The Impact of Mixed Planning on the Accuracy of Iranian Learners' Oral Performance

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This study set out to explore the impact of three levels of task planning on the accuracy of task-based oral performance with narrative task types among sixty Iranian sophomores majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Islamic Azad University – Tabriz Branch. It was hypothesized that simultaneous pre-task/on-line planning would lead to more accurate performance. To test the research hypothesis, a quasi experimental design was used with three levels of planning (pre-task planning (PTP), on-line task planning (OLP), pre/on-line task planning (POLP). The participants in the study included 60 pre-intermediate TEFL sophomores at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch who were selected out of a population of 200 TEFL sophomores on the basis of their scores on a proficiency test and an oral pre-test. One-way ANOVA run on the post-test data indicated statistically significant effects on the accuracy of the participants' task-based oral performance under POLP planning condition. However, there was no significant effect on accuracy as a result of PTP and OLP planning. The independent samples t-test analysis revealed significant accuracy gains in the POLP groups whereas the same improvements were not observed in the PTP and OLP planners.

Keywords: Pre-Task Planning, On-Line Planning, Pre/On-Line Planning, Oral Performance, Accuracy

Task-based instruction (TBI), the descendent of the communicative language teaching approach (CLT), is supported by the process-oriented view of language learning where meaningful communicative tasks enhance L2 learning. However, it is not a unified approach and may be interpreted and implemented differently. Ellis, (2003) and Nunan (2004) make a distinction between task-based language teaching (TBLT) and task-supported language teaching (TSLT) approaches. In TBLT the primary focus is on completion of a number of tasks which have been selected, graded and organized in terms of the cognitive processes involved and in a way to help the learner through different stages of development to ultimate mastery of the language. Although all versions of TBLT indicate degrees of focus on form, they are usually contrasted with TSLT in which communicative activities are carried out to teach students how to use language through methodological procedures resembling Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) model hoping that students will be able to extend this sort of consciously learned knowledge to real life situations. Research findings focused on TBI have indicated that various aspects of tasks foster language production and thereby language learning (Willis, 1996; Skehan, 1998; Skehan, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1999; Wenden, 2002; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). It is claimed that both TBLT and TSLT models foster acquisition via engaging the learners in tasks activating cognitive, communicative, and metacognitive processes that enhance language acquisition (Skehan, 1996).

Theoretical Evidence

Two theoretically different approaches are evident in all attempts made to account for task-based language learning: the socio-cultural approach and the psycholinguistic one. The Socio-cultural account of task-based language teaching and learning derives from the socio-cultural theory claiming that learning is mediated by social interaction (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). From this perspective, higher forms of mental activity are mediated. Mediation may occur externally through assistance from

an expert or a more knowledgeable partner. It is also possible for the learner to practice mediation internally by using his own resources to achieve control over a function. In second language learning, mediation involves mediation by others in social interaction, mediation by self through private speech, and mediation by artifacts such as tasks (Lantolf, 2000).

From the psycholinguistic standpoint, tasks are envisaged as external means for manipulating how learners process language when engaged in certain types of language use. They can directly enhance acquisition by providing practice opportunities for automatizing linguistic and discourse resources and for engaging syntactic processing (Skehan, 1998). The facilitative role of tasks in language learning has also been attributed to the input they generate and opportunities they provide for meaning negotiation (Long, 1996), the contribution they make to communicative effectiveness by impacting on the skillfulness of L2 learners' performance (Yule, 1996), the development of explicit knowledge to implicit knowledge through proceduralization (Anderson, 1983), and the restructuring that occurs with linguistic material (McLaughlin, 1990) , or the development of the exemplar-based implicit knowledge which is lexical in nature into the rule-based system which is made up of abstract underlying language patterns (Skehan, 1996).

TBI is also congruent with the speech processing model. Levelt (1989) delineates how learners' knowledge of language, explicit or implicit in nature, is processed in three hierarchical and interactive stages of conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. A paramount claim in SLA research is that tasks contribute to speech processing at these stages through opportunities they provide for planning of the conceptual content of speech at the conceptualization stage, for lexical and grammatical coding of the content at the formulation stage, and for articulation of the intended message using the lexical and grammatical features at the articulation stage. The likelihood of trade-offs as the learners struggle to conceptualize, formulate and articulate language is justifiable with regard to learners' available limited attentional capacities. That is to say, attention to one aspect

of production is likely to be at the expense of others (Ellis, 2003).

