Coming to an Understanding: The Case of Using Reformulators in Verbal Interactions of Iranian Female Adolescents

Masoume Ahmadi and Naser Sabourian Zadeh

Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord Branch, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Reaching the goal of using a language -communication and interaction- is only possible with choosing the most appropriate language devices in both spoken and written genres. There are a plenty of such devices of which discourse markers are paramount. Speakers need to be able to master discourse markers, particularly discourse markers of reformulation, in order to be able to communicate as well as to be recognized as a proficient member of their community. In response to research recommending a more explicit focus on variation among adolescent, this article aims to add to the study of adolescent speech production from a reformulation-centered perspective as well as to add to socio-pragmatic studies. This paper was an attempt to presents the results of analyzing transcriptions of reciprocal oral interaction in a simulated informal context, for Iranian female adolescents, discussing the importance, frequency, and distribution of the different types of reformulation markers (namely paraphrastic and non-paraphrastic) through employing Gülich and Kotschi's (1995) classification. The analysis revealed no significant differences in employing different types of reformulators. The low frequency of observed reformulation samples revealed that Farsi adolescent speakers are not highly concerned with the use of reformulation markers. They took advantage of a few non-paraphrastic reformulators to clarify their intention. Regarding reformulators of explanation, as a sub category of paraphrastic reformulators, they tended to employ it more in comparison with other subcategories. Accordingly, some suggestions on further research of the present study are proposed.

Introduction

Communication is the goal of using a language and this aim is of paramount importance for its speakers, either in written or spoken discourse. To this end, writers or speakers do their best to get their hearer(s) or reader(s) involved in an interaction and participation in a dialogue. Reaching this aim is only possible with choosing the most appropriate language devices in both genres. There are a plenty of such devices found in spoken English, but not common in written language–these two modes of use differ a great deal. The differences lie in inclusion of features like code switching, self–correction, reformulation, false starts, repetition, hesitation, discourse markers and vagueness, for instance. This is due to the spontaneous nature of the spoken language.

Discourse markers are among these language devices which their occurrence is widely known and well-documented. Discourse markers (e.g. expressions like well, you know, viz, and oh) are a fascinating characteristic of a language and create a positive impact on the smooth flow of communication (Stenström, 1994; cited in Mikkola, n.d). Since the 1970s, the study of discourse markers has undeniably been on the rise and the growing interest can be observed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While the literature emphasizes the importance of discourse markers, it can be claimed that little is known that about some types of discourse markers in different genres. In a same vein, Pons (2003, cited from Saz Rubio, 2003) pointed out that although English can be regarded by far the most thoroughly described language considering discourse markers; little is known of its set of reformulators. No concerted effort

has been made on delving different aspects of using reformulation markers regarding variables such as age, gender, genres, and so on. From a sociolinguistic perspective, age and gender can be regarded as two factors which are of essence in employing lexical varieties of a language. In terms of language development in children, Labov (1972, as cited in Wardhaugh, 2006) suggests that it is the preadolescent stage in which acquisition of the local dialect takes place. It is widely held that adolescence is the focal period of linguistic innovation and change. In a similar vein, the present study, as a tentative contribution to the field of discourse markers, deals with the notion of reformulation and more specifically, with a group of lexical units by means of which the activity of reformulation is codified among native Iranian adolescent speakers' oral interaction.

Literature Review

Definition of Reformulation

Cuenca and Bach (2007) defined reformulation as "a process of textual interpretations" (p. 150) in which the writer or speaker re–elaborates a previous fragment of discourse presenting its content in a different way by which the speaker or writer facilitate the hearers or readers' understanding of the original. They also considered them as a discourse operation which implies an auto reflection about language and as a clear sign of metacommunicative function of language. To be more specific, reformulation markers guarantee textual cohesion and at the same time elaborate a text and consequently, facilitate discursive progression (Cuenca and Bach, 2007) and compensate the communicative defects of the text. Accordingly,

Tele:
E-mail addresses: nasersabourianzadeh@gmail.com

reformulation can be triggered by the speaker's desire to achieve his/her communicative goals and to overcome any kind of communicative problems that may be due to mentioning the first utterance out of place and incoherent. In all of the cases reformulation prevents, signal, or even solve the problems made through misunderstanding. Ciapuscio (2003) has also defined reformulation markers as "the discursive rewinding, the resumption of a previously verbalized idea that is linguistically realized in the two-part structure 'referential expression' + 'treatment expression' – usually linked explicitly by means of markers" (p. 213) . He also added that reformulating includes "several subtypes (paraphrasing, repetition, correction), categorized by the authors on the basis of the kind of marker used and the semantic–pragmatic relationship established between referential and treatment expressions" (p. 213).

