

Textual Borrowing Behaviors in Integrated Tasks

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Abstract

This review synthesizes research on textual borrowing in integrated L2 tasks. It focuses on how L2 writers and speakers use source texts. Three dimensions are covered: extent, form, and influencing factors. Challenges include over-reliance, poor paraphrasing, and content distortion. For writing tasks, the review examines theoretical bases, design effects, and automated scoring. For speaking tasks, it addresses cognitive load, strategy use, and task-type differences. A major gap is the lack of studies on source use in speaking. Pedagogical recommendations stress explicit instruction in paraphrasing, summarizing, and academic integrity, along with careful task design to improve authenticity and validity.

Keywords

Textual borrowing; integrated writing tasks; integrated speaking tasks.

1. Introduction

Source text use is a key topic in L2 writing research. It is especially important for integrated writing tasks. This review examines recent studies on how L2 writers use source texts. It covers the extent, nature, and impact of source use in academic writing. The review also looks at factors that affect source integration. It discusses the challenges L2 writers often encounter. It also explores the implications for writing instruction and assessment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Source Text Use

Source text use refers to the way in which an author incorporates information from external sources into their own writing. In second-language writing, this involves not only technical aspects such as paraphrasing and summarizing, but also cognitive processes such as comprehension, synthesis, and integration. Recent trends in the field of language testing—such as the introduction of integrated writing tasks in exams like the TOEFL iBT and IELTS—have made it particularly important to understand how second-language writers effectively utilize source texts (Uludag et al., 2019).

2.1.1. Extent of Source Text Use

Research shows that there are significant differences in the use of source text by second language (L2) writers. The study found that in a comprehensive assessment of reading and writing, most students learned less than 10% of the content from the source text in the composition, and only a few students showed extensive borrowing (Weigle & Parker, 2012). Similarly, some studies have pointed out that in CAEL writing tasks, the number of source views adopted by EAP students can predict their scores, which shows that it is beneficial to use the source text moderately (Uludag et al., 2019). However, over-reliance on the source text may cover up the lack of language ability, resulting in a decrease in scores (Cumming et al., 2005).

2.1.2. Nature of Source Text Use

The use of the source text can be divided into three categories: word-by-word copying, rewriting and generalization. Research shows that second-language writers often find it difficult to rewrite appropriately and may resort to superficial modification or patchwork writing (Keck, 2006). For example, when aligning their writing with the source text, high-level learners are more inclined to use words that are close to native speakers and have fewer formal errors (Wang & Wang, 2014). However, it may be difficult for low-level learners to accurately present the content of the source text, which leads to potential misunderstandings (Wette, 2018).

2.1.3. Factors Influencing Source Text Use

There are several factors that affect the way second-language writers use the source text. These factors include language proficiency, task type and cultural background. Writers with high language proficiency can often use the source text more effectively and seamlessly integrate the views in the source text into their writing (Plakans & Gebril, 2013). Cultural differences in attitudes towards plagiarism and quoting practices further increase the complexity of the use of source texts (Pennycook, 1996). Borrowing vocabulary from the source text can significantly improve vocabulary diversity. When words related to the source text are removed, the diversity of words will decrease, especially among writers with low language ability. Research results show that source text vocabulary plays a crucial role in comprehensive writing tasks, and vocabulary diversity is an important indicator of writing ability (Gebril & Plakans, 2016).

2.1.4. Challenges and Implications

The challenges of using source text in second language writing include improper quoting text, distorting the source content, and over-reliance on source text. These problems have an impact on writing teaching and evaluation. Teachers need to provide clear guidance on rewriting, generalizing and quoting norms. Scorers must be aware that the use of source text may cover up the lack of language ability, so scoring standards that can comprehensively consider the integration of source materials should be developed.

2.2. Integrated Writing Tasks

Traditional independent writing tasks require candidates to write according to their own experience or views, but this form has been criticized for its lack of conceptual validity in academic context (Cumming et al., 2005). For this reason, comprehensive writing tasks have been introduced in standardized tests such as TOEFL iBT and IELTS. These tasks require candidates to read and/or listen to the source materials, and then write an answer that integrates these source information into it. This review aims to outline the current research status of comprehensive writing tasks, focusing on its theoretical basis, practical application and challenges.

