

## A CRITICAL REVIEW OF YANG AND PLAKANS' STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR INTEGRATED WRITING

**Imam Wahyudi Karimullah**

University of Islam Malang (UNISMA)

E-mail address: imamwk@unisma.ac.id; imamwk@gmail.com

**Abstract :** This article reviews Yang and Plakans' (2012) Strategy Inventory for Integrated Writing (SIIW). The existence of SIIW is crucial to elicit strategies used by TOEFL iBT test takers in completing integrated reading-listening-writing task. After reviewing Yang and Plakans' SIIW, it is found that there is a need to develop a more comprehensive, reliable and valid strategy inventory for integrated writing.

**Keywords:** strategy inventory, integrated writing

In most academic writing at the university level, writing tasks are often integrated with reading and listening. In a graduate school for example, students write a scholarly paper after reading some relevant academic texts and listening to some lectures. It is also the case with the latest TOEFL generation, Internet-based TOEFL (iBT), in which test takers are writing an integrated academic writing task. They write a topic based on a reading passage and a lecture.

In relation to integrated writing, many researchers are interested in this area. Among of them are Spivey and King (1989); Spivey (1990, 1997); and Weigle (2004). They were focusing their studies on L1 composition and integrated reading-writing. Research on integrated reading-listening-writing, especially in the context of English as foreign language is still scant (Yang & Plakans, 2012).

I agree with the idea that composing from reading materials involves three major discourse synthesis processes (Spivey & King, 1989). They are organizing (writers approach and make meaning of the texts based on their prior knowledge about general text organization), selecting (writers sort key ideas from less important details based on task goals, demands, purposes, or specifications), and connecting (writers link information from different sources and elaborate a combination of these ideas from an integral perspective). In addition to these mental operations, research on L2 integrated writing has indicated two other major operations: monitoring and evaluating (Yang & Plakans, 2012).

Monitoring and evaluating are strongly related process in integrated writing. Monitoring is when writers identify goals, make informed decisions, and create strategic plans to accomplish the task (Yang & Plakans, 2012). Evaluating occurs when writers seek to reexamine task effectiveness and fulfillment by reconsidering task requirements, planned thoughts, written texts, and revisions made to the text (Esmaeili, 2002).

Another type of strategy found to respond to integrated writing tasks is a "test wiseness" strategy. It is tricks examinees use to arrive at correct answers to the questions rather than the cognitive operations expected by test designers (Cohen & Upton, 2007). It has been found that some test takers chose to simply write down their previously memorized writing models and fill in some key words, or copied the material verbatim from source materials (Braine, 2001; Cumming et al., 2005). In addition, less proficient writers often use copy-and-revise strategies (Hyland as cited in Yang & Plakan, 2012) to complete integrated writing tasks.

I strongly agree that the writing strategies used in completing the integrated writing task is a multifaceted construct, as what was found by Yang and Plakans (2012). They found that integrated reading-listening-writing strategy consists of three general strategy types: self-regulatory strategy (SELFS), discourse synthesis strategy (DSS), and "test-wiseness" strategy (TWS). SELFS consists of two factors (monitoring and evaluating). It has an executive control over other types of strategy use. DSS consists of three factors (organizing, connecting, and selecting). DSS has a direct, positive impact on test performance. TWS has a direct, negative impact on test performance.

Their study suggests that the task requires not only comprehension and production abilities, but also regulation skills for managing reading, listening, and writing interactions.

A more recent study, has investigated the correlation between integrated reading-listening-writing strategy use and writing performance. Plakans and Gebriel (2013) found that the use of listening text and the inclusion of important ideas from source texts have high correlation with the integrated writing score. However, use of the reading text and verbatim source use had low negative correlation. It means that high-scoring writers used important ideas from the source texts and the listening text. Low-scoring writers depended heavily on the reading texts for content and direct copying of words and phrases.

Eliciting writers' strategies (actions and behaviors used by the writer to solve problems in the writing process) are substantial. Low-scoring writers might not use strategies that are used by high-scoring writers. Therefore, teachers of English can teach or train their students to use effective writing strategies that they did not use while taking integrated writing test (Clark, 2008). Thus, the existence of an instrument to assess writers' strategy is crucial for researchers, teachers, and students (Carmines, 1991; Weinstein, 1986).

