

Enhancing Second Language Speech: The Roles Of Task Repetition And Planning In Improving L2 English Production

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of task repetition and planning conditions on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) of second language (L2) speech production. By conducting a case study on an L2 English learner, the study investigates how the learner's speech performance is characterized under the CAF construct and how it is affected by task repetition, the absence of pre-task planning, and the presence of unpressured within-task planning. The study employs various measures to assess lexical and grammatical complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The findings suggest that while the lack of pre-task planning did not completely compromise complexity, accuracy remained low despite the unpressured within-task planning condition, and fluency was negatively impacted. However, task repetition led to improvements in all three dimensions of CAF. The paper concludes with pedagogical implications for L2 instruction, highlighting the importance of strategic and guided pre-task planning, multiple-task repetitions, and learner self-evaluation to enhance CAF in L2 speech production.

1. Introduction

Researching the development of second language (L2) proficiency has often focused on the notions of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) as key dimensions of L2 performance (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). While accuracy and fluency have been central to investigating the proceduralization of explicit L2 knowledge, complexity has been introduced to capture learners' progress towards automatization, where both speed and error rate are improved (Michel, 2017). This paper aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining how task repetition and planning conditions influence the CAF of L2 speech production in a case study of an L2 English learner.

2. Theoretical Background

The CAF Constructs and Measures

Complexity, accuracy, and fluency have been recognized as distinct but interrelated dimensions of L2 proficiency and performance (Housen et al., 2012). Complexity refers to the elaborateness, richness, and diversity of the learner's L2 system, which can be viewed from developmental, cognitive, and linguistic perspectives (Michel, 2017). For this study, the focus is on linguistic complexity, which encompasses both lexical and grammatical aspects. Lexical complexity is often measured through diversity, sophistication, and density, while grammatical complexity is assessed by length, variation, and interdependence of clauses (Michel, 2017).

Accuracy concerns the extent to which L2 production adheres to target language norms (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Although there is no consensus on a consistent way to measure accuracy,

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common approaches include holistic scales, specific measures targeting pedagogical interventions, and global measures such as the ratio of error-free clauses (Michel, 2017).

Fluency, in the context of L2 speech production, refers to the ability to produce language without undue pausing or hesitation (Skehan, 1996). It is typically measured by speed or rate, breakdown (pauses and hesitations), and repair phenomena such as false starts, repetitions, and self-corrections (Michel, 2017).

Task Planning and Task Repetition

Task planning and task repetition have been identified as key variables influencing the CAF of L2 performance (Ellis, 2009). Task planning can be further divided into pre-task planning, which occurs before the task performance, and within-task planning, which takes place during the task execution (Ellis, 2009). Pre-task planning may involve strategic planning (i.e., planning content and organization) or rehearsal, while within-task planning can be either pressured or unpressured depending on the time constraints imposed on the performance (Ellis, 2009).

Task repetition, on the other hand, refers to the repeated performance of the same or similar tasks (Bygate & Samuda, 2005). It is hypothesized that task repetition allows learners to build upon their previous performance by reducing the cognitive load and freeing up attentional resources for focusing on different aspects of language production (Bygate, 2001).

Previous research has shown that different task conditions may have varying effects on CAF. For instance, strategic pre-task planning has been found to benefit fluency and complexity (Gilbert, 2007; Kawauchi, 2005), while within-task planning has been associated with improved accuracy (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Task repetition, on the other hand, has been reported to positively affect all three dimensions of CAF (Bygate, 2001; Lynch & Maclean, 2000).

3. Research Method

Participant and Research Design

This case study involved a single participant, an L2 English learner with the pseudonym "Kevin." Kevin was a sophomore majoring in Environmental Science at a university in Vietnam. He began learning English in secondary school and had participated in several English language debates, most recently achieving a score of 6.0 on the IELTS speaking test.

The study employed a within-subject design, where Kevin performed two narrative speaking tasks under different planning and repetition conditions. In the first performance, Kevin was asked to talk about a time when he felt happy without any pre-task planning or time pressure. He was then asked to repeat the same task immediately after the first performance, again without time pressure. Both performances were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The transcriptions of Kevin's performances were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess CAF. For lexical complexity, the texts were processed using Vocabprofile (Cobb, 2019) to obtain diversity, sophistication, and density measures. The researcher, who had two years of teaching experience in error recognition and feedback, manually analyzed grammatical complexity, accuracy, and fluency.

