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THE EFFECT OF TASK REPETITION AND FOCUSED FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS' ACCURACY: A CASE STUDY OF INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effect of task repetition and focused feedback on students' accuracy. The students' language output that was investigated included: two writing tasks, one oral task, and one written post-test. Students' writings and were analyzed and the level of accuracy was measured, which was based on the ratio of the correct use of the targeted structure. T-test for paired samples and ANOVA with Repeated Measure were used to see if there were any significant differences between the means. The findings found that learners with low writing skills were the ones who gained the benefits the most, which were shown from the improvement in sentence structure and the number of the target structure produced.

Keywords: task repetition, feedback, accuracy, present verb, subject

1. Introduction

In an attempt to leave behind the traditional grammar teaching, which was generally based on textbook, communicative-based teaching was introduced to a grammar class in the institution A 2 years ago. Based on the questionnaire that was distributed at the end of the program, it was revealed that the students found the grammar class enjoyable. They stated that through the new activities, grammar was no longer boring and difficult, which was how they perceived grammar prior to the treatment. However, it was found out that even though the students were excited in learning grammar through communicative activities, their language output, both oral and written, showed a lot of grammatical inaccuracies. Further efforts, ones that incorporate communicative activities to practice the grammar point and, at the same time, train the students to produce better, more accurate language output, need to be done.

For almost two decades, a number of scholars have investigated the effect of task repetitions on students' language output (Gass, et.al, 1999; Bygate, 2001; Ahmadian, 2011; Hawkes, 2012; Bohlool dan Ghahramani , 2013; Jung, 2013) and some others showed certain advantages related to focused feedback (Ellis, et.al, 2008; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2009, Sheen, et.al, 2009; Farrokhi, 2012). This study aimed to explore the effects of task repetition and focused direct feedback on the same type of task.

2. Literature review

Bygate and Samuda (2005) defined task repetition as asking learner to do the same or altered task at certain interval, say a week or two, or at the same session. In task repetition, the first task is seen as planning or pre-task (Ellis, 2005).

Bygate (2001) described language processing and problems that second language learner encounter during the processing as the initial reason for task repetition. Oral language processing comes in three stages: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. Conceptualization refers to forming the content and structure of message. Formulation deals with accessing, categorizing, and arranging morphemes and collocation based on the message to be delivered. Articulation is the physical production of the utterance plan, which includes rhythm, stress, and intonation that are previously selected during the formulation stage. During these three stages, second language learner needs to deliver the message that they want to say with limitation in language formulation, under the pressure to produce utterance. Problems arise when there isn't enough linguistic knowledge stored in the mind to formulate the message that they want to express, leading them to reform and restructure the message. When the same task is repeated, the load of message processing is considered less, since the message processing of the first task is still in memory. Hence, learners have more attention spare for formulation and articulation stages, leading them to: 1) speak more fluently, 3) produce utterance more accurately, or 3) use more complex vocabulary or structures.

Skehan (1998) also stated that learners' processing capacity was limited and they were not able to pay attention to form and meaning at the same time. This limitation leads to 'trade off" effect (Skehan, 1998), that is learners choose the aspect that they want to highlight in their utterance, and by doing so, sacrifice the other aspects. When they choose to be fluent in delivering their message, they will likely produce less accurate language or less complex vocabulary or structure. When they choose to be accurate or use more complex vocabulary or structure, they will likely become less fluent. During the first task, learners usually focus more on forming the message that they want to send, so they tend to choose meaning over form. When the same task is repeated, learners have opportunities to reconstruct or reformulate their language. Hence, learners might gain advantage in one or more of these aspects: fluency, accuracy, and/or complexity.

Besides task repetition, another attempt that has been done to encourage learners to produce a more accurate language is through corrective feedback. The efficacy of feedback has been the subject of debates among scholars, with Truscott (1996) as one of the earliest who questioned the efficacy of feedback towards language acquisition. He argued that giving feedback might result in less mistakes found in the next draft, but it had no effect to a new piece of writing. Learners might avoid using the problematic structure to avoid making mistakes. It that case, Truscott saw giving feedback as not only useless but also harmful. Ferris (1999, as quoted in Ferris, 2004) rebutted this argument by saying that it depended on the quality of feedback. As long as feedback was given consistently and clearly, she claimed, it would lead to improvement, and at the end, acquisition. Truscott (1999) responded that Ferris had no proofs for her claim.

