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THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF THREE TYPES OF TASK PLANNING ON THE FLUENCY OF L2 ORAL PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Studying task design and performance conditions have become an important area of research within task-based language teaching, learning, and assessment.The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of three types of task planning on the fluency of L2 learners' oral production. Planning was operationalized at three levels: rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task planning. To this end, 40 students who were in four advanced classes with the same level, both male and female, were chosen from an English language institute in Hashtgerd, Iran. Four classes were randomly selected to work under three different planning condition and one class acted under no-planning condition. In order to collect the data, the presentation task was employed as the means of data collection. The participants in the first group were asked to perform the task two times with two-week interval between the two performances. The second experimental group received strategic planning with ten minutes of planning time. Whilst the participants in the third group began to speak immediately but took time as long as they like to performed their presentation. The participants in the no-planning group, were asked to perform their presentation immediately after reading each text within a limited time. Performance was assessed through speech rate (as a measure of fluency). The data collection procedure was carefully performed and the raw data was submitted to SPSS (version 19.0). Results indicated that strategic and rehearsal planning have statistically significant effect on fluency of the learners' performances.

KEY WORDS:task, rehearsal planning, strategic planning, within-task planning, fluency

INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching has become a burgeoning area of research in second and foreign language research (Salimi et al. 2011). Teachers and syllabus designers in order to have an effective teaching-learning environment should pay more attention to the role of tasks and task-based instruction. As Kasap (2005) mentioned tasks are of the most essential tools in the process of language learning and teaching in classroom. TBI is an approach that emphasizes the significance of the role of tasks in learning process. Classroom activities become primary in language teaching when foreign language learners have fewer opportunities to practice language outside school. According toEsfandiari, Knight, Molinari and Zacharias (2012)

the initial aim of TBL is to motivate learners to engage in meaning with the language resources they already have. Instructional tasks are useful components of the language learning environment and hold a central place in the process of learning. Focusing on tasks as pedagogic tools might cause wider enhancing language learning. While language learners perform the tasks, they engage in certain types of language use and mental processing that are very beneficial for language acquisition (Bamanger, 2014). Training in oral skills which let learners communicate and interact in a meaningful way, by exchanging information, negotiating meaning, supporting ideas, facing oral defenses, is an effective way to increase students' motivation to take part in L2 learning interactions. Instructional tasks are effective tools of the language learning in classroom, the type of task used in instruction may directly and positively influence learners' performance (Gutierrez, 2005).

Despite the methodological approaches which aim to enhance second language acquisition (SLA), still speaking appears to be a difficult skill to develop in the process of second language (L2) learning (Khan, 2010). Unfortunately fewer studies have been efforted to the evaluation of the effects of task planning on L2 oral production (Rahimpour& Jahan, 2011). To fill this gap, the present study set out to develop a greater understanding of the differential effects of these three types of task planning on L2 oral production in terms of fluency.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Difference between Task-Based Instruction (TBI) and Traditional Learning

The task-based framework for language teaching differs from the traditional teaching methods in terms of different sequencing of the instructional phases. In a traditional classroom, the first step is to present the target language function and forms, and then to practice them, and finally to produce examples of these language function/forms without teacher support. In a task-based framework, learners first perform a communicative task (with the help of any previously learned language structures) after they are introduced to the topic and the task itself. They might listen to a recording of learners working on the same or a similar task or read something related to the task topic. After they have some sense of the task production, they apply this knowledge to re-try the task. A holistic approach is used in task-based framework since learners are first involved in the task, and they try to negotiate for meaning using existing resources. Then, they focus on the target language forms they find they need. They have been familiarized with the specific language functions and language forms useful in task completion. So these functions and forms are contextualized and have become more meaningful for the learners within the task (Kasap, 2005). Table 1shows the major differences between TBI and traditional types of learning according to Ducker (2012).

Table 1: Comparison of TBI and traditional types of learning (Ducker, 2012)

Aspect	TBI	Traditional learning
Focus of learning	Meaning	Form (grammar, etc…)
Language input	Students generate language	Teacher generated language
Learning content	Driven by student needs	and rules of language
Learning action	Implicit learning by student	Pre-determined by teacher
	Deduction	Explicit learning by teacher
Description of language	Holistic "chunks" of natural	Instruction
Learning activity	Language	Discreet segments of
	Tasks to practice whole integrated	synthesized language
	skills	Exercises to practice segments
		of language