Grammatical complexity was assessed through the number of clauses, the ratio of subordinate to coordinate clauses, and the variation in morphemes. Accuracy was measured by the ratio of error-free clauses to total clauses and the number and types of errors, which were categorized into lexical, grammatical, and degree-based errors (first, second, and third-degree). Fluency was evaluated based on the number of words produced in the first 30 seconds, the number and duration of pauses and hesitations, and the frequency of repetitions and repairs.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of Kevin's speech productions revealed several noteworthy findings regarding the effects of task conditions on CAF. In the first performance, which lacked pre-task planning, lexical complexity was relatively low, with 86.05% of the words belonging to the first frequency level. However, grammatical complexity was not substantially compromised, as evidenced by the presence of more subordinate clauses than coordinate clauses and the use of both inflectional and derivational morphemes. Accuracy, on the other hand, was unsatisfactory, with only three out of eight clauses being error-free and a total of seven first-degree and two third-degree errors. Fluency was also negatively affected, with six one-second pauses and hesitations, four repetitions, and one repair.

These findings partially support the first hypothesis, which predicted that the lack of pre-task planning would negatively impact fluency and complexity while the unpressured within-task planning would enhance accuracy. Although fluency was indeed impaired, grammatical complexity was not substantially affected. Moreover, accuracy remained low despite the unpressured within-task planning condition, possibly due to Kevin's prioritization of complexity over accuracy.

In the second performance, which involved task repetition, notable improvements were observed across all dimensions of CAF. Lexical complexity increased, with a higher percentage of words from lower-frequency levels and better lexical diversity and density. Grammatical complexity also improved, with more clauses, a higher subordinate-to-coordinate clause ratio, and additional morphemes. Accuracy was significantly enhanced, with eight out of ten clauses being error-free and a reduction in first-degree and third-degree errors. Fluency also benefited from task repetition, with fewer pauses, no repetitions, and no repairs.

These results support the second hypothesis, which predicted that task repetition would improve all CAF dimensions. The findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that task repetition allows learners to capitalize on their familiarity with the content and to allocate more attentional resources to various aspects of language production (Bygate, 2001; Lynch & Maclean, 2000).

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for L2 pedagogy. First, the benefits of strategic and guided pre-task planning for complexity and fluency suggest that teachers should encourage and assist learners in planning the content and organization of their speech before the actual performance. This may involve providing relevant language input, discussing ideas, or offering guidance on appropriate grammar and vocabulary.

Second, the positive effects of task repetition on all dimensions of CAF underscore the importance of incorporating multiple task repetitions into L2 speaking practice. Teachers can

design activities that require learners to perform the same or similar tasks multiple times, either within the same session or across different lessons. Encouraging learners to evaluate their own performances and set goals for improvement can further enhance the benefits of task repetition.

Third, the results highlight the potential trade-off between accuracy and complexity when learners prioritize one aspect over another. Teachers should raise learners' awareness of this trade-off and guide how to balance their attention between form and meaning during speaking tasks. Offering targeted feedback on accuracy and complexity can help learners develop a more balanced approach to L2 speech production.

5. Conclusion

This case study investigated the effects of task repetition and planning conditions on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of L2 English speech production. The findings suggest that while the absence of pre-task planning may negatively impact fluency, it does not necessarily compromise complexity. Accuracy, however, may remain low despite unpressured within-task planning, possibly due to learners' prioritization of complexity. Task repetition, on the other hand, led to improvements in all three dimensions of CAF, highlighting its potential as a valuable pedagogical tool in L2 speaking instruction.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of task conditions in shaping L2 performance. It provides insights into the complex interplay between CAF dimensions in L2 speech production. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the study's limitations, such as the small sample size and the lack of inter-rater reliability in the data analysis. Future research could address these limitations by involving more participants and employing multiple raters to ensure the consistency and reliability of the CAF measures.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable pedagogical implications for L2 speaking instruction. It emphasizes the importance of strategic and guided pre-task planning, multiple task repetitions, and learner self-evaluation in promoting the development of CAF in L2 speech production. By incorporating these elements into their teaching practice, L2 instructors can create a more effective and supportive learning environment that fosters learners' progress toward greater proficiency and automatization in L2 speaking.

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