

Announcements of Self-Repair in MICASE: an Analysis

Introduction

No one would question that there are fundamental differences between spoken and written language. Many features, including formality and spontaneity, are inherently different between these two types of discourse, although, of course, a text's features depend heavily on the context in which it is found and other factors. On the other hand, certain similarities exist between the two types of communication, and some features of one modality may parallel those of the other in function.

One phenomenon that helps illustrate this point is the concept of repairs and reformulations in speech. When one speaks, "there is no going back and changing or restructuring our words as there is in writing" (Cook 1989: 115). However, although a previous utterance cannot be erased from history, further elaboration of it can often alter the way it is interpreted. This is where repairs and reformulations enter the picture, providing speakers with the ability to change what he or she just said, at least to a certain extent. Use of these methods can be helpful in many situations, ranging from the frivolous (a joke being misunderstood among friends) to the serious (a statement being misinterpreted in court). The cases under consideration in this analysis fall somewhere in-between: the academic discourse that constitutes MICASE.

Background

Locating previous research on a similar theme was difficult. Bruti (2004), however, has conducted similar analyses of reformulations across a set of biology textbooks, called the Pavia biology corpus. She examined this corpus for instances of the phrases "namely," "e.g.," and "that is." Her methods of gathering data and making observations with respect to semantic

equivalence, expansions versus reductions, and the like have helped shape the foundations of this paper. Of course, the fact that Bruti analyzed written sources makes a comparison with MICASE a bit questionable, but this paper is not going to take much of her data into account, only her techniques.

Methods

In beginning my research, I (with assistance) brainstormed phrases that one might use when he or she wanted to fix a speech mistake, clarify an idea, or rephrase an ambiguous utterance. In so doing, several examples came to mind, often as part of a set of phrases with slight variation (i.e. “that’s what I meant,” “what I meant to say,” “I think you meant,” etc. Several MICASE searches were then conducted, looking for each individual phrase in the corpus. Twelve phrases out of the original group were located and included in the data. (“Mean” and “meant” were considered separately, although the distinction may be due more to the usage of the attitudinal past than to any differences in the actual functioning of these two words.) It is entirely possible that applicable phrases have been missed, but the ones found seem to provide a suitable representation. Furthermore, Bruti (2004) mentions that many reformulations are not introduced by indicators; that is, they use simply a colon, a hyphen, or a pause (when referring to spoken discourse) before a repair. Because of this, it would be nearly impossible to catch every single instance in MICASE or any other corpus.

Next, the apparently relevant results were sifted through and any data that did not involve repair were excluded. An example of one of these misleading utterances was the use of “meant” as “intended but foiled,” as seen in the excerpt “I *meant* to bring a book to be able to read you this uh this big long quote.” These and other similar instances of the phrases were removed from

consideration. Due to the large amount of potential data, any utterances that I judged as “questionable” were eliminated, so some repairs were most likely thrown out because they were not obvious at first glance. The final data set was composed of 387 samples of reformulation.

I then divided these instances of repair words (which appear in contexts which I judge to involve repairs) into four categories, or types. These can be summed up in the following table, setting A as the person who utters the repair word (usually referred to hereafter as “the speaker”) and B as a fellow conversant or passive listener. The types vary in their combinations of three parameters: who uses the repair word, who makes the mistake in speech, and who corrects the mistake.

	corrects mistake →	
	A	B
makes mistake	A	type 1
	B	type 2
	type 3	type 4

Type 1 repairs involve a speaker making a mistake and then correcting him or herself using a repair word. Type 2 is where a speaker makes a mistake and a listener corrects him or her, and the speaker agrees with the reformulation using a repair word. Type 3 occurs when a speaker corrects a listener’s mistake using a repair word, and type 4 involves a speaker asking a listener for reformulation of a mistake he or she made, using a repair word in the request. For the purposes of this paper, types 1 and 2 were considered self-repairs, as the person using the repair word is the one who had originally made the mistake. (Of course, the “mistake” does not have to be a factual error; it is simply a statement that is perceived as less than ideal by someone in the situation.)

Lastly, I looked at the data and, for each phrase, I separated the data into instances of expansion and reduction. This has been done only for the self-repairs, and only those classified as type 1. The amount of change between the original utterance and the reformulation was noted, especially with respect to any discrepancies in length.

Results

The total instances of each repair phrase found in MICASE are shown in the following table. These are broken down according to the type of reformulation found in each instance.

