assessment to the performance of learners in language assessment [4].

Based on the previous framework, Bachman [2] and his co-researcher [3] articulate AUA and adopt it as a new approach in the class-room assessment. They believe that test developer should be quite aware of the claims, outcomes, and qualities of the AUA [3]. The outcomes are the consequences, decisions, interpretations, and assessment records that we would claim for the test use, while the qualities are the characteristics of these outcomes [2]. The following figure shows the links between the claims of outcome and their qualities.

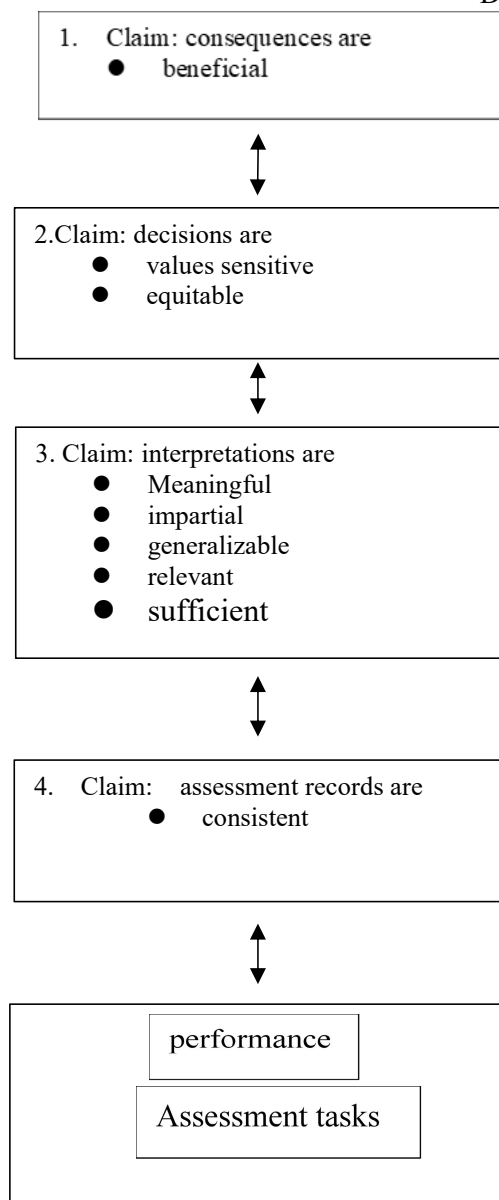


Figure 1. Claims, outcomes, and qualities in an AUA
(After Bachman and Damböck [3], Figure 3.3, p.82)

2.1.2 The accountability of AUA

Bachman [2] and his co-researchers [3] [4] address the fairness in providing rationale for the claims, the qualities of which include fairness in test procedure, test use and absence in rating.

Also, the outcomes of the test, including the consequences, decisions, interpretations, and assessment scores are all provided with reliable evidence from meeting the syllabus to generalizing the task characteristics according to the TLU domain.

2.2 Context: The syllabus of the course

The syllabus for the English Language Teaching

The Syllabus for University English Language Teaching has made it clear that the students are required to have a solid foundation of English language abilities in speaking, reading, listening, writing, and translating. According to the National Advisory Committee for Foreign Language Teaching, teachers are encouraged to have teaching reforms; instead of teacher-centered teaching mode, teachers should inspire and encourage the students to discuss and have critical thinking to motivate the students to improve students' communicative ability.

The course test aims to survey the students' mastery of English language skills, to see whether they could meet the teaching objectives. It also aims to evaluate the efficiency of teaching and learning and promote teaching reformation to achieve better classroom teaching results.

3. Validating the Paraphrasing task with an AUA

3.1 The Paraphrasing task

The Paraphrasing task contains 5 items, altogether 10 sentences; all the input sources are from the text that have been explained in class. It aims to find out whether students could meet the course objectives or not; therefore, the task is closely related to what is taught in the class and its content is based on the course syllabus. All the students have attended the class and are informed of texts covered in the tests.

The stakeholders are juniors and teachers who teach the course of Advanced English. Twenty students, including the juniors, seniors, and those who have graduated, answer the questions individually via the internet and 5 teachers who have been teaching the course of Intensive Reading are interviewed.

Paraphrasing task covers the area of language knowledge from interpreting source text to producing grammatically correct sentences without changing the meaning of the source text. Therefore, grammatical correctness, lexical similarity, semantic completeness would be measured in scoring the sentences.

3.2 The AUA of the Paraphrasing task

To justify a test validity, there should be claims, warrants, rebuttal, and the backing to justify the assessment task in an AUA [4]. In the following part, the claims are articulated, and warrants and rebuttal are listed from the collected information based on the interview of teachers and questionnaire for students.

