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The role of task repetition in L2 acquisition

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Degree in English Studies

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Academic year: 2016/2017

Abstract

The use of tasks in language teaching has been demonstrated to be beneficial as it provides learners with the opportunity to develop their interlanguage by means of conversational interaction. However, as tasks are meaning-based activities, task-based language teaching has been criticized for disregarding the formal aspects of language. Recent research on second language acquisition has included variables in task design which allow learners enrolled in communicative language learning courses to develop both meaning and form in their second language (L2). Task repetition, which consists in the repetition of the same or slightly altered task at intervals of time, is one of these variables and the focus of the present paper.

The aim of the paper is to show, from a theoretical and empirical perspective, that task repetition encourages learners to focus on the form of their speech and thus, to develop their L2 in terms of overall proficiency, complexity, accuracy, and fluency among others. This will be done by summarizing the most important research on the effects of task repetition in second language acquisition in different settings (second language vs. foreign language contexts) and with different participants (adult learners and child learners). Furthermore, and in order to offer the reader a full picture of the role of task repetition in language learning, the paper presents some interesting emerging research lines on the topic, such as the application of task repetition to writing tasks, individual differences and the relationship between task repetition and working memory capacity, and, finally, learners' and teachers' perceptions.

As will be shown, the findings reported in these studies support the freeing-up effect of task repetition and, thus, that task repetition facilitates L2 acquisition. In view of these results, one could recommend that task repetition be included among the activities used in language classrooms, especially in task-based language teaching contexts.

Keywords: task repetition (TR), task-based language teaching (TBLT), second language acquisition (SLA), focus on Form (FonF).

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. Introduction

The use of tasks in teaching contexts has been of great interest in the last decades because it has been shown to facilitate the acquisition of a second language (L2) by encouraging conversational interaction (García Mayo, 2007; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994, 2013). Task based language teaching (TBLT) is the pedagogical approach which uses tasks as the principal element in curricular design and learners' evaluation (Nunan, 2004). Ellis (2003) defined 'task' as a meaning-focused activity, designed to reproduce the communicative behaviour of real-world processes of communication, which require learners to adopt the role of 'language users'.

Van Patten (1990) noticed that in communicative activities learners tend to prioritize meaning over form, and so he proposed that some variables in task design could be modified to redirect learners' attention to formal aspects of the target language. Task repetition is one of these variables and the focus of the present paper. Task repetition, as the name itself suggests, consists in the repetition of the same or vaguely altered outcome oriented task at intervals of time (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, 2008).

The aim of the present paper is to demonstrate that task repetition offers learners the opportunity to focus their attention on formal aspects of language within an overall communicate environment and, thus, it facilitates the language learning process. In order to illustrate the importance of task repetition, I have selected different empirical investigations that consider its effect on different aspects of language, such as overall proficiency, interaction, complexity, accuracy and fluency.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, I will refer to the theoretical model supporting the potential advantages of using task repetition in language teaching. Secondly, I will summarize a sample of studies that have been carried out on this topic, differentiating between second language and foreign language contexts. I will then move to present some of the emerging research lines on task repetition to finally devote the last section of the paper to the conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

In this section I will review the theoretical evidence supporting the potential learning benefits of using task repetition in second language acquisition. Behaviourists conceived language as a "process of habit formation through repetition and practice" (Ahmadian, 2013; p. 38). Nevertheless, this new conceptualization of task repetition, as will be developed across this section, has a psycholinguistic rationale. Task repetition involves asking the learners to repeat a task at intervals of time (Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Ellis 2005). The initial performance, called pre-task activity, is a preparatory task that facilitates learners' subsequent performances. The rationale behind the facilitative role of task repetition is based on Levelt's (1989) production model, which postulates that in oral performance speakers go through three different levels: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation.

