

Students' Pre-Speaking Drafts: Exploring Idea Organisation and Preparation Strategies in an English Speaking Test

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ABSTRACT

Speaking assessment requires learners to communicate fluently in the second language (L2). Before the actual assessment, pre-task planning is always preceded, whereas this time is important for students to organise their ideas related to the topics, that it may reduce their cognitive load when having the L2 assessment. One strategy to do pre-task planning is by having drafts. It is crucial to scaffold learners to prepare themselves with accuracy, fluency, and coherence of the ideas by having drafts before the assessment. This study aims to conceptualise the role of content in the drafts. This is because even pre-task planning has always been researched, less attention is given to the content of the drafts (Park, 2021). The content not only materialises the ideas but also conveys the discourse organisation that helps listeners follow the ideas. The ideas can be structured in linear sequencing (point - example - conclusion) problem - solution or listing format. In addition, translanguaging strategy or flexible language also may appear, which enhance planning efficiency. However, a minority of learners provided drafts with unclear structure, which may justify why planning is not always guaranteed learners to produce good performance in the assessment. This conceptual study discusses on students' pre-speaking drafts in preparing for speaking assessments. By understanding this, teachers can decide whether students genuinely organise their ideas or rely too heavily on notes, thereby providing targeted intervention for the students.

Keywords: (speaking assessment, pre-task planning, draft organisation)

INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language (L2) is often considered challenging, particularly when it comes to speaking. This is because cognitive processing capacity for speech production, which dictates language accuracy and fluency, is limited. The pressure is heightened especially in formal speaking assessments in which the performance is evaluated according to the criteria of fluency, accuracy, and coherence. Out of all these factors, coherence becomes a crucial indicator of comprehensibility. (Tsunemoto & Trofimovich, 2024).

It is believed that learners may perform better in speaking assessments when their ideas are well organised. Research suggested that pre-task planning is a key strategy that helps students with speaking tests. (Chen, 2020; Aaj, Maftoon, & Siyyari, 2023; Yingsheng & Yeung, 2023; Lampropoulou, 2023).

This is because speaking assessments are always preceded by a period of preparation in which students can plan or draft their ideas before the actual assessment. Although previous research highlights the significance of planning for accuracy and fluency (Shakbakh & Mardani, 2025), actual planning artifacts—the contents of learners' drafts or notes—receive less attention. The organisation of the thoughts, which is rarely regarded as significant data, is just as important as the ideas themselves in these drafts.

Hence, this paper aims to conceptualise students' pre-speaking drafts as tangible evidence of organisational strategies. By anchoring the concept of planning quality, it explores recent literature on pre-task planning and

discourse organisation and suggests the use of translanguaging as a draft-centred framework for effective pre-task planning in L2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-task planning in L2 speaking

In L2 speaking, pre-task planning (PTP) refers to preparation time allocated before the actual speaking assessment, whereas learners prepare themselves with content, language and discourse structure. It is deemed a fundamental construct which has been studied widely within task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2005). In this framework, tasks are considered goal-oriented communicative activities that demand learners to use language meaningfully rather than just practising linguistic forms. TBLT is conceptualised as a process with three separate stages that each contribute differently to learner output: pre-task planning, task performance, and post-task reflection. Ellis established pre-task planning as a crucial pedagogical and theoretical component of L2 learning by demonstrating through this model how it can have a substantial impact on fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Thus, this work served as a foundation for subsequent research that examined how students plan and prepare before speaking.

Research generally indicates that pre-task planning enables better L2 performance, particularly in terms of task complexity, lexical selection, grammatical accuracy and fluency. (Chen, 2020; Park, 2021; Yingsheng & Yeung, 2023, Aaj, Shakbakh & Mardani, 2025). The time allocated during planning allows for improvised language production by reducing cognitive overload (Chen, 2020) as learners are not required to pay attention to all these distinctive elements simultaneously, a process that heavily demands working memory. The findings are aligned with those completed by Shakbakh and Mardani (2025), who examined the impact of distinctive planning conditions on speaking accuracy and found that these conditions significantly affected students' performance. Correspondingly, Aaj, Maftoon and Siyyari (2024) who investigated the effects of different pre-task planning conditions on the complexity, accuracy and fluency of L2 oral production among 60 EFL learners, reported similar findings, marking positive effects of speaking performance on fluency, accuracy and syntactic complexity.

