Effects of task repetition on EFL oral performance

There is considerable research into the effects of task repetition (TR) on second language (L2) performance but the results are not yet conclusive. However, some patterns are emerging in the findings such as TR in most cases seems to trigger more fluent language. Unfortunately, limited attention has been paid to L2 learners' perceptions of TR. In this study, 40 English as a foreign language (EFL) learners were asked to repeat a task, three days after they first performed the task. On both performances, they performed the task as soon as they received instructions. The results indicated that TR triggered more complex and fluent, but less accurate, narratives. Post-task interviews indicated that the majority of learners had positive attitudes towards TR; they were more confident second time around because of their familiarity with the task. The finding of the study that TR promoted fluency and accuracy might have some pedagogical implications for EFL teaching.

Key words: task repetition, complexity, accuracy, fluency, narrative

Introduction

Since the advent of task-based language teaching (TBLT), tasks have been used as a major and influential tool for promoting meaningful interaction in second language (L2) learning classrooms. A task refers to a classroom based activity that involves learners in comprehending and interacting in the target language (Nunan, 2006). Tasks engage L2 learners in meaning-focused activities and provide them with an opportunity to practise their target language. Tasks also provide L2 learners with an opportunity to refine their language. When L2 learners are engaged in language production, they seem to be "able to

1

utilize their own internal resources, via using them in production, to both construct and complexify their inter-languages" (Ellis, 2003, p. 115).

Similarly, the value of repeating a task in learning a second or foreign language has long been recognized by language teachers and researchers because task repetition (TR) is believed to "render a certain skill perfect" (Bei, 2013, p.11). TR involves L2 learners to repeat "the same or slightly altered tasks- whether whole tasks or parts of a task" (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p.43). TR is supposed to provide L2 learners with the opportunity to manipulate and channel learners' attentional resources (Ahmadian, 2011; Bygate, 2006; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Skehan, 2007) and enhance certain processing opportunities (Bygate & Samuda, 2005). Thus, TR may support L2 learners to produce more developed speech.

The logic underlying the belief that TR leads to better language performance is largely based on Levelt's (1989) speech production model, which has been adopted by most previous task based studies "as the theoretical anchor and a psycholinguistic framework for their investigation"(Ahmadian, 2011, p.270). According to Levelt, language speakers are complex information processors who can translate their thoughts, intentions, and feelings into articulated speech. Levelt's model describes speech production as an autonomous process, which proceeds in three overlapping stages: (a) conceptualisation, which provides general knowledge and discourse knowledge as an input to the next stage i.e. relevant information to be expressed are selected and prepared in the form of a preverbal message; (b) formulation, which translates the conceptual representation into linguistic structures; and (c) articulation, which transforms linguistic structures into actual speech. These three

stages are parallel processes in the speech of native speakers as native speakers are able to plan contents, organize language and make utterances simultaneously. However, in the speech of L2 speakers, it is not very clear whether these three stages are parallel processes or they might proceed step by step as a serial process. There are some arguments that it is more a matter of degree, and that it is unlikely that even elementary speakers can maintain fluency and continuity while adopting an entirely serial form of processing. Ellis (2005) suggests that, "rehearsal may provide an opportunity for learners to attend to all three components in Levelt's (1989) model- conceptualization, formulation, and articulation" (p.14).

Thus, it is assumed that repeated encounters with the same or similar communicative demands enhance L2 learners' ability to manage communicative situations (Bygate, 2001). L2 researchers perceive TR as a means of capturing learners' attention and practicing their processing skills. It is worth noting that during communication activities, L2 learners' attentional and processing capacity is inherently restricted i.e. L2 learners cannot focus both on form and meaning. However the repetition of the same or similar tasks may support them to "build upon what they have already done in order to buy time not only to do mental work on what they are about to communicate but also to access and (re)formulate words and grammatical structures more efficiently, effectively, and accurately"(Ahmadian, 2012, p.380). Thus, the first performance can be framed as preparation for a subsequent performance. TR seems to release L2 learners' processing capacities and enable the learners to pay attention to both task content and linguistic forms. This means, the learners have more processing space available for integrating new content

and also for formulating better language structures to accomplish the task in the repeated performance (Bygate, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Fukuta, 2016).

Thus, it is assumed that when L2 learners repeat the same or similar tasks, their attention can be devoted to different aspects of L2 performance. This means, TR enables L2 learners to integrate all three aspects of L2 performance: complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF), implying that TR promotes L2 acquisition. Actually, being able to integrate C, A, and F should be one of the objectives of L2 learning. In this context, complexity refers to the use of a wide range of structures and vocabulary; accuracy to the correct use of a language; and fluency to the ability to produce L2 with native-like rapidity without undue pausing, hesitation or reformulation. It is of prime importance in language learning to be competent enough to use the language with a high degree of CAF (Ellis, 2009). Most learners, who develop their proficiency, do actually improve on all three aspects. However, TBLT research has tended to concentrate on differences in CAF on particular performances, and that research has tended to find gains on one or two but rarely on all three measures. Therefore, Skehan (1998) put forward his 'Limited Attentional Capacity Model' and claimed that learners have limited information-processing capacity and resources. Therefore, when learners allot attentional resources to one dimension (e.g. complexity), this happens to the detriment of the other two (accuracy and fluency), suggesting that the prioritization on one aspect will hinder development in other areas. However, this does not mean that gains cannot be achieved on all three measures through a series of TR encounters, or that learners are normally unable to progress on all three

measures. Some task-based studies (e.g Bygate, 1996; Pirooz, Maleki & Hajimirzayee, 2014) have also reported that TR promotes all three measures in L2 performances.

