

ผลของการทำงานซ้ำต่อการพัฒนาการของความสามารถด้านวัจนปฏิบัติของนักศึกษา
มหาวิทยาลัยชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ
THE EFFECTS OF TASK REPETITION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC
COMPETENCE OF THAI EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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งานวิจัยนี้แสดงถึงผลการศึกษาผลของการทำงานซ้ำต่อการพัฒนาการของความสามารถด้านวัจนปฏิบัติของนักศึกษาชาวไทยวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 101 คน โดยมีกลุ่มทดลองจำนวน 2 กลุ่ม คือกลุ่ม IR และ TR หัวข้อเรื่องการดำเนิน ร้องเรียนด้วยวิธีการทำงานซ้ำ (Task repetition) ทั้งเนื้อหาและกระบวนการเดิม (IR) และแบบทำงานซ้ำในรูปแบบเฉพาะกระบวนการเดิมแต่ใช้เนื้อหาที่ต่างกันในแต่ละครั้ง (TR) ส่วนกลุ่มควบคุมเป็นแบบชั้นเรียนปกติ ทั้งนี้กลุ่ม IR และ TR ได้รับการสอนสัปดาห์ละ 2 ครั้ง โดยทำแบบทดสอบก่อนเรียน รับการสอนแบบ IR และแบบ TR ตามกลุ่ม แล้วทำแบบสอบถามวัดทัศนคติและแบบทดสอบหลังเรียน ส่วนกลุ่มที่เรียนแบบปกติทำงานเพียงครั้งเดียวแล้วทำแบบทดสอบหลังเรียน ผลของการศึกษาพบว่า การเรียนแบบทำงานซ้ำทั้งสองรูปแบบ

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สามารถส่งเสริมให้ผู้เรียนมีพัฒนาการด้านวัจนภาษาในการตำหนิ ร้องเรียนดีขึ้นอย่างมีนัยสำคัญที่ระดับ .05 และยังมีทัศนคติในเชิงบวกต่อการทำงานซ้ำอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: การทำงานซ้ำ, ความสามารถด้านวัจนปฏิบัติ, วัจนกรรมการตำหนิ ร้องเรียน

Abstract

This study revealed the results of the effects of task repetition towards the development of pragmatic competence of Thai EFL university students. The study was conducted with 101 English majors who were grouped into three instructional groups: identical task repetition (IR), task type repetition (TR), and traditional class. The two treatment groups (IR and TR) were given a pretest, six treatment tasks on pragmatic speech act of complaint, an attitude questionnaire, and a posttest. Meanwhile, the traditional class group were given a pretest, a traditional teaching method of one task, and a posttest after class. During the treatment, the IR group engaged in six tasks with the same content and the same procedure while the TR group performed six tasks with the same procedure but different content each time. Learners from both treatment groups received the tasks twice a week, and a questionnaire and a posttest after all six treatments. The results revealed that both the treatment groups showed significant development on pragmatic competence with a priori set at 0.05 and had positive attitudes towards task repetition.

Keywords: Task repetition, Pragmatic competence, Speech act of complaint

Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach where tasks are used to engage learners in language use. The TBLT focuses on having learners use authentic language to do meaningful tasks, which is, using the target language to complete the task goal while the task assessment is primarily based on the appropriate completion of the task rather than the accuracy of the linguistic forms. As learners focus on meaning rather than the accuracy of language form while processing the tasks, it can be claimed that tasks reduce the linguistic demands which are found to be a burden to language learners (Ellis, 2003). Accordingly, TBLT is presumed to be beneficial for learners to acquire the target language in the way that classroom tasks capture learners' attention to engage in certain types of language use and mental processing while performing the tasks. Moreover, Ellis (2005a) suggests that a trade-off assumption might play a role in TBLT class because learners have limited attention capacities available while the different components of language production and comprehension compete for such limited capacities; consequently, the choice to pay attention to one area may well be at the expense of the others. Nevertheless, task repetition might be able to fill this gap since it has received modest attention in the past decade or so in the sense that it facilitates task performance and in turn acquisition of the linguistic knowledge. Thus, according to the positive effects of task repetition on acquisition, Ahmadian (2011) conducted a study which consequently reveals effects of massed repetitions of the same task on performance of a new task. In this study, 15 participants repeated the same task for 11 occasions. Each occasion was at a two - week interval for a total duration of six months. At the end of the period of massed task repetitions, participants showed better performance of a new task in terms of complexity and fluency.

