The Effects of Guided Planning on L2 Oral Discourse Management

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Abstract

The role of pre-task planning in L2 learners' oral performances has long been of interest to applied linguists. One of the main research topics is the effect of guided and unguided planning in L2 speech. Overall, previous research found that guided planning increased L2 oral fluency more than unguided planning (e.g., Ellis, 2009; Kawauchi, 2005; Ortega, 1999; Sangarun, 2005). More specifically, note-taking has been used as one of the instructional techniques in integrated listening-speaking tasks, but its effect on L2 performances has under-examined in terms of fluency and content. To address this gap in the literature, the present study aims to investigate how two types of note-taking (i.e., guided and unguided) influence L2 oral speech in terms of oral fluency and content. L2 speech data were collected from ten advanced ESL learners' performances on two integrated listening/speaking summary tasks. In Task 1, the participants watched a short academic video clip, while taking notes on a blank paper. After listening, they had five minutes to prepare for their 1~2 minute-long oral summary of the clip. In Task 2, the same participants repeated the same procedure as Task 1, but they used a guided note-taking worksheet. Results showed that the participants' oral performances on Guided Note Taking were marginally stronger than those on Unguided Note Taking with respect to oral discourse coherence and fluency. Teaching implications are discussed.

Background

The study of the effect of planning on how L2 learners perform oral task has long been interests of the field of applied linguistics. In task-based teaching, issues such as whether or not to allow students time to plan, what kind of planning, and how much time to allow have been concerned. More specifically, task structure has been discussed as one of the crucial variable that may affect the L2 oral task performances. In general, it is known that more structured the task is, the better the task performance would be in terms of oral fluency and complexity (Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005). The present study examines whether or not the increased task structure by providing a guided note taking would result in better oral task performance with respect to coherence and fluency. Given the situation where many L2 students struggle in recording the hierarchical structure of the lecture in university (Clerehan, 1995), the guided note taking is expected to aid learners' understanding of the input discourse structure and ultimately production of coherent and fluent speech.

In other words, the purpose of the present study is to investigate how different degrees of task structure in pre-task planning (guided/unguided note taking) affect English learners' oral performances in terms of discourse management (i.e. fluency and coherence). This study is valuable in that it informs whether or not guided note taking/ pre-task planning is effective in promoting L2 oral proficiency in integrated listening-speaking tasks.

Research Questions

- What effects do different types of pre-task planning (guided/unguided note taking) have on learners' oral performances in terms of fluency?
- What effects do different types of pre-task planning (guided/unguided note taking) have on learners' oral performances in terms of coherence?

Methods

Participants

Ten Program Intensive English (PIE) level six students participated in this study. The population is diverse in terms of nationality: six Brazilians, one Saudi, two Chinese, and one Korean. Their average length of stay in the U.S. is about three months to 15 months and their age ranges from 21 to 28.

Measurements

Fluency. To examine the participants' fluency, speech rate and pauses were measured by PRAAT software program, along with an online syllable counting tool (http://www.syllablecount.com). Fluency was divided into the rate fluency and the pause fluency in this study. The rate fluency was further operationalized into Syllable per Second (total number of syllable including the hesitation markers/ total length of speech) and Mean Length of Run (total number of syllables/total number of runs—a run means utterances between pauses of .25 seconds and above.). The pause fluency was measured by four different variables: Number of Filled Pauses (with fillers such as *um*, or *ah*); Mean Length of Filled Pauses (total length of filled pauses/ total number of pauses); Number of Silent Pauses; and Mean Length of Silent Pauses (total length of pauses of .25 or greater/ total number of pauses).

Coherence. Coherence was operationalized into three different variables in this research: average percentage of key ideas of the listening source covered, use of introduction, and the number of conjunctions used, as they were proven significant to verify coherence of spoken performances in L2 test tasks. (Kang, 2013; Jamieson & Poonpon, 2013).

Key Ideas. Key ideas are categorized into three different levels with regards to the hierarchy of the information. The level indicates the level of discourse organization, starting

form level 1 key ideas referring to main topics; level 2 key ideas indicating subtopics; and level 3 key ideas, which are major details. First, the list of the Key Ideas was proposed by the researcher according the discourse level, with the exclusion of minor details and inaccurate information. Second, the Key Ideas list was examined by another qualified ESL teacher, and discussed until a consensus was reached on a final list. Task contains 14 key ideas from the listening on, with four Level 1 ideas, five Level 2 ideas, and five level 3 ideas (See Appendix A). Task 2 consists of total 10 key ideas, with three Level 1 ideas, two Level 2 ideas, and five Level 3 ideas (See Appendix B). Third, all the key ideas were identified, tallied, and coded manually from the students' speech transcripts according to the discourse level.

Use of Introduction. Use of introduction in oral summary was reported as one of the important predictors for coherent speech (Brown et al., 2005; Kang, 2013; Jamieson & Poonpon, 2013). Therefore, it is included as one of the variables for coherence in this research. Use of introduction in speech was coded as 1, and the absence of introduction as 0. Then, the average percentage of introduction use was calculated for each task.

Number of Conjunctions Used. Lastly, the number of conjunctions used in participants' speech was calculated according to their purposes (i.e. result; apposition; addition; contrast; and summation). Then, the average number of each type of conjunction uses and the average number of the total conjunction uses were calculated for each task. (See Appendix C for examples of conjunctions counted.)

