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A comparison between Task Repetition and Task Sequencing, the Effects on L2 Students' Oral Performance

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ABSTRACT

In the past few decades, there is a change of teaching method from presentation, practice and production (PPP) to a more communicative approach in teaching. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a method, which allows learners to actively participate (Hashemi et al., 2012), and they will be given a more realistic situation for them to learn the target language. In Hong Kong, TBLT has been promoted, and its curriculum and guidelines have been changed and reviewed over the last decades (Carless, 2004). It can be defined that TBLT should be learner-centered and it should also develop learners' communicative competence (Curriculum development council, 2007). In this paper, our focus will be comparing task repetition and task sequencing. I would like to see which method will help a bigger improvement based on students' performance. In this research, 40 Hong Kong tertiary students were participated in an English speaking course, and they were divided into 2 groups. All of the students were non-language major. Those groups had been divided into two different teaching methods, which are task repetition and task sequencing. During the six-week course, students needed to submit their recordings in class. Their recordings were being codified and analyzed after each lesson. Students' performances were evaluated in three categories, which are fluency, complexity and accuracy (Skehan, 1998). Furthermore, the results were being compared by using T-test.

Keyword: TBLT, Task repetition, Task sequencing, Task performance

Introduction

In the past few decades, there is a change of teaching method from presentation, practice and production (PPP) to a more communicative approach in teaching. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a method, which allows learners to actively participate (Hashemi et al., 2012), and they will be given a more realistic situation to learn the target language. In Hong Kong, TBLT has been promoted, and its curriculum and guidelines have been changed and reviewed over the last decades (Carless, 2004). TBLT should be learner-centered and it should also develop learners' communicative competence (Curriculum development council, 2007). In TBLT, there are several approaches to teach learners, such as task repetition and task sequence.

Some scholars claim that task repetition can enhance students' accuracy and fluency. This is due to the fact that learners can familiarize themselves with the content of the pervious task (Fukuta, 2015), and then they can formulate their language structure to finish the task in their second performance (Bygate, 2001; Ellis, 2003). Although students may speak fluently, their speech may contain a lot of errors. Willis and Willis (2007) suggested that using a systematic complete task sequence, it can enhance students' performances. For example, introducing some common grammatical mistakes during the

pre-task stage (Doughty and Williams 1998). As a result, students will pay attention to the related details while achieving their tasks (Robinson, 2003).

Both task repetition and task sequencing have relevant research to evaluate their overall outcomes in students' performance, but there is lack of research in comparing these two teaching methods' outcomes. Therefore, in this paper, the focus will be on the improvement of those two groups of students, who were being taught in either task repetition or task sequence.

Literature Review

Definition of Task

There are several scholars who have put their own definition into task. The most common quote is from Long (1985), which referred task as something that did for others, for example, making an airline reservation. Therefore, "task" was meant something that is done in everyday life (Long, 1985). Based on this definition, scholars further elaborate on the definition of "task". For instance, "task" uses in the classroom, and allows learners to interact or manipulate the target language (Nunan, 1989). Hence, "task" should be primary focus on meaning (Skehan, 1998). As a result, "task" is something that can be used in classroom teaching, and it should be able to create a real purpose for language use (Hashemi et al., 2012). Moreover, the tasks, which implemented in the lessons, should be related to real life settings, so that students can learn within their own area of interest (Hashemi et al., 2012).

Task Repetition

Levelt's (1989) speech production model is the base of how task repetition function among students. According to Levelt (1989), language production system can be divided into three parts, which are the conceptualizer, the formulator and the articulator. Speaker will start with conceptualize the information by selecting the related material to be encoded and decided the sequence of the information. After that, the conceptualizer will pass the information to formulator. The formulator will select the appropriate lexical units and using grammatical and phonological rules. Finally, the articulator will articulate the linguistic units as sound. These are the basic processes which undergo by a monolingual speaker, but task repetition allows speakers to finish part of the processes in their first performance (Bygate and Samuda, 2005). After finishing some of the steps, some of the materials are store in memories and they can be reused in the second occasion (Bygate and Samuda, 2005). Therefore, task repetition is useful for learners to improve their performance in their second attempt (Fukuta, 2015).

