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**The Influence of Planning Time on the Accuracy of
Iranian EFL Students' Speech Performance.**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of MA
in Teaching of English as a Foreign Language**

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دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی
گروه زبان شناسی و زبان های خارجی

تاثیر زمان آمادگی بر صحت کلام زبان آموزان ایرانی

پایان نامه برای دریافت درجه کارشناسی ارشد در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی

استاد راهنما: دکتر فاطمه همتی

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نگارنده: سعیده فراتی

پاییز 1389

بنام خداوند بخشنده مهربان

چکیده

این مطالعه باهدف بررسی تاثیر زمان آمادگی برصحت کلام زبان آموزان ایرانی انجام شد. تعداد سی نفر از زبان آموزان دارای سطح متوسط روبه پایین از سه کلاس مکالمه زبان انگلیسی موسسه گویش شهرستان دامغان در این مطالعه شرکت کردند. شرکت کنندگان بطور تصادفی در میان سه گروه آزمایشی قرار گرفتند.

هرکدام از این گروه ها کارروایت داستان را در شرایط مختلف انجام دادند: گروه اول: سه دقیقه زمان آمادگی پیش از کار - گروه دوم: چهار دقیقه زمان آمادگی فشرده حین کار - گروه سوم: سه دقیقه زمان آمادگی پیش از کار علاوه بر چهار دقیقه زمان آمادگی فشرده حین کار.

از شرکت کنندگان خواسته شد بلافاصله پس از تکمیل کارشان پرسش نامه ای را به فارسی پر کنند که پیرامون چگونگی بهره گیری آنها از زمان آمادگی شان بود و نهایتاً روایت های مختلف ضبط شده نوشته شدند و مورد تحلیل قرار گرفتند. یک سری آنالیز واریانس یک جانبه در تمام این روایات مورد استفاده قرار گرفت تا به بررسی این نکته پردازیم که آیا زمان آمادگی تاثیری عمده برصحت رفتار شفاهی شرکت کننده ها دارد یا خیر؟.

این مطالعه نشان داد که سه شرایط آمادگی مختلف دارای تاثیرات مختلفی بر جنبه های مختلف زبان از جمله صحت آن دارد. مزایای کلی زمان آمادگی اضافی به مواردی همچون جمع بندی افکار و تشخیص مشکلات زبانی و جستجوی کلمات در زمان آمادگی پیش از کار و ارزیابی دانش انگلیسی در زمان فشرده آمادگی حین کار منجر شد.

نتایج نشان می دهند که زمان آمادگی فشرده حین کار و پیش از کار در گروه سوم در مقایسه با گروه دوم که از این زمان محروم بود مزیتی به شمار میرفت و همین زمان منجر به انتخاب کلماتی شد که برای روایت داستان لازم بودند. و به همین ترتیب زمان آمادگی فشرده حین کار هم مزیتی بود برای گروه سوم زیرا آن منجر به تمرکز بیشتر بر ساختار دستوری جملات در حین روایت داستان شد و بنابراین منجر به کلامی صحیح تر گردید.



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1-1 Overview

Using language to fulfill a pedagogical task for long has been considered important in that it resembles the students' performance in the real language use. Task-based language teaching is a realization of communicative language teaching. It has received much attention from second language (L2) acquisition researchers and teachers (Ellis 2003).

