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A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? Critical Discourse Analysis of Five Online Automated Paraphrasing Sites

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A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? Critical Discourse Analysis of Five Online Automated Paraphrasing Sites

Abstract

Research on academic integrity used to focus more on student character and behaviour. Now this research includes wider viewing of this issue as a current teaching and learning challenge which requires pedagogical intervention. It is now the responsibility of staff and institutions to treat the creation of a learning environment supporting academic integrity as a teaching and learning priority. Plagiarism by simply copying other people's work is a well-known misconduct which undermines academic integrity; moreover, technological developments have evolved plagiarism to include the generation and copying of computer-generated text. Automated paraphrasing tool (APT) websites have become increasingly common, offering students machine-generated rephrased text that students input from their own or others' writing. These developments present a creeping erosion of academic integrity under the guise of legitimate academic assistance. This also has implications for arrival of large language model (LLM) generative AI tools. In accessing these sites, students must discern what is a legitimate use of the tool and what may constitute breaching academic integrity. This study critically analysed the text from five online paraphrasing websites to examine the discourses used to legitimise and encourage APT use in both appropriate and inappropriate ways. We conceptualised these competing discourses using Sheep and Wolf metaphors. In addition, we offer a metaphor of the Educator as a Shepherd to become aware of APT website claims and assist students to develop critical language awareness when exposed to these sites. Educators can assist students with this through knowledge of how these sites use language to entice users to circumvent learning.

Practitioner Notes

1. Paraphrasing skills are a key element of competent academic thinking and writing.
2. Technological developments have increasingly enabled students to access online Automated Paraphrasing Tool (ATP) websites to assist with paraphrasing content.
3. There is a lack of clarity around what constitutes acceptable use of APTs and what breaches academic integrity.
4. Through a critical discourse analysis, we show how APT websites use language to use the tool in both appropriate and inappropriate ways.
5. Critical awareness of language use on APT websites will assist educators to teach students to avoid inadvertently breaching academic integrity if using these tools.

Keywords

Automated paraphrasing tools, generative AI, academic integrity, critical discourse analysis, higher education

Introduction

Technological developments have increasingly enabled students to access online free and for-profit sites and tools to assist with academic work (Eaton, 2022; Harrison et al., 2021). Automated paraphrasing tool (APT) websites commonly offer students machine-generated rephrased text from their own or others' writing. While these websites can be used to assist learning without breaching academic integrity, encouraged misuse by the sites themselves presents a creeping erosion of academic integrity boundaries. This encouragement is often under the guise of legitimate academic assistance. Bretag et al. (2019) identified a shift in thinking about learning that accompanies these tools. They described this shift as a "range of behaviours which signal a 'transactional' approach to learning more generally, where education is viewed as a product to be bought, sold or traded rather than an intrinsically motivated, effortful and potentially transformative individual process" (p. 1838). The shift in thinking about education as transaction versus transformation gives rise to competing discourses about how these sites are viewed, and the more recent arrival of LLM generative AI chat tools such as ChatGPT, Google Bard, and Bing Chat. Students are being asked to critique the outputs of generative AI tools (Lodge et al., 2023) and educators are considering how the tools will shape assessments (Liu, 2023); however, everyone also needs to be cognisant of the discourses constructing the acceptability and use of these tools. Clarity is needed around the academic integrity in learning mediated by these tools. The tools can be constructed as generators of output for academic assistance or output as product for academic misconduct. This paper uses critical discourse analysis of the text in the webpages from five popular paraphrasing tools.

Literature

Prior to the use in higher education, writers of web publication, such as blogs and advertising sites used APTs to increase Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to increase Google rankings of a website and conceal plagiarism detection algorithms. These tools worked by 'spinning' text by machine generating rephrased text from the original text while maintaining the original meaning (Prentice & Kinden, 2018). These text spinning tools emerged for the unethical purposes of deception in spamming and article marketing websites. However, once Google updated its ranking algorithms to lower the ranks of these low-quality sites, article spinning technology was less favoured until it was repurposed for students wanting to avoid plagiarism detection (Bailey, 2018). Although at the time of Bailey's article the APTs were less sophisticated than they are currently, he correctly predicted they would become better and easier in time.

Paraphrasing skills are essential for higher education writing, social interactions, demonstrating understanding of material, supporting arguments (Fillenbaum, 1970; Keck, 2006, 2014; Shi, 2012; Rogerson & McCarthy, 2017), rewording information to suit other audiences, persuasion (Suchan, 2014)

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and coaching (McCarthy, 2014). Paraphrasing skills take time to develop, often longer than is available in a semester (Prentice & Kinden, 2018). Through paraphrasing, students learn to use language in the ways of their intended professional discourse community (Hyland, 2006) and learning outcomes often include assessment of student ability to use formal language (Prentice & Kinden, 2018). Paraphrasing skills can develop from near copying with a few word replacements, to competent variation in words and grammatical structures (Keck, 2006). Failure to paraphrase accurately can lead to misunderstanding of the material and plagiarism. Introductory academic literacy courses traditionally inform students of the difference between plagiarism and paraphrasing by teaching students how to cite and rephrase the work of other people. However, time-pressed students may look to technology to save time on paraphrasing. This requires academic literacy teaching to now consider the addition of artificial intelligence (AI)-generated text in the concept of plagiarism, where the ideas and/or writing of *other people* should also include *automated* generation of ideas or text.