However, it should be noted that previous studies have operationalised TR in different ways. While some researchers asked their participants to duplicate the whole task (e.g. Bygate, 1996; Pirooz, et al., 2014), some others focused only on task contents (e.g. Lynch & Maclean, 2000) or on procedural repetition (e.g Jung, Kim & Murphy, 2017). Similarly, some studies were only concerned with the impacts of repetition on the second performance (e.g Bygate, 1996; Pirooz, et al., 2014; Hawkes, 2012), whereas others observed the impacts over a more extended period (e.g Azizzadeh & Dobakhti, 2015; Baba & Nitta, 2010; Bygate & Samuda, 2005). Following Bygate (1996), in this study, participants were asked to repeat the whole task three days after they performed it. Thus, this study focused on the duplication of the whole task and it was only concerned with the impacts of TR on the second performance.

Empirical Background to the Study

The recent literature on TBLT has witnessed a growing interest in investigating the effects of TR on L2 performance. Bygate (1996) asked an L2 learner (English native speaker) to watch a video extract and narrate the story of the video immediately afterwards. The task was repeated without warning three days later. This form of repetition led to some improvement in fluency and accuracy, and a marked improvement in lexical repertoire suggesting that TR improves all three measures of language performance (CAF) simultaneously. Pirooz, et al. (2014) have recently replicated Bygate's study, in nearly the same experimental situation, with an L2 learner. The study mirrored Bygate's findings "in

terms of the participant's improvement of fluency, relative appropriateness for selecting more native-like words, phrases, and increase in the number of self-corrections"(p.13). However, it should be noted that both studies were limited to a single research participant. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the findings of these studies.

Lynch and Maclean (2000) also investigated TR effects on L2 oral performances and compared oral performances of two learners at markedly different levels of English proficiency. The participants were asked to take part in a poster presentation called 'poster carousal' task in which they responded to different visitors poster related questions posed by different visitors. Thus, unlike in Bygate's (1996) and Pirooz, et al.'s (2014) study, there was not a strict duplication of the task. Repetition was something more like recycling where the basic communication goal remains the same, but with variation in content and emphasis, depending on the visitor's questions. Also, there was almost no gap between the initial and repeated performances. The results indicated that students at all levels of proficiency benefitted with TR. Bei (2013) also explored the immediate effects of TR on the oral performances of two adult EFL learners with intermediate and high proficiency. However, TR was operationalised in a different way. The participants performed a narrative speaking task after watching a cartoon video clip and repeated their performance three times with no time gap in between, followed by a retrospective report in an interview. Contrary to Lynch and Maclean's findings, the high proficiency learner benefitted more from TR than the participant with intermediate proficiency. The results also revealed that TR triggered more fluent and accurate language but not more complex language. However, it should be noted that both studies were limited to only two research participants.

Similarly, Hawkes (2012) investigated the immediate effects of TR on L2 accuracy but TR was manipulated in a different way. In the study, Japanese students (aged 13–14 years) performed three different kinds of tasks (opinion exchange, descriptive and drawing) in pair. Unlike in most previous studies, participants had a form-focused activity (preceded by pre-task activity and main task); predetermined structures along with vocabularies were practiced, and they also received feedback on their initial performance before actually repeating the task. Consistent with Bei's (2013) finding, Hawke's study found that TR triggered more changes in accuracy. However, this might not be surprising given that the study included a form-focused phase along with a feedback session within the sequence of activities.

Some other studies have explored the impacts of TR over a more extended period. For instance, Bygate and Samuda (2005) compared the oral discourses of a group over a 10-week period. In the study, 14 non-native speakers of English were first asked to watch a short extract from a cartoon video and recount what they had seen to an interested listener; they repeated the task 10 weeks later without prior information. The results in the study were inconsistent with the previous studies reviewed above as the stories these students told the second time were not more accurate, though the stories contained more framing (framing refers to any language additional to the narrative contents) of the events (see Bygate & Samuda for detail). Similar effects of TR were reported in slightly different settings by Brijandi and Ahangari (2008), Azizzadeh and Dobakhti (2015) and Baba and Nita (2010). Brijandi and Ahangari (2008), worked with 120 intermediate level English as a second language (ESL) learners who were asked to repeat narrative, personal and problem-solving tasks a week after their initial work on the task. Azizzadeh and Dobakhti (2015)

worked with 40 Iranian high-intermediate EFL learners, who were tested three weeks after they had engaged in seven weeks of repetitive practice of narrative writing tasks. Meanwhile, Baba and Nitta (2010) conducted research over a full year to explore the effects of repeating a timed classroom activity on the written performance of 46 Japanese university EFL students. The first two studies demonstrated that TR triggered more fluent and complex, but not more accurate language. In contrast, Baba and Nitta (2010) reported that fluency of language construction seemed not to develop significantly but there was a significant improvement on grammatical complexity after the 30-week treatment.