However, surprisingly, several different studies presented contrasting findings regarding the effects of pre-task planning on learners. For instance, Kim (2020) found that planning did not always have significant effects on students' oral performance. A study on 77 undergraduates investigating the effects of pre-task planning and task complexity demonstrated that students performed accurately and fluently even without allocated planning time, and that the use of more complex language was driven primarily by task difficulty rather than by planning. Another noteworthy finding was presented by Lampropoulou (2023), who stated that the correlation between pre-task planning and performance can be inconsistent. The study revealed that making notes did not improve students' oral performance. It appeared that students primarily used their planning time on generating main propositions only, rather than preparing for language accuracy and complexity. These findings raise the question whether the quality of planning matters before oral performance.

Drafts as Artifacts of Strategic Discourse Organisation

There are some specific aspects to be assessed in oral assessment, specifically the organisation of the ideas (Tsunemoto & Torimovich, 2024). The link between coherence and comprehensibility goes together, but discourse organisation is primarily relevant for a listener's comprehensibility, to follow the ideas and make sense of the ideas in taking part in the construction. Comprehensibility is even more relevant when learners are involved in an oral assessment and planning is always preceded by a pre-task planning, in which you could record notes related to the ideas given opportunities to plan ideas with drafts, so they could produce L2 ideas once they were given the opportunity in an oral assessment. Lambert, Aubrey & Leeming (2021) suggested that a conceptual precursory option in L2 could be related to successful L2 production because learners had an opportunity to plan ideas in L2 and going entails reducing some of the burden to monitor their language use in a conceptual framework.

Although research on drafts has been reviewed extensively in oral assessment, not as much attention has been given to written drafts preceding the speech. This relates to Park's (2021) assertion that sources of planning have not been examined sufficiently in task-based language teaching. As drafts were enacted on paper, the assumption was that listeners would easily follow the content of the drafts. Through the analysis of written drafts, ideas that are visibly externalised in organisation will be identified as both macro-organisational and micro-organisational strategies for the specific purpose of aiding a better and more effective L2 production. Research on pre-speaking drafts shows that pre-speaking drafts are more than just notes; they are a concrete manifestation of Strategic Competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), which most directly reflects the cognitive planning that occurs before L2 speech. When a student is provided with the prompt "compare and contrast the pros and cons of online learning," they will first evaluate to what extent the task will be demanding and the scope of what they know about the topic.

Their planning subsequently appears in a draft with a T-chart, a transparent macro-organising strategy, where they have listed separately "Pros" and "Cons", which all indicate the overall plan for a coherent compare and contrast discourse structure. In the Pros and Cons columns, the student uses (L1) "kemudahan" (convenience), in the L2, as a keyword to illustrate their micro-linguistic strategy of translanguage to capture complex ideas and easily retrieve that lexical item in the L2 while speaking. This linguistic scaffolding has direct implications for the execution phase, as the draft enables the learner to now shift to the priority of fluent delivery, and grammatical monitoring was not on-the-go generative idea development. Thus, rather than peripheral, these artifacts provide us with valuable insights into how learners are strategically managing their cognitive load, positively impacting fluency, accuracy, and coherence of their oral performance.

Translanguage and planning quality

Planning acts as a crucial part prior oral assessment. However, in task-based language teaching, sources of planning rarely caught the attention to be examined (Park, 2021). Drafts, as one source of planning, convey the organisational ideas which are critically important to be understood since they translate the ideas on paper. This is where translanguage - the ability to draw both target language and known language flexibly as one single resource - takes place (Canagarajah, 2011). It serves as a micro-linguistic strategy that is employed by learners in the pre-speaking drafts to assist them in oral assessment. Even though it is an important concept, translanguage receives limited attention on how it may influence L2 speaking (Luo & Sun, 2025). A study completed by Liu and Yeung (2023) proposed that by using L1 in pre-speaking drafts, it benefited learners in terms of syntactic complexity, accuracy and fluency rather than using L2 in planning time. However, the result related to lexical diversity was not significant. Another study by Luo and Sun (2025) revealed a similar finding about the positive effect of translanguage on syntactic complexity and idea units. This is because, by switching to the familiar language, learners may prioritise their language use in the task given and eventually perform better in oral assessment. These findings are correlated with the claim by Liu and Yeung (2023) that the quality of the usefulness of the planning depends on the language use either learners employ L1 or L2. This concept of translanguage is aligned with the framework by Bachman and Palmer (1996) that learners apply three stages when using translanguage, namely assessment, planning and execution. During the assessment level, learners may write L1 keyword like "kelestarian". Then, in the planning level, they generate the ideas related to the keyword in L1 efficiently. Finally, at the execution level, by referring to the notes in the planning process, only learners will switch the word to L2. This may scaffold them to perform well since they do not have to stuck from the first place if they lose the right word in L2. Therefore, this is robust evidence of how translanguage operates as an effective planning strategy before oral assessment.