The first level is *conceptualization.* Here the communicative intentions; that is, the intended meaning of what the speaker wants to say, are generated. This preverbal message is sent to the *formulation* level, where it is converted into a phonetic plan by applying the proper grammar –lexicon and syntax-, and phonological rules. At the last level, the *articulator*, the linguistic units are encoded and articulated to produce sounds. These stages are summarized in Figure 1 below:

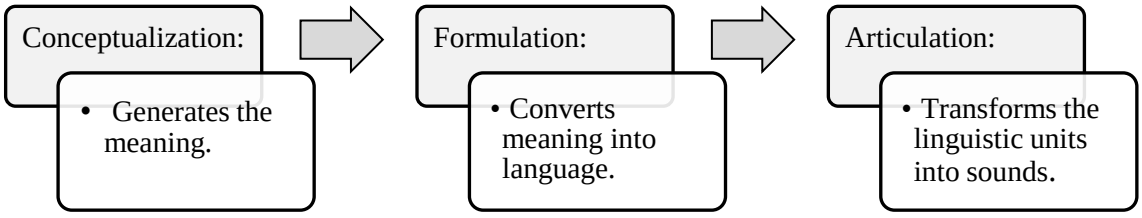

Figure 1. Stages in Levelt's (1989) model.

In this process, second language (L2) learners deal with the challenge of finding the formulation possibilities that they know in order to convert the conceptualized meaning into language under the pressure of the articulator. Hence, during the second performance of the task "part of the work of conceptualization, formulation and articulation carried out the first occasion is kept in learners' memory store and can be reused on the second occasion" (Bygate, 2001; p. 29); that is, they can integrate their previous knowledge into what they are doing.

Bygate (1996) noticed that, during the first performance, learners are essentially focused on the conceptualization of the preverbal message. This idea is consistent with Skehan's (1998) Trade-off hypothesis, which claims that our attentional capacity is naturally limited and selective and, thus, we are unable to focus simultaneously on meaning and form. As for task repetition, when the pre-task activity is performed, learners' focus is placed on meaning, whereas during the second enactment the freeing-up effect allows learners to focus on the form of their speech (Bygate, 1999, 2001, 2006; Bygate & Samuda, 2008).

Focus on form (FonF) (Long, 1991, 1996) is an important aspect in language teaching and learning. The idea that L2 learning takes places implicitly, that is, without explicit instruction, was held in the 80s in research basically influenced by Krashen's (1985) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis. However, research carried out in Canadian French immersion programs revealed that, despite being exposed to numerous hours of high-quality input, learners enrolled in those programs exhibited low levels of linguistic accuracy. On the basis of these findings, authors such as Long (1991) argued that FonF is necessary for acquisition to take place as the continued exposure to comprehensible input, although necessary, is insufficient to acquire the formal aspects of language. Accordingly, FonF is defined as the attention to linguistic elements within communicative and meaning-focused teaching contexts (Long, 1991).

Following Long's (1991) definition, and being TBLT a communicative approach to language teaching, task repetition, as will be demonstrated throughout the paper, offers learners the opportunity to focus not only on the message itself, but on its code.

3. Empirical studies supporting the benefits of task repetition in oral performance

This section will be devoted to presenting a summary of a selection of studies that have shown the benefits of task repetition (henceforth TR) for the quality of learners' oral production. As the context in which language is learned has been claimed to have an impact on the learning process, I have decided to organize the research studies into two sections according to the context in which they have been carried out. I will first refer to the studies carried out in second language (SL) settings, and then to the ones in foreign language (FL) settings. Table 1 below highlights the main differences between the two contexts:

Foreign language context	Second language context
Low level input: typically 1-3 hours a week timetabled lessons.	High(er) level input: more than just timetabled lesson.
No/restricted opportunities to outside class use of the target language.	Regular opportunities to use the target language outside class.
Focus on language as a formal system and as a subject.	Focus is on content and language integrated across the curriculum.

Table 1. Main differences between foreign and second language settings (Pinter, 2011; p. 87).

Besides, and for the reader's convenience, each section has been organized following the chronological order in which the different studies were published.

