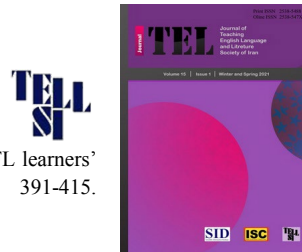


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Research Paper

Effects of Repeating Tasks of Different Complexity Levels on EFL Learners' Oral Production

Masoud Saeedi¹

Department of English Language and Literature, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

There is abundant evidence in task-based research suggesting that modifying task design, implementation, and complexity brings about variant effects on language learners' attention division and performance. The present study was aimed at exploring how modifying task implementation and task complexity variables affects learners' focus of attention and oral discourse. Task implementation was manipulated along the variable of repetition and task complexity was modified in terms of tense and availability of contextual support (i.e., performing in Here/Now vs. There/Then). To accomplish this objective, task performances of 60 English as foreign language learners were elicited under the following conditions: doing a narrative task once in Here/Now; doing a narrative task twice in Here/Now; doing a narrative task once in There/Then; and doing a narrative task twice in There/Then. The findings revealed that whereas repeating the task in Here/Now enhanced fluency and complexity, repeating the same task in There/Then triggered better performance in all dimensions. The findings may bear implications for researchers and language educators which are presented in connection with pertinent theoretical and practical issues.

Keywords: Accuracy, Complexity, Fluency, Task Complexity, Task Repetition

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¹ Corresponding author: saeedi.tefl@pnu.ac.ir

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been accorded considerable attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research. TBLT is premised upon the centrality of tasks as effective tools, which can be employed to generate meaningful interaction necessary for EFL learners' interlanguage development. Broadly, a task is characterized as a meaning focused activity through which learners use language to accomplish a specified goal (Bygate et al., 2001). Though tasks are primarily meaning-based, however, the importance of focus on form in task-based teaching has also been underscored in different ways (Khezlrou, 2023). But, given that the learners' processing capacity is constrained, achieving a balanced production in terms of aspects of form and meaning (i.e., complexity, accuracy, and fluency) (CAF) has proved problematic for them (Vanpatten, 2007). For this reason, researchers and educators have shown increasing attention in employing tasks as pedagogic tools which provide abundant opportunities for negotiating meaning and fostering focus on form. Indeed, it is argued that designing tasks with different features makes it possible to channel language learners' constrained processing capacity to different facets of performance and facilitate balanced interlanguage development (Robinson, 2015; Skehan, 2014). Therefore, it is pedagogically imperative to predict which task variables can be manipulated in such a way as to boost L2 production relative to the CAF (Skehan, 2016).

The study of cognitive complexity and repetition as task feature and condition variables has been a vibrant strand of inquiry in SLA research. Broadly, the results reported to date show that modifying task demands results in directing language learners' attention towards different aspects of performance. In particular, findings have disclosed that raising the complexity level of a task through the variable of \pm Here/Now affects L2

performance. More precisely, compared with less demanding Here/Now performance condition where learners looked at the pictures and used present tense to narrate the story, doing a more complex version of the same task in the past tense without being allowed to look at the pictures (i.e., performing the task in There/Then) facilitated attention to form and increased accuracy and complexity but hindered fluency (Gilbert, 2007; Ishikawa, 2007; Iwashita, et al., 2001; Robinson, 1995; Saeedi, 2021, 2023). Previous findings also suggest that task repetition brings about gains in fluency and complexity (see Khezlrou, 2021b for an updated review).

In the light of the above-mentioned findings, a theoretically and pedagogically important question is whether and how task complexity interacts with task repetition to develop of L2 oral production. Accordingly, in order to extend available findings, the current empirical study delved into the synergistic effects of task repetition and task complexity, operationally defined in terms of availability of contextual support and use of tense (\pm Here/Now).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Task complexity

