# L2 Writing Tasks and Writing Performance

# 二语写作任务与语言表现

陈慧媛 著

Task Performance

云南大学出版社

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**Chen Huiyuan**

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# 内容提要

本书旨在探讨不同类型的第二语言写作任务对英语作为外语学习者语言表现的影响。在借鉴了口头话语、母语写作以及二语写作等理论模式的基础上，同时在对英语学习者写作问题的讨论当中，作者尝试建立一个综合性的任务写作框架，并以此为基础对学习者完成不同写作任务的语言表现进行预测、描述和解释。实验在中国某高校英语专业的一年级和三年级进行，不同年级被作为不同英语水平层次的代表。受试在两种时间条件下完成了四种不同的写作任务，即：归纳性写作、标题性写作、看图写作和图表写作。研究对受试的写作结果进行了量性的和质性的分析。量性分析采用了不同的语言测量手段对学习者的语言准确性、流利性和复杂性进行分析。质性分析在观察学习者完成不同写作任务时所表现出来的语言特点的基础上进行归纳和总结。两种分析都得到了显著的和有趣的结果。结果显示写作任务的认知要求和语言要求都会对学习者的语言表现产生影响，也即：学习者在完成不同类型的任务时所表现出来的语言特征在质和量的方面都具有差别。在有的任务中，比如图表写作，语言特征表现很明显，而且可看出有的语言特征与学习者的策略使用有关。结果也显示出一些不同因素之间的交叉效应，如时间条件与英语水平的错综关系等。实验得出的结果不仅提供了有关学习者语言表现的有用材料和信息，也提出了一些值得思考和进一步探讨的问题。

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# Abstract

This is an exploratory study of how different types of L2 writing tasks may have affected English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing performance. Specifically, the study has investigated the effects of four types of writing tasks on EFL learners' writing performance under two task conditions: time-constrained condition and less time-constrained condition. The four writing tasks selected for the study are topic writing (TW), picture writing (PW), graph writing (GW) and summary writing (SW). The specific aims of the study are to find out whether EFL learners would perform differently on different writing tasks and how the differences in performance would relate to the types of tasks under study. The writing tasks and the corresponding written performance are analyzed for the task internal and task external requirements according to the theoretical framework established for the study.

The theoretical framework is built by synthesizing various oral and written production models and task analyses. The assumption underneath is that the cognitive demands of a task in terms of the conceptual operations needed and linguistic requirements can affect different stages of L2 writing process and thus lead to varied per-

formance in written production. In addition to observing the effects of task types, the present study also examines the effects of two variables – task conditions and learners' proficiency.

Altogether 56 university students majoring in English, at two different proficiency levels, participated in the study, with 28 in each proficiency group. Each group of participants was again divided by matched assignment into two sub-groups for two task conditions. Altogether 224 written texts were collected and analyzed to obtain data about nine measures representing three major aspects of performance: linguistic accuracy, linguistic complexity and fluency. Besides the quantitative results obtained by a detailed data analysis, this study also examined linguistic tendencies typical of each different task as shown in the written texts for the purpose of further confirming the results obtained in quantitative study and also for the purpose of achieving a more comprehensive understanding of task writing and writing process.

The results obtained have shown significant differences for all the measures across the four writing tasks, suggesting that tasks under study did lead to significantly varied performance. Time condition was found to affect participants' performance in fluency and accuracy, but not in syntactic complexity. The effect of proficiency was limited mainly to certain measures for one task – TW. The results also indicate that the participants' linguistic complexity was mainly determined by the conceptual demand of tasks with time conditions exerting little influence on it. While accuracy was found sensitive to both task-internal and task-external factors, fluency tended

to be affected mainly by the linguistic requirement of the task.

The specific results concerning different tasks have shown that the conceptually more demanding tasks (SW) were associated with the highest degree of linguistic complexity. TW, which was analyzed as conceptually demanding in a special way, was found to be associated with the lowest rate of accuracy for one measure (E/W: proportion of total number of errors to the total number of words in a written text) and it was ranked the second highest in linguistic complexity. GW, which was considered as a linguistically demanding task, was associated with very low rate of accuracy and fluency. PW, the conceptually and linguistically least demanding task of the four, elicited better accuracy and fluency, but the lowest rate in syntactic complexity. The results concerning individual tasks indicate that different writing tasks with different cognitive demand did affect L2 learners' writing performance in different ways.

The study suggests that although L2 writing can be affected by multiple factors, conceptual as well as linguistic demands can be considered as the major internal elements in L2 writing and may well affect the writing process and thus the written performance. Both of these internal elements can be the fundamental factors in L2 writing and L2 writing task analysis; the identification of these two elements may be helpful in explaining and predicting certain aspects of L2 writing performance. The study also finds that L2 writing can be special in many ways. Linguistic problems are again confirmed as a crucial factor in L2 writing in that language problems and difficulties beyond learners' linguistic capability may affect not only the formulating

process but also the whole writing process. Furthermore, it is found that learners' use of strategies is closely related to task types and task requirement. The effect of proficiency on L2 writing is selective. Based on the findings of the study, certain theoretical and pedagogical implications on L2 writing were discussed.

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