Regarding task repetition, task-based planning is a crucial component of the method. The planning of tasks, namely, pre-task and within-task includes the subdivision of pre-task into rehearsal, which in other words is repetition, and strategic planning (Ellis, 2005b). Speaking of which, rehearsal or repetition involves tasks performed ‘before the main performance . . . with the first performance of the task viewed as preparation for the subsequent performance’ (Ellis, 2005b). Thus, while repeating tasks, learners have already conducted a considerable part of the conceptualization, formulation and articulation from the first performance (Bygate & Samuda, 2005), and accordingly, free up resources of attention to allocate to various dimensions of output. In other words, when learners already know what they will say or do in their task, they have more processing space available to be used in the formulation of the target language to express their thoughts which in turn, the quantity of the performance will be enhanced (Ellis, 2003). That is, the language enhancement can be said to rise due to the production conveyed in the first task performance. Consequently, ample research on task repetition (Bygate, 1996; 2001; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Patanasorn, 2010; Hawkes, 2011; Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh, 2012; Moser, 2012; Ahmadi & Ghaemi, 2017) has been conducted with beneficial findings to verify the appropriate teaching method for helping learners grasp concepts of the second language, which in the present study consists of EFL learners. Bygate (1996; 2001) revealed that learners gained more accuracy and fluency after repeating the same task which is consistent with Bygate and Samuda (2005) for the increase of complexity, accuracy and fluency after having learners repeat the same task as well. Meanwhile, Lynch and Maclean (2000) found that recycling of tasks enhanced the accuracy and fluency in English for specific purposes (ESP) context of learners. Moreover, Patanasorn (2010) and Takimoto (2012)

found that different types of task repetition positively affected learners' English proficiency while Hawkes (2011) discovered that repeating tasks as a post-task activity could turn participants' attention to form in the repeat performance. Consistently, Baleghizadeh and Derakhshesh (2012) as well as Moser (2012) claimed that participants improved their task performances when repeating the same task. Furthermore, Ahmadi and Ghaemi (2017) found out that output-generation task repetition had positive effect in explicit L2 speech acts instruction. Therefore, task-based language teaching, especially task repetition, has been posited as one approach among those of different types of teaching and learning methods to benefit L2 learners.

Nevertheless, when talking about L2 learning, pragmatic competence which refers to the ability of using appropriate language in a social context (Taguchi, 2009), or "the ability to say the right things in the right way at the right time" (Pinto, 2002 cited by Morris, 2017) plays the very crucial role, particularly for being successful in communicative interaction between two parties. Messages considered linguistically appropriate but with a lack of social inappropriateness can result in communication breakdown. Therefore, concerning language and culture, effective communication between a speaker and a hearer or an interlocutor should be researched in order to help promote communicative competence of both parties. For instance, a shop assistant should appropriately say, "May I help you?" to a customer instead of saying "What do you want?" Obviously, the two expressions semantically mean the same in that situation, but the latter sentence is found rude in the context of a shop assistant to a customer though it will be considered suitable when a mother asks her children for their need. Only the initial sentence contains pragma linguistic competence in the shopkeeper scenario as it includes appropriateness of what to say to whom and when in the utterance.

Pragmatic competence is the ability to use appropriate language in any appropriate contexts. Regarding pragmatics, researchers usually study the speech act aspect because it is more accessible and specific. According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the smallest unit of communication is the performance of certain kinds of acts not a sentence or other expression. Those acts, for example, are asking questions, giving orders, thanking, apologizing, complaining, etc. They consider the speech act as a key concept in the pragmatics field concerning meaning, use, and action in the contextual interaction between a speaker and the hearer, with both verbal and non-verbal contributions to the negotiation of meaning.

