HOW DO TEACHERS VIEW STRATEGIC PLANNING AS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING IN EFL CLASSES?

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Abstract

This study investigates how teachers view strategic planning as contributing to the development of speaking in EFL classes. The study is based around the following two research questions: How far are teachers aware of strategic planning and its potential function? How do teachers see a task with an internal preparation to production structure as contributing to the development of speaking? To answer these questions, a task was chosen with an internal preparation to production structure so that it represented the theory of strategic planning, and was used as the focal point for data collection. Interviews were conducted with eight teachers to see how they commented on the task's internal features and whether they thought the task could develop learners' fluency and accuracy skills. The findings showed that the majority of teachers believed the task could improve learners' fluency and accuracy, which implies that strategic planning can develop different aspects of learners' oral skills.

Keywords: task, strategic planning, speaking, fluency, accuracy

Introduction

The past thirty years has seen an increasing amount of research on the role of tasks and how they can help develop learners' second language (L2) oral skills. An aspect of tasks that has received significant attention is task planning. Numerous studies such as Ellis and Yuan (2003), and Sangarun (2005) have confirmed that when learners have the opportunity to plan before they carry out an oral task, they are able to perform at a higher standard, using fewer undue pauses and hesitations, resulting in greater fluency. This type of planning, known as strategic planning (SP), allows learners time to plan what they are going to talk about prior to performance. Learners can also use SP to think about how they are going to speak, by focusing on language form (Ellis and Yuan 2003, p.20). In doing so they can reduce the number of errors they make when speaking and improve their accuracy. However, studies carried out on the effects of SP with learners' accuracy are not as convincing. For example, Crookes (1989) concluded that SP has no effect on accuracy, Skehan and Foster (1997) reported that planning only improves accuracy on narrative tasks, whilst Ellis and Yuan (2003) found no gains in accuracy. Consequently, it is left open to debate whether SP can improve all aspects of learners' speech.

Given the amount of research carried out on SP, the aim of this study is to see how teachers in general consider SP as beneficial for the development of speaking in terms of fluency and accuracy. We first begin by describing the relevant literature behind the process of speaking, as well as the two aspects of speech connected with this study: fluency and accuracy. The role of tasks is then discussed as a means to develop learners' oral skills, followed by the effects that SP has on accuracy and fluency. The next section outlines the methodology for the study, followed by an analysis of interviews from two groups of teachers regarding the effects of SP. The findings and conclusions are then discussed.

Background

The process of speaking

In order to develop the skills for oral L2 use, it is useful to know how speech is produced. 'By far the most influential theory where studies of task planning are concerned is Levelt's (1989) model of speech production' (Ellis, 2005, p.11). Levelt's (1989) processing model contains three main factors of speech production:

- Conceptualisation
- Formulation
- Articulation

First is conceptualization which involves the speaker generating the basic content of a message at a 'macro-level' which is not yet linguistic but contains all the necessary information to be converted into language, referred to as a 'pre-verbal message'. The second stage, formulation, concerns the grammatical encoding of the preverbal message which is done by retrieving the required lexical items and phonological forms from a learners' working memory. Finally, the third stage; articulation receives and executes the message as spoken language. A 'monitoring' function also exists, in which speech is checked for errors and can result in the re-phrasing of utterances.

Bygate (2001, p.16) describes how the process of speech requires conceptualisation, formulation and articulation to be carried out at speed, especially formulation, as human interaction does not usually allow time to consciously think speech processes through. A beginner L2 learner would find processing conceptualisation, formulation and articulation difficult under normal time limits for speaking, as he/she would lack the ability to produce L2 speech automatically. So how can the automation of speech be developed? Fluency and accuracy are two important aspects of learners'

speech which teachers can focus on to improve the proficiency of oral language, and we shall now examine each one.

Fluency has been defined in many ways but for the purpose of this study it relates to the 'learner's capacity to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation' (Skehan, 1996, p.22). In other words, fluency can be seen as the ability to speak in the L2 under normal time constraints without too much hesitation.