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Total
in other words	224	0	5	0	229
mean	50	0	2	0	52
another way	18	0	4	1	23
meant	11	3	2	0	16
that is to say	16	0	0	0	16
namely	15	0	0	1	16
i.e.	14	0	0	0	14
clarify	4	0	0	4	8
rephrase	4	0	3	0	7
more specifically	2	0	0	2	4
paraphrase	0	0	0	1	1
misspoke	1	0	0	0	1

Type 1 repairs can be further broken down into those that are made immediately and those that are delayed, being brought up later in the conversation. However, only three instances of delayed self-repairs were found in the data (two using “meant” and one using “misspoke”), so separating them in the data seems a bit superfluous.

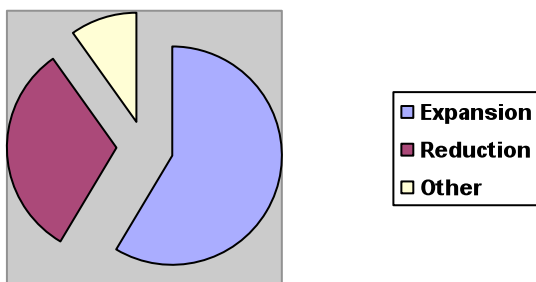
Analysis

Following are the specifics of each phrase: if the reformulation is an expansion or a reduction, how changed the reformulation is from the original statement, and any further

comments that are warranted by the data. Illustrative examples are given for each of the three contexts using each phrase, if applicable.

In other words

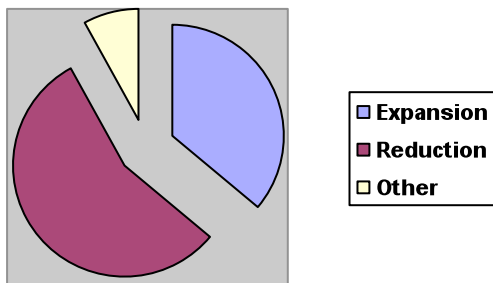
Expansions	Reductions	Other
131	71	22



This phrase is used mainly in the context of expansions, as when explaining a concept or giving examples that illustrate a point (“it is a call to personal and social transformation. *in other words* we can imagine and reconstruct various ways of creating sustainable relationships with each other, between partners between partners and children at different stages of our lives”). In second place for the amount of data found are reductions, reformulations that state the point succinctly (“men and women, have and they should have equal roles in both family care and work and public involvement, *in other words* both men and women should be, full human persons”). The remainder of the data could not easily be classified into either of these categories, as the reformulation contained about the same amount of information as the original statement (“the labor movement which rose in the late nineteenth century in this country championed the middle-class white family ideal. *in other words* they tried to raise the male wage to the level, where the wife could become a full-time housewife”).

Mean

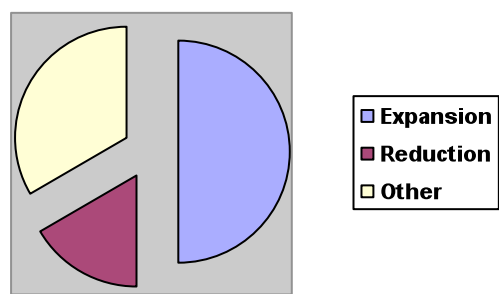
Expansions	Reductions	Other
18	28	4



Reductions are the most often used reformulations with this phrase, and one particularly common type is to specify the concept after explaining it (“he's throwing, kind of an, anchor off. notice that she bounces up and down. pulling the boat in, sways. no. kay so that's what i *mean* by, boat-on-dry-land schtick”). Expansions are relatively common as well, where the speaker elaborates a term he or she has brought up (“what clinicians call body angst, or i like this term better, bad body fever, alright, and i_ what i *mean* by that is a continuous internal dialogue with the self, about what's wrong”). The type with the fewest representations is the same-length reformulations (“sometimes i refer to that as, vertically-dominated region of the rack and what i *mean* by that is the vertical motor, is the critical motor there”).

Another way

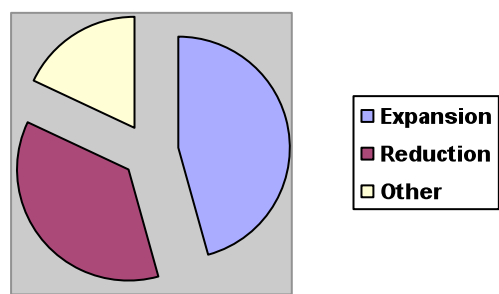
Expansions	Reductions	Other
9	3	6



Half of the instances of this phrase are found in the context of expansions, occurring especially often when defining technical terms (“they’re called clades, and clades is *another way* of call- of saying monophyletic group”). Also quite common in this group were reformulations of about the same length, when just rephrasing a concept using different words (“one way of putting it is that all the laws, of physics... work equally well, in any inertial frame of reference. and, *another way* of putting it is, the concept of absolute motion, so-called, whether that you’re definitely moving or not”). Reductions appeared in the lowest proportion, mainly summing up a long initial utterance (“with anybody at least in a public situation i mean that, you sort of go out of your way to be polite and to not offend, um, and, and i suppose *another way* you can get at the same phenomenon is the ques- is in the notion of being honest”).