There are a number of different types of planning and these are discussed by Ellis (2009). According to him, a basic distinction is drawn between pre-task and within-task planning. These are distinguished based on when the planning takes place either before the task itself or during the performance of the task. Pre-task planning can be further divided into rehearsal or strategic planning. Within-task planning can also take two forms. It can be pressured (i.e. learners are required to perform the task rapidly by specifying a time limit) or unpressured (i.e. they are given an unlimited amount of time to perform the task) (see Figure 1). Ahmadian (2012) mentioned when participants perform a task under time pressure, the working memory uses the limited time to access lexical information from long-term memory, but when they perform without any time pressure, they can access syntactic information too. According to Abdi, Eslami and Zahedi (2012) in unpressured task performance, participants takes part in to careful on-line planning which calls 'planned language use' and in pressured task performance participants are engaged in rapid planning which calls 'unplanned language use'. Online planning takes place during performance of a task, whereas pre-task planning examines how planning prior to performance influences (Ghavamnia, Tavakoli, &Esteki, 2013). Pre-task planning and within task planning can be categorized further into guided planning, in which learners can be given specific advice about what and how to plan, and unguided planning, in which learners receive no or a little specific advice about planning and performing the task (Moradi&Talebi, 2014, Bagheridoust&AllahyariFakoor, 2013, & Ellis, 2005,p5).

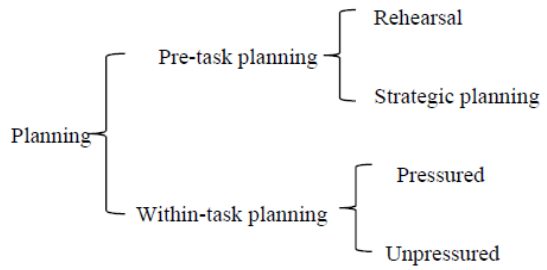

Figure 1. Types of planning (according to Ellis, 2005, p4)

Task planning has strong effect on the effectiveness of language instruction and become a popular method of how to teach L2 communicative acquisition (Seyyedi& Ismail, 2012). According to Foster and Skehan (1999) providing greater planning opportunities should have a beneficial effect on the course of language development, since planned L2 discourse should push learners to extend what they are capable of saying.

Planning time studies

Bei (2012) in a study focused on the effects of immediate task repetition in L2 speech. As the results showed repetition of narrative tasks to significantly improve fluency while accuracy also has quite some benefit to gain. Repeating a speaking task, on the other hand, had little influence on complexity. Also it was found that the learners had generally correct self-perception of their performances, which was the interaction of enhanced repeated performance, fatigue, and their proficiency levels. Mojavezi (2013) performed a study to investigate the way task repetition correlates with language proficiency and the differential effects that task repetition might have on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of L2 learners with different levels of proficiency. Results of this study revealed that, compared to the participants with lower L2 proficiency, participants with higher levels of L2 proficiency produced more complex, accurate, and fluent speech on the second encounter with the same task in their oral production. The findings also indicated that participants with higher English language proficiency are more capable of using this task-based opportunity to produce more complex, fluent, and accurate language. Bamanger (2014) conducted a study on the effect of task repetition on foreign language output in terms of fluency and accuracy. The findings of this study concluded that when EFL learners are asked to repeat task, they are likely to get some improvements in their accuracy and fluency in their oral production. Moradi and Talebi (2014) in a study find out pre-speaking strategies instruction in strategic planning has effects on Iranian EFL students' use of pre-speaking strategies as well as their fluency and lexical resources. Analysis of the data on the basis of the students'

performance showed that the students' overall scores in fluency and lexical resources was improved from pre-test to post-test. This research has shown if students develop using pre-speaking strategies, the fluency and lexical resources will show significant improvement. Further analysis of the data showed the effect of speaking strategies on both fluency and lexical resources, but lexical resources was more affected and fluency was less affected. Analysis of the data showed the effect of pre-speaking instructions on student's awareness and use of strategies in guided strategic planning. In a study performed by Gashan and Almohaisen (2014) in order to examine the effect of task repetition on foreign language output the participants were asked to perform the task two times with two-week interval between the two performances. The oral performances were transcribed and analyzed to measure fluency and accuracy of language output. The findings revealed that task repetition resulted in significant differences in the subjects' oral discourse in terms of fluency and accuracy. The findings of this study came to conclude that when EFL learners are asked to repeat the information-gap task, they likely to get improvements in their accuracy and fluency.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the purpose of the study, the following research question and hypotheses were formulated:

I. Q1. Which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) leads to fluency in L2 oral production?
II. Ho1. The rehearsal task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production.
III. Ho2. The strategic task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production.
IV. Ho3. The unpressured within-task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Participants

The participants in this study were 40 non-native speakers of English in advanced level at Khalafi language institute in Hashtgerd. One fourth of the students are female and the others are male. They were in four classes with the same level. Therefore, their language proficiency levels were similar according to the norms of this language institute. Three class were randomly selected to act as the experimental groups and one class was selected as the control group (see Table 2).