Contrary to the studies reviewed above, which investigated the effects of TR on the same or a similar kind of task performance, some other studies have explored whether the effects of TR of the same task carry over to performance of a new task. This raises the concern that if positive effects accruing from TR do not transfer to new task performance, its contribution to second language acquisition (SLA) and inter-language development could be called into question (Ahmadian, 2011). Thus, Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres and Fernández-García's (1999) study not only investigated whether repeating (both same and slightly altered) tasks triggers more sophisticated language use but also whether or not more accurate and/or sophisticated language use carries over to a new context. L2 learners of Spanish, were asked to watch snippets from "Mr. Bean" videos, which contained no audio. They watched the video segments four times with two to three days gap between each viewing, and each time they were asked to tell the story of the video snippet in Spanish. One group watched the same video each time whilst another group watched different video snippets. The results showed that those who watched the same video content

had greater improvement than those who watched different video snippets, indicating low level of TR effect benefit to new contexts. It also indicated that TR leads to greater overall language proficiency, accuracy in morpho-syntax, and lexical complexity. Similarly, Bygate's (2001) study revealed that repetition of the same task contributes significantly to complexity and fluency, but not to accuracy. However, consistent with Gass et al.'s (1999) findings, those linguistic improvements did not carry over to new exemplars of the tasks. In contrast, Ahmadian (2011) claimed that the benefits of TR of "the same task transfer to performance of a new task" (p. 269). The study, with 30 intermediate EFL learners, revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of complexity and fluency but not accuracy. However, none of the studies reviewed above have explored L2 learners' perceptions of TR.

To sum up, the literature on TR indicates that there have been several attempts to explore the effects of TR on L2 performances; however, results of previous studies are not yet conclusive. In addition, although there is an extensive body of research on TR, there is limited research investigating learners' experiences of repeating the same or similar task. Consequently there is potentially a great deal that the EFL profession can learn about the extent to which L2 learners' perceptions of TR affect their performances It might be reasonable to assume that L2 learners' repeated performances might be affected by their attitude towards TR, just like EFL learners' attitudes towards planning affect their oral performances (Dawadi, 2015). Furthermore, there has been very little task-based research in the Nepalese context and no research, to the author's knowledge, has explored the effects of TR on English oral performances of school level students in Nepal, a small developing country in south-Asia. Therefore, there is no evidence whether or not TR works in the

Nepalese EFL context, and how the Nepalese EFL learners perceive TR. Thus, this study has been designed to fulfill these research gaps.

The study

Research Questions

The main purpose of the study was to explore the effects of TR on L2 oral performance in native speaking Nepalese 14-15 year olds learning English. The specific questions to be addressed were:

1. Does TR have any significant effect on the complexity of EFL oral performance?
2. Does TR have any significant effect on the accuracy of EFL oral performance?
3. Does TR have any significant effect on the fluency of EFL oral performance?
4. How do EFL learners perceive TR as part of their learning experience?

Research Participants

The study took place at a public secondary school in Nepal. Forty students (26 male and 14 female) (aged 14-15 years) voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. All the students, who shared the same mother tongue (Nepali) were English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The average time spent studying English was 10.5 years. During the time of the data collection, the students were studying at Grade 10 and they were preparing for an important national level examination (i.e Secondary Education Examination), which they had to take in two months' time. Therefore, they were receiving an extra English class (45

minutes) each day for the preparation of the test, complementing their regular English classes (also 45 minutes each day).

Task

The task used in the study was adopted from Heaton (1975, p.48). It was a narrative task that contained six wordless pictures presented in the correct order. Participants were asked to look at the pictures and relate the story depicted in the pictures to the researcher. The researcher was a silent listener. There were three main reasons behind selecting this task. First, the task was monologic because L2 learners' performances in interactive tasks can be influenced by the interlocutor's reconfirmation, clarification request and recasts (Kawachi, 2005). Secondly, it was necessary to ensure that the task was reasonably demanding on the participants. Yuan and Ellis (2004) argue that "this can be achieved by selecting a story that requires interpretation on the part of the learners" (p.9). Finally, wordless picture stories have been successfully used in previous linguistic research to elicit both EFL/ESL oral and written narratives (e.g Azizadeh & Dobakhti, 2015; Yuan & Ellis, 2004), providing data from each iteration of the task for comparison. On the basis of the task nature, the current study resembles Yuan and Ellis's (2004) study but if the task operationalization is considered, this study resembles Bygate's (1996) study. However, this study differs from the design used by Lynch and Maclean (2000) and Bei (2013), among some others. The task was piloted with four other students, who had similar backgrounds to the participants in the study, to ensure task complexity and appropriacy.

Research Design

This study is within-subjects design, with the same condition for each iteration (new task and repeated task). Following Bygate (1996), without prior notice or time for preparation, participants were asked to repeat a task that they had learned three days earlier.