Ellis and Yuan (2003, p.2) define accuracy as 'the context to which the language produced conforms to target language norms.' This means being able to speak in the L2 at the same standard of a native speaker in relation to the amount of mistakes or errors made when speaking. When referring to accuracy in terms of oral performance, 'in no sense is it meant to imply that fluent language may not also be accurate language' (Brumfit, 1984, p.52). In other words, being able to speak accurately, for example without making mistakes, can be seen as a component of being able speak fluently. Brumfit (1984) does, however, distinguish accuracy and fluency in terms of pedagogical context, for example, when referring to different classroom activities that teachers can use to develop different areas of learners L2 speech:

> Accuracy and fluency is essentially a methodological distinction, rather than one in psychology or linguistics. That is to say, it is a distinction which may have values to teachers in decision making about the content of lessons and the distribution of time between various types of activity. (p. 52).

Byrne (1987) contrasts accuracy activities with fluency activities. The former is 'to make sure that students get enough practice in a particular point of grammar or vocabulary or pronunciation' (p.7). Accuracy exercises are used to draw students' attention to specific areas of language form in order to help them speak correctly. Whereas the latter allow 'your students opportunities to *use* the language they have learnt: to use it freely, even if they make mistakes' (ibid). In other words, fluency activities allow students to use language for interaction. Students do not need to focus as much on the accuracy of small details but rather to produce larger amounts of discourse. As both accuracy and fluency activities have their advantages for improving L2 speech, Byrne (1987, p.10) suggests teachers should provide 'a balanced diet' of both for developing L2 speech. So the question now is how do we provide the correct balance of accuracy and fluency? Tasks offer an opportunity to apply language form (accuracy work), with language in use (fluency work).

Tasks

Numerous definitions of tasks have been documented in the literature and the following is a definition in the pedagogic sense:

> a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilising their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. (Nunan, 2004, p.4).

In other words, tasks are used so learners can apply their L2 knowledge to interact with others in the L2 focusing primarily on meaning in order to achieve an outcome. Despite the growing amount of research into task-based learning and teaching, Ellis (2005, p.1) notes that results of task-based L2 oral performance have been inconsistent, although research has shown more consistent results in relation to task planning.

Task planning

According to Ellis (2005, p.3), task-based planning can be divided into the following categories:

- Pre-task planning
- Within-task planning

The distinction is determined by the time when the planning occurs. Pre-task planning takes place before the performance of the task, as opposed to within-task planning which occurs during task performance. 'Pre-task planning is further divided into *rehearsal* and *strategic planning*' (ibid). Rehearsal also known as 'task repetition' involves repeating a task prior to actual performance. 'Strategic planning entails learners preparing to perform the task by considering the content they will need to encode and how to express this content' (ibid). In other words, learners are provided with the instructions for what is required to perform the task, and they then complete these steps in order to carry out the task successfully. The purpose of this study is to focus on the effects of SP on learners' oral performance in terms of fluency and accuracy.

The effects of SP: fluency vs accuracy

'Skehan (1998) suggests that speakers' fluency, accuracy and complexity of speech demand capacity, and that there is likely to be a trade-off between these aspects of the skill' (Bygate, 2001, p.17). Complexity refers to the amount of complex L2 structures used by learners (Skehan, 1998, p.22). Skehan (1998) argues that it is difficult for learners to attend to all aspects of L2 speech

simultaneously, i.e. trying to speak correctly whilst also attempting to produce large amounts of discourse. As a result, 'learners with limited L2 proficiency trade off attention to one aspect of language against another when given the opportunity to plan the performance of a challenging task' (Ellis and Yuan, 2003, p.23). Skehan and Foster (1997) argue that SP results in a trade-off between accuracy and complexity with gains in one or the other but not both. Robinson (2001) however, believes that both accuracy and complexity can result in positive gains when learners have the opportunity to plan for a cognitively demanding task. However, as this study is concerned only with accuracy and fluency, which aspect of this speech does SP benefit the most? 'A general finding of all but two of the studies (Guara-Tavares 2008) and Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) irrespective of whether learners were second or foreign, was that strategic planning has a positive effect on fluency' (Ellis 2009, p.493). In terms of accuracy, however, research results are not as convincing. According to Ellis (2009) 'previous studies have produced somewhat mixed results regarding the effects of strategic planning on grammatical accuracy' (p.496). For example, Ellis (1987) found that planning had a positive effect on learners' accuracy of certain tense forms but not on other tenses, whilst Crooks (1989) showed that planning had no effect on accuracy with article use.

> 'Foster and Skehan (1996) found that pre-task planning had an effect on general linguistic accuracy when the planning was unguided but not when it was guided. Skehan and Foster (1997) found that the type of task influenced whether planning had an effect on accuracy; planning led to increased accuracy in the case of a personal and a narrative task, but not a decision-making task' (Ellis and Yuan 2003, p.3).