An example of assessment instrument to elicit writing strategies is strategy inventory for integrated writing (SIIW). It is a list of strategies (before, during and after writing) used by writers (test-takers) to complete integrated reading-listening-writing test/task. It is in the form of a Likert scale questionnaire (e.g., in Appendix 1). To the best of my reading, Yang and Plakans (2012) are the only researchers who developed SIIW to elicit test-takers' writing strategies in completing the integrated writing tasks/tests (in iBT TOEFL). Thus, it is important to review its validity, comprehensibility, and reliability. Because the development of a more valid, comprehensive, and reliable SIIW is substantial and is a must to reduce the assessment error. Furthermore, a more comprehensive SIIW will strengthen its generalizability. As a result, any researchers or EFL teachers can use it to identify integrated writing strategies used by any EFL students/writers. It contributes to the collective knowledge in the field of EFL integrated writing.

## **Method**

The purpose of this study is to check the validity, reliability and comprehensiveness of Yang and Plakans' Integrated writing Strategy Inventory. The researcher used some key principles in producing a valid and reliable assessment instrument proposed by Radhakrisna (2007) and Dornyei (2003). It is substantial as it can produce a valid and reliable assessment instrument.

The principles consist of several procedures. They are problem identification (setting up the background or the context of the study which include the identification of problem and research objective) and instrument conceptualization (what is the instrument measuring?). After that, it comes to the setting of the instrument format (questionnaire layout, format, font and size), and the process of establishing its validity and reliability.

The following are the procedures to investigate the comprehensiveness, validity, and reliability of strategy inventory for integrated reading-listening-writing: re-identifying the problems or the limitations of the Yang and Plakans' SIIW more comprehensively, and identifying and generating all possible theoretical bases and empirical findings that are related to this study, or that can explain the concept of integrated reading-listening-writing strategies. They include aspect of reading and listening comprehension process/strategy, L1 and ESL/EFL writing process/strategy, integrated writing process/strategy (which include reading-writing, reading-listening, and reading-listening-writing processes/strategies), and test-wiseness strategy.

## **Results and Discussion**

After reviewing the Yang and Plakans' Strategy Inventory for Integrated Writing, the researcher found that their SIIW is still not comprehensive yet. It "represented only a small subset of all possible strategy items (Yang and Plakans, 2012, p. 96)."

The incomprehensibility of Yang and Plakans' SIIW is because its development process did not fulfill the criteria of a valid (comprehensive) and reliable questionnaire development. Those criteria are: setting up the context of the study that is relevant to the research objectives, developing comprehensive questionnaire conceptualization (what is the questionnaire measuring about?), designing effective questionnaire format (questionnaire layout, format, font and size), and

establishing validity and reliability. These principles are the main steps and are a must, at minimum to follow (Radhakrisna, 2007) to reduce the assessment error. The following are the result of analyzing Yang and Plakan's SIIW.

**First**, the Yang and Plakans' SIIW did not fit the contextual background of their study. One of their research objectives was to elicit writers' strategies in completing integrated writing test of iBT TOEFL test. Their participants were EFL students who were asked to do integrated writing task. Their research context is different from the language-testing context. Given that the participants of Yang and Plakans' study were not the real test-takers, their strategies may vary considerably from those used by high-stakes test takers. Also, participants' experience of the integrated task would likely differ if the task, as in the actual iBT TOEFL, were placed near the end of the 4-hour-long test between other test tasks. Moreover, the study only considered 161 cases, including graduate, undergraduate, and ESL students from one U.S University, which limits the generalizability of the findings (Yang & Plakans, 2012).

**Second**, it did not use comprehensive questionnaire conceptualization frameworks of integrated reading-listening-writing strategies. In developing their SIIW, they used only some theoretical bases of writing strategies. Unfortunately, they depended very much on theoretical bases of integrated reading-writing principle. They did not balance the use of listening-writing, and reading-listening-writing principles. The evidence is that Yang and Plakans (2012) used preliminary items based on theoretical frameworks of the integrated operations proposed by Spivey (1997) and Spivey and King (1989), which in fact are about integrated reading-writing framework. Another evidence is that they used empirical findings of studies conducted by Asencion (2004), Esmaeili (2002), Plakans (2008, 2009a, 2009b), and Watanabe (2001), to frame their questionnaire conceptualization. These studies again are related to the process engaged in integrated reading-writing task.

