THE ROLE OF THE PARAPHRASING COMPETENCE IN ELABORATING RECEPTION EXERCISES

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ABSTRACT. *The role of the paraphrasing competence in elaborating reception exercises.* Our study is based on the premise that, in the case of native speakers, the ability to paraphrase is innate, without their internalising any paraphrasing rules, whereas a non-native speaker is commonly bound to acquire such rules. Although the general studies dedicated to the didactic-related paraphrase focus rather on developing the paraphrasing competence specific to foreign students, our aim is to highlight the paraphrasing competence of the teacher-native speaker, more exactly, the awareness of their own paraphrasing operations while elaborating various didactic materials on the oral- and written-reception competences in the Romanian language. If during the oral communication to the students, the teacher's appeal to the paraphrase, viewed as an explicative method, is, to a certain degree, intuitive, and thus difficult to record, control and analyse, in the case of oral- and written-reception exercises (the input-texts, the proper items), the mechanisms of paraphrasing adopted by the teacher are easier to identify and examine. The aim of our study is to sensitise the teachers to the adequate use of the paraphrase in elaborating reception exercises, so that the foreign students can have easier access to the meaning of the oral or written message, along with the development of their paraphrasing competence.

Keywords: *paraphrase, paraphrasing competence, reformulation, paraphrasing techniques, Romanian as a foreign language, Romanian as a second language, oral reception, written reception.*

REZUMAT. *Rolul competenței parafrastice în elaborarea exercițiilor de receptare.* Lucrarea noastră pornește de la premisa că, în cazul vorbitorilor nativi, abilitatea de a parafraza se dezvoltă în mod natural, fără a conștientiza regulile de parafrazare, în timp ce un vorbitor nonnativ este, în general, nevoit să învețe aceste reguli. Cu toate că, în mod obișnuit, studiile consacrate parafrazei în context didactic pun accentul mai degrabă pe modalitățile de dezvoltare a competenței parafrastice specifice studenților străini, noi ne vom concentra pe

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competența parafrastică a profesorului-locutor nativ, mai exact, pe necesitatea ca acesta să conștientizeze propriile operații de parafrazare realizate în timpul elaborării materialelor didactice destinate competențelor de receptare orală și scrisă în limba română. Dacă, pe parcursul comunicării orale cu clasa, apelul profesorului la parafrază, ca procedeu explicativ, se face oarecum intuitiv, fiind mai greu de înregistrat, de controlat și, prin urmare, și de analizat, în cazul exercițiilor destinate receptării orale sau scrise (textele-input, itemii aferenți), mecanismele de reformulare parafrastică puse în act de către profesor sunt mai ușor de identificat și de cercetat. Scopul cercetării este acela de a sensibiliza profesorii cu privire la utilizarea adecvată a parafrazei în elaborarea exercițiilor de receptare, astfel încât să se ușureze accesul studenților străini la sensul mesajului oral sau scris, dar și să se dezvolte competența parafrastică a acestora.

Cuvinte-cheie: *româna ca limbă străină, româna ca limbă nematernă, parafrază, competență parafrastică, reformulare, tehnici de parafrazare, receptare orală, receptare scrisă.*

0. Introduction

Tackling upon the subject of the parafrastic phenomenon seems to be a rather unrewarding task. If such a phenomenon is viewed from a native speaker's perspective, a speaker able to paraphrase naturally, *namely* – already one of the commonest paraphrastic markers –, to produce and recognise semantically equivalent utterances, we run the risk of minimising it, considering it unworthy of any further investigation. The empirical definitions of the paraphrase also hinder us from making it a research object, thus reducing it to the classic, yet often perceived as unnatural, requirement present in all classrooms: *Can you say it in other words, please?* Such a "spontaneous" concept, traditionally defining the paraphrase as "the diversity of phrases corresponding to the same content" (Fuchs 1982a: 175), is reflected in the dictionary definitions as well: "presentation, explanation etc. of a textual content, oral communication etc. personally (and extensively) formulated" (DEX: 748). If we appeal to the different linguistic theories concerning the paraphrase in the last 65 years[2], we