Still, there are many scholars who are in favor of giving feedback, and recent issues focus more on which type of feedback is the most effective. Related to the strategies of giving feedback, feedback is seen as either:1) direct, or 2) indirect (Ellis, 2009). Direct feedback means providing learner with the correct form, while indirect feedback means giving some indication or sign where mistakes are located. Metalinguistic feedback is generally considered as direct feedback, and recast is seen as indirect feedback. Based on the focus of the feedback, feedback is either seen as: a) focused – the feedback is directed

at one problem, or b) unfocused – the feedback is directed at all of or majority of the problems found. It is generally believed that focused feedback is more effective because learners can pay attention on fixing certain target structure.

The efficacy of feedback can be seen from modification that the students perform to the structure given feedback. If the learner reacts towards the feedback by modifying the structure in question, then the feedback is considered effective. This is what is called as 'uptake' (Elllis, et.al, 2001a). According to Ellis et.al, uptake is a reaction towards an act done by other people (mostly teachers), who inform learners about some linguistic elements, explicitly or implicitly. This view was somewhat different from Lyster and Ranta (1997), who emphasized that uptake has to be initiated by a feedback. Lyster and Ranta, therefore, didn't classify 'self-initiated repair' as an uptake.

However, Ellis, et.al (2001b) warned that a learner's successful uptake doesn't mean that the form has been acquired, but it mostly indicates that the form has been 'noticed' by the learner. A number of scholars (Ellis, 2009; Bitchener, 2005; Ferris and Roberts, 2001, and Chandler, 2003) highlighted the role of revision in improving the writing's quality. Ellis (2009) stated that after giving feedback, teacher needed to provide some opportunities for the learners to react towards the feedback. Ellis argued that revising drafts that had been given feedback would lead learners to 'notice' the feedback and revise their mistakes. This view is in line with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990, 2001), which emphasizes that a learner needs to 'notice' input in order for it to be acquired.

A number of studies (Gass, et.al, 1999; Bygate, 2001; Ahmadian, 2011; Hawkes, 2012; Bohlool dan Ghahramani , 2013; Jung, 2013) have revealed some mixed results for task repetitions,   and some others showed certain advantages related to focused feedback (Ellis, et.al, 2008; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2009, Sheen, et.al, 2009; Farrokhi, 2012). Gass, et.al (1999) investigated the effect of task repetition on Spanish language learners' linguistic output. Gass et.al.'s study examined whether task repetition resulted in a more sophisticated language and whether it could lead to a more accurate language use in a new context. The findings showed some positive effect to proficiency in general. Ahmadian (2011) investigated the effect of massed task repetition on students' oral performance and a new task. The results showed significant improvement on fluency and complexity but not accuracy. Jung (2013) studied the effect of task repetition on 6 Korean university students in Midwest, the U.S. He divided the 6 students into 3 treatment groups (task repetition and feedback, task repetition without feedback, and feedback without task repetition) and 1 control group (without feedback and task repetition). Students were asked to write for 30 minutes, and they received unfocused feedback, which covered lexical, morphologic, and syntactical items. The result revealed some benefits for groups with repetitions. For further studies, Jung suggested the use of focused feedback on certain target structure(s), so that the students would focus on fixing the mistakes.

Related to focused direct feedback, Ellis, et.al (2008) investigated the effect of focused and unfocused direct feedback on the use of article "a" and "the". They divided the students into 3 treatment groups (focused direct feedback, unfocused direct feedback, and writing practice) and 1 control group. Students were asked to listen to a story (delivered by the teacher) and retell the story based on their notes. The study involved post-test and delayed post-test. The findings revealed that the students in focused direct feedback group outperformed the other three groups.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question was as follows:

1. Does task repetition and focused direct feedback improve students' accuracy when they perform the same type of task?

To answer the question, three written tasks (Task I, II, and written post-test) were compared.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted in Grammar I class, a compulsory course in which 24 first-semester university learners involved in this study enrolled. There were 20 female and 4 male learners. When the study was conducted, all participants have at least studied English formally for 12 years.

3.2 Design

The study followed a treatment and post-test design. During the treatment, the learners were asked to watch a video and write a narrative paragraph, and the activity was repeated a week later. The study also employed a mixed-method research design, in which both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection and analysis.