The development of SIIW should not only be based heavily on theoretical frameworks or previous empirical findings of integrated reading-to-writing operation. It is because it is not only covering the reading, but also the listening aspect. Thus, ideally it must be also based on the use of theories and findings on the process of integrated listening-to-writing, or combination of reading, listening and writing. Unfortunately, Yang and Plakans (2012) forgot to address this important consideration. Failing to balance the use of integrated framework of reading, listening and writing in developing the SIIW will lead to the development of incomprehensive SIIW.

In relation to the questionnaire conceptualization, it is substantial to use up to date empirical findings or theoretical frameworks. Some other related studies that might be relevant to development of the conceptual framework of integrated writing strategy questionnaire are studies done by Alharthi (2011), Chien (2008), Plakans & Gebiril (2013), Sadi and Othman (2012), and Shapira and Lazarowitz (2005). It is not a wise decision to use only some (a small number) out of dated empirical findings (such as Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Upton, 2007, Spivey, 1997; Spivey and King; 1989) to generate writing strategies used by test takers in completing integrated writing section of iBT TOEFL.

One clear example showing that Yang and Plakans' SIIW is not covering comprehensive theoretical bases of integrated writing strategies is it does not include 'affective' writing strategy items in their SIIW. Alharthi (2011), and Shapira and Lazarowitz (2005) are among researchers who believe that there are four types of writing strategies in which one of them is "affective" writing strategy. This strategy functions to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes. It is effective to reduce anxiety, and it is for self-encouragement (Cohen and Dornyei, 2002, p. 181). This is in line with my experience of taking TOEFL iBT Test. I used affective strategy when completing the integrated writing section of my iBT TOEFL test.

Failing to use other (various) possible theoretical bases that are relevant to explain integrated writing strategy will result in the difficulty of covering all possible integrated reading-listening-writing strategies, which will affect the generalizability of the SIIW.

**Third**, the limitation of Yang and Plakans' SIIW is on the language use of the questionnaire. After reviewing their SIIW by using the questionnaire assessment rubric of the product (adapted from questionnaire validation rubric developed by Simon (2013) with the input from Jacquelyn White) to collect the data about the effectiveness, efficiency, attractiveness of the product, and tried it out for myself and for the five EFL learners, we found that Yang and Plakans'

SIIW does not meet the standard criteria of developing a valid and reliable inventory. When filling it out, it is found that there are some items that are ambiguous. For example, strategy item number 11, which says "I tried to understand the organization of the reading passage or the lecture" (Yang and Plakans, 2012). The wording of this statement can lead to various interpretations. Especially when it is used as one item with one answer, in the Likert scale questionnaire of Yang and Plakans' SIIW. We cannot really measure the frequency of using this strategy in each activities (reading or listening) with one answer. It might need two answers because test takers might have different level of frequency on using this type of strategy in different type of information (text or audio). This problem could not be tolerated as it could threat the validity and reliability of the instrument (Radhakrisna, 2007). Thus the wording of this strategy item number 11 needs to be revised. The words "reading or lecture" need to be separated into two different questionnaire items because it may involve different styles of processing information input from reading and the lecture. The wording for this strategy can be modified into "I tried to understand the organization of the lecture" and "I tried to understand the organization of the reading passage."

**Fourth**, to gain more valid and reliable assessment instrument (strategy inventory for integrated writing), think-aloud protocols and interviews could usefully be undertaken (Alharthi, 2011; Yang and Plakans, 2012) to understand how students/writers respond to integrated writing tasks. In fact, Yang and Plakans did not use any of those tracking strategy instruments to develop their SIIW.

To solve some limitations and problems above, it is crucial to develop a modified strategy inventory for integrated writing after generating all possible items of integrated writing strategy from the process of reviewing related literature, interviewing and observing the participants (think-aloud protocols). The layout, format, font and size, and the language use of the questionnaire should be adapted to ease the students/writers/test-takers in filling out the questionnaire so that it meets the criteria of designing a good questionnaire proposed by Dornyei (2003) and Radhakrisna (2007).

### Conclusion and Suggestion

In summary, the strategy inventory of integrated writing is important for EFL researchers, teachers, and students. So far there is only available integrated-reading-listening-writing strategy inventory, which is Yang and Plakans' SIIW. Unfortunately, this SIIW is not comprehensive yet. Furthermore, its development process did not meet the criteria of developing a valid and reliable assessment instrument. Therefore, it is substantial for future researchers to develop a more valid, comprehensive, and reliable assessment instrument (SIIW) to elicit all possible writing strategies used by writers (test takers) in completing the integrated-reading-listening-writing test of iBT TOEFL.

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