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[2] Certain schools should be mentioned here: the School of Pennsylvania represented by Z. Harris, who introduced the much-tackled-upon valuable concept of *transformation* in 1951. Later on, his disciple, Noam Chomsky, will explain the mechanism of phrase-generation, as part of his famous Transformational Grammar; the Russian School of Semantics - A. Žolkovskij, at the end of the 1950's, whose first publications on the automatic translation and paraphrase issued in 1964 were excelled only by the Linguistic Circle in Cambridge (M. Masterman and others). Together with Igor Mel'čuk, Žolkovskij will put forth the renowned *Théorie Sens-Text* (TST – Meaning-Text Theory), vital in the comprehension of the paraphrase; the Prague School, with P. Adamec's studies on the role of communicative information in the paraphrase process and, generally, in text-production; the studies

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will undergo the same lack of enthusiasm: the paraphrase appears as an extremely intricate and unapproachable phenomenon to everyone not familiar enough with the sophisticated linguistic models proposed to comprehend the mechanisms of paraphrase production[3].

Completely aware of the variable character of the paraphrase, which renders it hard to control and categorise in a unique typology, we have approached the paraphrase phenomenon with the aim of exploiting the various theories on the paraphrase, meant to improve the training process of the specialists in Romanian as a foreign/second language (RFL/RSL). Such an objective may seem unusual, since most studies on the didactic-related paraphrase underline the strategies of developing the students' paraphrasing competence (PC), not the teacher's (in our case, the RFL/RSL teacher's[4]). Nevertheless, we have decided to examine the PC of the RFL/RSL teacher – native speaker, since he/she should clarify certain basic notions of the paraphrase types or the techniques used in the paraphrasing reformulation, in order to facilitate the foreign students' access to the meaning of the oral/written message, but also to their own PC development. Since there have been no RFL/RSL studies on the paraphrastic phenomenon, we will provide an elementary theoretical frame followed by certain observations on the necessity of PC conscious exploitation in the elaboration of reception activities.

1. The concept of the paraphrase

Despite the perspective diversity throughout the time, the paraphrase has been defined by at least two fundamental elements: *the semantic invariant* and the relation of *semantic equivalence*[5] between a *source utterance* (SU - *l'énoncé-source*) and the *reformulated utterance* (RU). For instance, Fuchs considers the paraphrase a semantic equivalence between two utterances,

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of generative semantics of J. R. Ross and J. McCauwley in the 1980's, which extend the domain of paraphrase, considering that the semantic equivalence cannot be reduced to the logical equivalence and exploring notions such as *conversion, noun-phrases, illocutionary acts* etc.; the Theory of Enunciative Operations, elaborated by A. Culioli in 1990, emphasises the role of the paraphrase, together with the experimental studies of C. Fuchs (1982a) and C. Martinot (1994) in the French academic context, placing the paraphrase within language acquisition (*apud* Milićević 2003: 102-118).

[3] Such as the linguistic functional model proposed by TST, elaborated in Moscow (1965) by Žolkvskij, Mel'čuk and Apresjan, which analyses the formal means to be utilised in the paraphrase modelling (for further information on TST, see Mel'čuk 2012).

[4] As a general term for all those involved in elaborating oral or written activities (teachers or didactic-material authors).

[5] Fuchs separates *the semantic equivalence* from *the total semantic identity*, since, similarly to the non-existence of lexical absolute synonymy, there is no total identity between the paraphrastically-related utterances (the paraphrase being a particular case of synonymy - Fuchs 1982a: 53).