Procedure

After obtaining written consents of all participants and their parents, they were given clear instructions for the task completion. They were asked to perform the tasks as soon as they received instructions. Instructions were identical for both initial and repeated tasks except that participants were reminded about their first attempt as part of the instructions for the repeated task. They were allowed five minutes to complete the task on both the first occasion and on the repeated occasion. They performed the tasks individually in a quiet room just in the presence of the researcher. Their speech was audio recorded. On completion of the repeated task, each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire (See appendix A) in order to assemble retrospective accounts that tapped into participants' memories regarding their task performance. The questionnaire comprised several questions concerning the participants' attitudes towards TR and their focus during the task performances. The questionnaire initially constructed in English was translated into Nepali, the language which the participants were most comfortable with. Finally, ten of the participants were randomly selected for in-depth interviews. Interviews were semi-structured (see appendix B for interview guidelines) and mainly focused upon clarifying and elaborating on participants' responses to the questionnaire. The participants' responses

to the questionnaire were used to stimulate accurate recall. All the interviews were conducted in Nepali and audio-recorded.

Measures

Different studies have employed different measures to assess L2 learners' CAF. Ellis (2008) provides a fairly comprehensive list of CAF measures. He highlights that using multiple measures to assess each dimension of L2 oral/written performance may result in more valid assessment. However using different measures across different studies might decrease the comparability of results. In order to enhance both the validity of the assessments and the comparability of the results, it was decided to adopt some of the measures used by Azizzadeh and Dobakhti (2015), Larsen-Freeman (2006), Dawadi (2016), and Yuan and Ellis (2004).

a. **Complexity**

Complexity, as stated by Ellis (2009), includes both grammatical complexity and lexical complexity. In this study, syntactic complexity was established through the calculation of sub-ordinate clauses per AS-unit. Following Bei (2013), the number of sub-ordinate clauses per AS-unit was calculated. The AS-unit is defined as "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with it" (Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000, p. 365). This means, the more clauses per AS-unit, the higher the complexity score (Bei, 2013). In order to measure syntactic variety in the oral narratives, the

number of different verb forms in terms of tense (e.g. simple present, simple past, gerund), modality (e.g. would, could) and voice (active and passive voice) were calculated. Additionally, to measure overall syntactic complexity, the mean number of words per AS-unit, excluding repetitions, filled pauses and false starts were observed.

b. Accuracy

Skehan and Foster (1999) consider global units represent a realistic measure of accuracy. Hence, accuracy of the oral texts was measured by calculating the percentage of error-free clauses. An additional measure of accuracy was the number of errors per 100 words. While calculating the number of errors, both grammatical and semantic errors were considered. Finally, the number of immediate successful grammatical corrections made by the learners was also calculated. Corrected errors were not included in the overall calculation of errors as the correction indicated that the learner understood the accurate use of the target language.

C. Fluency

Tavakoli and Skehan (2005), highlight the multifaceted nature of fluency and mention three dimensions of fluency: speed fluency, break down fluency and repair fluency. This study focused on all three dimensions of fluency, when considering the effects of TR on EFL performance, as the use of multiple measures to assess fluency of L2 oral performances may result in more valid assessment. Speed fluency, which indicates the rate and linguistic density produced, was measured in terms of the total number of syllables per minute, and the total number of words produced (excluding filled pauses). Breakdown fluency was measured in terms of the total number of filled pauses (number of fillers like

'um', 'uh', 'you know', 'you see', and 'well'). Finally, repair fluency, which reflects awareness of forms and/or attempts at being accurate, was measured in terms of the number of false starts (utterances that are abandoned before completion) and repetitions (words, phrases or clauses that are repeated with no modification).

Data Analysis

In order to explore the effects of TR on each measure, the two performances of each participant were separately tabulated and counted, and a series of paired sample t-tests were performed. The alpha for achieving statistical significance was set at p<.05. In addition, post-hoc power analysis was made to observe the effect size, which is an indication of the degree to which the phenomenon under study is manifested (Cohen, 1988).

Results

Complexity

The effects of TR on complexity measures are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive for TR effects on complexity

	First task		Repeated task				
Variables	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p-value	t-value	Cohen's d

Clauses per AS-unit	1.57	.18	1.72	.11	*.001	-2.98	1.01
Words per AS-unit	11.40	2.28	13.80	1.93	*.001	-4.97	1.13
Verb forms	32.40	3.92	37.05	10.02	.062	-1.98	0.06

SD= Standard Deviation, significant at p<.0

As can be seen in table 1, all differences were statistically significant except for verb forms (p<.05). Thus, the results indicate that the participants gained in complexity of their L2 speech in the second performance and those gains were statistically significant (p<.05). However, TR did not lead to syntactically more varied language, t (39) = -1.98), p=.06). The effect size on the first two measures was high, suggesting that TR had a strong effect on EFL complexity. In term of the verb forms, the difference in the mean score for verb forms looks quite large compared with the other scores; however the difference was not statistically significant. This measure might have been affected by the amount of overall language produced and/or the high SD. Also the effect size on the measure was moderate (.06).

Accuracy

TR did have a clear effect on accuracy measures. Table 2 summarises the results.

Table 2: Descriptive for TR effects on accuracy

	First task	Repeated task

Variables	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p-value	t-value	Cohen's d
Error free clauses	79.40	5.87	72.70	5.42	*.001	6.38	-1.18
Errors per 100 words	5.45	1.19	7.05	1.70	*.001	-4.29	1.09
Self-correction	4.75	1.33	5.75	1.25	*.011	-2.81	0.77

SD= Standard Deviation, significant at p<.05.

As revealed through table 2, TR led to less accurate language. There was a sharp decrease in the number of error free clauses (p<.05) whereas the number of errors per hundred words sharply increased; all the measures reached statistical significance (p<.05). However, the students self-corrected more in the repeated task than in the new task, t (39) = -2.81, p=.01. The effect size on each of the measures seems to be high. Thus, it is plausible to argue that the EFL accuracy was affected by TR.