There are some studies which are related to the effects from task repetition. Bygate (1996) explored the effect of task repetition on L2 cognitive processes. The study required students to watch a video for about a minute and a half, and they were asked to produce their speech immediately (Bygate, 1996). After that, students watched the video for the second time, and they were asked to do the same thing after watching the second time (Bygate, 1996). The result showed that students can produce more complex sentence structure than pervious, and they can reuse the material from the initial experience (Bygate, 1996). This has proven that the effectiveness of task repetition on attention to linguistic form (Bygate, 1996).

In a study from Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres and Fernandez-Garcia (1999), they have done a similar task from Bygate (1996), but they have repeated the task for four times. The result showed that students' overall performance, such as proficiency, accuracy in morphosyntax, has been increased (Gass et.al, 1999). Students used less common words

after repeat the task for four times which means their lexical variety has been enhanced (Gass et al., 1999).

Task repetition can also enhance students' fluency and complexity. In a study from Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011), they used task repetition as a pre-task planning, and they found that task repetition can bring positive impacts in both complexity and fluency. This is due to the fact that students have finished their conceptualize step in their first performance, so during their second attempt, they did not need to pay much attention to the meaning (Ahmadian and Tavakoli, 2011). Moreover, some of the materials have been memorized during the first attempt, and they can be reused in their second attempt (Ahmadian and Tavakoli, 2011).

Task sequencing

As for task sequencing, scholars mainly focus on form for the input before carrying the task. This can help students to aware of the form in a specific context (Robinson, 2005) and successfully accomplish the target task (Skehan, 1998). Having task sequencing in teaching, it can build up a course syllabus for students to learn (Long, 1985). In the past, some scholars proposed that a task-based syllabus should be developed and sequenced, so that it could be relevant to real-world tasks (Robinson & Ross, 1996).

Highly-structured approach, such as Willis's framework (1996), can provide ways for teacher to frame up classroom activities, but task-based teaching is more than just using pre-, during- and post-task. With the large range of tasks selection, they should be implemented more flexibly so that they could adapt to a diversity environment (Norris, 2009). However, feedbacks are essential during the lesson, such as recasts, brief grammatical explanation (Norris, 2009). Those kinds of feedbacks can build a greater awareness in language, and they allow learners to use them in practical settings (Norris, 2009).

Since Nunan's opinion (1989) came across, some scholars proved that task-based teaching can focus on form explicitly without affect the communicative purpose (Swain, 1997). Task sequence can be divided into focus on form and focus on meaning, and those sequences had been put into real classroom setting for experiment (Swain, 1998). Students were able to construct the meaning and focus on form while they were performing the task (Swain, 1998). Swain and Lapkin (2001) further propose that in their study, the dictogloss task type would allow students to pay more attention on form rather than the jigsaw task (Pica et al., 1993).

Research Hypothesis

Based on Ahmadian and Tavakoli's findings in 2011, task repetition can enhance students' complexity and fluency. It can be seen that task repetition has more positive effects on students' performance, since this method allows students to repeat and redo the task again (Fukuta, 2015). However, in this paper, I would like to focus on comparing both task repetition and task sequence. Therefore, there are several hypotheses that I would like to discuss in this paper which I hope this can compare both the outcomes of task repetition and task sequence.

- 1) Task repetition is a more effective method than task sequence in enhancing students' fluency.
- 2) Task repetition is a more effective method than task sequence in enhancing students' accuracy.
- 3) Task repetition is a more effective method than task sequence in enhancing students' complexity.

- 4) Task sequencing can help students to aware the linguistic features, such as grammar, comparing with task repetition.

Methodology

There were two groups of participants. The first group was using task repetition as the main stream of teaching, whereas the other group was using task sequencing, which is based on Willis's framework (1996).

Participants and setting

There were 40 participants in this research, and they were divided into two classes, which will be 20 people for each class. The participants were mainly university students, who were not major in English. Due to the fact that English major students may have a bigger advantage in tackling the task, this may affect the whole purpose of this research. The age range of those students was between 18 and 23, and they were learning English as a second language. For the background of the participants, they have taken 12 years of English lessons in primary and secondary school. Before the first lesson, they will take an IELTS listening test to show their English proficiency level.