One aspect of the cognitive, information-theoretic approach to TBLT is the role of task complexity in production with respect to complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Azizi & Gholami, 2020). The complexity level of a task relates to the mental processing demands its features impose on the learner (Robinson, 2001). Generally speaking, there are two contrastive perspectives on how task complexity affects learners' attention division and performance. Based on the multiple resource view of attention whereby attention consists of multiple pools (Wickens, 2007), Robinson postulates that producing accurate, complex, and fluent utterances is the result of different pools of attention and, consequently, there is no competition for

attention among these performance areas (Robinson, 2015). Robinson asserts that manipulating design features of tasks influences their cognitive load and complexity, which consequently affects learners' oral performance. He also argues that tasks should be sequenced based on increasing levels of complexity to help learners produce accurate and complex language to achieve authentic task demands (Robinson, 2011, cited in Qiu, 2022). Task complexity is a core constituent of Robinson's (2007) Triadic Componential Framework (TCF), which incorporates task complexity, task conditions, and task difficulty. According to Robinson, task complexity can be changed through resource-dispersing and resource-directing dimensions. It is hypothesized that making a task more cognitively demanding through resource-directing variables reduces fluency but enhances accuracy and complexity. On the contrary, rendering a task more challenging by means of resource-dispersing factors prevents learners from focusing on formal aspects (i.e., accuracy and complexity) (Robinson, 2015, 2021).

An opposing view is put forward by the Trade-off Hypothesis which is an outgrowth of the conviction that humans have limited and selective attention; accordingly, learners' working memory is constrained and makes use of a single resource (Skehan, 2014; Wickens, 2007). Given the meaning-based nature of tasks, Skehan (2016) argues, performing more cognitively demanding tasks directs learners' primary attention toward meaning. As a result of the paucity of attentional capacity left for formal aspects of the language, learners are induced to focus on either accuracy or complexity.

The above-mentioned predictions have inspired a large number of investigations. In this vein, research motivated by Robinson's viewpoint has aimed at investigating task complexity relative to various cognitive variables in his TCF. Especially relevant to this investigation is the immediacy (\pm Here/Now) variable. Previous research has modified task complexity relative

to spatial or temporal displacement to investigate its impact on L2 output. The ±Here/Now dimension of task complexity is operationalized with respect to the availability or removal of pictures displaying a story utilized as the visual stimulus and its ensuing immediate/displaced reference (Sánchez & Kalamakis, 2023).

The first operational definition of immediacy was provided by Robinson (1995). He defined the Here/Now in terms of allowing the participants to simultaneously see the pictures and use the present tense to recount the story they displayed. The more challenging There/Then condition involved doing the same task in the past tense without having the advantage of looking at the picture prompts. Based on these findings, Robinson (1995) deduced that performing the more difficult narrative task in There/Then advantaged complexity and accuracy but decreased fluency of participants' production. Subsequent studies reported positive results for accuracy (Gilbert, 2007; Ishikawa, 2007; Iwashita et al., 2001; Rahimpour, 1997), complexity (Ishikawa, 2007; Skehan & Foster, 1999) and negative effects on fluency (Gilbert, 2007; Saeedi, 2020). To sum up, the results of the aforementioned studies confirm the beneficial effects of doing a more complex narrative task on accuracy and/or complexity of L2 output; however, increased task complexity impairs fluency (Ishikawa, 2007).

2.2 Task repetition

Owing to its potential for promoting both L2 knowledge and skills, task repetition has been accorded considerable attention (Bygate, 2018). Repeating a task involves “repetition of the same or slightly altered task-whether the whole tasks, or parts of a task” (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p.43). In effect, task repetition is considered a type of planning whereby learners are allowed to carry out a given task once before doing it again (Ellis, 2005). Repetition is of different types, including task repetition, procedural

repetition, and content repetition. Whereas task repetition involves repeating the same procedure and content, procedural repetition entails repeating the same procedure with different content. Content repetition involves repeating the same content with different procedure (Khezrlou, 2019, 2021a). The focus of the present study was limited to the first type of repetition. It is presumed that when doing a task a second time, learners are familiar with the content of what they wish to communicate and consequently have more available processing time to formulate their message (Ellis, 2003). In the same vein, Bygate (1996) posits that during the first performance, learners prioritize conceptualizing and conveying their message; however, doing the same task again enables them to focus on formal aspects of their output because content familiarity eases the cognitive load and releases more processing capacity for learners to efficiently articulate the language and monitor their performance for accuracy (Bygate, 2001).