TBLT and Oral Performance

Oral performance plays a major role in all EFL and ESL contexts due to globalization and the need to communicate orally, and task-based language learning strives, at its best, to engage learners in tasks that improve oral performance. A number of studies have been carried out to investigate task-related factors that may have a bearing on various features of oral production (McLaughlin, 1996, Anderson, 1983; Skehan, 1996; Crookes, 1989; Skehan, 1992; Bygate, 1996; Bygate, 1999a, 1999b, Lynch & Maclean, 2000).

Among task-related factors studied so far are implementation factors such as planning (Ellis, 1987; Yuan & Ellis, 2003; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Wigglesworth, 1997; Wendel, 1997, cited in Ellis, 2003; Mehnert, 1998). The bulk of research in task planning embodies the incipient concern in SLA research to explore ways of integrating task-based and strategies-based approaches to prolifically focus attention at various stages of speech production and thereby to foster accuracy, complexity and fluency of speech production.

Studies on the effect of different levels of planning, e.g. pre-task planning and on-line planning (Ellis, 1987, Yuan & Ellis, 2003), the amount of time allocated for planning (Mehnert 1998), and the source of planning and task types, (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Ortega, 1999) confirm the role of levels of planning on fluency (Crookes, 1989; Foster& Skehan, 1996; Wendel, 1997, cited in Ellis, 2003) and on complexity of task-based oral performance (Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Wendel, 1997, cited in Ellis, 2003; Mehnert, 1998; Ortega, 1999). Trade-off effects have also been found between either complexity and accuracy, or accuracy and fluency owing to task types (Skehan & Foster, 1997), to available planning time (Mehnert, 1998), to levels of planning (Wendel, 1997, cited in Ellis, 2003), or to teachers' guidance (Skehan & Foster 1997, Foster & Skehan, 1999). Although uncertainty exists as to the very nature of the

trade-off effects between accuracy, complexity, and fluency, ample evidence supports the role of various features of task planning in improving these three features.

None of the studies have ever given priority to any of these features alone in a specific context for a certain purpose. Skehan (1996) associates fluent performance with attention to exemplar-based knowledge and complex performance with focus on rule-based knowledge. He suggests that varying degrees of emphasis can be placed on accuracy, fluency, or complexity depending on individual language users and the task types used. Fluency concerns are greater when learners are engaged in semantic processing, whereas accuracy and complexity are of paramount concern in syntactic processing. That is to say, priority solely taken over any of these features might be justifiable with regard to the setting in which learning takes place. Ellis (2007) makes a distinction between educational settings, typical of schools and universities where learners' native language is the medium of communication and instruction to teach the target language as a subject only, and natural settings, typical of ESL contexts where learners have immediate contact with native speakers in a variety of situations.

Accuracy concerns still remain a major problem in non-form exposure-limited educational setting of Iranian EFL context. A strong case can be made for the priority of accuracy for TEFL students on three grounds. Firstly, accurate performance seems to be the primary educational goal during the first two years of university studies when grammar, reading, and study skills courses are offered to assist students develop their knowledge of English and to learn how to proceduralize that knowledge accurately in speaking and writing classes. This proceduralization is required to enable learners to encode and decode more technical information later in their studies. Secondly, accuracy, complexity, and fluency seem to emerge in the same order at least in exposure-limited EFL contexts where learners first need to learn how to perform accurately on simpler carefully pre-planned pedagogic tasks which facilitate their gradual transition towards more complex and fluent performance. Thirdly, an initial focus on complexity and fluency

may lead to fossilization particularly in exposure-limited EFL contexts where the learner's access to the target language and opportunities to forming and testing hypotheses is limited. This is a serious peril to TEFL students who are indeed prospect teachers that will function as the only source of input for their future students.

Accurate oral performance seems to be dependent on the learners' ability to effectively plan both the form and the content of their oral performance based on carefully selected tasks that are at the right level of difficulty and complexity when they are provided with sufficient amount of planning time. Accordingly, this study sought to explore the possibility of improving the accuracy of the participants' task-based oral performance through concomitant pre-task and on-line task planning using evidence from a number of major studies (Foster &Skehan, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Wendel, 1997; cited in Ellis, 2003; Mehnert, 1998; Wenden, 2002; Yuan & Ellis, 2003).