Notwithstanding, Thai teachers still struggle to bring communicative competence to their students due to Thai culture and students' characteristics of being shy and lacking confidence to express their feelings (Inprasit, 2016). Thai university students are found inadequately equipped with pragmatic competence and even found rude when communicating with native speaker lecturers to show their dissatisfaction on their grades, for example. Speech act of complaints is found common but difficult to perform appropriately as both a speaker's and hearer's faces have to be taken into account (Nakhle, Naghavi, & Razavi, 2014). In this study, a complaint refers to an utterance made by the speaker to the hearer to show the displeasure and annoyance of the speaker to the hearer in a specific situation. It is the common face-threatening acts revealed in various studies to possibly happen to anyone, anywhere at any time in a society. Research also reveals that making effective communication when complaining is crucial to L2 learners in terms of avoiding communication breakdown. Being able to make a complaint appropriately is also one of the course objectives in the curriculum of English majors in a university. In Thai culture, performing a complaint is regarded as a very difficult interaction in consequence of the

fear of foreigner confrontation. Accordingly, the speech act of complaints is chosen in the present study in attempts to help EFL learners in complaining appropriately. That is, this study adopted task repetition which is a sub-method under TBLT approach to fill the gap of lacking pragmatic competence among EFL university students.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of task repetition on the development of pragmatic competence of Thai EFL university students, especially on pragmatic awareness about how to complain properly in specific sociolinguistic contexts.

Research Hypothesis

Task repetition with two cohorts: Identical task repetition and task type repetition will increase learners' pragmatic competence.

Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in the Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) area focusing on the effects of two types of task repetition; identical task repetition (IR), and task type repetition (TR), on the development of pragmatic competence of Thai EFL university students. The study emphasized the production ability development of speech act of complaint alone, and was conducted based on the empirical findings of communicative studies in the past few decades that the goal of foreign language teaching and learning was the pragmatic competence which was considered the vital part of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990). The participants of the study were L2 learners in a university in Thailand and the study was carried out in a Thai EFL setting.

Research Method

The research method comprises the population and participants, tools and measurement, task and procedure, and data analysis. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design. The experiment included two treatment groups and a traditional class group.

1. Participants

The participants were 101 second-year and third-year English major students with 88 females and 13 males from three intact classes of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Udon Thani Rajabhat University in Thailand. All participants were assigned by convenience sampling to be divided into two experimental groups of 33 and 35 students, and one traditional class group of 33 students.

2. Tools and measurement

This study used DCT and roleplay tests as the tools to measure the pragmatic competence of the students. The DCT is a planned written-production task (Takimoto, 2012) which assigns participants to read short situations that elicit displeasure or annoyance where participants have to write what they believe to be suitable to say in such situations. The DCTs reflect different scenarios (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and in this study, two sets of DCTs consisted of a similar set of ten situations in each, and a DCT was given to participants at a time as a pretest and a posttest. Each situation was built based on a survey about the situations that university students found to frequently happen in daily life in society. In the present study, closed role play was adopted as a test and a practice in the treatment phase to allow participants to yield pragmatic production in each task. In the test phase, two different sets of 3 role plays were administered as a pretest and a posttest as well. Participants' pragmatic production from

each test was rated to indicate their pragmatic competence by two raters of a native speaking lecturer of the university and the researcher. Both DCTs and roleplay tests were rated using a scoring rubric established based on the Brown & Levinson's theory (1987), and some aspects from Trosborg's (1995). The scoring rubric was comprised of 5 scales from 1 to 5: 1 = Unacceptable, 2 = Minimally acceptable, 3 = Acceptable, 4 = Accomplished, and 5 = Exemplary.

