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CONTEXTUALIZED PRACTICES IN EFL TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

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CONTENTS

Contextualized Practices in EFL Teaching and Assessment

Introduction

> Language is socially constructed. Language use, social roles, language learning, and conscious experience are all socially situated, negotiated, scaffolded, and guided. They emerge in the dynamic play of social intercourse. Our expectations, systematized and automatized by prior experience, provide the thesis, our model of language, and we speak accordingly (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006).

When we make a direct quotation, we decontextualize those words, and, thus, have more chances of losing the intended meaning (if it is possible to ever have it); we also run the risk of misusing the quoted words when we try to give life to them in the context of our text. However, since, in my view, there is no way out – the borrowed words are always going to assume a recreated meaning in the new context – I would like to make some 'additions' to the last sentence in the quotation above: one has to do with the last clause where, instead of saying "...and we speak accordingly," we could say "...and we speak, *listen, read, write, teach, in other words, we act* accordingly *in the world*," since all of our actions are influenced by the prior knowledge that was gained/constructed through social interaction. Another

related but more specific issue has to do with the fact that, besides constructing a 'model of language' through social interaction, we also build, and store in our memories, different types of schemata or knowledge (e.g. cultural, semantic, episodic, declarative, procedural, implicit, explicit), which will enter into play and guide our further interaction in the world we live in.

The quote above comes from an introduction that Nick C. Ellis and Diane Larsen-Freeman wrote to a special issue of the journal *Applied Linguistics* entitled "Language Emergence: Implications for Applied Linguistics" (2006). I chose it as the epigraph to this introduction because I think it represents the view of language that is portrayed in each of the four articles presented in this volume; they are all in line with the view that "Language is socially constructed". However, I will give the reader the opportunity to explore this issue on his/her own first, by making a detour and presenting a brief summary of each article, and leaving my own inferences for the end of this introduction.

In the first article – "Assessing reading ability: the fair focus of test items" –, Tumolo argues for fairness in reading comprehension tests used for selection, by proposing a set of criteria that should be followed to design bias-free test items. It is argued that, in a selection process, there are many issues involved, related to individuals and society, which go beyond the testing situation itself, and, therefore, test use should be 'appropriate' (in relation to the consequences that are intended) and 'responsible' (as for the consequences that are unintended), so that it is 'defensible'(fair, non-discriminatory and construct-related). The author brings extensive arguments to support the view that prior knowledge is a confound in language tests and, thus, should be a variable that is controlled in testing situations where test takers differ in terms of stored topic knowledge. Two suggestions are offered to minimize this confounding effect, one being controlling the topic and the other being related to controlling the test item level of comprehension that is required.

In relation to topic control the solution provided is that a specific topic be chosen to underlie all test items and that this topic be announced in advance to the public, so that all test takers have the same fair chance of becoming knowledgeable on that subject and test evaluators can be more certain of what it is that they are measuring. As regards test items control the suggestion is that test developers keep all test items within the literal comprehension level (involving lexical access and parsing) and, in relation to the inferential comprehension level, only include items which cater for the integration subprocess level (e.g. involving local coherence or intersentential relations), leaving out the higher level subprocesses of summarization and elaboration, since they involve the use of greater amounts of prior knowledge.

In the second article – "Distance teaching of academic writing: A genre-based approach" –, Figueiredo discusses academic writing from a genre-based perspective, and proposes an e-course which focuses specifically on book reviews. The author contends that there has been, within the so-called field of 'communicative language teaching', a range of different methodologies, many times claimed as 'the best', leaving foreign language teachers with the dilemma of what to choose and pushing them "to adopt an intuitive pedagogical basis for their teaching practices". According to the author, socially based theories of language, such as systemic functional linguistics and genre-based approaches, have received a growing number of practitioners among researchers and teachers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), especially among those who missed a "well-formulated theory of language" to support the communicative approach; socially based theories of language offer "students explicit and systematic explanations of the way language functions in social contexts". The author draws on two theoretical approaches to a genre-based pedagogy which she considers as complementary: Swales' rhetorical analysis of text structures and the British/Australian New Literacies approach.

The proposed e-course called "Escrita acadêmica em inglês: a resenha" involves "(1) a syllabus; (2) an overview of genre studies, as well as an exploration of the socio-cultural aspects of academic genres, especially in what concerns the genre 'book review'; (3) writing activities/exercises; and (4) language conventions and linguistic features of book reviews". Besides providing an algorythm for a course on academic writing with a focus on book reviews, the author sees the course as an opportunity for both teachers and researchers in the area to assess the effectiveness of an academic writing course in distance education.

In the third article – "Reflective reports as a genre: an investigation of contextual configuration and modality features" –, which builds on the premise of genre as social practice, Moritz uses principles from Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze reflective reports produced by student-teachers from the undergraduate Languages Program, taking their last semester *practicum* course without having had any teaching experience prior to the course. Two main features of the reports are analyzed: contextual configuration, with a focus on the context of situation as given by field, tenor and mode; and interpersonal features of modality, as portrayed by kind, frequency, and purpose. In relation to field, results show that "teacher-trainees write their texts aligned with the systems of knowledge and beliefs that permeate the field of teaching/learning a foreign language, i.e., they demonstrate to be in line with the technicalities specific to their areas". As for tenor, agent roles are portrayed by the supervisor and the student-teacher, with an asymmetry in relation to these roles, where the supervisor is in control and has the authority and the trainee is in a hierarchically lower position. Regarding mode, language was found to play a constitutive, monologic role in the reports, being "used for reflection rather than for action", and with the student-teacher writers basically giving rather than demanding information. In relation to the analysis of the interpersonal features of modality, as the author shows, modality markers were mostly

used "i) to present her/his failures, ii) to make prospections as for her/his future behaviors, iii) to praise positive aspects of her/his practice, iv) to show knowledge regarding teaching aspects, and also v) to raise general reflections".

In the fourth article – "The impact of familiarity with strategic planning and teacher-led planning on learners' L2 oral performance of focused and unfocused tasks" –, D'Ely investigates the role of familiarity with strategic planning and teacher-led planning in high-intermediate learners' performance in two oral tasks – a focused picture-cued narrative and an unfocused video-based narrative – evaluated in terms of fluency (measured by the speed of language production), complexity (measured by the number of clauses per c-unit) and accuracy (measured by the number of errors per c-unit). Generally speaking, as the author reports, results show that both strategic and teacher-led planning, coupled with enough time given to prepare for the tasks, and also the choice of a familiar genre, the narrative, led learners to perform at their best in both focused and unfocused conditions, in all aspects of speech performance. In relation to fluency, both strategic and teacher-led planning enabled participants to promptly access their stored lexical knowledge, leading to a more fluent performance. As regards complexity, learners were more able to produce more complex speech in the focused task, reinforcing the pedagogical value of these tasks as scaffolds so that learners feel more confident to take risks and thus become able to learn more complex structures. A positive effect of both strategic and teacher-led planning on accuracy was also found, and is explained by the author as a possible "proceduralization of declarative knowledge..., a fact that made learners work with larger chunks, freeing up their attentional resources and allowing them to focus on not making mistakes".

Resuming my initial point, that the four studies here presented can be placed under the view that "Language is socially constructed," I think the reader will agree with me that it is easy to

do that with Figueiredo's and Moritz's articles, especially because both lie within the fields of Systemic Functional Linguistics and genre-based approaches. But even if one did not know the premises underlying these two related fields, claims that signal this relationship are explicitly made in their texts. For example, when Figueiredo says that "this concern has given rise to a shift, in terms of language teaching, towards socially based theories of language, such as systemic functional linguistics ... and genre-based approaches" (p.29) or when Moritz argues that "language is not only influenced and determined by social practices, but also influences and determines the way social practices are likely to occur" (p.48). In relation to Tumolo's study, although this relationship is not so explicit, it is signaled by his concern with 'fairness' in tests, which directly implies social relationships/ interaction, since 'fairness' involves human beings' actions and not inanimate objects. This relationship can also be seen when Tumolo claims that "the benefits of test use must outweigh the negative consequences caused for individuals and for society" (p.4). And lastly, working from a more cognitive perspective, D'Ely draws a relationship with the premise that language learning is socially situated, especially when she observes that "...an understanding of planning should consider learners' educational histories which include issues such as learners' identity, social context and learners' learning culture (either learner-centered or teacher-centered)" (p.81).

The high-quality research reported in this volume lies within the realms of applied linguistics and should be of interest to all those seeking studies related to the teaching and learning of L2, or to put it more specifically, to "Contextualized practices in EFL teaching and assessment".

Lêda Maria Braga Tomitch

Reference

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Assessing reading comprehension: the fair focus of test items

Celso Henrique Soufen Tumolo

1 Introduction

The ability of reading in English as a foreign language has probably been the most required for all purposes in our society, especially today with so much information in English available on the Internet. It has particularly been a requirement for university studies, since many academic articles are published in this international language.

Many instruments have been developed and used to assess reading ability, suitable for both regular education and distance education. As I have shown in Tumolo (2005), the use of a test has consequences, and a test is considered more defensible if the interpretations based on it can be argued to be appropriate, i.e., based on the intended consequence of discriminating those with the various levels of the relevant factor(s). Any discrimination based on other factors will be considered unfair. That is, performance on tests should be related to relevant factor(s), not to features of unfairness.

One of the widely debated features of unfairness is bias, particularly if it is predictive. Shohamy (2000), for example, raises several questions in talking about fairness in testing, one of them being "do they [the tests] create biases?" (p. 17). For that

reason, test use must be examined closely, since the actual use may be different from the intended purposes, with the unintended consequence of bias against some test takers. Test use must, thus, be appropriate in terms of the intended consequences, and responsible in terms of the potential unintended consequences. As Bachman (1990) stresses, the benefits of test use must outweigh the negative consequences caused for individuals and for society. Otherwise, it is not defensible.

In Tumolo (2005), I investigated university entrance examinations, analyzed test items and concluded that some of the items were not defensible based on an investigation of validity. In this article, I aim at extending the discussion by focusing specifically on the aspect of fairness and by pointing to items and item characteristics that may reduce the unintended consequences of test bias. Ultimately, this article aims at contributing with discussions and suggestions for the development of tests with features of fairness, which are required in most international codes of testing practice currently available.

Next, I present the motivation for this article. In section 2, I discuss background knowledge as a potential source of unfairness. In section 3, I review the literature to show how background knowledge affects reading comprehension, in terms of multiple readings and of unified representations and processing gains, being, thus, a source of bias in testing. In section 4, I present the processes underlying reading comprehension and ways to minimize background effects for testing purposes. In section 5, I present reading tasks compatible with a language test which complies with features of fairness. Lastly, in section 6, my final remarks are made.

1.1. Motivation for the article

This article is motivated by the university entrance examinations used for admission to UNICAMP. The concept of reading used for the development of the examinations is

in line with what scholars believe today: that reading is not a passive decoding of meaning, but an active task of negotiating meaning based on global comprehension, resulting in a new text by the reader[1]. The skills tested include explicit and implicit or inferential aspects, global and local comprehension, and micro and macro level skills (Scaramucci, 2002), that is, high-level skills are expected for the test.

The concept of the test is also in line with the purpose of the whole examination. The 2003 candidate's manual mentions that the entrance examinations have sought, since 1987, to select students who can think, draw correlations, develop hypotheses. All the skills tested are in accordance with what Clapham (1996) found to be essential for university studies.

The emphasis on these high-level skills for the entrance examination may be accounted for as one way to overcome what Norton and Stein (1998) consider to be a validity paradox: while universities want students who can think, draw correlations, be critical and independent learners, testing instruments used as entrance examinations do not always allow for the demonstration of such skills.

But there is a note in the candidate's manual: *not any reading is allowed*. This suggests that the test developers are concerned with what is the fundamental characteristic of comprehension as an active process, which, as mentioned in the manual, will lead to the creation of a new text by the reader. Comprehension is active, and a "reader cannot help but interpret and alter what he reads in accordance with prior knowledge about the topic under discussion" (Pearson & Johnson, 1978, p. 24).

Ultimately, the test developers seem to be concerned with the extent of the alteration, particularly with the possibility of textual intrusion and/or script intrusion. These two types of intrusion are discussed by Pearson and Johnson (1978), who characterize the

1 Taken from the session concerning English as a foreign language on the *manual do candidato*.

former as a reading coming from the text, but being the result of random selection of segments, with no argument for them to be considered plausible, and the latter as coming from the reader's head for which there is no plausible line of reasoning. My first question was, then, how is it possible to know what is plausible or intrusion if comprehension is active?

However, the issue seems to be more complex. Allowing some readings and not allowing some others, that is, considering some readings plausible or intrusion, correct or incorrect, may be based on specific knowledge and on value judgment. This, thus, raises ethical questions: What is the line between correct and incorrect reading? Who is to decide what reading is to be allowed and not allowed? Who has the right answer? Does that decision result in any form of discrimination against some groups based on irrelevant factors? Can that be a source of bias, hence of unfairness?

2 Sources of unfairness

One aspect presented in the specialized literature as a potential source of bias, of unfairness, is background knowledge[2]. Kunnan (2000) summarizes the most important concerns associated with fairness in language testing, including content and format bias, and stresses that bias causing unfairness include "topical knowledge and technical terminology, specific cultural content and dialect variation" (p. 3).

Background knowledge may be a source of bias when favoring groups or individuals with more familiarity with the topic. However, sources of bias can only be claimed if the factor affecting performance is not included in the construct[3] to be used

2 Background knowledge in this article refers to any prior knowledge such as content, topical, technical, and cultural knowledge.

3 According to the Dictionary of Language Testing, published by Davies et al (1999), construct can be defined as "an ability or set of abilities that will be reflected in test performance, and about which inferences can be made on the basis of test scores. A construct is generally defined in terms of a theory; in the case of language, a theory of language" (p. 31).

for the development of the test. The scope of a construct must be delimited to define what factors to include or not, which has implications for the development and use of tests and for the interpretation of their results.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) offer three options for defining the scope of the construct in relation to topical knowledge[4], considering the characteristics of the examinations and of the test takers' expected knowledge. The options are: 1) construct definition including only language ability, not including topical knowledge; 2) construct definition including topical knowledge; and 3) separate constructs defined for language ability and topical knowledge.

Considering language testing situations in English as a foreign language (EFL), in which test takers are heterogeneous in relation to topical knowledge, the scope of the construct should follow the first category, where language ability is the only relevant factor for the interpretations and decisions based on the test. Thus, for the purpose of assessing language ability with heterogeneous test takers in relation to knowledge, background knowledge must be a factor to be controlled and its effects minimized, or else bias may result.

3 Effects of background knowledge

In this section, I discuss some effects of background knowledge for reading comprehension. For that, I a) consider background knowledge as promoting multiple readings; and b) bring to bear scholars and researchers showing where background knowledge has its most effect, contributing to reading comprehension as a ready-made structure and as a resource-saving structure.

4 The definition of topical knowledge by the authors is that it refers to knowledge schemata or real-world knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 65).

3.1 Background knowledge promoting multiple readings

The concept of reading used for the aforementioned entrance examination is in line with what most recent accounts of the reading comprehension processes claim. Reading is considered today an interactive process. Rumelhart (1977), in proposing his interactive model for reading, argues that reading involves the application of all knowledge sources, that is, a reader will draw on sources of information such as visual, orthographic, lexical, semantic, syntactic and schematic (world knowledge).

The sources of information contributing to reading are, thus, top-down, coming from the reader's background knowledge stored in the long-term memory as schemas, and bottom-up, coming from the conveyed meaning in the text. Since readers will have different background knowledge, the mental representation resulting from the reading process may be somewhat different for each reader.

Studies carried out by renowned scholars such as Gernsbacher (1997), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), Kintsch (1988), Lorch and O'Brien (1995), Kintsch (1998) on the mental representation resulting from the reading process point to the construction of two networks of comprehension, one called text model and the other situation model. Grabe (1999, 2000) reviews these studies as well as others relevant in the area and summarizes the conclusions concerning the two networks. Text model reflects the information in the text, being a closer representation of comprehension up to the level of propositional integration. Situation model represents an interpretation of the text information, involving reader's background knowledge to a further extent, based on the reader's goal for reading, motivation, attitudes and evaluations of the information in the text.

In his conclusion, Grabe (1999) stresses that the reader will be able to "both recognize and understand the information in the text, and also to create an interpretation that is unique" (p. 19). Readers will, thus, provide similar and also distinct summaries,

and the mental representation will be the result of the similarities and the distinctions, with features of interpretation.

Similarly and based on many other studies on reading comprehension, Urquhart and Weir (1998) claim that there will be different readings of the same text. The authors accept variations caused by the different background knowledge of readers, and call them interpretations. Thus, it is possible to conclude, based on the accounts and claims presented, that the outcome of reading will be somewhat different from reader to reader.