Reformulation can be according to an equivalence operation in which two utterances present a single idea (paraphrase). In the first statement the idea is formulated and in the second utterance the idea is reworded in a better and more relevant way, at least from the speaker's perspectives. It can be thus defined "as a metalinguistic discourse function based on disjunction, that is, alternative formulation" (Cuenca and Bach, 2007, p. 152).Discourse markers of reformulation, as Saz Rubio & Speck (n.d.) constitute "a sub-class of Fraser's (1999) Elaborative Discourse Markers" (p. 89) which are "recharacterization of the message conveyed by the whole previous discourse segment SI, or one of its constituents." (p.111)

Defining properties of Discourse Markers of Reformulation

In an attempt to define discourse markers of reformulation, Saz Rubio (2003) asserted that reformulators play two pivotal roles in discourse: Connectivity and Non-truth conditionality. The role of connectivity, as a major feature of all types of discourse markers, is approved by other researchers (Archakis, 2001; Bach, 1996; Matsui, 2001; Murillo, 2004; to name a few) and can be appeared in the following structure: S1 DMRF S2 in which DMRF stands for discourse makers of reformulation. Non– truth conditionality refers to the fact that these reformulators have a meaning that does not affect the truth condition of the sentence. The other proprieties identified for discourse markers of reformulation are: containing different types of meaning encoded by them, multi–categoriality, and weak clause association (ibid.). Cuenca and Bach (2007) have also considered text progression, facilitation of communication, and presentation of new information as other features for such markers.

Categories of Discourse Marker of Reformulation and Previous Studies on Discourse Markers of Reformulation

Approaches to the notion of reformulation come from rather different frameworks about differences with regard to the nature and the activity of reformulations. For Cuenca and Bach (2007) reformulation contains semantically equivalent but more frequently encountered vocabulary means that may achieve the same contextual effects of the original but for less processing effort. For them, there is a gradient from strong paraphrase to weak paraphrase including discourse values such as explanation, specification, generalization, implication, (or argumentation), gloss or summary. From another point of view, Fuchs (1982) differentiated three metalinguistic operations indicating identity relations between sign and referent: designation (from sign to thing), denomination (from thing to sign), and exemplification (class predication or inclusive predication).

Bach (2001) classifies relationships made by reformulators into four types: expansion, reduction, permutation, and switch.

An utterance expand the previous one when some features are added to the meaning or specifies information that is implicit in what mentioned and the hearer cannot be aware of. Reduction is on the other way round; an utterance reduces a previous utterance when the first utterance is more synthetic or eliminates the possible ambiguity or contextual inferences of what went. However, permutation and switch tend to non-paraphrastic reformulation either because the second utterance introduces some kind of counterargument or because it introduces new argumentative elements. In both cases, propositional equivalence becomes weak. Finally, these specific meanings or moves combine with second level instructions including denomination, designation, exemplification, correction, conclusion, argumentation, level change and degree of specialization change.

Quirk et al. (1985) described four main categories of reformulation including 1) Reformulation based on linguistic knowledge; 2) Reformulation based on factual knowledge, (although they point that the difference between linguistic and factual is a fine one); 3) More precise formulation or correction in the defining appositive of what was said in the first appositive; 4) Revision that includes the form of "editing" or "self-correction" that is typical of impromptu spoken English where execution and planning take places simultaneously. According to Saz Rubio's (2003) classification, explanation, rectification, conclusion, and summary are the four main categories of discourse markers of reformulation. Explanation contains three other sub–categories: clarification, identification, illustration. Neutral rectification, rectification and improvement, rectification and time–tuning are put under rectification category. The other main category named conclusion does not contain any sub–category, while recapitualation and summary are placed in the last category named summary.

Two types of reformulations (horizontal and vertical) are also distinguished through the analysis done by Fløttum (1993, mentioned in Cuenca & Bach, 2007). The horizontal relation can imply definition, denomination or substitution (to precise or to correct something previously said). The vertical relation can mean either generalization (summary) or specification (example).

According to the scope of reformulation and the semantic relation that is conveyed, Gülich and Kotschi (1995) proposed a two–branched classification for discourse markers. Based on their proposal, reformulators are devided into paraphrastic and non– paraphrastic. paraphrastic reformulators (such as that is, or in other words) express expansion (through specification or explanation), reduction (through summary or denomination) or variation, whereas non-paraphrastic reformulators indicate dissociation (through recapitulation, reconsideration or separation) or correction (through content, formulation or form; represented in Table1). This classification can be regarded as the most comprehensive one because other researchers (e.g. Bach, 2001) put their classification forth by grasping it. As a result, this classification, as one of the thorough ones, is employed as a base of comparison in this study.