Meant

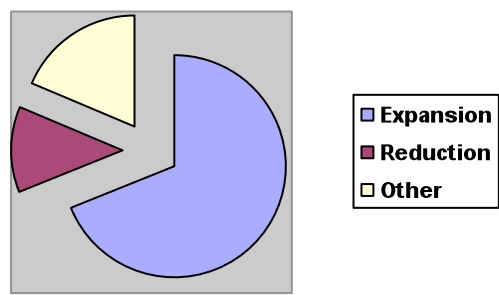
Expansions	Reductions	Other
5	4	2



This phrase is most often found in the context of expansions, to explain an idea in more detail (“so when i said they were free i *meant* they were free relative to going out into the world and looking at each sensor value”). Close behind are the reductions, summing up the previous statement in a few words (“this sort of misinterpretation of the Bible doesn’t, occur in our world. yeah. i just *meant* specifically that. oh okay”). Less frequent in these instances, although still found, are reformulations of similar length and structure (“well i mean there’s, three choices. that’s what i *meant*. no three-part i *meant* to_ just, three choices”).

That is to say

Expansions	Reductions	Other
11	2	3

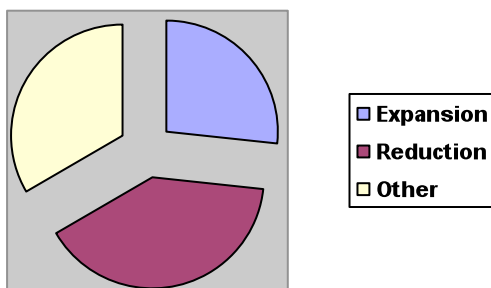


Expansions are the most common types of statements following this phrase, as it is often used to detail an important concept (“uh and yet single women, uh *that is to say* w- uh, women

who were never married or widows”). Next in rank are the reformulations that are about the same length as the original utterance, like simple restatements (“is there a time when independent judgment, and that includes technology, age of technology and science. *that is to say*, a point when, authority rests in something that is new something that is devised by individuals”). The two reductions involve a summary of what has just been explained (“the attitude that seems more modern to us than we would find in other thirteenth century thinkers *that is to say*, um, the, the, the utilitarian rule”).

Namely

Expansions	Reductions	Other
4	6	5

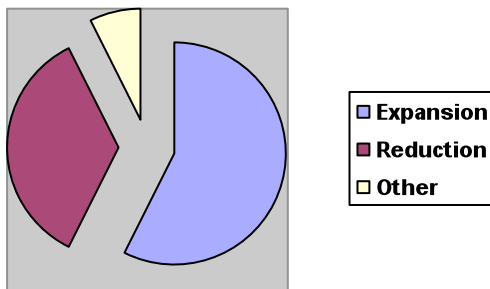


The three types of reformulations all have about the same prevalence when used with this phrase. Reductions are used when the original statement can be summed up in a very succinct way (“the concept of the predicate, *namely* unmarried, is already in the concept of bachelor”). Next, utterances of the same length appear when the idea is just being put forth in similar words (“so in the c- does this happen here where you have, basically two options, of characteristics, *namely*, two different actions, of a person”). The last group of reformulations using this phrase involves expansions, where more detailed phrases are used in the second position of the

utterance (“we’ve got some kind of, thing that needs explanation here *namely* the fact that, every time we think of things we think of them in terms of time”).

i.e.

Expansions	Reductions	Other
8	5	1



Expansions are found most often for this phrase, as would be expected, as it is often used to give examples or illustrations of an idea (“you’re going from a sound here that’s labial *i.e.* involving articulators that are in the front of the articulatory apparatus”). Reductions come about when the definition of a word is given before the word itself (“so trade, calculated in terms of a multipurpose medium of exchange and standard value, *i.e.*, money”). The lone instance of a similar-length reformulation appears when the speaker substitutes another phrase with the same meaning, in this case a name (“you know outside the little cottage, that he shares in Berkeley with Alva Goldbrook *i.e.* Allen Ginsberg”).