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"based on the existence of a common semantic joint[6], on which various secondary semantics are transplanted" (1982a: 53), corresponding to formal transformations. In this author's perspective, the appearance of secondary semantics is due not only to the alterations on the form level, but also to the context of utterance and the speaker, which have a decisive role in setting the paraphrastic relation. *In other words*, the paraphrase represents a certain equivalence not only on the language level, but also on the discourse level[7], since there is no other means "besides the intuition of the speaker[8] to decide which are, among the linguistically equivalent utterances, the synonymous ones, namely paraphrastic" (Fuchs 1982b: 28). As an illustration, in the pair of utterances: **a**. *John wrote a book*. and **b**. *The book was written by John.*, the paraphrasing relation is purely linguistic, as a syntactic transformation; in such utterances as: **a**. *It is cold*! and **b**. *Close the window*!, the paraphrasing connection cannot be established exclusively on the basis of linguistic knowledge, but it also implies extralinguistic information, related to the communication context and the speaker's world knowledge. As a matter of fact, the classifications including the nature of the necessary knowledge to produce/recognise the paraphrase refer to two major types of paraphrase: "the linguistic paraphrase, encoded in the language system" and "the non-linguistic paraphrases", namely "the referential and pragmatic paraphrases (encoded in the speaker's use of language)" (Fuchs 1982a: 75), also called "cognitive paraphrases" (Milićević 2007: 136). Yet, since a paraphrastic relation is valid only within a certain judgement on the degree of semantic equivalence between the two utterances, the paraphrase should be simultaneously viewed as a metalinguistic activity and a meta-discoursive one.

In order to overpass the dichotomy language-discourse characterising the theoretical approaches on the paraphrase, we will propose an all-encompassing, yet straightforward definition of the paraphrase: a "relation which binds (quasi-)synonymous utterances, such as: **a**. *Penelope is certain that Ulysses will return*. **b**. *Penelope does not doubt Ulysses's return*. **c**. *Penelope thinks that Ulysses will certainly return*. (...) **e**. *In Penelope's view, Ulysses's return is a certain fact.* etc." (Milićević 2007: 1). On the contrary, the definition of the

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[6] In *Dicționarul de științe ale limbii* [*Dictionary of Language Sciences*], this concept appears in the rhetoric approaches of the paraphrase: "a figure of thought close to accumulation, by which more (variants of some) ideas belonging to the same **semantic core** can develop/be reformulated" (our emphasis, Bidu-Vrănceanu: 370).

[7] The discourse as "a communicative event, evinced by a linguistic behaviour" (Bidu-Vrănceanu: 184).

[8] Differently from Fuchs and following Harris's theory, Martinot considers that it is not the speakers' paraphrastic exercise which "creates paraphrases", but "the more or less extended possibility of paraphrasing or not an utterance, which we call paraphrastic plasticity" (Martinot 2009: 30-31), specific to each language and dependent on its restructuring possibilities.

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paraphrase as a "relation" triggers certain observations on the character of this connection, respectively on the degree of semantic equivalence between SU and RU, which can significantly vary. Thus, between the utterances **a**. *Maria has solved this exercise correctly*. and **b**. *Maria has found the correct solution to this exercise.,* there is a high level of equivalence, but, between **a**. and **c**. *Maria has found the proper solution to the problem.,* it can be argued that there is only a relation of approximate equivalence (quasi-equivalence), since lexically substituting *exercise* by *problem* and *correct* by *proper,* the meaning modifies and we start doubting whether it involves an exercise or a personal problem, of a different sort. The disambiguation may be possible by contextually neutralising the semantic differences, thus adding a supplementary explanation: **d**. *Maria has found the proper solution to the mathematics problem*. In contrast, between **a**. and **e**. *Maria has solved her problem.,* the relation is certainly of non-equivalence, since by the use of the possessive pronoun, the meaning disambiguates, the problem naturally turning into a personal one.