3. Tasks and procedure

In this study, two types of tasks were used: an identical task (IR) and a task type (TR). All three groups studied and practiced the same series of complaining situations as Task 1 in their first class. The IR group performed the Task 1 another five times in a three to four-day interval and made six times of engaging in the same tasks and the same procedures as the identical task repetition. The TR group performed other five tasks as Task 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 which consisted of five other different complaining situations but with the same procedure each time at the same interval as the IR group. Meanwhile, the traditional class group performed only Task 1 in the first class. Each task comprised the lesson on how to make appropriate complaints concerning sociological variables and politeness theoretical framework of Brown & Levinson (1987) namely, relative power (P), social distance (D), and rank of imposition (R). The roleplay practice of making a complaint after each lesson was included in each task as a part of a task. The whole process for each task took 20 to 30 minutes.

Participants from each group took a posttest a week after the last task. The pretest, and posttest were made in the closest to the term "identical" since they contained similar situations with the same sociological and were approved by two native speaking lecturers of the university.

4. Analysis

Both pretest and posttest role plays were video-recorded by each pair of participants at a time and the clips were sent to the raters to rate the appropriateness of complaints according to the scoring rubric. The pragmatic production from both DCT pretest and posttest was also rated by the same two raters. To make sure of the rating scores, inter-rater reliability was assessed using Pearson Correlation Test. Then the DCT pretest mean scores and the roleplay pretest mean scores of the treatment groups were calculated and compared with those of the posttest via *t*-test to investigate the development of participants from the IR and TR experimental groups via *t*-test. The results of the statistics are as follows.

Summary of results

Paired samples *t*-tests were used to assess whether significant improvements were made on their posttests.

Table 1 Pretest and Posttest Paired Sample *t*-test Statistics of DCT Mean Difference

Group	n	df	DCT			
			Mean dif (post-pre)	SD	t.	sig. (2-tailed)
IR	35	34	24.60	5.29	27.53	0.00
TR	33	32	24.97	5.69	25.2	0.00
Traditional	33	32	14.7	7.72	10.94	0.00

DCT. Table 1 shows a mean difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores within each group to identify the DCT development of the IR, TR, and traditional class group after the treatment.

Table 2 DCT Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores by Group (Total 50 Points)

Paired Sample Statistic					
Treatment Group	Test Type	n	Mean	SD	SD Error Mean
IR	Post	35	41.71	2.95	0.5
	Pre	35	17.11	4.5	0.76
TR	Post	33	43.12	2.57	0.45
	Pre	33	18.15	5.65	0.98
Traditional	Post	33	29.88	5.86	1.02
	Pre	33	15.18	5.23	0.91

Note. n. = number of participants

sig. = significance

SD = standard deviation

IR = identical repetition group

TR = task type repetition group

Post = posttest

Traditional = traditional class group

Pre = pretest

t. = t-test

DCT. Table 2 shows individual pairs of DCT pretest and posttest mean scores in the IR, TR, and traditional class group. The maximum score was 50. A paired samples t-test was used to examine whether there would be any significant differences between the DCT pretest mean and posttest mean within each group. The results shows that the IR group and the TR group gained significantly higher scores on posttest than on the pretest, $t(34) = 27.53$, $p = .00$, $d = 6.60$ and $t(32) = 25.20$, $p = .00$, $d = 5.59$ respectively. Unexpectedly, the traditional class group also gained significantly higher scores on posttest than on pretest, $t(32) = 10.94$, $p = .00$, $d = 2.65$ albeit with a much lower mean score than the two treatment groups as shown in Tables 2. Thus, it can be concluded that both types of repetition had a greater impact on developing participants' written use of pragmatically appropriate complaints in English.

Table 3 Pretest and Posttest Paired Sample t-test Statistics of Role play Mean Difference

Group	n	df	Role Play			
			Mean dif (post-pre)	SD	t.	Sig. (2-tailed)
IR	35	34	6.74	2.70	14.81	0.00
TR	33	32	6.61	1.82	20.86	0.00
Traditional	33	32	3.09	0.29	60.82	0.00

Role Play. Table 3 shows a mean difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores within each group to identify the role play development of the IR, TR, and traditional class group after the treatment.

