



**Payame Noor
University**

School of Foreign Languages
Department of English Language

Title

On the Effects of Planning Conditions on Accuracy and Complexity of L2
Learners' Oral Production in Task-based instruction

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By:

Mir Reza Khorasani Mogaddam

Supervisor:

Dr. Afsar Rouhi

December, 2007

In The Name Of God

Payame Noor University

School of Foreign Languages

Department of English language

Title

On the Effects of Planning Conditions on Accuracy and Complexity of L2
Learners' Oral Production in Task-based Instruction

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By:

Mir Reza Khorasani Mogaddam

Supervisor:
Dr. Afsar Rouhi

Reader:
Dr. Manoochehr Jafarigohar

December, 2007



**Payame Noor
University**

School of Foreign Languages

Department of English Language

We here by recommend that the present thesis written by Mir Reza Khorasani
Mogaddam under the title of

**On the Effects of Planning Conditions on Accuracy and Complexity of L2
Learners' Oral Production in Task-based instruction**

Be accepted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
(M.A.) in English Language teaching

Supervisor:	Afsar Roohi, Ph.D.
Advisor:	Manoochehr Jafarigohar, Ph.D.
Examiner:	Fatemeh Hemmati, Ph.D.
Representative of the language department:	Belgeis Roshan, Ph.D.

To:

My wife and little daughter

Acknowledgement

Praise be to Allah the cherisher and sustainer of the world, most gracious, most merciful. It was he who sparked my interest after 10 years of graduation to start again, and accomplishment of the following was an impossible without his assistance.

At first I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Afsar Rouhi for offering me the topic. He provided me with invaluable advice and ideas and also painstakingly read and commented on this thesis. As a supervisor and mostly a gentleman, he was kindly present from the very beginning of the study to the end which took approximately 12 months.

My special thanks to my honorable professor Dr. Manoochehr Jafari Gohar for his insightful comments and suggestions regarding different parts of the study.

My heart-felt thanks to the many learners and teachers of EFL from different universities and institutions that participated in the study and cooperated with me during different phases of the thesis completion. I am also appreciative for the support of Mehran Davaribina and Taha Payam.

Last but by no means least, I wish to thank my wife Nasrin for her continual patience and constant source of inspiration.

Table of contents

	Pages
Acknowledgement	I
Table of contents.....	II
List of tables.....	VI
List of figures.....	VII
Abstract.....	VIII

Chapter one: Background of the Study

1.1. Introduction (paradigm shift).....	2
1.2. Statement of the problem.....	5
1.3. Research question	5
1.4. Research hypothesis.....	6
1.5. Definitions of Key terms.....	6
1.5.1. Task	
1.5.2. No-planning	
1.5.3. On-line planning	
1.5.4. Strategic planning	
1.5.5. Undetailed planning	
1.5.6. Teacher-led planning	
1.5.7. Fluency	
1.5.8. Complexity	
1.5.9. Accuracy	
1.5.10. T-unit	

1.6.	Measuring and scoring system.....	7
1.7.	Limitations of the study	8

Chapter two: Review of the literature

2.1.	Introduction.....	10
2.2.	Task- a new insight to language teaching.....	10
2.3.	Underlying assumptions of task-based teaching.....	11
2.4.	Task.....	12
	2.4.1. Task- aim and outcome.....	16
	2.4.2. Task component.....	17
	2.4.3. Strong vs. weak form of the task	18
	2.4.4. Open vs. closed task.....	20
	2.4.5. Task type.....	21
2.5.	Task: Grammar and consciousness raising.....	23
2.6.	Two contrasting approaches to task.....	24
2.7.	Task complexity vs. task difficulty	25
2.8.	Topic familiarity	29
2.9.	Sequencing tasks.....	29
2.10.	Task-based language teaching	31
2.11.	Advantages and disadvantages of task.....	33
2.12.	Meaning focused activity.....	34
2.13.	Focus on form	35
2.14.	Memory limitations.....	36
	2.14.1. Fluency.....	38
	2.14.2. Complexity.....	38

2.14.3. Accuracy	39
2.15. Studies of aspects of production	39
2.16. Planning	42
2.17. Self-monitoring.....	44
2.18. Characteristics of speech production process	45
2.18.1. Controlled and automatic processing.....	45
2.18.2. Incremental production.....	45
2.19. Automaticity and planning.....	46
2.20. Planning time: An over view	47
2.21. Proficiency level and pre-task planning.....	53

Chapter three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction.....	55
3.2. Participants.....	55
3.3. Materials	57
3.4. Design	57
3.5. Procedure	58
3.6. Measures	60

Chapter four: Data analyses and results

4.1. Data analyses of the proficiency scores.....	62
4.2. Data analyses of the accuracy	63
4.3. Data analyses of the complexity	65