Students may be unsure of when they cross the line from receiving academic support over to breaching academic integrity. There may also be temptation to breach academic integrity when trying to juggle life with assessment deadlines (Fudge et al., 2022; San Jose, 2022). Many students faced an academic crisis during the pandemic and the “predatory industry” took advantage of students at this time by collecting their data (Eaton, 2022, p. 178). One of the authors here (PL) noted that after investigating the websites, there were advertisements appearing in her Facebook feed. Similarly, students are likely to be targeted through social media. When making the decision to engage with paraphrasing tools, students need a critical understanding of the introductory information when choosing how to use the site. Students and educators should become aware of the origins and purposes of APT technology. Guerrero-Dib et al. (2020) stated, “Academic integrity is much more than avoiding dishonest practices such as copying during exams, plagiarizing or contract cheating; it implies an engagement with learning and work which is well done, complete, and focused on a good purpose – learning” (p. 2). The concept of ‘well done’ should include the idea of students valuing the ethics of integrity. Students should be willing to submit an authentic middle-grade piece of work rather than a plagiarised high-scoring piece of work. This requires the university to have assessment practices for identifying authenticity and originality. Otherwise, the environment favours those who get high grades by whatever means. Thus, academic integrity is important at all levels of the university and beyond.

Academic integrity is important to multiple stakeholders (De Maio & Dixon, 2022). Bretag et al. (2019) stated, “Academic integrity matters. It matters to governments, to funding bodies, to publishers and editors, to the media, to educational institutions at every level, to students, to teachers, to researchers, to families, to employers and to society” (p. 8). It is essential for students to learn the necessary academic integrity skills along with developing an ethical decision-making framework (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020). The role of the educator is key in supporting and guiding students to utilise these commonly used tools in an ethical way. Rogerson and McCarthy (2017) raised the question of whether the use of paraphrasing tools constituted student original work or a breach of academic integrity. They advised students, staff, and the institution to be aware of how to detect the use of these tools and assist students to develop their own writing skills. There is a contested reality around what constitutes acceptable use of APTs. Students face competing discourses around the use of these sites as they are receiving education about the use of APT from the sites themselves. In reference to visual images, Clarke (2005, p. 11) pointed out, “They tell us who we ‘should’ be and what

we 'should' do, and often 'how to' do it and the products to use in the process." These cues also apply to textual messages shaping a reality where APTs are acceptable for academic use. These discourses position the subjects (students, other writers, and the tools) in relation to each other and to socially accepted behavioural norms.

As academic integrity officers we have noticed some students were genuinely unsure of where paraphrasing becomes plagiarism, and this occurrence has been noted elsewhere in the literature (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Therefore, taking preventative measures through education, rather than a punitive approach, may be more palatable for academics. There are many opportunities for educators to examine academic integrity within their teaching and learning environments and offer to support student engagement in good practice (McKay & Devlin, 2014; Zobel & Hamilton, 2002). One aspect of academic dishonesty is the act of plagiarism assisted by automated writing websites. Harrison et al. (2021) argued,

The transformation wrought by commercialized corruption online requires institutions and faculty to better understand the scale and extent to which students' access to and use of these websites fits into and exceed traditional understandings of academic authenticity and academic misconduct. (p. 484)

Although academics agree on the importance of academic integrity, there is less agreement on who should teach it, how to teach it, and how to handle breaches (Löfstöm et al., 2015). Technological tools for the detection of machine-generated text are continually developing (Foltýnek et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Prentice and Kinden (2018) noted literature reporting the clash educators feel between the traditional values of academia and their role as detectives and judges required by academic dishonesty investigations. Additionally, judging student behaviour is not straightforward. Detection of plagiarism also generates additional administrative load (MacLeod & Eaton, 2020). There is often no single solution, so educators need to look to their own contexts for areas of improvement and share findings with others.

Automated Paraphrasing Tool and Cognitive Engagement

One way to share the discussion is to develop understandings of academic integrity versus academic dishonesty. Considering the realm of educational assistance, Figure 1 illustrates a continuum of assistance from acceptable guidance with writing mechanics through to unacceptable contract cheating. There is some overlap in the educational use versus the cognitive outsourcing use of assistance from staff (e.g., educational – advice in a tutorial; outsourcing – staff writing parts of a thesis to get struggling students through).