3.1 Second language context

Plough and Gass (1993) conducted a study on the effects of what they called ‘task familiarity’ on the use of negotiation of meaning (NoM) strategies. NoM strategies are discourse moves that speakers use to reach an understanding among interlocutors when they experience communicative breakdown. Some examples of NoM strategies are

clarification requests (*what?*), confirmation checks (repeating a preceding utterance to make sure that it has been heard and understood correctly), or comprehension checks (*you know?*). The participants in their study were 18 dyads of adult English learners, of which 9 had done a similar task twice before the data collection, and thus were familiarized with the type of task. Results showed that 'task familiarity' generated a non-threatening environment for learners, which enhanced the use of NoM strategies. However, they also noticed that learners became disinterested when working with the same task repeatedly.

Bygate is the pioneer in the study of the so called TR variable. In 1996 he investigated the relationship between L2 cognitive processing and TR for the first time, trying to demonstrate its positive influence on L2 output. His database came from a single English as a second language (ESL) learner who was asked to perform an oral narrative task (to watch a video and to retell it afterwards). This study revealed that TR had a positive impact on the three main areas a learner has to improve to achieve a native-like speaking ability, namely, complexity, accuracy and fluency, the so-called CAF triad.

To date, the majority of studies on TR have investigated its effects on the CAF triad. According to Skehan (1998) complexity is related to syntactic sophistication and variety. Accuracy is achieved when the speaker uses error free clauses, and fluency is associated with the amount of words that a speaker can utter in a certain amount of time (Skehan, 1998). Additionally, Bygate reported the relevance of TR in L2 learning, teaching and testing.

Bygate (2001) reported similar results in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency. In this study he examined the effects of TR on the L2 oral production of 48 ESL learners who were asked to perform a monologic narrative task plus an interview twice, with an interval of 10 weeks in between. In this study the sample of participants was larger and, consequently, the findings were more relevant.

In this section I have reviewed some of the studies which have explored the effects of TR in SL contexts. As the reader can observe, research on SL contexts is scarce as current studies are primary determined to explore the benefits of TR within FL learners.

3.2 Foreign language context

As stated above, most recent research on TR has been carried out in FL contexts, also referred to as low-input contexts precisely because most learners only have access to the target language in a classroom context. These studies have tried to show that TR might improve some aspects of learners' oral performance and could be a potentially useful task variable to manipulate in teaching. The studies to be commented below have been organized according to whether the participants were adults or children.

3.2.1 FL adult learners

Gass, Mackey, Álvarez-Torres and Fernández García (1999) reported that TR results in lexical sophistication and overall proficiency when the same task is performed but not when repeating a procedural task, a slightly altered task, which has the same procedure but a different content (Patanasorn, 2010). Their data, which came from 103 North-American students learning Spanish in the United States, corroborates Skehan and Foster's (1997) hypothesis, which maintains that oral production improves by simply repeating a task, as in the second enactment the learner is dealing with predictable events.

Following Bygate (1996, 2001), Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) explored the benefits of TR on complexity, accuracy and fluency. The participants in their study were 60 Iranian intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, none of whom had had the opportunity to practice English outside the classroom context. The students were encouraged to narrate the story of a silent film within a one-week interval. This study is particularly interesting as it compares the effects of TR in oral production with careful online planning and pressured online planning conditions. The ‘careful online planning’ group was free to take as much time as they needed to complete the task and to reformulate and improve inaccurate sentences. On the other hand, the ‘pressured online planning’ group had only 6 minutes for task completion.

The main findings of the study were that the careful online planning group displayed a greater improvement in CAF than the pressured online planning group. Consequently, these findings support the hypothesis that our attentional capacity is naturally selective

and limited, and that careful online planning with TR leads to more accurate oral production.

More recent studies (Fukuta, 2016; Kim & Tracy-Ventura, 2013) are devoted to exploring both the influence of TR on the CAF triad, and whether same TR and procedural TR had a different impact on learners' oral performance.

