INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF TASK TYPE ON IRANIAN L2 NARRATIVE ORAL PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The impetus of the present study was to scrutinize the impact of task types on Iranian L2 Narrative oral production. In order to homogenize the participants, Cambridge Placement Test including 120 items was taken from among 74 students of the Iran Language Institute and 44 of them were chosen. A dependent sample T- test was used to compare paired samples. The hypothesis focused on Descriptive and Summary types of task. L2 learners' performance differs from task to task. Hence, L2 learners' production would be different when they perform different task types and consequently these different types of tasks will result in variation. Therefore, in performing different task types, learners' productions of some grammatical and phonological forms vary in particular manners.

Key terms: *Accuracy, Complexity, Descriptive task, Fluency, Summary task, Oral Production*

INTRODUCTION

There are many factors such as anxiety of the L2 learners, planning time, familiarity with the topic, genre of the tasks, learner's proficiency level, task type, task structure, task condition, and the degree of cognitive complexity of the tasks, which affect the performance of second language learners. As an example we may refer to their production rate and complexity of their utterances (Tarone, 1988). The issue of task types is the main concern of language instructors and syllabus designers. As Rahimpour (2007) claims, the L2 learner`s performance differs from task to task. So, L2 learner`s production will be different when they perform different task types, and consequently these different types of tasks will result in variation. Therefore, because of the importance of tasks and their aspects this study attempted to investigate the effects of one aspect of task, i.e. task types, on Iranian EFL advanced learners` oral performance through presenting an overview of research into task types and to connect the findings to how these variables affect the fluency, accuracy, and complexity of L2 oral performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different Types of Tasks

There are many factors such as anxiety of the L2 learners, planning time, familiarity with the topic, genre of the tasks, learner's proficiency level, task type, task structure, task condition, and the degree of cognitive complexity of the tasks, which affect the performance of second language learners. As an example we may refer to their production rate and complexity of their utterances (Rahimpour 1997; 1999; 2008). As Kuiken and Vedder (2008, p.49) points out "in the literature on both L1 and L2 writing, it has been suggested that some task types result in lower test scores than others. The issue of task types is the main concern of language instructors and syllabus designers." As Rahimpour (2007) claims, the L2 learners' performance differs from task to task. Hence, L2 learner`s production will be different when they perform different task types, and consequently these different types of tasks will result in variation, which is called "task-induced variation".

Tarone (1988), agrees with this variation and states that in performing different tasks learners' production of some grammatical, morphological and phonological forms will vary in a particular manner. Foster and Skehan (1996), Franken and Haslett (2002) and Sweller (1994), claim that task type may be an important factor in determining if writers are able to automatize certain features of writing tasks or deal with additional load to process those aspects. It has been argued that different kinds of tasks are all useful components of a school-wide assessment system. Individual teachers are more inclined to develop and use tasks that meet less stringent conditions, rather than the tasks that would develop as an academic department, instructional team, subject-like group, or other groups to assess student learning towards more commonly help goals. However, tasks developed for classroom usage can be revised, so they meet the more stringent requirements of intra and inter school usage.

The effect of Task type on Oral Production

Today, communication skills are taught in a wide range of general education courses and students are in need of speaking and listening skills that will help them succeed in future courses and in workplace. Thus, the assessment of communication skills is an important issue in general education (Dunbar, Brooks & Miller, 2006). Oral assessment is often carried out to look for students' ability to produce words and phrases by evaluating students' fulfillment of a variety of tasks such as asking and answering questions about themselves, doing role-plays, making up mini-dialogues, defining or talking about some pictures or talking about given themes. As categorized by Bygate (1999), the operations in an oral ability test are either informational or interactional skill.

Nakamura (1993) stated that testing oral proficiency became an important issue with the emergence of communicative language teaching; in which, speaking skill played a prominent role. Regarding speaking skill, Madsen (1983) declared that "The testing of speaking is widely regarded as the most challenging of all language tests to prepare, administer and score" (p. 147). The reasons of difficulty in assessment of speaking ability or the oral exams are: 1) the nature of the speaking skill, since it is not easy to decide whether the fluency or accuracy will be evaluated, and the criteria to evaluate the performance of the exam takers; 2) the role the tester plays during an oral assessment has to be decided on prior to the assessment.