Ortega (1997) found that planning helped L2 learners' accuracy with nouns but not with articles (ibid), whilst Ellis and Yuan (2003) reported gains in fluency as a result of SP but not accuracy, yet Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) reported gains in accuracy but not fluency.

Ellis and Yuan (2003) related the findings of their study to Levelt's (1989) processing model and argued that SP appeared to benefit fluency more than accuracy because learners use SP to think of *what to say* first, and *how to speak* second (Ellis and Yuan 2003, p.20). Consequently, they 'prioritised conceptualisation over formulation and articulation' (ibid), i.e. they focused more on message content rather than attending to grammar which benefitted their oral performance in terms of fluency at the expense of accuracy. Although, in order to be sure of what learners do during planning, it is crucial to cross-examine them, for example using post-task interviews, in order to determine their planning strategies.

Learner perspectives towards accuracy and fluency when planning

Ortega (2005) carried out interviews with Spanish learners of English in order to determine the strategies they use when planning for oral tasks. The results showed that some learners preferred to focus on accuracy during SP whilst others preferred to concentrate on meaning and fluency. The students concerned with fluency 'seemed to accept error and error correction as inherent to their being non-native speakers of the language, and as part of a gradual process of second language learning' (p.92). On the other hand, Ortega (2005) described how some learners were more interested in developing accuracy as 'they were anxious about making mistakes, and they seemed to view L2 learning as a prolonged effort to reach "a hundred percent correctness"' (p.93). This study showed how learners prioritize accuracy and fluency in different ways depending on their needs.

To summarize, the literature to date shows that SP benefits learners' fluency more than accuracy, although certain learners may prioritize accuracy over fluency depending on their needs. There is, however, a lack of research concerning teachers' views regarding SP. In order to obtain a complete picture about the effects of SP, it is important to see how teachers in different teaching environments view SP as contributing to the development of learners' L2 fluency and accuracy skills.

The present study

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. How far are teachers aware of SP and its potential function?
    It was hypothesised that the teachers in this study would show a general awareness of SP and its potential function.
    2. How do teachers see a task with an internal preparation to production structure as contributing to learners' fluency and accuracy development?
    It was hypothesized the teachers in this study would see a task that has an internal preparation to production structure as contributing to learners' fluency development but not their accuracy development.

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Methodology

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The participants

Two groups of native EFL teachers participated in the study. One group consisted of four teachers, three males and one female who worked for an English Language school in Japan. They

had approximately three to seven years teaching experience and they taught English oral communication classes to predominantly young Japanese learners of English of varying levels of proficiency [1]. The second group of participants were four teachers from an English Language school in the UK (three males and one female) who generally had more teaching experience, ranging from two to twenty years. These teachers taught English language to mostly young adult learners of varying levels of ability from a variety of different countries.

The views of both groups regarding the effects of SP were compared to find any similarities or differences from teachers working in different socio-cultural contexts.

The task

An oral interactive task taken from *Going for Gold*'s (Acklam & Crace 2003, p.128)[2] intermediate level English Language course book was used in this study. The task was chosen for three reasons. First, it contained an internal preparation to production structure, therefore representing the theory of SP. For example, it comprised of two parts, the first part was a preparation stage in which learners, in pairs, would have to write a description of a film they know using the passive tense. The second part was the performance stage in which each pair would read their description to the class without saying the film name and the rest of the class would have to guess the title. As the task involves SP during part one, it could be presented to teachers to find out their awareness of strategic planning without explicitly referring to the subject matter. Second, as previous SP studies have shown limitations over gains in accuracy, this task was chosen because it contains a preparation stage that focuses on language form, i.e. the passive tense. It was therefore of interest to see whether teachers believed the task could improve learners' accuracy as well as fluency.

Third, the task was taken from an intermediate level course book because of the researcher's personal interest in teaching intermediate level learners. The UK teachers had experience teaching similar tasks to intermediate level learners, therefore their comments were expected to be highly relevant for this study. The Japan teachers had less experience with such tasks, nevertheless, their participation was justifiable as they were still EFL teachers and the fact that they taught younger learners should have resulted in an intuitive knowledge of SP. For example, younger learner teachers generally do not rely on the use of textbooks throughout an entire lesson due to the need to engage in physical activities such as songs and games, therefore one would expect them to plan tasks or activities prior to lessons.

