A Literature Review on Summary Writing in EAP Programs

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ABSTRACT

University student plagiarism has attracted considerable attention, and many studies have examined the extent to which students intentionally or unintentionally copy source text language into their writing. To avoid plagiarism, EAP learners have to learn the appropriate and effective ways of source text use, such as paraphrasing and summarizing. However, few studies have examined how learners of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the Chinese context employ strategies of source text use in summary writing tasks, and how source text difficulty and learners' language proficiency affect such use. To address this gap, the study examines previous studies on the importance of summary skills in academic contexts, the causes of such inappropriate source text use, current summary instruction strategies and implementation, and recommendations for coping with such problems in EAP programs at the tertiary level in Chinese universities.

Keywords: Summary Writing, Source Text Use, Text Borrowing Strategies, EAP.

1. INTRODUCTION

Summary writing is the process where readers determine what the most important content is in the original text and rephrase it in their own words, which helps students to connect between new ideas and prior knowledge [1], to provide them with essential skills applied in future academic studies, and to facilitate cognitive development and CT skills [2]. Such writing skill is essential for college students' academic learning which helps them to finish tasks requiring the integration of source texts into academic essays and presentations[3-5].

However, novice summary writers have met challenges in reconstructing source information into a summary and they tend to copy verbatim[6-8]. Inappropriate source text use, possibly due to underdeveloped paraphrasing and summarizing skills, may cause plagiarism, an act 'widely regarded as an archetypal violation of ethical standards within academia'[9]. Therefore, this study aims to review the previous research on summary writing in the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program at the tertiary level in terms of the possible causes for inappropriate source text use, solutions proposed by scholars and recommendations for the existing problems,

providing an insight into summary instruction strategies in the EAP program in Chinese universities.

Inappropriate source text use in summary writing might lead to plagiarism. Many studies have examined how students deliberately or undeliberately copy source text language into their writing. Shi and Keck have found that L1 writers tend to conduct substantial paraphrase in summary writing, whereas L2 writers are more likely to borrow verbatim from the source text[10].

1.1 Cultural Perspective

One possible explanation is concerned with cultural differences Their copying behaviors can be viewed as intercultural struggle to the adaptation to the academic English conventions. For L2 writers, East Asian students are more likely to rely on text memorization compared with their L1 counterparts who get sufficient exposure to training on incorporating source texts into summaries in academic courses [11]; however, cultural factors can only serve as a partial view behind the verbatim copying behaviors for novice summary writers, as is challenged by many researchers. For instance, nowadays there are strict rules and regulations

against plagiarism at universities in China, which has long been considered immoral and detected by computer programs[12-13]. Therefore, cultural perspective is not the primary cause for inappropriate source text use, which points to the necessity of seeking possible reasons behind the surface.

1.2 Developmental Perspective

Another popular belief among scholars is that such inappropriate source text use is a developmental procedure that novice writers are to undergo until they become experienced summary writers [14-16]. Such copy-paraphrasing continuum is a developmental phase for novice EAP writers and close paraphrasing are essential steps for them. Educators should view the verbatim copying behavior as unintentional or innocent plagiarism [17], which requires teachers ' scaffolding in offering L2 writers intensive instruction on helping learners to recognize summary schemes, enhance micro-writing skills and develop writers' cognition instead of solely giving punishments on their unintentional text borrowing from original texts.

1.3 Cognitive Perspective

Besides, such inappropriate borrowing practice can be examined from the cognitive perspective. Kirkland and Saunders (1991) has given an overview of the external and internal constraints on learners' cognitive load.

1.3.1 External Constraints

The external factors include the features of the source text itself (or primary textual features), such as length, genre and complexity [18], as is supported by the findings of several studies. For instance, Yu argues that summary performance is strongly related to the summarizability which includes organization of the source text, frequency of new words, content familiarity and length of the source text [19]. Li proved that genre differences might impact learners' summary performance by conducting a experiment where different language proficiency groups were given a narrative and expository writing respectively as source texts [20]. The findings show that the participants relied more on the original source text in expository writing than that of the narrative style because learners are more familiar with the narrative style in daily life, whereas they have to compensate for their deficiency in summarizing the expository writing

by lifting larger proportion of source text borrowing. However, there are few differences between the two proficiency groups in terms of textual borrowing strategies, such as Moderate, Major and Maximal Paraphrase, for they might consider rewording on the surface could fulfill the paraphrasing task.

1.3.2 Internal Constraints

When it comes to internal constraints, summarizing performance of L2 learners is closely related to "language proficiency, content schemata, affect, formal schemata, cognitive and meta-cognitive sills"[3]. Among all these elements, writers' linguistic proficiency is one of the major constraints on their summarizing performance. Peng and Bao also examine the impact of language proficiency and task complexities on summarizing performance, showing the significance of these two constraints and giving implications for the task based teaching in EAP programs [21].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON SUMMARY WRITING