Research Questions

The present study was an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does pre-task planning (PTP) improve the accuracy of the learners' oral output?
2. Does on-line task planning (OLP) improve the accuracy of the learners' oral output?
3. Does simultaneous pre/on-line task planning (POLP) improve the accuracy of the learners' oral output?
4. Do POLP planners produce more accurate language than PTP planners?
5. Do POLP planners produce more accurate language than OLP planners?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study included 60 male and female TEFL sophomores at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch. They came from two language backgrounds: Turkish and Persian, and had passed English Conversation Courses I and II. They had a two-hour oral English conversation class every week. The participants received the treatment for fifteen sessions and were tested with a one month interval at the beginning of the next semester.

Sampling Procedure

A Preliminary English Test (PET, 2005) was administered to eight classes with 200 TEFL sophomores at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch. The total test scores obtained from the test were subjected to a one-way ANOVA with the alpha set at .05. After the results indicated no significant difference among groups, three homogeneous classes were randomly selected for the study. To assure that the   participants are homogeneous as far as the accuracy of their oral performance was concerned, a narrative oral task was assigned to be narrated and recorded. The recordings were, further, transcribed and coded for accuracy indices.

Research Design

This study used a quasi experimental between/within-participants design with three levels of planning: pre-task planning, on-line task planning, pre/on-line task planning on focused narrative task types. The study set out to investigate the effect of the independent variable: the mixed level of planning (POTP) on the dependent variable: the accuracy of task based oral performance in focused narrative task types.

Levels of Planning

Levels of planning can operationally be defined as three different planning conditions: pre-task planning (PTP), on-line task planning (OLP), and a mixed form of the first two conditions in the form of simultaneous pre-task/on-line task planning (POLP).

In the PTP group, ten minutes was devoted to organizational planning where the participants were required to plan both the content and the form. New words required for the completion of the task were provided so that the participants could focus on organizational and grammatical planning of the story. They were, then, required to put their notes away and to audio record their reproduction of the story in six minutes. They were not told anything about how they could monitor their oral performance on-line.

In the OLP group, the participants were first told about the significance of on-line planning of their performance through paraphrasing and repairing their speech. Then, the same picture strips were distributed and two minutes was allocated for previewing the story before narration and on-line monitoring of the story.

In the POLP group, the time was allocated equally to both pre-task planning of the organization of the text and for on-line planning of the grammar. Participants were required to plan the content of the same task in the first 8 minutes and to narrate their stories without referring to their notes in another 8 minutes.

Procedure

The treatment designed for the groups was a modified version of Nunan's proposal for task-based language teaching originally consisting of seven stages. The program included 15 sessions of listening-based speaking instruction each comprising five stages.

1. Schema Building (10 minutes)

Each lesson started with a schema building listening activity to introduce the topic and to set the context.

Meanwhile some of the key vocabulary and expressions needed to complete the task were elicited by involving students in picture descriptions and matching exercises.

2. Controlled Practice (10 minutes)

The main objective in this stage was to provide students with controlled practice in paying attention to particular features of the target language vocabulary, structures and functions, and subsequently, in using them reconstructively. This was done through authentic listening practice followed by two types of tasks.

A) The first task was ordering a set of pictures according to the text. This activity was carried out to sensitize students to chronological relationship among a limited number of events (5 minutes).

B) The second task aimed at improving directed attention and sampling information. Some detailed pre-listening questions were posed and students were required to sample the information to answer the questions (5 minutes).

3. Focus on linguistic elements (10 minutes)

This exercise was carried out in the form of question and answers and class discussion. Meanwhile students were invited to attend to the grammatical points while they were using the language in the next stage of the lesson.

4. Providing free practice (20 minutes)

The fourth stage of the lesson was the beginning of students' speaking activities. starting with pair work and culminating in individual planning and reproduction of the listening text.

A) Initially, 10 minutes was allocated for pair work questions and answer activity based on the listening text.

B) Secondly, each participant was required to prepare a summary of the text individually in five minutes, and to present that summary in another five minutes while audio-recording their summary and paying attention to form and meaning simultaneously. (10 minutes).

5. Pedagogical task-based performance (15 minutes)

From the 6th session on, a new picture strip was administered to be planned in 15 minutes. The allocated time was utilized differently in the three experimental groups.

A) In the PTP group, ten minutes was devoted to organizational planning where the students were required to plan both the content and the language. New words required for the completion of the task were provided so that students could focus their attention on organizational and grammatical planning of the story. They

were, then, required to put their notes away and to audio record their reproduction of the story in five minutes.