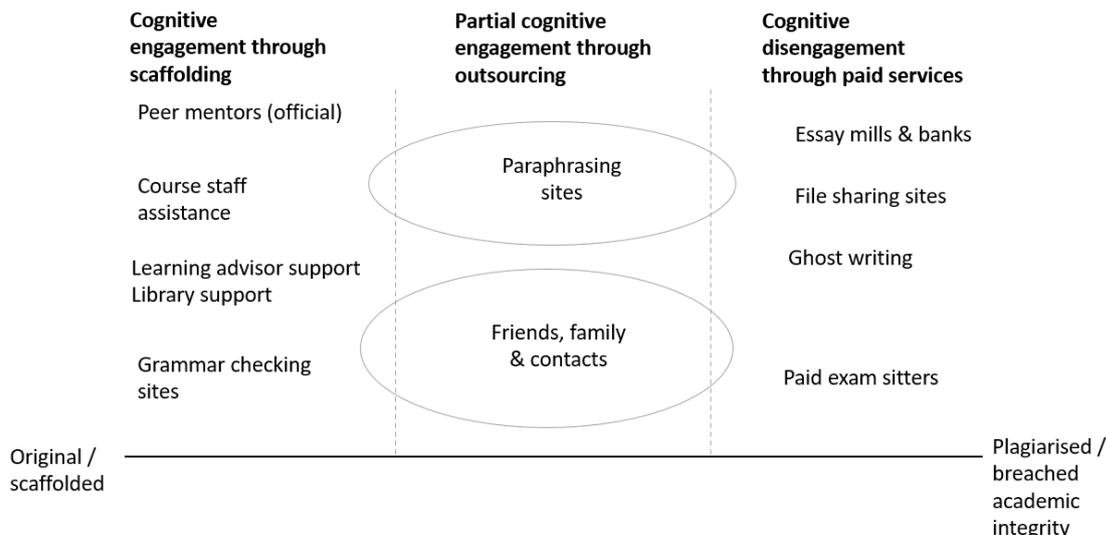


Figure 1
Continuum of educational assistance and cognitive engagement

The left-hand column of Figure 1 shows mechanisms for scaffolding of cognitive engagement. Traditional scaffolding includes teachers prompting students with specific questions or teaching on a focused point with examples to guide attention. Library support staff can assist in student education about paraphrasing and referencing using guides with annotated examples. The key is to not overwhelm learners with too much information, rather, add information in small, manageable increments. Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of proximal development as, “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable peer” (p. 86). Currently, the “adult” or “more capable peer” role can be performed by the paraphrasing tool. Learning can be described as occurring within a zone of proximal development in which the student’s existing ability to solve the problem is facilitated by the APT’s suggestions for grammatical and lexical changes. Students engaging with APTs in this way are still cognitively engaged and thus this could be considered a legitimate use of the tools.

The path from scaffolding through to breaches of academic integrity is not always clear. Developments in technology bring uncertainty around where the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour lies (Roe & Perkins, 2022). There are grey areas where assistance crosses over from the student doing the work and learning into the work and learning not being done by the student. The exact point at which assistance facilitating learning within the student crosses into the learning being outsourced may only be known to those present at the time. However, in the long term, students who engage in learning will master the skills and be able to think and write independently of a tool.

Figure 2 shows two examples of paraphrasing using the QuillBot site. In the upper box, the user-entered text in the left panel (“Despite the limitations...”) is rephrased automatically in the right panel (“Despite the drawbacks mentioned...”). This example was rephrased using the free ‘standard’ option and is presented as an example in which we entered a conclusion from a published article and used the tool to rephrase the text. This is potentially an example

of how a student could answer a task requiring the demonstration of their understanding of a published text; however, it demonstrates that by using the free 'standard' options, they can copy and submit the AI generated text in place of submitting text resulting from their own cognitive engagement with it.

The figure displays two screenshots of the iBot Paraphraser tool interface. The top screenshot shows the 'Standard' mode with a text input on the left and a paraphrased output on the right. The bottom screenshot shows the 'Fluency' mode with a text input on the left and a paraphrased output on the right. Both screenshots include a 'Rephrase' button and a legend for 'Changed Words', 'Structural Changes', and 'Longest Unchanged Words'.

Top Screenshot (Standard Mode):

Input (64 Words): Despite the limitations noted, our findings provide rich insights into how young people perceive the SFG and its impact, and could guide the policy's implementation. In particular, challenging industry depictions of the SFG as a ban and reframing it as a conduit to freedom could foster reflection, clarify the policy's benefits, and elicit even stronger support from the cohort the SFG aims to benefit.

Output (2 Sentences • 71 Words): Despite the **drawbacks mentioned**, our findings **offer insightful information** on how young people **view** the SFG and its **effects, which may help with** the implementation of the policy. In particular, **refuting corporate portrayals of the SFG as a ban and recasting it as a pathway to freedom could encourage introspection, make the benefits of the policy clear, and get even more** support from the **group** the SFG is intended to help.

Bottom Screenshot (Fluency Mode):

Input (27 Words): In the world nowadays health is a big problem. Lots of money and time is need to fix problem an we can have good system for health.

Output (2 Sentences • 30 Words): Health is a **major issue in today's globe**. It will take a lot of money and **effort** to **repair** the problem so **that** we can have a good **health-care** system.

Figure 2
Examples of output from an AI paraphrasing tool

In contrast, a potentially positive use of the paraphrasing tool can be in the form of accessing examples of better writing for the student to learn from. For example, in the lower box of Figure 2, using the 'free fluency' option, the user-entered the text (In the world nowadays...) which the tool rephrased in the right panel (Health is a major issue...). The site makes extensive use of synonyms to replace user-entered text while maintaining grammatical accuracy. In the rephrased text, all words which are changed are identified by colour, as are the structural

changes to the grammar. In line with the zone of proximal development, the paraphrasing tool can serve as the more competent 'other' to increase the student's ability. However, if the student does not engage with the rephrased example and merely submits the output as their own, then this would be considered cognitive disengagement and plagiarism. Using APT-generated text is problematic for assessment that relies on the text as the end-product for demonstration of understanding because instructors might be unable to tell the difference. This has implications for designing assessment to evaluate student understanding of material. Cognitive disengagement can also be encouraged by the sites as they seek ongoing dependence on the sites through paid subscriptions. The example in Figure 2 was produced by the free version of the site; however, more options are available if a user chooses to pay for the 'premium' upgrade. It is likely that a repeated user of the free version will receive multiple requests by the site to upgrade to premium and be shown evidence of the features available in the upgrade. It is possible that the free version may represent a lure which attracts potential users and nurtures a dependency on the site. Also, the free paraphrasing sites advertise for other services (free and subscription) which may further lure users into paying a fee.