Chapter Five: Discussion and conclusion

5.1.	Introduction.....	68
5.2.	Planning conditions and L2 learners' accuracy.....	68
5.3.	Planning conditions and L2 learners' complexity.....	72
5.4.	Summary and conclusion.....	73
5.5.	Implications of the study.....	74
5.6.	Suggestions for further research	74
References		76
Appendices		82
Appendix 1	Summary of previous second language research on pre-task planning.....	82
Appendix 2	Instruction to learners	84
Appendix 3	Descriptive statistics of proficiency scores for group one (No-planning time)	86
Appendix 4	Descriptive statistics of proficiency scores for group two (Pre-task planning).....	87
Appendix 5	Descriptive statistics of proficiency scores for group three (Teacher-led planning).....	88
Appendix 6	Celt proficiency test	89

List of tables	Pages
Table 2.1. Comparison of different kinds of tasks	21
Table 2.2. Components of TBL framework	33
Table 3.1. Mean and standard deviation of the proficiency test scores for three groups of learners.....	56
Table 3.2. Groups, planning conditions and time to perform the task.....	60
Table 4.1. Results of one-way ANOVA for confirming groups' homogeneity....	63
Table 4.2. Descriptive statistics for accuracy.....	63
Table 4.3. One-way ANOVA results for the effects of planning conditions on accuracy	64
Table 4.4. Descriptive statistics for complexity	65
Table 4.5. One-way ANOVA results for the effects of planning condition on complexity	66

List of figures	Pages
Figure 2.1. A framework for task components	17
Figure 4.1. Comparing accuracy means in three planning conditions	64
Figure 4.2. Comparing complexity means in three planning conditions	65

Abstract

Task-based language teaching, as a version of communicative language teaching, is criticized for its failure in fostering native-like accuracy and focusing mainly on meaning at the cost of accuracy. To account for this concern, planning condition has been proposed as a methodological option for making up the inadequacy within this framework.

Having come up with mixed results on the effects of planning conditions on L2 learners' different aspects of production, the following study set out to investigate the impacts of two planning conditions (pre-task planning and teacher-led planning) on accuracy and complexity of L2 learners' in an oral narrative task. A language proficiency test was administered and an oral interview was followed. Sixty out of 150 students of Payame Noor University and Azad University (Ardebil Branch) were randomly assigned to three groups, namely, a control group (no-planners), and two experimental groups (pre-task and teacher-led planners). To examine the effects of planning time on accuracy and complexity of learners, the first group narrated their oral accounts of the silent cartoon immediately after watching it; the second group was given 10 minutes as planning time; and the third group, also having 10 minutes for planning, was instructed to spend the planning time on the forms which were essential for the narration. The production of the three groups were recorded, transcribed and measured for accuracy and complexity. The findings indicated that the two planning conditions do not result in much effect on L2 learners' accuracy and complexity in oral narrative task.

Key words:

No-planning, Pre-task planning, Teacher-led planning, Accuracy, Complexity

Chapter one

Background of the study

1.1. Paradigm shift in language instruction

As Brown (2000) comments “Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture a new way of thinking, feeling and acting”(p.1).

For the last three or four decades, English language teaching has been a subject widely debated among researchers and practitioners around the world, all aiming at working out a comprehensive approach to teaching language in general and English in particular. Many theories about the learning and teaching languages have been proposed, which have in turn been influenced by developments in different fields of science such as linguistics and psychology, and these have inspired many approaches to teaching second and foreign languages.

Beginning with the Grammar Translation Method, language learning was associated with the learning of Latin and Greek, in which it was supposed to promote speakers’ intellectuality, prepare students to study literature, and to cope with difficult learning situations and materials. In this method, language is not taught for the purpose of oral communication but for fostering syntactic structures, memorizing vocabulary, and translating literary texts.

From 40s to 60s the Audiolingual Method was firmly grounded on conditioning and habit formation models of learning put forward by behaviorist psychologists and pattern practices of the Audiolingual method. Behaviorist psychologists believed that language learning could be successful if three elements were identified: stimulus, response, and reinforcement.

The Audiolingual Method relied mainly on presentation, practice and production (PPP) in which first, the teacher presents a new item of the language in a specific context, second students are asked to complete a controlled practice stage, and finally they move on to the production stage. But the unnatural language use (decontextualized use) and the belief that language can be learnt by rote learning and memorization were haunting problems which brought the method down. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out, “students were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through Audiolingualism to real communication outside the classroom, and many found the experience of studying through the Audiolingual procedures to be boring and unsatisfying” (p. 65).

Different methods waxed and waned and ELT went through various stages and very little remained of what might be associated with traditional classroom activities until communicative language teaching emerged in the 1980s focusing on communication (rather than grammar). Learners in this model do not simply learn the linguistic structures and grammatical rules; rather they are initiated into using the language properly. Communicative language teaching pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. In contrast to the grammar-translation and the audio-lingual methods, CLT gives priority to the communicative activities that involve the real-life use of language.