2.2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Integrated Writing Tasks

The task of comprehensive writing is based on the concept of academic literacy, which emphasizes the ability to synthesize and convey information from multiple sources (Cumming, 2013). These tasks are designed to be closer to real-life academic writing. In actual writing, authors usually rely on sources such as textbooks, articles and lectures. The theoretical basis of comprehensive writing tasks can be traced back to the research of Oller (1979), who proposed a comprehensive evaluation method that combines various components of language ability. In recent years, the research focus has shifted to the relationship between reading, listening and writing skills in comprehensive tasks. For example, Sawaki et al. (2013) identified three independent and interrelated concepts behind the TOEFL iBT comprehensive writing task: reading, listening and writing content. They also found a high-order factor of "understanding"

related to the output vocabulary and sentence norms in written answers. This shows that comprehensive tasks can not only assess a variety of skills, but also more general language skills.

2.2.2. The Promises and Perils of Integrated Writing Tasks

Compared with traditional independent writing tasks, comprehensive writing tasks have many advantages. First of all, they provide real and challenging reading and writing activities to guide candidates to write specifically for specific content (Cumming, 2013). Secondly, they can offset the test methods or practice effects associated with traditional test types, and evaluate language ability according to the "construction-integration" or "multi-reading and writing ability" model. However, these tasks also bring some challenges. A major risk is that they confuse the evaluation of writing ability with the ability to understand source materials (Cumming, 2013). This may make it difficult to distinguish between language ability and reading/listening comprehension skills. In addition, in the text generated by the comprehensive writing task, it is often difficult to distinguish the language in the source material from the candidate's own language expression, which makes the scoring process complicated.

2.2.3. Source Text Use and Writing Quality

A large number of studies have explored how the use of source text affects the quality of comprehensive writing. Research shows that the ability to effectively integrate source materials is a key predictor of writing quality. For example, Plakans and Gebril (2013) found that the use of information in listening materials, the use (rewriting) of implicit source texts, and the use of "important" information in source texts are all positively related to writing scores. On the contrary, directly copying the information in the source text is negatively related to the writing score. This shows that successful comprehensive writing requires not only the ability to understand the source material, but also the ability to appropriately rewrite and synthesize information. Weigle and Parker (2012) further explored the nature of the integration of source materials and found that high-scoring students cited shorter content and showed a more mature comprehensive ability of source materials. This highlights the importance of teaching students how to make effective use of source materials in writing.

2.2.4. Task Design and Performance

The design of comprehensive writing tasks has a significant impact on the performance of candidates. Research shows that the way the task is presented, the type of material and the instructions provided will affect the way candidates handle the task. For example, compared with single-round tasks, multi-round continuation tasks involving more interaction between learners and texts can bring stronger vocabulary alignment and higher writing quality. This shows that the task design should be committed to maximizing the intensity of interaction to promote in-depth interaction between candidates and source materials. In addition, it is also very important to choose the appropriate source text (Wang et al., 2021). Characteristics such as the structure, length and vocabulary difficulty of the text will significantly affect the performance of candidates. This highlights the need to carefully consider the source materials to ensure that their content is easy to understand and suitable for the language level of the examinees (Yu, 2009).

2.2.5. Automated Scoring and Construct Validity

With the increasing application of comprehensive writing tasks in standardized examinations, the demand for reliable and efficient scoring methods is also increasing. In order to achieve fast and consistent scoring, automatic composition scoring (AES) systems such as e-rater have been developed. However, these systems must be carefully designed to ensure that they can cover all the ideas evaluated by the comprehensive writing task. Recent studies have explored the use of automated indicators to measure the use of source text, and has achieved encouraging results. For example, indicators related to the overlap of content words and the overlap of n-elements can explain a considerable part of the variation in the overall writing score. This shows that by

integrating features that can capture the use of the source text, the automatic scoring model can be improved to improve its conceptual validity (Kyle, 2020).

2.3. Integrated Speaking Tasks

In the past few decades, comprehensive oral tasks have attracted wide attention in the field of second language (L2) assessment and teaching. Unlike the independent oral task that requires candidates to express themselves orally based on personal experience or general knowledge, the comprehensive oral task involves the integration of multiple language skills such as reading, listening and speaking. This integration aims to simulate the communication situation in real life, so as to make a more realistic assessment of language ability. This section aims to review the current research on comprehensive oral tasks, focusing on its theoretical basis, empirical research results and teaching inspiration.

