

Experiment



Introduction The task set was to paraphrase others during conversation. The parameters used to decide when to paraphrase were during long descriptive sentences throughout the conversation, although not every sentence was paraphrased. Most of the decisions were made during the course of the conversation, as it is hard to set parameters for something as fluid as natural speech.

How challenging was this task? Why?

Initially, it was particularly difficult to get into the habit of paraphrasing others as it is quite unnatural to paraphrase during conversation. After a short time, though, it began to feel habitual and even after terminating the experiment, I find myself paraphrasing others more than before. When others seemingly terminated the conversation before its natural end, it was very difficult not to admit that I had been conducting an experiment - I was reluctant to allow others to think I had changed my conversational style permanently.

How did it feel to paraphrase others?

It felt quite patronizing, because others seemed to feel as though I felt the need to simplify their sentences so they would understand parts of the conversation. I also felt as though it was unnecessary during some conversations, because the nature of the topic was so simple that paraphrasing would add confusion. I also felt that conversations became quite unnatural and forced on my side, because of the extra thought that was required to add the paraphrasing element into natural speech. Overall, after paraphrasing had become more natural, it was not difficult or particularly traumatizing to use.

What were others' reactions?

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During the course of a conversation, the other participant would not notice initially, and then begin to act strangely and some even terminated the conversation before it seemed to reach its natural end. However, during shorter conversations, it seemed to comfort some, as though I was highlighting how well I understood them, and perhaps even made it seem as though I was empathizing well. No hostility was shown by others, although there was definitely a feeling of confusion when paraphrasing was used often (particularly during descriptive conversations).

What effect did paraphrasing have on interpersonal relationships?

Paraphrasing conversations did not have any lasting effects on interpersonal relationships. When paraphrasing was used when talking to people that I do not have a close personal relationship, the previously mentioned empathy seemed to improve these relationships. When paraphrasing those who I talk to regularly, the obvious change in my conversational style may have had a negative effect at the time of the conversation, but once the experiment had stopped it was easy to resume normal relations with these individuals.