3.3 Task

Participants were asked to watch a 6-minute video and then write a narrative paragraph about the character's daily routines. Teacher provided a focused direct feedback to the first writing. The activities were repeated a week later. In the written post-test, they were asked to write a narrative paragraph about someone's daily routines based on the timetable given.

The learners' writings from 3 written tasks (Task I, II, and written post-test) were then analyzed. The accuracy ratio was calculated based on the number of the correct target structures divided by the number of both correct and incorrect target structures produced.

3.4 Target Structure

The targeted structure was simple present verbs for third singular subjects. This was not the first time the participants encountered the structure since they have studied it during their high school days. However, the structure was chosen because it is one of the English structures that is notoriously difficult to internalize.

4. Results and discussion

Three writing tasks (Task I, II, and written post-test) were analyzed and the accuracy rates were counted. The accuracy was based on the number of the correct target structure produced divided by the number of both correct and incorrect target structures found in the writing. Below is the accuracy rates achieved of the three written tasks.

Table 1. Accuracy rates for three written tasks

NO.	NAME	TASK I (%)	TASK II (%)	POST-TEST (%)
1	S1	57.1	46.4	58.8
2	S2	57.1	33.3	50.0
3	S3	72.7	75.9	50.0
4	S4	75.0	83.3	83.3
5	S5	87.5	91.3	88.9
6	S6	93.3	93.8	84.6
7	S7	83.3	62.5	81.8
8	S8	88.9	96.0	100.0
9	S9	50.0	16.7	16.7
10	S10	0.0	23.5	40.0
11	S11	0.0	11.8	40.0
12	S12	16.7	63.2	30.0
13	S13	70.3	88.9	91.9
14	S14	88.2	85.3	100.0
15	S15	69.2	82.4	83.3
16	S16	100.0	96.7	83.3
17	S17	95.2	89.2	93.8
18	S18	94.7	91.4	100.0
19	S19	92.9	93.8	100.0
20	S20	40.0	94.7	40.0
21	S21	93.3	90.3	100.0
22	S22	72.2	72.7	100.0
23	S23	73.7	96.0	88.9
24	S24	50.0	47.1	62.5

The table shows that basically there is almost no major fluctuation, except for S20, and that majority of the students' accuracy rates for three tasks tend to be static. Twenty five percents students performed better during the post-test, which were indicated by the highest accuracy rate (100%).

Tabel 2. T-test for Task I and II

Variable	t	df	sig (1-tailed)	mean diff.
accuracy	1.29	46	0.1033	5.21
fluency	4.53	46	0.0001	3.21

T-test was performed to see any significant change in the students' writing. Table 2 shows that there is no significant improvement in accuracy aspect, with sig 0.1033 ($> \rho = 0.05$). In fact, there is some significant change in fluency aspect, as indicated by sig value 0.0001 ($<(> \rho = 0.05$).

Table 3. ANOVA for Task I, II, and written post-test

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Treatment	474.9558	2	237.478	1.37	0.264279
Ss/BI	44651.5721	23			
Error	7998.4308	46	173.879		
Total	53124.9587	71			

The result of ANOVA for Repeated Measure shows that there is no significant difference among the three written tasks, since P = 0.26 (> ρ= 0.05), and F =1.37.

Although the quantitative analysis reveals no significant difference among the written tasks, a closer look to one the learners' writings for the three written tasks shows some improvement in spelling and verb structure when the learner met the same word.

Table 4. Comparison of three written tasks of S1

Task I	Task II	Post-test
*...Then she **preapers** for breakfast.* *...She **is preapers** milks….*	*...After that he **prepares** go to work.* *... He **prepares** for go to the river.*	*… Then she **prepares** for breakfast time.*

From Table 4, it can be seen that S1 was not able to write the correct inflectional form of "prepare" in Task I, but he could write the form well in Task II and written post-test. Further investigation towards the learners' writing tasks also reveals some syntactical changes that the learners made in Task II and post-test.

