

# The Differential Effects of Three Types of Task Planning on the Accuracy of L2 Oral Production

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of three types of task planning on accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' oral production. In this study planning was operationalized at three levels: rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task planning. The oral presentation task was employed as the means of data collection. The subjects consisted of forty advanced students in four classes with the same level of language proficiency (N=10). One class was randomly selected to act as the control and three others selected as the experimental groups. In order to collect the data, the oral presentation task was used as the means of data collection. In the first group participants were asked to perform the task two times with two-week interval between the two performances. Participants in the second experimental group received strategic planning with ten minutes of planning time. Whilst the participants in the third group began their oral presentation immediately but took time as long as they like to performed their presentation. The participants in the no-planning group, were asked to perform their presentation immediately after reading each text within a limited time. Performance was assessed through the percentage of error-free clauses (to measure accuracy). Data analysis showed a positive influence of both rehearsal and unpressured within-task planning on accuracy of L2 output. Also the results were greater in rehearsal group than within task group.

**Index Terms**—rehearsal planning, strategic planning, within-task planning

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tasks have a central place in L2 research and also in language pedagogy. In recent years there have seen an enormous growth of interest in task-based language learning and teaching which is because task is seen as a construct of equal importance to the researchers and the teachers of second language. Task is a means of clinically eliciting samples of learner language for the purpose of research and task also is a device for the purpose of organizing the content and methodology of language teaching (Ellis, 2000). Tasks came into widespread use in school education in the 1970s (Kasap, 2005). So TBLT received more attention from the point of view of SLA researcher's, curriculum developers, educationalists, teacher trainers and language teachers worldwide (Van den Branden, 2006). Over the past decade researchers have remarkable attention to the role of planning in the process of task-based language learning (Abdi, Eslami & Zahedi, 2012). Planning is one of the significant factors in the studies of TBLT. Understanding more about the construct of planning is of worth for both SLA researchers, who are primarily interested to develop a set of ideas about L2 acquisition, and language teachers, whose aim is to help learners to learn languages more effectively and efficiently. Planning and its influence in task-based language performance are extensively studied in the literature (Wang, 2008). But there have only been few studies that have considered the issue of how different task planning might have influence on complexity, fluency and accuracy of L2 learners' performance in terms of their oral production (Ahmadian, 2011).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Task-based Instruction

Prabhu, who published the Bangalore research report in 1982, was the first person who performed task-based approach in L2 teaching (Bantis, 2008). Prabhu believed that students' minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using they may learn more effectively (Hasan, 2014). Task-based approach which views language as a communicative tool has attracted more and more attention in the foreign language teaching field since the 1980s (M. Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). According to Harris and O'Duibhir (2011) one challenge of a communicative approach to language teaching is to provide students with chances to communicate meaningfully with their classmates. In order to cope with this challenge teachers need to create activities or tasks that extend beyond language drills, where

learners communicate ideas and feelings to one another about topics of interest to them. In these activities, learners need to make their utterances comprehensible and receive feedback as to whether they have been understood. This is called TBI. Task-based interactions are seen to be facilitative of L2 learning process. The role of the teacher during these activities is to monitor the language of the learners' performance and any intervention needs to be carefully measured.

Esfandiari, Knight, Molinari and Zacharias (2012) mentioned that a general definition of TBI is "giving learners tasks to complete, rather than items to learn, have positive effects on the natural language learning process." Rahimpour (2008) also defined TBLT a kind of language teaching which focuses on students' ability to do a task with no explicit teaching of the grammatical instruction. This type of L2 teaching provides a good condition in the process of developing language performance.

### *B. Benefits of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)*

Task-based approach of language teaching provides many advantages in the process of 2nd language learning which are discussed by Ellis (2009a) as follows:

1. The natural language learning in the classroom situation can be achieved by TBLT.
2. It emphasizes meaning over form but can also emphasize for learning form.
3. A high amount input of foreign language can be provided for the learners.
4. It extremely motivate learners.
5. It allows for teacher input and direction but focuses on a learner-centered educational philosophy are more highlighted.
6. It focuses to the development of communicative fluency while not neglecting accuracy.
7. A more traditional approach can be used together with TBLT.

The goal of TBLT is to provide students with opportunities of language learning by which they will become able to communicate more effectively in everyday life. Tasks are good at training learners to use the L2 for practical purposes, and that this will make them ready for doing some tasks successfully in the world outside the classroom by completing specific tasks involving 'real world' situations (Dailey, 2009).