Rationale

Database searches revealed previous literature commonly mentions plagiarism; however, knowing how to avoid plagiarism is still a current topic of interest to researchers (Kumar et al., 2014). This is an ongoing concern with emerging technologies offering further scope for academic misconduct. Considering the calls for educational/academic integrity to be enabled by all stakeholders in education, each party needs to examine what they can do to promote quality engagement and learning. One aspect of this is for academics to be aware of the temptations students face online with academic assistance tools and help them develop critical thinking around the claims these sites make. This is particularly important in online learning where students may come across these sites without the presence of an instructor.

Our analysis aims to make transparent how APT sites present the use of their writing tools. The insights gained will be used to develop recommendations to help educators and students develop a critical language awareness when reading the sites and deciding to what extent they may use them. The research questions are:

1. What themes are mentioned for encouraging the use of automated paraphrase tools?
2. How does the language in these themes construct the legitimacy of APT use?

Method

We engage with a qualitative approach when analysing the website texts. The APT sites use language (and visuals) to communicate the technical procedures of how to obtain an automated paraphrase and the reasons for doing so. User choice to do so is influenced by educational and social values contained within these texts and the readers of the sites' sociocultural practices. Language contains situational and cultural uses of language (Gee & Green, 1998). Critical discourse analysis critically examines language to make these language constructions transparent and identifies what subject positions are offered to people with the aim of enabling social change (Fairclough, 1995). We study the use of language across the different sites to identify interpretative repertoires that may serve to promote action or use of the tool by students. Interpretative repertoires are a "recognisable routine of arguments,

descriptions and evaluations, distinguished by familiar cliches, common places, tropes and characterizations of actors and situations” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 443). Language use shapes perceptions and social interactions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). We examine the words of the texts to illuminate the types of claims the sites make to encourage use of the site for obtaining an automated paraphrase as part of an educational process, or as part of a cognitively disengaged transaction to complete a task. Language and its use in educational settings reflect and constitute a view of the world, and shape learning practices in the classroom and outside it (Gee & Green, 1998). Thus, we take a critical approach to these texts and examine how they attempt to construct a plausible discourse regarding the positive use of APTs as legitimate way to obtain writing outputs, and a hidden discourse of education as transaction instead of transformation.

Data Collection

We entered the search words “best paraphrasing tools” into Google, as this could be considered a simple search strategy students might use. The top results included a review site recommending eight tools and provided links to their sites (Makeuseof.com). Five of these included a strong orientation towards students through mention of students and academic assessment, and three aimed at web content writers. We chose the five student-oriented sites (see Table 1) to examine more closely. While there are visual elements also adding to the meaning, we focused on the textual elements. On the 18th August 2022, we viewed the introduction pages of each paraphrasing tool site which explained how the site worked and could be used. In total, there were 31 pages of text which contained 7200 words and 58 images (also including text within them). These pages constituted the data for analysis.

Table 1

Paraphrasing tool links

Rank in top 8	Paraphrasing tool site number	Link to introductory text
1	Site 1	https://quillbot.com/
2	Site 5	https://plagiarismdetector.net/paraphrasing-tool
3	Site 3	https://paraphrase-online.com/
4	Site 4	https://www.duplichecker.com/
7	Site 2	https://www.wordtune.com/

Data Analysis

In line with our first research question to identify themes related to encouraging the use of automated paraphrase tools, we examined the data for language we considered to be encouraging the use of APTs, and how this language constructs the legitimacy of APT use by students. This process required two rounds of analysis. In the first round, we utilised thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) to develop codes for the website texts based on the recommendations the sites made for users/students to solve their writing issues. Over several meetings we collaborated by reading together the content of each APT site to identify meaningful words or phrases and develop codes to describe them. We all grouped codes into the themes presented in this article and agreed these themes represented the data well.

We addressed the second research question of how themes combined to construct discourses of legitimate educational use with or without breaches of academic integrity. We examined interpretative repertoires indicating how APT sites positioned themselves in relation to students and the nature of the services they offered, and the influence on students' agency using these tools. During this phase of the analysis, we paid attention to the situational and cultural use of language (Gee & Green, 1998). By applying the codes and developed themes from the first round of analysis, we examined how the APT sites' discourse constructs potential understandings of APT use, such as how users should solve their writing issues. Several features of the APT website texts construct a social reality and potentially influence student choices regarding how to use these services. Using critical discourse analysis makes these constructions transparent and identifies what subject positions are offered to potential users of the sites (Fairclough, 1995). Through this analysis we identified the competing discourses the sites make to construct the legitimacy of using APT to complete academic work and to entice students to deviate from established principles of academic integrity.

This article focuses on our interpreted meaning of the textual element of each of the five APT sites. We acknowledge our interpretations may be biased by our roles in academia (Widdowson, 1998). KH, PL, and AH have served as academic integrity officers, while SR is an experienced educator whose view also offers interpretations of the texts.

Findings and Discussion

To address the first research question about the themes mentioned for encouraging the use of APT, we identified numerous claims from the websites enticing students to use the APTs. Some claims and wording supported site use as a form of scaffolding for learning, while others encouraged cognitive by-passing of the learning process. Interestingly, many of the claims contained grammatical errors, which suggests the authors had also by-passed the learning process. We conceptualised these competing discourses using Sheep and Wolf metaphors. The Wolf discourse constructs the social practice of enticing users to have the work done for them through an education-as-transaction view, whereas the Sheep discourse constructs the ostensibly legitimate use of an APT as an unproblematic resource. Therefore, to oppose these discourses when using APTs, we start building a Shepherd discourse of educators and learners which constructs the social practice of only using these tools to develop one's writing skills via cognitive engagement through the view of education as transformation.