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[1] Details of the teachers' experience and background can be found in Appendix 1.
[2] For a full description of the task, please see Appendix 2.

The interview design

Interview questions were designed to explore how far teachers were aware of SP, and whether a task that has an internal preparation structure could develop learners' fluency and accuracy skills. It was therefore crucial to be as discreet as possible when asking questions related to planning so that the teachers would be unaware of the study's purpose.

The interview consisted of four parts. The first part attempted to see if teachers would, without prompting, notice the task's internal preparation to production structure, by commenting on the connection between parts one and two of the task, for example, having to do part one in order to perform part two. If the teachers showed an awareness of the task's internal preparation to production structure, the interview would move onto part two, where they would be asked about the task's effectiveness for developing learners' L2 speech. If, however, during part one of the interview, a teacher did not acknowledge the internal structure of the task, the interview would move onto part three. This section asked further questions about the internal preparation to production structure of the task in an attempt to elicit responses about the task's planning structure. If the teacher could identify the task's structure, the interview would turn to part two. If the teacher still did not recognize the task's internal structure, the interview would move onto part four in a final attempt to elicit the teachers' views on the task's planning structure. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 3.

Piloting

The interview questions and the task were piloted on three EFL teachers from the UK, China and Japan to see how teachers from different socio-cultural backgrounds would view a task with a planning structure and how they would consider it beneficial for developing learners' oral language. Only the teacher from China acknowledged the task's internal structure and how both parts of the task are connected to develop learners' speech. As all the teachers in the pilot had less than three years teaching experience, this suggested that it may not be just experienced teachers who are able to refer to a task's internal function. The piloting resulted in slight adjustments made to the interview questions, whilst the chosen task appeared to successfully compliment them.

Interview settings and instruments

The interviews with the teachers from Japan were carried out during the second week of June 2008. The interviews were recorded on *skype*. The task was emailed to each participant before the interview so they had time to review it before giving their responses. The UK teacher

interviews were carried out face-to-face during the last week of June 2008 and were recorded using a tape cassette-player.

Analysis

This section analyses the teacher interview data in relation to each research question. Teachers' comments are examined individually and then summarised for each group.

How far are teachers aware of SP and its potential function?

Japan Teacher 1 (TJ1)

During part one of the interview, TJ1 did not appear to be aware of SP as she did not comment on the task's internal structure and the connection between parts one and two. For example:

"Erm, it involves using the passive tense."

The interview then moved onto part three where TJ1 did provide an awareness of SP as she acknowledged the task's internal preparation structure:

"Er, part one is like the kind of preparation work. Sort of part one would be students
together like actually doing the bulk of the work, making their descriptions and then
part two would be either smaller groups or a whole classroom setting, erm, more of a
presentation style."

Japan Teacher 2 (TJ2)

TJ2 did show signs that he was aware of SP during part one of the interview, as he commented slightly on the task's internal structure and the connection between parts one and two:

"They would discuss what they're going to say in pairs before they like talk to each
other in the groups, erm, which is like helps them to relax."

Japan Teacher 3 (TJ3)

TJ3 did not appear to be aware of SP during part one of the interview:

"I suppose it's getting them to think about the When, Where, Who questions."

However, during part three of the interview, he did show a slight awareness of SP:

"Can you see any way the second part builds on the first part?"

 TJ3: "Erm … erm, well, apart from the fact that it just it answers the first part, doesn't it?"

Japan Teacher 4 (TJ4)

TJ4 did not appear to show signs of awareness about SP during part one of the interview:

"Erm well both of them, the partners discussing, erm, coming up with a film that
they've, that they both know."

But he did show an awareness during part three:

"Erm, er, so you know the actual sort of thinking part's been done in the first half."

From this we can see that one out of the four teachers in Japan appeared to show an awareness of SP during the first part of the interview, however, the rest did not do so until part three, where they all commented on the task's internal preparation structure and the connection between parts one and two of the task.

UK Teacher 1 (TU1)

TU1 did not appear to have an awareness of SP during part one of the interview, for example:

"Pair work, which is always good for communication. It uses knowledge they already
have so it is good to use something they know about."

However, during part three, TU1 did show an awareness of SP by commenting on the task's internal structure and the connection between parts one and two of the task:

"They are going to have to repeat themselves as far as what they have said to their
partner."

UK Teacher 2 (TU2)

TU2 did not seem to comment on the task's internal structure during part one of the interview:

"It involves describing a film, having to guess a film without knowing what it is from

the description."

