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Gisele Daiana Pereira

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS  
TO ELDERLY LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE: Taking a Bigger Picture into Consideration**

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Área de Concentração: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários

-----  
Dra. Anelise Reich Corseuil  
Coordenadora da PPGI

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

-----  
Dra. Raquel Carolina de Souza Ferraz D’Ely  
Orientadora e Presidente

-----  
Dra. Donesca Cristina Puntel Xhafaj  
Examinadora II

-----  
Dra. Maria Ester W. Moritz  
Examinadora III

-----  
Dr. Vilson José Leffa  
Examinadora IV

Florianópolis, 16 de Outubro de 2015

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Dra. Marimar da Silva  
Coorientadora

*Learnability determines teachability.*  
*Pienemann, 1984*

*I dedicate this study to other teachers who are  
as interested in becoming better English teachers as I am.*



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## RESUMO

### O DESENVOLVIMENTO E IMPLEMENTAÇÃO DE TAREFAS EM UM GRUPO DE APRENDIZES IDOSOS DE INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA: Levando em Consideração o Contexto Maior.

Gisele Daiana Pereira

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Raquel Carolina de Souza Ferraz D'Ely  
Co-orientadora: Profa. Dra. Marimar da Silva

Este estudo qualitativo dentro do campo de Aquisição de Segunda Língua investigou a percepção dos participantes sobre a implementação de um ciclo de tarefas desenvolvido por meio da abordagem embasada em tarefas (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998) para um grupo de aprendizes idosos de inglês como língua estrangeira. Para tanto, foram utilizados os seguintes elementos teóricos: o esquema de análise de tarefas de Skehan (1998), o esquema para implementação de tarefas de Skehan (1996), os princípios de abordagem embasada em tarefas segundo Ellis (2003), o conceito de Focus on Form cunhado por Long (1991), o conceito de Long (2015) sobre needs analysis, e os elementos de planejamento estudados por Foster e Skehan (1996; 1999) e de repetição estudado por Bygate (2001). O grupo de participantes deste estudo foi formado por oito aprendizes idosos de inglês que participaram de cinco aulas, responderam a questionários sobre suas percepções após cada aula, e participaram de uma entrevista ao final do ciclo de tarefas. Os dados coletados foram submetidos a uma análise qualitativa. Os resultados mostraram que os participantes perceberam alguns elementos da abordagem embasada em tarefas como relevantes para sua aprendizagem, sendo esses: foco em significado e a semelhança das tarefas ao mundo real. Os resultados também mostraram como positivo o uso da abordagem embasada em tarefas para desenvolver um ciclo de tarefas para esses alunos idosos. Outros resultados também mostraram que (1) needs analysis é essencial para construir tarefas significativas e motivacionais; (2) os dois esquemas desenvolvido por Skehan são úteis para equilibrar o nível de dificuldade das tarefas e para balancear a atenção dos aprendizes entre significado e forma; (3) os elementos de planejamento e repetição podem aprimorar o desempenho dos participantes nas tarefas; (4) e a abordagem embasada em tarefas promove a reflexão dos alunos sobre a percepção de si mesmos como aprendizes e sobre suas crenças a respeito da aprendizagem de idiomas. Por fim, este estudo indicou que desenvolver e implementar um ciclo de tarefas pode contribuir para a formação do professor.

**Palavras-chave:** Abordagem Baseada em Tarefas, aprendizes idosos de inglês, ciclo de tarefas

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## ABSTRACT

### THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS TO ELDERLY LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: Taking a Bigger Picture into Consideration

Gisele Daiana Pereira

Advisor: Profa. Dra. Raquel Carolina de Souza Ferraz D'Ely

Co-advisor: Profa. Dra. Marimar da Silva

This qualitative study inserted in the SLA field, investigated the participants' perception of the implementation of a cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998) in a group of elderly EFL learners from NETI-UFSC. The theoretical frame used in tasks development included: Skehan's (1998) framework for task analysis, Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation, Ellis's (2003) principles for TBA, Long's (1991) Focus on Form, and Long's (2015) needs analysis concept, and the elements of planning by Foster and Skehan (1996; 1999), and repetition by Bygate (2001). Eight elderly EFL learners who attended the five classes answered perception questionnaires on the classes and took part in an interview in the end of the cycle. All data collected was submitted to a qualitative analysis. The results showed some TBA elements in the participants' perceptions – focus on meaning and tasks' resemblance to real world – as relevant to their learning. The results also showed that the use of TBA to develop a cycle of tasks for these elderly EFL learners was positive. They also showed that (1) needs analysis is essential to build meaningful and motivational tasks; (2) both Skehan's frameworks are resourceful in balancing the task level of difficulty and the learners' attention between meaning and form; (3) planning and repetition can be catalysts for task performance; and (4) TBA promotes learners' reflection on their perception of themselves as learners and their beliefs about EFL learning. Finally, this study indicates that developing and implementing a cycle of tasks can contribute to a teacher's formation.

**Key-words:** Task Based Approach, Elderly EFL learners, Cycle of Tasks

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Preliminaries

Since my very early beginning as an English teacher, in 2001, I have had some elderly learners among younger learners. I could notice that there were differences in their learning processes. As it is known, due to aging, old people may experience a certain cognitive decline<sup>1</sup> which may interfere in learning. Advances in technology and health, in the last 20 years or so, have offered people the opportunity to live longer, and this new scenario in Brazil has contributed to increase the number of elderly people inserted in the classroom environment learning English as a Foreign Language<sup>2</sup>.

During my undergraduation program at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina - UFSC, I had the opportunity to work in a special program developed by Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade<sup>3</sup> – UFSC, when I had the chance to teach two groups of elderly EFL learners. At that time, I could notice that my readings on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) during my undergraduation program were not enough to understand how second language (L2) learning took place in the elderly. Since then, I became interested in understanding more about the teaching and the learning processes that lead this specific group of people to learn a second language.

When I returned to UFSC, in 2013, to embark in my journey as a master student, my advisor, Professor Raquel D'Ely, introduced me to the realm of SLA and cognition research, and I became very interested in Task Based Approach (TBA<sup>4</sup>). TBA represents a cognitive proposal to SLA, which takes into account the conditions in which the students will learn a second language and has recently been at the core of research discussions related to Language Pedagogy (Skehan, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> The aging cognition decline is explained in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> In this study the terms foreign and second language are used as synonyms. By the same token, the terms acquisition and learning are used interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade – NETI – has been working at UFSC for 30 years, attempting to include the elderly into the academic world and community. It offers an English program for elderly EFL learners. More about NETI and this program are explained in Chapter

<sup>4</sup> TBA has its origins in the communicative approach, which started during the 70s, when focusing only in the structure did not seem to be enough, and a need to develop the capacity to express meanings was emerging.

Yet, as far as my knowledge goes, there seems to be no study trying to understand how TBA works in the context of elderly EFL learners, and few studies relating TBA theories to Language Pedagogy in Brazil (D'Ely, 2006; Farias, 2014; Specht, 2014). I side with Ellis (2003), when he said that “there is considerable scope for future research to find out more about the effects of such participant factors as **age**, gender, personality, and so on, on the nature of interaction in task and group work” (p. 118) (my highlight).

Different approaches and methodologies have been employed with the purpose of teaching English in instructional settings. For instance, in the 50s, the grammar translation method was the one mostly used, while in the mid 60s, the audio visual approach assumed the position of the innovative approach, and in the late 80s the communicative approach started to be seen as a suitable alternative to the previous methods and approaches (Nunan, 1989; Prahbu, 1987). TBA then emerges within the communicative approach as an alternative to SLA (Skehan, 2003).

Among all these different approaches and methodologies, the TBA is chosen as a guideline to this study due to the fact that it is grounded in the main tenets of information processing approach (Skehan, 1998). This means that TBA finds itself within a cognitive approach, thus, taking into consideration the cognitive processes involved in learning, such as attention and noticing (Ellis, 2003; Schmidt, 1990).

Tasks, as proposed by Skehan’s (1996, 1998) frameworks, cater for diminishing the cognitive load involved in performing the task and preparing students for doing so. These aspects seem to be important especially for elderly learners since they will already struggle with the cognitive decline typical of their age. Skehan’s (1996, 1998) frameworks offer strategies and steps to choose, analyze, develop, and implement tasks in a way to maximize L2 learning. Thus, by proposing tasks to elderly learners, there is going to be a concern for building a fruitful learning context considering that this population has already experienced loss in their attentional system (Burke & Shafto, 2008).

Moreover, there are two conditions within TBA that may help understand how TBA is suitable for elderly learners: *planning*<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>5</sup> Pre-task planning implies learners being given the opportunity to plan a task prior to its performance (Foster & Skehan, 1996).



*repetition*<sup>6</sup>. These two processes have been researched for the last two decades, and results have shown positive evidence regarding the benefits of them in SLA (Skehan, 1998). Some studies within TBA (Bygate, 2001; Crookes, 1989; D'Ely, 2006; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1995; among others) have investigated planning and repetition so as to gain insights for L2 learning and pedagogy. These metacognitive processes within TBA may characterize a differential when working with elderly learners.

In sum, I thought about investigating how a cycle of tasks developed under the TBA rationale (Ellis, 2003), based on Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks, Ellis's (2003) principles for TBA, Long's (1991) Focus on Form, and Long's (2015) needs analysis concept, and the elements of planning by Foster and Skehan (1996; 1999) and repetition by Bygate (2001), would be perceived by a group of elderly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from their own frame of reference. By doing so, this study also intends to show how such complex framework intertwine and behave in a pedagogic environment so as to shed some light on the understanding of how task based lessons may impact on this specific population.

## 1.2 Statement of the Purpose

The present study aims at unfolding the perceptions of a group of L2 English learners on the implementation of a cycle of tasks developed under the task-based approach rationale (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003). For this, I developed a cycle of tasks based Skehan's (1998) framework for task analysis, Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation, Ellis's (2003) principles for TBA, Long's (1991) Focus on Form, and Long's (2015) needs analysis concept, and the elements of planning by Foster and Skehan (1996; 1999) and repetition by Bygate (2001).

After its development, the cycle of tasks was implemented in a group of eight elderly EFL learners. The participants' perceptions of the cycle implementation were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Then, the analysis of the data was conducted to investigate participants' perception of the cycle of tasks. Two research questions guided this study: RQ1- *What are the elderly EFL learners' perceptions*

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<sup>6</sup> Task repetition happens, as a performance condition, when learners have the opportunity to repeat a task or to practice the same task type (Bygate, 2001). More on this is explained in Chapter 2.

*on the implementation of a cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale on their learning?; and RQ2- Which TBA elements are foregrounded in these participants' perceptions? And what does this reveal about the implementation/development of a cycle of tasks for a group of elderly EFL learners?.*

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

There are three major reasons for the development of this project. One reason regards the scarcity of studies that have attempted to build an interface between TBA and the teaching of EFL to elderly learners to understand this process. The second refers to the fact that there are few studies connecting TBA, needs analysis, planning, and repetition within instructional context<sup>7</sup>. And the third refers to the fact that Brazil has an increasing aging population and such group of people lacks new challenges, which includes the learning of foreign languages, among other things.

In the SLA field, not much has been researched specifically on how elderly learners perceive learning; thus, it seems to be worthwhile verifying these learners' perception of a teaching/learning approach which, potentially, might be effective to promote language learning.

Considering all aspects aforementioned, the proposal of a development and implementation of a cycle of tasks seems to contribute to broaden horizons into the range of tools used to teach EFL to elderly learners in Brazil. Besides, it may also shed some light into the field of teacher education.

### **1.4 Organization of the thesis**

Besides the introduction (Chapter 1), this master thesis has five more chapters. Chapter 2 lays the theoretical background for this study. It starts by analyzing findings related to aging and language learning as to set a context for the theories chosen to guide the development of the cycle of tasks. Secondly, it brings a review on TBA's general aspects; then, it provides a definition for the construct task and presents Ellis's (2003) principles for TBA. After that, it discusses both Skehan's

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<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, there are some studies in TBA such as those of Almeida Junior (2011), Caramelo (2014), Farias (2015), Xhafaj, Muck and D'Ely (2011), and Xhafaj (2014).

frameworks for task analysis (1998) and for task implementation (1996). Finally, it overviews some crucial elements for this study within TBA: needs analysis, planning and repetition.

Chapter 3 describes the method employed to collect data for the present study. This includes the objectives and research questions, information about the setting where data was collected, participants, the instruments, and techniques used to analyze the data. The chapter also brings the description of the cycle of tasks developed for this study.

Chapter 4 reports and analyzes the results obtained in the present study. This chapter includes the qualitative analysis of data collected from the perception questionnaires and interviews. It also makes use of the lesson plans and video recordings to support the findings that arose from the data analysis.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings brought in the analysis in the light of existing research and theories on TBA in order to answer the research questions. It also builds an interface between this study's results and the theoretical framework used to develop the cycle of tasks.

Finally, in Chapter 6, the conclusion and the main findings of the present study are summarized, and a reflection on the implications of applying such theoretical frame into the pedagogic context of elderly EFL learners is presented. The chapter also points out the limitations of the study and provides some suggestions for further research. The last section depicts some pedagogical implications that arose from the results obtained.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork of the present study whose objective is to unfold the perceptions of a group of L2 English learners on the implementation of a cycle of tasks developed under the task-based approach rationale. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two main issues in the field of SLA: (2.2) aging, learning and cognition, and (2.3) task-based approach.

#### **2.2 Aging, learning and cognition**

As previously stated, the participants of the present study were elderly learners of EFL from the NETI program, so it is relevant to take into account the impact that aging might have on learners learning processes. In this realm, the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) seems to be a starting point since it claims for the existence of a period in which the learner is more likely to acquire a language, either the mother tongue or the second language (Ortega, 2009). This period is said to be from the age of 0-12 years old, showing a more emphatic advance in the early age.

The CPH does not refer directly to adults or to elderly people, but it implies that “adults are no longer able to call upon the innate language acquisition capacities which work so well for young children” (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p.42). If taking into consideration that the CPH only points a high difference between learning a language before the puberty and after it, it is not possible to determine, through the CPH only, the effects of longer aging on the learning process. Therefore, further analysis in this field is necessary.

According to Skehan (1998), “after the [critical] period is over, language learning is constrained by similar structures and processes to other than learning. If, as a result, we have to regard second language learning as cognitive in orientation, then we need to take more seriously what psychologists tell us generally about how humans learn.” (p. 3)

There are a few theories attempting to explain the cognitive decline caused by aging. Burke and Shafto (2008) reviewed these theories through relevant studies on aging and cognition (as for example Brown & Pichora-Fuller, 2000; Craik & Byrd, 1982; Hasher & Zacks, 1988; Madden, 2001; McCoy et al, 2005; Murphy et al., 2000;

Salthouse, 1985, 1996, 2000; Schneider et al., 2005). The most promising theories the authors reviewed are: *resource theory*, *general slowing theory*, *inhibition deficit theory*, *working memory theory*, and *sensory function theory*.

According to Burke and Shafto (2008) the resource theory is based on the idea that human capacity for processing information is limited. It postulates that “older adults have reduced resources<sup>8</sup> compared to young adults and that certain operations are more resource demanding for older than young adults. Consequently, older adults reach the point where available resources are insufficient to complete a task before young adults do” (Burke & Shafto 2008, p. 377). This suggests that elderly learners need more time to perform tasks.

General slowing theories (or Processing Speed Theory) suggest that age-related cognitive deficits are functions of a reduced processing speed. According to Burke and Shafto (2008):

slowing impairs functions requiring simultaneous availability of information because information from early processes may have decayed by the time information from later processes is produced. For example, sentence comprehension requires coactivation of successive words and their meaning in the sentence in order to build a representation of the sentence meaning. Comprehension will suffer if processing is so slow that the meaning of initial words has decayed before final words are represented (p.378).

This suggests that elderly learners benefit from working with shorter chunks of oral information spaced with time.

Inhibition deficit theory proposes that aging weakens inhibitory processes that regulate attention and the contents of working memory. Older people lose the ability to stop unnecessary and irrelevant information from entering into it, thus replacing the relevant information that was being stored there. This theory explains “why older adults’ performance suffers more from distracting stimuli during reading or listening and why older adults’ conversations are more likely to go off topic” (Burke & Shafto, 2008, p. 379). This suggests that it might be good to reduce interfering stimuli to maximize chances of the older learner performing the task with minor deviation.

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<sup>8</sup> Resources include processing speed, working memory, attention, and inhibition (Light, 1991; Salthouse & Craik, 2000; Wingfield & Stine-Morrow, 2000).

Working memory theory proposes that older adults suffer reductions in working memory capacity over time. The working memory (also called short-time memory) is a limited mechanism, only capable of holding and manipulating a small amount of information at times. According to Burke and Shafto (2008), “this constrains their ability to comprehend and produce complex semantic content and complex syntax” (p.380). Park (2000) remembers that environmental support takes over some of the workload that would need to be processed by the working memory. Therefore, this suggests that it might be good to use environmental support (visual aids) to benefit elderly people by reducing their working memory load.

The sensory function theory asserts that cognitive decline is due to sensory decline, particularly auditory and visual impairments. According to Burke and Shafto (2008), it “makes a straightforward prediction: age-related declines in sensory and perceptual processes yield incomplete or erroneous input to the computation of lower level phonological and orthographic codes; this impairs lexical selection and other subsequent linguistic processes so that older adults select incorrect words or none at all.” (p. 379). Then, special attention should be addressed to how message is conveyed to elderly learners, in relation to clear audios, well-projected voice for instructions, and proper visual instruments.

These four theories account for the decline in cognition that the brain suffers when aging. It can also be inferred that this decline will reduce language learning capacity. According to Mota and D’Ely (2009), there is a general agreement among researchers that language learning capacity, indeed, declines with aging. Ellis (2007) reassures that “adults are unable to achieve native-speaker<sup>9</sup> competence in either grammar or pronunciation” (p.68).

A few features of second language acquisition can suffer with the aging decline of the brain, as for instance: pronunciation, grammar and, oral production (fluency).

Regarding pronunciation, according to Flege *et al* (1999), people tend to stop recognizing new sounds as they are aging; they start categorizing the sounds into phonemes they are familiar within their own language code; therefore, leading them to a pronunciation

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<sup>9</sup> Although I recognize that achieving a native-speaker like performance is not essential to assure success in communication, I also understand that there is a minimum of righteous pronunciation and grammatical structure use to be reached in order to make communication happen successfully. However, most arguments found on this issue bring the native-speaker as the ultimate performance.

frequently farther from the native-like. Although this may pose some type of disadvantage, Pires's (2005) study points out that though this may lead elderly learners to less fluent speech and a stronger accent, it is possible to train the brain to recognize new sounds by turning the process into a conscious one.

Regarding grammar, contrary to children, adults have no longer the innate abilities of learning grammar automatically, and they need to think it through before internalizing it. (Ortega, 2009). Conversely, Ortega (2009) recalls that adults have knowledge about their mother language as a system as well as knowledge of the world. These two kinds of knowledge combined can be seen as an advantage for them to develop new skills in the acquisition of the lexicon and the grammar of a new language (Lightbown & Spada, 1993).

Regarding oral production, aging brings problems to access stored information (Lightbown & Spada, 1993), thus fluency can seem an unachievable goal for elderly learners. It is typical to hear elderly people complaining that they forgot certain words necessary to express their ideas, and when this occurs, they usually blame their bad memory. There is a myth about the elderly being forgetful: “[t]o be old is to forget, and the fear of forgetting becomes something certain for them, so they believe they will forget and then they do forget” (Adamy, 2005, p.53).

However, according to Bialystock et al (2004), *crystallized intelligence* – which represents accumulated knowledge of the world - holds up well in the later adult years. In this sense, the decline of memory with aging is a questionable matter. Thus, the information may not have been gone from the memory; actually, it suggests that the retrieval of necessary vocabulary takes significantly more time since “[o]lder adults experience more word-finding failures, such as tip-of-the-tongue states, than young adults do, and this and other speech production failures appear to stem from difficulties in retrieving the sounds of words” (Burke & Shafto, 2004, p. 21). Although the memory may not be gone, having difficulty in retrieving information from it poses as a downside in learning EFL and turns fluency into a very unlikely goal to be achieved.

The impairment to access existing knowledge and also the integration of new information to the existing one and vice-versa lies on the decline of the control processes, also called, the *fluid intelligence*. As explained in Craik and Bialystock (2006), after the age of 20, the gray matter volume of the brain suffers a very slow decline until senescence, reflecting a neuronal atrophy. This decline occurs in the frontal area of the brain, which is also responsible for planning and thinking and



includes functions such as: “selective attention to relevant aspects of a problem, inhibition of attention to misleading information, and switching between competing alternatives” (Bialystock et al, 2004, p. 291). All these processes are fundamental when learning a second language; therefore, the formation of new representations becomes a harder task for elderly learners.

It is true that this lower capacity to access old information and store new one might constitute a thick barrier for L2 learning, but Dornelles’s (2005) study, which investigated how a group of elderly people learned EFL, showed that elderly learners generally use repetition to memorize new content. It is expected that the repetition of new content will assist the transference of the information from the working memory to the long-term memory. Besides, Craik (2002) claims that the reinstatement of context is necessary for a successful retrieval of information. Perhaps, using metacognitive processes involving planning, task repetition or familiar tasks (bringing similar context/genre) may be in favor of the learning process of the elderly people.

Dornelles’s (2005) study concluded that: “certain language teaching methods may be inappropriate for older adults, [the learners] complain about the lack of effective programs that meet the needs of older adults and can benefit older adults by helping in their process of learning a foreign language.” (p.21) Therefore, it is necessary to think about the aging cognition effects and the elderly expectations when developing lesson plans for those specific learners of EFL.

Since aging presents a cognitive decline, as previously pointed out, a teaching approach that takes into account learners’ needs and suggests certain conditions, as for example, *planning* and *repetition*, as cognitive processes to aid learning, may help develop lessons for such specific EFL learners. Therefore, the next section presents the Task-based Approach as an alternative to deal with elderly EFL learners.

### **2.3 Task-Based Approach**

In order to understand how the Task-Based Approach (TBA) is suitable to the purpose of this study, the following topics are presented: 1- the TBA cognitive context; 2- the definition of *task* and its principles; 3- Skehan’s (1998) framework for task analysis; 4- Skehan’s (1996) framework for task implementation; and, 5- other relevant elements within the TBA.

### 2.3.1 The TBA cognitive context

In the cognitive field, there are two different systems to explain how oral production takes place: the rule-based system, and the exemplar-based system. According to Skehan 1996, the rule-based system would imply that interlanguage<sup>10</sup> development would be the result of the restructuring that occurs with linguistic material. The exemplar-based system, in contrast, would argue for development as being the accumulation of useful chunks of language.