Procedures

The participants did 10 minute-pre-listening activities to activate their background knowledge about the task topics (Task 1: *Public Opinion Polls*; Task 2: *Dyslexia*). They discussed the pre-listening questions and the meanings of the vocabulary words listed. In Task 1,

the students watched a 4-5 minute-long academic animation video from *ed.ted.com* on *Public Opinion Polls* twice, while taking notes on a blank note. After listening, the participants had five minutes to plan what to say, before they recorded 1~2 minute-oral summary using the hand-held recording device. They were to summarize the contents of the video as well as their own opinion or evaluation about the topic. Right after Task 1, the participants continued working on Task 2. The students watched a similar kind of the *ted ed* video on *Dyslexia*, and performed the same speaking task, except that they used a guided note-taking worksheet this time. This structured outline worksheet was expected to guide students to better organize their oral summary and response. The students had five minutes to make an outline for their speech using the given worksheet, and had up to two minutes to perform the oral task.

Statistical Analysis

The descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon Repeated Signed Ranks Test were implemented on all the fluency and coherence variables to figure out if there is any statistical mean difference with respect to fluency and discourse coherence between task 1(unguided) and task 2(guided). As the research design in this study is within group design with small sample size (n=10) and irregular distribution, Wilcoxon Repeated Signed Ranks Test, a non-parametric test, was used instead of the repeated T-test.

Results

Pre-Task Planning Effect on Coherence

Overall, the results show that the participants' performance on task 2 (guided note taking) is slightly better than their performance on task 1 (unguided note taking), even though the difference is not statistically critical.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon Repeated Signed Ranks Test on Coherence

	Key Idea (%)		*Mean*	*SD*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Z*	*Sig.*
Key Idea (%)	Level 1	Task 1	32.50	16.87	.00	50.00	-1.79	.07
		Task 2	50.00	28.33	.00	100.00		
	Level 2	Task 1	24.00	15.78	.00	40.00	-2.21	.03*
		Task 2	45.00	28.38	.00	100.00		
	Level 3	Task 1	30.00	28.67	.00	80.00	-1.05	.29
		Task 2	20.00	28.38	.00	75.00		
	Total	Task 1	28.57	15.79	7.14	50.00	-.46	.65
		Task 2	32.00	17.51	10.00	60.00		
Introduction (%)		Task 1	.70	.48	.00	1.00	-.45	.66
		Task 2	.80	.42	0.00	1.00		
Conjunction	RST	Task 1	.80	1.40	0	4	-.52	.60
		Task 2	1.10	.88	0	2		
	APP	Task 1	1.00	1.49	0	5	-1.19	.24
		Task 2	.50	.97	0	3		
	ADD	Task 1	2.70	1.16	0	4	-1.39	.166
		Task 2	1.50	1.78	0	6		
	CTR	Task 1	.30	.48	0	1	-1.86	.063
		Task 2	.90	.74	0	2		
	SUM	Task 1	.22	.44	0	1	-1.00	.317
		Task 2	.30	.48	0	1		
	Total	Task 1	5.00	2.83	2	11	-.83	.41
		Task 2	4.30	2.63	1	10		
Total		Task 1	34.27	18.22	10.14	62.00	-.46	.65
		Task 2	37.10	19.18	11.00	67.00		

Pre-Task Planning Effect on Fluency

Generally, the results demonstrate that the participants' oral performances on Task 2 (guided note taking) are slightly better than their performances on Task 1 (unguided note taking) with regards to fluency, but the comparisons were not statistically significant.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon Repeated Signed Ranks Test on Fluency

			Mean	*SD*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Z*	*Sig.*
Rate Fluency	SPS	Task 1	2.45	.55	1.62	3.62	-.26	.80
		Task 2	2.49	.56	1.57	3.52		
	MLR	Task 1	8.20	4.54	3.74	18.09	-.36	.72
		Task 2	7.54	3.69	4.86	17.06		
	Total	Task 1	10.65	5.09	5.36	21.71	-.36	.72
		Task 2	10.03	4.25	6.43	20.58		
Pause Fluency	NFP	Task 1	3.14	2.36	.58	7.88	-1.78	.07
		Task 2	2.26	1.69	.00	4.72		
	MLF	Task 1	.67	.49	.28	1.97	-1.48	.14
		Task 2	.49	.29	.00	1.10		
	NSP	Task 1	22.17	5.73	14.64	30.83	-1.38	.17
		Task 2	19.43	5.58	9.02	27.39		
	MLS	Task 1	.94	.38	.55	1.71	-1.48	.14
		Task 2	.80	.20	.56	1.26		
	Total	Task 1	26.92	6.85	17.32	39.48	-1.58	.11
		Task 2	22.97	6.77	10.80	30.73		

Note. SPS: Syllable per Second; MLR: Mean Length of Run; NFP: Number of Filled Pauses; MLF: Mean Length of Filled Pauses; NSP: Number of Silent Pauses; MLS: Mean Length of Silent Pauses.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

The present study demonstrated that the participants' oral performances on Guided Note Taking were marginally stronger than those on Unguided Note Taking with respect to oral discourse coherence and fluency. ESL/EFL instructors, including the PIE teachers, may want to develop guided outline notes to assist their students to take notes in a more organized manner, so that they can better remember and recount academic lectures. The small sample size and the lack of teaching intervention/ time lapse seem to have mainly contributed to marginal performance differences in this study. However, more studies in the future with careful research designs are needed to find how guided pre-task planning would facilitate L2 oral task performances.

Related Readings

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