Table 5. Comparison of three written tasks of S15

Task I	Task II	Post-test
*. And than **make has** breakfast. **Enter** the rooms. **Turn** of the music. Her hair.*	*In the morning **he wakes** up at 6.45. after that, **he does** some exercise yoga. Next **he makes** coffee,…..*	*.. **she goes** to school. Second**, she has** lunch chicken… **She has** piano lesson.*

As Table 5 shows, S15 produced some fragmented sentences in Task I. The writing of Task II shows that the student managed to fix the syntactical problems, and the improvement was maintained during post-test.

Based on the gap of the accuracy rates between Task I and II, the learners were put into 3 groups: 1) Group I (highest increase in accuracy – above 10%), 2) Group II (the increase/decrease in accuracy rates within 10%), and 3) Group III (highest decrease in accuracy – above 10%). **Group I** consisted of S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S20, S23, and S24. **Group II** had the most members; they were S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S14, S16, S17, S18, S19, S21, and S22. **Group III,** the one with the least members, consisted of S2, S7, and S9. A further look into their writings of Task I and II was then performed to see how they achieved such results.

Based on the writings produced for Task I and II, learners in Group I mostly consisted of those with low writing skills and grammar knowledge, which were reflected from simple sentence structures used and syntactical problems found in the writing. As

such, they tended to produce short writing. Learners in Group I didn't produce the target structure as many as the other groups, and the correct target structures tended to be limited in certain verbs only. However, since their writing was short, the learners might have found it easier to locate mistakes in the target structure, hence resulting in higher accuracy rates.

Unlike those in Group I, learners in Group II were majorly those who had moderate writing skills and as well as grammar knowledge, which were shown from the complexity of sentence structures used. They could already compose complex and compound sentences, even though the two types of the sentences were yet to be discussed in the class. It seems that learners in Group II used the opportunity of doing Task II to be more detailed in writing the paragraphs, resulting in double amounts of word counts compared to what they had produced in Task I. The researchers in this study thought that the length of the writing, combined with complex sentence structures, might have decreased the learners' ability in identifying mistakes, hence resulting in insignificant improvement in accuracy. This was further proven with the post-test results. When the length of the writing was limited, learners had a better control over accuracy, resulting in a more accurate writing. Forty six percents of learners in Group II could even reach 100% accuracy rate for the target structure in the post-test writing.

Group III were those who experienced the biggest fall in accuracy rates. Two-third of learners in this group were the ones with low writing skills and grammar knowledge, which were reflected from many syntactical and spelling problems found in their writings. However, unlike Group II who sacrificed accuracy to achieve higher fluency, the writing length for Task II in Group III was actually not too different from Task I. When the researcher asked one of the learners in this Group, she admitted that she still had problems identifying which verbs should be added inflectional –s/es. Hence, limited understanding in grammar might be the cause that hindered Group III members from achieving improvement in accuracy.

Even though the quantitative analysis did not find any significant progress in accuracy, a closer look to the learners' writings, which can be seen in Tables 3 and 4, show that both Task II and the written post-test provided the learners with opportunities to meet the problematic structures, hence a chance to modify them. As was shown in Table 4, S1 was not able to write the correct inflectional form of "prepare" in Task I, but he was able to write it correctly and consistently in Task II and written post-test. Similar improvement also happened to S15, who previously wrote fragmented sentences in Task I but could fix the sentence structures and produce more targeted structures in Task II and the written post-test. These improvements indicate that task repetition had some positive effects on accuracy.

Based on these analyses, the researcher thought that had the learners been given time to proofread their writing after doing Task II, it might have resulted in a more significant improvement in accuracy. The proofreading could be made focused, in this case related to Subject- Verb agreement, so that the learners would find it easier to detect inaccuracy related to the targeted structure.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study validated Bygate's claim (2001) that task repetition leads to improvement on either accuracy, fluency, or complexity. In this case, majority of the students chose to use the opportunity of doing the same task to write as much as they could, which indicates improvement in fluency (Wolfe-Quintereo, et.al, 1998 as quoted in

VanderMolen, 2011) . However, by focusing their attention in developing fluency, there wasn't much attention directed at accuracy, resulting in insignificant progress in accuracy.

Related to focused direct feedback, the result of this study contradicted some previous researches (Ellis, et.al, 2008; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2009, Sheen, et.al, 2009, and Farrokhi and Sattarpour, 2012). The absence of proofreading and revision during the treatment was seen as the cause why the treatment didn't lead to a more significant improvement on accuracy.

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