Fluency

TR seems to have effects on fluency measures as well. The results on fluency are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive for TR effects on fluency

	First task	Repeated task

	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p-value	t-value	Cohen's d
Syllables per minute	90.10	15.93	109.55	15.32	*.001	-6.33	1.24
Number of words	312.35	40.77	376.85	43.02	*.001	-5.75	1.53
Filled pauses	27.20	5.50	24.35	5.17	*.037	2.24	-0.53
Repetitions	21.70	7.04	19.20	5.81	*.004	3.23	-0.39
False starts	7.65	1.66	7.15	2.08	.281	1.11	-0.27

SD= Standard Deviation, significant at P<.05.

It is revealed through the data that TR triggered more fluent language. They produced more syllables per minute in the repeated task than in the new task, t (39)= -6.32, p=.001. Also, the narratives produced second time around were longer than the first narratives t (39)= -5.75, p=.001. A high level of effect size on these speed fluency measures (i.e total syllables per minute and total number of words) suggests that fluency was greatly affected by TR. Additionally, TR was associated with less repetitions and filled pauses (p<.05); however, the effect size on these two measures seems to be moderate. Nonetheless, there was no significant difference between the two performances in terms of the number of false starts, t (39) = 1.11, p=.281. This measure might have been affected by the amount of overall language produced.

EFL Learners' Perceptions of TR

EFL learners' own perceptions of TR are important for a number of reasons. They can help us to understand how and why TR worked for some EFL learners and not for others and the reasons for differing levels of impact on learners. In the study, participants' appraisal of the putative benefits of TR fell into three patterns. The majority of participants (29, or 72.5%) reported that TR definitely helped them tell a better story and they felt less stressed and threatened while repeating the task. A smaller portion (8 or 20%) found repeating the task a boring job and thought that TR did not make a difference in their task performance. Finally, three participants (7.5%) were ambivalent in their appraisal of repeating the same task.

It was revealed through the questionnaire and interview data that there were some benefits of repeating the same task. Being able to organize thoughts and solve lexical problems were the two distinct benefits afforded by TR. Many participants highlighted those two benefits. For instance, participant B reported,

> During the first task performance, I was a bit lost. I spent a lot of time finding the link between pictures and thinking about a good way to organise the contents. Also, I really could not remember proper words to tell the story. But, while repeating the task, I felt more comfortable with the task. Being familiar with the story, I could organise my thoughts in a better way. I could easily figure out some of the words that I was not able to remember during my first task performance. Actually, I could rack my brain for some other way to relate my ideas.

The statement further indicates that, during the first performance, she spent time formulating her thoughts and searching lexical items. During the second performance, however, she was able to organise her thoughts and solve lexical problems. Many other participants thought that TR supported them to improve overall contents. Participant F stressed, "I think my second story is far better than the first story. It contains much more information. Actually, I learnt a lot by repeating the task." Participant C added, "During the second task performance, being familiar with the contents of the story, I had enough time to tell the story. So, I could add more information to each picture. I think, the second story is longer than the first story". In addition, though quantitative data did not indicate that TR triggered more accurate language, some participants reported that TR supported them to monitor their grammatical structures and produce more accurate language. For instance, participant G reported,

> During the first task performance, I was somehow lost as I spent a lot of time to find the links between the pictures and create the whole story. So, I was just thinking about the contents of the story. I did not pay attention to the grammatical structures that I was producing. I even did not have time to correct my mistakes. But, during the second task, I found the task easier. So, I could focus both on the contents of the story and grammatical structures; I also corrected some of my mistakes.

However, such benefits of TR did not seem to be reaped by every participant. Ten (21%) of the participants, who did not necessarily perceive the opportunity of repeating the task as advantageous gave varied reasons. One of the reasons given was perceived 'low task complexity'. This means, they found the task much easier, when they were asked to

repeat it. For instance, Participant A reported, "When I repeated the task, I did not find the task challenging enough for me". Participant I added, "When I was asked to repeat the task, I found the task very easy. I do not think I produced a better story; I was able to produce an excellent story on my first trial". Another reason participants gave for not valuing the opportunity to repeat the task was that duplication of the same task and the same content reduced their enjoyment. For instance, Participant J reported, "I could not enjoy redoing the task as there was nothing new in the story. Redoing the task was really a boring job for me".

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to explore the effects of repeated engagement with a narrative task on the CAF of EFL learners' oral performances. The study provides a valuable perspective on what happens when speakers re-engage in the same task. Consistent with the findings reported by most previous task-based research, the narratives produced upon repeating the task are different and TR seems to affect all the CAF dimensions, but not in an identical way.

Whilst results of the study are inconsistent with some studies discussed in the empirical review of research earlier (e.g Bygate, 1996; Gass et al., 1999; Hawkes, 2012; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Pirooz, et al., 2014), the results are in line with Skehan's (1998) 'Limited Attentional Capacity Model'. EFL learners with intermediate level of proficiency, in this study, do not seem to have ready-made plans in their possession to promote all aspects of language production (CAF) under real time pressure (Birjandi & Ahangari,

2008). Nevertheless, it should be noted that there is a disagreement as to the dimensions involved in the trade-off. For instance, Skehan (1998) claims that there is a trade-off between accuracy and complexity but Wendel (1997) reports a trade-off between fluency and complexity. Similarly, Bygate (2001) claims that gains in complexity are paid off by losses in both fluency and accuracy. This study results do not provide complete support to either of the claims as the gains in complexity and fluency are offset by losses in accuracy, when the results for TR effects are considered.