Despite a substantial body of research on task repetition, the precise effects of repeating a task on the quality of performance and L2 development remain unclear (Rogers, 2022). With regard to the quality of task performance, task repetition studies conducted so far have examined whether and how it influences the CAF of production. These studies have investigated whether requiring the learners to repeat a task affects how they perform a new task or the extent to which it influences their performance of the same task (Bui et al., 2019). As noted above, a review of the outcomes presented by the latter strand of research shows that task repetition consistently advantages fluency; however, the results for complexity and accuracy have been inconclusive and unclear (see Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Boers, 2014; Lambert et al., 2017; Saeedi & Rahimi Kazerooni, 2014; Thai & Boers, 2016; Wang & Chen, 2018).

Most of the aforementioned task repetition investigations have employed Levelt's (1989) model of speech production as the psycholinguistic benchmark for explaining such effects on L2 performance (Bui et al., 2019). Levelt's model has been particularly referred to in order explain the way variant task performance conditions influence the process of speech production (Kormos, 2006). Based on this model, speech is the product of three information processing stages. In conceptualization the intentions and related information that the speaker wishes to communicate are selected and ordered. This stage generates a conceptual and non-linguistic preverbal message, which is sent into the second stage, namely, formulation where the speaker selects lexical items and syntactic structures to convert the preverbal message into a linguistic structure called internal speech. Finally, during articulation, the speaker converts the internal speech into actual speech. It has been hypothesized that when doing a task for the first time, learners mainly give priority to conceptualization pertaining to the planning of content. However, task repetition induces them to prioritize formulation and articulation over conceptualization (Bygate, 2001).

3. Present study

As was mentioned above, repeating the same task and performing tasks of different degrees of difficulty exert variant effects on the CAF of language learners' speech. The above reviewed studies show that whereas making a task more complex with reference to the variable of \pm Here/Now leads to accurate and complex performance, task repetition is associated with enhanced fluency and complexity. However, despite the existence of a plethora of research related to task repetition and task complexity, the interaction between these variables and the way they may affect different facets of EFL learners' speech have not been fully investigated. Accordingly, the current research was undertaken to extend this line of inquiry and cover

this lacuna in the literature. The study was geared towards answering the following questions:

1. What effect does repeating a task in Here/Now cause on the CAF of L2 oral output?
2. What effect does repeating a task in There/Then cause on the CAF of L2 oral output?

4. Method

4.1 Design

The present research used a between-groups design. Task repetition and task complexity were manipulated as independent variables the combination of which constituted four levels. The three dependent variables were as follows: (a) complexity, operationalized as syntactic complexity and syntactic variety; (b) accuracy, operationalized as error-free clauses and correct verb forms; and (c) fluency operationalized as rate A and rate B. Rate A was operationally defined as the number of syllables in speech divided by the total number of seconds spent on task performance and multiplied by 60. Rate B was defined as the number of meaningful syllables divided by the total number of seconds spent on task performance and multiplied by 60 (see Table 1 below).

4.2 Participants

The investigation was carried out with the participation of sixty Iranian English learners in the age range of 16 to 21 years at a language institute in Isfahan. Based on the results of a placement test administered at the institute, these learners had been assigned to the intermediate-level classes. However, Quick Oxford Placement Test (QOPT) was also administered to verify their homogeneity. The QOPT is a reliable and time saving test including 60 multiple choice test items. The participants were required to answer the questions in 30 minutes. As stated by Allan (2004), QOPT is considered an

international test with scoring criteria applicable to different levels of proficiency in diverse educational settings. The participants' use of English was limited to the classes they attended twice a week. The researcher notified them that he would use the results only for research purposes and therefore they would not affect their final achievement testing. As regards the ethical considerations, the learners agreed to participate in the research by signing written consent forms.

4.3 Procedure

A narrative task was used to collect a sample of each participant's speech. Doing a narrative task involves describing the story shown in a set of sequenced pictures. The narrative task has been an extensively used instrument in task-based studies involving task repetition (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Hassanzadeh-Taleshi et al., 2021; Hsu, 2019; Khezrlou, 2019). Researchers have employed such tasks as an appropriate means for eliciting language learners' L2 production because given their monologic nature, they do not involve any interaction among participants and therefore enable the researchers to collect the type of performance which is not affected by interactional variables (Yuan & Ellis, 2003).