### *C. Problems in Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)*

There may be different problems in a situation in which TBLT is concerned. Some of these major problems according to Richards and Rynandya (2002, p. 102) are as follows: first, despite the early research which support the use of task as an effective way to conceptualize language teaching, the amount of research it is still in sufficient. Second, task-based program has been implemented and subjected to rigorous evaluation. So our understanding of many factors influencing task difficulty is quite limited and our teachers must fall back on their intuition about how well the learners can deal with specific tasks. Third, we know little about task finiteness. Nunan (2001, p. 48) mentioned the most important problem for the designer of task-based syllabus is different factors which will interact to determine task difficulty, e.g., what is difficult for the learner A may not necessarily be difficult for the learner B, these are factors which are dependent to the learners' characteristics.

M. Hismanoglu, & Hismanoglu, (2011) also mentioned some challenge of task-based approach as follows:

1. The disadvantages of task-based learning rely not so much on the potential powerfulness of this type of instructional content but on problems of conducting the instruction.
2. If the teachers only focused on more traditional roles or do not possess time and resources to provide task-based teaching; in this situations task-based teaching may be impossible to do in an effective way because this type of teaching involves a high level of creativity and dynamism on the part of the teacher.
3. The resources which are necessities of task-based learning are beyond the textbooks and related materials generally available in foreign language classrooms.
4. Task based instruction is not what many students expect and want from a language class, so they may refuse to task-based language learning
5. Some learners when face with a difficulty or if the group feels refusing try to use mother tongue.
6. Some individuals enhance superior communication strategies, e.g. miming and employing gestures, but get by employing just uncommon words and phrases and let others provide the more challenging language they need. This may give rise to the fossilization of those individuals prior to improving very far in the syntax of the target language.
7. Some learners do not worry about how it is placed into the discourse but they are tending to get caught up in making an effort to find the appropriate word.
8. For the learners there is a danger to achieve fluency at the expense of accuracy.

In order to cope with the problems faced in task based teaching Ellis (2009a) presents the following principles:

1. The tasks must be fit to the students' proficiency levels (e.g. in order to work with the learners who have limited proficiency, in these cases the tasks should be of the input providing rather than output-prompting).
2. Tasks need to be tasted to ensure that they result in appropriate L2 use and revised in the light of experience.
3. A clear understanding of what a task is for TBLT to work is necessary for the teachers.
4. It is necessary for the teachers and students to be aware of the purpose and reason for performing tasks.
5. In the process of teaching a task-based course, teachers must be involved in the development of the task materials.

#### D. Task Planning

Different types of planning are discussed by Ellis (2009b). A basic distinction is drawn between pre-task and within-task planning (also called online planning). These are distinguished based on when the planning takes place either before the task itself or during the performance of the task. Pre-task planning can be further divided into rehearsal or strategic planning. Within-task planning also divided into pressured (i.e. learners are required to perform the task rapidly under time limitation) or unpressured (i.e. learners receive an unlimited amount of time in order to perform the task) (see Figure 1). Ahmadian (2011) mentioned the working memory uses the limited time to access lexical information from long-term memory when participants perform a task under time pressure, but the participants can also access syntactic information when they perform without any time pressure. According to Abdi et al. (2012) in unpressured task performance, participants takes part in to careful on-line planning which calls 'planned language use' and in pressured task performance participants are engaged in rapid planning which calls 'unplanned language use'. Online planning takes place during performance of a task, whereas pre-task planning examines how planning prior to performance influences (Ghavannia, Tavakoli, & Esteki, 2013).

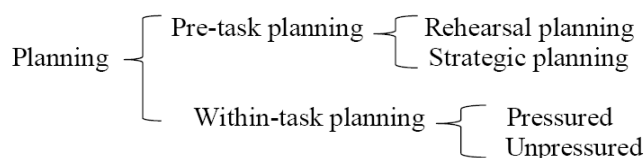


Figure 1. Types of planning (according to Ellis, 2005b, p4)

Task planning has strong effect on the effectiveness of language instruction and become a popular method of how to teach L2 communicative acquisition (Seyyedi & Ismail, 2012). According to Foster and Skehan (1999) providing greater planning opportunities should have positive effects on the process of learners' language development.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION

Focusing on the deferential effect of task type on L2 learners, the present study addressed the following research question and hypotheses:

Q1. Which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) leads to accuracy in L2 oral production?

Ho1. The rehearsal task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production.

Ho2. The strategic task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production.