There are a few studies (Adam & Revaz, 1989; Ciapuscio, 2003; Cuenca, 2003; Cuenca and Bach, 2007; Murillo, 2004; Rossari, 1994; Roulet, 1987; Saz Rubio & Speck, n.d.; inter alia) concerning the notion of reformulation and the lexical units that display such a function. Ciapuscio (2003) examined the oral interviews between experts and laypersons. He claimed that besides illustration, reformulation procedures can be considered as another variety of formulation procedure and speakers resort

to them in order to minimize or repair potential or actual communicative difficulties. Based on text analysis, Ciapuscio mentioned that using reformulation markers specifies the position of experts and laypersons in the interaction because they were viewed as identity makers.

Table 1. Gülich and Kotschi's (1995) Classification of Reformulation Markers

Type of Reformulation markers	Sub-classes of reformulation markers	
Paraphrastic	**expansion**	*Specification*
		Explanation
	Reduction	*summary*
		Denomination
	Variation	
Non-paraphrastic	**Dissociation**	*Reconsideration*
		Recapitulation
		Separation
	Correction	

Cuenca and Bach (2007) researched the form and the use of reformulation markers in research papers written in English, Spanish and Catalan. They claimed that considering the form and frequency of the markers, Formal Catalan and Spanish papers outperformed the English papers in employing more markers. They also added that English papers tend to use the simple fixed markers while the other two ones employ complex markers as well as structural variability. Regarding the use of reformulation markers, as they claimed, English authors usually reformulate expand the concept, whereas Catalan and Spanish authors reduce the contents or the implicatures of the previous formulation more frequently than English.

Despite the much research (Brown, 2006; Bucholtz,1999; Cutler,1999; Cheshire & Williams. 2002; Erman, 2001; Lyster, 1996) carried out on the linguistic features of different age groups, to date, little, if any, research has been conducted on the use of targeted discourse markers (reformulators) considering adolescent groups. Eckert (2003) researched the use of linguistic resources from the perspective of the creation and maintenance within an age group, to be more exact adolescent categories, and specifically on the use of aspects of verbal style in the creation and maintenance of distinctiveness. The researcher exclaimed that oppositions with which the group defines itself generally also serve as organizing principles within the group, accounting not only for intergroup but for intragroup differences in language use. Yet in another study, Rampton (1995, mentioned in Brown, 2006) probed linguistic 'crossing' by adolescents in England. He scrutinized brief moments of linguistic appropriation and came to conclusion that the observed 'liminal' events had the chance to enact affiliation among various races and new identities. Even though, he asserted such probability not to be generalizable across all instances of crossing. To shed some more light, this study is an effort to investigate reformulation markers in verbal interaction of native Iranian female adolescent speakers. This study contributes to the body of the literature on discourse markers as well as to the explanation of communicative and dynamic aspects of unplanned discourse. Accordingly, this study took over the mission to find out whether the markers (i.e. paraphrastic vs. non-paraphrastic reformulators) are employed in the speech of such age group. Of interest was also the extent to which such markers were put to use periodically in their interaction.

Method

Participants and Materials

In regard to the analysis of discourse markers of reformulation, the researchers delved into seven native Iranian female adolescent speakers' interactions. The data which this study was based on consists of 53 minutes of their transcribed conversation. The participants' consent for their speech to be recorded was obtained. A fairly intimate and close relationship was dominant in their gatherings on the basis of their long-term friendship they themselves claimed to be involved in and as a result a relaxed, spoken style was utilized in which the least conscious attention was paid to their speech.

Procedures

The first step was to compile and record Farsi interactions of teens in an informal context. This task was accomplished by means of recorders. Then, the researchers had a thorough revision of the existing research on the topic as well as an analysis of the way DMs of RF function in naturally occurring language. Once a list of lexical phrases of reformulators (see Appendix A) was obtained, a comprehensive classification (Gülich and Kotschi, 1995) of the various English DMs of RF was chosen. This classification was based on the meaning relationship they brought to the discourse segments that they linked. Afterwards, recordings were transcribed. On average, the transcriptions were 53 minutes long and they have been transcribed based on common rules of transcription. They have been read manually in order to identify any type of reformulation markers. Once identified, in order to increase the inter–coder reliability, the researcher asked another co-worker to do the same. The controversial sections were discussed and agreed upon. Finally, an automatic search has been made through using tICorpus software, so all occurrences have been thoroughly collected. The next level of analysis involved a closer look at the different markers utilized by the participants in order to account for the importance, frequency, and distribution of the different types of reformulation markers (namely paraphrastic and non-paraphrastic). Here are some example sentences:

Speaker1:

Avatar se bodish bood, na ghashang bood,ghashang bood, khob inja nemishe, masalan alis dar sarzamin ajayeb ham se bodi bood, vali inj nemishe ke…

Translation:

It was *Avatar* 3D…no, it was good…yeah it was. Well, it's impossible in here, as an instance, *Alice in Wonderland* was in 3D, but it can't be seen here…

Speaker2:

Footbalam negah mikonid bacheha? Are, man parsal…man age roo tarane kar konam ghashang ye Adel Ferdosipour moanas mishe!are, estedlal kardanesh aalie! Eyval, damesh garm, kheili aalie!

Translation:

Do you like watching football matches? Yeah…last year…if I work on Taraneh's skills, she can be a female version of Adel Ferdosipour! Yeah, I mean she has a great capability in deductive reasoning! Wow, superb!

Speaker 3:

Un mogheha aslan chi dars midadan? QBasic!...QBasic dars midadan, Visual Basic ham na taze! Un migan sakhta tar Pascal bood? Are Pascal, daghighan Pascalam dars midadan! Are, kheili badavi bood! Mesle inke beri Dos yad begiri bejayeinke beri Windows yad begiri!

Translation:

What did they use to teach those days!? QBasic!...they used to teach QBasic, not even Visual Basic!…I've heard it was more difficult than Pascal!? Yeah, Pascal, exactly, they used to teach

Pascal too! Yeah, it was so preliminary; it was like learning DOS rather than Windows!

Speaker 4:

Masalan nomrehatoon chandeh? Yani manzuram ine moadelatoon too che renjie? Nnuzdah inast…

Translation:

What are your scores in the school? I mean what's the range of your GPAs?...around 19…

Subsequently, an analysis of each of the markers that make up the two main groups of DMs of RF was run. Finally, a series of Chi–square analysis were conducted in order to investigate ay significant and meaningful difference among the use of main categories of discourse markers in oral interaction of female teenagers.

Data analysis

The number of reformulators in each category was computed per section separately and then totally. The frequency of DM of RF in this study was based on per "phrase" due to Gülich and Kotschi's (1995) classification. A series of Chi-square analysis were carried to probe any significant difference between employing different reformulation categories among participants and find about their preferences of implementing reformulators. The analysis was also carried out to make the role of gender in such implementation clear.

Result

The main purpose of this study was to determine the tendency of native adolescents in the use of discourse markers of reformulation. The first research question that whether or not significant differences exist in the frequency of paraphrastic vs. non-paraphrastic reformulators employed by Iranian teens in their spoken language was addressed by the researchers. To this end, the total number of reformulators was counted to provide the data for forthcoming steps. The corpus included 63 utterances including reformulation markers. The counted frequencies revealed that the participants tend to use reformulation markers of explanation more frequently. They all used non-paraphrastic reformulators less commonly. As a result, there was no significant difference (x^2=2.23 > $x^2_{critical}$= 3.84, *df*=1) in the frequency of paraphrastic vs. non-paraphrastic reformulators employed by native adolescents in their spoken language. As mentioned before, explanation was a subcategory of para-phrastic reformulation markers. It can be claimed that they inclined to explain rather than to summarize, to recapitulate, etc.

Table 1. Analysis of Chi-square on the Use of Reformulators in Oral Interaction of Female adolescents

Discourse Markers of Reformulation	Chi-square	2.23
	Df	1
	Asymp. Sig.	.005

cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.86.

Discussion

In this era of globalization, language and communication seems to be the center of every individual's universe and the key for understanding internationally. As it has been observed in the literature, such communication and interaction are bound with specific patterns and rules. Within this situation, people of different age groups make use of such systematicity in their own special way. Age-correlated differences can reflect language change and adolescents are among the most suspicious case who offer more noticeable changes through a language. Due to the importance attached to these changes, researchers tend to know the noticeable feature of a language which can be used