Summing up our opinions on the specificity of the paraphrastic phenomenon, we observe a slight reiteration of the four fundamental principles of the paraphrase issued more than five decades ago, within the Meaning-Text Theory, namely: **1**. the paraphrase should always be perceived from the speaker's perspective, as a linguistic activity of producing/identifying certain synonymous utterances; **2**. the linguistic meaning represents the invariant of the linguistic paraphrases; **3**. the paraphrastic connection is intuitive – the native speaker can intuitively confirm the paraphrastic equivalence or non-equivalence, and **4**. any paraphrase is approximate, the absolute identity of the utterances sharing a paraphrastic relation being non-existent (*apud* Milićević 2007: 13).

2. The role of the paraphrastic competence (PC) in communication

PC, more specifically, the ability of a speaker "to produce synonymous or quasi-synonymous utterances" (Milićević 2003: 1), is an essential element of the general linguistic competence (Fuchs 1982a: 93). Thus, during the oral production, paraphrasing allows a better clarification of ideas, as well as a further diversity of expressions in order to avoid repetitions. At the same time, the production of semantically equivalent utterances represents a genuine communication strategy, by which any communication breach caused by the absence of a certain linguistic means can be avoided (Tsedryk: 19). For example, the speakers can replace a word they cannot remember with an equivalent term, making all the necessary changes so that their utterances be correct grammatically and lexically, but also "acceptable", in Chomsky's terminology, namely "immediately comprehensible, easy-to-get and

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homogeneously decoded…" (Vasiliu, Golopenția: 27). The paraphrastic reformulation is also used in the production of the written text, in order to clarify certain ideas, especially in the case of those studies which "vulgarise" scientific terminology (Fuchs 1982b: 30). PC is not important mainly because it helps us be understood, but also because it helps us understand better; PC has, in fact, a vital role in the reception of the oral/written text. The exploitation of PC becomes obvious in writing, as a tool to avoid plagiarism, since the quality of understanding a scientific text reflects in the quality of paraphrasing bibliographical references. During a verbal interaction, PC is present in reformulating the other's reply in order to assure ourselves of understanding correctly the message, whereas during the inter-linguistic translations, the PC becomes a guarantee for the interpreter's expertise.

Furthemore, in a didactic context, the role of PC cannot be neglected, the teacher making use of a certain "intra-linguistic translation" (Cuq 2003: 186-187) whenever they reformulate the utterances for their students, to render them more precise and transparent. In the case of teaching a foreign language, the paraphrase acquires the status of a "correction method". The teacher reformulates the incorrect utterances of the student, who becomes aware of the mistake and corrects it, by comparing their own production with the teacher's. Similarly, the didactic explanation transforms the paraphrastic reformulation into "an explicative procedure", to facilitate comprehension, by simplifying the language (Cuq 2003: 187). In fact, in foreign language teaching, the paraphrastic reformulation becomes a very complex process – it preserves the semantic equivalence and follows other linguistic restrictions too. Such restrictions are imposed by the need to use a micro-language adapted to the student's inter-language level, with a view to ensuring the success of exo-language communication[9].

Therefore, PC plays an essential role in language acquisition, functioning as both "a recognision tool for the learning stages" and "a means of acquisition" (Martinot 2009: 29, 32). Because the present study refers to the native speaker - teacher's PC, we consider it useful to focus on the manner in which this competence appears and develops. Thus, it has been demonstrated that PC develops "progressively" and is acquired "naturally", without the speaker becoming aware of the paraphrasing operations or the learning stages. Following the methods of PC development in the case of French-speaking children and running comparative studies with the Italian-speaking children, Martinot ranges the types of paraphrastic reformulation for

[9] See Platon 2016, for the concept definition of *micro-language (ML)* and *exo-language communication (CEX)*.

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each age[10], reaching the conclusion that their number increases gradually and systematically, with a climax between 6 and 8 years, the non-linguistic paraphrases occurring only after the age of 10. It is worthwhile mentioning that, at this age, the PC is already formed, namely the main paraphrasing operations are functional (which does not entail that the PC cannot continue improving, by exposing the child to a more and more complex language, allowing them to produce comparably complex utterances).