Claim 1: The consequences of using the Paraphrasing task are beneficial for the stakeholders

Warrant1: The consequences of using the Paraphrasing task are beneficial to the teachers

The assessment records of paraphrasing task could help the teachers interpret the students' language ability and give corresponding advice.

Advanced English is a comprehensive course that requires the students to have a good mastery of linguistic competence. Paraphrasing contains the ability to understand the source text entirely and rephrasing it in different ways. The purposes of containing paraphrasing in the final test are to determine whether the students have a great mastery of what they are supposed to learn, whether they could meet the requirements of the course curriculum and syllabus.

In the interview, teachers who have more than ten years of teaching held the view that paraphrasing skills are critical for English majors, and the ability to rephrase reflects students' linguistic competence. They generally agreed that the students who are better in English perform well in paraphrasing and learning habits could influence the students' paraphrasing skills. Those students who tend to look up Chinese meanings of English words are generally poorer than those who often read English explanations in the dictionary.

Warrant 2: The consequence of using paraphrasing task is beneficial for the students

Bachman [1] defines language ability as containing two components: language competence or language knowledge, strategy competence which is used in utilizing the language.

The Paraphrasing task requires the test takers to use the metalinguistic strategy in comprehending the source text completely and have a great mastery of grammatical, textual, and pragmatic knowledge. Paraphrasing exercises help the students improve their understanding of the text, reading comprehension, and writing skills.

Rebuttal

While most of the young teachers believe that paraphrasing is quite significant for improving students' language competence, some teachers, who tend to adopt traditional approaches in teaching,

disregard the beneficence of paraphrasing task. They argue that students could understand a sentence by translating alone. They hold the view that in their English learning years back to 1980s or 1990s, they seldom paraphrased. In this backdrop, they believe that paraphrasing is not important. Hence, the Paraphrasing task would be unnecessary in the final achievement test.

Backing 1. Literature support

Many researchers have underlined the usefulness of paraphrasing skills, McNamara [10] and McNamara et al. [11] emphasize the aspect of reading comprehension and Golightly & Sanders [7] and Hawes [9] from writing ability. Some other researchers [6] [8] have demonstrated the significance of paraphrasing in increasing text comprehension for different age group learners. Watson et al. [12] believe that paraphrasing is an effective way to reduce the workload of reading and increase retrieval of information. These literature works show that, paraphrasing skills are crucial for English learners in that it could facilitate the English language competence in comprehensive ways.

Backing 2. Students' positive opinion

The usefulness of paraphrasing could also be found in the answers of the questionnaire. The students generally believe that paraphrasing could help build their vocabulary, improve their reading and writing proficiency.

Backing 3. The correlation analysis

To show that paraphrasing ability could facilitate the reading comprehension and writing ability, the scores of 117 students from 3 classes are collected to calculate their correlations by using SPSS22. The scores of Reading comprehension (full score:15), Paraphrasing task (full score:30) and writing task (full score:20) in the classroom achievement test of Advanced English in the 2nd term of 2020 are collected as source data (the source data of an Excel sheet is attached in the Appendix3). The following graph1 shows the significant correlation between the Paraphrasing task and the Reading task, and graph 2 shows the significant correlation between the Paraphrasing task and the Writing task.

Correlations			
		Paraphrasing	Reading
Paraphrasing	Pearson Correlation	1	.202*
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.029
	N	117	117
Reading	Pearson Correlation	.202*	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.029	
	N	117	117
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).			

Graph 1 Correlation between the Paraphrasing task score and the Reading task score.

Correlations			
		Paraphrasing	Writing
Paraphrasing	Pearson Correlation	1	.235*
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.011
	N	117	117
Writing	Pearson Correlation	.235*	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.011	
	N	117	117
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).			

Graph 2 Correlation between the Paraphrasing task score and the Writing task score.

Both graphs show that the students who could do better in the Paraphrasing task would have higher marks in the Reading task and Writing task, suggesting that paraphrasing ability is closely correlated with the reading comprehension and writing ability.

Claim 2: decisions based on the interpretations of the Paraphrasing task are valuable and equitable to the stakeholders

In defining the role and purposes of assessment, Bachman and Palmer [4] have made the relationship between teaching and testing quite clear. Language task tests might bring about different decisions concerning teaching and learning, including formative and summative decisions on both the teachers and students.