Addressing Methodological Variations in Previous Studies

The differences in results from pre-task planning studies may largely be attributed to methodological differences in how pre-task planning conditions are defined and executed. Shakhbakh and Mardani (2025), for example, conducted a study on the effects of different types of planning conditions (guided, unguided, and no planning) specifically and found that these conditions impacted students' speaking accuracy, which means that an explicit planning condition was generally more favourable for developing students' language control. Conversely, Lampropoulou (2023) examined planning in a more open-ended context and found that allowing students the opportunity to make their own notes did not improve oral performance. The participants focused

more on content production, rather than on developing control of language form and complexity. These opposing findings indicate that the nature and structure of the planning task itself, which may include the context of the pre-task planning, time to plan, or provide explicit emphasis on language over content, may be an important aspect that could help explain deviations in the research on pre-task planning.

DISCUSSION

Source of Illustrative Samples

In this discussion section, authentic pre-speaking drafts created by diploma-level ESL students were used as the basis for the examples of draft organisation and translanguageing techniques. As part of routine classroom procedures, these drafts were gathered with consent and subsequently anonymised for analysis. These samples offer important insights into how learners at this proficiency level visually structure ideas, sequence content, and use translanguageing to support oral performance. The discussion focuses on demonstrating observable planning patterns rather than statistical generalisation.

Drafts as a window into the planning process

An array of studies proposed the significant value of planning, which positively affects the speaking performance (Chen, 2020; Aaj, Maftoon & Siyyari, 2023; Lampropoulou, 2023). Unlike mental planning, having a draft as a tangible record of planning is crucial to leave an observable trace of cognitive processes – all generated ideas are prioritised and sequenced to language resources, which are clearly recorded on paper. With drafts, it can assist learners to follow the ideas well during actual speaking and eventually perform better in the assessment. The use of drafts in the planning process is perfectly aligned with the idea posited by Strategic Competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) about how mental capacity processes the information by assessing the communicative situation, planning the response, and executing the plan to a communicative goal. These are the three stages employed by the learners when having drafts prior to the speaking assessment.

Drafts and the construction of coherence

Employing drafts allows learners to understand the coherence of their ideas. This is crucial as coherence is a key criterion that affects the speaking performance. (Tsunemoto & Trofimovich, 2024). From the drafts, it helps researchers to understand the coherence of ideas through macro-organisation strategies utilised by learners. For instance, when students use a point-example-conclusion strategy in the draft, it indicates a clear progression of ideas to be presented in the actual assessment. The students simply keep track of the ideas smoothly since those important ideas are clearly stated in the notes.