The learner/language user combines both systems during oral production, thus, “coping with real-time performance means developing effective modes of coexistence between form- and lexis-based systems” (Skehan, 1998, p.5).

Besides drawing from a dual-system to perform orally, speakers need to address attention to content and form simultaneously. As it is known that attention is a limited resource, when oral performance takes place, attention can be focused on meaning at the expense of form. As engaging in meaning may de-emphasize form, TBA’s challenge is “to contrive sufficient focus on form to enable interlanguage development to proceed, without compromising the naturalness of the communication that tasks can generate” (Skehan, 1998, p.4). The challenge for the task designer is, then, to design situations in which this may be possible.

According to Skehan (1996) the limited attentional capacity “is needed to respond to both linguistic and cognitive demands [...] then engaging in activities which reduce cognitive load will release attentional capacity for the learners to concentrate more on linguistic factors [accuracy, complexity and fluency]” (cited in Ellis, 2003, p, 244).

Therefore, within TBA, “the underlying rationale is one in which there is limited-capacity processing ability and in which tensions between a concern to be fluent, a concern to be conservatively accurate, and a concern to take risks and use more complex language need to be balanced”(Foster & Skehan, 1999, p. 237).

According to Hatch (1978, as cited in Skehan, 2003): “[o]ne learns how to do conversations, one learns how to interact verbally, and

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<sup>10</sup> The term interlanguage, “coined by Selinker (1982), refers to (1) the system of L2 knowledge that a learner has built at a single stage of development (‘an interlanguage’), and (2) the interlocking systems that characterize L2 acquisition (‘the interlanguage continuum’)” (Ellis, 2003, p. 344).

out of this interaction, syntactic structures are developed.” (p. 404) Based on such idea, the communicative activity gained room in linguistic studies, and one of its variety became the TBA.

Prabhu was one of the pioneers in developing TBA concepts and his ideas are still relevant in the current TBA rationale. According to Prabhu (1987), what differentiated TBA from other previous approaches and methods is that TBA sees language as more than just a set of grammar rules; TBA sees language as a way to exchange meanings in order to communicate. Its objective is to use authentic language throughout the performance of a task, and, after that, linguistic aspects, or formal aspects regarding language use may be discussed. This way, language is learned due to students’ need to perform such tasks.

Therefore, the assumption in using tasks in any course plan of language teaching is “that transacting tasks in this way will engage naturalistic mechanisms, cause the underlying interlanguage system to be stretched, and drive development forward” (Skehan, 1998, p.95).

Under this context, the concept of task and Ellis’s (2003) principles of TBA are brought next, as to start to construct the theoretical framework, which was used in the development of the cycle of tasks in this study.

### **2.3.2 The definition of task and its principles**

In order to understand how the term *task* was used in the elaboration of this study’s cycle of tasks, it is necessary to understand what is the concept behind this term. Foster and Skehan (1996) defined *tasks* as “activities that are meaning-focused, and outcome-evaluated, and have some sort of real-world relationship” (p.300). This indicates that rather than a simple English activity, when learners perform a task, their energy will focus on the achievement of a goal/an outcome rather than how they will use language to achieve it. “Of course, translating these criteria into reality is not always a straightforward matter” (Skehan, 1996, p.38).

However, Ellis (2003) reviews other authors’ definition of tasks (as for example, Long, 1985; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1996) and claims that there is not “complete agreement as to what constitutes a task, making its definition problematic” (p.2). As he explains, it is possible to find certain characteristics permeating tasks. According to him, tasks

must: (1) work as a *workplan*<sup>11</sup>; (2) have primary focus on pragmatic meaning; (3) involve real-world processes of language use; (4) focus on one or more of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing); (5) engage cognitive process; and (6) have a defined communicative outcome (p. 9, 10).

Taking into account these characteristics, Ellis (2003) proposes the following definition:

A task is a *workplan* that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms, a task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (p. 16)

The present study makes use of this definition to work as guide for the design of tasks because the tasks developed and implemented in this study are used for pedagogical purposes.

As according to Ellis (2003) the “overall purpose of task-based methodology is to create opportunities for language learning and skill development through collaborative knowledge building” (p. 276). In order to enhance the chances of such purpose being achieved, Ellis (2003) proposes eight principles, as they follow:

**Principle 1** - *ensure an appropriate level of task difficulty.* There are various means to adjust the difficulty of a task, such as incorporating a pre-task phase or even using teacher-talk. Teachers can also ensure that students possess the necessary strategies to engage in task-based interaction.

**Principle 2-** *establish clear goals for each task-based lesson.* Since engaging students with tasks is not sufficient to ensure the development of their interlanguage, the teacher can invite them to make use of some

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<sup>11</sup> According to Ellis (2003), the term *workplan* acknowledges that although task designers developed tasks to encourage focus-on-meaning, the task performers may have a different perspective and, through performance, the task developed “may result in display rather than communicative language use” (p. 5).

methodological options such as strategic and online planning to help students to focus attention on different aspects of performance.

**Principle 3-** *develop an appropriate orientation to performing the task in the students.* Students need to be made aware why they are performing such tasks. This way they are able to see that the task has a clear role in developing their L2 proficiency.

**Principle 4-** *ensure that students adopt an active role in task-based lessons.* When communicative problem arises, stimulate group or pair work and encourage learners to negotiate meaning.

**Principle 5-** *encourage students to take risks.* When students take risks they ‘stretch’ their interlanguage resources as they experiment with language. Creating an appropriated level of challenge in an effective climate that is supporting of risk-taking will assist this.

**Principle 6-** *ensure that students primarily focused on meaning.* When learners perform a task, they focus on meaning. This can only be achieved whether they are motivated to do the task and achieve an outcome. Treating language as a tool, not as an object.

**Principle 7-** *provide opportunities for focusing on form (FoF).* It can occur in the pre-task, during-task and post-task phases. FoF is beneficial and possible even if students’ primary focus is on meaning.

**Principle 8-** *require students to evaluate their performance and progress.* “Students need to be made accountable for how they perform a task and for their overall progress. A task-based lesson needs to engage and help foster students’ metacognitive awareness” (Ellis, 2003, p. 278).

Once the definition of task and the principles of TBA have been covered, it is of interest to see how a task could be analyzed, chosen/developed and implemented. For doing so, two frameworks developed by Skehan (1996, 1998) are essential and explained in the sequence.

### 2.3.3 Skehan’s framework for task analysis

Schmidt (1990) argues for the importance of *noticing* as a means to channel attentional capacity so that input can become intake. It is also desirable to achieve a balance among the communicative goals (accuracy, complexity, and fluency) in order to enhance interlanguage development. According to Skehan (1998) “if the appropriate level of task difficulty is chosen, there is much greater likelihood that *noticing* will occur, that balanced language performance will result, and that spare attentional capacity can be channeled effectively” (p. 134).

The need to control tasks' level of difficulty<sup>12</sup> in order to achieve different purposes motivated Skehan's development of the three-way-distinction framework for the analysis of tasks (see Table 1). Based on Candlin's (1987) early attempt to characterize task difficulty, Skehan (1998) proposes a scheme that can be more easily related to actual tasks to be developed and implemented. This framework helps understand better how the level of difficulty takes part in different features in a task.

Table 1 *Skehan's three-distinction framework for the analysis of tasks* (Skehan, 1996)

<b>1 Code complexity</b>	Linguistic complexity and variety Vocabulary load and variety Redundancy and density	
<b>2 Cognitive complexity</b>	Cognitive familiarity	Familiarity of topic and its predictability Familiarity of discourse genre Familiarity of task
	Cognitive processing	Information organization Amount of 'computation' Clarity and sufficiency of information given Information type
<b>3 Communicative stress</b>	Time limits and time pressure Speed of presentation Number of participants Lengths of texts used Type of response Opportunities to control interaction	

Code complexity refers to the language required to perform the task. Within code complexity, a task's level of difficulty can be measured by the linguistic complexity, the vocabulary load and its redundancy and density. Simply put, some tasks will be developed for the use of simpler language than others will. In a regular/traditional teaching context, the measuring of the level of difficulty is normally regulated by the structural syllabus in a developmental sequence, usually less-to-more complex. Ideally, it should cater for learners' readiness to learn.

<sup>12</sup> Although it is acknowledged that the level of difficulty is ultimately determined by the learner (Ellis, 2003) when proposing the framework for the task analysis, Skehan (1998) is interested in manipulating the level of difficulty considering some tasks and performance's elements.

Cognitive complexity, where thinking is required, is subdivided in cognitive familiarity and cognitive processing. The cognitive familiarity involves retrieving existent organized chunks of knowledge from the long-term memory and mobilizing them in the working memory. The level of difficulty can be controlled (usually reduced) here with use of familiar topics (when background knowledge on the topic is available), familiar discourse genre (when pre-existent knowledge of the macrostructures of the genre is available) or familiar task (discussed on page 30); thus, less effort might be put to finding specific vocabulary and structure to communicate. This indicates that the more familiar a topic, a discourse genre or a task type, the easier the task will be performed, and thus, the bigger the chances to channel attention to other issues, such as form.

Concurrently, the cognitive processing refers to the processes the brain embarks into when thinking, planning what and how to communicate, often verified when it is necessary to work out solutions. The level of difficulty here can be manipulated in task design in four aspects, as seen in the table 1. First, information organization refers to the natural way the necessary information is organized, for instance, when narrating a story, it is natural to organize it in a temporal sequence. Second, amount of computation refers to how much manipulation or transformation of information is necessary to task completion. Third, clarity and sufficiency of information given refers to how clear a piece of information is as compared to how much information needs to be inferred from it. And forth, information type refers to contrast types of information, “such as concrete – abstract, static – dynamic, contextualized – decontextualized” (Skehan, 1998, p. 100).

Finally, the communicative stress is the last layer to be controlled. Teacher’s decision on some performance conditions will also balance task difficulty. Regarding time limit, “if teachers want to emphasize accuracy in a task performance, they need to ensure that the students can complete the task in their own time. However, if they want to encourage fluency they need to set a time limit” (Ellis, 2003, p. 250). Regarding the lengths of the texts used, it is expected that if there is a large quantity of material to be worked within a short period of time, the level of difficulty will be higher due to the necessity to speed up the cognitive process (Skehan, 1998). Other performance conditions that influence on task’s level of difficulty are: the speed of the presentation, the number of participants to perform each task (individual, pairing or grouping) and, the type of response (written – promoting accuracy, or oral – promoting fluency).

Nevertheless, some of the decisions can be made beforehand during tasks design, others can be administrated by the teacher during class time (through online decisions), as long as the teacher is familiar and aware of them. All these factors will probably have an impact on participants` performance and engagement with the task.

By simply applying this tripartite scheme in the design of tasks, it is also possible to ensure task validity, since certain conditions brought by this scheme relate to real world life and will definitely involve a cognitive component, generating meaning and giving the task substantial content. In addition, the communicative stress also reflects other features present in real-world situations.

Besides assuring task validity, and measuring the proper level of difficulty of the task in order to release attentional resources to be addressed to form, Skehan (1996) addresses other features for task development and implementation. These features are brought in the following framework.

### 2.3.4 Skehan`s framework for task implementation

Skehan (1998) draws attention to the need to systematize the implementation of tasks in a way it would both meet the definition of task and promote interlanguage development. In his study with Foster (Foster & Skehan, 1996), he presented a framework developed by taking into account previous studies on *pre-task* (Crookes, 1989; Ellis, 1987), *mid-task* (Harrison, 1986) and *post-task* (Doughty, 1991; Willis & Willis, 1988). According to Foster and Skehan (1996), this framework “allow[s] principled decisions to be made regarding the attentional focus and pedagogic goals of different activities” (p. 303). This framework (see Table 2) is also used to develop the tasks in this study.

As seen in Table 2, a task implementation is divided in three phases: *pre-task*, *mid-task* and *post-task*. Each of these phases is carefully developed prior to task implementation, aiming at achieving different/similar goals (accuracy, complexity or fluency) and including different techniques that require attentional resources to shift among aspects, thus, enhancing the chances of interlanguage development.

*Table 2: A framework for task implementation*  
(Foster & Skehan, 1996, p.303)

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Phases	Goals	Typical Techniques
1. Pre-task		
Linguistic	Introduce new forms to interlanguage repertoire	Explicit and implicit teaching Consciousness-raising
Cognitive	Reduce cognitive load Push learners to express more complex ideas	Plan linguistically and cognitively Observe similar tasks Plan Observe
2. Mid-task		
Task choice	Balance difficulty of task	
Task calibration	Increase or reduce difficulty	Use analytic scheme Introduce surprise Provide (visual) support
3. Post-task		
	Raise consciousness for a focus on form	Use public performance Post-task activities

According to Ellis (2003), “the purpose of the *pre-task phase* is to prepare students to perform the tasks in ways that will promote acquisition” (p.244). According to Skehan (1998), the *pre-task phase* usually displays three major techniques: *teaching*, *consciousness-raising* and *planning*. Through *teaching*, the teacher can mobilize/activate previous language/knowledge, introduce new language, increase the chances of restructuring (by triggering a reorganization of existing structures), and recycle language - that is, remind learners of vocabulary already seen. *Consciousness-raising* involves activities that “change learners’ awareness of elements of the task before it is done” (Skehan 1998, p. 139). Usually learners are invited to observe similar tasks, explore texts to find patterns and brainstorm or discuss ideas. *Planning* also takes place during the pre-task phase. Through planning, learners can see tasks in more demanding ways and then push themselves to take risks and use more complex ideas. Planning also eases the cognitive load in task performance, which may be positive when dealing with elderly learner (more on *planning* on pages 27-29).

The *mid-task phase* is the actual performance of the task developed. It should be of appropriate difficulty in order to be perceived by learners as an achievable challenge (Skehan, 1998). As previously shown, a task designer should make use of Skehan’s (1998) framework

for task analysis to adjust the task difficulty. Besides, one can balance the task level of difficulty by giving learners access to input data since “tasks that are supported by pictures and texts are easier than tasks that are not” (Ellis, 2003, p. 250). They can also introduce surprise elements in the middle of the task performance, which “serves as an obvious way of extending the time learners spend on a task and thus increases the amount of talk” (Ellis, 2003, p.250).

Still, during the mid-task phase there can be some online adjustments made by the teacher or by the learners. According to Ellis:

The teacher’s online decision about how to conduct the discourse of a task reflect his/her ‘theory-in-use’ (Schön, 1983) and ‘practical knowledge’ (Eraut, 1994). On the learners’ part, they reflect the language-learning beliefs (Horwitz, 1987) they bring to the classroom and, more, particularly, to a specific task. (Ellis, 2003, p. 251)

As Ellis suggests, there could be differences between the task workplan and its performance. Skehan (1998) claims learners can exert some control on the task as they can ask for extra time, or to change the topic for instance (which may increase their interest in the task, or at least, extend its performance). Besides, learners might focus on a different goal rather than the one intended by the task.

The *post-task phase* gives opportunity to Focus on Form – FoF (Long, 1991). During the post-task, learners have the opportunity to focus on the formal aspects of the language that may not have been salient during the task. Some common techniques used during post-task are: reporting findings or outcomes (the reports should primarily focus on summarizing the outcome of the task - Willis, 1996) and presenting publicly or to the camera. Making learners aware of an upcoming public performance or telling them they will need to analyze each other’s (or their own) performance induce them to allocate more attention to form during the task.

Other post-task activities raise students’ awareness through reflection, encouraging consolidation and promoting restructuring, in turn, interlanguage development. These activities usually involve identifying, classifying, searching for patterns, reconstructing texts, hypothesizing, and engaging in cross-language exploration. According to Ellis (2003), during the post-task phase, it is also possible to:

ask students to reflect on and evaluate their own performance of the task, for example: what language they learned from the

task, how they might improve their performance of the task. This reflection may contribute to the development of the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring and evaluating, which are seen as important for language learning. (p. 259)

It is worthwhile emphasizing that FoF can be present in all task phases (not only post-task phase), as Skehan's framework was created "to enable the organization of task-based instruction to minimize its dangers (excessive focus on meaning) while maximizing the chances that its advantages will be realized (accurate and complex form)" (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 317). However, "it is likely that students will often focus on form when teachers or material designers intend them not to, and ignore form when they are supposed to concentrate on it" (Long, 1991, p. 44). There is no guarantee that the structures you chose will be the structure they internalize, as processing language to extract meaning does not guarantee automatic sensitivity to form.

Therefore, the ultimate allocation of attention will always be determined by the learner during pre-task and mid-task phase, thus, the *post-task phase* "is needed to counter the danger that students will develop fluency at the expense of accuracy" during the task. (Ellis, 2003, p. 260). Both frameworks provided an overview on how the cycle of tasks was developed and implemented in this study.

According to Skehan (1996, p. 23), if tasks are well-chosen or well- developed, the rewards are:

— An effective balance between fluency and accuracy. It is difficult to achieve each of these goals simultaneously, but at least tasks of appropriate difficulty will give learners some chance of directing balanced attention to each of these areas (Schmidt 1990) and operate a dual-mode system (Carr & Curren 1994)

— The opportunity for previous restructuring to be applied. By enabling attentional spare capacity, there will be some chance that previous restructuring can be incorporated into ongoing language use (Swain, in press) and a wider repertoire of language be supported (Crookes 1989, Foster and Skehan 1994).

Therefore, the use of Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation may assist the task developer or teacher to increase the learning opportunities in their lessons.

Now, I explain other elements within TBA that may be relevant when developing a cycle of tasks to elderly EFL learners.

### 2.3.5 Other relevant elements within TBA

Some other elements within TBA need to be observed when developing a cycle of tasks for a specific group of learners. The elements relevant in this study are: *needs analysis* and *focus on form*. Besides, there are two metacognitive processes at the core to the development of the cycle of tasks to the elderly learners: *planning* and *repetition*. All these elements are relevant to the development of a cycle of tasks.

The first element, *needs analysis*, can take the form of a questionnaire. The needs-analysis questionnaire is meant to clarify how students will need to use language in real-life, and therefore, provide the basis for the development of the tasks. According to Skehan (1996), “needs analysis should clarify how students will need to use language in real-life, and task design should ensure that classroom tasks bear a developmental relationship to such non-classroom activity” (p. 39).

The second element is *Focus on Form* (FoF). It was already mentioned that during real-world communication, Form is only paid attention to when there is need to recovery meaning (Skehan, 1996). Therefore, it is necessary to bring attention to Form, if interlanguage development is expected to happen. One way to address to form, which goes in line with TBA, is through the use of FoF (Long, 1991).

Long (1991) defines FoF as opposed to Focus on forms. The first approaches “linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is meaning” (p.46), while the latter represents “lessons based on linguistic items themselves, a lesson is designed to teach the past continuous, requesting, and so on, and nothing else” (p. 44). FoF lessons teach something else, for instance: biology, mathematics, geography, culture and customs.

According to Long (1991), “instruction which encourages a systematic, non-interfering FoF produces a faster rate of learning and (probably) higher levels of ultimate L2 attainment than instructions with no FoF” (p.47). Therefore, FoF is a desirable feature in a cycle of tasks.

These two elements (*needs analysis* and *focus on form*) are relevant to the development of tasks and are part of the cycle of tasks in this study. In addition to these, *planning* and *repetition* seem to be promising features in a cycle of tasks for elderly EFL learners.

*Planning* takes place when the teacher allows students time to plan and develop strategies to improve their performance. It “involves the students considering the forms they will need to execute the task workplan they have been given” (Ellis, 2003, p. 247). “The overriding hypothesis is that planning will have positive effects on performance” (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 305). When there are opportunities to plan before oral tasks are attempted, the preparation during planning can change the balance on attentional resources in different communicative goals (accuracy, complexity or fluency<sup>13</sup>), thus, planning can “ease the subsequent attentional burden” during performance (Foster and Skehan, 1999, p. 218).

Foster and Skehan (1996, 1999) conducted a series of studies on different kinds of *planning* and their effect upon the communicative goals. Based on such studies, the kinds of planning that interest this study are: detailed (guided) planning and teacher-led planning<sup>14</sup>. Their 1996’s study showed that “guided planning condition produced greater complexity than the unguided planner, and slightly greater fluency” (Foster & Skehan, 1999, p.219). Yet, their 1999’s study presented the following results: (guided) individual planners produce language that is more complex, more fluent and based on longer turns; teacher-led planners produce more accurate language; and (guided) group-based planners seem less fluent (Foster & Skehan, 1999, p.234).

Teacher-led planning proved to be the planning with most desirable results in performance as Foster and Skehan (1999) pointed out:

This condition produced a very clear accuracy effect, suggesting, rather unsurprisingly, but pleasingly nonetheless, that a teacher-organized planning session does lead to more control over the language used. But it is also worth remarking that such accuracy was not achieved at the expense of other aspects of performance. The teacher-led group produced quite

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<sup>13</sup> According to Ellis (2003), accuracy refers to “the extent to which the language produced in performing a task conforms with target language forms” (p. 338), complexity refers to “the extent to which the language produced in performing a task is elaborated and varied”(p. 340), and fluency refers to “the extent to which the language produced in performing a task manifests pausing, hesitation, or reformulation” (p. 342).

<sup>14</sup> Based on my readings of Foster and Skehan (1996; 1999), my understanding is that *guided-planning* or *detailed-planning* occurs when the learners receive instructions about what to do during their planning time, while in *teacher-led planning* the teacher not only instructs them with more specifics about how to use their planning time, but also guides them through this process more closely.

high complexity scores (the second highest, after the Solitary Planners), and were not notably disfluent. It would seem, overall, that the teacher-led condition produced the most balanced gain in the different aspects of performance (p.239).

This result is striking and relevant for pedagogy. Therefore, teachers can lead learners to be able to do things with language that they could not do before. They may provide “linguistic forms/strategies for performing the task depending on the amount of guidance the teacher wishes to provide” (Ellis, 2003, p. 247).

Another aspect to be observed is the amount of time students are given to carry out planning. Ellis (2003) reviewed some studies in the area (Foster, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Wigglesworth, 1997; Wendel, 1997) and concluded that when a shorter time is given, fluency usually increases, while when more time is given for planning, complexity usually increases.

Another cognitive process relevant in this study is *repetition*. D’Ely (2006) based her understanding of repetition in Bygate’s (2001) study, when she explains that:

repetition may be seen as the process through which the learners may exert some control, guidance and regulation over what they know by integrating previous knowledge in a subsequent encounter with the same task, thus, building a path towards the proceduralization of declarative knowledge, which, in turn, may lead to qualitative changes in learners’ performance (cf. Bygate, 2001b; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Ashcraft, 1994). (p.70)

It suggests that “when learners repeat a task their production improves in a number of ways, for example, complexity increases, propositions are expressed more clearly, and they become more fluent” (Ellis, 2003, p. 258). Besides, when a task is repeated, the chances of being stored in the long-term memory are enhanced (Bygate, 2001). When learners perform it again, they can retrieve information they have practiced before and even make some adjustments in order to maximize communication effectiveness. According to Skehan (1998), “repeated performance of the task seemed to engage a more syntactic mode, with subjects showing a greater tendency to self-correct” (p. 114).