Table 2: The participants of the actual study

Participants	Number (Male/Female)	Mean age (Range)
First experimental group	10 (13/0)	18.8 (17-21)
Second experimental group	10 (13/0)	19 (16-22)
Third experimental group	10 (0/13)	17.9 (16-21)
Control group	10 (13/0)	18.4 (15-23)

3.2. Instruments

Instruments

In this study, the following instruments were used:

- The researcher choose four advanced class in a language institute, who were in the same level of language proficiency according to the norms of this language institute.
- Twelve reading parts of American file, student book 3, units 1-7 were chosen as the source of input that the participants weren't taught before. A pilot study was performed by five language teachers on ten student with the same level as the participants of this study to justify the length of these texts and the amount of

time the participants in this level need to read these texts completely for the first time.

- Oral presentation taskhave been selected by following Teng (2007)as the means of data collection of this study.
- The researcher designed four different programs. One program was in the form of no-planning condition and three programs were based on task planning condition. In the first treatment group (rehearsal pre-task planning); the participants performed the same task two times with an interval of two weeks between the two performances. The participants had not been informed in advance about the repetition of the task in order to diminish the practice effect. The choice of planning time was based on Ellis (2005). In the second treatment group (strategic pre-task planning); as the participants read the given text within a limited time, they were required to plan their performance for 10 minutes before they performed the task. They were also asked to complete the task within a limited time. As Lavolette (2013) mentioned strategic planning is operationalized by giving learners time (often about 5 to 10 minutes) to plan before being asked to perform a task. Here the choice of planning time was based on Rahimpour and Jahan (2011); Fahim, Nourzadeh and Fat'hi, (2011). In the third treatment group (unpressured within-task planning); in the unpressured within-task planning condition, the participants were asked to speak immediately after reading the text but encouraged to carefully plan their sentences while speaking. They were given as much time as needed to complete the task. Thus they were not given any time in advance but were allowed an unlimited time to plan while performing the task. In the control group (no-planning condition) the participants were under the no-planning condition in which participants were not given time for planning, and in order to prevent them from on-line planning a time limit was established for their presentation.
- The participants' oral production was recorded by the researcher in each section. After each section the researcher listened to their oral production and wrote them down on a piece of paper. Then the fluency of their oral production was determinedbased on the chosen criteria.

Procedure

In order to achieve the effect of three types of task planning: pre-task (rehearsal & strategic), and unpressured within-task on fluency of L2 learners' oral production, four classes (N=10) in a language institute with the same level of language proficiency, were selected by this study. There was no need to use pre-test to ensure that the students were from the same level of language proficiency, because according to the norms of their language center they were at the same level of proficiency. Three classes received TBI with three different types of task planning and one class act as control group received the same task under no-planning condition. Twelve texts were chosen as the source of input that the participants weren't taught before. In order to collect the data, the presentation task was employed as the means of data collection. Students in each class were under experiment in 12 sections (one section for each text). The researcher recorded their voice and analyse their oral production in terms of fluency. Then the data collected from the study were statistically analyzed using the three one-way ANOVAs. The data collection procedure was carefully performed and the raw data was submitted to SPSS (version 19.0) to calculate the required statistical analyses in order to address the research questions and hypothesis of this study.

Measures

Measure of the fluency was developed to evaluate the quality of the participants' oral production.

Fluency Measure (Speech Rate)

Fluency in the participants' oral production was achieved by calculating total number of tokens (words) / total task time (in minutes): wpm (Khan, 2010).

RESULTS

Testing Assumptions

Interval data, independence of subjects, normality and homogeneity of variances are four assumptions that should be met before one decides to run parametric tests (Field, 2009). The first assumption is met because the present data are measured on an interval scale. Bachman (2005, p. 236) believes that the assumption of independence of subjects is met when —the performance of any given individual is independent of the performance of other individual.

The third assumption concerns the normality of fluency scores (see Table 3), which are checked through the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors. As shown in this table, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors are within the ranges of +/- 1.96.

The last assumption – homogeneity of variances – will be discussed when reporting the results of the inferential statistics.