According to Nunan (1987) the main characteristic of communicative language in real sense of the word is “uneven distribution” of information, i.e., meaning negotiation in which interlocutors may or may not contribute to an interaction. Brown and Yule (1983) propose that communication has two functions, i.e., the interactional and the transactional function. The first is for establishing social relationships and expressing personal attitudes, and the latter is for exchanging factual information. Howatt (1984)

presents two possible versions of communicative language teaching, namely, 'strong' and 'weak'. In his words, weak version emphasizes providing opportunities for learners to use language for communicative purposes, so it takes language knowledge as a prerequisite to communicative activity, whereas strong version provides opportunities for learners to become familiar with how language is used in communication, and does not consider language as a prerequisite to communicative activity.

Since the advent of CLT and the belief that language is best learned when it is used to communicate messages, the communicative task has ascended to a position of prominence as a unit of organization in syllabus design whose main focus is to bring the real-world context into the classroom.

Along with its initiatives, CLT has its drawbacks too. Studies on immersion program (e.g., Harley & Swain, 1984; Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1982) where learners attend to the subject matter through the L2, indicated that learners developed conspicuous fluency and confidence in L2 production while accuracy remained as a challenge. Based on the findings of the above-mentioned studies, communicative language teaching came to be critiqued for failing to foster native-like accuracy, and comprehensible input was not the only source of second language acquisition. Swain (1985) suggests that success in second language acquisition does not only arise from comprehensible input, and providing opportunities for non-native-speakers to produce comprehensible output is of great importance. Also Swain and Lapkin (1995) claim that if learners are pushed beyond their existing level of performance, they will be led to an enriched performance that is due to the internalization of linguistic knowledge or consolidation of existing knowledge.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In spite of significant improvements, language teaching methodologies have not been that much successful in educating native-like language learners, especially when the accuracy of L2 production is concerned. Also some have questioned the validity of task-based instruction (Swan, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Hence, more research and study might be necessary in task condition to shed light on the issue at the stake.

On the other hand, studies about planning time make it clear that planning time is effective on learners' production especially when fluency is involved. Iranian learners of English are predicted to experience the accuracy problem when they are taught through CLT or task-based teaching. Of various potential methodological procedures which have been suggested and operationalized in EFL classroom settings to account for accuracy problem along with CLT or task-based teaching, planning is taken to be investigated in this study.

1.3. Research questions

The present study is an attempt to make a distinction between the effects of no-planning, pre-task planning and teacher-led planning on learners. In particular, the following questions are sought to be answered:

- 1- What is the effect of pre-task planning on intermediate learners' accuracy?
- 2- What is the effect of teacher-led planning on intermediate learners' accuracy?
- 3- What is the effect of pre-task planning on intermediate learners' complexity?
- 4- What is the effect of teacher-led planning on intermediate learners' complexity?

1.4. Research hypotheses

The following predictions are made in the form of research hypotheses:

1-There is not much difference between using pre-task planning and no-planning as teaching techniques on improving the accuracy of Iranian learners' oral production

2-There is not much difference between using teacher-led planning and no-planning as teaching techniques on improving the accuracy of Iranian learners' oral production.

3-There is not much difference between using pre-task planning and no-planning as teaching techniques on improving the complexity of Iranian learners' oral production

4-There is not much difference between using teacher-led planning and no-planning as teaching techniques on improving the complexity of Iranian learners' oral production.

1.5. Definition of key terms

Task: "A task is' a piece of work or an activity, usually with specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research" (Ellis, 2003, p. 5).

Planning time: The opportunity given to learners to reflect on both content and form and be prepared to perform the task.

On-line planning: The planning that takes place during performance of a task, while allowing time for monitoring (Levelt 1989).

Pre-task planning (Strategic): A kind of planning in which learners are given time to be prepared for the performance, without drawing their attention toward specific forms (Skehan, 1996).

Detailed planning (Teacher-led): A kind of planning in which, learners are given some advice about particular forms which is necessary for task completion (Skehan, 1996).

Fluency: The capacity of the learner to mobilize his/her system to communicate meaning in real time (Skehan, 1996).

Complexity: The utilization of elaborate and structured language (Skehan, 1996).

Accuracy: The ability to produce well-formed sentences, which conforms to the features of the target language.

T-unit: The shortest unit which a sentence can be reduced to, and consisting of one independent clause together with whatever dependent clauses are attached to it. Also it is a unit of sentences to measure errors including the main clause and the dependent clause (Rouhi, 2006).

1.6. Measures and scoring system

According to Skehan and Foster (1997), in order to evaluate the accuracy of the learners' production, the number of error-free clauses will be calculated. All errors relating to syntax, morphology, and lexical choice will be considered. Lexical errors are defined as errors in lexical form or collocation.

Complexity will be measured by an index of subordination. The data will be coded for T-units and for clauses. By dividing the number of clauses by the number of T-units, complexity will be indexed (Rouhi, 2006).