effectively in oral or written communication. Discourse markers are among those features which have captured the attention of so many researchers (Fortuno, 2006; Lenk, 1998; Mikkola, n.d; Muller, 2005; Reomero–Trillo, 2007; Schiffrin, 1987, to name a few). Due to the lack of research on discourse markers in spoken language (Fortuno, 2006), and more specifically from the social perspective of different age groups (adolescence, as the focus of this research), the researchers were intrigued to plumb the depth of discourse markers, i.e. discourse markers of reformulation. As pointed in previous section, the data analysis was run based on Gülich and Kotschi's (1995) classification of reformulation markers. Hopefully, reformulators were involved in oral interaction of the participants. The results second those of Fortuno (2006). He analyzed the spoken discourse and claimed that discourse markers observed in spoken genres (lectures). Following the same line of research, Cuenca & Bach (2007) stated that there is a difference between the uses of reformulators cross culturally. It seems true to claim that not only the difference lies cross-culturally, but also it exists among age groups. The results of this study showed that Iranian adolescents speaking Farsi language made use of explanation markers much more than other reformulators; even though, the difference was not significant regarding the subcategories mentioned in Gülich and Kotschi's (1995). Parapharstic reformulation markers include a recharacterization of a massage conveyed by the previous segment(s) and further divided into three main sub–classes (viz. expansion, reduction, and variation). Explanation reformulators which clarify some aspects of mentioned segment(s) constitute prototypical reformulators such *as that is to say* or *in other words*. Here are some examples:

Speaker 3:

Parsal ro man ziad donbal nakardam, vali emsal be nazaram social network bayad behtarin film mishod! Bebin, masalan kargardanesh adam maroufi bood, tamame bazigarash hamashoun nabazigar boodan! Nabazigar yani kasi ke ta hala kare bazigari kheili anjam nadade…bebin ye kargardane kheili maroof, Benjamin buttons ro ke shoma didid? Kargardane oon in filmo skhte bood…

Translation:

I didn't follow *The Oscars* thoroughly last year, but this year's best movie should have been *Social Network!* Look, for instance, the director was so famous, it had no real cast! An unreal actor is the one who hasn't been involved in acting so much! A very top class director, have you ever seen the movie *Benjamin Button*? The director of that movie has also made *Social network*!

Another sub-category of paraphrastic reformulators which is included in the expansion section, besides explanation reformulators, is specification which carries out a recharacterization of the message conveyed by the whole previous discourse segment in, or one of its constituents, the rendition of which is a rectification in the newly reformulated sentence. Following examples will clarify the point:

Speaker 4:

Parsal man madreseye dolati boodam, madreseye iman. Ke intor, hesbi az vaghtetun estefadeh mikardin…

Translation:

Last year, I was studying in a state school, it was Imaan School. I see, you were making the best use of your time!

Although teens benefited from reformulators of explanation and specification, it should be noted that they used just one of the subcategories of paraphrastic section, i.e. expansion, and the

researcher never observed the examples of other subcategories in their interactions. It seems safe to claim that the group under study pays less attention to the effect of two other categories of paraphrastic reformulators, namely *reduction* and *variation.* They didn't use non-paraphrastic reformulators frequently as well. Cuenca (2003) asserted that "the selection and use of markers expressing reformulation are not simply a matter of different grammar, but also of rhetorical strategies. Assuming that the process leading towards the creation of many connectives has its roots in discourse, the analysis of reformulation markers supports the hypothesis that certain differences in grammar and in discourse construction are related. The tendency of English formal style towards synthetic, linear and simple forms in the overall construction of the text mirrors a tendency towards a more extensive use of grammatically simple markers, which in turn decreases the level of verbosity"(p. 1089). Based on Mckelvie (1998), if one wants to parse spontaneous spoken language, then one needs some way to cope with disfluency which hinders communication. Reformulators, as cohesion devices, add some unity to the spoken language and somehow remove disfluency. Danieli and Bazzanella (2001) discussed that such devices are commonly resorted by interlocutors in order to perform interactional tasks and in order to signal each other the steps of the understanding process. They added that such markers have cognitive, conversational, and interactional functions which contribute to the process of achieving a mutual understanding. Concerted attempts should be made to have adolescents get acquainted with the impact of understanding while interacting with other interlocutors. More contrastive studies are recommended among different age groups.

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Appendix A

A List Lexical Phrases of Discourse Markers of Reformulation

Alternatively
(Or) better (yet/still)
Especially
For example/ for instance, e.g.
I mean
In a few words/to put if in a few words
In a nutshell {in sum}
In a sense {in other words}
In conclusion/to conclude
In more technical terms
In one word/In a word/in words of one syllable
In other words/To put it in other words
In short/in brief/in a nutshell
In sum/to summarize/to sum up
Literally
More accurately/to be more accurate
More clearly/to be more clear/to make things clear
More exactly/to be more exact

More precisely/to be more precise
More simply/in simple(r) terms/Put more simply/to put it more simply
More specifically/to be more specific/ specifically
Or rather
Particularly/in particular
Say (for example/for instance)
Technically speaking

That is/that is to say/i.e/ that means that
To cap it off
To recap/to recapitulate
To simplify
To top it off
Viz. (Videlicet)/Namely/To wit
What I mean is
What I'm saying is