Applied linguists studying second language acquisition have emphasized the value of tasks in the classroom (Brown 1995). Although many scholars have dwelled upon the differences between the tasks carried out in the classroom and those in the real world, yet classroom tasks are beneficial as they create a sense of need. Some researchers (e.g. Long & Crookes 1992; Skehan 1996; Willis 1996) believe that giving learners tasks to perform rather than items to learn provides a better environment for promotion of natural language learning process. Furthermore, through using particular tasks teachers can emphasize one aspect of language over another. In the last two decades, extensive research has been done on task conditions, task difficulty and task complexity. Some researchers like Ellis (1987), Skehan (1998), Skehan & Foster (1999), have given priority to task conditions. Others, taking Robinson (1995) views have mostly elaborated on the concept of task difficulty. The latter group considered factors within the text itself as the most influential ones. The former group of scholars introduced planning time as one of the factors to be considered in task conditions. Given that in task completion, meaning is usually attended to at the expense of form, planning time in the form of strategic or

within-task can provide L2 speakers with an opportunity to plan what they are supposed to talk in terms of their goals and sub-goals prior to or during speaking, freeing them from pressure in terms of processing load. This reduction of pressure on processing capacity is more likely to allow L2 speakers to attend to form in formulation stage of language production. There is also a possibility that the given time will provide learners with more ready-made plans for new situations. Research so far has investigated the influence of this planning condition on different aspects of performance like fluency, accuracy and complexity. Regarding the developments toward reflective teaching, teachers and practitioners may feel the need to emphasize one of these aspects over the other ones. Research on task conditions may give us a better insight in this regard.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Recent studies of oral L2 performance within task-based contexts have focused on the problems of using more fluent and accurate language. One kind of these investigations concerns the role of planning which has been one of the recent areas in task-based research. Literature review shows that planning impacts positively on language production.

Skehan (1998) believes that there are three aspects of performance: fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Most researches to date favor pre-task planning. In the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context, pre-task planning may help teachers draw learners' attention to use more accurate forms because it is claimed to reduce learners' cognitive processing load and free up their attention resources, allowing them to focus on form (Crookes1998; Ortega1999; Skehan1998). In addition, it does not require intensive

teacher-to-learner interaction, which is difficult to do in an EFL setting. It has revealed positive impacts as far as fluency and complexity are concerned. In contrast, mixed results have been reported for accuracy (Yuan & Ellis 2003).

This study was a partial replication of Yuan & Ellis' study (2003). In their study, they set out to investigate planning under a new timing condition. They called this new construct within-task (WT) planning. The findings of the above research indicate that pre-task (PT) planning advantaged grammatical complexity while WT planning resulted both in greater grammatical complexity and accuracy. They also found that neither types of planning favored fluency or lexical variety. Yet, the problem with this study is just considering each of the planning conditions separately and regarding no planning condition when one of the groups was intentionally deprived of any planning time and process. Moreover they ignored any possibility for simultaneous consideration of both PT and WT planning time which might lead to different results with regard to fluency, accuracy, and complexity of the subjects' speech.

In this line the present research aims to investigate the impact of three types of planning time on the accuracy of L2 speech of Iranian EFL students. The study intends to find out the probable advantage of these three states. The main research questions in this study were:

(1) Is there any significant difference between the accuracy of lower intermediate subjects' speech in pre-task (PT) planning condition and pressured within-task (PWT) planning condition?

(2) Is there any significant difference between the accuracy of lower intermediate subjects' speech in PT planning condition and pre-task plus pressured within-task (PTPWT) planning condition?

(3) Is there any significant difference between the accuracy of lower intermediate subjects' speech in PWT planning condition and PTPWT planning condition?

So the purpose of this research is to find the probable effects of three different types of planning on speech accuracy and their long term impact on the fluency and L2 proficiency.

1-3 Research Hypotheses

Taking abovementioned research questions into consideration, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis (1): There is no significant difference between the accuracy of lower-intermediate subjects' speech in PT planning condition and PWT planning condition.

Hypothesis (2): There is no significant difference between the accuracy of lower-intermediate subjects' speech in PT planning condition and PTPWT planning condition.

Hypothesis (3): There is no significant difference between the accuracy of lower-intermediate subjects' speech in PWT planning condition and PTPWT planning condition.

1-4 Significance of the Study

With the advent of modern approaches to language teaching and learning like communicative approach, the attention of those involved in this field has been turned from purely grammatical and structural features of language toward more communicative ones, developing new types of techniques for teaching foreign languages.