This difference can, however, be taken further. Norton and Stein (2000) reported on an experience that challenged their views of testing in reading particularly, in their own words, "disrupted our assumptions about tests, texts, and teaching" (p. 232). They were carrying out the pilot testing phase of a reading comprehension test designed to select some students for university admission. It was a post apartheid situation in South Africa. The passage was based on an article published in a local newspaper and was about a factual account of monkeys disturbing one family in a town. This is what both researchers thought was the 'universal understanding'.

What the researchers found relevant was the possible alternative interpretation of the passage. In a retrospect interview with the participants, the researchers found that some of them thought that the text reflected the interests of a class and a race over the interests of a less powerful one, resulting in what can be considered a divergent or insurgent reading: "it is about Black people, who are the 'monkeys' 'on the rampage' in the White people's home", "it is about who owns the land", "it is about violence in our society" (Norton & Stein, 2000, p. 244).

The researchers, surprised by the alternative interpretation based more on a metaphor than on the factual information, concluded that their intended meaning was a dominant reading, with meanings that hegemonically frame text interpretation, based on assumptions of knowledge shared by the writer and

the intended audience. They also concluded that divergent or insurgent readings may occur, at specific times and places, which challenge meanings that hegemonically frame text interpretation.

Considering the alternative interpretation legitimate, they explain that there is an inherent instability of textual meaning in that it is the product of its social occasion, a

> complex tapestry in which the status of the participants, their use of body language, their race (among other characteristics), the time and place of interaction, and the purpose of the interaction have a direct bearing on the social meaning of the texts apprehended within the occasion (Norton & Stein, 2000, p. 244).

In fact, many studies confirm that meaning is social, contextualized, situated. Gee (2000) briefly presents many areas which are converging to the idea that the mind is social, with the consequence that thinking and communicating are also defined as socially shaped. In sociohistorical psychology, thinking is mediated through tools historically and culturally shaped for certain functions and meanings. Cognitive linguistics is based on the idea that the way language is organized shapes the way we interpret the world. Modern sociology stresses that thinking is structured by institutional forces leading to human social practices. And in poststructuralist and postmodern work, thinking and acting are thought around discourses, socially and culturally formed.

Based on all these studies, and furthering the discussion, Gee (2000) concludes that meaning is situated in specific sociocultural practices and experiences, and that thinking and using language is assembling situated meanings, defined by one's sociocultural experiences and specific shared practices, routinized and normed by the groups and their members.

Nonetheless, the instability of textual meaning may be somewhat under the control of the writer, who makes efforts

to limit the use of inferences on the part of the reader. Ashcraft (1994) refers to this process as implication, used by the writer in the expectation that readers will draw certain conclusions through inference making[5] based on the information in the text. He recognizes, however, that inferences made during a communication event can be authorized and unauthorized.

Successful communication, according to the author, relies on authorized inference, whereas unauthorized inference will lead to some miscommunication. It is possible to argue, however, along with Rumelhart (1980), that, although miscommunication will result when readers do not make the expected inferences, hence misunderstanding the author, there will be some understanding(s) of the text as the result of the reading activity.

In sum, multiple readings may result from the interaction of readers' characteristics with texts, being mostly influenced by the different background knowledge, including sociocultural schemata. How is it possible to accommodate this within a test? Or as Urquhart and Weir (1998) put it "the theory insists that the good reader makes sense of the text by supplying knowledge based on his or her own unique experience. The testers, on the other hand, are obliged to look for 'correct answers'" (p. 113).

The question for fairness is: if multiple readings or interpretations are an integral part of comprehension, if there can be different legitimate readings and consequently different legitimate answers, particularly considering the discussion on the divergent or insurgent readings presented above, who has the correct answer? Or rather, is there a correct answer?

3.2 Background knowledge: essential for higher-levelprocesses

The effects of background knowledge on reading comprehension have been extensively studied. The studies are

5 The process of drawing connections and conclusions not mentioned in the text, based mostly on background knowledge.

concerned with whether or not it contributes decisively and in what levels or operations it contributes the most.

Many scholars have shown positive contribution of background knowledge to reading comprehension. Gagné, Yekovich and Yekovich (1993), for example, in their model of reading, claim that background knowledge has its strongest effect on the inferential comprehension, involving integration and summarization. During integration, inferences necessary to understand the information only implicitly present in the text are made to connect two or more propositions occurring within sentences, across sentences and across paragraphs, based on the rules of pronominal reference or on the activation of some schemas.

Consider the example, similar to the one provided by the authors: *The dog walked towards John. He ran for shelter*. Integrating these sentences requires making inference based both on the rule of pronominal reference and on the existing schema that dogs represent danger. Integration organizes the new information present in the text by building a coherent meaning representation with the help of existing knowledge.

The summarization processes are implied in the production of a macrostructure that expresses the main ideas of the text. Conceptual understanding of the topic of the passage, essential for this process to occur, is involved in the inference of the missing relevant information to connect large amounts of information. The production of the macrostructure involves a system to find relations among concepts, through the identification of the topic and the search for the relations among concepts, based on hierarchically structured propositions, on the activation of associated concepts, and on the convergence of the activated concepts into a summary statement. Summarization, like integration, organizes the new information by building a coherent meaning representation with the help of existing prior knowledge.

Research has also shown the positive contribution of background knowledge for reading comprehension, which may

be direct as well as indirect. The direct contribution refers to the provision of an organized structured knowledge for the resolution of what is only implicitly given in the text. During comprehension, knowledgeable readers will: a) map the incoming relevant information onto already existing knowledge structure, allowing for the encoding and retrieval of domain-related information more readily and the interpretation of events in a unified manner (Chiese, Spilich & Voss, 1979); and b) know in advance how facts are interrelated, being able to draw the appropriate inference when the relations among facts are left implicit (Just & Carpenter, 1987), relating different propositions in the text, resulting in a more interrelated representation (Smith, 1992).

This is also true for specific cultural knowledge. Knowledgeable readers with specific type of background knowledge in terms of cultural schemata will provide a better integrated understanding and the development of a unified meaning of the text. Pritchard (1990) carried out a research to investigate the role of specific cultural knowledge comparing the readings produced by members of two different cultures for the same texts and concluded that the content of culturally familiar materials made possible the integration of local understandings and the development of a unified meaning of the text.

Knowledge, thus, allows for a more accurate representation of the text contents, since it facilitates the integration of local comprehension and the development of unified meaning of the text, and provides a coherent understanding of the contents at between-sentence, between-paragraph, and between larger units of text (Fincher-Kiefer, Post, Greene & Voss, 1988).

There is also the indirect effect of background knowledge, related to the fact that the provision of an organized knowledge structure will make it possible for the cognitive operations to consume less resource from the limited working memory capacity, i.e., knowledgeable readers will demand less resource from working memory (WM) in terms of information computation.

The two functions of WM – processing and storage – have a limited pool of resources to share, having to trade off against each other, meaning that "a computationally demanding task may leave less capacity for storing information and vice versa"(Just & Carpenter, 1987, p. 472). In this sense, a knowledgeable reader will have more resources available for storing information longer in an active state, allowing for more relations to be established. Hence, the reader will have more concepts and relations from the previous parts of the text still active in the WM (Daneman & Carpenter, 1980), with the positive consequence that the chunking produced will be richer, more coherent and with qualitatively different information.

Main idea construction will benefit from the use of cognitive resources made available. It gains in processing efficiency for prediction, comprehension monitoring, derivation of word meanings, and assignment of importance (Afflerbach, 1990), underlying processes essential for main idea construction. Other underlying operations benefited are finding referent, processing complex syntactic structures and ambiguities in garden-path sentences, relating predictive pairs (Tomitch, 2000), and achieving balanced inference strategies in terms of trade-off between information needed for local and global coherence (Whitney, Ritchie & Clark, 1991).

In sum, there is enough evidence that background knowledge has a positive effect on comprehension. The more background knowledge, the more efficient the underlying processes of reading, particularly integration and summarization. Conversely, the poorer the background knowledge, the less integrated the information, the weaker the meaning constructed.

All in all, in the case of language tests, considering the effects of background knowledge in allowing for multiple readings and even legitimate divergent readings, and in providing gains in processing efficiency for a more integrated and unified representation, as presented above, there seem

to be reasons enough to minimize the effects of background knowledge to find evidence of the relevant factor of language ability. In so doing, features of fairness are enhanced and biased discrimination is reduced.

4 Minimizing the effects of background knowledge

As mentioned before, reading has been characterized as an activity resulting from both lower- and higher-level processes. The higher the processes, the more background knowledge is involved. Once test takers will have different background knowledge, its effects on a language test can be considered unfair: biased in favor of those who share it and against those who do not share it. Fairness in testing can, thus, be best achieved if the effects of background knowledge are minimized.

Two possible ways may be considered to minimize such effects for the purpose of enhancing fairness in language testing used for selection, that is, to comply with the features of fairness: by topic and by item level. By topic implies choosing one specific topic for the texts used as part of the assessment instruments, and make it public in advance so as to allow for similar opportunities for all test-takers to become knowledgeable on the topic to be able to really understand the test texts and perform at their best in a language test.

By item level implies choosing items demanding specific levels of cognitive operations involved in the reading process. Gagné, Yekovich and Yekovich's (1993) account of the reading processes can be used. In their account, the underlying lower-level processes are decoding[6], lexical access, and parsing whereas the higher-level processes are the inferential processes of integration, summarization, and elaboration.

6 Decoding is mostly perceptual, thus not a process to be measured in testing for the purposes discussed here.

Both summarization and elaboration, the highest levels, involve background knowledge to an extent further than the advocated in this article as possible for fairness. Summarization is the process leading to main idea construction[7] and involves background knowledge for the selection of relevant information and for the organization of the propositions in a hierarchical outline. Elaboration is when the reader brings his prior knowledge to make some sense out of the new information presented in the text, aiming at acquiring declarative knowledge[8]. Test items requiring summarization and elaboration will not comply with the features of fairness.

Lexical access and parsing, on the other hand, are at the level advocated here. Lexical access is responsible for the identification and selection of the appropriate meaning of the words. Parsing uses the syntactic and linguistic rules of the language to derive meaning from larger units of meaning, such as the meaning of a phrase, a clause or a sentence. Any item requiring lexical access and parsing will comply with the features of fairness.

The decision for choosing items requiring integration is more complex. Integration is the process of connecting the propositions together, which results in a coherent representation of the ideas in the text. Readers will have to relate some elements given as separate in the text, with no explicit mention of the relation. Integration requires, thus, referencing[9], the process of connecting elements in the text, of establishing intersentential relations. Integration also requires inferences for the construction of a coherent mental representation. This is the highest level possible advocated here to comply with features of fairness.

However, inferences required for integration may be at two levels: at the propositional level, inferences based on the

7 Pearson and Johnson (1978) consider the construction of the main idea as the highest level in their taxonomy.

8 See Ballstaedt and Mandl (1984) for a study on the role of elaborations.

9 Examples of referencing are given as appendix 3.

information recoverable from the text, called propositional inferences, and at the pragmatic level, based on information not recoverable from the text, called pragmatic inferences.

To understand this difference, consider the examples given by Hughes (2003). Propositional inference refers to the inference made to understand that Harry was working at her studies, based on the information *Harry worked as hard as she had ever done in her life. When the exam results came out, nobody was surprised that she came top of the class*. Making the required inference is mostly a matter of relating the propositions: Harry got a good grade in the exam because she worked hard, where grade and exam are associated with the schema of school which defines the meaning of work as the activity of studying.

Pragmatic inference[10], on the other hand, refers to the inference made to understand that some drivers drove fast or slowly with the information *it took them twenty minutes by road to get from Reading to Heathrow airport*. The inference is based on the knowledge of the distance between the two places, Reading and Heathrow airport. It can be inferred that they drove fast if it is known that the places are very distant and that they drove slowly if it is known that the places are close to each other. If the specific information about the distance is not part of the reader's background knowledge, such inferences are not possible.

When the pragmatic inference is based on factual knowledge as the example of the airport above, readers will be able to understand if they have the required knowledge. Conversely, if they do not have it, inference will not be made and comprehension will be impaired. On the other hand, when the pragmatic inference is based on conceptual knowledge, various plausible inferences may occur.

10 Pragmatic inference is based on pragmatic knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996) define pragmatic knowledge as referring to the characteristics of the language use context, being divided in functional (intentions) and sociolinguistic knowledge (appropriate use and cultural reference).

In their explanation of the nature of comprehension, Pearson and Johnson (1978) mention plausible inference, determined by the default value dictated by the schema with the slots constraining the inferences. To explain the process of inference drawing, they provide the following short story of a situation in a restaurant:

> John went to Vescio's, his favorite Italian restaurant. He ordered lasagna. When the waiter brought it, John was so enraged that he left without leaving a tip. He even forgot his umbrella.

The authors propose some questions whose answers will require inferential comprehension. Considering the question *why did John go to Vescio's?*, the authors point out that possible answers are *because it was his favorite restaurant*, requiring only literal comprehension, or *because it was convenient for him, since it is close to his workplace*, requiring plausible inference. The plausible inference is, in fact, pragmatic inference, since inference making relies on information not recoverable from the text about the distance separating John from the restaurant. The inference is considered only plausible, since more than one answer is possible for the question.

This plausibility criterion is, according to the authors, what distinguishes between plausible inferences and wrong inferences, called intrusions in that no argument can be given for them to be considered plausible answers. In their account, intrusions seem to be easily identifiable because of what is plausible to expect as default to fill the slots, and also because deviations from the default are usually mentioned by the writer.

However, the target reader with specific knowledge presupposed by the text writer may be different from the real readers who may not share the presupposed knowledge. This may be particularly true when the reader is a test taker and does not choose the texts to read. Since the reasoning underlying the answers to inferential questions involves shared knowledge and

generalizations about the world, not necessarily shared by the test takers, different reasoning may occur, resulting in different answers.

Pragmatic inference relies on factual knowledge and on conceptual knowledge. In both cases, it relies on the idea of shared knowledge. The question for fairness now is: Is it possible to presuppose shared factual or conceptual knowledge for readers/test takers? In a language test whose construct does not include background knowledge, the logical answer is no.

As we move from lower-level to higher-level processes, we are increasing the contribution from the reader's background knowledge. Since this knowledge is always different and unknown, we are moving from stability to volatility (Pearson & Johnson, 1978). This must be considered within test development to choose items which focus on the propositional inferences as the highest level to comply with the features of fairness.

5 Fair focus in language tests: reading tasks

When describing reading tasks, Nuttall (1996) divides them into reading for plain sense and reading into discourse. Reading for plain sense involves understanding syntax, recognizing and interpreting cohesive devices, and interpreting discourse markers whereas reading into discourse is concerned with what the writers mean by what they say, that is, what is either presupposed or implied by the writer.

Since the aim of the article is to pursue items with features of fairness, tasks under reading into discourse are not presented, in that they are mostly top-down oriented, involving pragmatic inferences. Rather, it will present the mostly lower-level tasks of reading for plain sense. Although test items may focus on any of the tasks, some of them may deserve the focus, namely, tasks for a) establishment of reference; and b) for understanding

syntax in terms of establishing the boundaries of each clause, of recognizing the constituents of a noun phrase, and of identifying participles and infinitives in non-finite clauses.

The process of establishing reference, called by the author understanding cohesive devices, is divided in the following subtasks: interpreting proforms and ellipsis, and establishing lexical cohesion. Proforms are words such as *it*, *our*, *this*, *one*, *so/not* (as in I think so/not), and comparatives (smaller, same, other). They can be anaphoric and cataphoric[11]. Ellipsis is the omission of certain words already mentioned, used by the writer to avoid unnecessary repetition.

The establishment of lexical cohesion may be in terms of synonyms, hyponyms, text-structuring words and pin-down words. Both synonyms and hyponyms are used to avoid repetition. Text-structuring words are lexicalized within their context, that is, the reader must refer to some information previously stated. Examples are *issue, methods, events, views, explanations* and *phenomena*. Pin-down words refer to propositions, thus carrying their underlying propositional meaning, for example the word *approach.*

Test items may assess readers' ability to establish reference, i.e., to relate some words to some information previously given in the text. The ability will involve background knowledge to the level that a reader is trained (Pearson & Johnson, 1978), that is, a reader knows that certain words are related to some referent backward or forward, and that some words are omitted to avoid repetition.

Tasks for understanding syntax involve a) the establishment of the boundaries of each clause, b) the recognition of the constituents of a noun phrase, and c) understanding participles and infinitives in non-finite clauses. The establishment of the boundaries of each clause requires the identification of main verbs and other finite verbs, as well as the subject and object.

11 Anaphoric is a reference to a previously stated word. Cataphoric is a reference to a word used later in the text.

Readers must be able to recognize all these elements to parse the sentence and know how the words relate to one another. In Nuttall's words, get the signification of the clauses and sentences. Test items may focus on the identification of anyone of the sentence elements and will provide evidence about test takers' ability to relate information under the constraints of the language system, not based on random selection of segments of the text.