Table 3; *Normality Tests for Fluency Scores in the Four Groups*

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Rehearsal	10	1.063	.687	.143	1.334
Strategic	10	.867	.687	-.229	1.334
Within-task	10	1.045	.687	.582	1.334
Control	10	.465	.687	-.437	1.334

Investigating the Research Question

The research question of this study asked which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) leads to fluency in L2 oral production. In order to answer this research question One-way ANOVA was used. Before discussing the results of this analysis, the descriptive statistics of participants' fluency scores in the four groups were assessed and presented in Table 4. The table indicates that the mean of strategic group (*M* = 69.46, *SD* = 5.27) was considerably more than rehearsal group (*M* = 62.38, *SD* = 5.15), and the means of these two groups were noticeably greater than the unpressured within-task group (*M* = 54.63, *SD* = 4.80) and control group (*M* = 52.84, *SD* = 2.49) (See appendix A for the fluency scores).

Homogeneity of variances is the major assumption of running ANOVA. Levene's Test was used to test this assumption. A quick look at Table 5 reveals that we have not violated the homogeneity of variance assumption for the four groups' fluency scores because the Sig. for Levene's test (.25) was more than .05.

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Table 4: *Group Statistics of Fluency Scores in the Four Groups*

Group	N	Mean	SD
Rehearsal	10	62.38	5.15
Strategic	10	69.46	5.27
Within-task	10	54.63	4.80
Control	10	52.84	2.49
Total	40	59.83	8.01

Table 5: *Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Fluency scores in the Four Groups*

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.416	3	36	.254

Table 6 below displays the results of ANOVA that was used to compare the fluency scores in the four groups.

Table 6: *ANOVA for Comparing Four Groups' Fluency Scores*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1750.835	3	583.612	27.878	.000
Within Groups	753.631	36	20.934		
Total	2504.466	39			

ANOVA results, as appeared in Table 6 revealed a statistically significant difference in fluency scores among the four groups at the $p < .05$ level, $F_{(3, 36)} = 27.87$, $p = .000$, $p < .05$. Fortunately our p value (.000) was lower than .05, and our F value, 27.87 was above the F critical (4.38).

The graphical representation of the results is displayed in Figure 2.

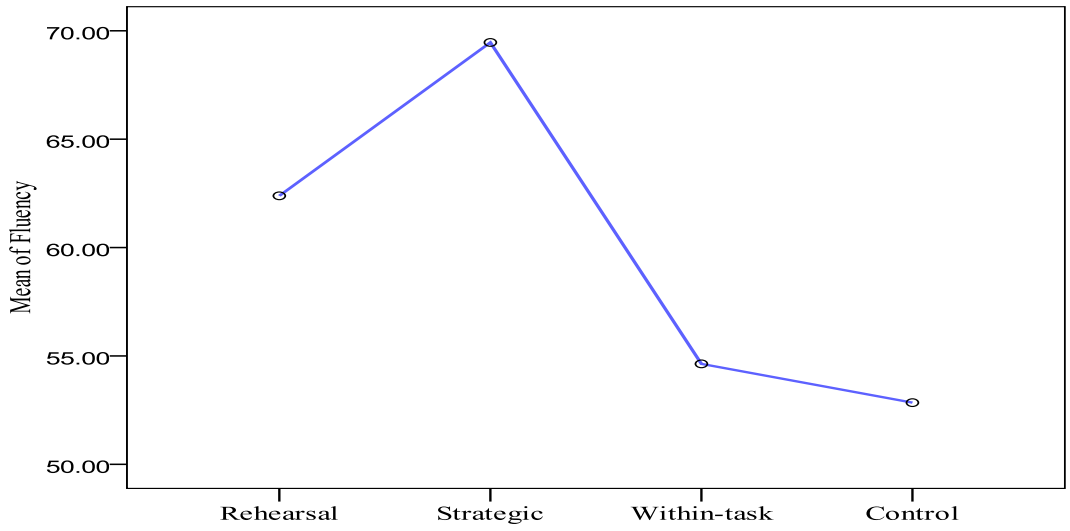

Figure 2. Line graph for fluency scores in the four groups

Since ANOVA does not tell us the exact location of the differences among the groups Tukey's HSDwas performed. The results of TukeyTest are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: *Tukey's HSD post-hoc Testsfor Multiple Comparisons of Four Groups' Fluency Scores*

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Rehearsal	Strategic	-7.07583*	2.04618	.007
	Within-task	7.75200*	2.04618	.003
Strategic	Within-task	14.82783*	2.04618	.000

Control	Rehearsal	-9.54025*	2.04618	.000
	Strategic	-16.61608*	2.04618	.000
	Within-task	-1.78825	2.04618	0.818

Tukey's HSDpost-hoc Tests (see Table 7) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the rehearsal group (*M* = 62.38, *SD* = 5.15) and control group (*M* = 52.84, *SD* = 2.49) with the mean difference of 9.45, *p* = .000, *p*< .05, in which *p* value, .000 was less than .05; thus the first null hypothesis of the first research question as "The rehearsal task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production" was rejected. Accordingly we could claim that the rehearsal task planning leads to fluency in L2 oral production.