B) In the OLP group, the same picture strips were distributed and two minutes was allocated for previewing the story before narration and self-monitoring of the story in the form of on-line planning.

C) In the POLP group, the time was equally divided for both pre-task planning of the organization of the text and for on-line planning of the grammar. In the first 8 minutes students were required to plan the content of the same story in their own ways. Then they are given 7 minutes to narrate their stories without referring to their notes.

The Pre-test and Post-test Tasks

In other studies of planning, oral narrative tasks and decision making tasks have been used (Yuan and Ellis, 2003; Foster and Skehan, 1996; Foster and Skehan, 1999). Oral narrative task were selected for the purpose of the study for several reasons. Firstly, such tasks are claimed to require less complex ideas (Skehan & Foster, 1997) and thus are supposed to elicit more accurate performance. Secondly, similar tasks have been used in other studies of planning (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Wendel, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003), thus, it would be easier to compare the results. Finally, narrative tasks are monologic in nature and would elicit more language from the learner without being influenced by interactional variables (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). To save place, only three samples of pre-test, post-test transcriptions have been

randomly selected and included in Appendix A.

The Oral Pre-test

The task used as the pre-test required the learners to narrate and audio-record a story based on a picture strip (Richards, 1997, see appendix B). The task was focused on "Sea Mail", and past events and was assigned as part of class activity to avoid any negative influence of testing conditions. Students were required to make at least three sentences to describe each picture. Ten minutes was allocated for pre-task planning and oral practice of the story. Then the notes were taken away, and the subjects were asked to narrate and audio-record the story in five minutes. The recordings were further transcribed and analyzed to calculate accuracy of students' initial task-based oral performance. The total test scores were subjected to a one-way ANOVAs with the alpha set at .05.

The Oral Post-test

In the post-test, students were required to narrate a story based on a picture strip entitled "A Surprise" (Heaton, 1975, see appendix B). To avoid any negative influence of testing conditions and to measure the long-term effect of the treatment, the post-task was assigned as part of class activity in the next semester and after a 40-day interval. Students were required to make at least three sentences to describe each picture under the three planning conditions.

Operationalization of Oral Performance

The participants' oral narrations of the stories were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. "Accuracy" refers to the learner's capacity to handle different levels of interlanguage complexity (Skehan, 1996, p: 45). Building on previous research (Foster & Skehan, 1999; Yuan & Ellis, 2003; Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005, cited in Ellis 2005), in this study, overall grammatical accuracy of students' oral performance was

measured as the percentage of error-free clauses in overall performance.

Measures

Various segmentation approaches have been taken in previous studies to measure accuracy of oral performance. Drawing on Skehan (1996), Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster (1999), Yuan & Ellis (2003), (Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005, cited in Ellis, 2005), overall grammatical accuracy was measured as the percentage of error-free clauses in overall performance in this study,. That is to say, the recordings were transcribed and coded for c-units and for dependent, independent, and error-free clauses. Further, accuracy was indexed by dividing the number of error-free clauses by the number of all clauses.

All performances were scored by two raters and a reliability of 89% was calculated.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions two statistical analyses were used. The scores on the proficiency pre-test, as well as the accuracy indices on the oral pre-test and post-test were submitted to a one-way ANOVA to find out if there were any statistically significant difference among the groups. Furthermore, the pre-test post-test accuracy indices of the groups were submitted to a paired samples t-test to measure and compare the amount of progress in each group. In all analysis the alpha was set at .05.

Results

To answer the research questions two statistical analyses were used. The scores on the proficiency pre-test, as well as the accuracy indices on the oral pre-test and post-test were submitted to a one-way ANOVA to find out if there were any statistically significant difference among the groups. Furthermore, the pre-test post-test accuracy indices of the groups were submitted to a paired

t-test to measure and compare the amount of progress in each group.

The Proficiency Pre-test Analysis

A sixty-point Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to test the initial homogeneity of the six groups in listening and reading. Table one shows the descriptive statistics of the groups.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for the proficiency pre-test (PET)

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Group 1	20	31.0000	6.72779
Group 2	20	35.0000	6.79783
Group 3	20	34.6500	7.18386
Group 4	20	33.1500	5.95841
Group 5	20	33.1000	6.94262
Group 6	20	33.8500	4.85880

The scores were submitted to a one-way ANOVA. Table two shows the results of the one-way ANOVA. There was no meaningful difference among the groups as far as the participants' general proficiency in reading and listening was concerned, $(p > .05)$.