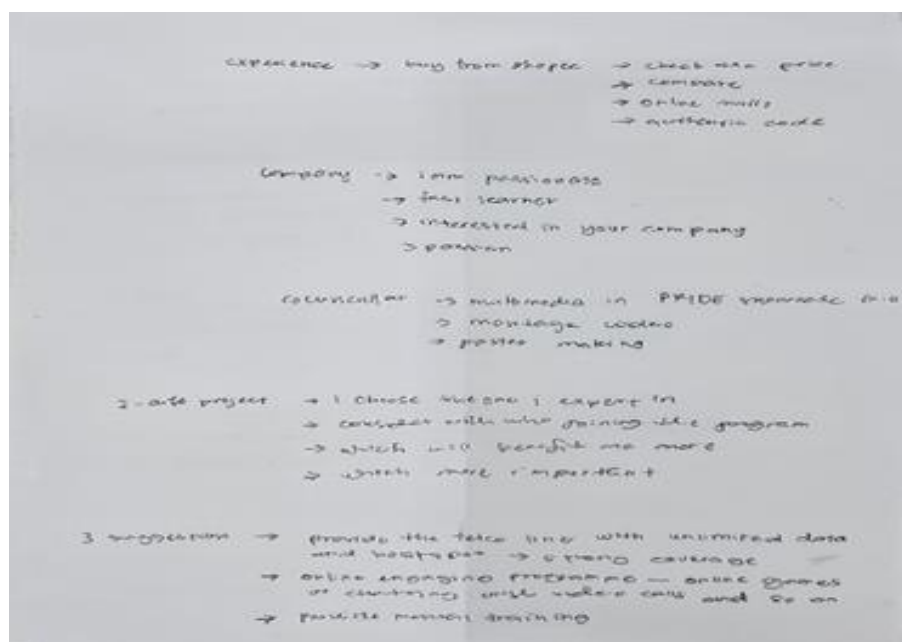


Figure 1 Point-example-conclusion strategy

As captured in Figure 1, implementing the point-example-conclusion strategy assists learners in presenting the ideas well in oral assessment since they have a clear picture of the ideas to be delivered. The coherence of the ideas, starting with the main idea, is supported by the examples and concluded with the conclusion, allowing listeners to follow the ideas well.

However, it is a distinct issue when the students simply jot scattered keywords on the drafts, whereas they tend to produce fragmented discourse that will make the ideas unclear and hard to follow.

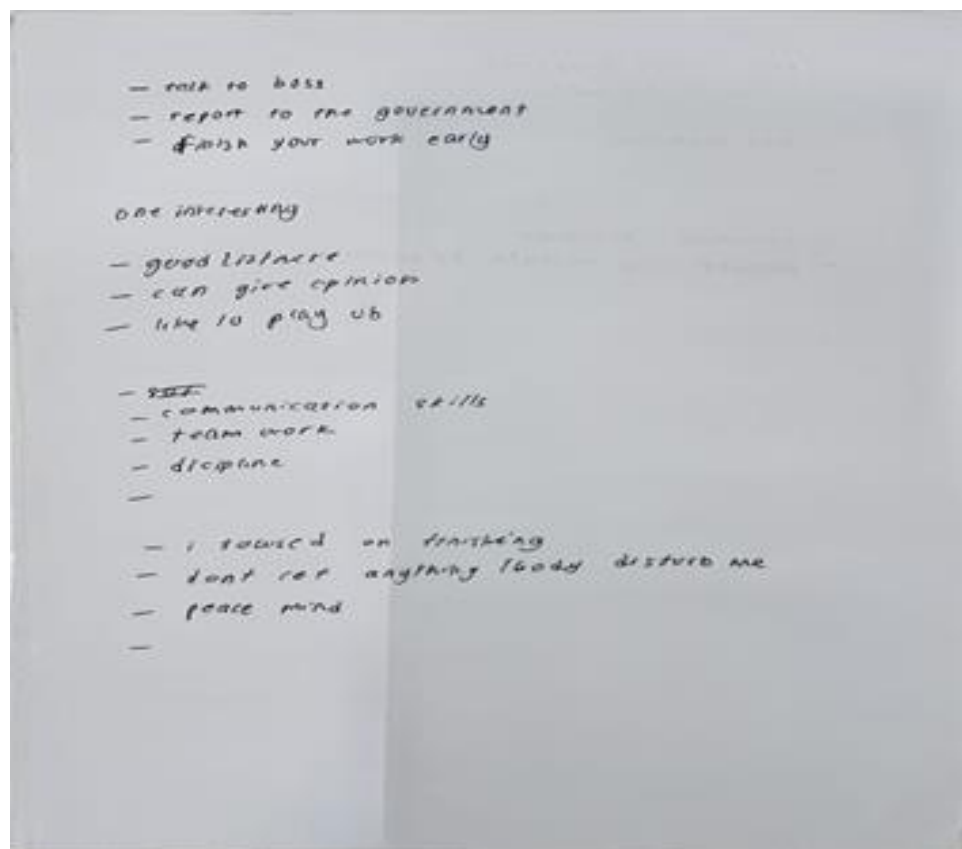


Figure 2 Scattered keywords strategy

With this strategy employed, learners tend to get stuck with their own ideas since they do not arrange the ideas coherently. This is because, when delivering the ideas, they need to think simultaneously about how to extend the ideas well, which might impair their accuracy and fluency, particularly when they are anxious to complete the oral assessment.