As there was a duplication of the same task, it was expected that TR would allow learners to familiarise themselves with the content of the task, thus freeing up their attentional resources, and they would focus more on accuracy (Bygate, 1996). However, the results did not indicate that TR supported learners in this way as the repeated narratives were less accurate. One possible reason for the reduced accuracy might be that learners prioritised fluency over accuracy in their repeated performance. Many students, through interview and questionnaire, reported that they could not provide enough information about the pictures in their first attempt so they focused more on fluency in their repeated attempt. For instance, Participant E reported "In the second attempt, I was speaking much faster as I could not finish the story in my first try. I did not even care the grammatical rules. I just kept on speaking". Participant B added "I was completely lost in my first attempt as I could not understand the linkage between the pictures, so I could not even complete the story but I could speak much faster in my second try as I already knew the story". Participant D Echoed, "When I told the story for the second time, I just knew that I had to speak faster. I did not even pay attention to my grammar. Sometimes, I could notice my own mistakes but

I did not correct them as I thought meaning will be understood". Thus, it seems that they overlooked their errors and paid more attention to communication than grammatical accuracy in their repeated performance. In other words, the learners, who speeded up second time around to solve the time pressure problem, prioritised fluency over accuracy. Consequently, the repeated performances were less accurate than the first performances.

Another possible reason for the reduced accuracy with TR could be associated with the students' increased levels of confidence in the task performance and their readiness to take risk to use new linguistic structures and vocabularies. Participant F reported:

> In my first performance, I was a bit nervous and lost. I spent quite a lot of time to understand the story. But, in my second performance, having understood the story, I was more confident. So, I looked for some new and better vocabularies and also some new sentence structures.

Participant C added "During the second task performance, I tried my best to use better sentence structures and vocabularies". Thus, learners' readiness to take risk using more sophisticated language in the repeated performance might have possibly led to more complex but less accurate language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). This means, the attentional resources required to overcome the constraints related to complexity might have negatively affected their accuracy.

The data also indicates that some learners speeded up second time around to solve the time pressure problem and focused only on fluency (i.e they prioritized accuracy over

23

fluency) and some others had better understanding of the story second time around so they might have more confidence to take risk. That might have also reduced accuracy in their repeated performances. However, it may be that accuracy could drop on the second occasion but not on a third iteration. The possibility of additional iterations also raises the possibility that different learners might follow different trajectories across the iterations. In other words, on different iterations, L2 learners can change their purpose and focus.

Additionally, lack of guidance to learners on how to improve their performance, between the first and repeated task, might be associated with the reduced accuracy. Unlike Hawkes (2012), the learners were simply asked to repeat the task without necessarily raising their awareness about the correct use of language. They neither got practice of the correct forms as in Hawker's study, nor did they receive any feedback after their first performance as in Baba and Nitta's (2010) study.

It might also be plausible to argue that TR allows L2 learners to redirect their attentional resources on the content and selection of better language to fulfill the task. As pointed out by Ellis (2003), the learners' previous experience of doing the task seems to release their processing capacity to focus on the language necessary to express their ideas. It can be assumed that when learners were repeating the task, a considerable part of the conceptualization, formulation and articulation had already been conducted in the initial task performance (Bygate & Samuda 2005). This might then have provided them enough opportunity to look for greater variety in the use of language structures.

This argument further indicates that, as Bygate (1996) argues, during the first attempt of the task, the students were primarily concerned with heuristic planning of content. They were under time pressure when seeking logical links between the pictures

and seeking the linguistic resources to communicate them. But, during their repeated attempt, being already familiar with the content of the task, they could pay more attention to the linguistic repertoire and communication. Some students also reported that they aimlessly engaged in the task in their first attempt as they did not know how the pictures were making a story and they spent a lot of time to see the linkage between the pictures as articulated by participant C, "I think I spent nearly half of the time in finding the linkage between the pictures, so I could not complete the story in my first attempt". But, in their repeated attempt, the first task was likely to make them aware of the volume of the content or the information that they had to express within the limited time, as reported by the participant D, "Being familiar with the sequence of the pictures along with the contents and length of the story, I could prepare myself accordingly. So, I was able to complete the story when I repeated the task". Thus, through the repetition of the same task, EFL learners seem to have been pushed to notice their problems and try to repair them in their repeated attempt.

To reiterate, in the first performance, L2 learners may well not have completed tasks, whereas they did on the second run. The, learners appeared to struggle with the first performance of the task during which they were primarily concerned with planning to complete the task and searching for appropriate linguistic forms such as vocabulary and sentence structure. This planning and search for linguistic forms however supported them to perform better in their second attempt. Thus, the study provides support to Ortega's (2005) argument that self-report data (elicited via questionnaires and/or interviews) are an important source of information about how L2 learners perform tasks.

