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INPUT, UPTAKE, OUTPUT:
A STUDY OF INTERTEXTUAL SOURCE USE
IN ACADEMIC WRITING

A thesis presented in
fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Second Language Teaching
at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

Research in writing has moved from writing to learn to writing from sources. This represents a move to considering writing not just as an isolated activity, but one associated with acquisition and representation of knowledge from different forms of texts. Research on sources to date has focused on a limited number of inputs, mainly one or two sources, in relation to the target product. In contrast, the present study investigates a wide range of sources students use as material for their studies. This naturalistic study investigates sources used by different groups of students, (L1 writers, L2 writers; expert L1 writers, novice L1 writers), and their ability to integrate these inputs in written text. The research was conducted within the context of an academic course and followed a pilot study trialling pedagogical and data gathering procedures. The primary data was in-class essays annotated by students to indicate source use. The essays were analysed structurally by a coding scheme adapted from the work of Christensen (1966), Mann & Thompson (1988), and Hyland (1990). Secondary data was obtained through pre-course and post-course questionnaires and included information on students' cultural and linguistic experience, their perceived usefulness of particular sources in the course, and their attitude towards writing tutorials.

Results indicated that there were differences in the way the identified groups of students accessed the varying sources. While the lecture remained the primary input for all students, the manner and extent students used personal experience was demonstrated in different ways. Results showed L1 students integrated a wider range of sources in their writing. The differing patterns of source use indicated that students followed different pathways in developing text, and that the strategies they used had consequences for their text construction. As an extension of this, a hierarchy of personal experience in writing was established: 1 personal narrative; 2 untransformed narrative; 3 integration of personal knowledge with concept and discipline knowledge. Findings also indicated the difficulties less proficient writers
had in moving beyond the writer-oriented narrative form which is consistent with other research (Leki 1995, Flower in Leeds, 1996). There are a number of factors that appear relevant to explaining the different pathways. These include language proficiency, writing expertise, content and schema knowledge, and perceived saliency or interestingness of the task and topic.

The results of the present research points to the fact that these and other affective factors deserve further research attention. Such research could possibly affect the pedagogical achievements of learning experiences in academic courses.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1  INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

2  FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE UPTAKE IN ACADEMIC LEARNING ................................. 8
   2.1 Language processing in listening, note-taking and reading ............................................ 8
       2.1.1 Bottom-up processing ......................................................................................... 8
       2.1.2 Top-down processing ........................................................................................ 9
       2.1.3 The role of memory in listening and note-taking ................................................ 11
       2.1.4 Information processing in reading ...................................................................... 13
       2.1.5 Influences on knowledge transfer ..................................................................... 14
       2.1.6 Levels of cognitive involvement ....................................................................... 15
   2.2 Strategy use ............................................................................................................... 16
   2.3 The role of interaction in facilitating uptake .................................................................. 17
       3.3.1 What are the benefits? ....................................................................................... 18
       2.3.2 Influences on learning outcomes ..................................................................... 19
   2.4 Summary .................................................................................................................... 20

3  INTERTEXTUALITY .............................................................................................................. 21
   3.1 Background to views in intertextuality ....................................................................... 21
   3.2 From intertextuality to sources .................................................................................... 24
   3.3 Sources: Maintaining a wider view of sources in research ........................................... 26
   3.4 A view on intertextuality in the present study ............................................................. 27
   3.5 A description of sources in the present study ............................................................... 28
   3.6 Aspects of knowledge relevant to the study .................................................................. 30
   3.7 Situating the present research .................................................................................... 31

4  THE PLACE OF WRITING .................................................................................................. 33
   4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 33
   4.2 Learning to write ......................................................................................................... 33
   4.3 Writing to learn .......................................................................................................... 34
4.3.1 The nature of the task ........................................ 37
4.3.2 The place in the task ........................................ 38
4.3.3 Writer expertise ............................................ 39
4.4 Reading to write ............................................. 41
4.5 Influences on rhetoric ....................................... 43
4.6 The argument text ........................................... 46
4.6.1 Studies on argument writing .............................. 46
4.7 Summary .................................................... 48