Therefore, the effective strategies are important to ensure the clarity of discourse organisation among listeners. With coherence of the ideas, it will affect comprehensibility of L2 speech in a positive way. (Tsunemoto & Trofimovich, 2024).

Translanguaging as a resource for effective drafts

In pre-task planning for L2 speaking, translanguaging acts beyond a mere pedagogical technique. In fact, it is regarded as a cognitive and strategic resource to aid learners in crafting their ideas in the drafts (Luo & Sun, 2025). By this micro-linguistic strategy, learners first brainstorm and conceptualise the ideas in L1 before shifting to L2. Learners may reduce cognitive load since this strategy is cognitively less demanding to generate the ideas in the language learners are familiar with (L1), compared to drafting them in L2 simultaneously.

In addition, learners may produce effective drafts when implementing translanguaging, as content richness can be enhanced. This is due to learners' lexical limitations in L2 that impede the exploration. Translanguaging assists learners in keeping the ideas in L1 while allowing more time to formulate those ideas in L2.

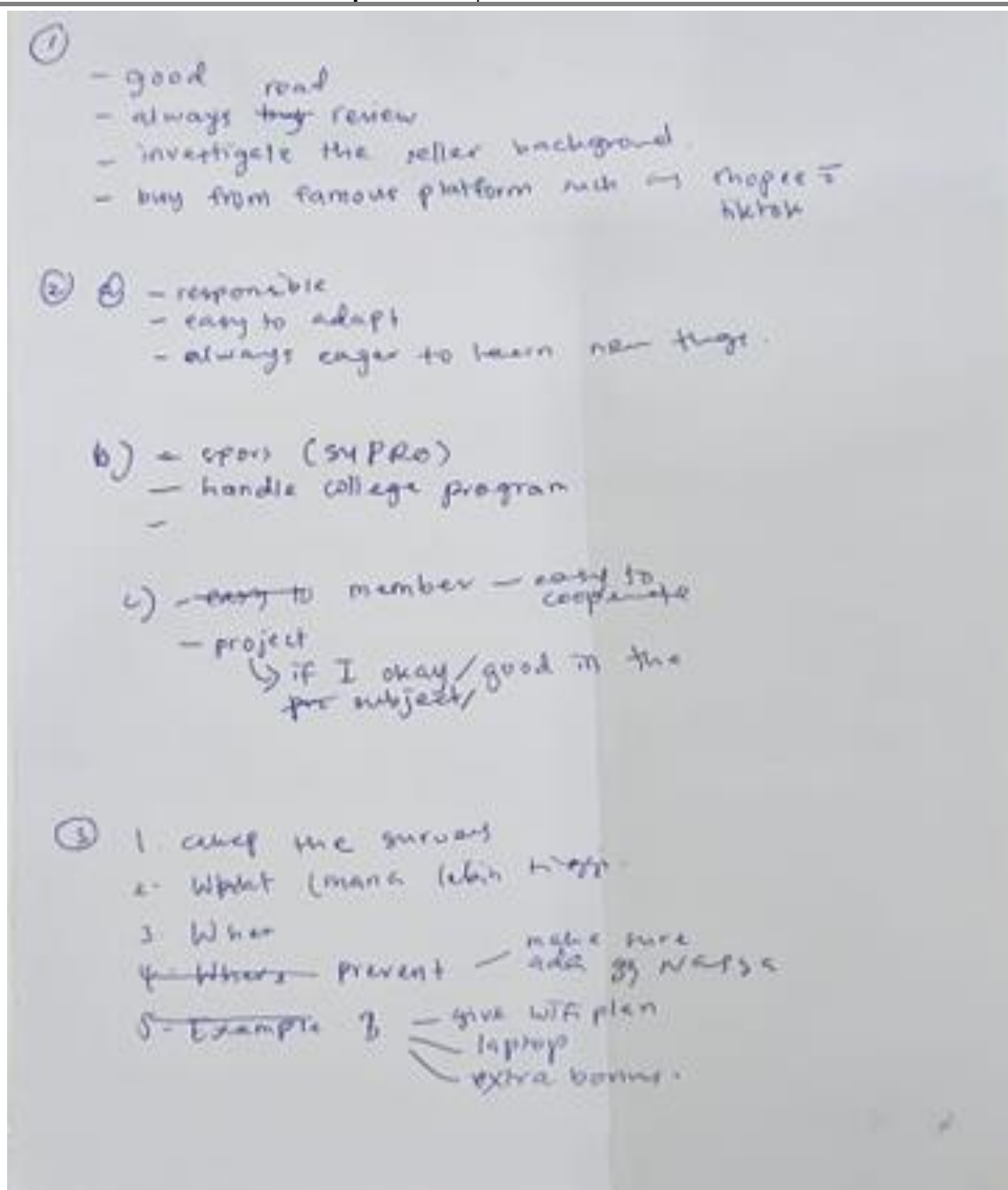


Figure 3 Translanguage strategy

The draft marks the translanguage strategy used by the learner to make the ideas. Highlighting the L1 as part of the main ideas, it helps the learner crafts the ideas before expanding them later in L2. This is important because L1 will not block the ideas from being generated in the first place. The learner has ample time to think of the right words in L2. Otherwise, missing the L2 words hinders learners from generating more ideas in oral assessment.

Therefore, this paper proposes that translanguage is essential in pre-task planning, which should not be treated merely as a preliminary stage of speaking assessment. Instead, it enables learners to plan more coherently and strategically by reducing cognitive load and constructing a dynamic process of knowledge and discourse organisation.

Implementing Draft-Based Strategies in L2 Classrooms

In practice, teachers can implement draft-centred techniques by introducing structured pre-speaking drafts as a common speaking preparation task and adapting them to the students' language development and learning contexts. For example, teachers may ask students to create a visual or written outline—like a mind map, a list