In comparison to a native speaker, the non-native adult speaker (especially the one not constantly exposed to a foreign language) must be aware of the paraphrasing mechanisms and to benefit from the explicit teaching of the paraphrasing rules, so as to improve their PC (Tsedryk: 21). As a matter of fact, these rules describe the equivalence connection among the linguistic expressions. For example, in the pair of paraphrastic utterances: **a**. *Maria has analysed this problem properly.* and **b**. *Maria has made the proper analysis of this problem.*, the paraphrasing rule should sound as follows: V ≈ support V (N) + N - the verb *to analyse* was replaced by a noun-construction (derived from a verb), *analysis,* together with the support-verb *to make,* which forms a collocation. Taking into account that a complete inventory of the paraphrasing rules functioning in a language should be realised on the basis of an extensive corpus, in the present analysis we will introduce solely certain elementary paraphrasing operations, to be traced in various languages.

3. Types of paraphrastic operations

Since a native speaker applies the paraphrasing rules intuitively, while a non-native speaker ought to acquire them in order to achieve PC, should the teacher also be conscious of such rules? We assume that, as a native speaker, the teacher is already an ideal "paraphraser", making use of all the linguistic and extra-linguistic information for the efficient functioning of PC; however, the teacher should also internalise the reformulation mechanisms necessary in a didactic context. In the absence of this internalisation, the teacher will not be able to clarify the paraphrastic operations, by means of simple rules, neither will they be capable of designing special exercises to develop the students' PC. On account of this premise, we believe that a short presentation

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[10] Between 4 and 6 years, there occur "lacunar descriptive reformulations"– for example, *to whisper ≈ to say something in a certain way* is reduced to *say*; starting with the age of 6, there occur "the semantic paraphrases" (synonymous substitutions such as "to hold one's hand ∼ to hold one's arm); after 8, "the formal paraphrases", such as *transformations* (for ex. *She was holding a girl's arm* vs. *... who was holding her arm*) and *restructuring* (*Max loads the lorry with cases* vs. *Max loads the cases in the lorry*); after 10, there already occur the explicative and nonlinguistic paraphrases (Martinot 2015: 10).

of the types of paraphrastic operations is more than welcome, because, no matter how diverse the perspectives on the paraphrase are and no matter how many efforts have been made to exclude it from the language domain, the conclusion is that merely linguistics allows a satisfying formal double-layered analysis of the linguistic paraphrases: the analysis of "forms" as such and the analysis of "formal procedures", illustrated by Harris's transformations (Harris 1951). In conclusion, a linguist makes use of no other means of "revealing" the sense of an utterance or setting a meaning relation between two utterances but by describing "the manner of producing these utterances, viewed as such transformations or operations" (Fuchs 1982b: 28).

Our mini-inventory will adopt only some of the types mentioned in Milićević's classification system (2007: 138-141). The objective is to assure a minimal theoretical frame for the analysis of some reception exercises proposed in RFL. A *paraphrastic operation*[11] refers to the particular alteration of an utterance in order to produce a paraphrase. The examples we will provide represent utterance pairs of paraphrases, **a**. representing SU, whereas **b**., **c**. etc., the RU. We have chosen such a manner of paraphrase description, considering that in TST it seems easier to admit the fact that two utterances have *the same meaning*, on account of intuitive perception, than to recognise *the meaning*. In other words, "the same meaning" appears to be a simpler notion than "the meaning" (Milićević 2007: 17).