The APT sites present contradictory discourses as they offer educational assistance while also legitimising breaches of academic integrity. Using paraphrasing tools is tempting when juggling pressures of assessment, other life commitments, or feelings of being overwhelmed when adjusting to university. This is especially the case for non-traditional students from diverse cohorts, those returning to study, and those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Fudge et al., 2022). This temptation is capitalised on by the sites as they emphasise the solution of saving time from writing. The additional appeal of 'everyone else is doing it' normalises the practice and could confuse students who are less familiar with higher education academic integrity conventions.

The Sheep Discourse: Disguised Messaging Appealing to Innocent Students Exploring the Site

The Sheep discourse positioned the site as a helpful resource. We noted themes of appeal as: the low cost, easy to use, avoids plagiarism, useful in the development of paraphrasing skills.

Emotional appeal – free and easy to use

All the APTs examined have an emotional appeal to the user. Tools were commonly emphasised as being “completely for free” (Site 3), thereby creating a powerful initial emotional hook for students who lack time and money. For example, the following quote appeals with low cost and positive experience.

Other sites of the same category will have you pay for their services even for simple tasks such as spell-checking. We want you to have the best experience while using our website because we understand what you need. So, you don't even need to sign-up to use any of our free tools. So, just roam around our site and put our tools to their best use. (Site 5)

Emotional appeals assist with attracting the user to examine and apply the tools to their writing needs. The APT's intention seems to be making the user feel comfortable with their choice to use these tools, thereby encouraging the maintenance of ongoing engagement with the platform. Engaging with the platform may lead to clear educational benefits or create opportunities for plagiarism depending on the environment the user is faced with during their decision making.

Ease of use was a claim commonly made by APT sites. The language centred on words highlighting the minimal number of steps needed to use the tool and how easy it was. Examples of the simple steps language included “After filling ‘Text before’ field, just press the ‘Paraphrase!’ button” (Site 3), and “simply pasting the text in the given box and clicking the Paraphrase button”, “All you need to do is follow the simple steps” (Site 4). Examples of the ease-of-use language included: “a breeze for everyone”, “The ease of use is crucial”, “creative writing was never easier” (Site 3); “Rewrite as many articles as you want with this free rewording tool”, and “without any hassle” (Site 4).

Antiplagiarism – avoid text matching

The sites claim using their tools keeps the content “plagiarism-free” (Site 4) by defining plagiarism as simple text matching, then thoroughly explain how to “avoid plagiarism” (Site 3) so that the output will not be flagged by text matching software. They claim they “do not support plagiarism” (Site 3) to reassure users and warn them from “being held criminally liable” and from the “legal problems” of plagiarism by stating “be careful - without appropriate references, your rewording could be understood as copyright violation”. More reassurance that the “tool will completely eradicate plagiarism” from the entered content making it “plagiarism-free without any hassle” was given by Site 4, confirming the uniqueness of the text generated “without leaving any duplication”. They are also reminding the users this will “save” them “from the harmful effects of plagiarism”. Site 5 declares the users “would neither need to proofread nor check plagiarism” as the output is “squeaky-clean”! The language used when discussing plagiarism is confusing and contradictory, the sites explain the importance of paraphrasing and what plagiarism is, but then offer ways to avoid its detection by generating a “squeaky-clean content” for their users. Moreover, these sites add another

layer of protection by reassuring the users their “entered content vanishes once the paraphrasing process is complete” (Site 4). The description of the output as “squeaky-clean” and having evidence of tool use “vanish” has the nuance of getting away with a wrongdoing. This suggests an awareness of the sites about the ethical boundary they are enticing users to cross.

Cognitive assistance

In some instances, the suggested tool use could improve learning if used appropriately to develop skills. Factual educational information is given about academic process like defining essays, summaries, academic discourse, quotes, and the techniques of paraphrasing such as synonym use and grammatical restructuring. In these claims, the sites suggest they are working in tandem with the students’ efforts. For example, the tool can function as a reading assistant by showing original documents paraphrased to help understand them better (Site 1). Paraphrasing skills could be improved by examples provided to help students notice and understand how a sentence could be rephrased in different ways (Site 2). The next quote suggests the site could also be used to develop vocabulary,

This tool can help you figure out the better choice of words according to the context of the content. Your vocabulary will be significantly improved with the continuous usage of the sentence changer. This way, you will be able to bring variety in content and avoid using similar words, which negatively affect its readability. (Site 4)

In this above case, cognitive engagement with the suggested words can lead to increased vocabulary if the student does make the effort, over time, to integrate new words into an existing context. This describes the finished work as being an effortful engagement by the student. In some testimonials, students reported on their engagement and success in developing better skills. Some testimonials also demonstrated an educational use of the tool. For example, a testimonial on Site 2 reported the tool, “helps me learn how one sentence can be written in different ways”, “I review all the suggestions and then merge them and use them to find different options”, “gives me ideas on how to rewrite words and sentences” and “dropdown examples show how words can be changed.” These examples suggest the student views the options offered by the tool and then cognitively engages with these to produce their own writing rather than cutting and pasting the machine-generated writing verbatim. This can be described as the tool scaffolding the learning within a student’s zone of proximal development.