5 METHODOLOGY .................................................. 49
5.1 Introduction .................................................. 49
5.2 Approach to the research .................................... 50
5.3 The contextual base ......................................... 51
5.4 Sequence of activity ......................................... 51
5.5 Research design ............................................. 54
5.5.1 Participants in the study .................................. 54
5.5.2 Monitoring exposure to sources ......................... 56
5.6 Data analysis ................................................ 59
5.6.1 Establishing the unit of analysis ......................... 59
5.6.2 Analysing argument structure ........................... 60
5.7 Identification of sources .................................... 63
5.8 Analysing texts holistically ................................ 63

6 RESULTS ......................................................... 65
6.1 Introduction .................................................. 65
6.2 The relationship between source use, occasion and language background.. 66
6.2.1 Essay One .................................................. 66
6.2.2 Essay Two .................................................. 68
6.2.3 Essay Three ................................................ 69
6.2.4 Summary .................................................. 70
6.3 The relationship between text quality and source use ............................. 71
6.3.1 Summary .................................................. 75
6.4 The relationship between text quality and frequency of content units...... 75
6.5 Integration of sources in writing.......................................................... 75
6.6 Conclusion............................................................................................... 77

7 DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS........................................... 78
7.1 Differences between writers........................................................................ 78
7.1.1 The lecture.......................................................................................... 79
7.1.2 The workbook...................................................................................... 80
7.1.3 The task................................................................................................ 81
7.2 Source integration..................................................................................... 84
7.3 Other issues related to source use............................................................. 86
7.3.1 Place of the video................................................................................ 86
7.3.2 Place of the blackboard....................................................................... 88
7.4 Summary.................................................................................................... 90

8 PATHWAYS TO TEXT CONSTRUCTION............................................... 92
8.1 Source representation in student texts...................................................... 92
8.2 A strategic response: Using personal experience in student writing........ 98
8.3 Hierarchy and uses of personal experience............................................. 103
8.4 Summary.................................................................................................. 104

9 CONCLUSION............................................................................................ 105
9.1 Implications for research methodology................................................... 105
9.2 Theoretical implications and future research........................................... 106
9.3 Pedagogical outcomes.............................................................................. 109
9.3.1 The value of regular writing............................................................... 109
9.3.2 The value of tasks and outputs........................................................... 111

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................. 113
APPENDICES................................................................................................. 126
## APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Information sheet distributed to students</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Consent form signed by the participants of the study</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Coding system of sources used by students</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Feedback sheet for student writing</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Lecture handout: <em>Language and individual development.</em></td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Reading for collection 1. <em>Language and enculturation.</em></td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Pair task for collection 1. <em>Language and enculturation.</em></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Essay topic for collection 1. <em>Language and enculturation.</em></td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lecture handout: <em>The spoken word and silence</em></td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>Example of an OHT for <em>The spoken word and silence</em></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>Reading for collection 2. <em>The spoken word and silence.</em></td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>Pair task for collection 2. <em>The spoken word and silence.</em></td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>Essay topic for collection 2. <em>The spoken word and silence.</em></td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Lecture handout: <em>Acculturation</em></td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>Reading for collection 3. <em>Acculturation</em></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Pair task for collection 3. <em>Acculturation</em></td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Essay topic for collection 3. <em>Acculturation</em></td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Horowitz and Dudley-Evans typographies of essay prompts.</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Composition of international students</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Initial questionnaire</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Exit questionnaire: source usefulness and writing</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Students’ ranked average of source usefulness</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Rules for classification of text</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Worksheet for tracking sources and text units</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kristeva's intersecting elements contributing to meaning</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Place of present study in relation to two views of intertextuality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Division of sources according to endogenous/exogenous distinction</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Division of sources according to delivery mode</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Division of sources according to place of input</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Topic and procedure plan</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Composition of students in data collection sets</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Types of data collected</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pattern of text analysis according to Christensen</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Example of a concept developed on the board through class contribution</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Graphic representation of Example 1</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Graphic representation of Example 2</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Graphic representation demonstrating writer-oriented prose</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The relationship between lecture input and schema development</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

1. Percentage of content units derived from different sources by L and L2 students for essays 1 - 3 .......................................................... 67

2. Chi square analysis between LI and L2 writers and source use ............... 70

3. Chi square analysis between text quality as determined by holistic scores and source use ................................................................. 72

4. Percentage distribution of sources of ideas for L1 upper and lower assessed essays ............................................................................. 73

5. Frequency of content units per essay .................................................. 75

6. Percentage of essays demonstrating three levels of content units to source ratios ............................................................................. 76
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