The broad categories of paraphrastic operations fall into *lexical-syntactic, syntactic* and *semantic*. The first ones include different types of lexical substitution (which can be synonymous, antonymous, conversing and derivative), frequently combined with syntactic restructuring. For instance, by a simple synonymous substitution, **a**. *Maria has solved the problem correctly*. changes into **b**. *Maria has solved the exercise correctly.* By syntactic restructuring (more exactly, a lexical-syntactic operation), it results into **c**. *Maria has found the correct solution to this exercise.* In the case of antonymous substitution, two lexemes in the SU are replaced with their antonyms, the result being paraphrases as: **a**. *It is possible that passing be forbidden here.* and **b**. *It is impossible that passing be permitted.* In what concerns the conversion substitutions, they include the change of lexical-grammatical category and syntactic restructuring, as in: **a**. *My friend loves films*. and **b**. *Films are my friend's love*. In what regards the derivative substitutions, they include the change of lexical-grammatical category of a word by means of derivation: **a**. *Ironing bores me*. and **b**. *Ironing is a boring activity.*

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[11] In the literature of paraphrase, the *paraphrastic operation* is synonymous with *paraphrastic procedure*, *paraphrastic technique, paraphrastic strategy* etc. Our choice is Milićević's term.

The second category is represented by *syntactic operations*. A good example is passivization, where: **a**. *Maria has solved a difficult exercise correctly.* changes into **b**. *A difficult exercise was solved correctly by Maria.,* or relativization, where **a**. becomes **c**. *The exercise that Maria has solved correctly was difficult.*

In their turn, the *semantic paraphrases* (we refer here merely to the sentence-related ones, focused on denotation) can be the result of four types of operations: inferences, semantic additions/completions, semantic substitutions or decomposition. The semantic inferences are considered, to a certain extent, as halfway between the linguistic and non-linguistic paraphrases, because the semantic inference operation may trigger, besides the linguistic knowledge, naïve world-knowledge or elementary cognitive abilities, such as the deduction. For example, in the pair: **a**. *Grandfather gave good advice to his grandson.* and **b**. *Grandfather helped his grandson by his advice.,* the speaker generally knows, out of experience, that good advice is usually helpful. On the contrary, in the pair: **a**. *Maria likes swimming.* and **b**. *Maria loves going to the swimming pool.,* the elementary deductive reasoning is that, if Maria likes swimming, it is natural that she should go often to the swimming pool. The category of semantic completions is rather special, since they can lead to the production of certain quasi-equivalent paraphrases. In this case, the paraphrastic equivalence is realised only by adding supplementary explanations about the context, in order to neutralise any semantic differences. For instance, if in **a**. *Maria has solved this difficult exercise correctly.* we insert the verbs *can* or *know,* the result will become **b**. *Maria could/knew how to solve this difficult exercise.,* a fact that brings supplementary information on the context: *Although the exercise was very difficult, Maria managed to solve it.* The semantic substitutions function by replacing certain semantemes in the SU, but only under special circumstances: **a**. *Maria has solved this difficult exercise correctly.* **b**. *Maria has solved this difficult exercise successfully.,* thus *a priori* presuming as equivalent *to do something correctly* and *to do something successfully,* a reason for which such a case is also a quasi-equivalence. The semantic decomposition involves the replacement of a lexeme in the SU by its semantic equivalent, more specifically, by its lexicographic definition: **a**. *Maria is the author of the exercise.*; **b**. *Maria is the person who designed the exercise.,* a more adequate technique when the aim is to find an "absolute" identity relation.

At the end of this elementary classification, two further remarks are necessary. Firstly, following Chomsky's tradition, some of the reformulation procedures mentioned before have a universal character, generally depicting the linguistic activity and particularly, the acquisition process (Martinot 2012: 64). Secondly, even if we have isolated every type of paraphrastic operation, for the sake of clarity, seldom in reality does a paraphrase stem from one single operation. Regularly, during the paraphrastic reformulation, more procedures are combined and the more operation types are used, the more

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difficult to produce/recognise the equivalence relation will be, due to the existence of various cognitive operations. As an illustration, in the pair: **a**. *Maria has many questions for her teacher all the time*. and **b**. *The teacher answers the numerous questions that Maria asks,* a semantic inference can be traced: *to have questions – to answer questions* (since the one who asks naturally expects an answer, even if not always the case). Lexical substitutions are present too: *to have* is replaced with *to ask, many* is replaced with *numerous,* accompanied by syntactic alterations, such as relativization and the case category*.