The results of Tukey's HSDpost-hoc Tests, as appeared in Table 7, revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the strategic group (*M* = 69.46, *SD* = 5.27) and control group (*M* = 52.84, *SD* = 2.49) with the mean difference of 16.61, *p* = .000, *p*< .05, in which *p* value, .000 was well below .05 that we were quite safe to reject the second null hypothesis of the first research question as "The strategic task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production". Hence it was concluded that the strategic task planning leads to fluency in L2 oral production.

Tukey's HSDpost-hoc Tests (Table 7) failed to find any statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the unpressured within-task group (*M* = 54.63, *SD* = 4.80) and control group (*M* = 52.84, *SD* = 2.49) with the mean difference of 1.78, *p* = .81, *p*> .05, in which *p* value, .000 was more .05; therefore the third null hypothesis of the first research question as "The unpressured within-task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production" was retained. Subsequently it can be asserted that the unpressured within-task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production.

DISCUSSION

The present study has focused on the impact of three different types of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) on Iranian advanced EFL learners oral production while task performance. In this section we will summarize the findings of the study and discuss the findings in relation to other studies.

The research question of this study asked which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and within-task) leads to fluency in L2 oral production. Results of this study revealed a statistically significant difference in fluency scores among the four groups. There was a statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the rehearsal group and control group. So first null hypothesis of the study as "The rehearsal task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production" was rejected. Accordingly we could claim that the rehearsal task planning leads to fluency in L2 oral production. The results obtained in terms of the effect of rehearsal planning on the fluency of L2 learners' production are also in line with the studies conducted by Bei (2012); Mojavezi (2013); Bamanger (2014); and Gashan andAlmohaisen (2014). Ellis (2009) also mentioned the results of different researches showed that rehearsal planning result in greater fluency in learners' production.

As results also revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the strategic group and control group. These results reject the second null hypothesis of the study as "The strategic task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production". Hence it was concluded that the strategic task planning leads to fluency in L2 oral production. Also in the case of fluency the result indicated it was found that the participants in the strategic planning group outperformed the rehearsal planning group. In line with the findings of this study in terms of strategic planning, a number of studies have confirmed that giving learners the opportunity to plan before task performance results in greater fluency (Abdi et al., (2012) and Moradi and Talebi (2014). Ellis (2009) also mentioned the results of different researches showed that strategic planning result in greater fluency in learners' production.

There was not any statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the unpressured within-task group and control group. Therefore the third null hypothesis of the study as "The unpressured within-task planning does not lead to fluency in L2

oral production" was retained. Subsequently it can be asserted that the unpressured within-task planning does not lead to fluency in L2 oral production. The results obtained in terms of the effect of within-task planning on the fluency of learners' production are also in line with the results suggested by Ellis (2009).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The present study tried to cast some light on the effect of task planning on the fluency of foreign language learners' oral performance. The research was conducted with 40 language learners in a language institute at advanced level. Doing the same task, the participants' oral performance in all rehearsal, strategic, unpressured within-task and control group was recorded and measured based on the established criteria. The research question of this study asked which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task planning) leads to fluency in L2 oral production. Findings indicated that strategic and rehearsal planning have positive effect on the fluency of learners but there was no significance difference mean on learners' oral production under unpressured within task planning in terms of fluency. Also the results are greater for strategic group than rehearsal group.

The present study has implications for pedagogy. In terms of pedagogical practice, the findings of this study suggest that strategic and rehearsal planning can increase the learners' fluency of speech.Another implication of the current study is that researchers and teachers might find it very beneficial to devote some of their time to designing effective task planning conditions to help language learners improve fluency of their oral production.

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Appendix A: Fluency Results in the Four Groups

Fluency Results in the Four Groups

N	Rehearsal	Strategic	Within-task	Control
1	58.40	63.65	51.43	57.37
2	58.85	63.85	48.43	51.47
3	60.65	68.22	56.93	52.59
4	71.75	69.68	64.30	52.37
5	70.79	73.88	52.30	53.47
6	62.73	79.54	60.89	55.07
7	63.82	75.71	52.63	55.37
8	59.29	66.78	54.74	50.76
9	61.27	66.88	53.17	49.25
10	56.32	66.43	51.54	50.74