



Using multiple texts in an integrated writing assessment: Source text use as a predictor of score

Lia Plakans^{a,*}, Atta Gebril^{b,1}

^a*The University of Iowa, Department of Teaching and Learning, N259 Lindquist Center, Iowa City, IA 52242, USA*

^b*The American University in Cairo, English Language Institute, P.O. Box 74, New Cairo 11835, Egypt*

Abstract

Interest in integrated tasks is increasing in second language writing, accompanied by a concern for appropriate interpretation of performances and scores from these tasks. Integrated writing adds an element not found in traditional independent writing: the use of source text material. This study investigates how source text use appears in performances on an integrated writing task, and how it differs across score levels and task topics. Educational Testing Service (ETS) supplied 480 performances on the writing section of the Internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT) to explore these questions. The integrated TOEFL task involves a comparative summary of listening and reading texts that present differing views on a topic. In this study, multiple regression analysis was used to consider three areas of source text use: (1) the importance of source text ideas that writers included in their summary, (2) the use of ideas from a reading source text and from a listening text, and (3) the borrowing of exact wording from the source texts (verbatim source use). These three areas were analyzed across nine score levels and indicated that score and source use are related. Overall, these features of source text use explained over 50% of the variance in scores on the reading–listening–writing task. The use of the listening text and the inclusion of important ideas from source texts explained the most variance, while use of the reading text and verbatim source use were less predictive. The latter two held a negative correlation with score, indicating that the lower scoring essays had more of these features. These findings support the claim that integrated writing assessment elicits academic writing processes, which is reflected by score. High-scoring writers selected important ideas from the source texts and used the listening text as the task prompt instructed. Low scoring writers depended heavily on the reading texts for content and direct copying of words and phrases. These findings support the validity of interpreting integrated task scores as a measure of academic writing but provide a nuanced look at the contribution of certain source use features.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Integrated writing; Writing assessment; Source use

Introduction

Assessment tasks that isolate writing have been prominent in second language research and learning for decades; however, recently, tasks that integrate this ability with other skills are emerging in both high-stakes testing and classroom contexts. Multiple skills, such as reading and listening, are combined in one task that requires writers either to summarize or state their opinions on a topic presented in source texts. The rationale behind this approach,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 319 335 5565.

E-mail addresses: lia-plakans@uiowa.edu (L. Plakans), agebril@aucegypt.edu (A. Gebril).

¹ Tel.: +20 2 2615 1919.

particularly in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing, is to simulate language used in academic tasks that require comprehension and integration of source material (Plakans, 2008; Read, 1990; Weigle, 2004). In teaching, this alignment of classroom tasks and the “real world” increases student motivation and can improve transfer of language skills to academic courses (Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997). In language assessment, this connection substantiates the validity of inferences from test scores (Chapelle, Enright, & Jamieson, 2008) and strengthens test usefulness (Bachman, 2002; Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Our study investigated scores on an integrated writing assessment task from the Internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT) developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS).

TOEFL test scores have been used by North American universities in making admission decisions since the 1960s to determine whether the English skills of non-native speakers are adequate to undertake academic coursework. In 2000, ETS merged the Test of Written English (TWE) with the TOEFL; the resulting hybrid included a writing section, which consisted of one independent prompt. This change foreshadowed a major revision that came in 2005 when the TOEFL iBT was released. The revision was based on the recommendations of a number of studies conducted by ETS (e.g., Cumming, Kantor, Powers, Santos, & Taylor, 2000; Cumming, Kantor, & Powers, 2001). In the current test, the independent writing-only task is accompanied by an integrated writing task that prompts test-takers to read a passage, listen to a lecture on a topic, and then write a summary that connects the two source texts. This new task adds depth to the writing score on the TOEFL and improves the authenticity of the writing elicited. However, integrated tasks have had less research attention, and thus, many questions exist about how to interpret scores and the role of source texts in the writing from such tests. Cumming et al. (2005) conducted a large-scale study of three types of tasks piloted for the TOEFL iBT, two of which were integrated tasks: a reading–writing and a listening–writing task (the third was an independent task). By comparing language and textual features across these tasks and across score levels, the researchers provided important discussion about the impact of source texts. Their results indicated that the performances between the three task types differed in complexity, rhetorical style, and pragmatics, but not in grammatical accuracy. When ETS decided which task type to use for the iBT, however, reading and listening were combined into one task, compounding the use of multiple texts with multiple skills. How are test takers affected by this complexity? The goal of our study was to consider features related to source use in TOEFL integrated writing task performances and to analyze how they relate to score.

Background

Over the past ten years, research on integrated writing tasks has blossomed, delving into issues of task comparison, characteristics of performances across levels, and writers’ processes in composing these tasks. The studies have been conducted with TOEFL tasks, as well as other academic writing tests, such as university placement exams. This section will briefly review the research in these areas.

Research on integrated task performances has compared them to independent tasks (Gebril, 2009, 2010; Lewkowicz, 1994; Watanabe, 2001) to define language features at different proficiency or score levels (Cumming et al., 2005; Gebril & Plakans, 2009) and to uncover writers’ processes in composing these tasks (Ascención, 2005; Esmaili, 2002; Plakans, 2008, 2009b; Yang, 2009). Several researchers have correlated scores from the two types of writing tasks. In a study of reliability, Watanabe (2001) found that the correlation between two different integrated tasks ($r = .69$) was actually similar to the correlation between an integrated and independent task ($r = .62$). In contrast, Gebril (2006) and Lee and Kantor (2005) discovered much higher correlations between independent and integrated tasks with values of .93 and above. These differences could be explained by different scoring scales across studies and tasks as well as different participants. However, it is important to recognize that, while the two task types both seek to evaluate writing, some differences may lie in the underlying constructs they elicit. Most significantly, integrated tasks include elicitation of multiple skills as well as the ability to use sources to build one’s own writing.

Looking further than holistic scores has provided more explanation of the similarities and differences between these task types. Lewkowicz (1994) found that holistic scores did not differentiate the two tasks and that writing from the two tasks was comparable in response length. However, she identified a significant difference in performances in the number of points introduced in the essays, with more points made in the reading-to-write task. Her conclusion was that since the integrated task writing had more points but was not longer, then each point was less developed than those in the independent writing responses. Cumming et al. (2005) compared discourse features in TOEFL pilot tasks, which included integrated and independent tasks, finding significant differences across areas such as lexical/

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/364071>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/364071>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)