Adding emphasis to some of Nuttall´s tasks for understanding syntax, items may assess readers' ability to identify the various functions of the suffix *ing*, which makes the grammar system of English rather complex. In the Brazilian context, a test item may focus, for example, on the understanding of participles in clauses as in the sentence *smoking is bad for your health*, as well as on its uses after a preposition or as an adjective/modifier. Emphasis is justified once this is a source of difficulty and misunderstanding for Brazilian readers.

Likewise, items may focus on readers' ability to recognize and understand the constituents of a noun phrase, particularly to identify their heads, which actually express the substance of the phrase. The emphasis in this case is justified once noun phrases have different formation in English and in Portuguese, thus being a source of difficulty and misunderstandings for Brazilian readers.

Test items must provide evidence for the discrimination of test takers according to their levels of the relevant ability. They are only considered good items if they have high discrimination indices. Items focusing on propositional inferences, and on the tasks of establishing reference and understanding syntax are likely to allow for high discrimination indices, providing essential information for the interpretation of relevant factor of reading ability in English as a foreign language, when dealing with heterogeneous groups, particularly for the purpose of selection. And most importantly, complying with features of fairness.

6 Final remarks

In considerations of test use, today, justifications must be provided with evidence and/or argumentation as to relevance and to consequences. This claims for judgmental questions such as why something should be measured. The judgmental question discussed in the article is why to assess high-level processes once there may be the unintended consequence of test bias, that is, discrimination of test takers on the basis of the irrelevant factor of background knowledge rather than language ability.

As one moves from lower-level processes to higher-level processes in reading, one moves from stability to volatility (Pearson & Johnson, 1978). As one moves from assessing lower-level processes to assessing higher-level processes, one also moves from stability to volatility. And when this volatile arena is being assessed, uncertainty arises, bringing with it power relations[12], that is, someone must have the correct readings to provide the correct answers. And when there is power relation due to different social statuses, test takers may become submissive and may seek to provide answers they think will be considered correct understandings, affecting directly their answers in the test (Norton & Stein, 1998).

As already mentioned, background knowledge will always affect reading comprehension. Readers will have different background knowledge and construct somewhat different interpretations of the same text, resulting in multiple mental representations. Traditional testing cannot accommodate multiple readings. It is mostly based on the positivist/psychometric paradigm, which allows for value-neutral interpretations of reality, a reality "governed by immutable laws and mechanisms that are essentially independent of who, when, and how it is being examined" (Hamp-Lyons & Lynch, 1998, p. 259). It does not incorporate the idea that meanings cannot be determined in

12 See Shohamy (2001) for an extensive discussion on power relations and testing situations.

advance without considering the socio-cultural aspects of the test takers, the particular assessment contexts, and that multiple readings or even insurgent readings may result as the outcome of a reading activity.

Based on what has been presented, it seems logical to claim that the effects of background knowledge must be minimized, hence reducing the possibility of muddied measurement (Urquhart & Weir, 1998), with reading-irrelevant factors associated with the test items. Since the role background knowledge plays on reading comprehension has been shown to be essential, one possible way of achieving fairness seems to be by choosing test items which have low demands on this factor.

For the purpose of assuring fairness in language assessment, remaining on the stability seems to be defensible, that is, assessing text model up to the level of propositional integration involving propositional inferences, or plain sense of the language. Reading in a foreign language has been accounted for as an interactive process (Rumelhart, 1977, 1980; Eskey, 1988), that is, it also involves lower-level processes or bottom-up processing. A good reader makes inferences, constructs main idea(s), analyzes passage organization, recognizes author's tone and style, but also constructs literal meaning, being sensitive to semantic and syntactic cues. A good reader has linguistic knowledge for efficient syntactic and lexical processing necessary for the integration of information across sentences and, hence, necessary for the construction of coherence in a text (Zwaan & Brown, 1996).

Human communication is an interplay involving people. Due to its principle of efficient communication, information that can be presupposed or inferred is usually omitted (Nuttall, 1996). A writer will not include in the text what may be presupposed for the reader, which is usually part of shared knowledge and experience, shared opinions, attitudes and emotions. Also, the writer will not include in the text, but will imply, the information expected for the reader to be able to infer. For communication to take place,

the reader must be able to reconstruct the presuppositions and draw the expected unstated conclusions.

In this interplay, background knowledge resulting from membership in specific socio-cultural groups will play a role, leading to interpretations. Language tests used for selection do not seem to be able to accommodate that, and cannot have the unintended consequence of discriminating based on the irrelevant factor of socio-cultural membership.

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Distance teaching of academic writing: A genre-based approach

Débora de Carvalho Figueiredo

1 Introduction

This paper discusses, within the broad field of academic writing instruction, the teaching of academic writing from a genre perspective. To do so, I propose, as a an application of the theoretical approaches presented to the teaching of writing and as source of data for further reflections, a course to foster foreign language writing development, more specifically, to discuss and teach the academic genre "book review".

The emergence, in the 1970s, of communicative language teaching (CLT) brought about a paradigmatic change in terms of second and foreign language learning, by no longer equating learning a foreign language, which includes writing, with learning traditional grammar. However, within the broad area of CLT there is a sometimes confusing array of methodologies, some presenting themselves as the "best" method for foreign language learning, and all of them calling themselves "communicative", many times leading foreign language teachers to adopt an intuitive pedagogical basis for their teaching practices (Burns, 2001).

This has lead many researchers and teachers in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT) to question some of the assumptions implicit in communicative approaches to foreign

language teaching for not taking into account a well-formulated theory of language. Cope and Kalantzis (1993), for instance, argues that many of the existing English language teaching pedagogies, especially those based on the "progressive" curriculum approach initiated in the 1970s, have emphasized inquiry/discovery learning process and naturalism but have not offered learners systematic explanations of how language functions in various social contexts.

This concern has given rise to a shift, in terms of language teaching, towards socially based theories of language, such as systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 2004) and genre-based approaches, developed to tackle the needs of language learners (both L1 and L2/FL learners) by offering students explicit and systematic explanations of the way language functions in social contexts.

With the paradigm shift that has been taking place in language education in contemporary times, genre-based instruction has been the most strongly advocated alternative to the widely-used process approach (Hyon, 1996; Ramanathan; Kaplan, 2000; Paltridge, 2001; Atkinson, 2003; Hyland, 2002, 2003, 2004; Johns, 2002, 2003; Cheng, 2006, 2008).

For instance, here in Brazil the National Curricular Parameters for Secondary Education – Languages, Codes and their Technologies, in the section on Modern Foreign Languages (Brasil, 2000), consider exposure to genres and genre knowledge an integral part of foreign language education[1]:

> The analysis of different genres (slogans, cartoons, poems, newspaper reports, ads, how-to-do texts, among others),

1 Motta-Roth points out that, in terms of foreign language teaching, the notion of genre is not systematized in the PCN+ (for secondary education). In her words, "nos PCNs de Língua Estrangeira, Arte e Informática, gênero textual também é ponto de referência para o estudo de linguagens e códigos, mas é na parte de Língua Portuguesa que vemos o termo sendo usado mais recorrentemente e sob diferentes perspectivas, pois há flutuação no conceito de gênero nessas referências" (2005, p. 498).

> produced in the foreign language, enables learners to consolidate and recognize the notion that a text only comes into being through the articulation of certain elements, an intentionality, explicit or not, and a context shaped by sociocultural variables. [...] The learners' repeated exposure to different genres, covering a multiplicity of themes and situations (either of a similar or of a different nature), encourages them to make use of their abilities to analyze, compare, associate, identify, recognize and select. (Brasil, 2000, p. 93 and 118)

In short, genre-based approaches represent a major trend in English language teaching (ELT) in the new millennium (Rodgers, 2001). These approaches are not absolutely new, of course, and draw from the developments produced in earlier decades in the areas of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)[2], such as the pioneering work in genre analysis by John Swales (1981, 1990). Genre-based teaching and learning has become influential in mainstream ELT in different institutional contexts and at different levels, such as primary, secondary, tertiary, professional and community teaching contexts, involving native speakers of English as well as ESL and EFL learners, and in countries as diverse as Singapore, South Africa, USA, Italy, Hong Kong, Australia, UK, China, Sweden, Thailand (Deriwianka, 2003), and Brazil (Vian Jr., 2003; Meurer, 2005; Motta-Roth, 2005; Ikeda, 2005; Araújo, 2006).

Even though EAP originated in the 1970s, there have been few writing programs catering to the academic needs of undergraduate students, and there is still a large gap between writing for general purposes and writing for academic purposes with particular reference to field of study or a subject domain, as EAP goes beyond expression of thought and opinion (Hsu, 2006)

2 The term 'EAP' (English for academic purposes) originated in the 1970s. It is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in the formal education system (Jordan, 1997, p. 1).

In view of that, this article aims to:

- Present an e-course on book review writing which would yield data and reflections on the writing performance of academic learners (the course would focus both on linguistic and content knowledge);

- Propose, using the course as a source of written material, an evaluation of the teaching approaches through empirical data, i.e., through the comparison of an initial and a final production of a book review by the course participants; and

- Increase genre awareness, helping readers and learners to recognize the cultural and communicative purposes, the structure and the linguistic features of book reviews.

2 Theorectical background: genre-based pedagogy

Genre-based approaches have different theoretical basis in linguistics, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics and the New Literacies perspective. This paper discusses and explores two of these perspectives which can be seen as complementary: Swales' rhetorical analysis of text structures and the British/Australian New Literacies approach.

However, before we move on the discussion of these two perspectives, it is important to point out that the different genre approaches to ELT share some key features: first, a genre is seen as a form of social action, which emphasizes recurrent social situations, everyday social practices and the use of specific textual patternings to achieve particular rhetorical and social purposes. Second, their point of departure is the whole text, rather than the sentence, as the unit of analysis and the object

of learning. The concern, thus, is with the creation of meaning at the level of discourse and not the acquisition of syntactical forms. In that sense, text is understood as "a piece of language in use [which is a] harmonious collection of meanings appropriate to its context [and which has] unity of purpose" (Butt et al, 2001, p. 3). Third, as these approaches are concerned with the macro-purposes of language and not just the semantic micro-functions of individual words and sentences, the genres selected for analysis and instruction are generally defined according to the broad social purposes of communication. Finally, by looking at whole texts these approaches recognize the existence of a higher level of order and patterning in language than just the sentence – grammar at the level of discourse-organization and meta-patterning of grammatical features. But this does not mean that sentence-level grammar is seen as unimportant: rather, grammatical structures are important in terms of the part they play in the overall organization of whole texts (e.g. what kind of sentence patterns tend to predominate in a particular genre) (Lin, 2006).

2.1 The socio-rhetorical approach to genre and to writing

According to Swales,

> a genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. (1990, p. 58)

Swales' view on genre is applied to the description of language use in terms of rhetorical moves and their composing steps as basic units of textual analysis. The rhetorical organization

of a genre is made up of these analytical units – moves and steps. Each move and step is signaled through lexical and grammatical clues – microstructural elements – which express the rhetorical function of each part of the text. Nwogu (1991) further specified the definition of 'move' as "a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features (e.g. lexical meaning and illocutionary forces etc.), which [gives] the segment a uniform orientation and signals the content of discourse in it" (p. 114). Each move is taken to embody a number of 'constituent elements' which combine to constitute information in the move.

In his now classic analysis of research papers, which produced a model for genre analysis called the CARS model (see Table 1 below), Swales (1990) synthesized his findings that research papers present three moves: authors first establish a territory, then a niche and finally they occupy this niche. Although his analysis targeted only the introductory part of a research paper, his model has nevertheless been very influential in terms of genre analysis.

Swales' introduction to genre led the way to further genre studies (e.g. Bhatia, 1993; Flowerdew, 1993; Dudley-Evans; St. John, 1998). Among the research trends, some surveys have focused on the relationship between genre studies and academic literacy development in tertiary education as well as methods of equipping non-native speakers in academic and professional contexts with relevant genre knowledge (e.g. Jordan, 1997; Johns, 2001). Genre-based pedagogies have particularly emphasized raising the awareness of non-expert members of a genre community of conventional structures. Swales (1990) proposed that the identification of recurring discourse structures, such as moves and steps and discourse markers in genre specific texts, raises students' genre awareness and "facilitates their participation in their disciplinary discourse communities" (p. 213). It has been claimed that genre awareness has several advantages such as enhancing learners' performance in discourse communication skills, benefiting learners in their

professional roles, and promoting a higher level of intellectual quality in lines of logical thinking (e.g. Mustafa, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Johns, 2001).

Even though Swales' CARS model was devised based on a genre-analysis of research paper introductions, it can be applied to the investigation of the generic structure of any other academic genre, such as book reviews (Motta-Roth, 1996), abstracts (Araújo, 1999), PhD theses' concluding chapters (Araújo, 2006), etc., as well as to genres produced outside of the academic discourse community. In this article, the genre selected for discussion and instruction was the book review.

According to Motta-Roth (1998), a critical review must not only describe but comment on the book under analysis, presenting evaluations based on the critical view of the reviewer. In general terms, the evaluation (or judgment), even though produced by a single person, should be based on solid arguments as it will be shared with other academic readers, recommending or not the book reviewed.

Motta-Roth's schematic description of book reviews contains four moves realized by ten steps, as we can see in Table 1.

Move 1 INTRODUCING THE BOOK
Step 1 Defining the general topic of the book
and/or
Step 2 Informing about potential readership
and/or
Step 3 Informing about the author
and/or
Step 4 Making topic generalizations
and/or
Step 5 Inserting book in the field

Move 2 OUTLINING THE BOOK Step 6 Providing general view of the organization of the book and/or Step 7 Stating the topic of each chapter and/or Step 8 Citing extra-text material Move 3 HIGHLIGHTING PARTS OF THE BOOK Step 9 Providing focused evaluation Move 4 PROVIDING CLOSING EVALUATION OF THE BOOK Step 10A Definitely recommending/ disqualifying the book or Step 10B Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings

Table 1: Schematic description of rhetorical moves in book reviews (Motta-Roth, 1998)

In this article I adopt Motta-Roth's view of book reviews, in general a critical genre that might adopt a more evaluative or a more descriptive approach, depending on the production context. According to this author, book reviews tend to be more evaluative when the reviewer is an expert in the field and uses her/his knowledge and professional experience to establish the relevance of the reviewed book.

2.2 The New Literacies approach to genre and to writing

The line of research and theorization called *New Literacy Studies* distinguishes between two great blocks of current views on literacy: a non-social view, which conceives literacy as a series of autonomous and decontextualized abilities located in the individual; and the view of literacy as a group of socially,

culturally situated and ideologically built social practices (cf. Street 1984; Barton 1994; Bayham 1995; Gee, 1996; Clark & Ivanic 1997, 1998, 1999).

From this second perspective on literacy, genres can be seen as different textual forms organized according to the specific social goals a text aims at. According to Cope and Kalantzis, "texts are different because they do different things. So any literacy pedagogy has to be concerned, not just with the formalities of how texts work, but also with the living social reality of texts-in-use. How a text works is a function of what it is for" (1993, p. 7).

In this way, the causes for the differences among texts might be found in their specific social functions. From this viewpoint, genres are social processes, and texts assume relatively predictable structural formats according to culture-bound patterns of social interaction. In other words, "textual patternings and social patternings meet as genres" (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, p. 7), i.e. genres constitute culturally and socially defined ways to represent reality, to establish social relations and to construe social identities.

One possibility for implementing this approach in the classroom is the view of genre presented by J.R. Martin, commonly associated with genre literacy pedagogy. Martin's proposal, by linking social purpose to text structure, leads to an understanding of language very different from that of traditional grammar. Starting with the issue of purpose, text analysis is carried out by looking at the structure of the whole text, and only after that does it move on to a view of the whole text in terms of what happens in sentences and clauses.

To do so, Martin (1992; 1997; 2000; 2001) and his group came up with a teaching-learning cycle represented in the figure of a wheel divided into three phases, as you can see in this figure.

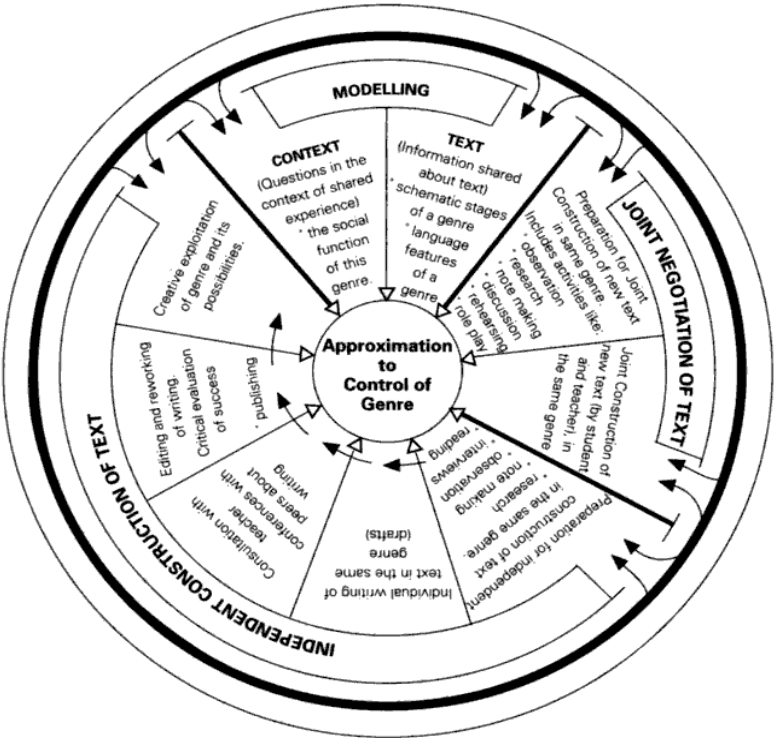

Figure 1: Martin's 'Wheel' model of genre literacy pedagogy (Cope; Kalantzis, 1993)

In the first, called *modelling phase*, students are exposed to a number of texts that exemplify a genre selected for analysis and instruction, which for the course proposed here would be book reviews. This includes a discussion of the cultural and social purposes of the genre (functions), how the information is organized (schematic structure) and aspects of the text's textualization (lexico-grammatical features).