Hingle and Linington (2002) stated that people who are involved stand in the fore front of the oral assessments, more than the testing instrument. In addition to these, task demands and task support are two important concepts that might change students' achievement and interest in the oral assessment test. As Taguchi (2007) confirmed, features of second language oral output such as accuracy, fluency and complexity vary by task type.

RESEARCH QUESTION

RQ: Does instruction and Task type have any effect on L2 oral production accuracy, fluency and complexity?

Participants

74 advanced EFL candidates of Iran Language Institute attended in this experiment and according to the placement test administered just 44 of them were selected. All the participants were female.

INSTRUMENTS

Cambridge Placement Test

74 advanced level students who had been placed at the same level of English class by an internal placement test of the ILI participated in this study. In order to homogenize the participants, Cambridge placement test was administered to all the 74 students. 44 were selected. This test includes 120 multiple questions and thus 120 marks. Those students receiving 100 to 120 scores were considered as advanced level.

Table 1 below illustrates the accuracy, complexity, and fluency measures:

Table 1: *Table of Accuracy, Complexity and Fluency Measures*

Measures	
Fluency	Rate A (syllables per minute in unpruned speech)
	Rate B (syllables per minute in pruned speech)
Structural Complexity	S-Nodes per T-units
Lexical Complexity	Percentage of Lexical Words
	Ratio of Lexical Words to Function Words
Accuracy	TLU of Articles
	Error-free T-units
	Percentage of Self-repairs

Radio commentaries from Special English Reports were used in order to choose the needed materials for testing student production. Related to descriptive task, a list of questions was used in order to gather data about learners' educational setting and their favorites (see appendix). A recorder was used in order to record participants' voice records.

Procedure

Piloting the radio commentaries was carried out with a small number of students before data collection in order to make sure about the difficulty and length of them. Three Radio commentaries were originally selected from Special English Reports and learners were interviewed, as well as on their perception of difficulty in terms of summarizing them and the difficulty of the vocabulary and sentences, only one of them was selected and used for data collection for the group.

Students were told that their voice would be recorded while performing the tasks in English. Each group was assigned to perform two types of tasks. The instruction of each task was given to participants and they performed the tasks in the instructed way. Students were asked to think about the task they had to do. Each subject, after introducing him-/herself, started to perform the

tasks and it was recorded on a recorder. This study focused on two types of tasks: in the summary task, examinees listened to a radio commentary and summarized its content for the researcher. In the descriptive task, the examinees were asked to talk about their educational setting and their favorites. Data collection took place in two different sessions in the ILI with each learner, and it was conducted by the researcher herself and her assistant. The steps taken during the two sessions are described below:

Session 1: At first, the researchers gave brief explanation of the research and gave the descriptive tasks' instruction to them. Then they started asking the related questions and recording their voices.

Session 2: In the second session the researchers gave the summary task's instruction to the participants and asked them to listen to a radio commentary and then summarize it. The participants listened and one by one summarized it while the researchers record their voices.

When all of the participants finished their performance, the subjects' speeches were transcribed by the researchers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 shows the experimental groups' task type (Summary and Descriptive Tasks) mean differences and Table 1 displays the control groups' task type mean differences.

Table 1

Table of experimental groups' task type mean differences

Variables	dependent sample test						
	Groups	Number	Task types	Mean	Mean difference	Sig	Results
Fluency Rate A	Experimental	22	Summary task	96.04	23.11	.00	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	72.93			
Fluency Rate B	Experimental	22	Summary task	83.45	16.21	.01	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive				

			task	67.24			
% lexical words	Experimental	22	Summary task	46.42	.42	.60	They have no significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	46.20			
%lexical to function	Experimental	22	Summary task	90.22	4.85	.01	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	85.36			
s-Nodes per T-unit	Experimental	22	Summary task	1.60	.46	.00	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	1.13			
Error free T-units	Experimental	22	Summary task	87.00	5.68	.01	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	81.32			
TLU of articles	Experimental	22	Summary task	89.68	6.16	.02	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	83.51			
% self-Repair	Experimental	22	Summary task	87.35	11.67	.00	They have significant differences
	Experimental	22	Descriptive task	75.68			

Fluency: According to Table 1 which displays the mean differences of two types of task the participants of experimental group produced more fluent speech in the summary task than the descriptive one. Hence, it can be said that a significant difference exists between means of performed tasks.

Complexity: Lexical complexity factor of two types of tasks doesn't have significant difference, but the ratio of lexical to function was significantly different. Structural complexity had significant difference. The number of S-nodes per T-unit in summary task were more than descriptive one.