The data-collecting procedures held in a small tutorial classroom in university. The classes had lasted for 6 weeks including the data collection process and students' feedback and discussion session. For the last week (Week 6), students can discuss their thoughts or anything with the teacher and their peers. Students were required to attend the class every week (See Table 1). I had conducted those lessons for 6 weeks, and after every lesson. I collected students' recordings for checking their progress and performance. The tasks were mainly communicative activities, such as picture descriptions, retelling the story, retelling the news and commenting on an issue. All the data was recorded into a recorder, and they were transmitted to the computer for transcriptions and coding.

Design

The research was being conducted by using two different experimental classes. The lessons were divided into four categories, but the methods of teaching for both groups were different. Class A consisted of a pre-task session at the beginning and a post-task session at the end, and the task was not repeated in the following week. As for Class B, their task was being repeated in the following week (See table 1).

Table 1
Experimental Classes

	Class A (task sequence)	Class B (task repetition)
Week 1 (Task 1)	Picture description	Picture description
Week 2 (Task 2)	Retelling story	Picture description & Retelling story
Week 3 (Task 3)	Retelling news	Retelling story & Retelling news
Week 4 (Task 4)	Comment on an issue	Retelling news & Comment on an issue
Week 5	Sum up this workshop	Presentation & Sum up this workshop
Week 6	Feedback and discussion	Feedback and discussion

Due to the fact that those are monologue tasks, students only needed to work by themselves. Those recordings from students were not being graded or taken account into their grade point average (GPA), so students' performance were not being forced or

controlled. As for the data collecting sessions, the students were asked to record their speaking with their own cellphone or a recorder from the teacher. All of the students, who attended the class, recorded their speaking task during the lesson, and sent it to their teacher in class.

Measures

In this research, I am focusing on three variables to judge students' performance, and they are fluency, accuracy and complexity.

The measurement of fluency was according to the number of pauses. The pause was only being recognized if it was longer than 0.4 seconds (Skehan, 1998). The measurement of complexity was based on the total number of clauses divided by the total number of AS-units (Foster et al., 2000). An AS-unit is related to a speaker's utterance, which contains an independent clause or sub-clausal unit (Foster et al., 2000). However, the utterance should contain a finite verb in order to become an AS-unit. For example, "Peter goes ::: to sleep ::: a . (2 clauses, 1 AS-unit)", using "::::" to signify independent clause, whereas "::::" to signify dependent clause. As for dependent clause, there were three different types, which were before (b), middle (m) and after (a). The minimum of the complexity score was 1.00. The measurement of accuracy was based on the error clauses divided by the total clauses. Those error clauses contained syntax error clause (err_m_s), pronunciation error clause (err_m_p), morphology error clause (err_m_m) and lexis error clause (err_m_l). If the clause was error free, the coder put errfr to signify an error free clause.

Analysis

This study used SPSS to organize all the collected data. The data was calculated and compared by using the T-test. Moreover, a task profile programme was used to analysis all the coded files, such as the number of words per minutes, formality, accuracy, complexity. There was also a modified calculator to calculate students' lexical density.

Findings

To begin with, the scores for accuracy in each class can be seen in table 2. The maximum score for accuracy is 1.00, and it can show the trends of each group. It can be easily spotted that students' accuracy score fluctuated in Class A, whereas in Class B, it maintained a steady rate between 0.42 and 0.48. In order to check whether the means for both groups were statistically significant, an Independent Samples T-test was being carried out. The result can be seen in table 3.

Table 2
Students' Overall Accuracy Performance (Means)

Classes	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
A (Task sequence)	.40	.53	.37	.34
B (Task repetition)	.48	.44	.45	.43

Table 3
Independent Samples Test for Class A and B (Accuracy)

	T-test for equality of Means			
	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Task 1	-2.265	38	.029	-.08850
Task 2	2.263	38	.032	.09395
Task 3	-2.117	38	.041	-.06705
Task 4	-2.154	38	.038	-.09615

It can be seen that all the means for both groups were statistically significant. This result can further strengthen Gass et al (1999) study, which their results showed that by using task repetition, students' accuracy in target language has increased. By comparison, this also emphasizes task repetition can help students to achieve better accuracy performance in oral.