Phase two, called *joint negotiation*, involves the joint construction, by teacher and learners, of a text in the same genre. After contextualized a certain genre, usually the teacher acts as

a scribe, taking notes both on the schematic structure and on the lexico-grammatical features the students have elicited from the exemplars of the genre analyzed.

The third and final phase is called *independent construction of text*. During this phase, students work individually to produce a sample of the genre under study.

The genre-based approach, both from Swales' and Martin's perspectives, is not just an attempt to chunk texts into identifiable knowledge structures. It is also concerned with characterizing the linguistic features of each 'move' and the means by which information in the moves is signaled, and what social purposes the textualizations of each move serve. The premise in the present work is that a genre-awareness approach could give the students a firm foundation in writing book reviews.

3 A genre-based approach to academic writing through computer-mediated technologies

Several common difficulties face an EAP writing teacher: the rather limited instruction hour; large class size; high workload in marking and providing feedback on each student's draft. With the contemporary advances in communication technologies, such constraints could be decreased, for example, with the use of an e-learning pedagogical framework to help increase academic writing competence.

According to Hsu (2006, p. 1), "with the rapid development of network technology in the 21st century, computer use has become more and more widespread and seemingly indispensable. The learning/teaching of English as a second and/or foreign language has been in the vanguard of computer-assisted language learning (CALL)". Some of the main advantages of CALL programs are that:

- they foster autonomous learning as students can study in their own time and at their own speed (Levy, 1997);

- they provide a flexible learning environment (e.g. in a distance-learning mode) free from place constraints (Rosenberg, 2001);

- they offer a less stressful learning context as students work on their own without peer or teacher pressure (Jiménez; Pérez, 2002).

Several studies on the role of computer courseware in the EFL/ESL classroom have indicated that multimedia technologies are conducive to the acquisition of certain language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar (Nagata, 1998; Kung, 2002; Lin; Lee, 2002; Oladejo, 2002; Chen, 2003).

In the context of CALL, "courseware broadly refers to educational software designed especially for classroom use. It is usually associated with networking, multimedia and hypermedia, distance-learning, e-learning and computer-assisted instruction" (Hsu, 2006, p. 3). One of the steps in implementing CALL is to decide which courseware is the most appropriate for the language skills to be developed during a particular period of time or within a course program. Regarding its use, instructional courseware can generally play two roles: "the all-encompassing managerial role" and the auxiliary role (Lasagabaster; Sierra, 2003, p. 295). In the former role, the courseware forms the core and acts as a substitute teacher while in the latter it is used as an assistant. In this article I present and illustrate the all-encompassing role of instructional courseware.

4 Methodological procedures

This article, within the field of academic writing, aims to discuss the influence of writing instruction and genre awareness on the development of academic writing competence. More specifically, it proposes a distance writing course on book reviews, followed by an evaluation of the course on the students' writing development. To do that, the course would require an initial and a final text production, a strategy borrowed from Dolz, Noverraz and Schnewly's (2004, p. 95-128) "didactic sequence" proposal[3]. The e-course would constitute both a means to carry out writing instruction and a source of data for future reflections on the impact of a distance writing course on the students' academic writing performance.

4.1 The e-course platform

The 'e-course' proposed here basically includes two elements: (1) an online course; and (2) the content materials put on a web-based learning platform. The e-course platform suggested here is Moodle (http://moodle.org), an Open Source Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which is currently used at many Brazilian universities. It has become popular among educators around the world as a tool for creating online dynamic web sites for their students.

According to information found on its website, Moodle gives educators tools to manage and promote learning in several ways:

- Moodle has features that allow it to scale to very large deployments and large numbers of students.

3 This genre-based approach to language teaching starts from an initial production of the genre being taught, which will serve as an indicator of the students' level of competence. The didactic sequence is then closed by a final production, which will give the learners the opportunity to put into practice the notions and tools acquired during the course and the teacher an instrument to evaluate the learning process (Guimarães, 2006).

- Many institutions use it as their platform to conduct fully online courses, while some use it simply to increase face-to-face courses (known as *blended learning*).

- The Moodle system offers several activity modules (such as forums, databases and wikis) which many users deploy to build collaborative communities of learning around their subject matter (in the social constructionist tradition). Others, on the other hand, prefer to use it as a way to deliver content to students and assess learning using assignments. In the course proposed here, both types of approach (collaborative community work and more traditional individual assignments) would be adopted.

Within the web-based learning platform, the writing teacher would post lecture materials and students' work in multimedia formats. The homepage of the courseware (each student would need a campus network access account to enter the platform) could include announcements, discussions, tests, activities and assignments.

On the online platform, teachers would be able to edit their materials, mark students' assignments, monitor students' logins and online activities and make announcements at any time and from different places (e.g. at home or on campus). Furthermore, such an online platform is flexible enough for teachers to replace, modify and expand existing activities, or add new ones. The e-course databank could also be easily expanded to include a new chapter/section.

4.2 The e-course design

In this article I propose a 30-hour, or 2-credit, extension e-course entitled "Escrita acadêmica em inglês: a resenha", aimed at the university academic community, which would provide students both with theoretical and practical knowledge

on academic writing, especially in what concerns book reviews. Even though this is a proposal for a distance course, there would be two non-virtual, face-to-face encounters, an initial and a final class. In the first class, after being introduced to the course and its purposes, the students would be asked to produce a book review. This initial review would serve as a means of comparison with the final review, to be produced at the end of the course. In this sense, this project is borrowing, from Schneuwly's *didactic sequence model*, the notion of an initial and a final production as means of comparison. The final class would offer a further opportunity for reflection on the impact of the e-course on the learners' academic writing abilities

The e-course design would comprise four main parts: (1) a syllabus; (2) an overview of genre studies, as well as an exploration of the socio-cultural aspects of academic genres, especially in what concerns the genre 'book review'; (3) writing activities/ exercises; and (4) language convention and linguistic features of book reviews. Each component could be further divided into units, depending on the nature of the learning focus. The learning points in each unit would be highlighted. The syllabus, aimed to present a teaching plan and an overview of proposed progress in accordance with the stages of producing a book review, would be put on the e-course platform for students to download.

This e-course would function as a way of applying and testing Martin's teaching-learning cycle. In that sense, courses such as this could contribute to the Brazilian fields of EAP and genre teaching/learning by increasing familiarity with a genre-based approach to writing still not used in our schools and universities, especially in a distance mode.

4.3 Awareness-raising and writing activities

The activity modules proposed for the e-course follow Martin's wheel model and present the three phases described in his teaching-learning cycle (as I commented above, each phase could

be further divided into units or sections, depending on the teaching/learning focus). In the first phase (*modelling phase*), authentic samples of book reviews published in academic journals would be made available, on the e-platform, for analysis. The students would also participate, via a forum format, of a discussion about the cultural and social purposes of the genre (functions), how the information is organized (schematic structure) and aspects of the texts' textualization (lexico-grammatical features). These discussions would guide the students to analyze information elements and to be aware of common patterns and expressions. Without being constrained by a face-to-face class schedule, students could read and take part of the discussion on the web at their own pace during their free time.[4]

In the second phase of the wheel model (*joint negotiation phase*), the students would continue studying and discussing (still via the forum format) the field and the context of book reviews, analyzing book reviews published on academic journals and taking notes as they move along. After this further reflection stage, the class would contribute to a jointly constructed schematic structure of the genre "book review". This joint production would be recorded and posted on the e-platform by the teacher. Even though Martin's teaching-learning model does not propose exposing learners to academic research studies on the genre under analysis, I decided to include at the end of this second module the reading of Motta-Roth's article on book reviews (2002), which would be available on the platform for the students to download. The reading would provide the group with a means of comparing their own reflections and observations with Motta-Roth's findings on book reviews, generating further debate.

The third phase of the wheel model (*independent construction of text phase*) would comprise four stages:

4 Even though the students' could accommodate the course around their own schedule, and follow their own paces, there would be deadlines to complete the course activities and assignments.

- the preparation for the independent construction of a book review, involving strategies such as research, note taking, observation, reading, etc.;

- individual writing of a book review (3 drafts);

- consultation with teacher and conference with peers about the writing (via chat or email format);

- editing and reworking of writing, as well as critical evaluation of performance. Well before the deadline for the submission of the final version, several drafts of the book reviews under production would be posted online. A checklist of questions would serve as a broad guideline to keep the student's writing focused.

4.4 Data analysis

Regarding the phase of data analysis, the initial and final book reviews produced in the e-course would be compared to investigate the learners' writing development in terms of:

- how the information is organized (the schematic features of the genre);

- how the reviews are textualized (the lexico-grammatical features of the genre, using constructs and categories from systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 2004);

- how the reviewers express their authorial voice (using the appraisal approach (Martin; White, 2005).

5 Final remarks

As far as the impact of the e-course proposed in this article is concerned, I believe it would contribute to the area of academic writing instruction by applying and evaluating a little known genre-based teaching methodology (Martin's wheel model), especially in the distance mode. In addition, the course would increase the course participants' genre awareness, not only of the macro (schematic) and micro (linguistic) features of a genre, but mainly of genres as situated social events organized around rules and conventions established within discourse communities.

Finally, the course proposed would generate a data and reference bank available online, including the lessons, teaching materials, guidelines, and students' works, which would provide valuable information for writing teachers and researchers that could foster future reflections and investigations.

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Reflective reports as a genre: an investigation of contextual configuration and modality features

Maria Ester Wollstein Moritz

1 Introduction

The concept of genre has been used as an instrument to explain how language works for creating and contextualizing social interactions. In this vein, there have been a growing number of studies that analyze different social life genres in distinct cultural contexts (Swales, 1990, 2004; Motta-Roth, 2006; Kaufer, 2006; Machado & Cristóvão, 2006; Bhatia, 2008; Souza, 2008; Vian Jr. & Ikeda, 2009).

These studies have demonstrated a bidirectional relationship between language use, materialized in different genres, and social practices: language is not only influenced and determined by social practices, but also influences and determines the way social practices are likely to occur.

Within the literature of genre studies, regardless of the genre approach that guides specific works, we may find studies on academic genres, professional genres (Bonini, 2009; Carvalho, 2006; Moritz, 2006; Schlee, 2006; Araújo, 2005; Bhatia, 2004; Baltar, 2004; Devitt 1991). The scenery of pedagogical discourse has not received much attention from scholars. To my knowledge few studies have investigated genres circumscribed to this sphere.

Fontana (2009), and Fontana & Paviani (2007) have carried out studies devoted to the analysis of internship reports from various different areas, amongst which Languages[1] is included. In Fontana's study, the focus of analysis lies on the description of the discursive characteristics and of the compositional form of reports produced by university students taking internship in different areas as a means of completing a requirement of their undergraduate programs. Findings demonstrate variability in both aspects researched probably due to the different professional domains investigated in their study and thus to the specific forms of producing discourse particular to each domain. Prior to that, Fontana and Paviani's research, whose aim was to identify the main features of internship reports, provide support to the understanding that different genres appear to originate from these reports, namely, the reflective report, the portfolio, the monograph report and the album.

Due to the fact that the aforementioned studies do not offer a systematic investigation focusing on one specific area, and to the fact that they basically constitute descriptive studies, the purpose of the present research is to raise critical awareness as to the use of the genre 'reflective report'. By these means, we may also identify the bidirectionality between language use materialized in this genre and the social practice established by the *practicum* to which student-teachers of Languages are submitted along the final year of their undergraduate program.

Within this perspective of genre as social practice, it is paramount that analysis derive from the delineation of the contextual configuration in which the communicative event occurs, an analysis that is enabled by the context of situation (Hasan, 1985). This study also carries out a micro-structural analysis in terms of the lexicogrammatical features of modality as an aspect of the grammar of the clause corresponding to the interpersonal

1 In this paper, **Languages** corresponds to the Undergraduate Program of *Letras- Inglês* in Brazil.

function of language, for it is at this level that interactants' voices are put forward, thus disclosing attitudes, judgments, identities and the role relationships set up in interactions. Both of these analyses are grounded on principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL), as proposed by Halliday & Hasan (1989); Halliday (1994); Halliday & Matthiessen, (2004).

Examining student-teachers' thinking as they write their reflective reports may be a fruitful tool for understanding both the context in which the *practicum* takes place and the particular speech role that teacher-trainees adopt for themselves in relation to their reader, in this case, the supervisor. Since language use – be it selected consciously or not – unravels viewpoints, values, preferences and beliefs, this study, as mentioned, intends to raise awareness as to the use of this genre. This concern emerged out of informal conversations with student-teachers who contend that they lean to care more about the reaction of their supervisor than about their own perceptions and feelings when writing reflective reports.

Summing up, the research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What is the contextual configuration of the genre 'reflective report'?

2. What characterizes the use of interpersonal features of modality in reflective reports (kind, frequency, purpose)?

This article first describes the theoretical framework of SFL as introduced by Halliday & Hasan (1989); Halliday (1985, 1994); Halliday & Matthiessen, (2004), focusing on the context of situation and on modality. This is followed by a methodological section that includes the context of the research, its participants, and the procedures of data collection and analysis. The third section is concerned with the analysis of the context of situation

and of interpersonal meanings regarding the samples of the 'reflective reports' collected. The final section summarizes the study and presents possible implications and suggestions for further research.

2 Theoretical background

The theoretical background that motivates the discussion is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as proposed by Halliday & Hasan (1989); Halliday (1985, 1994); Halliday & Matthiessen, (2004). Architected by Halliday, SFL is both a theory of language and a method of analysis (Eggins, 2004) of texts and contexts. Due to its dual nature, SFL aims at explaining how individuals use language and how language is structured in its different uses. It is through SFL that we can create possibilities to establish connections between the situational context, meanings or language metafunctions, and the lexicogrammatical systems involved in the use and production of texts.

The basic premise of Systemic Functional Linguistics is that language is an organized network of sign systems used by speakers to construe meanings through a process of choosing. It is also functional in the sense that it means to serve functional purposes. According to SFL's multifunctional view of language, when we communicate, we encode, simultaneously, ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings, which respectively correspond to representations of reality, to the enactment of our personal and social relationships and to the way the clause is organized regarding its context and message.

These meanings, in their turn, are closely related to the contextual configuration in which texts occur. Ideational meanings are realized by **field**, an element of the context of situation that specifies what is going on, i.e., the in course activity. Interpersonal meanings are realized by **tenor**, a second element

in the context of situation, which specifies the role relationships involved. Finally, textual meanings are realized by the **mode** of the discourse, the third element of the context of situation, which specifies the role assigned to language in the interaction.

The variables of the context of situation – field, tenor and mode – are socially determined and, taken together, can anticipate information about a given text (Halliday, 1978), as they allow predictions "about the language that will occur with reasonable probability of being right" (p. 32).

Following Halliday's contextual variables, Hasan (1989, 1996) further develops his framework. According to the author, the variable **field** should include investigation of the SOCIAL ACTIVITY and the NATURE OF THE SOCIAL ACTIVITY, ranging from the most to the least institutionalized. Additionally, according to Eggins (2004), field can vary according to terms that are used in the text, being more *technical* or *everyday* terms.

For the variable tenor, Hasan (1989) proposes that analysis focuses on AGENT ROLES, concerning the institutional roles taken on by the participants of the social activity; DYATIC (POWER) RELATIONS, referring to 'the degree of control (or power) one participant is able to exercise over the other(s), and SOCIAL DISTANCE, regarding the "degree of familiarity" between participants, ranging from minimal to maximal.

Finally, Hasan (ibid) suggests that the variable mode be examined through the following elements: LANGUAGE ROLE, regarding the role played by language in the social activity, which can be either 'constitutive' or 'ancilary', PROCESS SHARING, ranging from dialogic to monologic, CHANNEL, relating to phonic or graphic channel, and finally MEDIUM, differing from spoken to written text.

After identifying these three variables, one is able to define the elements of the Contextual Configuration (CC) which are necessary to delineate the interactional context of language use.