Dark Wolf Themes Disguise the Tools as a Legitimate Way to Improve Writing

The Dark Wolf discourse constructs an easy world of speed and efficiency while the student escapes the frustration of learning and avoiding the risk of negative emotion associated with being caught by plagiarism detection tools. The Dark Wolf discourse also invites students to use the tool because it normalised tool use as common and acceptable practice among students and professional writers alike. The sites’ testimonials included demographically diverse ethnicities in names, a wide range of occupations, and referenced up to millions of satisfied users to portray “everyone else” is doing it, so you can too.

Experience positive emotion and avoid negative emotion

APTs offer faster and easier ways of doing the writing work with no obvious financial or other costs. Emotional appeals come in the form of associating site use with positive emotions or

avoiding negative emotions. For positive emotions, all the sites appealed to users through claims of speed, ease, efficiency, and low to no cost. These were explicitly expressed in words such as, “the easiest process” (Site 4), “the program will do all the work for you” (Site 3), “rewrite the article while you relax and get the output instantly” (Site 5).

Avoiding negative emotion was signalled through offering escape from the feelings of frustration, fear of wrongdoing, and poor writing ability. In the case of checking one’s own work for plagiarism, one site claimed, “It’s boring, time consuming and the big thing is the MANUAL! Ah. Who wouldn’t want to skip doing something that technology can do for you” (Site 4).

Seeds are sown to second guess one’s ability to write with suggestions woven throughout the promotion of the value of APTs. This type of promotion plays on the negative emotions often associated with writing, and confidence to write. The APT is positioned as the helpful solution to the students’ lack of ability and time. The following quote illustrates this notion:

Of course, writing your content by hand, sentence-by-sentence is the surest way to ensure quality and plagiarism-free work, but that usually isn’t easy, especially if you are looking for quality results. One way to deal with this is to hire a professional freelance writer to help you with your content needs. But again, hiring a pro writer isn’t cheap at all. So, what should you do? Well, a much cheaper and quicker approach is to use an online rephrase tool.
(Site 3)

Although Site 3 explicitly states doing your own work is “the surest way to ensure quality and plagiarism-free work” it nonetheless claims this is not easy (one has to write “sentence-by-sentence”), or cheap if you get someone to do it for you, therefore using APT is a better option for the student who wants to “deal with this”.

APTs play on inklings of self-doubt to paraphrase competently so they are here to rescue, support and educate the student, depending on how it is viewed. Site 5 demonstrates this play in the following quote,

Paraphrasing is an easy method to eliminate plagiarism from any kind of content. However, the manual method to paraphrase a text demands an extensive amount of effort from your end, and it can still leave some instances of plagiarism.

Once self-doubt is confirmed, APTs go on to offer reassurance and confidence to user that they will avoid plagiarism detection with the sites writing product. Demonstrated by the following quote from Site 3:

In paraphrase, the meaning and ideas of the source material has to be maintained - by using your own words to express someone else's messages or ideas. To effective reword a text you should use as few words as possible from the source content. Our paraphrasing tool will help you achieve that and rewrite any text in seconds, therefore avoiding plagiarism issues.

Acceptability and Normalisation - Everyone does it

The following quotes illustrate these claims of mass use and interest:

50+ million trusted [...] No matter who you are or what you do, [our site] has writing and research tools to support you in making your work come alive. Authors, students, researchers, journalists, attorneys, and everyone in between have employed the paraphraser to reword writing for school essays, professional correspondence, creative storytelling, and personal projects. 2, everyone in between have employed the paraphraser. (Site 1)

The word changer is becoming increasingly popular in both the web and academic worlds due to several reasons [...]. The usage of our rephraser isn't limited to a specific niche or group of people. The top users of the paraphrase tool include the following: (students, teachers, marketers etc) [...]. The fact that our text spinner is preferred by students and teachers equally is because of the production of quality content. This really helps students in their assignments and thesis. It also allows teachers to the preparation of material for students to learn. (Site 4)

Paraphrase any text and get a plagiarism-free version of it with the rephraser available on [our site] [...]. Writing on a single topic repeatedly can become a major cause behind self-plagiarism. However, the paragraph rewriter utility can get your hands on fresh and unique content without leaving any duplication. (Site 4)

See what all the fuss is about [...] [A]lthough my writing is pretty cogent, I'm always running it through [...]. We all have slight challenges with selecting the appropriate words to express. (Site 2)

These quotes claim students, teachers, and other professionals use these sites. There is no distinction between the different genres of writing and how they are assessed and the APT is offered as suitable to enhance the quality of writing for everyone. Text such as “employing the paraphraser” has different meanings in the situations or web writing and educational assessment. Site 2 invites people to “see what all the fuss is about” which implies popularity by many excited people associated with the APT. Site 4 also describes their APT as “increasingly popular” and Site 1 refers to “50+ million trusted” users. These claims attempt to construct a culture of acceptance (Gee & Green, 1998). Describing the paraphrase as something to “get your hands on” aligns with the construction of a paraphrase as product rather than effortful learning (Bretag et al., 2019).

In addition to demographic diversity, another way the sites position their APT is in proximity to existing accepted tools and broad everyday situations. For example, stating the APT “Plugs into the writing tools you already use” (Site 1), “We believe that it is very useful both at school, at work, as well as in everyday life” (Site 3) and “this rewording tool will help you to have mass production of blog posts, website content, description, sales copy, or any other form of textual content” (Site 5). In return for these benefits, the Wolf hopes to get payment from users who upgrade to premium versions and revenue from advertising.