4. The role of PC in elaborating reception exercises

As easily assumed, PC is problematic to describe and separate as a subject of study. The first reason is the infinite number of variants, the paraphrastic reformulation having "no homogeneous working method", because of both the *paraphrastic plasticity* (see note 9 above), and the speakers' creativity, their abilities to adapt to the communication situation etc. Moreover, normally, "nothing obliges a speaker to produce a paraphrase of the "pure" restructuring type (Martinot 2009: 31), so, in everyday life, it is impossible to control the SU and RU pairs the way we have organised them above.

Nevertheless, during the courses addressed to the future experts in the domain of RFL/RSL, the controlled paraphrasing frequently occurs in the process of designing reception exercises. In fact, the very idea of this study resulted from the course-participants' empirical observations on the exploitation manner of their own PC, while elaborating True/False (T/F) items or multiple-choice items. Among the recommendations on the correct item-formulation, there is one requiring the paraphrasing of the targeted excerpt from the input-text, since a *tale quale* reproduction of the SU in the items will never trigger any further cognitive operations, thus making the exercise utterly irrelevant. How it is stated in the studies dedicated to the assessment of reception competences, the item-validity depends on the capacity to test "what is desired to be verified by them: *the comprehension* (on various levels) of the *listened text*". Consequently, the text in the item/at the basis of the item/in the variants should not be provided in its listened or read form, our task being "to paraphrase at least a part of the fragment whose comprehension we need to verify" (Vasiu 2015: 77).

In spite of this paraphrasing recommendation, also included in an *Item-decalogue* (Platon et alii. 2015: 369), the respective condition is frequently infringed. Even if most of the course-participants are native speakers and their PC is excellent, this PC is not functional at all or the reformulation is over-simplified, due to the limited number and types of paraphrastic operations. Such errors are frequent in the portfolios of the participants, who copy the SU as such

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in the item, not modifying it formally. Similarly, wrongly-formulated items can also be found in certain published tests. For example, there are True/False items which reformulate to a minimal extent, by using merely one type of paraphrastic operations. As an illustration, we will analyse such an item exclusively based on synonymous substitution: the source utterance in the text: *When living with a roommate, the young can have many problems.*, is reformulated in the item as: *When having a roommate, the young can encounter hardships.*" (Medrea et alii: 42). Although the exercise addresses an A2-level, where the text length and the students' inter-language do not always allow a sufficiently complex reformulation, we still doubt the efficiency of the item in the message comprehension. Reformulated as mentioned above, the item mainly regards the lexical competence, not the reception competence, thus solely verifying certain synonymy relations (*to have = to live (with) a roommate*, respectively, *problems = hardships)*. Actually, the elimination of the adjective *many* seriously affects the character of the paraphrastic relation, which is no longer an identity relation, but one of semantic quasi-equivalence. However, this item can also be solved as false (although the exercise key claims it is true), because *having problems* is not entirely identical to *having many problems*. Unfortunately, nothing neutralises this semantic difference (for example, *many* could have been substituted by *numerous*, as illustrated above, but the second adjective may have been perceived as too difficult for an A2 level, the solution being an approximate paraphrase). On the other hand, the "negation of such semantic differences" during the paraphrasing process comes as a natural reaction of the paraphraser, who considers them "insignificant and nonpertinent" (Fuchs 1982b: 33). In spite of this expected and accepted tendency in other communication situations, we think that the teacher should never ignore such differences during the item-designation, being obliged to neutralise them (by searching for the best paraphrastic variant or scheme, adding or omitting some context-related information in order to obtain a high level of semantic identity, etc.).