Overseas and domestic attention has been given to novice writers' difficulties in summary performance. One of the research foci is placed on summary theories and their application in summary instruction, which have provided scaffolding for summary learners. Van Diji and Kintsch(1986) proposed text process-theory that guides novice writers to construct central ideas through deletion, generalization, and construction instead of gathering them from surface structure, offering a solid basis for reading and writing program [22]. Besides, the theory of systematic functional linguistics helps to establish the basic concept of summary writing which concerns meaning making rather than word changing on the surface, i.e., the re-meaning ability is more important than rewording ability for novice summary writers. The SFL also provides a new angle to understand the developmental changes of novice summary writers in genre-awareness and meaning-making choices who attempt to explore ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings in the SFL-based teaching approach [23], which points to the impact of genre-awareness on summarizing performance and proves the effectiveness of the SFL framework in summary instruction. Domestic researchers have also paid special attention to summary writing course design, empirical studies of instruction model and its application in teaching practice. For instance, Zhou

and Deng (2019) analyzes the systematic differences between experienced and novice summary writers and discover that EAP learners exhibit deficiencies in micro-skills and meta-cognitive processes in summary writing (such as how to use strategies and when to use them)[24]. To address these issues, the researchers have made improvements: breaking down cognitive activities into smaller, single tasks for focused training; and increasing pre-task activities, such as schema-based cues and structure-based cues.

By focusing on the characteristics of EAP learners in Chinese universities, researchers have explored how summary tasks can be used in academic English reading and writing courses to improve learners' academic English reading and writing skills. This research has provided scaffolding for nonnative EAP learners in summary writing practice by setting up appropriate summary tasks according to learners' language proficiency, choosing genre-specific structures of source texts and paying attention to difficulty control. Li (2014, 2016) has empirically identified the mental process of EFL learners ' summary procedures and constructed a process model of reading-to-writing summarization tasks in line with the proposed theories about summary process, which shows the validity of such model and provides insight into summary instruction strategies.

3. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Research attention has also been drawn to specific ways to handle inappropriate text borrowing strategies[25]. For instance, Delgado-Osorio et. al deals with learners' ways of processing source texts and how different task types and topics affect their choice of source text processing strategies when writing summary and argumentative in German universities by doing a qualitative study [26]. Therefore, in real teaching practice, teachers should examine topic familiarity and develop learners ' genre awareness. [27] However, the sample size of the study is small with only 15 participants and the think-aloud method might cause impact on the results because students' differ in their abilities of verbalizing their own thoughts. Similarly, Xie (2023) filled in the gap of comparing different task types in the integrated writing research and found that source language use criterion does not fit in with the previously established writing performance rubrics, which shows the necessity of construction of the rubrics for source text use[28]. Summary assessment and

feedback have also been the research concern of professionals. Recently technology-based summary instruction and feedback has gained much attention . With the development of AI, there will be more priorities placed in the application of generative tools in supporting learners' summary writing skills through feedback and collaboration efforts among groups.

After reviewing previous literature, the author has discovered that sufficient attention has not been given to research on summary writing in EAP programs at the tertiary level in Chinese context. One of the causes for this phenomenon is that tests of summary competence is not related to high stake tests in China; however, it is one of the most essential academic skills to be cultivated among college students. As for research methods, the current studies tend to adopt mixed approaches by conducting surveys or qualitative approaches (think-aloud), but the sample size is not large enough to provide an unbiased research results, which turns to be limitations of many studies. What's more, qualitative research can provide more objective results especially when summarizing performance is measured by a set of rubrics and ratings, few studies pay special attention to the internal process of summarizing where learners have to make choices of summary strategies, schema, and specific text borrowing strategies and how affect impacts on such process. In order to get better understanding of influencing factors of summary performance, interviews need to be added to explore whether learners' affect could lead to differences in the writing outcome. What's more, none of the research has examined the impact of the interaction

4. CONCLUSION

A review of the related literature suggests that it would be more beneficial to focus on the source text use of a group of nonnative writers who were raised in the same culture to explore internal (e.g. language proficiency) and external factors (e.g. characteristics of reading material). Specifically, regarding text difficulty, previous studies have considered text difficulty as a variable when examining the textual borrowing behavior of Korean students [29]. However, in the context of Chinese universities, regarding influencing factors on source text use, few studies concentrated on the impact of text difficulty and the interaction of text difficulty and language proficiency on EAP students' source text use and writing quality in

summaries. Previous studies focus on within-subjects design and sufficient attention is given to subjects with high linguistic proficiency. Few studies adopted between-subjects design to examine summary performance of different linguistic groups in EAP class in China.

There should be room for moderate reliance on source text use, which may help novice EAP writers to reduce their bafflement in the beginning phase of summary writing.

Educators should raise the awareness of unintentional or innocent plagiarism and offer novice summary writers summary writing rubrics in accordance with the taxonomy of paraphrase types (Exact copy, minimal paraphrase, moderate paraphrase, major paraphrase and maximal paraphrase), guiding them to know paraphrasing strategies such as deletion, generalization and construction instead of giving them punishments.

Summary writing should be incorporated in the EAP program assessment since there is a mismatch between the importance of summary skill and the attention it obtains in high-stakes testsat the tertiary level in China.

However, most of the studies examine summary performance based on the scores of summary writing, proportion of text borrowing texts, and task complexity, which are not sufficient enough to explain the developmental phrases of novice EAP writers of summaries. Well-designed interviews and observations of participants' source text use behaviors between proficiency groups are suggested to conduct to obtain better understanding of learners' cognitive and meta-cognitive development in the learning procedure as well as their affect development in coping with difficulties in summary writing.

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