Table 4 Role Play Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores by Group (Total 15 Points)

Treatment Group	Test Type	n	Mean	SD	SD Error Mean
IR	Post	35	12.11	1.92	0.32
	Pre	35	5.37	1.39	0.23
TR	Post	33	11.70	1.94	0.34
	Pre	33	5.09	1.63	0.28
Traditional	Post	33	9.24	1.68	0.29
	Pre	33	6.15	1.72	0.30

Note. n. = number of participants SD = standard deviation

IR = identical repetition group TR = task type repetition group

Post = posttest Traditional = traditional class group

Pre = pretest

Role Play. In Table 4, a paired samples *t*-test was used to investigate a significant difference between the role play pretest mean and posttest

mean scores within each group. The results show that the IR group and the TR group both gained significantly higher scores on posttest than on the pretest, $t(34) = 14.81, p = .00, d = 4.07$ and $t(32) = 20.86, p = .00, d = 3.70$ respectively. Furthermore, the traditional class group's role play performance also gained significantly higher scores on posttest than on pretest, $t(32) = 60.82, p = .00, d = 1.95$ albeit with a lower mean score than the two treatment groups as shown in Tables 4. Although all three groups showed significant improvements, the effect sizes in the treatment groups were clearly higher. Thus, it can be concluded that both types of repetition had a greater effect on developing participants' spontaneous use of pragmatically appropriate complaints in English.

To sum up, the hypothesis that task repetition increases learners' pragmatic competence is confirmed. Learners from the IR and TR groups scored higher on the DCT and role play test after repeating tasks. Moreover, results on attitudes towards task repetition suggest that learners from both treatment groups had positive attitudes towards each type of repetition with the scale of 3.91 for TR group and 3.23 for IR group.

Discussion

The present study reveals that task repetition was effective in developing learners' pragmatic competence on spontaneous and non-spontaneous use of appropriate complaints. This result confirms positive effects on L2 learning either in the form of identical repetition or task type repetition as during the repeating of tasks, learners have already performed a considerable part of the concept, form and expressions from the first performance and accordingly they can pay more attention on various dimensions of output, and the process boosts their linguistic production. This is compatible with the positive effect of task repetition in previous

studies with the main argument among researchers and scholars that task repetition affected an EFL/ESL learner's development as L2 learners acquired or developed their English either of linguistic or pragmatics competence (Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh, 2012; Ahmadi & Ghaemi, 2017). Additionally, other scholars (Bygate, 1996; 2001; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Moser, 2012) claimed that task repetition helped learners' cognitive-processing capacity in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity, made positive oral-production results, and affected task performances. Similarly, Patanasorn (2010) and Takimoto (2012) revealed that different types of task repetition; procedural, content, and identical task repetition showed great influence on accuracy and fluency on EFL learners, and on improvement of learners' recognition and production of L2 request downgraders. In conclusion, most of the studies confirm the efficacy of task repetition for EFL/ ESL learners' development and this present study also confirms that multiple times of repetition can develop learners' pragmatic competence be it identical or procedural repetition.

Limitations of the Study

A few limitations of the study should be mentioned. First, the study was conducted with a quasi-experimental design and slightly narrow population. Another point is that each task was repeated at a three-day or four-day interval (twice a week) which means learners were requested to spend their available time from their class schedules attending the extra class for three times (once a week) despite for only 25 to 30 minutes, and this caused a decrease of participants accordingly. A one-week interval is suggested to avoid this kind of limitation in the future.

Future Studies

As findings of only one study would be questionable to draw any conclusion from, and since the current study investigated pragmatic competence of learners measured by appropriate complaint production without regard to accuracy or fluency, future studies should be conducted to shed some light on different functions or acts of pragmatic speech act or can have similar design which includes more variables of accuracy and fluency. In addition, whether task repetition at a longer interval could enhance the ability to perform appropriate complaints or other different acts in pragmatics should also be interesting to explore. Moreover, it is interesting to investigate whether task repetition could help low proficiency learners to improve and retain pragmatic competence, or to see how many iterations of tasks can help improve pragmatic ability of learners with different proficiency level.

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