Table 2
One-way ANOVA results for the proficiency pre-test (PET)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	59.467	5	11.893	.312	.905
Within Groups	4346.000	114	38.123		
Total	4405.467	119			

The Oral Pre-test Analysis

Having ascertained groups' homogeneity in listening and reading, the researcher coded the transcribed pre-test data for accuracy indices. Table three shows the descriptive statistics of the groups.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for the task-based oral pre-test

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PTP	20	.2360	.16369
OLP	20	.2135	.25023
POLP	20	.2680	.27685

The data was subjected to a one-way ANOVA to verify initial homogeneity of the groups in oral production as well. Table 4 indicates that the groups' performance was not statistically different as far as accuracy of task-based oral performance was concerned, (p > .05).

Table 4
One-way ANOVA results for the task-based oral pre-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.030	2	.015	.271	.764
Within Groups	3.155	57	.055		
Total	3.185	59			

The Oral Post-test Analysis

To estimate the influence of levels of planning: PTP, OLTP, and POLTP on the accuracy of task-based oral performance of the groups, the accuracy indices obtained from the three groups were submitted to a one-way ANOVA. Table five illustrates the descriptive statistics of the participants' final task-based oral performance. The groups have been defined as pre-task planners:

PTP, on-line task planners: OLP and pre/on T line task planners: POLP.

As shown in the table, the POLP group obtained the highest degrees of accuracy (PTP= .3492, OLP = .3080, POLP = .4935) with the lowest variation among the members (PTP= .15073) compared to other planners (PTP= .19261, and OLP=.22400).

Table 5
Descriptive statistics for the accuracy of the task-based oral post-test

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PTP	20	.3492	.19261
OLP	20	.3080	.22400
POLP	20	.4935	.15073

Paired-Samples t-test Analysis

To investigate the impact of pre-task planning, on-line task planning, and pre/on-line task planning on the accuracy gains, the pre-test, post-test accuracy indices were submitted to a paired-samples t-test. Table 6 summarizes the statistics of the pre-test/post-test results, whereas table 7 indicates the results of the paired-samples t-test analysis.

Drawing on the descriptive statistics, accuracy gains were higher for the POLP and PTP planners compared to OLP planners.

The first three research questions addressed the effects of different planning conditions, PTP, OLP, POLP, on the accuracy of participants' task-based oral performance. As indicated in table 7, the accuracy gains among PTP and OLP planners were not meaningfully different in the post-test, while the POLP planners did make meaningful improvements. Drawing on the results, the first and the second research questions are negatively responded. That is to say, there was no statistically significant improvements in the accuracy of task-based oral performance among the PTP and OLP planners, (p>.05).

Table 6
Paired-samples statistics of the oral pre-test post-test

Groups	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of the Mean
Pair 1				
Pre-PTP	20	.2360	.16369	.03660
Post-PTP	20	.3217	.16162	.03614
Pair 2				
Pre-OLP	20	.2135	.25023	.05595
Post-OLP	20	.3080	.22400	.05009
Pair 3				
Pre-POLP	20	.2680	.27685	.06191
Post-POLP	20	.4935	.15073	.03370

Table 7
Paired-samples t-test analysis of the oral pre-test post-test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-PTP – Post-PTP	-.08567	.20601	.04607	-.18208	.01075	-1.860	19	.078
Pair 2	Pre-OLP – Post-OLP	-.09450	.32654	.07302	-.24732	.05832	-1.294	19	.211
Pair 3	Pre-POLP – Post-POLP	-.22550	.35886	.08024	-.39345	-.05755	-2.810	19	.011

With regard to the third research question, the results suggest a positive response; the difference between the accuracy indices of the pre-test and post-test results was statistically meaningful. Thus, the accuracy gains of the POLP task planners were meaningfully higher in the post-test (p<.05).

To recapitulate, pre-task and on-line task planning had no positive influence on the accuracy of task-based oral performance. However, meaningful gains were observed among the POLP planners.

The One-Way ANOVA Analysis of the Post-test

The fourth and the fifth research questions addressed the effect of concomitant pre/on-line task planning on accuracy of oral performance compared to pre-task and on-line planning conditions. To determine whether there were any meaningful differences in the post-test performance of the groups, a one-way ANOVA was conducted and the results are presented in tables eight, nine, and ten. Table eight indicates that the groups' task-based oral productions were significantly different (p<.05).