However, there are different tasks used at institutional settings which are done without paying attention to the critical roles of planning processes in learning and important role of these processes in developing learners' proficiency. Also, there are still many language teachers and textbooks who stick to the old methods and techniques for teaching of the tasks, but they are not aware of the planning processes and their roles in human memory.

This study gives the language learners and teachers an opportunity to try new ways of learning and teaching in an attempt to persuade them to examine new ways of teaching and learning with paying enough attention to different processes which are involved in planning. Moreover, the study of task planning provides a suitable forum for establishing the interconnectedness of theory, research and pedagogy in SLA (Pica 1997). The application of this research could be for teaching speaking skill in different institutes and universities by emphasizing on new ways of task implementation. It may provide new plethora for L2 instructors regarding reaching learners to accuracy and consequently the proficiency of speech faster than before.

1-5 Operational Definitions

Planning: Every spoken and written language use involves planning, though the speaker or writer does not try to plan it intentionally and produce it without special effort. That is, they have to decide on its content and the way of its production. Ellis (2005) believes that planning is essentially a problem solving activity; it involves deciding what linguistic devices need to be selected in order to affect the audience in the desired way. Planning takes place at a number of different levels, resulting in discourse plans, sentence plans and constituent plans, all of which have to be interwoven in the actual execution of a

language act (Clark & Clark 1977). Planning can take place in different types too. Ellis (2005) distinguishes between two principal types of planning- pre-task (PT) and within-task (WT) planning. Figure 1-1 shows this distinction between two types of planning. These two main types are distinguished according to when the planning takes place; either before the task is done or during its performance.

Pre-Task (PT) Planning: is divided into two types itself: rehearsal and strategic planning. Rehearsal involves providing learners with an opportunity to perform the task before the "main performance" (Ellis 2005). In other words, it involves task repetition, while the first performance of the task is regarded as the preparation for the first performance.

Strategic planning involves learners preparing to perform the task by regarding the content of the task they need to express and the way of its expressing. In PT planning, the learner has access to the actual task materials. According to Ellis (2005), it is this characteristic that distinguishes strategic planning from other types of PT activity (e.g. brainstorming content; studying a model performance of the task, dictionary search and etc).

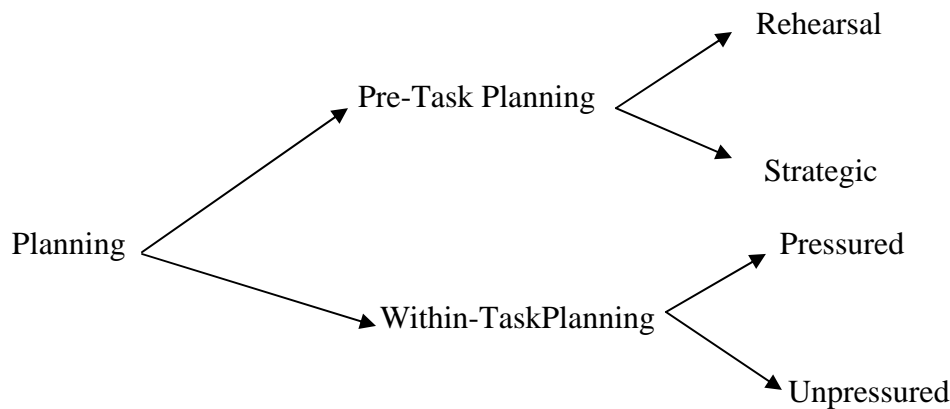


Figure 1-1 Ellis's types of task-based planning

Within-Task (WT) Planning: can be distinguished according to the extent to which the task performance is pressured or unpressured. This can be achieved most easily by using the time that is available to learners for within-task planning of language product in task performance. In an unpressured performance learners engage in careful WT planning which results in what Ochs (1979) called 'planned language use' and in pressured performance they engage in rapid planning which he called it 'unplanned language use'.