Moreover, as previously commented, it also allows us to make predictions regarding any text in a given context.

These three variables, then, refer to three kinds of meaning – ideational, interpersonal and textual – conveyed in the structure of the clause. We shall not pursue the ideational and textual meanings in this study, for they do not constitute the scope of this research. Rather, we shall go into the dimension of interpersonal meanings as our purpose addresses modality and thus role relationships.

Interpersonal meanings concern the social interactions in which interlocutors engage. At this level, the clause is seen as an interactive event that involves speakers/writers and their audience. In these interactive events, speakers/writers adopt speech roles, assigning to their audience a complementary role. The types of speech role that lie behind interactive exchanges are those of giving or demanding. The commodity being exchanged, in turn, may be information and goods and services (Halliday,1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

As information is given, the clause takes on the speech function of a statement, while when information is demanded, it takes on the form of a question. The exchange of information is called a proposition. As for goods and services, when they are given, we have an offer, while when they are demanded, we have a command. The exchange of goods and services is referred to as a proposal.

Propositions and proposals can vary according to polarity, a choice between positive and negative. Nevertheless, between these two poles are levels of intermediacy, i.e., there are intermediate degrees between yes and no poles, and these levels are named modality.

Modality is the expression of the writer/speaker's opinion while manifesting attitudes, judgments and commitment to the truth of the meanings being conveyed through her/his texts. It is through modality that one represents the writer's angle.

According to the Hallidayan theory, this gap between yes and no presents a different significance for propositions and for

proposals. In a proposition, there are two kinds of intermediary possibility: degrees of probability or usuality. As probability presents meanings connected to different degrees of likelihood, it has a meaning equivalent to maybe yes, maybe no; usuality, in turn, is equivalent to 'both yes and no', as it means sometimes yes, sometimes no, for example. Meanings expressed by usuality regard judgment as to the frequency with which something happens.

Degrees of probability and usuality are referred to as modalization. Linguistically, they are expressed by a finite modal operator, as in *Essa era uma atividade que envolvia opinião e eu* ***poderia*** *ter aproveitado melhor esse momento* (T6), by a modal adjunct of probabilty or usuality, e. g. *Por outro lado,* ***algumas vez****, eu, não aproveitei da melhor forma as informações que os alunos me forneceram* (T4), or by both together, e.g. (...) ***talvez*** *eu* ***pudesse*** *tê-los ajudado mais negociando melhor cada pergunta* (T6). See Figure 1 for markers of modalization.

Kind of modality	Congruent realizations	Metaphorical realizations
Modalization Probability/ usuality	Verbal operators Ex. pode, poderia, iria	Ex. Acredito que, penso que, sinto que, acho que, etc.
	Modal adjuncts Ex. algumas vezes, provavelmente, talvez	
	Both together Ex. talvez eu pudesse, sempre podiam	

Figure 1: Kinds of modalization

In proposals, the meaning of the exchanges between positive and negative poles is that of prescribing (do it) or proscribing

(don't do it). In a command, the intermediate position embodies degrees of obligation, and in an offer, it corresponds to degrees of inclination. The scales of obligation and inclination are referred to as modulation. Linguistically, they are realized by a finite modal operator, as in (…) *para a realização de uma boa aula, todos os detalhes* ***devem*** *ser cuidadosamente pensados* (T4), or by a passive verb or an adjective, e.g. *Os alunos* ***foram capazes*** *de compreender as perguntas* (T2). See Figure 1 for markers of modulation.

Kind of modality	Congruent realizations	Metaphorical realizations
Modulation Obligation/ inclination	Verbal operators Ex. devo, deveria, preciso	É necessário que, é importante que
	Passive verbs/adjectives Ex. Ex. dispostos a, capazes de	

Figure 2: Kinds of modulation

Modality also holds degrees of value attached to them, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, adapted from Halliday (1994, p. 358).

	Low	Median	High
Positive	can, may, could, might, (dare)	will, would, should, is/ was to	must, ought to, need, has/ had to

Negative	needn't, doesn't/didn't + need to, have to	won't, wouldn't, shouldn't, (isn't/wasn't to)	mustn't, oughtn't to, can't, couldn't, (mayn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to)

Figure 3: Values of Modal operators

	Low	Median	High
Probability	possibly, perhaps	probably	certainly
Usuality	sometimes	usually, often, frequently	always

Figure 4: Values of modal adjuncts

As can be noticed in the figures, the variables of value are organized as a system of three values: low, median and high. These levels are intimately related to the judgment of the writer and/or to the role relationship established between her/him and the reader.

As modality represents the writer's angle regarding the reader and the validity of her/his proposition/proposal, when choosing – consciously or not – to modalize/modulate assertions, one signals doubt. According to the SFL view, even if one uses a high-value modal marker, still there lies an expression of doubt. However, the higher the modal marker used, the higher the commitment of the writer to the 'truth' her/his statement.

Additionally, modalization/modulation can be explicitly realized by the use of a grammatical metaphor of modality. These realizations enlarge the range of modal meanings beyond

those realized by modal verbs. In reference to probability, the metaphor can involve the first person, making the speaker explicitly responsible for the assessment, such as 'I think', 'I'm certain', or , on the contrary, making it explicit that the probability she/he is referring to is objective, as in 'it is likely', 'there is no possibility'.

Concerning metaphors of inclination and obligation, the subjectivity of a speaker assessment can be made explicit through first person, such as 'I want, 'I need', or it can be realized objectively as in 'it is necessary', 'it is permitted'.

Still related to the grammatical metaphorical representations, Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, p. 616) point out that there are many ways of speakers/writers expressing their opinions or of "dissimulating the fact that they are expressing their opinions", for example: 'it is obvious that…', it is no doubt that…' nobody can to deny that…'. According to the authors, all these expressions mean 'I believe'.

Having introduced the theoretical rationale to be used in the analysis of the corpus, I now move to the presentation of the methodological procedures adopted for the study.

3 Method

Identifying the contextual configuration of the genre 'reflective report' and the characteristics of this genre in reference to interpersonal features of modality has been the motivation for the pursuit of the present study. It is expected that the results can shed some light as to the bidirectionality between language use and social practices materialized in this.

3.1 Context, participants and data collection

The participants of this study are 8 students – 2 male and 6 female – aged from 22 to 28 enrolled in the eighth semester

of the Languages Program of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina taking their *practicum* course. Selection was made according to a single criterion: none of the participants could have had any teaching experience prior to the *practicum* period. Other variables such as sex and age have not been controlled.

At the *practicum* stage, students are supposed to observe classes by more experienced teachers, as well as plan and teach some classes under the supervision of a professor with large experience in supervision.

These classes take place in public schools in groups selected by agreement between the supervisor and the director/ regular teachers. The supervisor offers some possibilities of schools and schedules and student-teachers pick the one that fits their timetable best. The observation period constitutes the starting point of the *practicum*. Teacher-trainees spend a period of approximately 2 months observing the group of students with whom they will work later. Concomitantly, they start their own planning. Drafting and revising mark this stage, as teacher-students make a first version of a class plan, which is presented and discussed with the supervisor. After this formal 'class plan' is negotiated with the supervising professor and then approved, the following step is the practice *per se,* that is attended and again evaluated by the supervisor, who, at the end of each class, makes comments, suggestions, criticism. Finally, student-teachers produce a reflective report as a means of evaluating their own practice. This report is also handed in to the supervisor, who uses it as another way of assessment. Students do not receive detailed instruction as to how to elaborate their reports; they are simply instructed to reflect on their practice, their students' behavior and aspects that can be improved.

Each student-teacher plans and teaches about 8 classes. This teaching is followed by the reflective reports that constitute data for the present study. These reports, thus, have not been produced

for the sake of research, but rather as a naturally occurring classroom event required for the *Teaching Practicum* course. Participants, therefore, did not know beforehand that their texts would be used for this research. Only at the end of the semester were they invited to participate. All those who accepted and who had not had previous experience in teaching have been used as participants.

The reports used in this study are from the fourth class of the each trainee.

3.2 Data analysis

This study, which has language as its object of investigation, is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1989; Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthieseen 2004), which considers language as a system of meanings that mediates human existence. The analysis of the reflective reports' contextual configuration and of interpersonal meanings is therefore grounded on this theory.

Precisely, the contextual configuration of the 'reflective report' is supported by Halliday's (1989) and Halliday & Hasan's (1989) concept of context of situation, which is realized by the three variables of field, tenor and mode. These three variables are thus described so as to allow sound interpretations regarding the genre in question.

At the level of interpersonal meanings, analysis focuses on modality features. As for the analysis of data regarding modality, there has been an initial division between finite and non-finite clauses. The former have been put under scrutiny and the latter have been ignored. Finite clauses were then examined in order to identify markers of modality. These markers were classified according to a taxonomy based on Halliday's (1994) and Halliday & Matthiessen's (2004) view of how clauses are structured as interactive events regarding possible degrees of intermediacy existing between yes and no poles.

The taxonomy includes two categories: i) modalizers of probability/usuality and ii) modulators of obligation/inclination. The first category includes the following components of probability and/or usuality: a) modal verbal operators of, such as, *pode, poderia, iria*; b) modal adjuncts, as for example, *algumas vezes, provavelmente, talvez*; c) compound modal markers, such as, *talvez eu pudesse, sempre podiam*; d) grammatical metaphors of modality, such as, *acredito que, penso que, sinto que, acho que,* etc. The second category includes the following components of obligation and/or inclination: a) modal verbal operators, for example. *devo, deveria, preciso*, etc; b) passive verbs and adjectives, such as, *dispostos a, capazes de*, and c) grammatical metaphors of modality, as for example, é *necessário que, é importante que*.

After categorizing modal markers, density of modality was also calculated. In order to do so, based on the principles adopted by research carried out by Rezende & Hemais (2004), the total number of clauses was divided by the total number of modal markers of modality. As compound modal markers are analyzed as one single occurrence of modality, clauses such as *talvez eu pudesse tê-los ajudado mais* (T4), although containing one modal adjunct of probability and one modal operator of probability, were considered a single modalized/modulated clause.

A following step into the analysis of interpersonal features was the purpose for which modality was used. In this case, clauses containing modality were divided into clauses referring to animate as opposed to inanimate subjects. Animate subjects were further sub-divided into teacher-students, students and the teacher in general.

These analyses allowed the understanding of how, when, what and in reference to whom modality was used by the teacher trainees.

4 Results and discussion

Systemic Functional Linguistics is the theory that supports the analysis of data collected for the purposes of the present research. The use of this theoretical background is justified as it is a theory of meaning that integrates text and context.

This section is organized in two sub-sections, each of which concerning each of the research questions. As such, the first sub-section presents results related to the context of situation in which the reflective reports here analyzed occur. The second sub-section takes more of a micro approach as it investigates interpersonal meanings as revealed in the participants' use of modality.

4.1 Contextual configuration of the genre 'reflective report'

Systemic Functional Linguistics' basic assumption is that "language comes to living only when functioning in some environment" (Halliday, 1978, p. 28). In this vein, Halliday (1989); Halliday & Hasan, (1989) emphasize the dialogic nature of the language/context relationship in which context is assumed to be realized (or construed) in/by language and context is assumed to determine (or activate) particular linguistic choices. As already mentioned, the description of the three situational variables of field (what is going on), tenor (who is taking part) and mode (role assigned to language) allows linguists to describe the impact that the immediate context of situation has on potential choices of meanings which speakers make in their everyday use of language (Halliday, 1989; Hasan, 1996).

Thus, based on Halliday's theoretical constructs of field, tenor and mode, Hasan (1989) presents the related concept of Contextual Configuration (CC). According to her, a specific grouping of field, tenor, and mode values constitute a CC, which, in turn, enables predictions about any text in a given context, thus facilitating the identification of a 'potential' exemplar of a

specific genre. Summing up, the CC characterizes the situation in which a given genre is constituted.

Out of the contextual configuration, there are some predictions about the text structure of the reports that can already be made (Eggins, 2004). In a text whose field is related to the professionalization of future teachers, one is likely to employ a more formal language, characterized by the use of technical terms – lexical terms shared by 'insiders' of a given community.

Likewise, as the reflective report is a genre institutionalized in programs that teach how to teach and as it constitutes a mandatory assignment in these programs, we are led to believe that, at the tenor variable, power relations between supervisor and student-teachers affect the production of these texts, as it is the supervisor who evaluates the reports. Moreover, there is likely to be a certain social distance between agent roles, as the student-teacher and the supervisor have regular contacts but their involvement is restricted to the professional ground.

As for the written mode of reflective reports, it forwards a monologic textual organization characterized by non-interaction and by the use of language as reflection since it fosters a context-independent text as the writer has to bring the context within the text. Additionally, one is expected to come across polished language as the writing mode allows writers to plan, draft, revise and rewrite. Due to these possibilities of planning, drafting, revising and rewriting, composers can also employ a larger lexical density in their texts and a lower density of grammatical intricacy.

After presenting the predictions previously elicited, we now move to the results of the analysis of the data *per se*. The Contextual Configuration of the reflective reports associated to the variables field, tenor and mode is described as follows.

The **field** refers to a descriptive evaluation of a teaching experience. Not surprisingly, teacher-trainees write their texts aligned with the systems of knowledge and beliefs that permeate

the field of teaching/learning a foreign language, i.e., they demonstrate to be in line with the technicalities specific to their areas, as illustrated in *Falha também cometida ao ministrar essa aula foi em relação à* ***negociação dos significados*** (T4). As can be noticed, **negotiation of meaning** is a technical term that belongs to the field of foreign language teaching. Moreover, teacher-trainee and supervisor share a convergent objective: seeking and providing critical reflections on the teaching experience. This social activity is institutionalized mainly in the environment of teacher education programs.

For the variable of **tenor**, the reflective report presents the supervising professor and the student-teacher as agent roles. The professor is the specialist and the authority and has the power to exercise a certain degree of control over the teacher-trainee as she/he guides the procedures of planning and executing the class. The teacher-trainee, on the other hand, occupies a hierarchically lower position. An example that illustrates this asymmetry is presented as follows:

> *Porém, pelo fato de estar ansiosa,* ***acredito que tenha me concentrado demais em seguir os procedimentos, com medo de falhar****, e acabei por esquecer aqueles que eram essenciais para o entendimento das atividades pelos alunos. (T3).*

In the extract presented, the student-teacher makes it clear that she/he focused too much in following the procedures established in the plan because of a fear of failure. This focus in the procedures of the plan together with the fear of failing appears to demonstrate not only the trainee's insecure stance over teaching but also an insecure stance in taking decisions which have not been agreed on with the supervisor.

Another characteristic within the text structure of the reflective reports investigated regards the speech role adopted by the teacher-trainees. For the most part, as also illustrated

in the previous example, texts are composed of information, which is expected from the genre analyzed as much as from the role relationships established by the asymmetry previously mentioned. Student-teachers are not likely to demand actions from their supervisors, for example.

Moreover, as the contextual configuration allows us to predict, power relations are likely to occur in this genre, a finding that does happen in the corpus here investigated, materialized in the modality marker *acredito que* underlined in the last example provided. This asymmetry, marked linguistically, is probably a result of the inexperience of the trainee in opposition to the experience of the supervisor as much as to the 'power' that the supervisor holds as the one in charge of evaluating.

As for the **mode** variable, the role of language is constitutive as the text is the whole of the communicative instantiation. Language, which plays a monologic role in the texts investigated, is used for reflection rather than for action, which has already been mentioned when commenting on the speech role adopted by the writers in their reports, who mainly give information rather than demand it.

Additionally, the medium of language is written, a feature that may foster a formal use of language, often marked by i) nominalizations, ii) grammatical simplicity and iii) lexical density, for example. The texts analyzed do not reveal a high level of formality, which may be a result of the tenor variable of social distance. In this context, although the contact between supervisor and trainees is eminently professionally grounded, there is regular contact between these social participants and, for this reason, the social distance is not maximum but medium. Yet, formal manifestations of language have been encountered, as in *O assessoramento aos alunos mediante o diagnóstico de problemas me leva a perceber que é necessário tornar isto uma constante em minhas aulas* (T7).

This extract is characterized by the three aforementioned features, as the nominalization process – whereby any element or group of elements is made to function as a nominal group in the clause – promotes both grammatical simplicity and lexical density. If we 'open' the nominalization above, we could find a textualization such as *Ao assessorar os alunos, diagnostico problemas*.... a linguistic structure less marked by lexical density and more marked by grammatical complexity. In the reverse way, we could also nominalize the second clause, transforming it in something like *a percepção da necessidade da constância [do diagnóstico de problemas] em minhas aulas* and make it denser in terms of lexis and less complex in reference to grammar.

The discussion related to field, tenor and mode so far presented suffices to guide the reader into understanding the contextual configuration of reflective reports which, according to Hasan (1989), determines not only the lexicogrammatical metafunctions but also the macrostructural patterns of texts.

As previously mentioned, these three variables constitute the three kinds of meanings that language encodes. As interpersonal meanings constitute the focus of the second research question, the tenor variable of context will be examined in the sub-section that follows.