While elaborating a reception exercise, we share a double status: native speakers and RFL teachers. The first status leads us to intuitive reformulation. The second one obliges us to consider a series of restrictions, such as the students' language level and the type of comprehension on focus. In a study on the B2-level validity of the construct, Vasiu reaches the conclusion that the majority of True/False and multiple-choice items in the item corpus on analysis target "literal comprehension, on a local level" (Vasiu 2014: 135), not the global comprehension, and provides two further explanations. The first explanation refers to the easiness of elaborating such items, in comparison to the interpretive ones, recommended in the verification of global comprehension. The second one mentions the text length, considering that the selected texts

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are usually too short and, thus, do not allow any further elaborate items. We completely agree to the fact that the text choice is essential, on account that "the complexity degree of the paraphrase (the fact that some paraphrases are more difficult to produce than others) depends on two factors: either the SU is "complex" or the paraphrastic procedure applied to this SU involves the simultaneous function of various mechanisms" (Martinot 2009: 29). Nevertheless, Martinot's second factor makes us wonder if the choice of the simplest paraphrastic operations (in our case, the synonymous substitution) may result from the insufficient awareness of all the possible paraphrastic operations, whose consequence is the designation of non-valid items.

We are of the opinion that, sometimes, even a shorter SU can be reformulated so that a lexical or lexical-syntactic paraphrase may occur. Although the comprehension type will not always be global-interpretive – due to the character of the information/text length/simplicity of the SU structures, the A2-level restrictions on the lexical means, the aim of text reception, etc. –, more complex paraphrastic operations can be used in order to activate more intricate cognitive operations than the plain identification of simple synonymy. For instance, an item formulated on the *sum pro habeo* principle may have proved efficient in our analysis: SU*: …the young can have many problems* vs. *the young's life can be difficult.* Or in the first part of the SU, a better choice would have been a semantic paraphrase, based on logical deduction and negation, rather than the simple synonymous substitution suggested by the author: *When sharing their room with somebody else* vs. *when they do not live alone in the room,* which would have triggered further restructuring in the second part too, so that the item will have at least three-four different variants, despite the so-called paraphrastic scarcity of the SU and the level restrictions: *When sharing their room with somebody else, the young's life can be difficult.* or *If they share their room with somebody else, many difficulties appear in the young's life.* or even: *In the young's life numerous difficulties appear when they share their room with somebody else*, the last variant simultaneously appealing to more synonymous and antonymous substitutions, syntactic restructuring, inclusively the change of topic. For the last variant, the SU-RU inversion would be suggested (the teacher can afford such 'luxury' since they are the authors of the input and the items), based on the recommendation to use the more simple variant of the paraphrastic pair in the items, not in the input-text. Only in this way will the item become a real tool for the easy access to the SU meaning (Vasiu 2015: 77). If various paraphrastic operations were simultaneously used, more relevant items would be more easily produced, thus revealing whether the human receptor has reached the semantic joint of the text – that "deep structure" coined by

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TST and extensively described by the transformational grammars, or not, thus remaining to its surface, where the noun *problems* was merely replaced by *hardships*. Moreover, the diversity of paraphrasing techniques will help us decode the message in genuine situations of communication, since rarely will the receptor face such subtle reformulations, limited to few cognitive operations and to the simple synonymous identification. On the contrary, outside the classroom, the receptor will always have to simultaneously activate more cognitive operations in order to decode the various paraphrastic variants to which he/she is exposed. As a consequence, the exercises should be designed by the model of authentic comprehension.

5. Conclusions.

The analysis of one single item does naturally not account for any further valid conclusions regarding the manner of using the PC in elaborating items within the listening or reading comprehension. In spite of the fact that such conclusions also rely on our empirical observations about the manner of item-formulation in the student portfolios, the latter cannot be persuasive in the absence of a minimal corpus analysis, which represents the topic of a future study. Nevertheless, we believe that the RFL teacher should be completely aware of the necessity of mastering their PC in order to devise the reception activities more efficiently. Besides their knowledge of the different types of reading and listening comprehension, the RFL teacher ought to master all the paraphrasing techniques specific to their own language; as a result, they will be able to elaborate more complex and subtler exercises, meant to ease the student's access to the text meaning and to demonstrate their language level.

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