Table 8
One-way ANOVA results for the accuracy of the task-based oral post-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.380	2	.190	5.177	.009
Within Groups	2.090	57	.037		
Total	2.469	59			

To find out the exact nature of the difference and to answer the fourth and the fifth research questions, the Tukey follow up test was conducted and the results are summarized in table nine.

As indicated in the table, the POLP planners' output was more accurate than the PTP and the OLP planners'. Thus, the forth and the fifth questions are positively responded: the POLP planners' performance was significantly more accurate than the PTP and POLP planners.

Table 9
Tukey results for the effects of metacognitive training and levels of planning on accuracy of task-based oral performance

Groups (I)	Groups (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PTP						
	OLP	.01367	.05745	.969	-.1246	.1519
	POLP	-.17184(*)	.05745	.011	-.3101	-.0336
OLP						
	PTP	.01367	.05745	.969	-.1519	.1246
	POLP	-.18550(*)	.05745	.006	-.3237	-.0473
POLP						
	PTP	-.17184(*)	.05745	.011	.0336	.3101
	OLP	.18550(*)	.05745	.006	.0473	.3237

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Discussion

The present study was designed to shed light on our understanding of instructional choices when attempt is made to take a task-based approach to teaching speaking and listening courses. Compared to other studies, it has taken the view that learners' processing capacity in non-forms EFL contexts (Ellis, 2007) is extremely limited due to scarcity of exposure to the target language and the subsequent difficulty of focusing attention on all features of oral production simultaneously. The concern for accuracy takes priority in such contexts on the ground that an attempt to balance accuracy, complexity and fluency may lead to fossilization. Moreover, accuracy, complexity and fluency seem to emerge in the same order when opportunities to test hypotheses are restricted. Thus, this study has focused on narrative tasks centered on past tense, metacognitive training, and three task implementation conditions of pr-task planning (PTP), on-line task planning (OLP), and pre/on-line task planning (POLP).

The planning level used in this study was innovative in that the planning time was allocated to pre-task, on-line, and

concomitant pre/on-line task planning. It seems that POLP planners could remember the content of what they had already planned and had sufficient amount of time to edit their performance on-line. The research findings provide evidence for the statistically significant effect of mixed planning level on the participants' ability to plan content and to produce accurate language under POLP conditions. The findings are consistent with the findings of Ellis (1987), Foster and Skehan (1996), Skehan and Foster (1997), Mehnert (1998) and Wigglesworth (1997).

Ellis (1987) has compared learners' performance on a written narrative task with no limitation in planning time, and two oral narrative tasks based on pictures. The first oral task was the repetition of the written narrative task without recourse to the notes that learners had made; whereas the second oral task was based on a new set of pictures. Ellis has reported higher degrees of accuracy with the first written task with no planning time pressure and has explained the difference in terms of on-line planning. Of course, this study was open to criticism for the difference in medium (Crookes, 1989). The findings of the present study substantiate the positive effect of planning in the form of simultaneous pre/on-line planning on accuracy of oral task-based performance; the comparison of accuracy indices of pre-test and post-test, however, revealed higher degrees of accuracy for the POLP group than the PTP and OLP groups.

Wigglesworth (1997) has investigated the impact of planning on the high proficiency learners' use of morphology, articles, and plurals in testing conditions. She has found more accurate use of morphology and articles but no effect for plurals. This study was concerned with pre-intermediate proficiency learners who were able to achieve higher levels of accuracy in their overall performance as a result of mixed planning. Although the study was focused on non-test performance and no specific categories were underscored, the overall results for the POLP planners are in line with Wigglesworth (1997).

Mehnert (1998) has also reported a significant effect on accuracy as a result of one-minute, five-minute, and ten-minute planning compared to non-planners with no significant difference

in accuracy gains for each planning time. Sixteen-minute planning time utilized for pre/on-line task planning proved effective in enhancing accuracy as well, whereas the same amount of time proved ineffective in augmenting accuracy under PTP and OLP planning conditions.

Conclusions

Previous research findings provide evidence supporting the effectiveness of planning conditions in enhancing accuracy and other features of oral performance. The present study provided support for the close link between planning conditions as a metacognitive strategy and accurate oral performance. Accurate oral performance seems to be dependent on the learners' ability to effectively plan both the form and the content of pedagogical tasks that are at the right level of difficulty when the learners are provided with sufficient amount of planning time to plan both the content and the form.