The Grey Wolf: Blurring Sheep and Dark Wolf Discourses

Within the innocent themes of assistance, a Grey Wolf discourse is constructed from the Sheep and Dark Wolf. It is a blurring of themes between the appeal for student support. However, if the student is not careful, they may head into the unsafe thicket. This thicket is

surrounded within factual academic information. Site 3 contained extensive descriptions of academic concepts. Students would read through considerable content that appears acceptable. This may increase their trust in the site and acceptability of the tool being offered. However, looking more closely at the 'helpful sheep', such information is peripheral to the actual use of the tools. It can serve as a 'window dressing of legitimacy' to obscure the boundary of acceptable and unacceptable use. The first clues of the hidden danger are that in some cases, the educational material is inaccurate and demonstrates problematic use of APTs. Consider the following quote from Site 3:

In paraphrase, the meaning and ideas of the source material has to be maintained - by using your own words to express someone else's messages or ideas. To effectively reword a text you should use as few words as possible from the source content. [note: this has been copied from other websites]. So, what does PARAPHRASE (or rephrase) exactly mean? It's a fundamental way of meaning analysis of sentences, developing, changing one's thoughts, the content of a specific text, for example, two evoked sentences: "father saw how a neighbor talked with mother" and "my father saw my mother talking with the neighbor" express the same content, but they are structurally different. The system of functioning in the language is valid. It is also reworking or rephrasing the work that contained the content, complementing it and interpreting it sometimes with a lot of freedom, but in the bounds that ensure a clear recognition of the original.

The initial text itself appears to be copied from another site and the expression "interpreting it sometimes with a lot of freedom" is awkward and likely generated by a paraphrasing tool. Furthermore, this expression does not accurately describe the process of paraphrasing.

Problematizes writing and learning – sidestep writer's block and push a few buttons

Several APTs problematise writing and learning by framing normal learning as requiring effort to improve skills and yet, in contrast, it is framed as a negative experience and something to be avoided. Learning requires time, effort, and the experience of frustration at times; however, the reward is the deepening and widening of one's knowledge and skills. The text below from Site 3 shows the interweaving of the two discourses.

The more independently you can paraphrase, the better you'll get at expressing your ideas clearly. The largest advantage of employing a paraphrasing tool, however, is that it enables you to sidestep the problem that most authors have always encountered: writer's block. You have all probably run into this problem at some point in your academic or professional careers. At work or in school, you've been given a task, but despite your best efforts, you can't seem to come up with anything insightful. This is where the paraphrasing tool comes to the rescue. It has the potential to improve your article or essay if you use it critically and analytically. It can even make dealing with a difficult writer's block as simple as pushing a few buttons. (Site 3)

In this description users are encouraged to "sidestep the problem" of writing difficulty by the simplicity of "pushing a few buttons". Cognitive effort is incidentally mentioned to improve one's writing by using the tool "critically and analytically", but the lingering impression is that pushing buttons would be easier as the site comes "to the rescue".

Blurred boundaries - authorship

Positioning the use of a paraphrasing tool for rewriting one's web content and one's academic content blurs the distinction between the two. This is a clash between the social worlds of blogging in which rephrasing one's own text for creating unique content is viewed as acceptable. However, in the academic world, such practice is viewed as self-plagiarism. In blogging, the aim is to draw readers to the site to increase readership. In education, the aim is to demonstrate one's ability to think and write and is evaluated with a grade indicating the degree of mastery. Despite the inclusion of some genuine educational uses of the tool, for the most part this information provides a façade of acceptability obscuring the real enticement to use the tool for a quick solution. Instructions from Site 3 show this blurring of acceptable and unacceptable use.

You don't need to search for synonyms word by word anymore, all you need to do is type or paste text you are interested in paraphrasing, and the program will do all the work for you. However, if you don't like the results, or you think you could find a better words to express yourself, you can change any synonym (clicking it and choosing new from the list) or edit text manually. (Site 3)

In this case, students are offered an apparently equal choice of having the work done for them or choosing the best words themselves. These are presented as an equivalent, which is an issue in the concept of authorship or ownership of the object taken (Ronai, 2020). A generated paraphrase is not available as a published or digitally published object. The sites encourage users to think of the output as a better expression of their own words (student authorship); however, the work of rephrasing the object is done by the site (external authorship).

Educators as shepherds

In the current educational environment, students can easily access the advanced AI based tools, like ChatGPT, that use LLMs that are able to create outputs coherent and original enough to pass undetected by traditional software for similarity detection. Even falsified references, that usually hint the AI involvement, can be fixed by students. Therefore, higher education institutions are encouraged to offer a legitimate use of these tools to support students' education and to carefully consider the use of this software by students when creating academic integrity policies, to encourage transparency of the students in clarifying how they used these tools to 'assist' with assessments (Perkins et al., 2023). Hence, we offer the discourse of educators as shepherds to guide their students towards learning how to use APTs appropriately for learning rather than shortcutting the learning process. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, to shepherd means, "To make a group of people move to where you want them to go, especially in a kind, helpful and careful way." It is important for teachers to empower students and build a relationship of care (Broom, 2015). Educators can empower students by fostering critical language awareness encouraging them to be cognisant of ambiguous portrayals on these sites. This act of care should be aimed at promoting understanding and discernment rather than merely avoiding punishment. We see educators performing this role through awareness-raising activities to bring the use of these tools out of the shadows and into the pedagogical light. We realise introducing students to APTs may be criticised as leading them to using them inappropriately. However, these tools do exist, and many students will find themselves in the time pressure where they actively seek these sorts

of possibilities, or they will talk to their friends who will show them. So, we encourage them to consider using the tools for educational purposes rather than misusing them. Dealing with the wolf should neither be by 'hiding our heads in the sand' and ignoring their presence, nor by confrontation with its use by punitive consequences. Education in the age of AI requires strategies and wisdom to be able to protect the students ensuring they get proper learning while upholding academic integrity.