There are two ways of applying repetition that are of interest of this study. First the repetition of the performance of the very same task and, second, the repetition of the same task with different content (Bygate, 2001).

Skehan (1998) reviewed two studies on the repetition of the very same tasks. The first, Plough and Gass's (1993) study, showed that to repeat the very same task can be tedious and boring for the learners; conversely, Bygate's (1996) study reported no fatigue or boredom. The first instance - the *rehearsal* of the task - serves as a form of *planning* and, then, as the *repetition* of the task occurs in a subsequent encounter, it encourages the retrieval of information from long-term memory. Bygate "was able to show that redoing a task is associated with a number of chances in the nature of performance, all of which add to the density of the ideas which are expressed" and then, "retelling is associated with greater organization and purposefulness" (Skehan, 1998, p. 113). As Bygate (1996) suggests, learners are likely to initially focus on message content and, subsequently switch their attention to the selection and monitoring of appropriate language. Bygate (1996) also suggests that rehearsal may allow learners the extra processing space they need 'to integrate the competing demands of fluency, accuracy, and complexity'.

Yet, the repetition of the same task with different content involves the concept of *task familiarity*. "If fresh and additional challenges are found, participants may exploit the greater task familiarity to produce more complex language" (Skehan, 1998, p. 119). In this sense, *task familiarity* resembles *planning*, as the first time the task is performed, it will serve as a *model* and, then, as a familiar task takes place in a subsequent class, it also encourages the retrieval of information from long-term memory. Bygate (2001) investigated the effects of practicing specific types of task. In his results, he found that the opportunity to practice a type of task did not appear to assist performance on a new task of a same type. In other words, there was no transfer of the positive effects to a new task. However, according to Skehan (1998) *task familiarity* serves as an accessory to lowering the cognitive load in tasks.

Thus, using both kinds of *repetition* discussed here with elderly EFL learners may benefit their interlanguage development, maximize the retrieval of information or linguistic items from the long-term memory, expanding memorization, and optimizing their communicative skills.

In sum, Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks along with the use of *needs analysis*, *focus on form*, *planning*, and *repetition* will assist the development of the cycle of tasks for a group of elderly EFL learners, whose cognitive ability is in decline due to aging, causing some difficulties in learning.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Method**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The objective of this chapter is to present how the methodological procedures used for data collection and analysis in the present study were constructed. Firstly, I bring the objectives and the research questions. Then, I introduce the setting where the study was conducted and its participants. In the sequence, I present the general design of the study: procedures for data collection, instruments, and analysis. Finally, I describe the development of the cycle of tasks and its implementation.

#### **3.2 Objectives and Research Questions**

As previously mentioned, this qualitative interpretative study aims at unfolding the perceptions of a group of L2 English learners on the implementation of a cycle of tasks developed under the task-based approach rationale (Ellis, 200; Skehan, 1998). To do so, two research questions were addressed.

RQ1- What are the elderly EFL learners' perceptions on the implementation of a cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale on their learning?

RQ2- Which TBA elements are foregrounded in these participants' perceptions? And what does this reveal about the implementation/development of a cycle of tasks for a group of elderly EFL learners?

#### **3.3 Setting and Participants**

##### **3.3.1. Setting**

The department known as Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade (NETI) [Department of Studies of the Elderly People – my translation] was created in 1983 by the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), with the objective to contribute to the quality of the life of the

elderly community of the State of Santa Catarina. Currently, NETI's mission includes using the existing knowledge on gerontology in virtue of valuing the elderly by inserting them into the academic and community context.

NETI does so by offering the elderly population a variety of activities, which range from lectures on several topics of interest to physical activities that contribute to keep their mind and body healthy. Among the NETI courses offered to the elderly population, there is the NETI English Program. According to the NETI website, the English course aims at developing oral and written comprehension and production (which encompasses the four elementary skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading) of elderly learners varying from beginning to intermediate levels.

The participants in this program form a diverse group of older EFL learners. The minimum age for this program should be 65; however, due to some bureaucratic reasons, NETI tends to accept learners aging 55 and on. These elders tend to come from a diverse background, therefore, sometimes they present discrepancies in their beliefs, learning styles, learning strategies, and so on. These groups of elderly learners meet either twice a week for a one-hour-and-a-half English class or once a week for a three-hour long English class.

As NETI is part of the UFSC environment, undergraduate students are selected by the coordinator of the English program to teach the classes. The coordination of the course recommends the use of the Interchange Fourth Edition textbooks, although the teacher in charge may vary his/her approach according his/her EFL teaching-learning beliefs and choices. Therefore, some teachers use the recommended series exclusively; others use them only as a course guide and add different materials; and others adopt a completely different approach to teach these elderly EFL learners.

Besides, the NETI English program is flexible in terms of the amount of units to be covered in a semester. The teacher does not have to rush against time to cover a certain amount of units, then, he/she can include extra activities or further practice on aspects she/he perceives as necessary for learning consolidation. Thus, the progress of the content happens at the pace of learners' learning progress.

This specific English program for the elderly population was chosen to be the setting for this qualitative study because I worked there as an English teacher in 2008 and became interested in learning more about this specific group of EFL learners to contribute to NETI context. Besides, after some search on CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Data

Base, I found out that there is very little research on this population, especially in Brazil.

Thus, due to the lack of EFL studies with elderly learners in Brazil, the possibility of using a different EFL teaching-learning approach for this specific population, and the time flexibility the program allows, I decided, for my MA Dissertation, to conduct a study on EFL teaching-learning with this population. To do so, I adopted the TBA approach, developing a cycle of tasks based on Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks and TBA's principles (Ellis, 2003). In addition, I was the teacher applying the cycle of tasks developed in order to assure it followed TBA rationale, as "non-skilled teachers can withdraw meaning from tasks and render its potential mechanically" (Skehan, 1998, p.96).

### **3.3.2 Participants**

In this qualitative study, there is one group of participants: the elderly EFL learners of the NETI English Program who volunteered to attend the extra English classes developed for this study.

A consent form (see Appendix A) was given to two NETI groups (a total of seventeen elderly EFL learners), but only those willing to participate in the whole sequence of five extra English classes developed for this study signed the consent letter to be a research participant. After that, they completed a profile questionnaire (see Appendix B).

It is important to say that in the beginning of the extra classes, there were eleven volunteers attending the classes. However, only eight learners were able to attend the complete cycle of tasks (5 classes). Therefore, only the data from those eight learners became the focus of investigation of the present study.

A needs analysis questionnaire was conducted prior to the development of the cycle of tasks, and it revealed that the eight participants formed a heterogeneous group of EFL learners in terms of age, perceptions of EFL learning, and knowledge of English. As seen in Table 3, the group's age ranges from 57 to 80, a mean of 65.75 years of age; six of them had studied English in high school, but two had never studied English before the NETI English course; three of them perceive themselves as good EFL learners; one as average; and three as low in

speaking or listening. As privacy was respected, the participants' names were changed to nicknames. Table 3<sup>15</sup> summarizes this information.

All of the participants were retired and only Ms. Violet had not had a career job before retirement. Despite that, nearly all of them had been to a foreign country before, used some English to communicate, but added that it was difficult for them. Only Mr. Gray had never been abroad or experienced using English in a different context than the classroom.

Table 3: *Participants' Profile*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years studying English at NETI</b>	<b>Previous contact with English before NETI</b>	<b>Perception of own performance as EFL learners</b>
Mr. Gray	67	2 and a half	High school for 2 years	Average
Mr. Black	64	3	High school for 2 years	Low
Mr. Yellow	69	3	None	Good
Mr. Green	66	6	High school for 2 years	Low in listening
Ms. Pink	66	3	High school for 2 years	Good
Ms. White	80	3	High School and Basic Level in a Language School	Good
Ms. Violet	57	3	None	Low
Ms. Orange	57	Half a year	High school and Language schools	Low in speaking

All of the participants were retired and only Ms. Violet had not had a career job before retirement. Despite that, nearly all of them had been to a foreign country before, used some English to communicate, but added that it was difficult for them. Only Mr. Gray had never been abroad or experienced using English in a different context than the classroom.

As regards motivation to learn English, the data from the needs analysis questionnaire showed that the participants' main motivation to learn English is to travel abroad. As seen in Figure 1, although other reasons were also mentioned, it became clear that traveling abroad was the participants' main motivation to learn English, and this piece of information was decisive to choose the central theme of the cycle of tasks developed and implemented in this study.

<sup>15</sup> All tables, figures and graphs, which do not inform an authorship were made by me.

In sum, the data from the needs analysis questionnaire revealed that the eight participants in this study form a heterogeneous group of EFL learners, not only in terms of age but also in terms of perceptions of themselves as EFL learners and of the knowledge they hold as regards English. Such heterogeneity had to be taken into account when developing the cycle of tasks; therefore, most tasks were designed to be performed in groups, as an attempt to promote collaborative learning. In addition, the data from the needs analysis questionnaire also revealed that there was a common motivation to learn English among them: they all wanted to learn English to travel abroad. Thus, in this study, the theme – Traveling Abroad – was the conduit through which their differences got closer, or their heterogeneities in terms of English knowledge, faded away.

Now, I present the general research design of this study.

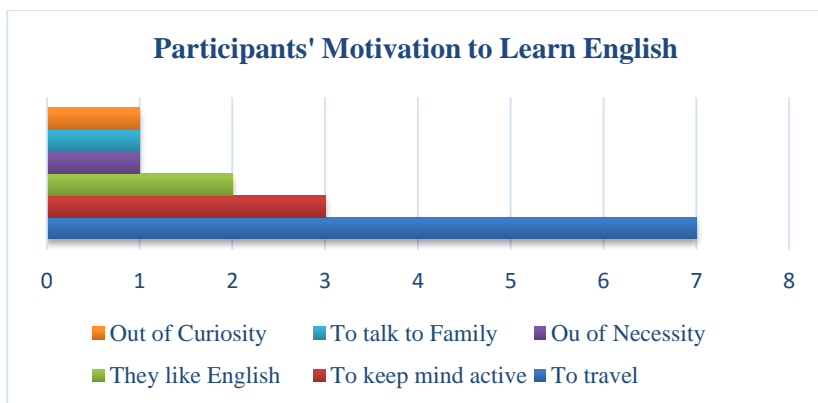


Figure 1: Participants' motivation to learn English.

### 3.4 General research design

In order to meet the objectives of this research, this piece of qualitative study encompassed five distinctive phases: class observation; task-cycle development; task implementation; interview with the participants; and data analysis.

In the first phase of this study – Class observation, I entered the classroom context (NETI) as an external observer of processes and actions that occurred there. In this context, I observed four English classes to be aware of the elderly EFL learners' behavior in the classroom and to establish bonds of trust and respect to get participants

for my study. During this phase, the learners were invited to participate in the research and those interested in taking part in the study received a consent letter to read and sign (see Appendix A for the consent letter content) and a needs analysis/profile questionnaire to read and answer (see Appendix B). The objective of the consent letter was to explain the study to the participants and ask them permission to use their personal information for my investigation. The objective of the needs analysis questionnaire was to gather information about their background and “to identify target uses of language, allowing tasks with a meaningful relationship to such language use to be designed for the classroom.” (Skehan, 1998, p. 96).

In the second phase – Task-cycle Development, I developed a cycle of tasks taking into account the needs analysis questionnaire results, my own class observation reports and notes, Ellis’s (2003) concept of task and his list of TBA’s principles, Skehan’s (1996, 1998) frameworks, and the cognitive aspects that permeate the elderly learning process. After that, I contacted the participants again through email (see Appendix C) to remind them of the objectives of the investigation, and to organize a consensual schedule for the classes, which came to be five sequential classes: four of them in October, always on Wednesdays, and the last one in the first week of November, in 2014.

In the third phase – Task Implementation, I implemented the cycle of tasks with the participants and applied, immediately after each class, the perception questionnaire developed to investigate participants’ perception of the class they had participated in (see Appendices D-H for perception questionnaires 1-5). This third phase was video recorded as well.

The fourth phase – Interview with Participants – began right after the five classes were implemented. Nevertheless, to conduct the interviews, I had to pre-analyze the answers from the perception questionnaires to create the questions of the individual interviews (see Appendix I). The individual interviews took place on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and, 25<sup>th</sup>. After that, I transcribed all interviews.

Finally, in the fifth phase – Data Analysis, I organized and analyzed the data to answer the RQ1 investigated here, which, in turn, provided data to answer the RQ2 posed in the present study.

Table 4 summarizes the phases, the dates, the procedures, and the instruments/data used in this study.

Now I turn to the procedures for data collection and analysis.

### 3.5 Procedures for data collection and analysis

All classes were video recorded. After each class, the participants answered a printed copy of the perception questionnaires (detailed in the following section). Later, I typed all answers and organized the data collected in diverse tables (profile questionnaire data table, PQ1 data table, PQ2 data table, PQ3 data table, PQ4 data table, and PQ5 data table, see them in appendices J-O). Next, I audio recorded

*Table 4 - General research design*

Phases	Dates	Procedures	Instruments/Data
<b>Phase 1</b>	July 1 <sup>st</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> September 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 9 <sup>th</sup> 2014	Class observation	4 reports with field notes
		Profile questionnaire elaboration & implementation	8 Questionnaires
<b>Phase 2</b>	August & September 2014	Development of a cycle of tasks	
<b>Phase 3</b>	October 8 <sup>th</sup> , 15 <sup>th</sup> , 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2014 November 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	Implementation of the cycle of tasks, followed by the application of the perception questionnaires, and teacher checklist notes	40 Perception Questionnaires 5 classes video recordings
<b>Phase 4</b>	November 19 <sup>th</sup> , 21 <sup>st</sup> & 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	Questionnaire Pre-analysis Semi-Guided interviews Data Transcription	1 List of questions for the interview 7 audio recorded interviews 7 transcribed interviews
<b>Phase 5</b>	December 2014 – September 2015	Data Organization Data Analysis	5 Charts on the Perception Questionnaires

the individual interviews that happened in late November. After that, I transcribed all interviews, and organized them into a table (see Appendix P). The perception questionnaires were applied from October 8<sup>th</sup> to November 5<sup>th</sup>, in the end of each class, and the individual interviews occurred on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, after the entire cycle of tasks had been implemented.

In order to unveil the participants' perception of the tasks, the perception questionnaires and the transcribed interviews were submitted to language-based analysis (Dörneyi, 2007). For that, the information from these different sources were categorized and some topics emerged from data triangulation. Thus, similar and different participants' perceptions could be identified.

The method chosen to interpret the data results was through coding, which consists of observing the emerging topics brought to light by participants' answers in the questionnaires and in the interviews, and discussing all data related to those codes (topics) as well. The data collected was analyzed qualitatively and interpretively (Dörneyi, 2007). The analysis triangulated the participants' answers on the perception questionnaires, the interviews, the lesson plans, and the video recordings of each class as well.

Now, I turn to the validation and analysis of each instrument used in this study.

### **3.6 The instruments**

The instruments used in this study were: field notes of class observation, a needs analysis questionnaire, five perception questionnaires, a cycle of tasks developed especially for this study (including all lesson plans and resources used), video recordings of the classes, consent forms, emails and audio-recorded semi-guided interviews.

#### **3.6.1 The validation of the instruments**

Before implementation, the needs analysis questionnaire, the perception questionnaires, and the cycle of tasks were scrutinized by Doctorate students at PPGI/UFSC, who were studying and developing their own research on TBA at the same time I was conducting this study. In this sense, the design of such instruments could be refined and their validity, to some extent, assured (Dörneyi, 2007). This was an important step in the process of making and refining methodological choices prior to the actual data collection phase for this research.

Some Doctorate students, specifically those working with task development and implementation, were also invited to proof-analyze the tasks designed for this study in order to verify whether or not the tasks



were developed according to Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks and also carried the elements and characteristics of a task (Ellis, 2003). This procedure was taken because the tasks could not be implemented in a pilot group due to time constraints.

After the final version of the cycle of task had been proof-analyzed and validated for the study, it was necessary to adapt some tasks during the implementation period in order to adjust to the reality of the classroom. Still, all adjustments were supervised and approved by the advisor and co-advisor to assure all tasks' validity.

### **3.6.2 Class observations field notes**

As previously mentioned, I observed four classes of the NETI English Program in order to: (1) collect relevant information about the elderly EFL learners and the context; (2) allow the participants to become more familiar with me (Dörnyei, 2007); and (3) observe the kind of activities they performed in the classroom and the themes with which they were familiar. The classes observed also helped me estimate the participants' proficiency level, since this variable was not controlled by means of a proficiency test due to time constraint. In order to profit the most from the observations, field notes were taken while the classes were observed (see appendix Q - T for full class observation notes).

The first and the second class observations happened in the end of the first semester of 2014, on July 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. In these two classes, I could talk to the participants briefly about my project, invite them to participate and give them the consent letter and the profile questionnaire to be read and completed. From the class observation (see Class Observation 1 in Appendix Q and Class Observation 2 in Appendix R), I could notice most participants were very punctual and usually in a good mood; they were also eager to learn, participate, ask or answer questions, and, most of them, used to write down everything the teacher wrote on the board. When asked informally about why they felt the urge to take notes on everything, they answered they found it somehow relevant to them. That is, they knew it could assist their learning, but could not explain why or how.

I could also notice certain discrepancy in the level of proficiency among participants. Some of them seemed to know more about grammar and vocabulary, while others did not. By talking informally with two participants, I learned that it was a heterogeneous group in terms of EFL learning: seven participants had already studied

Interchange Fourth Edition Book 1, until Unit 4; and other six had already started to study Interchange Fourth Edition Book 2. I also learned that the participants showed themselves a bit resistant to audio (listening) activities, which demanded the teacher the elaboration and presentation of pre-listening activities to create a more comfortable context for the listening activity itself. In the second class, I also observed that some participants had difficulty with pronunciation.

The third and fourth classes observed happened only after winter vacation, more specifically on September 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Since some participants present in these two classes were absent in the previous ones, I invited them to participate in my research project and provided them the consent letter and the profile questionnaire.

During the third class (see Class Observation 3 in Appendix S), I could notice that most participants did not seem to have difficulty in writing or understanding grammar. Pronunciation and ongoing oral communication seemed to be more challenging to them, though. For instance, two participants had a strong German accent that interfered directly in the pronunciation of most words in English. Others had difficulty when uttering different sounds for the same vowels. For example, they uttered the vowel “i”, in the verb *live* /lɪv/, the same way this vowel is uttered in the noun *life* /laɪf/. The activity proposed by the teacher in charge of the group to improve learners’ pronunciation was to ask each one to read a paragraph of the text aloud. Only one participant out of ten could utter the paragraph with minor mistakes in pronunciation. Although the teacher attempted to correct some of his elderly EFL learners’ pronunciation mistakes, many were left without any correction. Later the teacher decided to read the text himself so that the elderly EFL learners could listen to the correct utterance of all the words from the text. There was no more time for extra practice in pronunciation that day, the class time had finished.

Finally, in the fourth class (see Class Observation 4 in Appendix T), I could observe the elderly EFL learners in a group discussion. They switched codes (Portuguese to English and vice-versa) to ask additional questions and answer the ones made by the teacher or the book activity. In addition, they frequently translated words and expressions to Portuguese to clarify what they meant. The last resource they made use of when communicating seemed to be a summarized and simplified sentence in English of what they had discussed, which was elaborated in cooperation with most members of the group.

From these four class observations, I was able to determine four points to consider in the development of the cycle of tasks for the

participants of this study: (1) communication must be the focus when developing a task since it seems to motivate the learners into task completion; (2) pronunciation awareness of new vocabulary learned has to be approached in every class through focus on form; (3) elderly EFL learners take longer to perform tasks and they also take notes, thus, time has to be planned carefully; and (4) the group of learners is heterogeneous in their proficiency level.

### **3.6.3 Needs Analysis/Profile Questionnaire**

The needs analysis/profile questionnaire (see Appendix B) was administered in order to collect relevant information about the participants, to ensure external validity for this research (Dörnyei, 2007), and to serve as basis to the development of the cycle of tasks (Long, 2015). It consisted of open-questions, which intended to unveil three types of data about the respondents (Dörnyei, 2007): First, factual questions: name, age, current occupation, previous profession, email address, telephone number, amount of time learning English at NETI (question 1); experience in English outside the NETI English Program (question 2); and experience in English in a foreign country (question 3). Second, behavioral questions: reasons for being in the NETI English Program (question 4 and 5). And third, attitudinal questions: opinion on their own performance in English (question 6), the most enjoyable activities in the classroom, and the most comfortable themes to talk in English (questions 7 and 8).

The questionnaire was administered in Portuguese in order not to impose a burden on the participants. Besides, they could face some difficulties in expressing their opinions whether they had to use the target language instead of their first language. The results of the needs analysis questionnaire were presented in subsection 3.3.2 (on pages 34-36).

### **3.6.4 Perception questionnaires**

In order to unveil participants' perception of the cycle of tasks developed and implemented, they received one perception questionnaire to be answered after each class. Although the questionnaires contained similar questions, they constituted five different questionnaires, containing six to nine questions each. Each questionnaire was applied after each class, and contained questions developed for that particular class.

The Perception Questionnaire 1 – PQ1 (see appendix D) – contained six questions and was applied in the end of the first class, on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Its objectives were asking participants about: the difficulty of the task (question 1- a and b); to give an appraisal of their own performance (question 2- a and b); whether they felt prepared to perform the main task of the class in order to unveil how they perceived the pre-task phase (question 3); to observe the class as a whole and comment on it (question 4); to reflect and comment on their own learning (question 5); and finally, to provide other comments on the class in order to reveal any issues they found relevant to be mentioned, but were not covered by the previous questions (question 6).

The Perception Questionnaire 2 – PQ2 (see appendix E) – contained seven questions and was applied in the end of the second class, on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014. PQ2 was similar to PQ1, as it contained all the same questions from PQ1, but it also included one more open question about similarities and differences between the class taught that day and the previous one. The aim of this question was to verify whether (or not) the participants noticed that the Task 3 was similar in structure to Task 1 (conducted in Class 1) making use of similar linguistic resources and if it caused any impact in their learning process.

The Perception Questionnaire 3 – PQ3 (see appendix F) contained eight questions and it was applied in the end of the third class, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. PQ3 was similar to PQ2, but included an open question to check whether (or not) the tasks and classes encouraged them to search on the classes' theme or study more at home.

The Perception Questionnaire 4 – PQ4 (see appendix G) contained eight questions and it was applied in the end of the fourth class, on October 29<sup>th</sup>. PQ4 was similar to PQ2, but included an open question to identify whether the participants felt encouraged to study more after that specific class (class 4).