Kim and Tracy-Ventura's (2013) data came from 36 Korean EFL learners. Students were divided into two groups: the 'same TR group' performed the same task 3 times over a period of 4 weeks, whereas the 'procedural TR group' repeated three tasks with different contents. The study revealed that there were no significant differences between procedural-repetition and exact-repetition and their effects on the CAF triad. Both groups benefited from TR in terms of accuracy and complexity but showed no improvement in their fluency. These findings were expected to a certain extent: the researchers were interested in a possible improvement on the smoothness of learner's speech thanks to TR but when speakers prioritize form over meaning, fluency usually decreases (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Similar conclusions were reported in Fukuta (2016), which aimed to explain the way in which TR influences attentional orientation. The participants were 28 upper-intermediate Japanese EFL learners who were asked to perform a narrative task of six-frame cartoons twice, within a one-week interval. Participants were randomly assigned to two different groups in order to investigate the differences between same TR and procedural TR. Directly after the first performance, a retrospective interview was conducted. Thanks to these interviews the researcher observed the difficulties learners encountered at the different levels of production, especially, and as Bygate (1996) had pointed out, that speakers were mainly focused on the conceptualizer step, trying to convey meaning by focusing on communicative intentions and leaving aside lexis, syntax or phonetic encoding. Consider Example (1):

> Example 1: The man running away with his car… then…in the end.
> [Retrospective comment]: I realized there was a man (points in the picture), and I thought I had no mention him. I was wondering how to describe him.
>
> (Conceptualizing process) (Fukuta, 2016; p. 326)

In this example, the participant was deliberating what to say to describe the picture, not paying attention to the speech form (the lexicon, syntax and phonological rules). The selection and organization of the intended meaning is what Levelt (1989) called 'micro-planning'. Within TR, the pressure of conceptualization was released so that learners could redirect their attention to the code.

Overall results show a slightly improvement on the complexity, accuracy and fluency during the second performance of both, same TR and procedural TR groups, and thus, support the freeing-up effect of task repetition (Bygate, 1999, 2001, 2006; Bygate & Samuda, 2008).

3.2.2 FL child learners

Most studies on TR have focused on how this variable affects oral performance by adult learners. Research with child participants has been scant so far, although it is certainly on the increase due to the importance of the introduction of early foreign language programs around the world (see García Mayo, 2017).

Pinter (2007) studied the benefits of TR on children's peer-peer interaction. Interactive tasks, contrary to the monologic ones, are co-constructed; that is to say, they require the collaboration with a partner who can always contribute with new ideas and so the integration of knowledge from the pre-task activity can only be done to a limited extent. The participants in her study were two Hungarian 10-year-old EFL learners who performed a spot-the-difference procedural task three times. This kind of task encourages collaboration (Pica, Kang & Sauro, 2006) and, therefore, it is highly adequate for peer-peer interaction research. Pinter's study reported the benefits of using TR among young learners because, on the one hand, it increases their confidence and leads to a lower use of their L1 and, on the other hand, it fosters their fluency.

Shintani (2012) observed that there were no studies focused on complete beginner learners. Consequently, she carried out a study exploring teacher-learner interaction with 30 Japanese 6 year-old children who had no prior knowledge of English. Furthermore, this study is of particular interest as it employed input-based tasks instead of oral production tasks. Input-based instruction "involves the manipulation of the input that learners are exposed to or are required to process" (Ellis, 2012; p. 285). The focus

of these activities is not the verbal response, but the learners' understanding of the input. The task of this study was designed to enhance learners' comprehension by introducing new vocabulary and was repeated 9 times over a 5 week-period. Findings support the advantages of using TR in language teaching. Moreover, Shintani presents what, in her opinion and based on her research, are "the general principles that teachers need to follow when repeating a task with young beginner learners" (Shintani, 2012; p. 50). According to Shintani, eight characteristics should be met in order to promote a favourable scenario for second language acquisition (SLA):

Task repetition is effective when:

1. The teacher uses the L1 strategically, especially for task procedures but reduces its use over time as the learners become familiar with the procedures and begin to acquire L2 linguistic resources.

2. The teacher also allows the learners' strategic use of the L1 to achieve the task outcome, but encourages them to reduce it over time.

3. The learners are able to make frequent use of private speech[1] to achieve self-regulation.

4. The learners are allowed to take charge of the way in which in an interaction develops (i.e. take on an initiating role).