Accuracy: as Yuan & Ellis (2003) define, accuracy concerns the extent to which the language produced conforms to target language norms. Researchers have defined this notion in different ways. Some (e.g. Crookes 1989 ; Wigglesworth 1997) have preferred to examine how accurately specific grammatical features (e.g. articles) are used while others have selected to use more generalized measures such as percentage of error-free clauses (Skehan & Foster 1997).

CHAPTER 2

Review of related literature

2-1 Introduction

In the last decades a growing body of research has investigated various aspects of L2 learners' performance (e.g. Bygate 2001; Ellis 2003). They focused broadly on a variety of features of tasks and implementation procedures and their impacts on some processes such as comprehension, input processing, meaning negotiation, and fluency, accuracy, and complexity of L2 production.

One implementation variable that has attracted considerable attention and proved to have somehow consistent effect on L2 production is planning. Given that in task completion meaning is usually attended at the expense of form, planning time in the form of strategic or on-line can provide L2 speaker with an opportunity to plan what they are supposed to talk in terms of goals and sub-goals prior to speaking, freeing them from the pressure in terms of processing load. This reduction of pressure on processing capacity is more likely to allow L2 speakers to attend to form in the formulation stage of language production. There is also the possibility that given time will provide learners with some ready made plans for new situations.

A number of studies (e.g. Foster & Skehan 1996) have shown that when learners have the opportunity to plan a task before they perform it, the language that they produce is more fluent and complex and even more accurate than when no planning is possible .Other studies (e.g. Yuan & Ellis 2003) have shown that unpressured within-task

planning also has predictable effects, of course somewhat different from those resulting from PT planning.

2-2 Tasks in Language Pedagogy and SLA

Elicitation of language use samples has been the focus of attention for a long time. Both SLA researchers and teachers have been interested in this field. Researchers need these samples to investigate the process of second language learning, so do SLA teachers, since these samples serve as a great help for learners in their learning process and as evidence of successful learning.

Both researchers and teachers attest the need for elicitation of real world samples language use. It is believed that such samples provide evidence of learners' ability to use their L2 knowledge in real-time communication. These samples are also important in that they provide evidences on how learners structure and restructure their interlanguage over time (Ellis 2003). It is quite clear for SLA teacher that if learners aren't given the time to produce such samples, they may not succeed in developing the kind of L2 proficiency that is needed to communicate fluently and effectively. Tasks are those means that are needed to elicit such samples easily, and they have central place in SLA research and language pedagogy. There are a lot of publications that prove this claim (e.g. Willis 1996; Skehan 1998; Lee 2000; Language Teaching Research Vol. 4.3, 2000; Bygate et al. 2001). But some issues arises which worth explanation and they are investigated in following.

2-2-1 Task Definitions & Task Types

In the early 1980, influenced by Widdowson (1978) assumption about developing capacity to express meaning, many books about communicative activities were published in the United Kingdom. Today task replacing communicative activity is frequently used in SLA and second language teaching. There are different definitions of task because it has been examined from different perspectives. It should be acknowledge that there isn't any agreement over what constitutes task, and this makes its definition quite difficult (Crookes 1986:1).

2.2.1.1 Real-World Tasks

Real world task definition has no specific attention on language outcomes. it mostly looks at the outcomes of language usage and tasks' success in reaching learners to an ability for efficient communication in target language. Michael Long (1985. p.19) provides a definition of task in its everyday meaning:

"Task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. In other words, by 'task' is meant a hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. Tasks are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them, and they are not applied linguists."

Breen (1989) however regards task as a structured plan in reaching to opportunities for refinement of knowledge and ability of using the new language during communication. He considered the task as a device in reaching to language proficiency via participation in communication. Breen specially states that 'task' can be a 'brief practice exercise' or 'a more complex work plan that requires spontaneous communication of meaning'.