Finally, the Perception Questionnaire 5 – PQ5 (see appendix H) contained nine questions and it was applied in the end of the fifth and last class, on November 5<sup>th</sup>. PQ5 contained nine questions. Q1 was about the difficulty of the first task: presentation; Q2 about the difficulty of the second task; and Q3 whether the learners perceived the learning strategies to be helpful. Q4 instigated learners to reflect about the class as a whole and comment on it; Q5, whether they perceived the development of any learning strategy during the process; and Q6, provided the learner a moment to reflect on their own learning in the five previous classes. Finally, Q7, 8, and 9 were respectively about their

attendance, willingness to give individual interviews, and availability for doing so.

### **3.6.5 Semi-guided Interview and Emails**

With the purpose of enlightening some answers given in the perception questionnaires, after the cycle of tasks was completely implemented and all perception questionnaires were answered, an email containing some questions regarding participants' personal answers in their perception questionnaires was sent, and an invitation to participate in an open-ended semi-structured interview was made. According to Bell (2005, p. 156), "a response in an interview can be developed and clarified", in case questionnaires did not provide sufficient information. The interview is seen as a rich opportunity for the researcher to understand deeper and better the perceptions explicitly or implicitly posed by the participants in the questionnaires and to elucidate vague or unclear statements in this research tool. In addition, the interview can open space for the participants to unveil perceptions that were not privileged or noticed by the researcher in any moment in the questionnaires (Bell, 2005).

The emails exchanged also constituted the data analyzed in this study. However, they only clarified a few aspects of the participants' comments or answers in the perceptions questionnaires. The email exchange took place between November 13<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> 2014. All participants clarified the questions posed by me in the email, except Mr. Gray who preferred to answer personally in the day of the interview.

The individual interviews constituted the last phase of data collection and were conducted in Portuguese to ensure that the participants were capable of better expressing their opinion on the matter. The individual interviews occurred on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. Seven participants took part in the interview, only Ms. Orange could not make it.

The ten questions to guide the interview (see appendix I) with the participants concerned their perception toward their learning and the teaching of English through a cycle of tasks. There were seven direct questions to be answered, and three quotations from the answers of the perception questionnaires to be commented on.

The seven direct questions asked about: language and other content learned (question 1); classroom dynamics (question 2) ; task impact on their learning (question 3); the repetition element (question

4); group work (question 5); personal difficulties in learning English (question 6); and learning strategy (question 7). The other three questions, based on quotations, were about learning beliefs (question 8), grammar (question 9) and the final review (question 10).

In sum, all questions in the interview reflected the issues brought up by participants in their perception questionnaire answers. Now I turn to another instrument in this study: the video recordings.

### **3.6.6 Video Recordings**

The five classes were recorded to guarantee a better cover of data collection and insights for data analysis. Before task implementation, all participants signed a consent form regarding the use of their images. However, the videos were not transcribed because this action was not at the scope of this Master study. For the purposes of this study, the videos were only watched by the researcher as an instrument to clarify any striking information that emerged from the analysis of all the other data: perception questionnaires, interviews and the cycle of tasks.

Now, I present the core of this study - the development of a cycle of tasks and its implementation.

## **3.7 The Development of a Cycle of Tasks and its Implementation**

### **3.7.1 Theme choice and development of a Cycle of Tasks**

A cycle of tasks was developed by taking into account the participants' needs-analysis questionnaire results (Long, 2015), Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks, and Ellis's (2003) principles of TBA and his task definition; all these features compose a solid TBA rationale. I also took into consideration the field notes taken from the observation of the classes with the regular teacher and this population's cognitive decline, as referred to in the review of literature. In addition, I made sure to allow moments for focus on form, planning and repetition in the cycle of tasks developed, in order to verify how the participants perceived these elements, and the extent to which these elements seemed to impact on their learning. The elements that constituted the pre-task phase, the mid-task (the task itself), and the post-task phase were carefully thought of and constituted initially four classes.

After its development, the cycle of tasks underwent a refining process with the help of a doctorate candidate involved with studies within TBA, my advisor and co-advisor. At first, the cycle of tasks would comprise four classes; however, after realizing that some tasks could be better explored and transformed into improved tasks, my advisor, my co-advisor and I noticed they needed more time to be properly worked with the participants. Thus, the cycle of tasks officially became a 5-class cycle.

The first moment of its development involved defining a theme. Through analyzing the results of question 8 from the needs analysis questionnaire, which specifically asked the participants about their themes of interest, I was able to define the theme to develop the cycle of tasks: *Traveling*. As seen in Figure 2, six out of eight participants pointed traveling as a theme of interest, other participants pointed family or shopping.

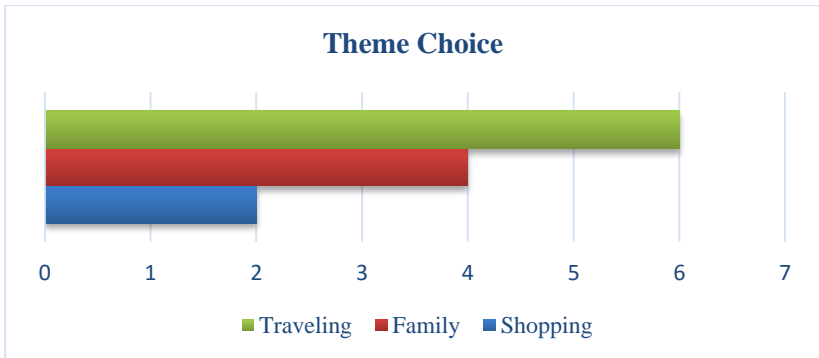


Figure 2: Theme of interest of the participants based on the needs-analysis questionnaire.

From the topic *Traveling*, I brainstormed a few ideas with my advisor and co-advisor, in order to come up with the final idea to develop the cycle of tasks. The cycle of tasks was developed with a view to creating the necessary conditions for the participants to elaborate an *Itinerary in English* for a weekend-long tour in a city in an English-speaking country. This initially resulted in a 4-lesson cycle of tasks, which after more refinement, extended to a 5-lesson cycle of tasks. Finally, this 5-lesson cycle was composed of 10 tasks carefully proofread before the implementation.

### 3.7.2 The cycle of tasks

The first class encompassed Task 1 (T1), its pre-task phase, and its performance. In T1, learners had to get information from a selection of pamphlets and brochures in order to fulfill a table (as seen in Figure 3). The pre-task phase was developed to motivate participants and provide them input for T1, thus, it counted on a slide presentation of three English-speaking cities: London, New York and Sydney, and some pictures of their main tourist attractions. During the class implementation, I instigated the participants to list things tourists could do in those places, and wrote them on the board, which became the vocabulary input for T1 (see appendix U for the lesson plan 1). Although a post-task phase was intended in T1 (see part b in figure 3), where participants would reaffirm their initial choices to the whole class, there was no available time during Class 1.

The second class started with a review of the vocabulary worked in the first class, with an emphasis on pronunciation. This step along with the completed table from T1 were essential pre-task for Task 2 (T2). This task consisted of exchanging information about the tourist attractions found in the pamphlets in the previous class. The participants received another table to be completed (see Figure 4) through oral

**Part A:** Read the pamphlet about the city you received. Then, write the name of the city the pamphlet announces. List three tourist attractions you find interesting, and choose two things visitors can do there.

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_

Tourist Attractions	What can we do there?
1	a. b.
2	a. b.
3	a. b.

**Part B:** Now tick (✓) the group decision in relation to visit this city in our summer vacation:

Figure 3. Task 1 from Class 1 of the cycle of tasks.



communication, a difficulty identified during class observation phase in this study. In order to complete the information required in the table and, at the same time, try to overcome the identified difficulty, I guided the participants to ask and answer questions by modeling the task and offering an example in the T2 as well.

Then, as T2 post-task phase, the participants decided on which of the three cities they would like to visit, so that the next task (Task 3 – T3) was directed to the most voted city, which was London.

**Part A:**  
 In groups of three, ask and answer about:  
 a) the tourist attractions you can visit: *what tourist attractions can we visit in \_\_\_\_\_ (CITY NAME) \_\_\_\_\_?*  
 b) the things you can do there: *What can we do in \_\_\_\_\_ (TOURIST ATTRACTION) \_\_\_\_\_?*

City: _____		City: _____	
Tourist Attractions	What can we do there?	Tourist Attractions	What can we do there?
1	a.	1	a.
	b.		b.
2	a.	2	a.
	b.		b.
3	a.	3	a.
	b.		b.

**Part B:** Return to your original group to decide if your group keeps (or not) the initial decision in relation to the city you are going to go to on your next summer vacation. Tick (✓) the group decision:  
 Yes = keeps initial decision  
 No = changes initial decision

Figure 4: Task 2 from Class 2.

T3 also occurred in the second class. In T3, the participants had to search for a website to find some tourist attractions in London. As a pre-task, I elicited from participants sources of information on London;

as they mentioned internet, I searched on google for a tourist website, and clicked on <http://www.visitlondon.com/>. I explained how to look for information in the website, and then assigned the groups. Each group received four different topics to search in the website, for instance, a place to learn about the city, a place to relax, a place to enjoy nature, a place to try local food, to give some examples (see appendix V for lesson plan 2). Each group received a laptop computer to perform their research. T3 did not encompass a post-task activity because there was no available time, moreover, the main purpose of a post-task phase, which is to provide learners with the opportunity to raise language awareness, would be assessed in Task 4 (T4), in the next class.

The third class encompassed Task 4 (T4) and Task 5 (T5). In the beginning of the class, as T4 pre-task phase, I reviewed the alphabet and the question: *how do you spell that?*; moreover, I explained T4 by showing them on the big screen the table to be filled in (see Figure 5). Participants were invited to go one-by-one to the computer keyboard to type down their findings, however they were not allowed to bring their notes to simply copy them; rather, their group members said the answer aloud and spelled difficult words. In this sense, the participants practiced the four language skills, spelling and pronunciation, a difficulty also identified during class observation phase of this study.

	<b>Tourist Attraction</b>	<b>Why should we visit this place?</b>
<b>A place to go for a walk</b>		
<b>A place to see different animals</b>		
<b>A place to have fun</b>		
<b>A place to appreciate arts</b>		
<b>A place to buy souvenirs</b>		
<b>A place to relax or enjoy nature</b>		
<b>Places to try local food</b>		
<b>Places to learn about the city</b>		
<b>Places to take nice pictures</b>		

Figure 5: Task 4 from Class 3.

T4 provided an excellent moment for Focus on Form (Long, 1991). After all of their answers were typed on the computer, participants could see all findings and observe a pattern among the

sentences. This moment made participants aware that *why-questions* should always be answered with *because*. Besides the structure used in the performances of T1, T2 and T3: *subject + can + verb in base form* could also be reinforced.

Still in the third class, participants started T5, which consisted in creating an itinerary for a weekend-long trip in London. As T5 pre-task, the participants received a London brochure and a map to locate a specific place indicated by me; so that they could become familiar with looking for information in the map and in the brochure. In T5, they decided the places/tourist attractions to visit in London, according to the itinerary sketch provided by me (see appendix W for lesson plan 3). As a post-task activity, the participants would receive all material (brochure and map) by email and were invited to examine it more carefully at home.

The fourth class consisted of Task 6 (T6) and Task 7 (T7), both developed based on the concept of planning (Foster & Skehan, 1996; 1999). Both of them provided the participants planning to refine their itinerary and transform it into an oral presentation for Task 8 (T8). In T6, through teacher-led planning, the participants were invited to write or rewrite their reasons to visit each place selected, with the objective of simplifying language. T6 pre-task phase focused on persuading the participants that complex statements take longer to be acknowledged classmates' oral presentation in order to be easily understood by the audience. As pre-task phase, I instructed them to use the internet to verify and understood by listeners. To do so, I presented them the concept of cognates; simple, short and clear sentences rather than

<b>Evaluate your classmate's rehearsal session.</b>			
Learner's Name	Did you get the information?	Did you understand most sentences?	Was the pronunciation good?

Figure 6: Task 7 from Class 4

complex ones; and the importance of clear English pronunciation. I pointed out that the main objective of an oral presentation is to transmit a message that could be understood by the audience. However, participants were not told that at the time one group was presenting, they had to take notes about the presentation seen.

After T6, the participants, organized in small groups, were addressed to T7, which consisted of a handout with a chart as a support for them to evaluate the comprehension of the oral presentation of the members of their own group (see Figure 6). In this task, one participant read aloud his/her own presentation, while the other participants of the group attempted to assess his/her own text comprehension. After that, the participants gave each other feedback and tried to help improve their

<b>Task – Observing my classmates’ presentations.</b>		
1) Complete the chart with the name of the tourist attraction (place) and the reasons to visit it.		
2) Use key words only.		
	Group:	Group:
Lunch	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:
Saturday Afternoon	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:
Dinner	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:
Saturday Night	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:
Sunday Morning	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:
Lunch	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:
Sunday Afternoon	Place: Reasons:	Place: Reasons:

Figure 7: Task 9 from Class 5.

the pronunciations of certain words, and I assisted those participants with more difficulty by monitoring the groups. As a post-task activity, a suggested homework was given: to create a card with key words to help them during the itinerary presentation (T8) (see appendix X for lesson plan 4).

Finally, the fifth and last class integrated three tasks: Task 8 (T8): presenting the itinerary; Task 9 (T9): taking notes about the classmates' itineraries; and Task 10 (T10): deciding on the best itinerary. The fifth class started with a review of the four previous classes, in order to account for their progress and contextualize the itinerary presentation for an audience that had not been present to all the previous classes. As T9 would occur concurrently with T8, I provided all audience (guests and participants) with a copy of T9 (see Figure 7) and explained they were expected to take notes, by using key words only, while watching and listening to their classmates' oral presentations.

After T8 and T9, as post-task phase, I elicited from the participants' notes the similarities and differences among the itineraries and listed the findings on the board. This post-task activity worked as vocabulary input for T10, in which the audience (guests and participants) argued for and against the itineraries presented and voted for the best one (see appendix Y for lesson plan 5).

Table 5 provides a summary of the ten tasks designed for the cycle of tasks to a group of EFL elderly learners, at NETI/UFSC, as proposed in this study.

Finally, the implementation phase was conducted supported by the lesson plans. During the implementation phase, it was necessary to make some final adjustments in the lesson plans, supervised by my advisor and co-advisor. Such adjustments were necessary due to time constrains mainly. However, the classes were described here in this method as they were actually implemented, despite the minor adjustments made in the original lesson plans.

*Table 5: A summary of the cycle of tasks designed for this study.*

<b>Class</b>	<b>Refer ence</b>	<b>Pre-Task</b>	<b>Mid-Task</b>	<b>Post-Task</b>
Class 1	T1	Language input: Slide presentation of three cities from English speaking countries and their tourist attractions, vocabulary input	<i>Search information in the pamphlets to complete a table about tourist attractions</i>	The complete table works as input for class 2

Class 2	T2	T1 Language input: review on first class vocabulary	<i>Exchange information about the tourist attractions found in &amp; taken from the pamphlets in the class 1 in order to decide on a place to visit</i>	Decide on the favorite city after comparing the three English speaking cities
	T3	Language input: Presentation of website of London (the English speaking city chosen), their social role and how to get information from them	<i>Search, find and choose some tourist attractions or places of their interest in London on a website in order to learn to look for similar information on the web</i>	The information collected works as input for class 3
Class 3	T4	T4 Alphabet review language input: <i>how do you spell that?</i>	<i>Type on the computer your group's findings about London tourist attractions (spelling) to share information with the other groups</i>	FoF – use of <i>because</i> and <i>subject + can + verb in the base form</i>
	T5	Language input: Presentation of the brochure, London map, and an itinerary sketch	<i>Decide the places to go to in London in order to create a weekend-long itinerary</i>	Take material home for further analysis
Class 4	T6	T5 T4's Post-Task language input: presentation of language strategies to simplify language, use of cognates, and simple structure	<i>Teacher- led planning: write or rewrite the reasons to visit each place by using simplified language in order to facilitate speech comprehension</i>	Check each other's work within the group
	T7	T6 Presentation of websites that support pronunciation	<i>Practice and improve pronunciation by verifying each other's pronunciation in order to facilitate oral comprehension during T8</i>	Suggested Homework: Create a card with key words for itinerary oral presentation
Class 5	T8	General review of all classes Final rehearsal	<i>Present their own itinerary so that the audience can be informed on different itineraries options</i>	Other learners may ask questions or make comments on performance
	T9	Explanation of the handout containing the table to be completed	<i>Take notes about the participants' itineraries in order to decide for the best one</i>	Table with similarities and differences among the itineraries presented
	T10	Table with similarities and differences	<i>Vote for the best itinerary to conclude the cycle of tasks and have, in the end of the process, an outcome: a suggested itinerary for the group's next vacation</i>	Choice of the best itinerary produced by the participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### Data Analysis

#### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to present the qualitative analysis of the data collected for this study, with a view to identifying and understanding the participants' perception of the implementation of a cycle of tasks developed under the task-based approach rationale (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003) on a group of EFL elderly students from the NETI English program.

To meet this objective, in the end of each class, the participants answered Perception Questionnaires - PQs (see appendix K-O for the PQs' data) about the classes they participated as volunteers. Besides that, after the entire cycle of tasks had occurred, each participant – except Ms. Orange, who was not available –, was individually interviewed (see appendix Z for all interviews scripts) about the cycle of tasks.

Data from the PQs and the interviews, supported by the lesson plans and the video recordings, were analyzed, categorized, triangulated and organized under two umbrella themes: i) Participants' Perceptions of the Teaching Approach<sup>16</sup>, and ii) Participants' Perceptions of the Cycle of Tasks.

In the sequence, I present the participants' main perceptions under the umbrella theme: Participants' Perceptions of the Teaching Approach.

#### 4.2 Participants' Perception of the Teaching Approach

Here, I present the participants' perceptions of the Teaching Approach based on their PQ's and interview answers, supported by the tasks designed for this study, the lesson plans, and the video recordings of each class.

The analysis of the answers given in the PQs unveiled some issues of interest. Considering the framework under which the tasks had been developed, I was curious to understand their perceptions of *theme*,

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<sup>16</sup> Although the teaching approach used in this whole study was TBA, the participants did not know that and neither it was informed to them in any moment; therefore their perceptions emerged from their own reasoning of the processes they engaged in throughout this study.

*methodology, group work, resources used, teacher's attitude, teacher's pronunciation, grammar or languages issues, and participant's own definition of repetition and its presence in the classes. These questionings led to the elaboration of the questions of the semi-guided interview. From the triangulation of all data produced by the participants (PQs and interviews), it was possible to downsize the coding to the following topics: TBA General Aspects, Theme, Language Issues, Repetition, Resources, Group work, and Teacher's attitude, each of which are addressed here.*

Beforehand, it is important to say that all participants perceived the approach used in the classes – TBA – as a different way to approach language learning. The classes were perceived as non-traditional, as compared to what they were accustomed to. As Ms. Violet said in the interview: *[a aula] fugiu daquele tradicional de você seguir ali o livro.* It seems, therefore, that the participants were exposed to a different way of learning EFL during their previous learning experience, such as following a course book.

Besides their exposure to different approaches to learning EFL, it is worthwhile remembering that adults have knowledge about their mother language as a system as well as knowledge of the world, according to Ortega (2009). These types of knowledge - their exposure to different methodologies and approaches to second language learning, their knowledge of the mother tongue as a system, and their knowledge of world – may have contributed to their own personal beliefs on what learning a language is. Although there has been difficulties to define the concept beliefs (Pajares, 1992), according to D'Ely and Gil (2005) it can be defined as views/ideas based on perceptions of specific experiences, in specific contexts, at a given period of time which influence one's own understanding, decisions and actions.

Regarding participants' perception of the general aspects of the Teaching Approach, the first mentioned by all participants in the PQs was that the classes were conducted entirely in English. According to Ellis (2003), a class spoken all in the L2 will increase the cognitive load demanded from the learners to understand the idea being transmitted. Though the level of difficulty became higher for the participants due to use of English during all the five classes, it brought them benefits, though. As Ms. White pointed since the first class: *Na aula falada em inglês, forçosamente somos levados a prestar atenção e isso nos leva a concentrar-nos.* Some participants (Mr. Gray, Mr. Black and Ms. Violet) initially perceived this as an obstacle to their learning. Nevertheless, later on, these participants started perceiving it was not an obstacle. For



instance, Mr. Gray claimed that Class 1 was difficult because, as it was conducted in English, he needed to translate mentally the sentences to understand what was going on in the class. In his words: *preciso também saber a tradução para poder responder o que está sendo transmitido*. However, in Class 2, his perception of such matter started changing as he noticed he did not have to translate everything to grasp the idea of what was being said in class: *muitas palavras iam se encaixando dentro das perguntas que [a professora] fazia*. As his words suggest, he felt as he did not need to translate in order to understand what was spoken; in this sense, Mr. Gray reflected about his own learning process and pushed himself to developing a learning strategy<sup>17</sup> to assist him in the cognitive task of comprehending oral communication. It seems that the cognitive learning strategy developed here was listening and grasping key-words in order to comprehend the central idea of oral messages.

Another general aspect perceived was that the tasks resembled real life, which constitutes one of the major tenets of TBA (Ellis, 2007). Mr. Black noticed that some tasks (as T1, T3, and T5) simulated everyday life tasks, as he said: *A dinâmica considero excelente pois é exatamente o que fazemos quando em viagem turística*. Mr. Gray, the only participant who did not have any experience abroad (see participants' profile on page 35) commented on this matter during the interview: *nós estávamos fazendo um trabalho de pesquisa e como a gente ia se portar fora do país*. His perception of this matter was more of a preparation to deal with real life events, concurrently Mr. Black perceived it as resembling real life.

Another general aspect perceived by the participants was that there was some kind of sequence throughout the tasks which led them to reach a final purpose. It is possible to say that all of them noticed that every part of the class intended to achieve a more general purpose in the end, which was an oral presentation of a Trip Itinerary to a place in an English speaking country. This can be verified in Mr. Yellow's words in the interview: *suas aulas tinham um objetivo, uma meta maior, e passo a passo fomos subindo escadas, degraus. Aula após aula havia uma retomada, e dava-se alguns passos adiante. Então foi se construindo um*

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<sup>17</sup>According to Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) "learning strategies are intentional behavior and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information" (p.209). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) claimed that learning strategies are "special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). In sum, learning strategies were seen as special ways of processing information that improve comprehension, learning, or retention of the information.

*caminho*. According to Van Den Branden (2012), “task sequencing is a matter of creating a coherent scale of increasingly complex approximations to the real-world target tasks” (pp. 134 - 135). Participants perceived the tasks were not disconnected, rather their outcomes were building-in to the final moment, to get participants able to perform the main task, the itinerary presentation, reflecting the TBA rationale.