4.2 Interpersonal features of modality in the reflective reports

Apart from relating to the area of foreign language teaching, the texts analyzed reflect the writer's attitude, (in)security, judgment, commitment or detachment towards this given area and/or towards her/his audience (Halliday, 1994). As aforementioned, modality is the linguistic resource that expresses one's stance in the course of interaction and which deserves attention here.

Due to specificities of the genre 'reflective report' and of its contextual configuration, the corpus, not surprisingly, is mainly composed of propositions, i.e., the type of speech role adopted by

the writer is for the most part giving information. Questions, thus, are not present in the corpus. Proposals appear in less percentage, as the participant-writers do not make use of offers at all and make use of very few commands.

In pursuing the analysis of interpersonal meanings, the samples examined present a total number of 361 finite clauses, out of which 111 contain markers of modality. Amongst the clauses containing modality markers, we may find both propositions, materialized in modalization, and proposals, materialized in modulation. The following examples respectively illustrate modalization and modulation.

> *Muitos dos problemas enfrentados,* ***acredito****, vieram da minha falta de experiência e ansiedade em relação a isso.* (T1).
> (...) *o professor* ***deve*** *traduzir o enunciado após a explicação dos alunos* (...) (T1).

The first extract presents the teacher-trainee giving information as to how she/he interprets the problems faced in class, and the second presents a demand in reference to when a teacher must translate a given utterance, in this case, the writer demands a certain behavior from teachers in general.

As expected from a text characterized by a larger use of propositions as opposed to proposals, modalization has been more frequently encountered in opposition to modulation, as Table 1 displays.

Table 1. Modalized/modulated clauses

Total use of modality	111	100%
Modalized clauses	82	73,87%
Modulated clauses	29	26,12%

In the 111 modalized/modulated clauses presented in the previous table, there are, in fact, 114 markers of modality. Yet, as mentioned in the method section, a clause containing two modal markers – a compound modal marker – is considered one single clause.

Within the modalizations encountered throughout the texts (82 occurrences), all the markers of modality presented in Figures 1 and 2 (see Section 2) have been found. Verbal operators were the ones most frequently used, followed by grammatical metaphors, modal adjuncts and compound modal markers. Table 2 displays numerical results together with examples.

Table 2. Kinds of modalization

Modalization		
Kind of modal marker	**Occurrences and percentages**	**Examples**
Verbal operators	34 – 41,46%	*Isto me deixa contente, porém sei que a indisciplina também* ***pode*** *se tornar presente.* (T8)
Grammatical metaphors	27 – 32,92%	***Acredito que*** *a reflexão rápida na hora da sala de aula, quando as coisas estão acontecendo, também deva ser trabalhada por mim.*(T3)
Modal adjuncts	18 – 21,95%	*Por outro lado, em* ***algumas vezes****, não aproveitei da melhor forma as informações que os alunos me forneceram.* (T4)

Compound modal marker	03 – 3,65%	*(...)* ***talvez*** *eu* ***pudesse*** *tê-los ajudado mai negociando melhor cada pergunta...* (T6)

As for modulations, the order of preference of modal markers in the reflective reports is verbal operators, grammatical metaphors and one single occurrence of an adjective. Table 3 displays these results, bringing number of occurrences and percentages, as well as extracts from the samples.

Table 3. Kinds of modalization

Modulation		
Kind of modal marker	**Occurrences and percentages**	**Examples**
Verbal operators	23 – 79,31%	*O volume e o alcance da minha voz* ***devem*** *certamente ser trabalhados.* (T3)
Grammatical metaphors	05 – 17,24%	*(...) é necessário que muito aprimoramento seja feito para que cada vez menos falhas sejam cometidas.* (T5)
Adjective	01 – 3,44%	*Os alunos* ***foram capazes de*** *compreender as perguntas.* (T2)

Moving back to the total number of clauses in the corpus (361) and relating it to the number of modalized/modulated clauses, modality density constitutes an enlightening element of

analysis, as it reveals the extent to which writers of reflective reports submit to this linguistic resource. The aim of modality, as already presented, is to attenuate discourse in terms of personal commitment both with the truth of a proposition/proposal and with the interlocutor, in this case, the supervisor. Table 4 displays results concerning density of modality.

Table 4. Modality density

Total number of clauses	361
Number of modalized/ modulated clauses	111
Density	3,3

The density of 3,3 means that in every 3,3 clauses there is one marker of modality. According to these figures, texts picture student-teachers as insecure and powerless at times, which happens, apparently, for the same reason, namely (in)experience: insecure because of their lack of experience, and powerless because of the experience of the supervisor. In this sense, lack of experience makes writers use modality either not to show commitment with their statements, as in *Em relação à atividade 3,* ***pude*** *perceber uma ótima aceitação dos alunos*. (T5), or to conform to a style regularly found in the genre 'reflective reports' that tends to place trainees in a position of searching for the reader's – the supervisor – acceptance, as in *De qualquer forma, o resultado desta atividade* ***poderia*** *ter sido melhor se eu tivesse colocado as respostas dadas pelos alunos no quadro, conforme planejado***.** (T5).

The examples above can also be viewed from the perspective of value, which, as stated in the theoretical background, enables text producers to position themselves along scales that range from high to low value. In the case of the first example, ***pude*** is a verbal operator to which low value is attached. This signals that the commitment of the writer to her/his assertion is low,

i.e., either she/he is not certain that there was good acceptance from the students, or she/he is not certain that all the students demonstrated such acceptance. The use of this modality marker is here interpreted as an indication of insecurity.

The second example also displays the use of a low value modal operator: ***poderia***. Nevertheless, modality, this time, appears to have been used for another purpose. The student-teacher is now trying to please her/his reader and avoid criticism, as the plan has not been followed. In the extract, the trainee positions herself/himself with a low commitment to her/his proposition as she/he modalizes the belief that a given activity could have had better results in case the plan had been respected. We may even raise the interpretation that not following the plan was in fact a choice of the trainee, and in the report she/he is simply excusing herself/himself as a means of responding to a belief that she/he knows her/his supervisor holds.

Another finding that deserves attention regards figures concerning animate and inanimate subjects. Out of the total of 111 modalized/modulated clauses, 95 are animate (85,58%), as in (…) *apesar de me fazer escutar,* ***[eu]*** *não conseguia "preencher" a sala com a minha voz* (T1)*,* and 16 are inanimate (14,41%), as in ***O resultado desta atividade*** *poderia ter sido melhor* (...) (T5). This finding reveals that the focus of student-teachers' use of modality as they produce their reflective reports is on themselves and on learners rather than on activities, class components or techniques.

Within animate modalized/modulated clauses, the subject is either the teacher, the students or teachers in general. Nevertheless, the student-teacher is given more emphasis as she/he is the subject in 78 clauses, representing a percentage of 82,10% of the 95 occurrences. Students appear as subjects in 16 occurrences (16,84%), and teachers in general in only 1, corresponding to 1,05%. Numbers show what is expected in a genre whose purpose is the self-evaluation of a teaching experience.

The purpose for which modality markers are used varies. When the trainee is the subject, modality is most often used i) to present her/his failures, ii) to make prospections as for her/his future behaviors, iii) to praise positive aspects of her/his practice, iv) to show knowledge regarding teaching aspects, and also v) to raise general reflections. The presentation of failures is the reason that most motivates the use of modal markers. Examples of each of these uses are introduced as follows. Examples respect the order presented above.

i. *Antes de começar a aula **eu deveria** ter averiguado o local de colocação do mapa já que o êxito dos alunos dependia da utilização deste material.* (T2).

ii. *Porém **[eu] preciso** melhorar em alguns pontos, como organização no quadro, negociar melhor os significados das palavras o que requer, conseqüentemente, aprimoramento na fluência, e principalmente, oportunizar aos alunos maior espaço de atuação e participação para que a aula não fique apenas centrada na minha pessoa.* (T6).

iii. *Fiz corretamente a explicação da segunda atividade (atividade oral) e **[eu] consegui** negociar com os alunos.* (T1).

iv. ***[Eu] Tenho consciência que*** *um bom plano de aula facilita a vida do professor.*(T7).

v. ***[Eu] Sinto que*** *preciso da atenção dos alunos para desenvolver minha linha de raciocínio.* (T8).

In analyzing the value of the extracts presented, we notice only one use of a low value modal operator, namely ***consegui***

in extract iii. Interestingly, this is an example which places the student-teacher in a position of self-praising. Thus, we are allowed to infer that this is more a form of being polite to the reader and avoiding a conceited stance than a low commitment to the proposition.

In extracts i, iv and v, medium value modals have been used. Respectively, these modals represent the trainees' opinions as to their failures, knowledge of the profession and practical aspects reflected along the *practicum*. This medium value attached to the propositions represents a higher commitment of the student-teachers with their sayings, thus attaching value to their learning process via the experience of both teaching and reflecting about their practice.

Moreover, the high value modal exemplified in ii reinforces the interpretation that teacher-trainees have benefited from the practical experience of teaching and from the reflective activity of writing reports as they raise prospections of high value (***preciso)*** to be followed in their future pedagogical endeavors. Although we are aware that even high value modal markers carry an expression of doubt, we are also aware that the higher the value the higher the commitment to the assertion.

When students are presented as subjects of the clauses, markers of modality are basically used with the aim of showing success or lack of it, as respectively illustrated in the examples that follow.

> Ex. 1. *(...) felizmente ao final, eles* ***[os alunos] sempre conseguiam*** *dar as respostas que eu esperava.* (T6).
> Ex. 2. *(...) principalmente com os alunos que não tinham entendido o que era para ser feito e* ***[os alunos] não conseguiam*** *sequer começar a cruzadinha...* (T2).

Teachers in general, as previously mentioned, are cited only once as subjects of a clause that contains a marker of modality.

This clause is a proposal, thus a modulated clause, as seen in the example: (...) *o professor **deve** traduzir o enunciado após a explicação dos alunos* (...) (T1).

Apart from this single occurrence of proposal with reference to teachers in general, all the other modulated clauses in the corpus are directed to the trainees themselves, as in *Acredito que os principais aspectos que **devo** melhorar como professora são minha atitude em relação à turma e a habilidade didática e metodológica* (T3), which appears to show that this reflective activity has led them to make prospections as to their future obligations/inclinations as teachers.

This finding appears to corroborate previous discussions raised in this study as to the influence that lack of experience and power may have on student-teachers' discourse. As we see, trainees appear to have learned from the reflective activity of writing reports. Yet, they maintain a polite stance over their reader as they do not impose their 'truth'.

This sub-section has provided an account of how interpersonal meanings influence the micro-structure of the genre reflective report as student-writers position themselves both in relation to their propositions and to their audience. The discussions raised have enabled the understanding that the density of modality encountered in reflective reports is relatively high (3,3) and is marked by all kinds of modal operators presented by SFL, these modals varying both according to purpose and value.

5 Final remarks

Based on the bi-directional relation between text and context, this study proposed to investigate the genre 'reflective report' by means of analyzing its contextual configuration and its linguistic expression of interpersonal meanings.

Results signal that the contextual configuration of field, tenor and mode does influence the social practice of writing reflective reports as the linguistic expression of modality indicates that trainees tend to conform to the characteristics elicited in the analysis of the tenor variable. Trainees position themselves in a hierarchically lower level in relation to their supervisor.

They had a clear picture of their reader (the supervising professor) and attributed to her/him certain knowledge, values, opinions, perceptions and beliefs to which they responded as they produced their reports. In this sense, trainees appropriated the discourse of the supervisor into their own.

Nevertheless, we cannot affirm that modality, in the reflective reports, represents only a subordinate and dominated stance in the power hierarchy of the Teaching *Practicum* Course played by the student-teachers. Conversely, our discussion of results appear to signal that modality, apart from enacting power (or lack of it) of text producers in relation to their audience, has also enacted insecurity of student-teachers in relation to their representation of reality as they approached teaching in the position of a teacher.

Summing up, the overall picture that we get on the basis of the findings of this study is that the trainees reveal to assume a subject position marked by uncertainty and submission either due to their inexperience or to the influence of their interaction with their main addressee.

As for limitations, it is likely that many other approaches to the data here analyzed would also contribute to the investigation of the genre 'reflective reports'. Within systemic linguistics, for example, there seem to be several insightful ways of widening the analysis so far carried out. The study of the thematic structure of the clause and the study of ideational meanings are some examples of these possibilities. Moreover, genre studies offer different approaches to the investigation of social practices. Social rhetorical analysis constitutes an example.

Nevertheless, considering what has been done, I believe that the shortcomings of the present study, with its focus on contextual configuration and the expression of interpersonal features of modality, relate mainly to the number of samples collected.

In this view, this study could not only be enlarged in terms of samples, but also enriched if replicated with various samples from the same participant. This would allow us to verify whether, in the long run, student-teachers would portray themselves as more secure and less dependent on their supervisor.

Pedagogically, the textual analysis carried out in this research has shown its importance in understanding the bidirectionality between text and context, as it has brought into sight that the reported practice of trainees is founded on a high use of modality not only because of uncertainties and insecurities of student-teachers, but also because of the demands that the register variable of tenor imposes upon text producers.

Moreover, the findings of this study appear to show that trainees, although portraying themselves as powerless in reference to their supervisor and insecure with some issues related to their practice, go through a learning experience as they produce their reflective reports. This experience, at the same time that exposes teacher-students, has the potential to trigger a critical and reflective stance that constitutes the basis of a qualified professional whose practice is marked by informed decisions rather than by intuition, for example.

Finally, it is important to make it clear that both the activity of writing reports and the activity of analyzing these reports – be it under any theoretical basis – may bring fruitful insights into teaching and thereby into teacher education programs.

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The impact of familiarity with strategic planning and teacher-led planning on learners' L2 oral performance of focused and unfocused tasks

Raquel Carolina Souza Ferraz D'Ely

1 Introduction

From a task-based perspective[1] (Skehan, 1998), tasks have been a fertile niche for research in the field of Applied Linguistics, more specifically in Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA), the focus of which has varied from unveiling their potential for learning (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001; Crookes & Gass, 1993, for example) to understanding the cognitive processing they might trigger (Bygate, 2001b; Crookes, 1989; Ellis, 1987; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998;Skehan & Foster, 1995; Silveira, 2004; Vasquez, 2004; among others). Within this scenario, it has been of special interest to scrutinize the role of strategic planning[2] (Foster & Skehan, 1996) as a pre-task

1 Skehan (1998), among other researchers (Ellis, 2003, for instance) advocates the use of tasks for research and pedagogical purposes. He proposes a cognitive view of acquisition, and, catering to the methodological aspects of using tasks, he proposes a framework for task analysis and implementation, in which a cycle of tasks – pre-, post- and/or mid-tasks are used so as to diminish the cognitive load of the task, to build optimal conditions for learners performance and to provide the opportunity for a focus-on-form approach.

2 Based on Foster and Skehan (1996), strategic planning is understood as a performance condition in which learners are given opportunity to prepare a task prior to its performance. In

performance condition, and studies conducted in intact classroom environments and/or in laboratories have signaled to the positive impact of this performance condition especially on participants' oral performance (Ellis, 2005) .

The rationale behind strategic planning finds its ground in an information processing[3] perspective to SLA (McLaughlin & Heredia, 1996) in the sense that providing learners with some preparation prior to performance will enable them to devote attention to form in a meaningful context (Long, 1991, Schmidt, 1999) and to lessen the cognitive load of the task, as the learners may be more prepared to cope with the demands imposed by speaking on-line[4] (Ortega, 1999). Thus, the concept of strategic planning seems to be appealing not only to theory building but also to L2 pedagogy.

With a focus on building this interface between theoretical and pedagogical issues a bulk of studies have been conducted, especially in second language contexts (Elder & Iwashita, 2005; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Iwashita, McNamara & Elder, 2002; Kawauchi, 2005; Mehnert, 1998; Ortega, 1999, 2005; Skehan & Foster, 1995, 2005; Sangarum, 2005; Skehan & Foster, 2005; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005; Yuan & Ellis, 2003; Wigglesworth, 2001), and the trend of overall research results brings support to the important role attention plays in learning, as they have shown that there are trade-offs among the different dimensions of speech

the research paradigm, it has been proceduralized as 'guided' or 'detailed', when learners are instructed on the task of planning, or 'unguided' or 'undetailed' when learners do not receive any guidance and are free to plan their messages the way they wish.

3 Information processing approach to SLA (McLaughlin, 1987) is a non-modular view of language acquisition, grounded on a psycholinguistic account of skill acquisition (Anderson, 1995) and it basically postulates that learning proceeds from declarative to procedural knowledge; therefore ,practice which impacts on the control of attention is the key for controlled process to become automatized. Within this perspective, another important construct is the idea of restructuring, as a mechanism responsible for the integration of new knowledge into an existing system. Thus, practice, in this paradigm, extrapolates the idea of mere repetition (Anderson, 1995; McLaughin, 1987, 1990; MacLaughin & Heredia,1996; Stemberg, 2003).