2-2-1-2 Pedagogic Tasks

Tasks can be manipulated for different empirical purposes and to test different theoretical constructs in both classroom and experimental settings. In this way, researchers usually suggest a series of ways that may affect either their internal structure, their interactional design, or the conditions under which they are performed in order to test and measure their effects' on learners' comprehension, production, or learning. Breen (1987) understands task as "a range of work plans" (p.23). Nunan's (1989) view on task is commonly cited, which is "a piece of classroom work" involving "learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language" (p.10).

As far as pedagogic tasks are concerned, Skehan takes a task-based instruction perspective to define task and followed what was previously advanced by Candlin (1987), Nunan (1989), and Long (1989). Skehan (1998, p. 95) identifies a series of defining traits most researchers would agree on when conceptualizing a task: "a task is an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some kind Of communication problem to solve; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; task completion has some priority; the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome".

Bygate (2001) believes that Skehan's definition is not quite complete. Apart from the ideas of the primacy of meaning, the existence of an objective, and the possibility of assessment, there is the fact that tasks are susceptible to pedagogic intervention, either brief or extended, as well as the idea that tasks can be influenced by learner choice and can be potentially reinterpreted by learners.

Recently, Ellis (2003) raised an updated definition, which covers Skehan's (1998a) four criteria and added that "a task is a work plan" requiring learners' cognitive

processes. Following Candlin (1987), Swales' (1990, p. 75) adds two more traits to the definition of task. According to Swales tasks and especially pedagogic ones should have the potentials to be sequencing and differentiating.

Although these definitions of task are various, they have some point in agreement. A classroom task is an activity with a specific goal and involves communicative language use in the process. Task goes beyond the common classroom exercise because task has a certain relationship with the real-world. The kind of discourse that arises from task is intended to resemble that which occurs naturally in the real world (Ellis, 2000).

2-2-2 Tasks versus Exercises

According to different proposed definitions of task, it is possible to regard it from another point of view; that is the different between task and exercise. Long (1985), Nunan (1989) and Skehan (1996a) define task as activity in which meaning is primary, though Breen(1989) regards task as any kind of language activity, including 'exercises'. Ellis (2003) defines 'task' as activities that lead to meaning-focused language use, while 'exercises' are activities that call for form-focused language use.

However, Widdowsen (1998) argues that the difference between task and exercise lies not in meaning or form but in the kind of meaning that is involves in each of these: task is concerned the 'pragmatic meaning', that is use of language in context but exercise is concerned with 'semantic meaning', which is systematic meanings that specific forms can convey without consideration of context.

Another key difference between task and exercise relates to the role of participants. A task makes participants act as 'language users', that is they are supposed to use the same

kinds of communicative processes as the ones that are involved in real-world activities. As a result learning is incidental. In contrast an exercise makes them act as 'learners' and consequently learning is intentional here. So according to Widdowson (1998), the fundamental difference between task and exercise lies in the point that whether linguistic skills develop through communicative activity or it is a necessity for engaging in it.

Ellis (2003) makes the concluding idea about the role of meaning and form in doing tasks. He points out that while a task need learner to act as language user and give focal attention to message conveyance, it allows for peripheral attention to be focused on the forms. Also, during the task performance, learners' focal attention may shift to form as they adopt the role of language learners. Thus the extent of learners attention to meaning or form is variable rather than categorical. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of task and exercise is the same i.e. learning a language but their means for achieving this purpose is different.

2-3 Tasks in Language Teaching

Tasks are important not only for researchers, but also for language teachers, material writers and course designers. This importance isn't the reason for them to use task in the same way. All of these groups of people have differed in their task implementations. Tasks have been employed by language teachers to make their teaching more communicative and in this regard, directly or indirectly, tasks are important characteristics of a number of new language teaching approaches especially communicative language teaching (CLT). CLT aims to develop the ability to use