Another general aspect perceived was that this approach – TBA – was indeed motivational<sup>18</sup>. All the participants claimed they felt motivated to come to the five classes and participate in them. The theme chosen through needs analysis was an important motivational factor, as Ms. Orange’s words summarize participants’ view on the theme: *Viajar é tudo de bom. Adorei o tema escolhido*. The general acceptance of the theme by the participants increases their motivation to participate in classes. This indicates that the *needs analysis* questionnaire (applied prior to the development of the classes) was an essential condition to the development of this cycle of tasks, as it allows the task-developer to prepare meaningful, therefore motivational, tasks related to the groups’ reality and their specific needs (Long, 2015).

In sum, the general aspects perceived were: the use of the L2 as main form of communication during the entire class, the representation of the real-world situation in the tasks, the sequential development of the cycle of tasks leading to a final purpose and, the motivational aspect present in the entire cycle of tasks. It is worth remembering that participants were not aware of what TBA is or what characteristic it has, still they were able to notice these aspects that specifically relate to TBA during the classes. These aspects drew their attention because mostly they differ from the other approaches participants were accustomed to. Thus, participants’ perception of these specific aspects confirmed some characteristics of TBA and Skehan’s framework (1996) as being relevant to the learning of EFL for this specific group of participants.

After bringing the general aspects of TBA perceived, I present the other topics that emerged from the PQs and interviews verification of data: Theme, Language Issues, Repetition, Resources, Group Work, and Teacher’s Attitude.

Besides the fact that this theme was seen as a motivational factor for this specific group, the fact that the theme was familiar to

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<sup>18</sup>According to Dornyei and Skehan (2003) “motivation is responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it” (p.614)

nearly all participants decreased the level of difficulty, thus enhancing opportunities to *Focus on Form - FoF* and increased fluency (Ellis, 2003). It is possible to observe in the videos that since the first moment the participants were in contact with this theme, they demonstrated a high engagement, participating integrally in classes and asking questions about form. This goes in line with Chang's (1999, as cited in Ellis, 2003) findings "when learners had prior knowledge of a topic they performed a task more fluently" (p. 121).

As the familiarity with the theme lowered the level of difficulty for them, then, it could be expected that the lack of familiarity with the theme could make Class 1 more difficult to some participants. Ms. White accounted for that possibility when she commented: *houve alguma dificuldade para aqueles, por exemplo, que não visitaram os países ou cidades citadas*. Mr. Gray was one example in this sense as he knew very little about the theme he perceived Class 1 as difficult. He justified Class 1 as difficult by saying: *Conheço muito pouco os pontos turísticos em outros países*. As a compensation for not being as familiar to the topic as the other participants were, Mr. Gray developed the strategy of searching his class notes and the class theme on the web. This led him to a significant decrease in his perception of the level of difficulty, as he explained:

*Na segunda aula, eu já tinha escutado algumas palavras na primeira, já tinha traduzido no meu caderno, já tinha visto em casa, já tinha melhorado um pouco, já tinha o conhecimento de algumas palavras e da maneira que se jogava ela na frase.*

This strategy was only useful due to the fact that the theme was kept the same during the five classes. Therefore, the theme, which initially was not familiar to him, became familiar, decreasing the level of difficulty of the class, as suggested by Skehan's (1998) claim that familiarity with the theme of the tasks is one of the key elements to reduce the level of difficulty.

Other four participants (Ms. White, Mr. Green, Mr. Yellow and, Mr. Black) also reported that the continuity of the theme lowered the level of difficulty of the task. To better illustrate this idea, I bring here Ms. White's words during interview: *A temática na verdade foi a mesma - a viagem, o turismo - mas, foi sendo progressivo, cada aula completava a anterior, eu acho que serviu para fixar melhor os assuntos e os temas que nós estávamos estudando*. As she perceived, the

continuation of the theme contributed also to make them memorize the issues studied in class better; as suggested when the level of difficulty is lower, the higher chances to engage in discussion about form (Ellis, 2003).

It is possible to verify in the participants' answers of all PQ's and interview that they noticed they learned some content, such as: how to write some new vocabulary related to traveling (7 participants), how to pronounce certain words (4), how to answer questions using because to indicate reason (1), how to simplify language in order to be understood easily by listeners (3), how to use the structure: we can + verb (2) and how to use and recognize cognates (2).

This leads us to the next aspect that emerged from the PQs - their perception of the language issues approached during the classes. On this topic, there were two groups of participants: two participants who perceived language issues as mainly learning grammar, and six participants who considered other aspects of the language issues, such as: learning vocabulary, learning pronunciation, to give a few examples. Mr. Green and Ms. White seemed to have a traditional perspective on what learning languages is, that is, they seemed to be structure centered as they perceive language issues as mainly learning grammar. They claimed in their PQs during class 2 and 3, that no language issue was worked during those classes: In Mr. Green's words: *Não houve ênfase a questões de linguagem* (PQ2). Even after the five classes, they kept their perception that the language issues did not receive enough highlight. In Ms. White's words during the interview: *Para falar a verdade eu não acho que a gente tenha aprendido muito em questão de língua, apesar de ter sido reforçado a estrutura das frases e acrescentado palavras e expressões novas ao nosso vocabulário*. One possibility to explain this, is the fact that they were more experienced learners (see profile on page 35) and had little to learn, as Branden (2012) suggested: "if there is no gap between the learners' current interlanguage system and task demands, there will be little to learn" (p. 134). Mr. Black thought the same way when he commented in interview: *Com certeza esses participantes já tem um conhecimento mais avançado da língua para ter tido essa percepção*. Another possibility is that it may be difficult for them to perceive that language issues, like grammar, can be worked implicitly rather than explicitly.

However, the other six participants were able to perceive that it was not a matter of giving less focus to language, but a matter of a different way to approach learning English. As Ms. Violet said in interview: *foi abordado uma outra maneira de aprender palavras novas*.

Mr. Yellow, for instance, realized since the very first class that the language issues were motivated by the theme of the class, as he posed in his PQ1: *gramática estimulada conforme os pontos turísticos escolhidos*, and he complemented: *a questão maior [foi] a comunicação*. This corroborates one aspect I worked on in Skehan's (1998) framework, which is the attempt to promote a balance between meaning and form when designing tasks.

These six participants (Mr. Yellow, Ms. Pink, Ms. Violet, Mr. Grey, Ms. Orange and Mr. Black) gave positive feedback on the amount of language issues discussed during the classes. They used positive words as: excellent (1 participant), relevant and contextualized (1), important (2), essential (1), and, enriching (1). They mentioned as language issues observed in class: learning grammar, learning pronunciation, learning vocabulary, learning structures, and learning functions.

Thus, though two participants claimed not to have perceived any language issues, the other six participants' perception account for the richness of the classes, where there were varied learning opportunities.

Another topic that most participants commented on their PQs was repetition. Since *repetition* is a metacognitive process within TBA that permeated the cycle of tasks developed, I tried to verify how they perceived *repetition* during the classes. Thus, I developed a question asking about the similarities and differences participants perceived when comparing the classes. As expected, they had different opinions on what repetition was and which aspects in class brought elements of repetition. Ms. Violet had a more simplistic view of repetition: repeating the same word or sentence due to clarify any miscomprehension. In an email, she explained repetition happened when the teacher repeated what she was explaining until the participants understood. Mr. Black's concept of repetition suffered an alteration along the classes. First, he said in the PQ1 that: *Repetir é importante. Acho que o método da repetição, pelo menos para mim, funciona*. But after the five classes, he concluded, in the interview, that the classes were not about the repetition he had in mind in the first class, as he said:

*na estratégia que foi apresentada de aula, ela não se fixou nisso, vamos fazer e repetir, vamos fazer e repetir, ela teve uma continuidade acrescentando alguma coisa, mas sem esquecer daquilo que foi feito anteriormente, ou seja, do jeito*

*que ela foi, ela foi evoluindo até chegar no ponto que chegamos.*

Thus, it is evident his perception of the concept of repetition changed and after the five classes it was similar to other participants (Ms. White, Ms. Pink and Mr. Yellow) who claimed that repetition did not happen during the classes, instead there were reviews and a progressive continuation of work.

These views about what repetition is did not quite meet the post-task condition of repetition within TBA. However, at some point in the PQs and interviews, they all shared a common sense regarding repetition, which was: *we memorize and remember by repetition*. This common sense meets somehow the purpose of applying repetition in tasks, as according to Bygate (2001), the term *repetition* refers to the rehearsal prior to the performance. It suggests that when a task is repeated (performed after rehearsal), the chances of being stored in the long-term memory are enhanced (Bygate, 2001).

The tasks were designed in an attempt to provide many opportunities for task repetition. The tasks had similar procedures and the outcomes of each task would be similar in structure in order to promote the participants memorization. According to Bygate (2001), when learners have the opportunity to repeat a task, they can retrieve information they have practiced before and even make some adjustments in order to maximize communication effectiveness. In this sense, the participants of this study would retrieve what they had used in the previous tasks, in order to perform the next task, as well as they would be adjusting language as necessary. Mr. Black noticed that some structures were repeated in different tasks: *quando aconteceu [a repetição] na montagem de algumas estruturas, eu tenho ela fixada na cabeça, because we can see... então essas [estruturas] ficaram fixadas*. Yet, Mr. Green perceived the repetition of features within tasks, as he said in interview: *trabalho em grupo e a apresentação daquilo que a gente fez; rever conteúdos passados anteriormente; é uma revisão para fixação*. In this sense, he had a slight perception of task familiarity, a kind of task repetition (as explained on page 30). Skehan (1998) called it task familiarity in his framework; he argued that learners can benefit from “task familiarity to produce more complex language” (p. 119) since it lowers task cognitive load. Therefore, *repetition* or *task familiarity* seem to have been a successful technique in helping the elderly EFL learners memorize new content and optimize their communicative skills.

Another topic that emerged from the PQs answers were the resources (data show, laptop computer, PowerPoint presentation, pamphlets, brochures and maps) used during the cycle of tasks. Skehan (1998) suggested that the lack of visual support represent a greater processing burden. As the intention was to ease the cognitive load in order to enhance chances for FoF to occur, the cycle of tasks in this study made use of a variety of visual resources, as Ms. Pink pointed in interview as one of the most important aspects of the cycle of tasks: *houve o material. A gente teve o mapa, a própria internet, a brochura, o material que você enviou pela internet para nós.*

All participants seemed pleased to work with different kinds of resources mainly because: 1) they stimulated participation; 2) they represented real world; 3) they contributed to their learning on different issues, such as computing, using maps, and others; 4) they were novelty, and 5) some students were visual learners. Mr. Black claimed that: *O uso do website motiva a pesquisa;* while Ms. Violet said: *esse método de data show, ajuda muito no interesse pela aula; A consulta no mapa e montagem nos prende na tarefa.* This indicates that the resources used motivated and stimulated their participation throughout the classes.

The chosen resources reflected TBA principles, since they represent resources used in real life events. For instance, the pamphlets and brochures were original, that is, they were not manipulated in any sense, which resembles a possible real life situation to any of the participants. Besides, as Ms. Violet posed, the fact the pamphlets and brochures were real contributed to their learning of English. In her words: *Os folders eram todos em inglês, tinha que ler, tinha que entender, e vão surgindo palavras novas, [...] você descobria uma maneira de pesquisar e de aprender.* This goes in line with Skehan's (1998) claim that the right amount of information provides a reasonable challenge and does not overload learners.

Besides, as Ms. Violet perceived, the use of real material contributes to the enrichment of vocabulary, since that the real life dimension present in this kind of material extrapolates language issues. This idea was called borrowing and was defined by Prabhu (1987) as taking over an available verbal formulation in order to express some self-initiated meaning content, instead of generation the formulation from one's own competence. Prabhu (1987) defended borrowing as "it can be seen as contributing directly to acquisition" (p.60).

Also, the use of internet, laptops and some websites reflect exactly the process of search for information on the web that very often takes places in real life situations. This was perceived by Mr. Black, who posed: *é o*

*que fazemos, antes e durante a viagem, ou seja: pesquisa antecipada na WEB; utilização de panfletos que são fartos em cidades turísticas.* Therefore, the use of this sort of resources also enables learners to deal with real material, and develop other skills, i.e., being able to use laptops to search on the web, rather than solely dealing with language. Confirming this, Mr. Yellow said in the interview that a good experience he had during the cycle of tasks was: *enfrentar o computador na hora lá e participar*, suggesting that using computer was something he was not very familiar with, but he learned to. Ms. Pink also claimed in the interview that she felt capable of using the internet after doing it in class, consolidating the idea that the use of these resources contribute to the participants' development of other skills.

Finally, some participants indicated they were visual and they enjoyed observing where the countries were located in the world map. As Mr. Yellow posed: *Legal o fato de mostrar o mapa do mundo e nele enfocar e localizar os continentes, países, cidades. E ainda apontando nas cidades pontos turísticos; e o próprio quadro para escrever palavras chaves.* The fact that Mr. Yellow remembered the use of the world map and the whiteboard to write vocabulary suggests that he has a visual learning style. The use of different resources contributed to vary the tasks in order to benefit all participants, irrespective of their learning style.

The next topic very evident in all participants' perception was the constant use of group work during the classes. Group work received positive feedback from participants, as they described it as: very good (3 participants), fundamental (1), enriching (1), interesting (2), excellent (2), important (3), positive (1), and, democratic (1). Some participants commented about aspects of group work which meet Jacobs' (1998, as reviewed in Ellis, 2003, p. 267) ten main benefits of group work. In table 6, I relate the benefits suggested by Jacobs (1998) to some parts of the participants' answers of the PQs and interviews.

Some of the benefits brought in Table 6 corroborate directly TBA principle. For instance, the increased amount of learners' talking time goes in line with the fourth principle of TBA - *to ensure that students adopt an active role in task-based lessons.* By observing the videos it is possible to perceive that, as classes progressed, participants talked more and more in English within their groups. This goes in line with what Ellis (2003) posed on this issue, that is, the ability to work effectively with others is a process that requires time.



Table 6: *Relation between Jacobs' (1998) group work benefits and participants' perceptions.*

<b>Jacobs' (1998) ten main group work benefits</b>	<b>Participants' perception of group work benefits</b>
<b>-it reduces students' anxiety</b>	Ms. White: <i>Quando se faz trabalho em grupo, a atividade se torna mais fácil.</i>
<b>-it encourages students to learn to work together</b>	Ms. White: <i>as dinâmicas [de grupo] ajudam a vencer a timidez</i>
<b>-it increases the quality of learners' speech</b>	Mr. Gray: <i>Achei o trabalho em grupo muito bom para ajudar o aperfeiçoamento do discurso. Trabalhamos em equipe é muito bom pois se vamos errando principalmente na pronúncia de algumas palavras, nossos colegas que sabem mais ajudam nos corrigindo para acertar.</i>
<b>-it increases variety of speech acts</b>	Mr. Yellow: <i>em termos da língua inglesa você fala mais</i>
<b>-it increases motivation</b>	Mr. Green: <i>Eu acho que se tornou mais motivadora por causa da participação ... em grupo</i> Ms. White: <i>deu mais motivação mesmo.</i>
<b>-it increases enjoyment</b>	Ms. Pink: <i>quando é trabalho em grupo a gente esquece até o tempo</i> Mr. Green: <i>torna a aula mais alegre e mais participativa</i>
<b>-it increases independence</b>	Ms. Pink: <i>porque você precisa falar, você precisa pesquisar, você precisa encontrar as palavras em inglês.</i>
<b>-it increases social integration</b>	Ms. White: <i>acho que é democrático, socializa, faz a turma ter integração.</i>
<b>-it increases learning</b>	Mr. Grey: <i>caminhamos juntos em uma mesma direção, e assim aprendemos mais com aqueles que sabem mais</i> Ms. Pink: <i>um ajuda o outro, e você sempre vai avançando.</i> Ms. Orange: <i>o trabalho em grupo instiga e aumenta a curiosidade de buscar novas informações.</i>
<b>-it increases teacher's individualization of instruction (teacher can monitor and assist individually during group work)</b>	Mr. Gray: <i>principalmente a professora entusiasmando aos alunos a participar juntos através das pesquisas e nos dando maneiras para chegar aos objetivos desejados</i> Mr. Yellow: <i>o acompanhamento e orientação, pela professora, no grupo; Destaco a colaboração, sugestões da professora no grupo</i>

Besides, the number of learners involved in the performance of each task also helped to decrease the level of difficulty of the tasks, as Skehan's (1996) framework for task analysis suggests (on page 17). As

it was already stated in this analysis, decreasing the task difficulty is a desirable feature to enhance the chances that attention is focused on form, not only in meaning. Besides, group work also reflects the real world (one of task main principle), as Mr. Black perceived in PQ3: *acho fundamental [o trabalho de grupo], pois quando viajamos, raramente estamos sozinhos.*

All these benefits justify the choice of group work to perform the tasks developed in this cycle. As Van Den Branden (2012) pointed: “it is through the interaction with peers (and particularly more knowledgeable peers) and with their teachers that students can meet the challenges the task introduces and learn new language by bridging the gaps they were confronted with” (p.135).

However, two participants (Ms. Violet and Mr. Black) observed some negative aspects related to group work. According to Ellis (2003), one of the dangers of group work is that it may result in pidginized<sup>19</sup> use of the L2 and concomitant interlanguage fossilization<sup>20</sup>. This is exactly what Ms. Violet was attempting to refer to when she commented:

*trabalhar em grupo tem dois lados, acho que ajuda e também prejudica; porque o colega também não sabe, as vezes ele sabe um pouquinho mais ou menos, então as vezes não ajuda. Também para a pronúncia, pois eu acho que no nosso nível ali quase todos não têm a pronúncia boa, e também a gramática, falta muito, vocabulário; eu acho mais fácil o professor corrigir pois as vezes ele [o colega] não sabe também.*

Although group work may open room for pidginization and fossilization, in a short term, these two processes will be hardly triggered. Besides, the post-task FoF moment is meant to account for minimizing these problems.

The other negative aspect observed was that group work increases the chances of certain learners to undermine themselves as learners, thinking they are less capable than the others. According to Ellis (2003) learners’ contribution can be unequal to the task completion and there is also the risk that some learners overuse their L1. This may

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<sup>19</sup> Pidginization: “the process when a language becomes made up of elements of two or more other languages and used for contacts” Retrieved on August 26, 2015 from the website <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pidginization>

<sup>20</sup> Skehan (1996) explains fossilization by saying that “if communicative effectiveness is achieved, the erroneous exemplar may survive and stabilize, i.e. become a syntactic fossil.” (p. 44)

have happened to Mr. Black since he complained twice in his PQs that he had depended too much on his partners to task completion. During the interview, Mr. Black explained:

*Se eu tivesse que fazer tudo que foi feito sozinho, eu não sairia do chão. Eu ficaria boiando, eu ficaria dependendo muito mais da explicação do professor. Se não tivesse a ajuda dos colegas do grupo, ficaria bem mais difícil para mim.*

Perhaps, these two participants' perceptions of the negative aspects of group work rely on their beliefs that only the teacher is capable of detaining knowledge about the language, and that their personal critical view on themselves reinforce the belief that they are not capable of achieving the results on their own. Wells (1999, as cited in Ellis, 2003) also explained that as speaking is ephemeral, students can present difficulty in observing the learning progress.

In sum, the use of group work accounts for much more benefits to interlanguage development than it does for damaging it. Besides, the possibilities of pidginization and fossilization are recurrent from long term use of language. Also, the post-task phase, which occurs immediately after task completion, is intended to correct any misuse of English.

As seen, group work has a range of benefits that justify its use in this study, but it does not ensure the conditions needed to achieve satisfactory task outcomes or language learning. Thus, teachers need to monitor and ensure that students are able to work together effectively. Regarding this issue, Van Den Branden (2012) posits the role of the teacher in TBLT, as:

- 1- Motivate the students to invest intensive energy in the task performance;
- 2- Efficiently organize the task-based activity, giving clear instructions and preparing them for the task, grouping them, providing all necessary material or inform ways to obtain the necessary materials;
- 3- Intentionally support the students while they are performing the task.

As I was the teacher in this study, I attempted to do that with this group of elderly learners, as well as I attempted to follow some of the eight principles of TBA presented by Ellis (2003), as seen in the Review of Literature. For instance: 1) I used teacher talk to adjust the difficulty of a task; 2) I monitored their group work to assist them in

making use of some methodological options such as strategic and online planning in order to enhance their performance; 3) I encouraged participants to take active roles and negotiate meanings among themselves; and 4) I encouraged participants to take risks in order to stretch their interlanguage resources.

Participants' perceptions of this matter suggest that I achieved the expected role of a teacher within TBA, as my attitudes as a teacher were one of the issues extensively commented by them in the PQs and interview.

For instance, participants perceived and extensively commented on the fact that I spoke clear English, paraphrasing ideas to guarantee most participants' comprehension, as Mr. Green exemplified: *Foi possível entender a aula, incluindo pronúncia e propósito da professora*. They perceived that I monitored them closely, suggesting them options to enhance their performance, as well as I corrected them when necessary, as Mr. Yellow posed: *no decorrer da aula, com a ajuda da professora, tornou-se mais fácil a tarefa*. They also noticed that I encouraged them to take risks, as Mr. Grey's said: *[a professora] encorajava [os participantes], mesmo arriscando, mesmo errando, a falar pra poder aprender*. All these perceptions reflect TBA principles, thus, the aspects they observed regards my attitudes and actions in class and are aspects of TBA as well.

Besides those perceptions, participants also listed some other characteristics of the teacher that made this experiment more enjoyable for them. They used adjectives such as: enthusiastic, good-humored, patient, hard-working, competent, capable, outgoing, dynamic, pleasant, humble, energetic, and friendly, to describe me as a teacher.

In sum, the topics widely commented by participants corroborate the following issues: (1) *needs analysis questionnaire* was effective and essential prior to task development for this specific group of EFL learners as it assured the tasks as relevant to most of them; (2) the use of only one theme for the whole cycle of tasks contributed to lowering the level of difficulty of the tasks; (3) the use of original texts and resources simulating real life situations contributed to language learning and the development of other skills, such as accessing internet, handling keyboards, laptop computers, brochures and maps; (4) the use of group work also brought benefits perceived and approved by most participants, though it may also have some disadvantages; (5) TBA was perceived by most as a different approach to effective language learning; and finally, (6) teacher's attitude reflecting TBA principles contributed to its acceptance by the participants.

It is worth remembering that though participants did not know what TBA was, the topics that emerged from the data mostly reflect TBA tenets and concepts, suggesting that Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks and Ellis's (2003) task definition and eight task principles can be applied when developing tasks for elderly groups of EFL learners.

Now, I turn to the analysis of the participants' perception of the cycle of tasks designed and implemented in five classes.

### 4.3 Participants' Perceptions of the Cycle of Tasks

Each task developed and implemented in the classroom context for this study was a sample of a learning process that participants went through. The questionnaires, the emails and the interviews were research tools used to try to identify and unveil the participants' perception of each task individually. The video recordings and the lesson plans assisted to support the findings.