The narrative task employed in the present research involved retelling the story of a passenger who boards a train with a pickpocket following him into a compartment where the passenger takes off his coat, hangs it on a hook, sits down, and begins browsing a paper. The pickpocket sits facing the passenger and lights a cigarette waiting for the right time. The passengers' siesta gives the pickpocket a chance to steal a wallet from his coat and flee.

As was noted above, the study had a between-groups design; therefore, participants were randomly assigned into four groups of fifteen and narrated the above story in one of the following conditions:

Effects of Repeating ...

Performing the narrative task once in Here/Now (-TR/HN)

It should be noted that following Robinson (1995), immediacy was manipulated with reference to tense and availability of contextual support. In addition, to control for the effects of strategic planning on the quality of their production (Ellis, 2009) the participants in all groups were given only thirty seconds to see the wordless picture clues prior to speaking. Learners who narrated the story under this condition were allowed to simultaneously see the pictures and tell the story using the present tense. They performed the task once without any repetition.

Repeating the narrative task in Here/Now twice (+TR/HN)

As in the above condition, the learners in this group were allowed to view the pictures while narrating the story in the present tense. However, they were required to repeat the task under the same performance condition. Their second performance was elicited a week later. The one-week interval between the performances followed related research (e.g., Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Saeedi & Rahimi Kazerooni, 2014) and was supposed to enhance the comparability of the findings. It should be pointed out that only the data collected on the second occasion was taken into consideration for analysis.

Performing the narrative task once in There/Then (-TR/TT)

The operational definition of the There/Then condition followed Robinson (1995). In doing so, the learners had just thirty seconds to see the picture prompts before beginning their narrations. However, they were denied the opportunity to see the pictures while explaining the story in the past tense. In fact, they could not make use of contextual support. As in the first condition, this condition did not involve task repetition.

Repeating the narrative task twice in There/Then (+TR/TT)

Here the same procedure as the previous condition was followed. However, the learners were required to do the same task after a week. As in the second condition, data analysis involved analyzing only the learners' second task performance.

The recorded samples of participants' speech were subsequently transcribed, segmented, and analyzed relative to the measures selected for tapping the CAF operationally defined below. It needs to be pointed out that the researcher had a second rater analyze about ten percent of the transcribed speech samples to establish reliable data analysis. The obtained inter rater coefficients for measures of CAF were greater than 0.8, which confirmed the reliability of scoring.

4.4 Operational definition and measurement of the CAF

Measuring L2 production is of central importance and constitutes a long tradition in SLA research (Michel, 2017). Today, SLA researchers agree that L2 proficiency and production are multi-componential constructs, which comprise three main aspects of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Farrokhi et al., 2018). In task-based research, these dimensions have been used as "the standard of measurement" over the last two decades (Lambert & Kormos, 2014, p. 608). In general terms, complexity refers to such criteria as size, elaborateness, richness, and diversity of speech and accuracy relates to the extent to which production is different from a target norm (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Fluency pertains to the extent to which speech or writing is easy, smooth, and eloquent (Freed, 2000).

To obtain more comparable findings, the researcher employed the following measures specified by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). They have also been utilized in related research (e.g., Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Hsu, 2017) (see Table 1).

Table1

Operational Definitions of the CAF

| Complexity | Accuracy | Fluency |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Syntactic complexity</i> : the number of clauses divided by the number of to AS-units (i.e., an independent clause or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with it). | <i>Error-free clauses</i> : the percentage of error-free clauses in terms of syntax, morphology, and lexis. | <i>Speech rate A</i> : the number of syllables in speech divided by the total number of seconds spent on task performance and multiplied by 60. |
| <i>Syntactic variety</i> : the total number of different grammatical verb forms in terms of tense and modality. | <i>Correct verb forms</i> : the percentage of correct verbs with respect to tense, aspect, modality, and subject-verb agreement. | <i>Speech rate B</i> : the number of meaningful syllables (i.e., all repeated, reformulated, or replaced syllables, words, and phrases were excluded) in speech divided by the total number of seconds spent on task performance and multiplied by 60. |

4.5 Data analysis

Given the design and the number of groups involved in the study, one-way between groups ANOVAs were used to statistically examine the significance of mean differences among the groups with respect to the CAF measures. Scheffe analysis was subsequently run to pinpoint the exact locations of mean differences.