Ho3. The unpressured within-task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production.

### IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

#### A. Participants

The participants in this study were 40 students of English in advanced level in a language institute in Hashtgerd, Iran. One fourth of the students are female and the others are male. They were in four classes with the same level. Their language proficiency levels were similar according to the norms of this language institute. Three class were randomly selected to act as the experimental groups and one class was selected as the control group (10 participants in each class).

#### B. Instruments

*Task:* oral presentation task was chosen as the means of data collection for this study. This task type have been selected by following (Teng, 2007).

*Source of input:* a pilot study was performed by five language teachers who were teaching English as the second language for more than ten years on ten students from the target population who did not participate in the study for the total number of five sections. These experts opinion were used to justify the length of the time and texts for this study. At the end of the pilot study twelve reading parts of American file, student book 3, units 1-7 were chosen as the source of input that the participants weren't taught before.

*Planning conditions:* four programs were designed by the researcher; three programs were in the form of task planning and one program was based on no-planning condition (see table 1).

TABLE 1  
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Stages Groups	First Stage T/A	Second Stage T/A	Third Stage T/A	Last Stage T/A	
First treatment group (rehearsal pre-task planning)	2 min/ Read the text	2 min/ Performed their presentation	interval of two weeks	performed the same task	
				2 min/ Read the text	2 min/ Performed their presentation
second treatment group (strategic pre-task planning)	2 min/ Read the text	10 min/ plan their performance		2 min/ Performed their presentation	
Third treatment group (unpressured within-task planning)	2 min/ Read the text			Unlimited time to plan while performing the task/ Speak immediately after reading the text	
Control group (no-planning condition)	2 min/ Read the text			2 min/ Performed their presentation/ to prevent them from on-line planning a time limit was established while their presentation	

*Data collection:* In each section the researcher and another language teacher recorded the students’ oral production. After each section the researcher listened to their oral production and wrote them down on a piece of paper. Then based on the chosen criteria the accuracy of their oral production was determined.

*C. Procedures*

After the participants and the materials were chosen. Three of the four classes were randomly assigned as experimental groups and one of them as the control group. The participants performed oral presentation task in their normal classroom setting. In this study the participants in each group were required to performed oral presentation task under different planning condition. In the first group (rehearsal pre-task planning); the participants performed the same task two times with an interval of two weeks between the two performances. In the second group (strategic pre-task planning); as the participants read the given text within a limited time, they were required to plan their performance for 10 minutes before they performed the task. They were also asked to complete the task within a limited time. Participants in the third group (unpressured within-task planning) were asked to speak immediately after reading the text. They were given as much time as needed to perform the task. Thus they were not given any time in advance but were received an unlimited time to plan while performing the task. In the fourth group (no-planning condition); the participants were under no-planning condition in which participants were not given time for planning, and in order to prevent them from on-line planning a time limit was established for their presentation. Treatment lasted after 12 sections for each class (two hours each section). Participants’ oral performance were recorded by the researcher. Then their oral performance were evaluated in terms of accuracy (percentage of error-free clauses).

*D. Accuracy Measure (Percentage of Error Free Clauses)*

In this study accuracy was measured by identifying the number of error-free clauses, which was then divided by the total number of clauses produced, and the resulting figure was multiplied by 100 (Khan, 2010; Skehan, & Foster, 1999). In this study the clause in which there was no error in syntax, morphology or word order was counted as an error-free clause. Also errors in lexis were considered only if a word was nonexistent in English, or if a word was indisputably inappropriate (Skehan, & Foster, 1997). High means indicate less number of errors and as a result better performance (Bamanger, 2014).

$$\frac{\text{Number of error-free clauses}}{\text{Total number of clauses}} \times 100$$

V. RESULTS

*A. Testing Assumptions*

Four assumptions of interval data, independence of subjects, normality and homogeneity of variances should be met before one decides to run parametric tests (Field, 2009). The first assumption is met because the present data are measured on an interval scale. Bachman (2005, p. 236) believes that the assumption of independence of subjects is met

when —the performance of any given individual is independent of the performance of other individual. The third assumption concerns the normality of accuracy scores which are checked through the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors. Table 2 reflects that the accuracy scores in the rehearsal, strategic, within-task, and control groups have normal distribution since the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors are within the ranges of +/- 1.96. The last assumption – homogeneity of variances – will be discussed when reporting the results of the inferential statistics.