Summative decisions

The interpretations based on the scores are valuable and equitable to all the students. The final achievement test aims to determine who could pass the course for the administer purpose. The Paraphrasing task is a critical part to refer to when evaluating the students' mastery of the course content since it is based on what the students have learned in the whole term. The teachers could decide the students' level and give advice to their learning strategy according to their performance in the test.

The formative decisions

According to the test takers' performance in the test, teachers could decide whether the students have good mastery of the course content. They could decide whether they should make adaptation to the students' language ability in the teaching or whether they should make new strategy to motivate the students to learn better.

For the students, if they meet great difficulties in the test, they would have more self-motivation in improving themselves in English learning or turn to the teachers for advice. If they have mastered what they are supposed to acquire in class, they should be encouraged to make greater progress, for example, to make preparations for the further education.

Claim 3: The interpretations of the Paraphrasing task are meaningful, impartial, generalizable, relevant, and sufficient

Warrant1: The interpretations of the Paraphrasing task are meaningful

The Paraphrasing task is following the course curriculum and syllabus for English majors. According to the National Advisory Committee for Foreign Language Teaching, juniors of English majors are supposed to fully comprehend the texts and the language competence that allows them to express themselves acceptably. The Paraphrasing task has covered these aspects.

Warrant 2: The interpretations of the Paraphrasing task are impartial

All the test takers are informed of the input source of the textbook. So, there are no disfavours for any test-takers. All the raters are the teachers of the Advanced English course and have the same criteria for scoring paraphrasing task. The interpretations based on scores are reliable and efficient.

Warrant 3: The interpretations of the Paraphrasing task are generable and relevant to the TLU domain

Paraphrasing task characteristics correspond to the specific characteristics of language ability that is required for the English Majors. The interpretations based on the students' performance help both the teachers and students to make decisions.

Warrant 4: The interpretations of the Paraphrasing task are sufficient for making decisions

The raters are the teachers of the course. Based on the students' performance, they could decide whether to make adjustments to their teaching strategy or give different advice for students on different levels.

Simultaneously, when students get the result from their score, they could consult the teachers as to which part they need to improve.

Claim 4: The scores are consistent across different stakeholders.

Warrant 1: The procedure of the final achievement test is consistent for all the test takers.

The Paraphrasing task is a part of the final test placed at the end of the term; hence all the students have similar settings and time length of finishing the final test.

Warrant 2: The procedures of rating the Paraphrasing task are consistent for all the raters.

The raters of the final tests are the teachers of the course, and they rate the test with the same criterion.

Warrant 3: The raters are experienced teachers of the course who are well trained and certified. They are trustworthy in correcting the papers fairly. When the teachers are interviewed, they all state that they will rate the Paraphrasing task from semantic completeness to lexical similarity, so there is no bias against any students in rating the test papers.

4. Findings and implications

4.1 The necessity of the Paraphrasing task

According to the syllabus for English majors, paraphrasing is one of the comprehensive skills required for Juniors. Paraphrasing involves the comprehension of the source text and the fluent use of synonyms, syntax, and semantic knowledge. To improve this skill, students should have sufficient practice. However, from the students' answers in the questionnaire, not many of them have a good mastery of the skill even though they admit that the teachers have shown them how to do it. Their low mastery of paraphrasing skills could also be reflected in the scores.

To make the students realize the importance of paraphrasing skills, linking classroom learning and assessment is efficient. In discussing the washback of Chinese tests, Cheng [5] states that most students accept the goal of passing the exam and would fight hard for it. By designing the Paraphrasing task, we aim to develop the students in their paraphrasing skills, not only to pass the course but to achieve much more in their language learning.

4.2 More forms of assessing paraphrasing

As one of the comprehensive skills, paraphrasing requires a large amount of practice. Teachers of the relevant courses, for example, Fundamental English course, Advanced English course, should encourage students to practice paraphrasing as much as possible. Given the limited time in the classroom, 45 minutes, there won't be much time for all the students (30~40 students for one class) to practice. Therefore, the alternative assessment, for example, recording sentences paraphrasing orally after class, or paraphrasing in written form, could be encouraged.

The feedback of the assessment is of great value to the students. Teachers could give corresponding advice according to students' different performance instead of giving similar instructions to all the students.

5. Conclusion

This paper first reviews the development of AUA. Then it studies the construct validity of paraphrasing task in the classroom achievement test in the framework of an AUA. The validity of the Paraphrasing task is proved with claims, warrants and rebuttal. The intended consequences and the decisions based on the Paraphrasing task are beneficial. The interpretations are accountable in the required aspects. From what is found in this paper, the Paraphrasing task is plausible as one of the tasks in the final achievement test for Advanced English course.

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