Although during part three, TU2 did comment on SP by acknowledging the connection between parts one and two of the task:

"One is writing the description, which is where you are communicating with each other but it is trying to write something down. The other part is actually using the information and communicating it to the other students."

UK Teacher 3 (TU3)

TU3 did not appear to show an awareness of SP during part one of the interview:

"There is quite a bit of description really, sounds like a bit of writing and then some speaking and listening."

However, during part three, TU3 commented on it by referring to the task's internal structure:

"Can you see any way the second part builds on the first part?"
"It could be used to build on the first task so the student who is reading the description could add things or if questions are asked then they could add other descriptive sentences to it, but I think it is like a good follow on task from the first one."

UK Teacher 4 (TU4)

TU4 showed a clear awareness of SP during the first part of the interview:

"Basically it seems to be practice, oral practice. Sorry, written practice of the passive and then reading it aloud, it seems to be, to be a speaking activity."

From this we can see that one out of the four teachers provided an awareness of SP during part one of the interview and the rest of the teachers did not until part three of the interview, at which stage they all referred to the task's internal structure and the link between the two parts.

Summary of both sets of teachers

From analysing the data of all the participants, it appears that hypothesis one is largely unconfirmed. Only one out of four teachers in each group showed an awareness of SP during part

one of the interview by commenting on the task's internal preparation to production structure, whilst the remaining teachers did not refer to the task's internal structure until part three of the interview. There were no significant differences between the two groups of teachers.

How do teachers see a task with an internal preparation to production structure as contributing to learners' fluency and accuracy development?

The following interview questions were used:

- How do you think this might affect their accuracy?
- How do you think this might affect their fluency?
- How do you think this task could contribute in terms of the students' language development?

Japan Teacher 1 (TJ1)

In terms of accuracy:

"I guess if they've written it down first their speaking may be more accurate because they've got something to work on."

In terms of fluency:

"They'd have the language there in front of them so they wouldn't be constantly thinking of what language to use next and how to construct sentences so it would, I think yeah, it would be quite good for fluency."

In terms of language development:

"Activities like this help because they have to communicate with a partner in order to come up with a joint piece of work."

Japan Teacher 2 (TJ2)

In terms of accuracy:

"Because you've got the first part which is a written part they, and they're going to do it together, erm, it should help them not make mistakes because actually they're writing it down what they are going to say."

In terms of fluency:

"It's not activity itself which affects fluency its how you get the students to do it."

In terms of language development:

"Erm, I guess, I mean it depends how you do it."

Japan Teacher 3 (TJ3)

TJ3 did not provide a clear answer regarding accuracy.

In terms of fluency:

"It should improve, shouldn't it, because they've had to think about their own answers, you know, they've had to talk a lot."

In terms of language development:

"It's going to make them speak entirely in the past tense, isn't it, which is good because it gives you the opportunity to correct their errors there."

Japan Teacher 4 (TJ4)

TJ4 did not provide a clear answer regarding accuracy or fluency.

In terms of language development:

"When they come to write their sentences, they've obviously got to use their passive tense."

From this it appears that half the teachers (TJ1 and TJ2) suggest how the task could improve learners' accuracy whilst half again (TJ1 and TJ3) comment how the task could help develop fluency. Finally, only TJ1 and TJ3 illustrate clearly how the task could help improve learners' language development.

UK Teacher 1 (TU1)

TU1 did not provide a clear answer regarding accuracy and fluency.

In terms of language development:

"Communication and listening definitely for some of the students."

UK Teacher 2 (TU2)

In terms of accuracy:

"One can help, then help the other make the written description more accurate which hopefully would help them be more accurate in their spoken version."

In terms of fluency:

"As they have written it down and prepared it then they should be able to talk about it with fewer pauses, fewer errors and gaps."

In terms of language development:

"It is free language, it is not limited and it is not structured language. It increases their fluency basically."

UK Teacher 3 (TU3)

In terms of accuracy:

"If students are speaking spontaneously then I think they will make more mistakes than when they have time to think and plan. Generally, when they are writing they have got time to think of a plan."

In terms of fluency:

"When they have time to prepare… even if they haven't written a description but have thought about a description, they would be more fluent than if they are speaking spontaneously."

In terms of language development:

"Being able to describe something and identify something is an important skill in a language."

UK Teacher 4 (TU4)

TU4 did not provide a clear answer regarding accuracy.