TABLE 2  
NORMALITY TESTS FOR ACCURACY SCORES IN THE FOUR GROUPS

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Rehearsal	10	.031	.687	-1.109	1.334
Strategic	10	.005	.687	-.988	1.334
Within-task	10	.364	.687	-1.361	1.334
Control	10	-.109	.687	.038	1.334

*B. Investigating the Research Question*

The research question of this study asked which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) leads to accuracy in L2 oral production. In order to answer this research question One-way ANOVA was used. Before discussing the results of this analysis, the descriptive statistics of participants’ accuracy scores in the four groups were computed and laid out in Table 3. According to Table 3, the means of rehearsal group ( $M = .55, SD = .06$ ) and unpressured within-task group ( $M = .52, SD = .06$ ) were significantly more than the strategic group ( $M = .40, SD = .05$ ) and control group ( $M = .36, SD = .04$ ) (See appendix A for the accuracy scores).

TABLE 3  
GROUP STATISTICS OF ACCURACY SCORES IN THE FOUR GROUPS

Group	N	Mean	SD
Rehearsal	10	.5536	.06805
Strategic	10	.4018	.05305
Within-task	10	.5242	.06083
Control	10	.3695	.04100
Total	40	.5536	.06805

The main assumption of ANOVA is homogeneity of variances. So Levene's Test was utilized. As Table 4 displays, the homogeneity of variance assumption has not been violated for the four groups’ accuracy scores since the Sig. for Levene’s test was .29, which is greater .05.

TABLE 4  
TEST OF HOMOGENEITY OF VARIANCES FOR ACCURACY SCORES IN THE FOUR GROUPS

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.292	3	36	.292

Table 5 below depicts the results of ANOVA comparing the accuracy scores in the four groups.

TABLE 5  
ANOVA FOR COMPARING FOUR GROUPS’ ACCURACY SCORES

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.244	3	.081	25.404	.000
Within Groups	.115	36	.003		
Total	.360	39			

ANOVA results, as shown in Table 5, indicated a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores among the four groups at the  $p < .05$  level,  $F_{(3, 36)} = 25.40, p = .000, p < .05$ . Fortunately our  $p$  value (.000) was less than .05, and our  $F$  value, 25.40 was more the  $F$  critical (4.38).

The graphical representation of the results is shown in Figure 2.

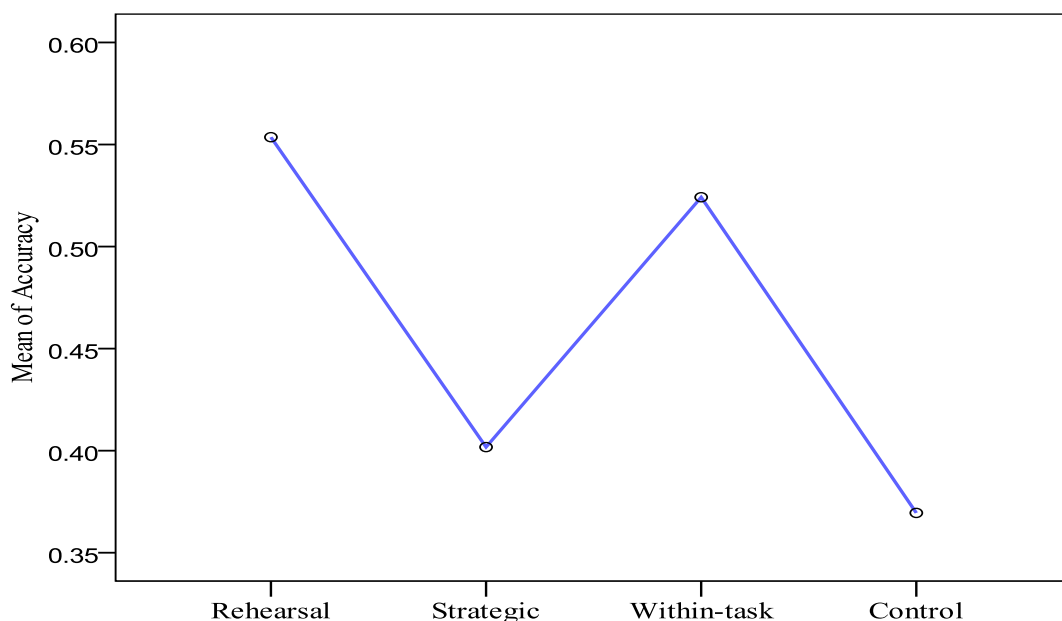


Figure 2. Line graph for accuracy scores in the four groups

Because ANOVA does not tell us the exact location of the differences among the groups, we run Tukey's HSD, and the related results are provided in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6  
TUKEY'S HSD POST-HOC TESTS FOR MULTIPLE COMPARISONS OF FOUR GROUPS' ACCURACY SCORES