In order to set the context, Class 1's objective was to get participants to learn about some tourist attractions of three cities: London, Sydney and New York. Class 1<sup>21</sup> was constituted of an expansive and exploratory pre-task phase and the mid-task phase of Task 1 (T1) as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Class 1 and its task

Class	Reference	Pre-Task	Mid-Task	Post-Task
Class 1	T1	Language input: Slide presentation of three cities from English speaking countries and their tourist attractions, vocabulary input	<i>Search information in the pamphlets to complete a table about tourist attractions</i>	The complete table works as input for class 2

The pre-task phase involved a slide presentation followed by the elicitation of vocabulary in order to provide the participants the necessary input to perform T1, which consisted of participants gathering information in pamphlets and brochures about tourist attractions of a specific country to fulfill a table given to them. In this table, they listed

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<sup>21</sup> It is very important to remember that each class consisted of one, two or three tasks, and that class and tasks are **not** referred here interchangeably. However, sometimes, in this study, it is necessary to refer to the class as a whole including the tasks designed for that specific class, in order to analyze the data gathered by the Perception Questionnaires.

the names of the tourist attractions and activities a visitor can do there (see appendix U for Lesson Plan 1).

The first question of the Perception Questionnaire 1 (PQ1) intended to verify the participants' perception of the level of difficulty of Class 1 as a whole (thus, the pre-task phase and the mid-task were included in this analysis). The analysis of the first question (see Figure 8) showed that 5 participants perceive the class as easy; 2 as difficult; 1 as reasonable and none as very difficult.

As regards the level of difficulty of class 1, the results indicate that the majority of the participants perceived Class 1 as easy, which suggests an appropriate level of task difficulty, thus, in line with the first principle of TBA, which proposes teachers to ensure an appropriate level of task difficulty (Ellis 2003). The appropriate level of difficulty is intended to balance the occurrences of FoF as compared to focus on meaning (Skehan, 1998), as this balance may enhance learning by stretching interlanguage.

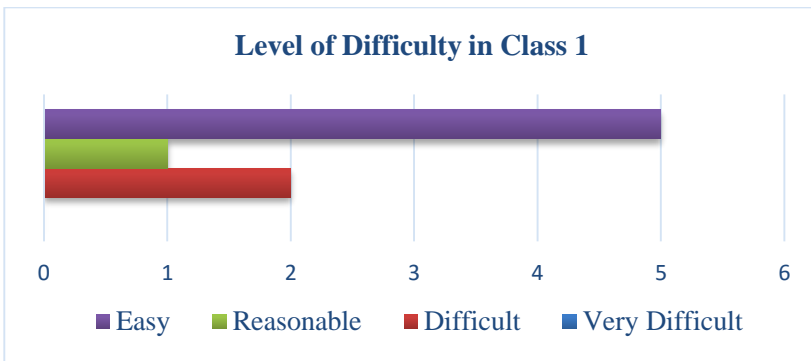


Figure 8: Level of difficult in class 1.

According to Ellis (2003), the difficulty of a task can be adjusted by incorporating a pre-task phase. Half of the participants perceived T1's pre-task phase as an encouragement to participate in the mid-task, exemplified here by Mr. Yellow's words: *Senti-me convidado e encorajado a participar e a desenvolver as tarefas feitas*, and other 3 participants (Mr. Black, Ms. White, and Ms. Violet) claimed that they felt encouraged but not prepared: *senti-me encorajada, diria que não absolutamente preparada* (Ms. White). Thus the pre-task phase proved to be motivational to the mid-task, leading participants to engage in task performance. This can be confirmed by observing Class 1 video

recording, where it is possible to see all students participating actively in T1.

However, it is still interesting to try to understand why these three participants (Mr. Black, Ms. White, and Ms. Violet) claimed they did not feel prepared for T1. Though the pre-task phase here attempted to provide the necessary lexical items for T1, it is not possible to foresee all vocabulary they will actually need to perform the task. However, the vocabulary provided was meant to be enough to a satisfactory task completion. Therefore, a possible explanation for Mr. Black and Ms. Violet could be the negative perception they have of themselves as learners. Though the PQs did not include any question about personal difficulties in learning English, Ms. Violet and Mr. Black (among others mentioned later in discussion) felt the urge to mention it in their answers. For instance, Mr. Black said: *[sou] pouco conhecedor da língua, tive dificuldades em escrever sem usar o texto* (PQ2) and, *dificuldade de conversar na língua em estudo* (PQ3); while Ms. Violet commented: *entendo muito pouco de inglês. Ouvir e escrever é ainda muito difícil* (PQ3). This indicates that perceptions of the self as learner may influence students' perceptions of their performance in class.

However, Ms. White, clearly said in interview that she does not have difficulty with the language. This claim led me to review the class videos along with the lesson plans, and the resources used in T1 (pamphlets and brochures). Ms. White - along with Mr. Black and Ms. Orange - worked with the pamphlets from the city of London. These pamphlets contained in their majority very simple language (see appendix U), and the ideas necessary to accomplish T1 had been indeed presented in the pre-task phase. Thus, the pre-task phase was performed appropriately.

Ms. White's claim on not feeling prepared to perform T1 and actually being able to perform it successfully, may have relation to the fact that she has a broader knowledge of the language if compared to the other participants (see participant's profile on page 35), therefore she must have expected a more complex content as a preparation for T1.

Additionally, by watching the Class 1 video, it was possible to observe that Ms. White, and her other 5 classmates who perceived Class 1 as easy, interacted actively either with the teacher or their classmates in class, while such active participation was not seen in the ones who perceived Class 1 as difficult. Therefore, her claim that she did not feel prepared to perform T1, her claim that the class was not difficult, and that she does not have difficulty with the language suggest that indeed she was expecting for more complex lexical options in the pre-task

phase. And her perception of this matter does not discredit the pre-task phase implemented for T1.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude from data triangulation that T1 fulfilled the aspect of having an effective pre-task phase. And by the analysis of the video, T1 was also successful in its objective. That is, students were able to look for the information in the pamphlets and come up with ideas of all sort of things they could do in each tourist attraction they had chosen.

Now, I turn to the analysis of the Task 2 (T2).

In order to set the context, Class 2 was composed of T2 and Task 3(T3). Class 2's objective was to give students opportunity to exchange the information collected in T1, to explore a website looking for other tourist attractions and, to work on the vocabulary to explain why they consider a specific tourist attraction a good option to visit. In order to achieve these objectives, the T2 and T3 were developed as seen in Table 8. T2 involved the pre-task phase with the review on the pronunciation of some tourist attractions and the vocabulary which appeared in the T1. In T2 mid-task phase, participants exchanged the information collected in T1 (class 1) in order to complete T2 table; and, in its post-task phase, participants voted and chose one of the three cities to be the theme of the following tasks, resulting in the choice of London as a theme for T3. T3 also involved a pre-task phase, containing the explanation of how to access the website and how to justify choices made; then, in the mid-task phase, participants actually searched and chose some tourist attractions and thought of reasons for choosing them (see appendix V for Lesson Plan 2).

*Table 8: Class 2 And its tasks*

<b>Class</b>	<b>Ref</b>	<b>Pre-Task</b>	<b>Mid-Task</b>	<b>Post-Task</b>
<b>Class 2</b>	T2	T1 Language input: vocabulary worked on the first class	<i>Exchange information about the tourist attractions found in&amp; taken from the pamphlets in the class 1 in order to decide on a place to visit</i>	Decide on the favorite city after comparing the three English speaking cities
	T3	Language input: Presentation of website of London (the English speaking city chosen), their social role and how to get information from them	<i>Search, find and choose some tourist attractions or places of their interest in London on a website in order to learn to look for similar information on the web</i>	The information collected works as input for class 3

As mentioned, in T2 pre-task phase, I reviewed the pronunciation of some tourist attractions and some vocabulary that



possibly would appear in T1 complete tables. After that, the participants were divided into groups so that there were different tables among them. Participants, then, engaged in T2 mid-task phase, exchanging information through oral communication.

The analysis of PQ2 regarding T2 showed that the participants were able to perceive the objective of the pre-task phase clearly and that it helped them achieve T2. As Ms. Violet posed: *os primeiros minutos foram para lembrar a aula passada, o que ajudou muito a sequência da aula*. T2 also motivated them to participate in T2 mid-task phase: *As tarefas feitas em aula estavam interligadas a aula anterior por isso eu me senti encorajado mesmo correndo o risco de errar participando*, said Mr. Gray. Nearly all participants (7 out of 8) gave positive feedback for the pre-task phase, claiming they felt prepared (5 participants), encouraged (4), comfortable (1), able (1), and, at ease (1), to perform T2. These seven participants pointed out that T2 was easy because it was a continuation of the previous class/task.

According to Skehan (1996), a cycle of tasks is designed with the purpose of each task being somehow input for the task to come. Thus, the task to come should be found more challenging to learners since, theoretically, learners have already acquired the necessary input in the previous task. In this sense, T2 demanded more participation from the participants than T1, and it could have been perceived as more difficult than T1. However, it seems that T2 was not perceived with such difficulty; on the contrary, some participants said it was encouraging, as Mr. Green posed: *Senti-me confortável porque o assunto da aula foi uma sequência do assunto*. This evidence highlights the importance of keeping learners familiar with the theme, which further seems to diminish the cognitive load of the task (Skehan, 1998; Bygate, 2001).

From the 8 participants in the study, only one, Mr. Black, claimed he did not feel prepared to perform the T2 (also, he did not feel prepared to do T1, as previously shown on page 79) and said that he had a regular performance in Class 2 (as a whole) because of his lack of vocabulary. As he said: *Porque ainda falta de vocabulário, mesmo aprendendo novas palavras e significados*. When I asked about why he claimed he did not feel prepared to perform T2, he explained by email:

*Naquela troca de informações sobre pontos turísticos, [T2] (...) não consegui ainda fixar corretamente os nomes e locais. [Foi] necessário uma consulta ao texto fornecido ou a ajuda de alguém, tanto ao escrever, como também na pronúncia*

*correta.*

In other words, he was referring to difficulties in memorizing new vocabulary and its pronunciation. Ms. Violet also was concerned about acquiring new vocabulary, as she said during the interview: *Acho que nós [elderly EFL learners] temos dificuldades em assimilar e guardar as palavras.* This is suggested by Craik and Bialystock's (2006) study, where they say the formation of new representations becomes problematic for elderly adults, since the brain suffers a cognitive decline until senescence.

Mr. Black seemed to have suffered with the acquisition of the new vocabulary and pronunciation, while other participants did not complain about that issue. What differentiated him from other participants is that, as he explained in the interview, he never studied or reviewed what was seen during the cycle of classes outside the classroom. In his words:

*E a dificuldade minha, não sei se pelo pouco interesse que eu sempre tive, mas daí passa para o interesse de dar continuidade daquilo que aprendeu em casa, rever aquilo que foi feito em sala, rever em casa. Revendo aquilo que foi feito em sala, eu pegar algumas dúvidas e levar para a aula seguinte. Então, por exemplo, a minha dificuldade, ela passa por aí, pois eu não faço isso, eu deveria fazer.*

This showed that this study encouraged him to reflect on his own learning, noticing what actions he could take to improve his performance, though he did not actually put any action to practice. When the interview finished, he told me he would try to put some into practice. This is evidence that TBA provides learners with opportunity to reflect on their own learning process, as they become aware of it, they may act upon it in order to enhance their learning process. Skehan (1998) suggested that TBA should dedicate a moment of the class for this reflection to occur. In his framework, he proposed the post-task phase as the most appropriated moment for that. In my study, the PQs (which were also post-task activities) were essential to give participants a moment for reflecting on their learning process, developing their metacognition, which can benefit them later on in their learning experiences.

Still on T2, many participants (5 out of 8) gave positive feedback to T2 regarding working in groups, which was already covered in this chapter; its pre-task was perceived by most participants as essential to T2 completion; and most participants were able to exchange information through oral communication, while only one participant (Mr. Black) was not successful in doing so, perhaps, due to his lack of extra practice outside classroom. This also shows that TBA motivates most elderly learners to continue studying/researching outside classroom, as well as it provides elderly learners with time to reflect on their learning process.

Class 2 still brought T3, whose objective involved participants searching and choosing some tourist attractions on London official website, as well as providing a reason to the choice made. In brief, the pre-task phase involved exemplifying justifications for the choice made and showing participants how to search for places in the website ([www.visitlondon.org](http://www.visitlondon.org)). For doing so, I provided each group of 3 participants with a laptop computer, used the data show equipment to show them the website, guiding them through its links. Next, participants received the T3 handout where each group would search in the website for places to: enjoy nature, try local food, buy souvenirs, learn about the city, take nice pictures, and others (see appendix V). Participants, then, engaged in the mid-task phase where they would search and choose a place to do such things, and elaborate on a reason to choose that specific place rather than another one.

It is worthwhile remembering two main tenets involving the concept of task: (1) tasks should have a certain level of resemblance to the real world, and (2) their primary focus should be on pragmatic meaning (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998). Both characteristics are present in T3, as indicated by participants' perception.

First, T3 simulated a real life situation where people search official websites in English to choose places to visit in a city of interest. Participants were invited to do exactly that; with the use of laptop computers and internet access, they navigated on the official London website to choose some places of interest, focusing primarily on meaning, feeling encouraged and stimulated by the real use of language before them. This perception can be exemplified in Ms. Violet's words: *Hoje a novidade foi pesquisar em websites que achei muito bom*. Ms. Orange also stated that she was glad to remember London through the website. Two other participants (Mr. Black and Ms. Pink) also emphasized that the search on website was especially interesting and

motivating. Ms. Pink said in PQ2 that time was not sufficient to perform T3, indicating she wanted to stay longer searching the website.

Of course, T3 required from the participants an extra knowledge on the use of laptops and the internet; thinking of that, the participants were divided in a way that each group had at least one experienced participant on this issue. However, Mr. Green still pointed out that he initially struggled in using the internet to search for information, but in the end, he could contribute with his group somehow, as he signaled in PQ 3: *Apesar de alguma dificuldade inicial em pesquisa pela internet, consegui contribuir na obtenção das informações que atendiam a tarefa do grupo.* Ms. Pink also remember T3 during the interview as she said that she felt pleased to realize she was able to use the internet in Class 2. Therefore, dealing with real life tasks, such as T3, promotes the extrapolation of the linguistic boundaries by allowing learners to acquire new skills rather than only language skills.

Also important is the fact that participants were able to focus on language aspects, specifically vocabulary, as Ms. Violet reminded: *E a atividade sobre escolher o que fazerem Londres e o porquê também acrescentou muito no vocabulário.* Other 5 participants claimed they had learned some vocabulary in Class 2. Mr. Gray claimed he learned some communication expressions as: thank you, see you next class, etc., which were not part of the intended content for either T2 or T3. This shows that language is not only acquired through direct instructions; all language used in class can be acquired by learners in the process. As Ellis (2003) posed, the ultimate attainment is always determined by the learner. All this evidence highlights the fact that the use of real material and the use of language for achieving non linguist-goals promote learning, corroborating what Skehan (1998) said: “[TBA] gives learners tasks to transact in the expectation that doing such tasks will drive forward language development” (p.4).

As an overview of Class 2, it is possible to learn that most participants (7 out of 8) perceived Class 2 in a whole as easy and half participants evaluated their performance as good while the other half evaluated as average. Therefore, a general overview of PQ2 indicates a good acceptance of Class 2 (T3 and T4) by the participants. So far the aspects or characteristics of the classes/tasks perceived by the participants as relevant to their learning have their origins in TBA principles and Skehan’s (1996, 1998) frameworks, such as promoting reflection on the learning process, focusing on meaning, simulating real-life situations, using real-world material, working in groups, using L2 to

communicate and exchange information. All this evidence suggests TBA was an appropriate choice as the approach for the classes developed to this population in particular.

Now, I turn to the analysis of Task 4 (T4) and Task 5 (T5) from Class 3.

In order to set the context, it is relevant to review Class 3 objective: allowing participants to share the information they have collected in T3, and starting to elaborate a weekend-long itinerary to London. In order to do so, T4 and T5 were developed as summarized in table 9.

*Table 9: Class 3 and its tasks*

<b>Class</b>	<b>Ref</b>	<b>Pre-Task</b>	<b>Mid-Task</b>	<b>Post-Task</b>
Class 3	T4	T4 Alphabet review language input: <i>how do you spell that?</i>	<i>Type on the computer your group's findings about London tourist attractions (spelling) to share information with the other groups</i>	FoF – use of <i>because</i> and <i>subject + can + verb in the base form</i>
	T5	Language input: Presentation of the brochure, London map, and an itinerary sketch	<i>Decide the places to go to in London in order to create a weekend-long itinerary</i>	Take material home for further analysis

T4 was meant for participants to share the results obtained in T3 (from Class 2). Since T4 pedagogical goals involved reinforcing spelling and pronunciation, its performance involved one participant uttering the groups' findings on London tourist attractions while another participant from the same group typed on the computer keyboard what had just been uttered. Yet T5 invited participants to work in new groups to decide the places to visit in London during a weekend-long trip with the support of a London brochure, a map and an itinerary schemata (see appendix W lesson plan 3).

To meet T4 pedagogical goal on spelling and pronunciation, the pre-task phase for T4 included a brief review of the alphabet pronunciation and the language input *how do you spell that?* Pronunciation was brought to attention in diverse moments in the entire cycle of tasks due to the fact that there is evidence that elderly learners have difficulty to recognize new sounds and, therefore, difficulty to reproduce them (Flege, 1999 as cited in Ortega, 2009). However, as some studies have shown (for example, Pires, 2005), it is possible to

train the brain to recognize new sounds by turning the process into a conscious one.

Besides, it was verified in this sample of elderly EFL learners that some of them (Mr. Yellow and Ms. Pink) had a very strong accent, resulting in difficult comprehension of their pronunciation or accent. Other participants also had difficulty in knowing the correct pronunciation of certain words, especially because English makes use of a much more complex syllabic system for the representation of the sounds (phonemes) of the words, as compared to Portuguese. Thus, T4 was developed to provide learners to pay attention to pronunciation and spelling in a conscious way.

As T4 involved focusing on form (spelling and pronunciation), focusing on meaning (to exchange information found), the simultaneous use of three communication skills (speaking, listening and writing) and knowing to use a not so common resource for them - the keyboard, it was indeed seen as one of the most difficult task from the whole cycle, as Mr. Black said: *Quando designado para digitar aquilo que se falava, senti dificuldades para entender, quando entendido, nem sempre a grafia era correta.*

Another possibility to explain why T4 was found to be difficult is that maybe the participants' level of anxiety increased since T4 required them to perform before all the others. As Ellis (2003) remembered, "performing a task in front of the class increases the communicative stress placed on the learner" (p. 259). Perhaps, they were afraid of making mistakes regarding pronunciation and spelling before the classmates, the camera, and the teacher. Five (out of 8) participants (Mr. Black, Mr. Green, Mr. Yellow, Ms. Violet, and Ms. Pink) perceived T4 as difficult. In Ms. Violet's words:

*Uma tarefa que eu achei diferente, que para mim foi mais difícil, com um grau de dificuldade, foi quando a gente usou o computador para escrever o que a gente estava ouvindo [...]. Eu achei essa assim, mais complicadinha, por ter que ouvir e escrever, [...] mesmo soletrando, você as vezes fica em dúvida. – Ms. Violet. In interview on November 21, 2014.*

It is significant to say that the interview occurred about 30 days after Class 3, and that, during the interviews, four participants still remembered vividly T4 as the task that created a big impact on their learning. This impact was seen as positive, as observed in Mr. Yellow's words during the interview: *No momento, na hora, foi um susto, posso*

*dizer assim também, mas hoje eu reconheço que foi positivo* and complemented Mr. Black's words: *Foi bom pois ajudou a fixar conteúdo e gramática*. Therefore, T4 mid-task phase balanced form and meaning, leading the participants to develop their interlanguage. It is also possible to state that task completion was reached by using the target language and that no use of the mother language was made by the participants in any circumstance.

After the T4's mid-task phase, the post-task phase took place leading participants to more Focus on Form. After the findings were typed on the table, participants could attend to the language structure used to give reasons: *because it is...* or *because we can + verb*. FoF came to happen here from the use of the language in its context (Long, 1991). Following Skehan's (1996) framework, T4 post-task phase opened the opportunity for FoF to emerge from a real need. Ms. Pink noticed this moment in particular, when she commented that she learned how to answer questions, using *because* to indicate reason. She mentioned this in interview, when I asked her what she had learned during the cycle of tasks. In her words: *[Aprendi] a formulação de frases: we can see..., you can learn..., outra palavra [aprendida foi] because, quando se responde [perguntas]*.

Due to all this, it is possible to confirm the essentiality of balancing focus on meaning and focus on form to enhance chances of interlanguage development, and it is also possible to see that Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation is successful to achieve that. Still in Class 3, there was Task 5 (T5), which was the first step to start developing the itinerary. The participants worked in groups to decide the places to visit in London during a weekend-long trip/vacation. As pre-task phase, students had the input from the complete chart of information from T4, a brochure and a map of the city of London given to each group. By analyzing the participants' responses to PQ3, it is possible to notice that most students (6 out of 8) felt encouraged to do T5, as seen in Figure 9. They used words like: encouraged (5 of them), curious (1), excited (1), at ease (1), and stimulated (1) to describe their feelings toward T5.

Once again, the pre-task phase was perceived as motivational. However, Ms. Pink and Mr. Green claimed that they found T5 particularly difficult due to the use of the map and brochure, whose genre they were not familiar with. Mr. Green's comments on T5 exemplifies it: *Acho que o mais difícil foi encontrar os lugares procurados nos mapas [...]. Eu me senti encorajado a participar, mas pouco preparado porque não tenho feito tarefa semelhante em inglês*.

Although participants had already looked for similar information in pamphlets (T1) and in website (T3), the lack of familiarity with the genre of brochures and maps cause the task to be perceived as more difficult by these participants (Skehan, 1998).