In terms of fluency:

"It is open for the teacher to use as he wants to, or she wants to."

In terms of language development:

"The main point seems to be more like a game or activity to wind up the unit."

Half the UK teachers (TU2 and TU3) commented how the task could improve learners' accuracy whilst half the teachers (TU2 and TU3) suggested how it would benefit fluency. Finally, all the teachers except TU4 commented how the task would improve learners' language development.

Summary of views of sets of teachers

From analysing the data of all the participants, it appears hypothesis two is largely unconfirmed. The same ratio of teachers in each group, (two out of four) clearly confirmed how the task could help develop learners' fluency *and* accuracy skills. Also, about half the teachers in each group commented how the task could improve learners' language development, thus showing general consistencies between the two groups of teachers.

Discussion

Teacher's awareness of SP and its potential function

The interview data confirms that most of the teachers in each group were not initially aware of SP and its potential function. The consistency between the two groups was surprising given that the UK teachers used similar tasks on a frequent basis and therefore were expected to have more awareness than the Japan teachers who used these types of tasks to a lesser degree. Furthermore, given that the UK teachers had considerably more teaching experience than the Japan teachers (on average 9.25 years compared to 4.25 years respectively) would imply that the UK teachers would be more aware of the task's function compared to the less experienced Japan group. As the Japan teachers were only in the early stages of their professional development, it is understandable that they may not yet be familiar with task-based learning. More awareness was expected from the more experienced UK teachers, especially considering the amount of task-based research that has been carried out over the last twenty years. Consequently, given these findings, one implication could be that even experienced teachers may not be familiar with task-based learning approaches or practise them in the classroom. However, generalisations regarding a lack of teacher awareness for SP cannot be made, given that only eight teachers participated in the study. Also, a lack of teacher awareness may be due to the task's internal preparation features not being salient enough for the teachers to notice them. The teachers may have been aware of SP but did not mention it because the task's features were not clear enough. After part three of the interview however, all the participants had commented on the task's internal structure, although this may be due to the wording of the questions. For example: 'This task is divided into two parts. How would you describe the difference between the two parts?'

This question strongly refers to the task internal structure, and may have prompted a teacher to comment on this feature, and in doing so, may not have reflected the true awareness the teacher had for SP.

Pedagogical implications of SP for developing learners' L2 speech.

The analysis shows general consistencies between both groups of teachers regarding how the task could contribute to the development of speaking. Half the teachers in each group clearly commented on how the task could improve fluency. As this task represents the theory of SP, this study supports previous planning studies such as Crooks (1989), and Wendel (1997), who argue that SP has a positive effect on fluency.

In terms of accuracy, the results from this analysis showed that half the teachers from each group clearly described how the task could benefit this aspect of speech. Thus these results counter previous studies of Crookes (1989) and Wendel (1997) who reported that SP has no affect on accuracy and that learners would trade off accuracy for fluency when planning. This study shows that teachers generally believed learners' accuracy would improve from using a task that contained a preparatory stage involving language form. As these findings are based on teachers' opinions only, with a small sample size, more concrete results could be determined by comparing the language of learners after they had completed steps one and two of the task, against another group who completed only step two. Differences in the accuracy of learner language could then be attributed to the preparatory stage of the task.

Ellis and Yuan (2003, p.3) provided five conditions where SP could improve learners' accuracy:

- unguided planning
- the target grammar has clear rules
- using simple tasks
- limited planning time
- higher learner proficiency levels.

The conditions of this study and the responses from the teachers provide contrasting views in relation to the above factors. For example, half the teachers considered the task would improve accuracy, despite planning being guided with reference to the passive tense. On the other hand, other conditions appear to match this study; the target grammar has clear rules (the passive tense used in this task has clear rules). Also higher learner proficiency; the teachers would use this task at the intermediate level, thus qualifying as higher level proficiency. Finally, this study also supports Skehan and Foster's (1997) claim that accuracy can be improved using narrative tasks, as the task used in this study required students to narrate a movie story. As a result, these findings, along with the guidelines of Ellis and Yuan (2003), and Skehan and Foster (1997) show the conditions necessary to improve learners' accuracy as well as fluency through the use of SP:

- the target grammar has clear rules

- the use of simple tasks

- higher learner level proficiency

- use of narrative tasks

- the task has a preparatory stage that focuses on language form.

Using this framework, teachers could design and use tasks to develop different aspects of learners' L2 speech.