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Rehearsal	Strategic	.15183*	.02532	.000
	Within-task	.02942	.02532	.654
Strategic	Within-task	-.12242*	.02532	.000
Control	Rehearsal	-.18408*	.02532	.000
	Strategic	-.03225	.02532	.585
	Within-task	-.15467*	.02532	.000

The results of Tukey's HSD post-hoc Tests (see Table 6) detected a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores between the rehearsal group ( $M = .55$ ,  $SD = .06$ ) and control group ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .04$ ) with the mean difference of .18,  $p = .000$ ,  $p < .05$ , in which  $p$  value, .000 was less than .05; accordingly the first null hypothesis as "The rehearsal task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production" was rejected. Accordingly we could claim that the rehearsal task planning leads to accuracy in L2 oral production.

The results of Tukey's HSD post-hoc Tests, as appeared in Table 6, displayed that there was not a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores between the strategic group ( $M = .40$ ,  $SD = .05$ ) and control group ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .04$ ) with the mean difference of .03,  $p = .58$ ,  $p > .05$ , in which  $p$  value, .58 exceeded .05; in consequence, the second null hypothesis that says "The strategic task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production" was retained. Hence it was concluded that the strategic task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production.

Tukey's HSD post-hoc Tests (Table 6) found a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores between the unpressured within-task group ( $M = .52$ ,  $SD = .06$ ) and control group ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .04$ ) with the mean difference of .15,  $p = .000$ ,  $p < .05$ , in which  $p$  value, .000 was below .05; therefore the third null hypothesis as "The unpressured within-task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production" was rejected too. Subsequently it can be asserted that the unpressured within-task planning leads to accuracy in L2 oral production.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The research question of this study asked which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) leads to accuracy in L2 oral production. The results of the study detected a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores between the rehearsal group and control group. Accordingly the first null hypothesis as “The rehearsal task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production” was rejected. Accordingly we could claim that the rehearsal task planning leads to accuracy in L2 oral production. Considering the effect of rehearsal planning on the accuracy of L2 learners' production, the findings of this study supports the previous studies of Mojavezi (2013); Bohlool and Ghahramani (2013); Bamanger (2014); and Gashan and Almohaisen (2014).

The results displayed that there was not a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores between the strategic group and control group. In consequence, the second null hypothesis that says “The strategic task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production” was retained. Hence it was concluded that the strategic task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production. The results obtained in terms of the effect of strategic planning on the accuracy of L2 learners' oral production are in odds with the study conducted by Abdi et al., (2012) and Bagheri, Rasht, Hamrang and Tonekabon, (2013).

The results also showed a statistically significant difference in accuracy scores between the unpressured within-task group and control group. Therefore the third null hypothesis as “The within-task planning does not lead to accuracy in L2 oral production” was rejected too. Subsequently it can be asserted that the within-task planning leads to accuracy in L2 oral production. The results obtained in terms of the effect of unpressured within-task planning on the accuracy of learners' production are also in line with the results suggested by Ellis (2009b).

VII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The research question of this study asked which type of task planning (rehearsal, strategic and unpressured within-task) leads to accuracy in L2 oral production. The results revealed there is no significant difference mean between the accuracy of learners' oral production in strategic group than control group. Findings indicated that rehearsal group and within-task group have positive effect on the fluency of learners. Also learners' performance in the rehearsal group was the best and in the unpressured within-task group was the second best. Finding of the present study may have implication for language teachers and material developers. Teachers can use these three types of task planning in their daily teaching programs. Providing students with the opportunity to plan a task performance helps them to produce the language that is more accurate.

APPENDIX A. ACCURACY RESULTS IN THE FOUR GROUPS

N	Rehearsal	Strategic	Within-task	Control
1	0.47	0.47	0.49	0.40
2	0.58	0.37	0.62	0.37
3	0.49	0.42	0.49	0.41
4	0.62	0.32	0.60	0.30
5	0.56	0.43	0.54	0.34
6	0.54	0.38	0.58	0.38
7	0.46	0.43	0.46	0.35
8	0.66	0.48	0.54	0.44
9	0.62	0.38	0.45	0.38
10	0.54	0.34	0.48	0.34

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