The second comparison between task repetition and task sequence is fluency. In this study, students' fluency performance was measured by two variables, which were lexical density and words per minutes (WPM). The maximum score for lexical density is 100, whereas WPM does not contain any maximum score. WPM depends on the spontaneity of students' oral performance. Table 3 and 4 show the mean score for both classes in lexical density and WPM, whereas table 5 and 6 show the T-test results for both classes.

Table 3
Students' Overall lexical density (Means)

Classes	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
A (Task sequence)	45.97	44.70	48.55	47.70
B (Task repetition)	48.86	47.88	44.87	45.08

Table 4
Students' Overall words per minutes (Means)

Classes	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
A (Task sequence)	89.01	84.61	82.44	79.02
B (Task repetition)	105.09	97.04	104.24	89.77

Table 5
Independent Samples Test for Class A and B (Lexical Density)

	T-test for equality of Means			
	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Task 1	-2.197	38	.034	-2.88750
Task 2	-2.151	25.410	.041	-3.17700
Task 3	2.857	38	.007	3.68500
Task 4	2.784	38	.008	2.61350

Table 6
Independent Samples Test for Class A and B (Words per minutes)

	T-test for equality of Means			Mean difference
	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	
Task 1	-2.098	38	.043	-16.08780
Task 2	-2.109	24.253	.045	-12.43615
Task 3	-4.552	38	.000	-21.79680
Task 4	-2.124	26.179	.043	-10.74835

The T-test results have shown that the means for both lexical density and WPM were statistically significant. However we do not know whether students were more fluent in Class B. This is due to the fact that class A's students produced more words than students in class B. Therefore, we cannot really confirm the first hypothesis which we will discuss in the discussion section.

The last finding is about students' complexity performance. The complexity scores were calculated by the number of clauses divided by the total AS units in the text (Foster et al., 2000). Therefore, the minimum score for each student should be at least 1.00. Table 7 shows the mean score for both classes, whereas table 8 shows the T-test result.

Table 7
Students' Overall Complexity Performance (Means)

Classes	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
A (Task sequence)	1.34	1.56	1.43	1.37
B (Task repetition)	1.47	1.40	1.55	1.51

Table 8
Independent Samples Test for Class A and B (Complexity)

	T-test for equality of Means			Mean difference
	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	
Task 1	-2.416	25.050	.023	-.12835
Task 2	2.243	38	.031	.15880
Task 3	-2.189	30.846	.036	-.12205
Task 4	-2.194	28.869	.036	-.13875

In table 8, the T-test shows that the means in table 7 were statistically significant. Therefore, in an overall point of view, the trend tends to indicate that class B has a better score than class A.

Discussion

Both Teaching Methods have Their Advantages

In my first hypothesis, which is task repetition is a better method in enhancing students' fluency performance, this is only partially correct. Students tended to produce more utterance in task repetition class, because they have a second opportunity to reproduce their task. Therefore, class B's students have better score in WPM than class A's students. However, students may just speak less spontaneous, their utterances may not

contain any meanings. Lexical density can show the text packages of information (O'Halloran, 2005), and it can also accurately justify students' fluency performance. It is quite interesting to find out that the means in lexical density (see table 3) fluctuated among both classes. For the first two tasks, class B had a higher density than class A, whereas for the last two tasks, class A had a better score.

The reason for this phenomenon is due to the familiarity of the topics. In class A, teacher provided some background information during the pre-task section, and this allowed students to have a better in-sight in that topic, especially in Task 3 retelling the news activity. However, for class B, they do not really have a pre-task section. The only advantage that class B had was allowing them to repeat again. Therefore, students do not have a lot of ideas in tackling or understanding the task. This leads to students in class can only base on their experience to perform the task, and their fluency scores become fluctuated.

Overwhelming results in both accuracy and complexity

The means scores have provided us with an overwhelming result. In both accuracy and complexity performances, class B's students achieved a better result than class A's students. This has further proven that task repetition can enhance students' linguistic performance, because they had a second chance to redo the task (Bygate, 1996; Gass et al., 1999; Fukuta, 2015). There are some linguistic features that students were able to correct and modify in their second attempt.