5. Results

This investigation probed into the influence of repeating a narrative task of different complexity levels on L2 speech relative to the CAF triad. In the following table, the descriptive statistics pertaining to participants' production elicited under the four performance conditions explained above are reported.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for the CAF

| Dependent variable | Mean (SD) | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | -TR/HN | +TR/HN | -TR/TT | +TR/TT |
| C/AS | 1.029 (.02) | 1.057 (.014) | 1.0493 (.019) | 1.072 (.023) |
| DGV | 7.15 (1.03) | 8.18 (.61) | 6.9953 (.86) | 8.4900 (1.11) |
| Correct clauses | 28.73 (1.23) | 29.54 (.98) | 30.6653 (.5) | 31.7400 (.81) |
| Correct verbs | 16.87 (1.07) | 18.64 (1.56) | 25.8653 (2.42) | 27.9960(2.31) |
| Rate A | 47.54 (1.39) | 49.07 (1.104) | 46.539 (1.33) | 48.0027 (1.38) |
| Rate B | 43.16 (.81) | 44.36 (.76) | 42.6207 (.91) | 43.6533 (1.17) |

Note. C/AS= Ration of clauses to AS units; DGV= Different grammatical verbs used.

To determine the statistical significance of mean complexity, accuracy, and fluency differences among the groups, one-way ANOVAs were run (see Table 3).

Table 3
Results of One-way ANOVAs on the Effects of Task Repetition and Task Complexity on the CAF Measures

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|---------|------|
| Syntactic complexity | Between Groups | .015 | 3 | .005 | 12.329 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | .022 | 56 | .000 | | |
| | Total | .037 | 59 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Syntactic variety | Between Groups | 24.680 | 3 | 8.227 | 9.596 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 48.010 | 56 | .857 | | |
| | Total | 72.689 | 59 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Correct clauses | Between Groups | 77.257 | 3 | 25.752 | 30.290 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 47.612 | 56 | .850 | | |
| | Total | 124.869 | 59 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Correct verbs | Between Groups | 1319.701 | 3 | 439.900 | 118.508 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 207.871 | 56 | 3.712 | | |
| | Total | 1527.571 | 59 | | | |
| | | | | | | |

Effects of Repeating ...

| | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------|---------|----|--------|-------|------|
| Rate A | Between Groups | 49.816 | 3 | 16.605 | 9.670 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 96.166 | 56 | 1.717 | | |
| | Total | 145.983 | 59 | | | |
| Rate B | Between Groups | 24.709 | 3 | 8.236 | 9.523 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 48.433 | 56 | .865 | | |
| | Total | 73.141 | 59 | | | |

As displayed in Table 3, different combinations of task repetition and task complexity led to significant differences among participants' performances as measured in terms of syntactic complexity, $F(3, 56) = 12.32$, $p = .000$, syntactic variety, $F(3, 56) = 9.59$, $p = .000$, correct clauses, $F(3, 56) = 30.29$, $p = .000$, correct verbs, $F(3, 56) = 118.508$, $p = .000$, rate A, $F(3, 56) = 9.67$, $p = .000$, and rate B, $F(3, 56) = 9.52$, $p = .000$.

Scheffe test results were used to answer the research questions. Examining the effects of repeating a less complex task (i.e., the task performed in Here/Now) on the CAF of participants' speech was the focus of the first question. The means of -TR/HN and +TR/HN groups were compared to find the answer to this question. As depicted in Table 4 below, participants' second task performance in Here/Now was characterized by increased syntactic complexity and variety ($p = .004$; $p = .036$). As regards the measures of accuracy, however, though task repetition yielded more accurate speech, the mean differences in terms of correct clauses and correct verbs were insignificant ($p = .135$; $p = .108$). Concerning fluency, the outcomes showed that repeating the narrative task in the present tense with contextual support (+TR/HN) enabled the learners to speak more fluently, an effect which was evident in enhanced performance relative to Rate A and Rate B ($p = .024$; $p = .01$). Therefore, repeating the less cognitively demanding narrative task exerted beneficial effects on fluency and complexity. Though

this performance condition also improved accuracy, the mean differences were not of statistical significance.