The findings emerging from this research underscore the benefits of mixed planning condition in enhancing accurate oral performance in exposure-limited EFL contexts where learners' oral performance is usually characterized by inaccuracy, excessive simplicity and monotonous tone. In the long run, simultaneous pre-task and on-line planning may assist learners' in planning both the form and the content of their messages and help them give due attention to all features of their oral production at least in formal instructional contexts. Although achieving such a goal is a demanding undertaking which may seem an ambitious enterprise with considerable inherent risks in terms of financial and human resources, the life-long educational benefits outweigh the risks. TEFL students will doubly benefit from the program. They will learn how to control and manage their task-based performance, and in their future career, they will serve as reliable sources of input for their students.

Although the ability to plan form and content can be enhanced through instruction (Foster & Skehan, 1999), a trade-off might be the side effect of the teacher's instant intervention and

students' reliance on her/his immediate assistance for completing the task as well as the result of limited attentional capacity. Further research is required to explore the possibility of maintaining the positive effect of task planning on accuracy without any negative bearing on fluency and complexity.

A possible way to achieve this goal might be through metacognitive training programs which may prove beneficial in raising learners' awareness and sensitizing them to accuracy. Such a preparatory metacognitive training program can incorporate strategy training activities into everyday classroom language instruction to introduce learners to task-specific strategies. This program can be of high executive value because it can assist TEFL students to manage their task performance and subsequently to employ the metacognitive awareness to manage their general learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Transcriptions

Three sample transcriptions from the oral pretest and posttest have been included. The first number indicates the number of student on the list, whereas the second number represents the class code.

Pre-test (13-237)

The man is to see and he enjoy that and near the man children play play and the children write the paper, and take the paper off the bottle. So he think the man, the man found one of the bottle and read the paper of bottle. Paper is about the man who was in island and he need the one to help and the man in the police office, tell everything to police. And the police tell the police about everything. And police and the man went to the sea and they see children.

Post-test (13-237)

One day an Indian man arrived with big parcel an airport. That parcel was very, that parcel was too heavy to carry; therefore, he put it down to put, he put it down to, he put it down for look,

for, to look for, a porter. After, after a minute the little boy came and said to, said to the man I can, I can carry this parcel if you allowed. At this time the man with dark glasses picked up the parcel; and the man and the boy runs away. The Indian hurried the police and, but, it was no use because the man and the boy get into the car and runs away. During the way the man drived with high speed, with high speed; and when they arrived at, when they arrived out of a city, they opened parcel, and they opened the parcel. to great surprise they saw a very big snow.

Pre-test (7-248)

In this picture it seems that a man that he is tired and so he's lying on the mat. As he played, he founded a bottle on the sea. He wanted to take it. He is quite surprised. He take it and read the paper of the bottle. And he is informed the place. And the police report the, says of the man. And if the man send it to the place of, the place that bottle is founded.

Post-test (7-248)

One day Indian man   arrived the …, As they, when he was a,   when they was in airport, there are two men father and son. They decided to rubber his bon and they did they did it. They rubber his bon and police can't, can't catch up the …., and they are surprised when they arrive their home and open their box. They saw …, shake. It was surprise.

Pre-test (18-250)

It was one day that a man was lying on the beach that he saw a bottle near the beach. He went and pick up it. He take off the later from it and read it. And he thougt with himself that it was from a man that is from a far island in the sea. So he went to the police station and say all of this to police. And police say that it's strange. And I think that it is from a man from a island. So the police and the man went to the peach with each other. And to

show, the man wanted to show the police the area that he found the bottle. But when they went there, they saw that the children are playing and the cause of this bottle is children that put this bottle in the sea.

Post-test (18-250)

One day an Indian man arrived with big parcel an airport. That parcel was very, that parcel was too heavy to carry; therefore, he put it down to put, he put it down to, he put it down for look, for, to look for, a porter. After, after a minute the little boy came and said to, said to the man I can, I can carry this parcel if you allowed. At this time the man with dark glasses picked up the parcel; and the man and the boy runs away. The Indian hurried the police and, but, it was no use because the man and the boy get into the car and runs away. During the way the man drived with high speed, with high speed; and when they arrived at, when they arrived out of a city, they opened parcel, and they opened the parcel. to great surprise they saw a very big snow.

Appendix B: The Post-test Picture Strip: A Surprise