4 See the review of literature session where there is an attempt to trace, historically, the origin of strategic planning.

performance[5]. That is to say that, due to the fact that learners operate under pressure, prioritizing certain goals happens at the expense of others (Skehan, 1996). In this sense, planning favors speakers' fluent and complex performance.

Nevertheless, studies focusing on the role of planning in the Brazilian context[6] (D'Ely, 2006; D'Ely & Mota, 2005; D'Ely & Mota, 2004, Guara-Tavares, 2008) have been dismissive of the positive impact of strategic planning in fluency (Guará-Tavares, 2008), and in overall performance (D'Ely, 2006; D'Ely & Mota, 2005; D'Ely & Mota, 2004). The limited impact of the processes triggered by strategic planning was explained on the basis of its individual character (i.e. students plan on their own), learners' difficulties in approaching the planning condition and implementing pre-planned ideas on-line. Thus, it was suggested that this process should be part of classroom activities so as to make learners familiar with and skilful at planning. Moreover, its individual nature could be expanded, and orchestrated by the teacher, in the form of instructional teacher-led sessions so as to prepare the learner, in the long run, with the tools to perform a task.

Another issue that has been raised is a criticism as regards the type of tasks being used in the planning studies, as the great majority has not employed focused but rather unfocused tasks. While focused tasks aim at triggering learners' attention to specific linguistic features and potentially push learners to use them, unfocused tasks are designed to elicit general language features (Ellis, 2003). Thus, claims regarding the impact of planning can be

5 Based on the assumption that speech is a multifaceted phenomenon, Skehan proposes that there are three dimensions that compete for the speakers attention while performing – fluency, that is, maintaining the natural flow of speech; complexity which implies using more elaborated language, and accuracy, which relates to linguistic control at a particular interlanguage stage (Skehan, 1996, 1998).

6 It is important to mention that the studies conducted in the L2 contexts solely compared planners vs non planners. The same is true for Guará Tavares' study (2008). However, studies conducted by D'Ely (2006), and D'Ely and Mota (2004, 2005) compared different performance conditions, thus planners were compared to learners who repeated, planned and repeated, and planned for repeating the tasks.

solely made concerning performance but not acquisition, as in the outcome of unfocused tasks there is no control of which features have been incorporated in the learners' repertoire (Ellis, 2005).

Bearing in mind the issues of familiarity with the planning condition, teacher-led planning as a pre-task activity, and the potential role of focused tasks to trigger focus-on-form (Long, 1991), the present study aims at unveiling the role that familiarity with the strategic planning condition and teacher-led planning may play in impacting learners' performance in focused and unfocused oral tasks in a classroom environment. Moreover, it also aims at shedding light on the issue of how learners perceive the processes they embark on when planning and their impact on their oral performance.

Besides this introduction, this research paper is organized in four main sections. Section 2 lays the theoretical background for the study as it reviews the construct of strategic planning and briefly summarizes results from mainstream studies in the task-based paradigm. Section 3 describes the method, posing the research questions, participants and context, instruments, data collection procedures and statistical techniques used for analysis. Section 4 reports the main findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. It also readdresses the research questions, and the findings are discussed in the light of research on planning and on L2 speech production. Finally, section 5 summarizes the main findings, points out the limitations, signals future avenues for research, and ends up with a reflection as regards applying strategic planning and teacher-led planning as pedagogical tools in classroom environments.

2 Review of the literature

2.1 The concept of planning in L2 speech models and within mainstream SLA

In order to understand the status that planning has gained in SLA, where it has been conceptualized either as a metacognitive

strategy that can be purposefully used by learners (Bialystok, 1981; Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chammot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1987, 1991) or as a performance condition amenable to manipulation that will provide learners the opportunity to focus-on-form[7] (Ortega, 1999, p. 110), there is a need to acknowledge that (1) by nature, this is an essentially cognitive processes, and that (2) the idea of manipulation of planning time is derived from insights in the L1/L2 speech production models[8].

As regards the cognitive nature of planning, which is qualitatively different from 'strategic planning', from an information processing perspective, this process is at the core of the speech system[9] (Levelt, 1989), being the driving force for message generation as it is planning (i.e. message conceptualization) that will trigger message formulation, and later, articulation. In relation to message generation, macro planning enables the speaker to retrieve information about the context and the interlocutor, for example, so as to decide what s/he wants to communicate. Concerning formulation, micro planning is responsible for the processes of making lexical choices and organizing the grammatical mappings for message conveyance.

As for the idea that manipulation of planning time may impact on fluent speech in an L1 (Bock, 1995; Goldman Eisler, 1968; Levelt, 1989), in the attempt to unveil the cognitive operations in producing language in L1, researchers have signaled that some variables are at play when determining the amount

7 Focus-on-form, a term coined by Long (1991), refers to a pedagogical intervention and a distinction has been made to its counterpart labeled focus-on-forms. While the former means that learners' attention is tuned to formal aspects of language within a meaningful context, the latter implies 'instruction per se', where there is a focus on a linguistic structure detached from its context of use.

8 See D'Ely, 2006 for an extensive discussion on this issue.

9 Levelt depicts the speech process in L1 as a very complex cognitive ability where four specialized components - the conceptualizer, the formulator , the articulator and the speech generation system - work in an autonomous and automatic fashion so as to generate uninterrupted fluent speech (Levelt, 1989). Although Levelt highlights that the system essentially requires linguistic and cognitive knowledge, he acknowledges that whole process is contextually and culturally bound.

of time devoted to planning. Of special interest is the nature of the information to be retrieved, which encompasses the issue of familiarity with the topic, which, thus, reflects on the cognitive load of the task the speaker might face (Levelt, 1989).

Thus, the on-line nature of the process of planning and the constraints that time may impinge on the complex process of message generation and formulation have provided a rationale for the facilitative role of strategic planning in SLA (Ellis, 1987; Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert 1998; Ortega, 1999 among others) because, if preparation plays a role in L1 speech generation, it is expected to play an even greater one in L2 speech production, where L2 knowledge is incomplete, and L2 oral production is more hesitant, with more slips of the tongue and shorter sentences Therefore, the process is much more controlled and uneconomical than in L1 (Poulisse, 1997).

Bearing these insights in mind, 'strategic planning'[10] can be defined as a metacognitive process (Ellis, 2003; 2005) that may lead learners "to purposefully exert some control, guidance and regulation over what they know, which, in turn, may optimize the process of organization of thought to foster their (oral) performance" (D'Ely, 2006, p.67).

2.2 A brief overview of empirical studies

As briefly discussed in the previous sections, the concept of strategic planning is appealing from both a theoretical and also a pedagogical perspective. Theoretically, it appears as a

10 As already posed in the introduction, strategic planning has been operationalized in two ways: 'undetailed'/unguided and 'detailed'/unguided. In strategic undetailed planning, learners are only given time to plan. In the detailed version, the purpose is to optimize learners' planning time by giving them metacognitive advice, in the form of instructions, on how they should go about attending to lexical choices, grammatical mappings, content and organization of the overall message (see Foster & Skehan, 1996). As regarding planning time, based on insights from Mehnert (1998) and Foster and Skehan (1996), for research purposes, generally 10 minutes have been devoted to it. Concerning other types of planning, teacher-led planning is a pre-task preparation which is conducted by the teacher prior to participants' performance (Foster & Skehan, 1999) in the form of instructional sessions.

possibility for maximizing learners' use of their attentional resources, which might lead them to embark on a process of focus-on-form within the process of message generation and formulation. Pedagogically, it appears as a pre-task performance condition that can be orchestrated and manipulated so as to create the optimal conditions for learners' performance (Ortega, 1999, 2005, Ellis, 2005).

It is with the aim of scrutinizing its effects on overall performance that various research foci emerged (see Appendix A for a summary of SLA studies on planning). To illustrate, researchers have investigated the role of strategic planning in spoken and written tasks (Ellis, 1987), the role of different types of planning on different task types (Skehan & Foster, 1995; Foster & Skehan, 1996), the impact of the source of planning (teacher-led/group) and focus of planning (Foster & Skehan, 1999), the impact of the amount of time devoted to strategic planning (Mehnert, 1998), the impact of strategic planning and tasks types in informal classroom assessment and/or formal assessment contexts (Wiggleswoth, 2001; Iwashita, Mcnamara & Elder, 2002; Elder & Iwashita, 2005), the relationship between strategic planning, task structure and learners' proficiency level (Tavakoli & Skehan 2005), the role of different strategic planning conditions as regards its form- focused foci (Sangarun, 2005), the relationship between the role of different types of planning, repetition and learners' level of proficiency (Kawauchi, 2005), the relationship between strategic planning and on-line planning[11] (Yuan and Ellis, 2003, Skehan & Foster, 2005), the relationship between strategic planning and learners' working memory resources (Guará-Tavares, 2008), the relationship between strategic planning and other performance conditions

11 On-line planning has been conceptualized as lack of time pressure in learners' performance, allowing them either to plan on-line or to monitor their output (Ellis, 2005). for a critique on Yuan and Ellis's (2003, 2005) operationalization of on-line planning see Skehan and Foster (2005) study.

such as repetition, strategic planning and repetition and strategic planning plus repetition (D'Ely, & Mota, 2005, D'Ely, 2006), the impact of learners' focus of attention while planning and the expansion of such focus during on-line performance (Ortega, 1999; Ortega, 2005; Sangarum, 2005), the relationship between strategic planning and form focused instruction in classroom settings (Mochizuki & Ortega 2008), and the role of collaboration in strategic planning, proceduralized as peer-planning (Xhafav, Muck & D'Ely, 2008).

From these studies, whose prevailing tenor is psycholinguistic, the majority has adopted a product-oriented perspective, has shown the positive and beneficial impact of this process on learners' oral performance (especially on fluency) and somehow lessening the trade-offs among the different dimensions of speech performance, has investigated the oral performance of intermediate learners, has been conducted in classrooms, but the tasks were designed for research purposes. Just a few have adopted a process-oriented perspective to scrutinize the planning process (Guará-Tavares, 2008, Ortega, 1999; Ortega, 2005; Sangarum, 2005) or at least attempted to unveil learners' actions while planning (D'Ely, 2006), have had results that challenge the positive role of planning per se – the Brazilian context and testing contexts – (D'Ely, 2006, Guará-Tavares, 2008, Iwashita, McNamara & Elder, 2002; Elder & Iwashita, 2005), and have had results derived from genuine classroom practices (Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008). This fact signals the importance of enlarging the scope of the investigation on planning so as to have a clear picture of which variables can hamper learners from profiting from planning, if pedagogical insights are to be incorporated in daily classrooms.

So far, from overall research results it can be tentatively suggested that the following issues are at play: (1) learners' level of proficiency (Skehan & Foster, 2005; Kawauchi, 2005), (2) learners' approach to instructions and how effective they may be in orienting learners' focus of attention (Kawauchi, 2005; Ortega,

2005), (3) learners' ability to sustain the effects of planning (Skehan & Foster, 2005, D'Ely, 2006), (4) learners' ability to plan effectively (Iwashita & Elder, 2005, D'Ely, 2006), (5) learners' familiarity with the planning condition (D'Ely, 2006) and (6) learners' approach to task structure and task type (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005).

Moreover, according to Batstone (2005), who takes a socio-cognitive view on planning, this process should be perceived as contextually bound. That is to say that an understanding of planning should consider learners' educational histories which include issues such as learners' identity, social context and learners' learning culture (either learner-centered or teacher-centered).

It is with this more comprehensive and pedagogical stance towards planning in mind, and also taking into account the insights from previous research, that I have attempted to understand the intricate relationship between familiarity with strategic planning, and teacher-led planning as a pedagogical intervention on the performance of two different task types – a focused and an unfocused task.

3 Method

3.1 Objectives and research questions

The purpose of this cross sectional, experimental, and quantitative study[12] (Nunan, 1996) is investigating the role of teacher-led planning and familiarity with the planning condition on Letras undergraduate learners' L2 performance of focused and unfocused oral tasks.

Therefore, the research questions guiding the present study are the following: (1) *Is there a difference in learners' performance*

12 The present study was conducted while the researcher was on a grant from Capes and, thus, had the opportunity to experience teaching situations at the under graduate "Letras" Program and at the graduate program (PPGI) of the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

of focused and nfocused tasks regarding fluency, complexity and accuracy? If so, (2) *which aspects - fluency, complexity and/or accuracy - seem to benefit the most from each of the conditions?* Taking into consideration the quantitative assessment of learners' performance and their appraisal of the performance conditions, the following questions might be posed: (3) *Does teacher-led planning and familiarity with the planning condition seem to play a role in affecting learner's oral performance*? If so, (4) *how do these two conditions affect learners' performances*?

3.2 Participants and context

The ten participants selected for the present study were randomly selected from an initial pool of 23 students who were attending the course LLE 5025 – Expressão Oral e Gramática em Língua Estrangeira, in the fifth semester of the *Licenciatura* Program at the Federal University of Santa Catarina – being 5 female and 5 male. Based on the answers provided in a profile questionnaire, participants' age ranged from 19 to 37, with a mean of 23.5 years of age. According to the level they are attending at that university, they are considered high-intermediate students. Most of the participants did not take the in-house placement test when starting the *Letras* Program, and started their majors since the first semester. On the average, the students have been studying English for about ten years except one participant who has been studying English for 20 years. At UFSC these participants have been studying English for 2 years. Concerning time spent abroad, most of the participants have, at least, spent one month in an English-speaking country.

As the learners were enrolled in a speaking and grammar class, the teacher perceived as important to unfold their views on these issues. In relation to speaking, the majority perceives it as a tool for communication and interaction, through which people convey thoughts, opinions and emotions, and which involves complex cognitive processing. Therefore, it seems that they do

have an informed view on this skill, and perceive it as socio-cognitive. When asked to define a fluent speaker in a foreign language, most said that a fluent speaker is one who can express oneself naturally, with no effort, maintaining the natural flow of a conversation, indicating that they see fluency as a temporal variable. Concerning grammar, the group defined it as a set of rules that has to be followed so that meaningful sentences can be built. As regards the role grammar plays in their learning, the majority said that it plays a major role. More precisely, they stated that to know grammar is to know the language, suggesting that they share a very broad view of grammar, since knowing grammar is to understand how a language works.

The LLE 5025 – Expressão Oral e Gramática em Língua Estrangeira is a course especially designed to develop oral skills in the English language. The course book adopted for the fifth phase is *Inside Out*; nevertheless, in the first semester of the year 2008, the teacher and the students agreed that the classes would be taught on a task basis (Skehan, 1998). That is, cycles of oral focused and unfocused tasks were built with various objectives, as for example 1) let learners know about important topics for their academic and personal lives such as their learning styles, their beliefs about the speaking skill and grammar, and theoretical and methodological tenets of the speaking skill and the task based approach; 2) give learners opportunity to work with the speaking skill in a systematized fashion, which meant that learners were exposed to different performance conditions, such as strategic planning (individual and teacher-led) and repetition condition, and faced situations which varied from informal classroom (individual and group) presentations, pair work, individual performances in the lab, to formal presentations of research papers, 3) provide learners the opportunity to work with grammar in a focus-on-form approach (Long, 1991), and 4) offer learners the opportunity to work with different discourse genres such as research papers, short stories, films and lyrics, as well as

performing different oral tasks such as personal narratives, story retelling, academic oral presentations and seminar discussions. The students and the teacher met on a weekly basis, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for one hour and a half, throughout the first semester of the year 2008.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Tasks used to elicit learners' speech

In the present study, based on Bygate, Skehan and Swain's (2001) and Ellis' views (2003)**,** a task is defined as "a tool devised for teaching, learning and/or research purposes, the performance of which may allow learners to undergo metacognitive processing to convey meaning for communicative and/or learning aims" (D'Ely, 2006, p. 9).

The students' speech production was elicited by means of two monologic tasks, a picture-cued narrative focused task and a video-based narrative unfocused task respectively. Monologic tasks were chosen because they (a) have been extensively used in the task based paradigm (see Ortega, 1999), (b) seem to be adequate to analyze speech at the level of fluency, complexity, and accuracy (see D'Ely, 2006, Freed, 1995; Lennon, 1990; and Fortkamp, 2000, for instance), and (c) seem to be more appropriate to see the effects of strategic planning as there is no interference of an interlocutor (Kawauchi, 2005). A picture-cued narrative task consists of the telling of a story that is depicted in pictures, whereas a video-based narrative task consists of the retelling of a video. Both stories present a fixed story line, but for the purposes of retelling the speaker might change the order of events without compromising the outcome of the story. The picture-cued narrative task used to elicit learners' speech samples comprised a series of six pictures of a couple who is having dinner at a restaurant – in each of them the husband imagines he is undertaking a series of actions against his 'beloved' wife.