Table 4

Scheffe Test Results on the Effects of Repeating the Less Complex Task on Learners' Oral Performance

| Dependent variable | Cross-group comparisons | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | -TR/HN Vs. +TR/HN | |
| | Mean difference | Sig. |
| Syntactic complexity | -.028 | .004* |
| Syntactic variety | -1.022 | .036* |
| Correct clauses | -.81 | .135 |
| Correct verbs | -1.77 | .108 |
| Rate A | -1.52 | .024* |
| Rate B | -1.19 | .01* |

*Mean difference is significant at the .05 level

The second question of the study addressed the influence of repeating a more complex task (i.e., the task performed in There/Then) on the CAF of L2 speech. In order to answer this question, the -TR/ TT group and +TR/TT group performances were compared. Considering complexity measures, the results reported in Table 5 show that repeating the more cognitively difficult task led to higher syntactic complexity and variety than completing the same task once ($p = .023$; $p = .001$). With regard to accuracy, the results indicated significant group mean differences pointing to the better performance of the +TR/TT group relative to correct clauses and correct verbs used ($p = .024$; $p = .036$). Therefore, task repetition in conjunction with increased task complexity led to more accurate language use. Finally, the results for fluency disclosed that performing a narrative task in There/Then a second time yielded more fluent L2 speech. Precisely, repeating the narrative task in the past tense without contextual support exerted beneficial effects on Rate A and Rate B ($p = .033$; $p = .035$).

Table 5

Posthoc Scheffe Test Results on the Effects of Repeating the More Complex Task on Learners' Oral Performance

| Dependent variable | Cross-group comparisons | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | -TR/TT Vs. +TR/TT | |
| | Mean difference | Sig. |
| Syntactic complexity | -.023 | .023* |
| Syntactic variety | -1.49 | .001* |
| Correct clauses | -1.074 | .024* |
| Correct verbs | -2.13 | .036* |
| Rate A | -1.46 | .033* |
| Rate B | -1.03 | .035* |

*Mean difference is significant at the .05 level

6. Discussion

The first question dealt with the extent to which repeating a task in Here/Now influences the CAF of EFL learners' speech. As reported above, the results revealed that repeating the less complex task of retelling the picture-based story in the present tense while taking advantage of contextual support promotes complexity and fluency. Though task repetition also enhanced accuracy, the mean differences were not of statistical significance. These gains were evident in the significantly higher complexity and fluency of the +TR/HN in comparison with the -TR/HN group. The second research question addressed the effects task repetition in There/Then exerts on the CAF measures. Interestingly, the obtained results disclosed that repeating the more demanding narrative task, which involved using past tense to recount a picture story without access to contextual support yielded beneficial impacts on not only fluency and complexity but also accuracy. Overall, whereas repeating a less demanding task produces more fluent and complex discourse, repetition involving the same task at a higher complexity level advantages all performance areas.

With regard to the effects of repeating a less complex task, the advantageous effects on fluency and complexity but not accuracy accord with some previous findings (e.g., Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Bygate, 1996, 2001; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Saeedi & Rahimi Kazerooni, 2014; Sheppard, 2006) but run counter to Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013), and Sample and Michel (2014), who reported positive effects on only complexity and fluency, respectively. The results are also different from Lynch and Maclean's (2000) study, which showed positive effects on fluency and accuracy but not complexity. Broadly, the results pertaining to the less complex task further corroborated the furnished evidence reported to date in favor of the role of task repetition in enhancing fluency and complexity and its mixed effects concerning accuracy (Khezrlou, 2021b). As for the effects of repeating the more complex task on performance, the findings of the present research are in line with the results of Kartchava and Nassaji (2019) demonstrating facilitative effects of task repetition on all performance areas. All in all, given that task repetition is a kind of planning (Ellis, 2005), the results obtained for the interaction between task repetition and task complexity in a way lend general support to the observation that planning has more substantial effects with more complex tasks (Khatib & Farahanynia, 2020). In other words, task repetition causes significant effects on all performance areas when it involves performing a task in the past tense without taking advantage of contextual support. On the other hand, in the case of a task, which is made easier through the use of present tense and availability of contextual support, repetition only assists fluency and complexity.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the meaning-based nature of the task along with learners' limited working memory capacity prompt them to give priority to meaning over form during their first task performance, leading to