5. The learners feel free and are able to negotiate understanding if at first they fail to comprehend the input.

6. The teacher modifies her input over time, gradually using more complex language. This should occur intuitively as a result of the teacher's recognition of the development in the learners' input-processing abilities.

7. The teacher 'pushes' the learners by removing lexical support and thus inducing attention to grammatical markers of meaning.

[1] Private speech is "the self talk which many children (in particular) engage in that leads to the inner speech that more mature individuals use to control thought and behavior" (Saville-Troike, 2006; p. 114).

8. The task has a clear outcome and when implemented the learners are given feedback on whether they have successfully achieved the outcome.

(Shintani, 2012, pp. 50-51)

More recently, García Mayo and Imaz Aguirre (2016) analysed the influence of TR (same task and procedural task) on NoM strategies and dyadic patterns (see Storch, 2002) among young EFL beginner learners. Participants were 120 EFL children divided into 60 dyads. 54 of them were in third-year primary (8-9 years old) and 66 in fourth-year primary (9-10 years old). All students' onset-age was 4 and, apart from the regular English classes, they devoted 3 hours to the study of Science in English as they were following a Content and Language Integrated Learning Programme (CLIL) (see Marsh, 1994, 2000). Each dyad was encouraged to complete a spot-the-difference task twice. The study reported that there was no impact of TR on NoM but there was a clear impact on dyadic patterns: upon TR, more so upon procedural TR, those dyads that had displayed a non-collaborative pattern changed to a collaborative one. The younger participants (age 8) exhibited more collaborative patterns than the older ones.

Azkarai and Oliver (2016) investigated the impact of TR on negative feedback (NF). Participants were 7 to 8 years old children, some of them in an EFL course in Spain and others enrolled in an ESL programme in Australia. The particular interest of this study lies on the comparison between ESL and EFL child learners. Results of the study showed differences between both groups. Unlike their ESL counterparts, EFL learners produced fewer errors during the second performance of the task. On the other hand, ESL learners seemed to be more aware of formal aspects upon TR and employed more NoM strategies than the EFL group. These results are consistent with the ones of García Mayo and Imaz Aguirre (2016).

The final study to be reviewed in this section is Azkarai and García Mayo (2016), who examined the impact of both same TR and procedural TR on L1 use and the functions the L1 serves. The participants were 42 Spanish EFL learners and the procedure and materials correspond with the ones used by García Mayo and Imaz Aguirre (2016) named above. Even though the use of the L1 in language classrooms is a controversial subject, it has been demonstrated that a "balanced L1 use might have positive effects on subsequent L2 learning" (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2016; p. 3). The

findings of the study revealed that learners employed their L1 essentially for two functions: borrowings and appeals for help. Consider the following examples:

Example (2). Exact task repetition condition group, time 2:

1	Álvaro:	have you, have you a head in the cowboy?
2	Tomás:	*¿sombrero?* [hat?]
3		yes.
4	Álvaro:	*te toca.* [it's your turn.]
5	Tomás:	have you
6		*¿sabes cómo se decía cinturón?* [do you know how to say belt?]
7	Álvaro:	no.

(Azkarai & García Mayo, 2016; p. 7)

Example (3). Procedural task repetition condition group, time 2:

1	Luis:	*¿cómo se dice hierba?* [how do you say grass?]
2	Isabel:	*no sé.* [I don't know.]
3	Luis:	green *hierba* [grass]?
4	Isabel:	yes.

(Azkarai & García Mayo, 2016; p. 8)

Examples (2) and (3) illustrate instances of appeal for lexical help. Moreover in example number (3) Luis uses his L1, Spanish, to say the word 'grass' and therefore, it constitutes an example of borrowing.

Besides, the study showed that TR had an impact on the learners' L1 use, which decreased the second time the task was performed. In general, L1 use by children is greater than that by adults reported in previous work (see Azkarai & García Mayo,

2015; Storch & Aldosari, 2010) but more research is needed to substantiate these findings.

4. Emerging research lines

This section will briefly present some emerging research lines around the topic of TR, namely, TR in writing, individual factors and working memory capacity, and teachers' and learners' perceptions.