The study also aimed to investigate EFL learners' opinions on repeating the same task. Post-task interviews and questionnaire data revealed that TR helped them to understand the story better and also improve their language. Participant H reported, "When I knew that I was going to repeat the same task, I was happy as I was not satisfied myself with my first performance." Participant G added, "I think, by repeating the task, I could understand the task better." Many participants reported that TR is necessary to make students feel confident when performing a task in English. However, such benefits of TR did not seem to be experienced by every participant. Some participants found repeating the task a boring job and they did not think that TR helped them to improve their language. For instance, Participant J reported, "I do not think I learnt anything new by repeating the same task. I was fully satisfied with my first performance". Participant A added, "If I compare my two stories, I think, the first story was better than the second one".

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The study has revealed some interesting findings with regard to TR effects on EFL oral performance. However, they are certainly not conclusive and comprehensive, and the extent to which the results obtained can be generalized to other learners with different ages and levels of English proficiency in different learning contexts remains to be investigated. Care needs to be taken not to over-interpret the results as this study was limited to a small sample size (40 students). In order to validate the findings of this study, further research with a larger sample of EFL learners within a similar learning environment is recommended. In addition, results of the study indicate that there are individual differences

regarding the effects of TR on EFL performances. While many learners found TR useful for improving their performances, some others had negative attitudes towards TR. The study reveals two main reasons for holding negative attitude towards TR: firstly, low task complexity and, secondly, the problem of duplicating the content and reducing the participants' interest. There might be some other reasons associated with learners' negative attitudes towards TR such as their EFL proficiency, motivation and task nature. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore a full range of potential issues.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has some implications for L2 pedagogy. The results of the study indicated that TR leads to more fluent and complex language. This finding gives a pedagogical message that providing learners an opportunity to do a task repeatedly may support gains in complexity and fluency. However, EFL teachers need to consider that the tasks, in the study, were conducted in a lab-setting, using tightly controlled picture description tasks. Classroom contexts and the nature of tasks might result in different learner experiences from those in this study. Additionally, the interview and questionnaire responses indicated that the majority of students felt less threatened and more confident while repeating the task; they also reported that TR supported them to improve their language. However, such benefits of TR did not seem to be experienced by every participant. Some participants found repeating the task boring and also did not think that TR supported them to improve their performances. The main reason for finding the second task boring was that there was a complete duplication of the task as the task was not complex enough for them and comprised the same content as previously. Thus, teachers

might need to consider slightly modified tasks which challenge and provide new and interesting content whilst providing the opportunity to practice the same tasks. More importantly, EFL teachers need to understand individual learners' preferences and engage them in tasks that fit their interests.

Conclusion

This study closely replicated Bygate's (1996) experimental study which was based on the assumption that L2 learners' performance is likely to improve with the repetition of the same task. This study set out to determine whether TR could be used as a tool to direct EFL learners' attention towards improvement of all three features of a language performance (CAF). TR was used in the form of complete duplication of the task. This study reveals a trade-off relationship between CAF measures. Results indicated that attention was being placed only on linguistic repertoire and fluency as repeated performances were more complex and fluent but less accurate. It should be noted that there is a disagreement regarding the dimensions involved in the trade-off but this study reports that gains in complexity and fluency are offset by losses in accuracy when the results for TR effects on EFL oral performances are considered.

The study was designed to isolate TR as the key variable acting on learners' performance. The learners were neither made aware of the task demands nor were given any feedback after their first task performance; the task on both the occasions was unguided and unprompted. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that TR seems to trigger different linguistic outcome. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to draw a conclusion that EFL

performance can be fully predicted by TR. What seems nearer the truth is that task-based "language use and development is a continual balance between the emergence, elaboration and exploitation of routines on the one hand, and ad hoc variation and creativity on the other" (Bygate, 1999, p. 209). The patterning in the data discussed in this article suggests that this position is approximately correct. In addition, the study has made a unique contribution to the field by investigating EFL learners' perceptions of TR. It also provides insights to support EFL teachers to design and implement TR protocols to aid learning. Furthermore, it is hoped that this article will stimulate interest in exploring other L2 learners' views towards TR as part of a language learning strategy.

In particular when reviewing literature for this research, only one study on TBLT was found in the Nepalese context (Dawadi, 2015). This is in spite of a call for TBLT research in Nepal over two decades ago. While rest of the world has already produced innumerable studies in this area, the Nepalese EFL research community remains in its infancy. Empirical studies need to be carried out to explore the effectiveness of TBLT in the Nepalese context in general, and the effects of TR on Nepalese EFL learners' performances in particular.

References

Ahmadian, M. J. (2011). The effect of 'massed' task repetitions on complexity, accuracy, and fluency: Does it transfer to a new task? *The Language Learning Journal, 39*(3), 269-280.

Ahmadian, M. J. (2012). Task repetition in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 66(3), 380-382.

Azizzadeh, L. & Dobakhti, L. (2015). The effects of task repetition on complexity and

accuracy of Iranian high-intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing performance.

International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature, 4(2), 17-25.

Baba, K. & Nitta, R. (2010). Dynamic effects of task practice on the Japanese EFL

University Student's Writing: Text Analysis with Coh-Metrix. *Proceedings of the*

Twenty-Third International Florida Artificial Intelligence Research Society

Conference Downloaded from:

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d733/bb318f81ff5c4169ad7635a11ee532a3f781.pd

f

Bei, G. X. (2013). Effects of immediate repetition in L2 speaking tasks: A focused study.