Extract 1: Class B's student picture descriptions

I think it want to play with the Bowie because it pick up a ball and go to Bowie side I think it want to play with Bowie. (First attempt)

There is a man who wears the cap is dealing with the bulb decorations but unfortunately the bulb is falling down on the floor. (Second attempt)

Those sentences were extracted from one of the students in class B. It can be clearly seen that she made some grammatical adjustments in her second attempt picture description.

As for class A's students, most of them often forget those grammatical features, such as third person singular, plural.

Extract 2: Class A's student picture description

Ken try to fix it out and try to turn the light on but still cannot turn on the light so he try to take a chair under the light and step on it and try to fix the bulb and suddenly there is a dog which is a monkey.

Since they do not have another attempt to the same task, students often regret after they noticed they had made some mistakes in their oral tasks.

As in complexity, students in class B allow to repeat the same task often resulted in higher complexity score. This is due to the fact that they do not need to produce their utterance "on the spot" (O'Halloran, 2005), whereas class A's students need to speak immediately and cannot repeat again. For students in class B, they can treat their first attempt as a rehearsal, and during their second attempt, they will try to modify the nouns or build up their sentences.

Extract 3: Class B's student retelling news

Hong Kong is afraid for the new dragon baby overload in the coming dragon years the pregnant Mainlanders is keep coming except to travel to Hong Kong to give

birth to that dragon baby the dragon is traditionally associated with emperor power. (First attempt)

This is a news about travelling Hong Kong to give birth the news about year of dragon in Fung Shi it's believe that baby who born in year of dragon will have the emperor power and none of this we don't have it emperor power but we still means they will have a good fortune and prosperity so not only the mainland China the Hong Kong people they are tend to have baby in this year. (Second attempt)

The above example shows that the second attempt for students can help them to rethink and modify their performance. Moreover, retelling news needs students to use another way to present their information. For example they need to speak in a more formal perspective and they cannot add anything irrelevant into the news. Therefore, students in class A can only produce simple sentences in their task, and this leads to low scoring in complexity. However, in class B, they have one more chance to redo the task, this allows them to modify their speech.

Students' Awareness in Linguistic Features

In my last hypothesis, those students, who studied in task sequence class, should be more aware of those linguistic features, such as grammars or sentence structure. However, the result shows that students in class B, which is the task repetition class, had a better score in grammar accuracy (see table 2). Although students in class A had more time discussing linguistic issues in class, they cannot use them in reality.

As for class B, they had a more steady score in accuracy compared to class A. However, there is an interesting phenomenon in class B. After their second attempt, students tended to over correct their mistakes in order to meet teacher's expectation. This is similar to Lightbown and Spada (2006) data in overgeneralization errors. Students in class B tended to emphasis too much on the third person singular issue, so in their speech, they overused the third person singular "-s" marker.

Extract 4: Class B's student picture description

Let's looks at the surroundings environment of the house from the picture we can see that it's a television placed on the cardboard while at the middle there is a lamp stands on the floor well from right hand side there are two pictures hangs on the floor

Those errors indicate that students understand the grammatical structure in English, but they overused them. This is a typical phenomenon that happens among L2 speaker. They got confused with their native language, and then they over correct their mistakes (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Conclusion & Limitation

To conclude, in this study, the result shows that task repetition is a more effective method in enhancing students' accuracy, complexity and fluency. However, in some occasions, task sequence has its own advantages, such as providing more information about the task to students. In some occasions, such as story-telling (Task 2), class A's students can perform better than class B's students in complexity. Therefore, in real classroom situation, teacher should provide enough practice time for students, but also teacher should provide enough background information for students during the per-task stage.

Furthermore, this study is just a six-week study, and there are still some limitations that need further investigations. Learning English is a long way, and students need time to adapt teachers' teaching methods. Therefore, longitudinal studies are needed for evaluating the effectiveness of both task repetition and task sequence. For example, the research can be held throughout an academic year to compare the result of students from task repetition class and task sequence class. Also, this study only focus on English learning, it can be expanded to different types of language learning, such as Korean, Chinese. Researchers can try to investigate whether Task-Based Language Teaching can teach other second languages or even mother tongue. Lastly, this study only focuses on students' oral performance, other aspects still need to discuss and examine in the future, such as writing task.

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