4.1 TR in writing

Notwithstanding the potential gains writing tasks offer for second language acquisition (Bygate, van den Branden & Norris, 2014), research on the area of TR has paid little attention to this topic.

To begin with, it is important to consider the different nature between writing and oral communication and the psycholinguistic processes involved in them (Kormos, 2014; Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002; Tavakoli, 2014).

> What makes writing different from speaking is that in writing, because of the lack of pressure caused by situational factors present in speaking, the existence of more time compared with speaking, and the visibility of the text produced, learners have more time and opportunity to pay attention to form and meaning simultaneously and to involve more active monitoring.
>
> (Tavakoli, 2014, as seen in Amiryousefi, 2016; p. 1054)

Apart from the opportunity writing activities offer L2 learners to revise and correct their own text during the production process, they allow them to go back over the feedback received and become aware of their particular mistakes. As noticed by Ferris and Hedgcock (2014), feedback is crucial for writing instruction, hence, it should be contemplated in research on TR. Feedback on the first performance of the task offers a unique opportunity for learners to attend and develop their L2 (Ellis, 2009; Manchón, 2014).

To the best of my knowledge, only two recent investigations have been conducted on the role of writing task repetition (WTR) in L2 learning and use. The first study was

carried out by Jung (2013), who investigated the development of language production by means of essay repetition, more specifically the influence of WTR and corrective feedback on complexity, accuracy and fluency. Results of this study came from 6 Korean ESL learners at a university in the United States and revealed that, even though TR and corrective feedback showed no effect on accuracy and fluency (measured by the length of the words used by participants in each essay), they had a positive influence on complexity. However, this was only a pilot study and its findings could not be generalized.

Research on TBLT has been mainly focused on the short-term results (Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005). The particular relevance of a recent study by Nitta and Baba (2014) lies in the fact that it explores the potential learning outcomes of TR over an extended period of time, a whole academic year. The study was carried out in two different Japanese university classes (Class A and Class B). TBLT research has been largely conducted in laboratories under controlled conditions. However, Nitta and Baba argue for the need to collect longitudinal data in real language classrooms. Each of the authors played the role of English teacher in one language classroom and at the end of the year they gathered a corpus of 1300 compositions from 46 students in both classes.

Regarding the characteristics of the two classes, both, Class A and B were classified as beginner learners in terms of writing. However, in terms of overall proficiency, Class A scores were noticeably superior. Furthermore, and as most EFL learners, the participants did not have the opportunity to use English outside the classroom context. Thus, the progress achieved throughout the research year was attributed exclusively to classroom activities.

TR, as initially pointed out by Plough and Gass (1993) and later on by other researchers (Amiryousefi, 2016; Gass et al., 1999; Kim & Tracy-Ventura, 2013) can affect motivation negatively, producing disinterest and low-engagement by the learners during task completion. In order to avoid this decrease in motivation, Nitta and Baba decided to repeat the same task and topic twice, although the same type of task was repeated during the whole research period (30 weeks). The students were asked to write about a familiar topic for ten minutes without stopping. It is important to notice that they were allowed to use a dictionary during their performance.

The study was framed within Dynamic System Theory (DST) (see Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Dynamic descriptions of the data provide a developmental understanding of the L2 changes at different stages. The Dynamic System perspective aims to analyze a restricted number of individuals at length. The authors justify the application of this perspective because of theoretical and practical reasons. With regards to the theoretical reasons, "a classroom can be viewed as a dynamic system, in which students and teachers interact with one another and with the choices of other participants who, more or less directly, influence the context in which they are operating" (Tudor, 2001, as seen on Nitta & Baba, 2014; p. 115). Accordingly, Nitta and Baba suggested that teachers should bear in mind the group-level changes generated by this interaction when preparing task activities. On the other hand, and with respect to the practical reasons, understanding the classroom as a dynamic system offers the opportunity to draw conclusions at both levels, the individual and the group level because, contrary to those studies which analyze a lineal cause-and-effect relationship, the dynamic perspective considers individual variation.