2.3.1. Theoretical Frameworks and Rationale

The application of comprehensive oral tasks is based on multiple theoretical frameworks. One of the influential models is the concept of "communicative language ability" proposed by Bachman and Palmer (2010), which emphasizes the importance of strategic ability in the use of language in real life. Strategic ability refers to the ability to make up for the lack of language knowledge by using various strategies, so as to achieve effective communication. It is believed that comprehensive tasks can stimulate a wider range of strategies and skills, so it is a more comprehensive means of measuring communication ability (Barkaoui et al., 2012).

Another relevant framework is the "Ternary Component Framework" proposed by Robinson (2015), which believes that the complexity of tasks can be regulated in two dimensions: resource-oriented (such as reasoning requirements) and resource-driven (such as planning time and a priori knowledge). The framework shows that tasks with different cognitive load levels can be systematically adjusted to design tasks with different cognitive load levels, so as to make a detailed evaluation of language ability (Zhang & Zhang, 2022).

2.3.2. Task Complexity and Cognitive Load

Some recent studies have explored how task complexity factors affect the cognitive load of candidates. Zhang Hezhang (2022) explored the perception of Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and teachers on the cognitive load under the background of comprehensive oral tasks. They found that task complexity factors (such as prior knowledge, planning time, and the number of steps involved) significantly affected the perceived difficulty of the task. Specifically, tasks that require less advance knowledge and have a shorter planning time are considered more difficult. These research results highlight the importance of adjusting the complexity of tasks according to the language level of learners.

2.3.3. Strategy Use and Performance

The study also focuses on the strategies adopted by candidates in comprehensive oral tasks and the relationship between them and their performance. Barkaoui et al. (2013) found that comprehensive tasks can stimulate more diversified strategies than independent tasks. In comprehensive tasks, candidates often report the adoption of cognitive strategies such as organizational ideas and evaluation content. However, the relationship between the use of strategies and test scores is more complicated. Although some cognitive and communication strategies are positively related to performance, metacognitive strategies are often negatively correlated, which may be because they put forward high cognitive requirements for candidates. Xu et al. (2025) further discussed the role of listening strategy in the comprehensive task of listening and speaking. Their research identified five different listening strategies: comprehension assessment, selective attention, inference, preparation and fixed attention. They found that comprehension assessment and selective attention are powerful predictive indicators of performance across multiple dimensions (including grammar, vocabulary, content

retelling, pronunciation and fluency). These findings highlight the importance of metacognitive strategies in improving the performance of comprehensive oral tasks.

2.3.4. Task Type and Performance

The study also explores the differences between different types of comprehensive tasks. Frost et al. (2020) compared the task of integrating reading, listening and speaking (RL-S) with the task of integrating listening and speaking (L-S). They found that R-L-S tasks can stimulate more complex language characteristics and perform better in content integration. This shows that the addition of reading may provide additional support for candidates, thus helping them achieve better performance in integrated speaking tasks.

3. Future Directions for Research on Source Text Use

At present, there is no research on the use of source materials in comprehensive oral tasks. Most researchers mainly focus on the field of comprehensive writing tasks. The existing research on comprehensive oral tasks has not yet involved the use of source text, and more research focuses on the relationship between listening strategies and oral performance, the difference between the use of strategies in independent oral tasks and comprehensive oral tasks, and the cognition of comprehensive oral cognitive load in task-based language teaching (TBLT). We believe that the use of source text can be combined with comprehensive oral tasks, the use of source materials in comprehensive oral tasks can be studied, and the factors affecting the evaluation results of comprehensive oral tasks can be analyzed. In the future, it may even be possible to use the same source materials to compare the comprehensive oral task with the comprehensive writing task, and analyze the similarities and differences between the use of the source text in these two different task types.

4. Conclusion

The use of source text is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in second language writing, involving cognitive, language and cultural dimensions. Understanding how second-language writers interact with the source text is crucial for formulating effective writing or speaking teaching programs and establishing fair evaluation practices. By responding to the challenges posed by the use of source text and giving full play to its advantages, educators can better support second-language learners in the academic environment.

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