Accuracy: Accuracy factor had significant differences in two types. It means that the participants did more accurate in performing summary task than descriptive task.

DISCUSSION

Rezazadeh, Tavakoli, and Eslami-Rasekh (2011), investigated the role of task type in foreign language written production in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Two types of tasks (instruction task and argumentative task) were used in the study. Participants in the instruction-task group performed significantly better than those in argumentative-task group in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. The argumentative essays were produced with more complex language than the instruction essays. Fluency was higher in instruction essays and in terms of accuracy, instruction-task group performed better than those in argumentative-task group, but argumentative essays were more accurate than instruction essays. In this experiment, by considering the mean differences of two types of tasks, the participants of experimental group produced more fluent speech in the summary task than the descriptive one. So, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the means of the performed tasks. However, as it is shown in Table 1 the means of fluency of the participants displayed that the learners produced more fluent speech while performing summary task comparing to descriptive task. Lexical complexity factor didn't have a significant difference. But the ratio of lexical to functional was significantly different and it means that the participants did better in summary task than the descriptive one. Structural complexity had a significant difference. The number of S-nodes per T-unit in summary task was more than that of descriptive one. Accuracy had significant differences in both types. It means that the candidates had a more accurate performance in summary task than the descriptive task. Thus, according to these findings the present study is in line with Rahimpour (2007**) w**ho claimed that L2 learners' performance differs from task to task. Therefore, L2 learners' production will be different when performing different task types and consequently these different types of tasks will result in variation. In addition to Rahimpour, Tarone (1988) agrees with this variation and asserts that in performing different task type, learners' production of some grammatical and phonological forms will vary in particular manners.

CONCLUSION

The present study applied two types of tasks i.e. summary and descriptive tasks. As the empirical findings of the study indicate, EFL learners performed somewhat differently on these two different types of tasks. Therefore, using a variety of oral tasks is recommended to EFL teachers as well as syllabus designers. In other words, the results obtained make it clear that utilizing appropriate task types are two important issues in TBLT. The findings of the study statistically demonstrate that the task complexity has a significant effect on accuracy and especially on fluency in summary tasks but its effect on complexity of EFL learners` oral performance is insignificant. These differences in terms of the aspects of Language production can have empirical implications for teachers to use different types of tasks in classroom environment, especially if they want to focus on one or two aspects of language production.

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APPENDIX A

The Full Text of Radio Commentary for Summary Task

Topic

How Loneliness Can Infect Social Network

Loneliness has been linked to depression and other health problems. Now a study says it can also spread. A friend of a lonely person was fifty two person more likely to develop feeling of loneliness a friend of that friend was 25% more likely to do the same. Earlier findings showed that happiness, obesity and ability to stop smoking can also spread like infection within social groups. The findings all coming from a major health study in the American town of Framingham Massachusetts. The study began in 1948 to investigate the causes of heart disease. Since the more tests have been added including measures of loneliness and depression. The findings involved more than five thousand people in the second generation of the Framingham hurt study. The researchers examined friendship histories and reports of loneliness. The results stablished a pattern that spread as people reported fewer close friend. For example, loneliness can affect relationships between next-door neighbors the loneliness spreads as neighbors who were close friends now spend less time together. The study also found that loneliness spreads more easily among women than men. Researchers from the university pf Chicago, Harvard and the University of California, San Diego, did the study. The findings appeared in the journal of personality and the social psychology .the average person is said to experience feelings of loneliness about 48 days a year. The study found that having a lonely friend can add about 17 days. But every additional friend can decrease loneliness by about five percent, or two and a half days. Lonely people becom less and less trusting of others. This makes it more difficult for them to make friends and more likely that society will reject them. Researcher says people who have been pushed to the edge of society should receive help to repair their social networks .the aim should be to aggressively create what he call protective barrier can keep the whole network from coming apart.

APPENDIX B

Students' Instruction

Instructions

Descriptive task

In this task you are going to describe something. Try to visualize your "educational- setting" and describe it fully telling the recorder every detail so that it could be visualized by the hearer. You have got one minute to prepare and two minutes to do the description.

Summary task

In this task you will be asked to summarize a radio commentary for a third person. In this regard, you are going to listen to a program about "Effect of Loneliness" for 4 minutes. You have got TWO minutes to plan your response and one minute to summarize the radio commentary