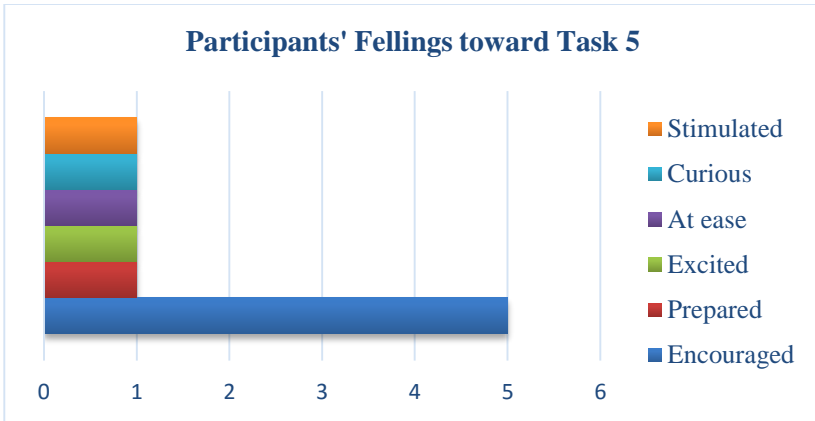


Figure 9: Participants' Feelings Toward Task 5 from Class 3

The role of the teacher was important to control the level of difficulty during T5, as I assisted individually participants who were initially struggling with the brochures and maps. After this procedure, it is possible to see in the video all students engaging fully during T5. In the following class, I learned that two groups out of three had continued the elaboration of the itinerary at home, with the material provided. This fact indicates that although some of them perceived the task as difficult, they must have found it more challenging and felt compelled to push themselves to perform well, thus, the level of difficulty worked here as a motivational challenge. As Mr. Gray said in PQ1: *gosto de desafio, me sinto encorajado de correr atrás, aprendendo e desenvolvendo as tarefas, mesmo com dificuldade*. Van Den Branden (2012) said that “students’ motivation will be higher when they perceive the task as a bridgeable challenge” (p. 134).

All the 8 participants perceived the dynamics applied in T5 as positive. They used terms as interesting (1 of them), good (1), excellent (2), fundamental (1), positive (1), and, great (1). Ms. Violet stated: *a montagem [do itinerário] nos prende na tarefa e nos traz muitas palavras novas, acrescentando conhecimentos da língua*.



In sum, participants' answer in PQ3 revealed that most students considered Class 3 as easy, despite introducing an entirely new type of task (T4) and working with resources the participants were not so familiar with, as keyboard (T4) and brochures and maps (T5). Similarly to Class 2, half of the participants perceived their performance to be good, while the other half thought it was regular, claiming basically that their personal difficulties impede them to participate more thoroughly in the class. T4 seemed very impacting due to the cognitive complexity involved in performing it, but participants were able to account for progression in their learning due to T4. Furthermore, most participants perceived T5 as difficult in the sense of challenging, which led them to push themselves to reach a better performance, which in fact they did as observed in the videos and as result of their performance in tasks from the following classes.

Now, I turn to the analysis of the T6 and T7 from Class 4.

In order to set the context, it is relevant to review briefly Class 4 objectives, which were to provide participants with the opportunity to finish their itinerary, by improving the written part of it; and to rehearse their presentation, by verifying if they were understood orally by their peers. As in the previous class participants had started to develop the itinerary, it was time for them to think about their public performance (Task 8 - T8). Givón (1979 as reviewed in Ellis, 2003) posed that "public performance is likely to encourage the use of a more formal style and thus may push learners to use the grammaticalized resources associated with this style" (p. 259). The introduction of a public performance in this cycle of tasks was meant to push participants to improve their performance skills. In order to do so, two tasks were developed, Task 6 (T6) and Task 7 (T7), as Table 10 summarizes.

Both T6 and T7 were developed to help participants improve their future presentation of their itinerary (T8), thus, both tasks are part of the preparation for T8. In 1987, Prabhu conducted a pre-phase task as a whole-class activity, as Ellis (2003) remembers, "Prabhu emphasized that the pre-task was not a 'demonstration', but 'a task in its own right'" (p. 245). Following this model, T6 and T7 worked as a pre-task phase of T8 and required *planning*. In general, *planning* takes place when the teacher allows learners time to plan and develop strategies to improve their performance (Ellis, 2003; Foster & Skehan 1996, 1999). During *planning*, learners can optimize their oral performance, especially by manipulating the message content and formulation, so that they can achieve better results when performing orally (Foster & Skehan, 1996). The threat that a "public performance of the tasks being done is likely to

be required increases the focus on accuracy” (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 321).

Table 10: Class 4 and its tasks

Class	Ref	Pre-Task	Mid-Task	Post-Task
Class 4	T6	T5 T4’s Post-Task language input: presentation of language strategies to simplify language, use of cognates, and simple structure	<i>Teacher- led planning: write or rewrite the reasons to visit each place by using simplified language in order to facilitate speech comprehension</i>	Check each other’s work within the group
	T7	T6 Presentation of websites that support pronunciation	<i>Practice and improve pronunciation by verifying each other’s pronunciation in order to facilitate oral comprehension during T8</i>	Suggested Homework: Create a card with key words for itinerary oral presentation

In this sense, the teacher-led planning used in T6 intended to lower text complexity, increase text accuracy, in order to reflect a better fluency in their final presentation. In order to help participants organize the structure of the sentences into a more logical pattern, some lexicalized language units were provided to ease processing and assure a more comprehensible presentation, intending a higher proportion of error-free clauses, increasing accuracy rate. The objective permeating this decision was that participants would render an easier to comprehend presentation, since Task 9 (T9) required the listeners to take notes about the presentation so that they could compare the three itineraries and decide on the best choice (T10).

T6 was developed to help participants organize their presentation as participants had the opportunity to write or rewrite the reasons to visit each place proposed in their itinerary in order to become clear when presenting and to organize who would say what during the presentation (T8). As T6 was meant to be a teacher-led planning, I led its development. First, I presented participants the difference between a complex sentence and a simplified sentence, reasoning that the simpler the sentence is, the faster the listener grasps its meaning; then, I explained how and why cognates make the comprehension of a message easier to be understood; finally, I provided the participants with a simple structure to be used when writing or rewriting the sentences that they would utter in the day of the itinerary presentation. Teacher-led planning was chosen to permeate T6 because, as according to Foster and Skehan

(1999), “the teacher might be an efficient and authoritative instrument to convey pedagogic norms” (p. 224). All these steps worked as instructions for the T6 performance as they are part of the teacher-led planning of T8. Teacher-led planning is capable of assisting learners to make most efficient use of the available time. Ms. White noticed that, as she said in PQ4: *a estratégia de aprendizagem aplicada não permitir perda de tempo, e a dinâmica é estimulante. Trabalhamos até o último minuto da aula.*

Five other participants commented on T6. Mr. Gray said: *Achei o trabalho em grupo muito bom para ajudar o aperfeiçoamento do discurso.* Ms. Pink, Mr. Green, Ms. Violet and Ms. Orange pointed that teacher’s help was essential to simplify what would be said during the itinerary presentation (T8). In Mr. Green’s words:

*As questões de língua trabalhadas foram essenciais para o discurso, uma vez que possibilitou uma montagem simples com uso de palavras mais conhecidas e frases estruturalmente compreensíveis para todos, independente do grau individual de afinidade com a língua inglesa. – Mr. Green in PQ4*

Ms. Violet, even dared to use the word safe, as she said that: *aperfeiçoar as respostas do itinerário, deixando uma estrutura mais simples, nos deixa mais seguro para a tarefa seguinte, que será o discurso.* Three of these same participants (Ms. Pink, Mr. Gray, Mr. Green) reaffirmed their opinion that T6 helped them to present the itinerary (T8) in PQ5, after the presentation itself occurred in class 5.

Time limit was another issue in T6. According to Skehan’s (1996) framework, time pressure and time limit are considered a communicative stress to be taken in consideration during task completion. Despite thinking carefully on how to divide the available time for the tasks in the lesson plans so that the participants would have enough time to perform each task, Mr. Yellow and Ms. Pink claimed there was not sufficient time to perform T6. They said during the interview that teacher’s help permitted them not to get stuck for too long in one single issue, in her words: *Importante foi a ajuda da professora em como fazer, aperfeiçoar e simplificar o discurso* (PQ4).

I had considered that this population would need extra time (when compared to groups of young learners), yet, it seems that time could have been better adjusted in Class 4, allowing the participants more time to perform T6 and T7, avoiding time pressure to be a complicating factor, turning the task more difficult to them. Ideally,

there should have been more time available in Class 4, or it could have been divided into 2 classes. This was not possible due to contextual reasons (the availability of the participants and of the room used to collect the data, for instance).

Still on T6, participants were told that they were not supposed to read full notes during the itinerary presentation (T8); thus, as a homework and post-task activity to T6 and T7, they were advised to prepare a card with key-words to assist them in the performance. If participants were to read full notes, they would not be actually producing oral discourse. Ideally, they would plan the ideas they were going to say, and during public presentation (T8) they would attempt to speak out their ideas as they would come to their minds in the moment of speaking. By observing the video, it is possible to notice that Ms. White and Ms. Orange were able to deliver a presentation without reading full notes; however, they had to produce simpler language and structures, leaving out some details that they had researched, as Ms. Orange lamented by email: *fizemos um resumo tirando as informações que não conseguiríamos falar sem ler.*

Task 7 (T7) was the continuation of T6, it was the rehearsal of T8. This rehearsal was a chance for the participants to notice and correct some problems that might occur in their presentation. In order to do so, T6 was a kind of guided-planning, where the participants received a scheme developed to help them analyze each other pronunciation, as well as check if the message was clear (see appendix X for Lesson Plan 4). I also showed them how to use the internet for checking the pronunciation of some words.

As observed in the video, all students were able to perform T7. Six participants gave positive feedback regarding T7. Ms. Pink and Mr. Yellow claimed that T7 also gave them a sense of security in order to perform T8 in the following class. The same way as T6, T7 was perceived as effective to prepare them for the presentation to come.

Only Mr. Black said he found T7 to be extremely difficult (as he did for T2 and T4). This time, he explained that his pronunciation was bad, that he could not contribute for his group during T7, and that he would not be able to perform without reading full notes. As observed in the class 4 video, Mr. Black, indeed, did not contribute with the other participants within his group as much as he was helped by his peers. A possible reason for that was that the other members on his group were Ms. Orange and Ms. White, who have had more experience with English (as seen in the Profile table on page 35), thus, having less difficulty with performing T7. As already pointed out in this chapter,

one of group work disadvantages is that it can cause learners to undermine themselves when they are working with other learners who are more knowledgeable in the language. It seems that this was the case here, as Mr. Black felt intimidated by the other participants, who held more linguistic knowledge.

Another participant who had great difficulty with pronunciation in T7 was Mr. Gray, but he did not claim T7 was difficult. When facing difficulties in pronouncing certain words, he asked his classmates or the teacher for help. Besides, he took notes of how to pronounce those words. He developed a strategy here, he used the Portuguese syllabic system to represent (the best version) of the correct pronunciation of new words. He got very excited about this strategy, as he said: *uma vez que escrevendo o jeito de pronunciar ajuda a gravar melhor na memória.*

T6 and T7 shared some very similar characteristics, as both worked as pre-task of T8, both included teacher-led and guided planning for the T8, and both were student-centered activities. As a consequence of such peculiar features, T6 and T7 differentiated from the previous tasks in this cycle. As seen in figure 10, Class 4 was not perceived as easy as classes 1, 2, and 3. Half participants considered Class 4 easy, while the other half considered it of reasonable difficulty.

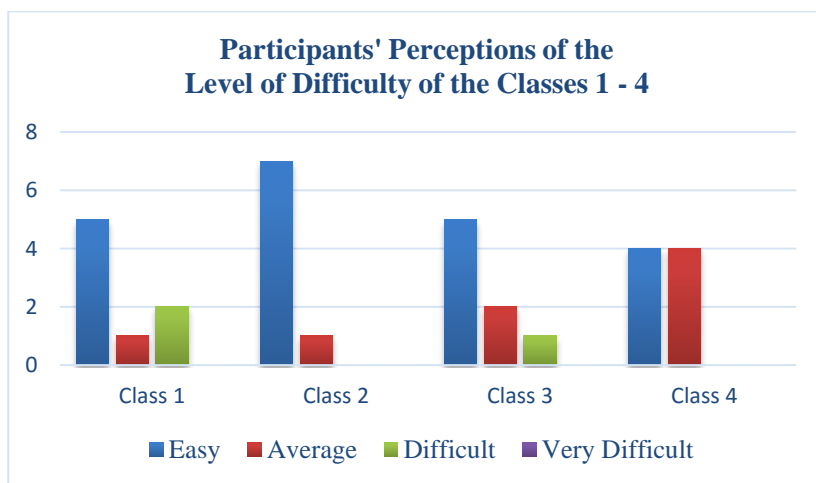


Figure 10: Participants' Perception of the Level of Difficulty of the Classes 1 to 4

A possible reason to explain this remarkable difference in participants' perception of the level of difficulty is that, in Class 4,

learners assumed a more central role. The participants perceived that T6 and T7 differentiated from others because they were student-centered tasks. For instance, Ms. Pink said: *o desenvolvimento, o desenrolar da aula ficou com os alunos, com a ajuda da professor.* Mr. Yellow reinforced this perception in the interview by saying: *[a professora] também fez isso, no sentido que os colegas apontassem onde tem que se melhorar a pronúncia.*

Regarding participants' own evaluation of their performance in Class 4, as seen in Figure 11, the number of participants who claimed they had a good performance increased considerably in comparison to the previous classes.

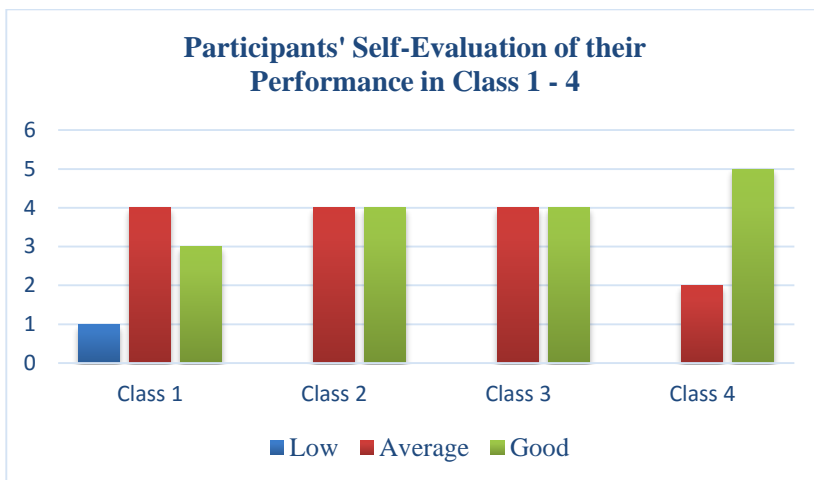


Figure 11: Participants' Evaluation on their Performance in Each Class

Besides Class 4 being the most student-centered class, it seems that because the participants knew they would have to perform the presentation (T8), they pushed themselves into giving their best in T6 and T7. Skehan (1996) explains that:

the knowledge while the task is being done that a task may have to be re-done publicly will cause learners to allocate attention to the goals of restructuring and accuracy where otherwise they would not. In this way, a concern with syntax and analysis can be infiltrated into the task work without the heavy-handedness of teacher intervention and error correction (p. 56).

Therefore, they must have tried harder to perform well in T6 and T7, in order to perform well in T8, and this made them perceive as if their performance and participation in Class 4 improved. The only two participants – Ms. Violet and Mr. Black – who claimed their performance was regular explained it was due to their difficulties with the language, and that they constantly needed to ask for the help of the other classmates in their groups, respectively.

As already mentioned, Class 4 included homework, suggesting participants to create a card with key words to help in their presentation. According to their responses in PQ4 and PQ5, they all claimed the class encouraged them to continue studying or researching outside the classroom, and most of them indeed created the card as the suggested homework indicated. Three participants commented they researched topics related to London and other cities (general knowledge) while other three participants claimed they continued studying English at home by revising their notes taken during the class and searching the pronunciation on the website cited during the class. Yet two others claimed that they felt stimulated to study their presentation at home, paying special attention to the correct pronunciation of certain words. All this evidence suggests that T6 and T7 were highly motivational as participants continued their learning outside the classroom.

In sum, the participants perceived Class 4 as different from the other previous classes, since its tasks - T6 and T7 - were entirely student-centered. Class 4 had the lowest number of participants considering the class to be easy, while it had the highest number of participants evaluating their performance as good. This fact reinforces the idea that the task level of difficulty and that a public performance is to come work as motivational reasons for the participants, as they try to perform better, in line with Skehan's (1996) framework. Moreover, both tasks had only positive feedback as they encouraged or urged participants to continue studying and researching after class and doing the suggested homework (creating a card with notes for the presentation – T8).

Now, I turn to the analysis of T8, Task 9 (T9) and Task 10 (T10), the last tasks constituting the last class of this cycle of tasks.

In order to set the context, it is worth reviewing class 5 objectives: to review the language content worked in the previous class; to give the participants the opportunity to rehearse their presentation one more time; to present their itinerary as the best itinerary; and to vote and choose the best itinerary (see appendix Y for Lesson Plan 5). It is worth mentioning that there was some extra audience in Class 5: the regular teachers from the NETI groups, the camera man, and some other elderly

EFL learners, who could not be participants of the entire cycle of tasks, but were invited to come to the last class.

*Table 11: Class 5 and its tasks.*

Class	Ref	Pre-Task	Mid-Task	Post-Task
Class 5	T8	General review of all classes Final rehearsal	<i>Present their own itinerary so that the audience can be informed on different itineraries options</i>	Other learners may ask questions or make comments on performance
	T9	Explanation of the handout containing the table to be completed	<i>Take notes about the participants' itineraries in order to decide for the best one</i>	Table with similarities and differences among the itineraries presented
	T10	Table with similarities and differences	<i>Vote for the best itinerary to conclude the cycle of tasks and have, in the end of the process, an outcome: a suggested itinerary for the group's next vacation</i>	Choice of the best itinerary produced by the participants.

During class 5, three tasks were undertaken, T8, T9 and T10, as seen in Table 11. Task 8 (T8) was the presentation of the itinerary by each group. T9 required listeners to take short notes about the information being presented by the groups. T8 and T9 occurred simultaneously. And finally, T10 was an open voting for the best itinerary.

PQ5's first question asked specifically about how difficult it was to present the itinerary (T8) and why. Three participants answered the level of difficulty during the itinerary presentation was easy; they explained: *Estava bem preparado*, said Mr. Yellow; *consegui transmitir o recado*, said Ms. Pink; and, *porque me esforcei para dar respostas bem feitas, apesar de simples*, said Ms. White. Other three participants said T8 was reasonable, as they felt too nervous and were afraid of making mistakes (Mr. Gray), ashamed to talk in public (Ms. Orange), and lacking the necessary language skills (Mr. Green). And two participants who perceived it to be difficult said: *Apresentar oralmente gerou dúvidas na correta pronúncia* – Mr. Black; and, *precisei ler praticamente todo o meu texto* – Ms. Violet.

As previously mentioned, it was not intended for participants to read full notes during T8, instead, they should have produced orally at the moment they presented, only using the card with notes if they forget



any relevant aspect of the itinerary. Unfortunately, only Ms. White and Ms. Orange were able to perform that way (at the cost of some additional information, as they had to remove some information and simplify what they were going to say). This reduction of content came in handy with T9, when the audience took notes on the most relevant information of the presentation.

However, other participants attempted to memorize their sentences by heart, and very few were able to do so. As observed in the video, it is possible to see that Ms. Pink, Mr. Green and Mr. Yellow had memorized most of their presentation, though they forgot some parts and took a look at their card to remember it. It is worth pointing that their cards contained more than just key words, as they contained some complete sentences of those parts they judged more difficult to memorize.

Yet, three participants (Mr. Gray, Mr. Black and Ms. Violet) had indeed to read full notes in order to perform the task. Mr. Gray did so because he forgot the pronunciation of certain words and had to use his notes on how to pronounce them. It is worth remembering that Mr. Gray was the participant with less linguistic experience. Mr. Black and Ms. Violet probably had felt too nervous, or not prepared enough for the presentation, causing them to read full notes.

These many differences in T8 performance is probably due to the fact that it was a heterogeneous class. As Lynch and McLean (2001) stated in their study, when learners repeat a task, they appear to benefit in different ways, according to their own level of proficiency. Moreover, learners find it difficult to attend to all three aspects of production at the same time, with the result that they need to trade off one aspect against another (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998).

Though performance standards clearly present varied results, it is possible to state that all participants benefited from the planning steps (T6 and T7) performed in the previous class. Ms. Violet also remembered that the post-task homework was essential to the presentation (T8). In her words: *Acho que só foi possível a apresentação com a ajuda do cartão*. This allows to say that all planning was perceived as positive by all participants, and somehow provided an improvement (even though in different levels) in all participants' performance.

T9 turned out to be one the most demanding task from the entire cycle as it involved a great cognitive load. Participants struggled to listen and take notes simultaneously. The cognitive approach explains that attention is a limited resource, and whether it is focused in one

aspect, it will be reduced in another (Skehan, 1998). Therefore, while participants were focusing on listening attentively, they had less attentional resources to spend at taking notes (and vice versa). Besides, most participants faced some difficulties with pronouncing certain words or listening and comprehending what was being said by the others, causing a problem of intelligibility. Although pronunciation was reinforced in every class, some participants had very strong accent and did not seem to have had enough practice to effectively learn the pronunciation of some words.

Four participants (Mr. yellow, Ms. Orange, Ms. Pink and Ms. White) perceived T9 reasonably difficult because they could not quite understand the pronunciation of the classmates. Three other participants (Mr. Gray, Mr. Green and Ms. Violet) perceived it to be difficult because they had difficulty to listen and understand what was being said at the same time. And Mr. Black said it was very difficult because he could not listen and take notes at the same time at all. The term difficult was rarely mentioned in the previous classes; however, T9 was mostly seen as a difficult task. Perhaps, this happened due to the fact that participants were not expecting and prepared to perform this movement of listening, comprehending and writing simultaneously, which proved to be cognitively very demanding for this specific group of elderly learners. Perhaps, their attentional resource would not suffice such demanding task. Besides, they have not done any similar task before nor had time to plan on how they would do it. Unfortunately, T9 lacked a well-prepared better pre-task phase, and the participants lacked more time to be prepared for the presentation (T8). This shows that when a task fails to be fully developed accounting for all aspects involved in Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks and Ellis's (2003) principles for TBA, the outcome may not be the expected one, nor promote much interlanguage development.

T9 was developed with three main purposes: 1) make participants pay attention to other participants' presentations, 2) engage listeners in the presentation and 3) make comparisons among the itineraries presented. In these three purposes, T9 was successful, even though it was the most difficult task of the entire cycle.

As a consequence of T9 notes, Task 10 (T10) took place. The notes taken in T9 were elicited from the participants and listeners, and written on a chart on the board. Then, similarities and differences among the three itineraries were pointed out, and it was given an opportunity for the participants to defend their own itinerary. After that, all people who were present in class voted for the best itinerary, including the

person who recorded the classes. One of the itineraries was finally chosen as the best option for a weekend-long trip in London.