Following this Dynamic System Perspective, the study by Nitta and Baba (2014) drew remarkable conclusions. Firstly, the effects of repeating the same type of task with one-week interval showed no increase in students' compositions quality, although writings were longer and improved in terms of fluency. On the contrary, the analysis of long-term effects revealed an improvement in terms of syntactic complexity and variety. Students also used more diverse lexis, although there was no improvement regarding fluency. Accordingly, the conclusions derived from these findings suggest that a single repetition is expected to foster learners' fluency; nonetheless, developing syntactic and lexical aspects of language requires repeating the same type of task over an extended period of time.

4.2 Individual factors: Working Memory Capacity

Several studies have emphasized the need to study the way individual factors interact with L2 acquisition and production (Ahmadian, 2013; Ellis, 2009; Fukuta, 2016; Robert & Meyer, 2012). However, very little research has been done on this topic. Ahmadian's (2013) study is groundbreaking in this area, as it analyses for the first time the way in which Working Memory Capacity (WMC) is correlated with the effects of TR on L2 oral production.

Working Memory (WM) is a system that provides "an interface between perception, long term memory, and action" (Baddeley, 2003; p. 82). Therefore, it is crucial to practically all complex cognitive functions such as speaking. However, WM is not an unlimited system and that is why we talk about WMC. The basis of Ahmadian's study are the findings of previous research that suggested a connection between WMC and a better speech performance (Ahmadian, 2012; Conway, et al., 2007; Guará-Tavares, 2008; Rosen & Engle, 1997; Towse & Jarrold, 2006).

Especially interesting are the discoveries by Rosen and Engle (1997) who found that individuals with greater WMC were able to perform oral tasks more fluently and accurately than those with lower WMC. The basis for this claim is that "individual differences in WM capacity reflect differential ability to attend to the information which is critical to the completion of the task at hand and to block distracting events" (Ahmadian, 2013; p. 40). In his study Ahmadian focused on the variable TR and addressed two research questions (RQs):

> RQ1: Is there any relationship between WMC and L2 oral complexity, accuracy, and fluency in performing an oral narrative task for the first time?
>
> RQ2: Is there any relationship between WMC and L2 oral complexity, accuracy, and fluency in the second encounter with the same task?
>
> (Ahmadian, 2013; p. 41)

The participants were 42 Iranian EFL intermediate learners between 19 and 22 years old. The data were collected in three different sessions: in the first one they were administered a WMC test taken from Mackey et al. (2002), for more information see Ahmadian (2012) and Mojavezi and Ahmadian (2013). The second session was devoted to the first performance of the task. In it learners were asked to watch a silent video and afterwards to narrate the story of the video monologically. The third session took place one week after and participants were required to repeat the same oral task.

The results showed that WMC did not interact with L2 oral complexity, accuracy, and fluency in the first performance. Accordingly, the answer to the first question was negative. On the other hand, results for the second research question suggested that, interestingly, WMC had positive effects on accuracy and on fluency. Nevertheless and

as Ahmadian pointed out, the correlational design of the research made it impossible to assure that the effects were only due to WMC, as there are other individual factors such as language aptitude or motivation that should be investigated.

4.3 Teachers' and learners' perceptions

The last article I am going to refer to discusses teachers' and learners' perceptions about TR. This study by Ahmadian, Mansouri and Ghominejad (2017) is highly interesting as no previous research had focused on this topic. Eight language teachers with an average experience of 6 years, as well as 21 upper-intermediate EFL learners participated in the study. The teachers adopted a TR dynamic in their speaking practice and the learners, without being aware that they were going to perform TR, completed the same task in pairs within one-week interval. Immediately after the second performance both teachers and learners engaged in a semi-structured interview which aimed to answer different questions: What did learners think the purpose of TR was? Which aspects of language did they (teachers and learners) think to be benefited by TR? Which was their overall impression regarding the procedure? These interviews showed that both learners' and teachers' opinions towards the pedagogical implications of TR were favorable:

> TR could be a useful technique in that the first performance leaves some traces in learners' memory and therefore they may be able to do it more efficiently on the second occasion because they know more about the content.
>
> (Ahmadian, Mansouri & Ghominejad, 2017; "Findings and discussion" para. 4)

> […] in the first performance, I struggled to figure out what I should say about pictures and how I should put ideas together, but this time I had something in my mind and could repeat the same content with a better structure.
>
> (Ahmadian, Mansouri & Ghominejad, 2017; "Findings and discussion" para. 6)

These transcribed comments, the former by a teacher, and the latter made by a student, are visibly consistent with Levelt's (1989) and Bygate's (2001) theoretical basis supporting the beneficial outcomes of TR in L2 learning.