Recommendations for Practice

Students should be made aware of the sites' enticements to breach academic integrity and circumvent learning. Our themes suggest five recommendations. Educators can draw students' attention to reconsider the definition of plagiarism in relation to AI generated text, how the concept of authorship applied to content and written expression, professional implications, development of critical language awareness when engaging with APT sites, and to what degree these sites can offer legitimate learning opportunities. These recommendations are described below.

1. Re-examine the definition of plagiarism to consider AI generated text

Determining acceptability of APT use requires definitions of plagiarism to be re-examined while considering technology development. A dictionary definition of plagiarism is to, "pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own: use (another's production) without crediting the source" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Definitions such as this refer to "the words of another", which implies a human other. However, with APTs, the original content still comes from another human, but the selected words of "another" come from a machine. In either case, the written expression is not generated by the student, nor does the student credit the APT site. We have experienced students defending automated paraphrases by claiming they have not "copied anyone", therefore claiming the work is their own.

2. Clarity regarding authorship

Students could use an exercise with alternative texts to explore the authorship. For example, texts could include their own work, text from an academic journal, and text obtained from a social media source. These examples could then be paraphrased, and the "new" authorship of the AI generated text can be discussed. The authorship of the content, and the written expression of that content, can be considered when the AI has paraphrased original input, and students can then re-examine the definition of plagiarism in which copying from "another" can refer to an AI source.

3. Professional responsibility and academic integrity

Educators can make students aware of the professional consequences of relying on AI generated paraphrased material instead of genuine cognitive development. This understanding could be done by using scenarios such as forwards thinking, reasoning, and reflection in real-time professional situations. Based on these scenarios, students can discuss these consequences in disciplines such as: legal, health, media, and education. Discussions can focus on the impact on personal knowledge and the ability to communicate it in these professional contexts.

4. Development of critical language awareness

The paraphrasing sites problematise learning by emphasizing the difficulties in achieving a unique written product. We recommend demonstrating the paraphrasing tools in the classroom to provide opportunities for discourse about the nature of learning and how to overcome those difficulties. Students can reflect on occasions where they have experienced a sense of transformation in learning after overcoming difficulties (e.g., learning to read), and understand that difficulties are often a necessary part of transformative learning.

5. Legitimate cognitive assistance within the zone of proximal development

As shown in Figure 2, educators can demonstrate a comparison of user-input or copied text with the AI generated paraphrase. They can draw students' attention to word changes such as synonyms, short-language chunks, and grammatical structure. Students can become aware of their options to choose alternative text while maintaining original meaning and stay close to their current language abilities – this makes it more likely that students will learn new language skills, rather than the gap being so large that students use the AI generated paraphrase to disengage with learning.

Limitations

This study is limited to educating students who are genuinely uncertain about the use of paraphrasing tools. Some students are aware of academic integrity but choose dishonesty due to poor time management, desire for higher grades, or insufficient study skills (San Jose, 2022). In addition, we have interpreted the site texts from the perspective of staff and academic integrity officers. Future research should explore how aware students are of these sites and their claims, and how they interpret them. Our analysis was limited to the textual features of the sites. Discourse analysis can also include the analysis of visual materials and how they construct meaning. Further research could include a visual analysis of the APT sites.

Large language models such as ChatGPT were not considered in this study. We note large language models as an area for future research. Our focus was on rephrasing tools which were being used by our students at the time of this study. These automated paraphrasing sites were convenient ways for students to rephrase small chunks of text rather than entire essays. It is possible that since they are only taking small chunks of text rather than entire works of others, students may be confused about the boundary between paraphrasing and plagiarism. However, the findings presented here make explicit the competing discourses around the use of AI tools and offers educators a guide on how to make these visible to peers and students while clarifying the boundaries of legitimate learning and academic integrity breaches.

Conclusion

Maintaining academic integrity is vital for students to learn professional ethics and skills, and for institutional reputations as providers of quality, accredited learning outcomes. With ever-increasing pressures to complete academic work within busy lives, the rapid rise of technology such as APT sites and LLM generative AI tools offer students a tempting efficiency at the expense of their learning and academic integrity. The use of such tool must be ethical, accountable and transparent (Liu, 2023). The Wolf discourses around the use of the APTs constructs the 'we' as the students and other groups needing to paraphrase as a solution to a mostly non-human 'them' which are the time pressures, effort of learning, and plagiarism detection tools. Although these offer students an initial sense of power over the demands of their lives, they disadvantage them as they do not master the skills resulting from effortful

learning. Educators and students must be critically aware of how sites operate to offer tools that jeopardise academic integrity and learning, versus legitimate use of the tools for authentic engagement and learning, and thus educate students to recognise the wolf when it comes knocking at the door.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) disclose they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The authors disclose they have not received any funding to produce this manuscript beyond resourcing of academic time at their university. The authors disclose there was no use of artificial intelligence as part of this research other than AI-generated paraphrases used as data.

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