English Language Teaching, 6 (1), 11-19.

Birjandi, P. & Ahangari, S. (2008). Effects of task repetition on the fluency, complexity and

accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' oral discourse. *The Asian EFL Journal, 10 (3),*

28-52.

Bygate, M. (1996). Effects of task repetition: Appraising the developing language of

learners. In Jane, W. & Dave, W. (Eds.), *Challenge and change in language*

teaching (pp.136-146). Australia: Macmillan Education.

Bygate, M. (1999). Quality of language and purpose of task: patterns of learners' language

on two oral communication tasks. *Language Teaching Research*, 3 (3), 185-214.

Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language.

In Martin, B. Peter S., & Merrill, S. (Eds.), *Researching pedagogic tasks second*

language learning, teaching and testing (pp. 23-48). London, NewYork: Pearson

Publication.

Bygate, M. (2006). Areas of research that influence L2 speaking instruction. In Uso-Juan,

E. & Martinez-Flor, A. (Eds.), *Current trends in the development and teaching of*

the four skills (pp.159–86). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Bygate, M., & Samuda, V. (2005). Integrative planning through the use of task repetition In

Rod. E. (Ed.). *Planning and task performance in a second language (pp.37-74).*

Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (2nd Ed.).

Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dawadi, S. (2015). *Effects of strategic planning and task type on EFL oral performance.*

An unpublished master dissertation. England: Lancaster University.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press.

Ellis, R. (2009). The differential effects of three types of task planning on the fluency,

complexity, and accuracy in L2 oral production. *Applied Linguistics*, *30* (4), 474-

509.

Ellis, R. & Barkhuizen, G. (2005*). Analyzing learner language*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press.

Foster, P., Tonkyn, A., & Wigglesworth, G. (2000). Measuring spoken language: A unit for

all reasons. *Applied Linguistics*, 21 (1), 354–375.

Fukuta, J. (2016). Effects of task repetition on learners' attention orientation in L2 oral

production. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(3), 321 –340.

Gass, S., Mackey, A., Alvarez-Torres, M. J., & Fernández-García, M. (1999). The effects of task repetition on linguistic output. *Language Learning*, *49*(4), 549-581.

Hawkes, M. L. (2012). Using task repetition to direct learner attention and focus on form. *ELT Journal,* 66(3), 327-336.

Heaton, J. (1975). *Beginning composition through pictures*. London: Longman.

Jung, Y, Kim Y. & Murphy, J. (2017). The role of task repetition in learning word-stress patterns through auditory priming task. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 1-28.

Kawauchi, C. (2005). The effects of strategic planning on the oral narratives of learners with low and high intermediate L2 proficiency. In Rod, E. (Ed.), *Planning and task performance in a second language* (pp.143-164). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Levelt, W. J. M. (1989). *Speaking: From intention to articulation*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Lynch, T. & Maclean, J. (2000). Exploring the benefits of task repetition and recycling for classroomlanguage learning. *Language Teaching Research,* 4(3), pp. 221–250.

Nunan, D. (2006). Task-based language teaching in the Asian context: Defining 'task'. *Asian EFL Journal, 8*(3), 12-18.

Ortega, L. (2005). What do learners plan? Learner driven attention to form during pre-task planning. In Rod, E. (Ed.), *Planning and task performance in a second language* (pp.77-110). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Pirooz, B. F., Maleki, R. & Hajimirzayee, F. (2014). Effects of Task Repetition: Appraising the developing language of Iranian learners. *Journal of Academic and Applied Studies*, 4(6), 13-25.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford University Press.

Skehan, P. (2007). Task research and language teaching: reciprocal relationships. In Sandra. F. & Hossein. N. (Eds.), *Form-focused instruction and teacher education: Studies in Honour of Rod Ellis* (pp.55-69). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Skehan, P., & Foster, P. (1999). The influence of task structure and processing conditions on narrative retellings. *Language Learning*, *49*(1), 93–120.

Wendel, J. (1997). *Planning and second language narrative production*. An unpublished doctoral dissertation. Japan: Temple University.

Yuan, F. & Ellis, R. (2004). The effects of planning on fluency, complexity, and accuracy in second language narrative writing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 26(1), 59-84.

Appendix A: Post-task questionnaire

Please answer the following questionnaire as truthfully as possible.

1. Your school's name _____

2. Your age _____

3. How long have you been learning English?

4. When you told the story for the first time, did you think about grammar? Vocabulary? The best way to organise your story? Give examples.

5. When you repeated the story, did you think about grammar? Vocabulary? The best way to organise your story? Give examples.

6. Did you like repeating the task? Why?

7. If you compare your two stories, which one do you think is better? Why do you think so?

8. Do you think TR helped you to tell a better story?

Appendix B: Interview guidelines

a. What did they do during the first task performance? How difficult did they find the task? What made the task easy or difficult?

b. What was their major focus (grammar or vocabulary or story) during their first task performance? Why?

c. Did they like repeating the task? Why or why not?

d. Did they find the task easier when they repeated the task?

e. What was their major focus (vocabulary or grammar, or story) during the second task performance? Why?

f. How do they compare their first and second stories?

g. Do they think that TR helped them to improve their oral performance?