"As for the CAF triad, all participants believed that TR had enhanced their fluency and most of them observed a development with reference to accuracy and complexity defined by learners as 'long sentences entailing difficult structures'" (Ahmadian, Mansouri & Ghominejad, 2017; "Findings and discussion" para. 8).

Another interesting aspect of the study was the sense of 'boredom' in repeating the same task. In this sense, learners' and teachers' vision differ as, on the one hand, almost all teachers (seven out of eight) believed that TR is boring for learners and leads to disinterest (see Amiryousefi, 2016; Gass et al., 1999; Kim & Tracy-Ventura, 2013; Plough and Gass, 1993). Learners, on the other hand, argued that TR is not boring, even though three of them suggested the use of procedural repetition instead of exact task repetition in order to maintain the interest.

Lastly, and as the students themselves indicated, it is important for learners to be aware of the purpose of TR. When goals are stated clearly, learners have the opportunity to focus their attention towards those aspects of language which are relevant for the activity.

5. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to demonstrate how TR facilitates the L2 acquisition process by offering learners the opportunity to focus not only on the meaning, but also on the form of their output. This claim has been confirmed by summarizing some of the most important studies carried out in this topic. The review of the articles has supported the stated psycholinguistic rationale for using TR in language teaching contexts, both in SL and FL settings.

In the SL context, the main findings regard the benefits of TR for improvements in the CAF triad. On the other hand, the more recent studies carried out in FL contexts showed mixed findings, as it is not clear whether fluency benefits from this procedure. The different findings could be attributed to the high-input SL context. Besides, studies in FL contexts have also aimed to investigate the differences between same task vs. procedural TR. From the findings reported in these studies, it can be said that there is no significant difference between the effects of exact TR and procedural TR, since both

procedures seem to be beneficial. However, learners think that exact TR could lead to disinterest.

This paper has also explored some emerging research lines on TR. I find the results on TR in writing very interesting since they show the benefits of repeating a writing task thanks to the feedback provided. Additionally, findings suggest that TR as a procedure needs to be implemented over an extended period of time to achieve its full potential. The study involving learners' and teachers' perceptions is also extremely interesting. The purpose of some SLA research is to find empirical evidence that could lead to methodologies aiming at improving the L2 acquisition process. Learners' and teachers' views should be included and taken into account. Results from Ahmadian et al.'s (2017) study showed that learners were aware of their improvement during the second performance of the task and felt motivated in using this method during their classes.

Unfortunately, research on TR is at the moment still scant and further work is needed. Moreover, not many of the noteworthy findings in the area have been made available to teachers, which is something to be done in order to create a common agenda which could be beneficial for all language learners. In my opinion, teachers will welcome any information on the topic that could improve their methodologies and improve their learners' performance. Before concluding, I would like to indicate that this topic, aside from being really interesting for me, has been very useful in my experience as teacher. As I began to read about the topic, previously unknown to me, I decided to apply TR in my classes. I teach Spanish as a second language to adult refugees, as well as EFL to Spanish children. In my Spanish lessons, I currently work with a task-based designed book, *Gente* (Martín Peris & Sans Baulenas, 2004), which gives me the opportunity to apply TR systematically during my classes. The results that I have observed are coherent with the ones reported in the articles reviewed in this paper, and thus I will continue applying TR in my lessons. Moreover, I am sure I will continue reading articles on TR and I do not exclude the possibility of carrying out some research in the future in order to collaborate in the dissemination and understanding of the beneficial effects of TR in the L2 acquisition process.

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