Few comments were made regarding T10 in PQ5 and in the interview. Mr. Black perceived it not really relevant, as he claimed that each group voted in their own itinerary as the best, in his words: *A votação não achei importante por cada um procurou vivenciar o seu itinerário. Mas serviu para descontrair e gerar expectativa.* As I previewed this possibility, the extra audience watching the presentation was meant to create an odd number of voters. Thus, the best itinerary could in fact be chosen, as it was indeed. Mr. Yellow and Ms. Pink claimed the voting was very nice, and Mr. Grey said, during the interview, that it was a great closure for the cycle of tasks. The other four participants were neutral about T10, not mentioning anything about it in the PQ5 and in the interview.

In sum, Class 5 was a closure to the entire cycle of tasks, which culminated with the choice of best itinerary. Participants could perceive how every step of the cycle of tasks was elaborated to reach a final outcome. Most participants' perception accounted for how tasks were developed following Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks and TBA's principles (Ellis, 2003), showing to be an efficient approach to be used with an elderly group of EFL learners. TBA was successful since the entire cycle of tasks was achievable by the participants, they felt motivated all the time and also some of them claimed in the interview they had observed possibilities to learning things they thought they could not learn before. As for instance, Ms. Pink said she felt capable of using the internet (overcoming one of her difficulties), and Mr. Gray claimed he felt capable of speaking in English (something he did not try to do before this study).

Though there seems to be some negative aspects in the intervention proposed in this study, such as: some disadvantages in group work, as for example, pidginization, fossilization, and occasional intimidation; lack of time to extend planning and rehearsal in Class 4; and lack of a better pre-task phase for T9, the results of the present study can be considered positive mainly due to the development of some of the participants, as seen in figures 10 and 11, on page 97 and 98, respectively.

Moreover, some participants' perceptions changed due to the way tasks were developed and implemented. For instance, the entire cycle of tasks showed some participants that there is, in fact, a different way to achieve learning, other than the one(s) they were accustomed to. As their perceptions sometimes were clearly permeated by their beliefs

and, in the end, some of them had different perceptions of themselves in comparison to the ones they had in the beginning of the experiment, perhaps, these participants may also have changed some of their beliefs after being part of this experience. As Barcelos (2011) suggests beliefs can be fluctuating, that is, “the same person can hold different beliefs about the same aspect related to SLA at different times or during short periods in their lives” (p.285).

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main findings are summarized in an attempt to answer the research questions of this study: RQ1- *What are the elderly EFL learners' perceptions of the implementation of a cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale on their learning?*; and RQ2- *Which TBA elements are foregrounded in these participants' perceptions? And what does this reveal about the implementation/development of a cycle of tasks for a group of elderly EFL learners?*

To do so, this chapter was organized into two parts: first, I bring a summary of the study, and then I answer the research questions.

#### 5.2 Summary of the study

The objective of the present study was to unfolding the perceptions of a group of L2 English learners on the implementation of a cycle of tasks developed under the task-based approach rationale (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003). The theoretical framework used to develop the cycle of tasks included Skehan's frameworks for task analysis (1998) and implementation (1996), Ellis's (2003) TBA's principles, Long's Focus on Form concept (1991) and needs analysis proposal (2015), and the elements of planning by Foster and Skehan (1996, 1999), and repetition by Bygate (2001).

The participants, eight elderly EFL learners, were considered a heterogeneous group in terms of level of proficiency and background. The participants attended five extra EFL classes in an extension program offered by UFSC, which were video recorded and used as data for later analysis. In addition, after each class, the participants answered a perception questionnaire – PQ on it. After the implementation of the entire cycle of tasks, some emails were exchanged between the researcher and the participants in order to clarify some of the PQs answers. In addition to that, some interviews were also scheduled with the participants to get further understanding on their perceptions of the entire cycle of tasks. Finally, the data collected was submitted to a qualitative interpretive analysis to answer the RQ1 and the RQ2 of the present study.

### **5.3 RQ1- What are the elderly EFL learners' perceptions of the implementation of a cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale on their learning?**

In sum, the analysis conducted in Chapter 4 indicated that the perceptions of the participants mirror the teaching principles of TBA as well as the elements, procedures and concepts of the theoretical frame used to guide the development and implementation of the cycle of tasks. Such findings have brought some evidence for the positive effect of using a theoretical framework under TBA rationale, suggesting that TBA was perceived as an effective approach to promote learning opportunities for this group of elderly EFL learners.

Besides, the findings showed a clear change in participants' perceptions of the level of difficulty of the class, as it decreased, and their own evaluation of their performance in class increased, reinforcing the idea that such interference has been positive to this group of elderly EFL learners.

After concluding that the participants' perception of the implementation of a cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale on their learning was positive, I attempt to answer the RQ2.

### **5.4 RQ2- Which TBA elements are foregrounded in these participants' perceptions? And what does this reveal about the implementation/development of a cycle of tasks for a group of elderly EFL learners?**

By discussing the data analyzed, the present study may bring some claims on the framework adopted for the development and implementation of a cycle of tasks, considering the elements that were foregrounded by these participants when answering the post task questionnaires and participating in the interview sessions. The foregrounded elements were the following: *needs analysis*, FoF, both Skehan's framework for task analysis and for task implementation, planning and repetition.

In relation to *needs analysis* (Long, 2015), it was verified its essentiality to ensure a cycle of tasks which relates to learners' life outside the classroom. *Needs analysis*, here applied in the form of a questionnaire prior to the tasks' development, allowed to choose a meaningful and motivational theme – Tourism – for the participants. Besides, it also assisted in the development of the tasks that attended

participants' specific needs. As Long (2015) explained "a true TBLT course [...] requires an investment of resources in a needs analysis and production of materials appropriate for a particular population of learners" (p.7).

Not only the theme was significant to the participants, but the use of real world resources and tasks involving real world situations were relevant to their learning. According to the findings, the participants perceived the resemblance of classroom tasks with real world communicative situations/events, which is one of the main tenets within TBA rationale. Tasks resembling real world situations contributed not only to participants' learning of language issues, such as enlarging their vocabulary in English, but also assisted them in learning other skills, such as using technological tools as a laptop and a keyboard, or searching information on the internet. The tasks developed for this study also encouraged the participants to make decisions and have some autonomy on certain aspects of their learning, for instance, enabling them to look for the correct pronunciation of certain words on the web.

There were also some findings regarding some aspects of Skehan's (1998) framework for task analysis used to balance the task level of difficulty, and TBA's first principle (Ellis, 2003) - *ensure an appropriate level of task difficulty*. For instance, in terms of code complexity, most participants made strong claims on comprehending teacher's speech, suggesting that the linguistic complexity and vocabulary load were comprehensible, challenging but achievable. However, the linguistic complexity and vocabulary load worked in most tasks varied a lot because of the real-world resources used (the pamphlets, brochure and website). This way, it was found that those who had more experience in EFL tried to stretch their interlanguage by paying attention to language items they were not familiar to, while others participants with less experience in the language focused on a simpler understanding of the general idea in the texts from the real-world resources used. Perhaps, this was possible because of the monitoring of the teacher aiding participants during task implementation.

In terms of cognitive complexity, most participants made claims in favor of the familiarity of topic, familiarity of task, clarity and sufficiency of information given. It was possible to observe in the findings that there was a progressive difference in participants' perceptions of the level of difficulty of the class and their evaluation of their own performance when comparing the first class and the last one.

This progressive difference shows that the more familiar the theme and the task type (Skehan, 1998), the easier the class and the better the participants perform.

Still on Skehan's (1998) framework for task analysis regarding task difficulty, although the participants did not make direct claims about the amount of computation, they perceived T9 as the most difficult task in the cycle. T9 – when listeners had to take notes about the itinerary presentations – demanded a high amount of computation from this specific group of elderly learners. According to Skehan (1998), the proper balance in the task level of difficulty will assist in promoting opportunity for interlanguage development, which may not have occurred in T9. Thus, it seems that the amount of computation is a prior item to be considered when the objective is to develop a task with a proper level of difficulty to promote interlanguage development. Besides, perhaps, when a task fails to be fully developed, accounting for all aspects involved in Skehan's (1998) framework for task analysis, the outcome may be neither desirable nor promote much interlanguage development.

In sum, considering the TBA elements that were foregrounded by the participants, more specifically for the findings relating to Skehan's (1998) framework for task analysis show that this framework is resourceful to balance a task level of difficulty. However, applying such framework during task development is a challenging endeavor that requires time to account for (nearly) all possible features that assist the manipulation of a task level of difficulty. Afterwards, the teacher has to adjust the communicative stress factors during the implementation of the task to assure a balanced level of difficulty. Besides, after one class, the teacher could observe how difficult those tasks were perceived by her/his group of learners in order to adjust some features of the tasks of the following classes, as to ensure a more balanced level of difficulty in the tasks to come.

Moreover, there were some other findings regarding Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation. For instance, the participants perceived most pre-task phases as a preparation and motivation to perform the tasks. They also perceived that group work allowed more opportunities to interact in English to complete the task and that the main focus of the tasks was on meaning, going in line with TBA sixth principle (Ellis, 2003) - *ensure that students primarily focused on meaning*. They also perceived the tasks were connected and sequenced, as one task was the preparation for the next, or the continuation of a previous one. All these perceptions show that Skehan's



(1996) framework for task implementation is resourceful in the sense of developing tasks to promote interactive situations that can lead to learning.

The participants not only perceived that tasks focus on meaning, as previously stated, but also perceived form or language issues emerging from the context being worked, as they perceived that some tasks balanced meaning and form (Skehan, 1998). For instance, in T4, when the participants dictated their findings to be typed in the keyboard by someone else in their group, form and meaning were balanced. During this task, the participants used language to convey meaning, but, at the same time, they were concerned about form. After this, during T4 post-task phase, the participants could observe a pattern in their findings, leading to a Focus on Form – FoF – moment (Long, 1991), which was perceived by the participants. This indicates the essentiality and feasibility of designing tasks that balance learners' attention to focus on meaning and FoF (Long, 1991), enhancing chances of interlanguage development.

Nevertheless, Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation should be seen in a dynamic fashion to fit learners' needs and the classroom setting complexity. In the cycle of tasks elaborated for this study, the tasks happened in a more fluid and dynamic way than Skehan's (1996) framework suggests. For instance, sometimes an entire task worked as pre-task of another task (it was the case of T6 and T7 that worked as pre-task for T8); in other cases, a task did not demand a post-task phase (as T1 and T3), or suggested *homework* instead of a post-task phase. Being able to see Skehan's (1996) framework in such dynamic way is not an easy movement; it requires task developers to think of the final purpose of the entire cycle of tasks and develop the tasks in a sequencing balanced way, as building steps to reach a final outcome. As Skehan (1998) posed, it is important to "implement sequences of tasks so that balanced development occurs as tasks which concentrate on different objectives follow one another in a planned manner" (p. 135).

In sum, though both Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks are resourceful to develop and implement tasks that assure interaction opportunities to develop interlanguage, they both must be used taking account the bigger picture. The task developer perspective must account for learners' needs, classroom settings, and the final outcome in order to develop a balanced cycle of tasks, with appropriate level of difficulty and balanced focus between meaning and form.

The findings of this study also showed that the participants perceived planning as essential to aid them in their itinerary presentation, to the point that some participants claimed the presentation was only possible due to some actions taken during the planning time. To recall, in my study, planning took place specifically in class 4, during T6 and T7 - T6: rewriting the itinerary and T7: practicing its pronunciation-, when participants planned, developed, made adjustments and practiced their itinerary presentation with the help of teacher-led planning and guided-planning.

Foster and Skehan (1996) explained that knowing a task will be publicly performed can cause learners to worry about accuracy issues, as they posed that “threat of a [...] public performance of the tasks being done [...] increases the focus on accuracy” (p. 321). The findings show that when the participants learned about the itinerary presentation, most of them got apprehensive and worried about mispronouncing, forgetting important information or having difficulty in structuring sentences. Thus, one entire class dedicated to *planning* came in handy for lowering their anxiety, and was perceived as essential to preparing them for the task completion. Besides, their planning also continued at home, when they performed the *suggested homework*: to create a card with key-words as support to their presentation.

Coincidentally, as planning requires student-centered actions, most participants considered Class 4 as the least easy of all classes, while this class had the highest number of participants evaluating their performance as good. This fact reinforces the idea that the level of difficulty of the task and that a public performance is to come work as motivational reasons for the participants, as they try to perform better (Skehan, 1998).

Although there were some differences among the level of quality of the presentations (T8), mainly due to the participants’ different language level, the participants were successful in delivering their speech, presenting the itinerary. This fact may bring claims in favor of planning.

In sum, planning used for pedagogical purpose is essential for preparing learners for a task that may require an extra amount of computation, involve anxiety issues, or enhance aspects with which learners have more difficulty. Previous research results (D’Ely, 2006) have signaled that planning time has positive effects not only in linguistic outcome, but also in lowering down learners’ level of anxiety, as students realize that they are prepared to do the task. Other studies

regarding planning<sup>22</sup> (Farias, 2014; Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999; Specht, 2014, to mention some), in general terms, also brought positive results in the final performance.

There were also findings related to repetition, another element within TBA at the core of my study. Repetition, when applied in this cycle of tasks, also assumed a much more fluid form, following what Bygate (2001) postulated: repetition has to be perceived, always, with an ingredient of novelty.

In this study, participants had different perceptions regarding repetition. Still all of them shared a common sense on it: *we memorize and remember by repetition*. They noticed the tasks had similar procedures, and similar outcomes in terms of structure; they claimed that they helped them memorize certain vocabulary and structures due to the repeated use of them in the sequencing of classes. For instance, the use of the structure *can+verb* appeared in all tasks, either in results of task completion or during the pre-task phase. Participants perceived this repetition as essential to consolidate this structure. Thus, it is possible to say that the repetition, as it appeared in this study, brought the benefits claimed by Ellis (2003), promoting learning consolidation.

Therefore, *repetition or task familiarity* seems to have been a successful technique in helping the elderly EFL learners memorize new content and optimize their communicative skills, similarly to other studies on repetition, which, in general terms, agree that repetition can be used as a beneficial condition to promote learning (Bygate, 2001; D'Ely, 2006, to mention some).

Thus, task-developers should pay attention to the fact that this theoretical framework works in a dynamic way when implemented in a particular classroom setting. For instance, using planning and repetition as metacognitive process on real classroom imply that it is necessary to make certain adaptations in order to guarantee a certain amount of interaction opportunities. The same dynamicity should be considered when using Skehan's frameworks for task analysis (1998) and implementation (1996).

Finally, the findings also show that the cycle of tasks was in line with TBA eighth principle (Ellis, 2003) as it *required students to evaluate their performance and progress*. For instance, when participants answered the PQs, they were asked about their performance,

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<sup>22</sup> Though planning was a controlled condition in these studies (D'Ely, 2005; Foster and Skehan, 1996, 1999; Specht, 2014) in order to examine the nuances of applying it under different conditions, or applying different types of planning, the overriding finding in all these studies was that planning had positive effects on performance.

which triggered their ability to think about their learning encouraging some metacognition processes, such as perception of their own learning, awareness and development of cognitive learning strategies.

Furthermore, this cycle of tasks along with the perception questionnaires also promoted participants' reflection on their beliefs and perceptions of themselves. At first, some participants had certain beliefs regarding how they learn English. Some of them found it impossible to understand spoken English without translating it word by word; others thought language issues should be addressed as a priority to promote learning. After the cycle of tasks, in the interview session, some of those participants showed different perceptions of themselves in comparison to the ones they had before. For instance, they perceived that there is a different way to achieve learning – through TBA; or that they were capable of understanding English being spoken without translating everything mentally. This reflection on their metacognitive processes, beliefs and perceptions of themselves, is essential to induce learners to develop a better control of their own learning process, which is a very important issue within Task Based Approach (Ellis, 2003).

In sum, participants' perception can confirm that (1) needs analysis is essential for developing a meaningful and purposeful cycle of tasks; (2) tasks and resources resembling real world situation promote not only language learning, but also the development of other skills, such as computer skills, among others; (3) the use of both Skehan's frameworks are resourceful when developing tasks, granting an appropriate level of difficulty to balance focus on meaning and FoF (Long, 1991), though they must be seen in a dynamic way; (4) the uses of planning and repetition may be positive to language performance; and, (5) TBA can promote learners' reflection of themselves as learners and their beliefs regarding learning.

Considering the findings obtained with this specific EFL group of learners in this study, it is possible to say that the impact of the implementation of the cycle of tasks under the task-based approach rationale was positive in the sense that: TBA was an accepted alternative to engage the group of elderly learners of this study into EFL learning; TBA successfully engaged these elderly EFL learners in task completion; TBA also motivated these learners to reflect on their perception of the self, perception of learning and their beliefs; and TBA encouraged awareness and development of cognitive learning strategies as well. In this sense, it is possible to say that the intervention conducted in this study on the group of elderly EFL learners granted more than

learning opportunities, as it has broadened learners' perception of themselves and the world surrounding them.

Since all tasks were performed successfully by the participants – though some participants may have had more difficulty than others, they all overcome obstacles and reached task completion –, it is possible to say that the combination of the theories used in the framework to develop a cycle of tasks with the group of elderly EFL learners of the present study was effective. Therefore, a cycle of tasks under this framework may also be possible, achievable and positive with other types of groups of learners. It is worth trying similar studies to corroborate (or not) the findings presented here.

The next chapter presents the conclusions of the present study, its limitations, as well as some pedagogical implications, and suggestions for further research.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Final Remarks**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I draw some conclusions from the findings, present some pedagogical implications to pedagogy and the limitations of this study as well, and finally, I suggest ideas for further research.

#### **6.2 Conclusions**

The findings of the present study indicate that the perceptions of the participants that emerged from this intervention mirror the teaching principles of TBA as well as the elements, procedures and concepts of the theoretical frame used to guide the development and implementation of the cycle of tasks proposed in this research.

Moreover, and most important, although the participants were neither aware nor could name either the TBA principles or the elements, procedures and concepts that underlie the theoretical frame, they not only perceived them but also verbalized most of them through different instruments of data generation. This fact contributes to validate both the theoretical frames used and the findings of the present study.

Besides that, this study showed that the participants perceived that the level of difficulty of the classes decreased while their performance improved. In fact, the entire cycle of tasks was planned and implemented to instigate participants' reflection on their performance and on their perception of themselves as learners. Due to that, some participants ended up developing new cognitive learning strategies and deconstructing beliefs regarding learning.

Putting it into a nutshell, this study showed, through the "eyes" of the participants, that the way the classes were conducted and the tasks planned and developed class triggered different types of learning, besides their own EFL learning. In other words, by bringing some of their learning strategies to a more conscious level, the participants could understand their own learning process better. In addition, by being aware of their learning strategies, the participants could improve, change and/or add new ones to their learning strategy repertoire. Moreover, by being aware of their learning strategies, the participants could also learn about themselves as learners and change their learning behavior and

attitudes in class and in their life outside the classroom walls as consequence. Finally, by being aware of themselves as learners and individuals, the participants could perceive their EFL learning progress more clearly and make more conscious decisions as regards learning attitudes in their EFL context and in the world outside it.

In this sense, this study indicates that Long's (2015) suggestion for the use of needs analysis; Skehan's (1996, 1998) frameworks for task analysis and for task implementation; Ellis's (2003) task concept and TBA's principles; Long's (1991) concept of FoF, Foster and Skehan's (1996, 1998) ideas on planning conditions; and Bygate's (2001) concept of repetition may be used together to develop a meaningful and purposeful cycle of tasks. Moreover, this study indicates that when meaning and form are balanced to promote learning opportunities, such balance may trigger broader and deeper learning opportunities. However, much research needs to be conducted to corroborate such findings.

Last but not least, this study shows that Skehan's (1996) framework for task implementation and the conditions of planning and repetition have to be understood and used in a more dynamic way that the didactic frame suggests to fit the demands of the complexity of the classroom environment. Therefore, implementing this frame requires more than catering for theoretical issues; it involves being sensitive to contextual factors and learner specific needs. In other words, it involves taking a bigger picture into consideration.

### **6.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research**

As this study was innovative in the sense of combining existing theories on TBA to develop tasks hierarchically and sequentially interwoven in a cycle of tasks and implement them to a single group of elderly EFL learners in Brazil, the results should be treated with caution. Thus, I bring some limitations of the study and present suggestions for future researchers interested in replicating it.

- (1) One single study: Since the study was conducted with a single group, its results cannot be generalized. Thus, it would be important that this study be replicated with other groups of elderly EFL learners.
- (2) Perception Questionnaires: Since Question 1 in the Perception Questionnaires (from PQ1 to PQ4) - about the classes level of difficulty - resulted in some ambiguous answers which could



not be solved afterwards and this led me to discard these ambiguous answers, the PQs have to be piloted in order to ensure questions that offer a more precise comprehension of perceptions. Thus, further research in the area should pilot questionnaires before applying them.

- (3) Cycle of Tasks: This study combined elements from a theoretical framework based on TBA rationale in order to develop a cycle of tasks implemented in a group of elderly EFL learners so as to see how these learners would perceive it. Further research could develop other cycle of tasks for other population in other Brazilian contexts, as for example, younger learners from public schools.

## 6.4 Pedagogical Implications

Research on Task Based Approach has largely contributed to the Second Language Acquisition area by providing teachers the possibility to improve their teaching skills. Developing a cycle of tasks based on the TBA rationale and its theoretical framework is a movement that by itself promotes improvement in teacher understanding of the learning/teaching process. Having the chance to implement such cycle can also contribute to consolidate such understanding.

In this study, I could also develop as an EFL teacher and learn not only about teaching elderly learners, but also about teaching and learning in general. Moreover, through this study, I learned that the development and implementation of a cycle of tasks, which caters for TBA theoretical framework (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003) and learner needs, demands a lot of time, effort and work. The investment made brought benefits for both teacher/researcher and learners, though.

As the theoretical frame used to develop a cycle of tasks took into consideration specific group characteristics and needs, it can be used in any other classroom setting as long as needs analysis is implemented. Needs analysis questionnaire proved to be essential to guarantee the development of meaningful and purposeful tasks (Long, 2015) in the present study.

Besides, teachers should consider embarking in this process of developing a cycle of tasks as an attempt to develop professionally, and teacher educators should consider including this process in teacher education programs to enrich teacher's knowledge in initial education, to say the least.

However, it must be borne in mind that developing and sequencing a cycle of tasks is not an easy task. In addition, attempting to balance all TBA elements in a cycle of tasks demands from the teacher (and the learners) a lot of time, effort and work. Most importantly, in a cycle of tasks, there should be an ultimate learning goal (or a final task) and the tasks should be developed and sequenced gradually in order to enable learners to perform the final task without major difficulties. Then, the frame must be seen as a dynamic system and its elements should be considered within the groups' need and classroom settings and educational contexts.

Finally, yet importantly, considering the findings of the present study, the current EFL teacher working conditions in public schools and EFL teacher education policies/programs in Brazil, more research on TBA and the theoretical frame used in this study should be conducted to offer insights to guide educational policies in our country.

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**APPENDICES IN DVD**