of bullet points, or a tree diagram of different arguments—those guides students to organise their ideas logically before speaking. These outlines can have planning templates added, focusing on the sequence of ideas, important vocabulary, and discourse markers to support students in connecting the content with the linguistic frame in which they will be speaking. In multilingual contexts, teachers may prefer to allow translanguaging in the drafts, enabling students to brainstorm ideas in their first language before transforming their ideas into English. This adds to the depth of content generation and organisation and creates clarity by utilising students' first-language-based thinking. Collaboratively, shading drafts is another process that can be integrated as well, where students take time to compare the drafts they wrote individually and revise their pre-speaking drafts together or in small groups, which prompts students to think about the metacognitive reasoning behind the articulation of drafts. Finally, teachers can instil short reflection tasks after speaking to have students read and think about their drafts in ways that connect the aspects of quality planning the student conducted to the outcome's performance. In overall, the adaptations described here demonstrate how useful draft-based pre-task planning can be in teacher-led language projects that use and allow some structuring without providing structure and allow for flexibility, depth, cohesion, fluency, and learner autonomy between the current planned-language task and engaging in real L2 use.

CONCLUSION

This paper suggests that making notes in the drafts during pre-task planning is not merely scribbling on scratch paper, but it forms a central artifact that materialises the contents for L2 speech clearly and efficiently on paper. Hence, drafts serve to scaffold learners' preparation for their oral assessment. By synthesising information in terms of pre-task planning, discourse organisation and translanguaging, this paper emphasises how drafts manifest the strategies employed by learners to manage cognitive load and all linguistic resources. The draft-centred framework in this paper, with translanguaging depicted as a bridge between preparation and performance, visualises the coherence of ideas in drafts. The implications of this topic suggest that, as for pedagogy, teachers need to guide students to implement pre-task planning effectively by employing drafts efficiently since the content of the drafts has rarely received attention, and students may not be fully aware of how to write on drafts well. For assessment, test designers may need to reconsider the importance of examining the content of the drafts in detail since they critically visualise the coherence of ideas. Future research may analyse the organisational patterns outlined in drafts more closely so that different planning strategies can be better understood and translated effectively into oral assessment.

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