‘trade off’ effects among aspects of form and meaning (Skehan, 1998). However, provided that repetition involves doing the same task with the same content, content familiarity eases the pressure on processing capacity with the result that the learner can direct more processing resources to retrieve the language needed for encoding the message (i.e., formulation) and delivering it (i.e., articulation), bringing about increased accuracy and/or complexity (Khezrlou, 2021b). Along the same lines, when learners repeat the same task and content, the pressure on their processing resources will be eased because the control mechanism monitoring the encoding, processing, storage, retrieval, and utilization of information (Huitt, 2003) demands less processing capacity as this monitoring process has been previously conducted. Concerning the facilitative impact of task repetition on fluency, it seems plausible to reason that since the first task performance involves processing unfamiliar content, increased processing demands on their working memory makes for less fluent output. When doing the same task and processing the same content a second time, however, learners have a preconceived notion of its content, hence more fluent production (Ellis, 2003). In this connection, D’Ely et al. (2019) ascribe increased rate of speech on the second performance to the fact that having previously activated, retrieved, and articulated the necessary lexical items and structures in the first performance leaves a trace in learners’ memory which enables them to more efficiently retrieve those words in their second performance.

As was noted earlier, the most significant finding of this investigation was that task complexity can substantially contribute to the effects of task repetition on different performance areas. This noteworthy piece of evidence may provide a viable explanation for the inconsistent accuracy results offered to date. Accordingly, repetition fosters an optimum focus on form context provided that it involves a more cognitively demanding task. The utility of

repeating a more complex task in simultaneously promoting complexity and accuracy may be clarified with reference to Cognition Hypothesis. As was stated earlier, one of the major claims of the Cognition Hypothesis is that increasing the cognitive load of tasks through the resource directing variables, simultaneously benefits complexity and accuracy if it is, at the same time, reduced in terms of the resource depleting variables (Robinson, 2015). Along the same lines, it seems plausible to reason that making a narrative task more complex along the resource directing variable of immediacy and simultaneously rendering it easier through the resource depleting variable of planning (i.e., rehearsal) lead to gains in complexity and accuracy. As was mentioned above, task repetition is conceived of as a type of planning; hence, one may argue that doing the more demanding narrative task in There/Then twice enables the task performers to direct their processing resources towards complexity and accuracy. On the contrary, repeating the same task in Here/Now benefits only complexity (not accuracy) because though the task is made simple through the resource depleting dimension of planning, its cognitive complexity has not been simultaneously increased along the resource directing aspect of immediacy. That the interaction between planning and task complexity exerts variant effects on different dimensions of performance verifies the findings of Santos (2018) and Levinka and Gilabert (2012), according with the general deduction that the impact of planning, be it task repetition or strategic planning, is mediated through task complexity, with planning involving more complex tasks producing more substantial effects on the resultant speech (Khatib & Farahanynia, 2020).

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the present investigation was aimed at examining whether and how task repetition interacts with task complexity to influence the CAF

of L2 oral discourse. Generally speaking, the results confirmed the utility of task repetition in promoting the linguistic quality of L2 speech. Additionally, and more importantly, the findings further illuminated the way different combinations of task conditions and task characteristics differentially affect learners' L2 oral output. The major contribution of the study to the results reported to date was that repetition yields optimum results when it involves performing a more cognitively complex task. In point of fact, though repeating a less complex task brings about enhanced fluency and complexity, repeating the more complex version of the same task advantages all performance areas. Thus, instructors are suggested to benefit from this performance condition to help learners achieve a performance which is balanced with regard to the aspects of complexity, accuracy, and fluency which constitute the most viable goals distinguished in the current approach to task-based research (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Skehan, 2009). The findings are also of theoretical significance in that they suggest learners' repetition of a cognitively complex task fosters their focus on both content and form which as McLaughlin (1990) presumes, can promote L2 output, interlanguage restructuring, and SLA development.

The current study is not without limitations. Given its cross-sectional nature, the outcomes do not present any valid evidence for the long-term effects of repeating complex tasks on enhancing complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Concerning the generalizability of the findings, they are generalizable to Iranian intermediate EFL learners; thus, replicating the study with participants of other L1 backgrounds at different levels of proficiency could enhance their external validity. Future studies may also examine the interaction between other task design features and implementation options. Finally, further research is needed to probe into the interaction between task

repetition and individual variables including learners' willingness to communicate and speaking style (i.e., fluency oriented vs. accuracy oriented).

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