Finally, Ellis and Yuan (2003, p.20) compared the effects of SP with Levelt's (1989) processing model. As their study reported gains in fluency but not accuracy, they believed that the participants used planning to think of what to say first, and how to speak second. Consequently, learners 'prioritised conceptualisation over formulation and articulation' (ibid). In other words, they used planning time to focus on message content as opposed to grammatical encoding. However, in this study, TJ1, TU2, TU3 commented how the task's internal structure could improve learners' fluency *and* accuracy. In relation to Levelt's (1989) model then, learners would be able to focus on conceptualisation during the preparatory stage, i.e. thinking of *what to say*, as well as formulation, i.e. thinking *how to speak*. In doing so, learners could place equal weighting on conceptualisation *and* formulation during planning, thus resulting in gains with fluency *and* accuracy respectively. However, a limitation of these findings is that no parameter was set regarding the amount of planning time learners would receive, as stipulated earlier by Ellis and Yuan (2003, p.3), and as a result, teachers' responses may alter depending on whether planning time is limited or unlimited.

Conclusion

In terms of how far teachers are aware of SP, the results of the interviews suggest the majority of teachers were not initially aware of its function. This shows that even experienced teachers may not be aware of the benefits of task planning. Regarding the effects of SP on fluency and accuracy, this study further emphasises the growing belief that SP benefits fluency, whilst it counters the claim that SP does not compliment accuracy. As half the teachers in each group clearly describe the task's advantages in terms of fluency *and* accuracy, further research into the effects of SP, and accuracy in particular, is required. Finally, given that half of the teachers in this study believed the task would benefit learners' language development, further research into how SP can be maximized to promote students' L2 speech appears warranted.

Acknowledgements

Bio-data

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Appendix 1

Teachers' background

Table 1: Teachers from Japan (TJ) and the UK (TU).

Code	Years of Teaching Experience	Native Speakers
TJ 1	2-3	Yes
TJ 2	2-3	Yes
TJ 3	4	Yes
TJ 4	7	Yes
TU 1	1-2	Yes
TU2	20+	Yes
TU3	12+	Yes
TU4	3	Yes

Appendix 2

The task

The task is taken from an Intermediate General level English Language Course book
Going for Gold (Acklam & Crace 2003: 128). The book is designed for non-native
speakers of English studying for the Cambridge FCE exam. This task is taken from the last
unit of the book which focuses on food. The unit begins with a reading section followed by a
grammar section, which contains five tasks of which this task is the last one.

Task

1.   Work in pairs and think of a film that you both know. Don't tell other pairs which one you
have chosen. Write a short description of the film, using these questions and any other information
you know. Use the passive where necessary.

When was it made?

Where was it filmed?

Who was it written by?

Who was it directed by?

Who are the main characters played by?

Where/When is it set?

2.   Now work in small groups. Read your description to the other students, but don't say the
name of the film. Can you guess which films other students are describing?

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

Part 1

1.1)   Please take a look at this task, what do you think are the main elements of this task?

1.2)   What do you do notice about this task?

1.3)   What do you think this task involves?

1.4)   What do you think this task aims the students to do?

1.5)   What do you think the students would do?

1.6)   How do you think this task could contribute in terms of the students' language development?

1.7)   What issues/problems could arise from using this task?

1.8)   What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this task?

Part 2

2.1)   How well do you think this task would fit in with your teaching? Why? / Why not?

2.2)   If you were teaching intermediate level students, would you use this task in your classroom? Why? / Why not?

2.3)   If you were to use this task, how do you think you would you use it?

2.4)   As it is in the book? Why? / Why not?

2.5)   What would you do before using the task?

2.6)   What would you do after the task?

Part 3

3.1)   This task is divided into two parts. How would you describe the difference between the two parts?

3.2)   Do you see a relationship between the two parts?

3.3)   What do you think about that?

3.4)   Are there any problems that might occur between the two parts? Why? / Why not?

3.5)   Can you see any way the second phase builds on the first phase?

3.6)   How do you think this might affect their accuracy? (By accuracy I mean amount of errors).

3.7)   How do you think this might affect their fluency? (By fluency I mean speed, i.e. reducing pauses/hesitations).

Part 4

4.1)   Which do you think is the most important part of this task? Why?

4.2)   If that is the most important part of the task, why have the second part? Why not just give them this part alone?

4.3)   Do you think the second part is just a continuation of the first part? Why?