Clarify

Expansions	Reductions	Other
4	0	0

The reformulations using this phrase tend to have quite long, detailed follow-up utterances as the second part, and these are often not given immediately after the original utterance (“at this point, uh let me *clarify* at this point most of the te- most of the texts a vast majority of the texts brought from India”). Most of the examples have a second part that follows quite far behind the original utterance, making it difficult to judge for certain what kind of reformulation it is. In addition, many of these examples are rephrasing an overall concept, although instead of summarizing them, the reformulations are also composed of detailed statements.

Rephrase

Expansions	Reductions	Other
4	0	0

The corpus’ only examples of this phrase are in the context of expansion, pinpointing the details of an unclear concept (“so all these circles represent goods which can be either, you know, a task or a resource. um, on this end, I have these box so uh you might another way uh another way to *rephrase* that might be, that, tasks are, resources that are supplied by other, agents”). If there had been more examples, same-length reformulations would very likely also have been found, since the word demands a fairly equivalent or more-detailed explanation in the second half.

More specifically

Expansions	Reductions	Other
2	0	0

This phrase was only found in contexts where the reformulation was an expansion of the original statement (“um, i’m now looking at injury prevention um, *more specifically* as a component of child advocacy”). By definition, this phrase would require the use of a more detailed reformulation, so the prevalence of expansions is no surprise. Reformulations of a similar length might be possible using this phrase, but reductions would probably appear awkward and poorly-worded.

Paraphrase

The one example for this word came in a type 4 utterance, where a speaker asked a fellow conversant to reformulate his or her statement (“yeah how would you say that? in a nifty little *paraphrase* like three words. five words. six maybe.”). The speaker is obviously asking for a reduction of the original phrase, and one would guess that this would be how the word would be used in a type 1 utterance.

Misspoke

Expansions	Reductions	Other
1	0	0

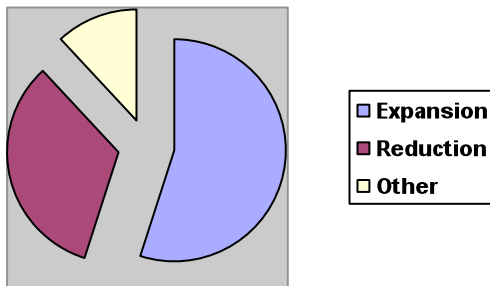
The one instance of this phrase is used as an expansion, and the speaker uses it a bit strangely (“no it’s it’s wrong to look at it as the elites, spreading it to the masses that was a, a *misspoke*, on my part. it’s that these we- tended to be mass movements, with new kinds of leadership, that hadn’t been seen, in these parts of West Africa before”). Considering that this is just one example, and the usage of it is not grammatically correct, it is not a particularly convincing argument for the context of the phrase. It is likely that this word can be used for

expansions and same-length reformulations, though not quite as much for reductions, since it implies an actual error in the original utterance, and this would probably require a longer explanation for the sake of clarification.

Discussion

The following table and chart illustrate the totals calculated across all twelve phrases in terms of expansions, reductions, and same-length reformulations.

Expansions	Reductions	Other
197	119	43



Of all 359 instances of self-repair (type 1 reformulations), expansions made up more than half of the total. This shows a very clear tendency for people to follow announcements of self-repair with an elaboration of the original utterance, providing more rather than less information in the new statement.

This pattern does not seem particularly surprising, given speakers' intuitions on the concept. Giving an explicit announcement that a concept will be fixed implies that the repair will be easier to understand and thus, most likely, more detailed and informational than the original statement. Of course, when a statement can be better-clarified using only a few words, this will be chosen over elaboration. The last option, of using a reformulation of similar length and content, can be used with most of the repair phrases as well, usually when the original

utterance has to be only slightly modified. All three of these choices occur in the vicinity of repair words, and they are all represented quite well in the data, though the proportions vary by the individual phrase chosen for a specific context.

Still, even though the results are not exactly surprising, the numbers are quite striking. Perhaps academic contexts tend to stress details at the expense of concise ideas, meaning that patterns of self-repair in different types of corpora would be fundamentally different. This question, however, would require much further research.

References

- Bruti, S. (2004). Paraphrase types in the Pavia biology corpus: Some appositional constructions. In A. Partington, J. Morley, & L. Haarman (Eds.), *Corpora and discourse* (pp. 125-138). Bern: Peter Lang.
- Cook, G. (1989). *Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.