The video used as a stimulus is a seven-minute Tom and Jerry cartoon portraying Tom's unfortunate love story. Neither the pictures nor the cartoon contained any oral or written clues, a fact that is supposed to aid the learners to focus on the events of the story, and in the case of the cartoon to prevent the interference of the listening comprehension process in the students' performance (D'Ely, 2006). These two tasks have already been employed in previous research (Bygate ,2001b, D'Ely, 2006, Guará-Tavares, 2008, and Silveira, 2004) and are adequate to be performed by learners with an (high) intermediate level of command of a given language. Moreover, both tasks are here-and-then tasks (Robinson, 1995), that is, they are characterized by the lack of contextual support when the learners are actually telling the story, and, therefore, require learners to retrieve the events previously stored and to integrate them with other information in semantic memory (Robinson, 1995, p.107). Thus, these tasks are considered cognitively demanding tasks, leading learners to embark in a process of using all their language resources, creating conditions for language development.

In the present study the learners produced two narratives, totaling a number of 20 speech samples which were tape-recorded, digitalized in audio and wave format and later transcribed. Conventions for transcriptions were adopted from Foster, Tonkyn and Wigglesworth (2000), Van Lier (1988), and Johnson (1995). The speech samples were analyzed in full due to variations in the time participants took to perform and learners' ability to sustain pre-planned plans (Foster & Skehan, 2006).

3.3.2 Questionnaires

In the beginning of the course, the students were asked to fill in a profile questionnaire, adapted from D'Ely (2006), with the objective of obtaining general information about the learners and their views on speaking and grammar. The students were also asked to fill in post task questionnaires after performing

their oral tasks. These questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions which aimed at unfolding the students' views on how they (a) felt about the task they performed, (b) evaluated their performance, (c) perceived the impact of familiarity with the strategic planning condition, (d) viewed the impact of teacher-led planning, (e) saw the impact of strategic planning condition, and (f) actually did while planning. Due to the fact that the 'filling-up the questionnaires' was an activity commonly performed after learners' performances, ultimately it functioned as an instrument for triggering learners' reflection on their overall process of learning.

3.3.3 Performance conditions

In the present study teacher-led planning (Foster & Skehan, 1999) is defined as opportunities for task preparation through instruction sessions, which were conducted by the teacher during four encounters and were part of the dynamics proposed in the Oral Expression and Grammar course. As regards the preparation for the first task (the Dinner task), the focus was on a grammar structure – the conditional in the past. Concerning the second task (the Love story task) the focus was enlarged, and issues related to the overall structure of narratives, and specific vocabulary to perform the task were dealt with.

The construct of strategic planning is operationalized as a 10–minute guided condition in which learners received metacognitive advice so as how to perform the planning task (i.e. to think of the most important events, to think of the vocabulary and grammar needed to perform the task) and were instructed to take notes during this process (Foster & Skehan 1996).

3.4 Procedures for data collection

The learners selected to participate in the study were part of a larger pool of students enrolled at an undergraduate course on speaking and grammar and were those who had attended the

classes in which the teacher-led sessions took place, and also those who performed the tasks on the same day, and therefore, the same interval of time between the performance of the first – The Dinner task, and the second narrative task – The Love story task. Due to the fact that the researcher decided to deal with the speech samples that were produced by the students during the first semester of the year 2008, at the time of writing the present article, they were asked to read and sign a consent form and see if they would agree to have their speech samples and questionnaires used for research purposes. The communication between the students and the researcher took place via e-mail.

Both tasks were carried out in a language laboratory where the students, individually, recorded their narratives. The dinner task was performed on June 3rd, 2008, while the Love story task was performed on June, 26th. Prior to the performance of the first task, the focused task, students had four classes in which they dealt with the grammar focus of the task – the third conditional, as well as with the vocabulary needed to perform the task.

The same procedure was adopted for the second task, the Love Story task, but this time there was not a specific grammar focus; rather, the focus was on the structure of the narrative and basic vocabulary regarding love stories. In the laboratory, each participant had a separate tape. In the focused task, the students were given a sheet of paper which portrayed, in a sequence of 6 pictures, the story of the couple having dinner, on which they could rely only while they were planning since they were not allowed to look at the story when performing orally. As regards the unfocused task, the students watched a 7-minute cartoon in the classroom, immediately after that went to the laboratory, and then, had to retell the story.

On both occasions, the teacher did not impose a time limit for students to perform their tasks, as the teacher wanted to maximize the conditions for task performance. Moreover, in both tasks they were instructed to strategically plan their narratives and had 10

minutes to devote to this task. The learners were encouraged to take notes, but were not allowed to look at them when performing. After finishing their performance, they were asked to fill in the post-task questionnaires, and were also allowed to listen to the narratives that were recorded, and could even record another version of the narratives if they were not satisfied with their first version (however, even though some students recorded another version, those transcribed for this study are the learners' first trial both in the focused and unfocused tasks).

3.5 Measures of L2 speech production

In order to assess learners' oral production, following the tradition within the task based paradigm, their speech samples were measured with general measures of fluency, complexity and accuracy, and assessed by the use of general measures (e.g. Bygate, 2001b; D'Ely, 2006; Fortkamp, 2000; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1995, 2005; to mention but a few).

Concerning fluency, here conceptualized as a temporal phenomenon (Foster & Skehan, 1995, p. 304) which implies the ability to cope with on-line performance, it was assessed by speech rate unpruned (see D'Ely, 2006; Lennon, 1990; Fortkamp, 2000; and Ortega, 1999 for instance) – a general measure that refers specifically to the speed of language production. Speech rate unpruned was calculated by dividing the total number of semantic units, that is, complete or partial words, including repetitions, by the total amount of time, in seconds, it took learners to perform the task. The resulting figure was multiplied by 60 so as to determine the number of words produced per minute.

Regarding complexity, a dimension that captures the use of more elaborated language and more varied grammatical patterning in speakers' performance (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 303), it was measured by an index of subordination[13] – number

13 According to Quirck and Greenbaum (1973) subordination is defined as "a non-symmetrical relation, holding between two clauses in such a way that one is constituent part of the other" (p. 309). A c-unit is defined by Foster and Skehan (1996) as "each independent utterance

of clauses per c-unit – as it has been considered a satisfactory measure to capture learners' use of complex language (Ellis, 2006, Foster & Skehan, 1996).

Taking into consideration the participants' performance, verbless clauses were considered as c-units, as they carried meaning and the verb of the sentence could be retrieved from a previous utterance. For example in the sequence of clauses produced by participant 1, in task 2 – P1/T2 – *and Tom just fell in love with her* (1 independent clauses) / *Love at first sight,* the second part of the utterance was considered as an independent clause since it was taken to mean '*It was love at first sight'*. The expression 'you know', was considered a 'filler', and in this study was not computed in the count of c-units as in this clause complex produced by participant 1, task 2 – *At last, Tom tried to buy a car X/ and to… to be… and won't be able to do that X / because he X didn't have any money /and started to X gave X to XXX You know… apólice de seguros…. I don't know /how to say that in English XX anyway*.

In this study a clause was considered as a subordinate clauses when it consisted of a finite (where the verb element is a finite), non finite (either bare infinitive, to infinitive, gerunds and participles), or even a verbless clause, plus any other clause element, such as subjects, objects, complement or adverbial (Foster et al., 2000, p. 326, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartak, 2007).

For the sake of illustration, the following clause complexes exemplify some instances of subordination produced by the learners. P1/T1 – *In the end X it was X the only thing X* (1 independent clause) /*he had got to do* (1 dependent finite clause) , P1/T2 – *and X Tom and Jerry were X in their yard* (1 independent clause) / *drinking some soda* (1 independent non-finite clause/gerund), P1/T2 – *but it was impossible X(1* independent clause) /*to convince*

providing referential or pragmatic meaning {being made up} of one single independent finite clause or else and independent finite clause plus one or more dependent finite or non finite clauses" (p. 310).

Tom (1 dependent clauses/to infinitive), P2/T2 – *then the kitty cat one day she met this rich XX good looking and X spontaneous X cat* (1 independent clauses) /*named Butch* (1 dependent clause/ participle), P3/ T2 – *so he could buy everything X* (I independent clauses) /*just as Tom* (1 dependent clauses/ verbless), P5/T2 So… *this whole situation made Tom* (1 independent clause) / *feel very very sad* (1 dependent clause/bare finite) .

Due to the fact that speech is characterized by some special features (Lennon, 1990) such as false starts, repetitions and reformulations, some criteria had to the established so as to deal with their occurrence within utterances. Following Foster et al. (2002), regarding false starts and/or reformulations, the utterance which was abandoned was not counted in the complex index, as it can be seen in this example from participant 5, in task 2 – *But this X doesn't keep uhm Tom /from trying to get the kitty ... ahm/ getting the kitty's heart* (2 clauses – 1 c-unit). In relation to repetitions, the repeated clause was not counted as a clause, unless it had been used for rhetorical purposes, a fact that did not happen in the participants' speech samples. The following utterance illustrates this case: *while they were ... while they were having dinner* (1 clause – 1 c-unit, P10/T1). In order to determine complexity in this study, the number of independent and dependent clauses was divided by the number of c-units produced, resulting in a figure that expresses the total number of clauses per c-unit. The higher the index, the more complex the speech is.

Finally, with regard to accuracy assessed by means of general measure – number of errors per c-unit (Foster & Skehan, 1996) – it reflects form with a focus on a very conservative stance towards speech, as it implies error-free performance. An error is perceived as a "breach of the language's code" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 117), therefore any deviation from the norm in relation to syntax, morphology and lexical choice was considered an error. These examples illustrate some instances of erroneous performance: *yesterday a couple was having*

dinner at a fancy restaurant in downtown (P8, T1, erroneous use of a preposition), *Tom try to buy a car X /to impress her* (P8, T2, erroneous use of verb tense), *made her not shout anymore with him* (P9/T1, erroneous use of preposition and word order), *as double as big as him* (P 6/T1, erroneous lexical choice). To provide an index of accuracy, the total number of errors were counted and, then, divided by the total number of c-units. As further criteria to consider an instance as an erroneous performance, mispronounced words were not considered as far as the listener could grasp the meaning of the word. This was also true for errors in stress and intonation. When learners self corrected themselves, the erroneous instances were not computed, for example – *it was love at first side... sight* (P5/ T2), *and then he buys a really old car X with huge ... lots of problems* (P8/T2). If learners made use of a communication strategy, such as code switching, the noun phrase uttered in Portuguese was not counted as an error. For instance participant 1, task 2 – *At last, Tom tried to buy a car X/ and to... to be... and won't be able to do that X /because he X didn't have any money /and started to X gave X to XXX You know...apólice de seguros.... I don't know /how to say that in English XX anyway.*

3.6 Interrater reliability and analysis of the data

Due to the quantitative nature of the study, the analyses of learners' speech samples regarding complexity and accuracy conducted by the researcher were double checked by different raters. For complexity, two raters who hold a master degree and a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics respectively analyzed different portions of the data. For accuracy, two raters – an undergraduate student with extensive experience in teaching and a professor with a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics – analyzed the complete speech sample. Despite the fact that statistical treatment was not run so as to verify interrater reliability, in the cases when the scores from any of the raters differed from those

of the researcher, the parts re-analyzed the discrepant instances and discussed the doubts until a consensus was reached

In order to compare the means of each participants' performance between a time interval, that is a person's score in condition 1 and the very same person's score in condition 2, a parametric test based on normally distributed means is used – the dependent t-test (Field, 2005). This was the case of my sample, as the very same students performed twice, first a focused task, then an unfocused task and their performance assessed in terms of three dependent variables: fluency, complexity and accuracy. Descriptive statistics were run in order to portray the participants' performance in the two trials and to verify whether the data were normally distributed. For the measure of speech rate unpruned in the first task it was found not to be normally distributed (kurtosis = 3.929). Thus, for this variable a non parametric version of the t-test – the Wilcoxon signed rank test – was used (Field, 2005). The SPSS 10.0 program was used, and following the tradition in social sciences, for all analyses, a probability level was set at .05.

4 Data analysis and interpretation

In order to scrutinize the impact of the nature of tasks (focus vs. unfocused tasks) on participants' oral performance, taking into account the role of teacher-led planning, strategic planning and familiarity with this metacognitive process, statistical analyses were run. I will start with the presentation of the descriptive statistics of the performance of the same participants in the focused and unfocused tasks in the 3 measures of L2 speech production under analysis: (a) fluency – assessed by means of speech rate unpruned, (b) complexity – assessed by means of number of clauses per c-unit, and (c) accuracy – assessed by means of number of errors per c-unit. Secondly, taking into account the fact that the scores were not normally distributed for

the variable fluency – speech rate unpruned in the first task[14], the results of the Wilcoxon signed rank test for this measure, and the results from the dependent *t*- test for the complexity and accuracy measures will be presented. Thirdly, the participants' answers on the post task questionnaires will be discussed so as to know, from the participants' perspectives, their views on the processes they experienced while planning and performing the tasks. Finally, the results will be discussed and interpreted under the theoretical tenets presented in the review of the literature section.

As shown in table 1, comparing the performance of participants in the first (focused) and second (unfocused) task, the first aspect that can be noticed are the small differences between the means in each of the variables, a fact that signals that there might not be statistically significant differences between the participants' performance in the two different moments. Nevertheless, the means for the first task are slightly higher for complexity, as opposed to the higher means in fluency and accuracy in the performance of the second task, a fact that might corroborate the impact of trade-off effects among different dimensions of speech performance. That is to say that, due to the fact that participants' attentional resources are limited, devoting attention to a specific dimension of the oral performance happens at the expense of others (Foster & Skehan, 1996). An examination of the kurtosis score reveals that the data for the variable fluency in task one deviates from normal distribution (3.929) since the score is much higher than the accepted 2.0.

Dependent Variables	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
speech rate unprunned task 1	10	98.83	58.99	157.82	88.7050

14 See subsection 3.6, in the method section, on page 11.

speech rate unprunned task 2	10	46,37	70,13	116,50	92,4500
complexity - clause/ C-unit - task 1	10	1.13	1.64	2.77	2.0770
complexity clause/ C-unit - task 2	10	.71	1.36	2.07	1.8180
accuracy errors/ C-unit - task 1	10	1.17	.16	1.33	.5790
accuracy errors/ C-unit – task 2	10	.46	.14	.60	.3410
Valid N (listwise)					

Table 1A Descriptive statistics

Dependent Variables	**N**	**Skewness Statistics**	**Std. Error**	**Kurtosis Statistics**	**Std. Error**
speech rate unprunned task 1	10	1.699	.687	3.929	1.334
speech rate unprunned task 2	10	.133	.687	-.413	1.334
complexity - clause/ C-unit - task 1	10	.867	.687	-1.144	1.334

complexity clause/ C-unit - task 2	10	.71	.687	1.111	1.334
accuracy errors/ C-unit - task 1	10	1.17	.687	-.242	.1.334
accuracy errors/ C-unit – task 2	10	.46	..687	.-1.368	.1.334
Valid N (listwise)			.687	3.929	1.334

Table 1B Descriptive statistics

In order to check whether there was difference in the performance of the participants in the first and second tasks for the fluency measure, results from the Wilcoxon signed rank test (see table 2) were taken into consideration and revealed that, though the difference between scores was not significant (p=0.386), most learners improved their performance in the second task, as there are seven participants that have a positive rank (see table 3). In a rather speculative manner, this result can tentatively suggest that teacher-led planning, which in the second task had a clear focus on vocabulary, and the effect of strategic planning itself facilitated the process of lexical searches on-line, therefore enabling learners to impose a more accelerated rhythm to their performances (Skehan, 1996).

	speech rate unprunned task 2 - speech rate unprunned task 1
- Z	-,866
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,386

Table 2 Wilcoxon signed rank.

Fluency measure.
Test statistics

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Speech rate unprunned task 2				
	Negative Ranks	3	6,33	19,00
Speech rate unprunned task 1				
	Positive Ranks	7	5,14	36,00
	Ties	0		
	Total	10		

a speech rate unprunned task 2 < speech rate unprunned task 1
b speech rate unprunned task 2 > speech rate unprunned task 1
c speech rate unprunned task 1 = speech rate unprunned task 2

Table 3
Wilcoxon signed rank
Fluency measure

Concerning participants' complex and accurate performance, results from the dependent *t*-test for the measured number of clauses per c-unit and number of errors per c-unit in the focused and unfocused tasks, depicted in table 4 , also show a lack of statistically significant differences in the two measures (p=.103 for complexity, and p=.068 for accuracy). Nonetheless, statistical significance was approached for the accuracy measure, a fact that might indicate that the optimization of performance conditions (teacher-led planning, strategic planning, familiarity with strategic planning and with the task itself) plays a role and positively impacts participants' accurate performance. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that, despite the lack

of statistically significant differences, which might be due to the learners' highly complex performance in both tasks (see table 1, descriptive statistics on page 13, participants produced almost 2 clauses per c-unit), the first task (focused), due to its very nature (it led learners to use the conditional in the past) yielded a more complex performance. Therefore, there might be some room to speculate that the nature of the task does have an impact on which aspects learners might prioritize when producing oral language (Bygate, 2001b; D'Ely, 2006; Ellis, 2003).

Variable	Task	**M**	SD	MD	*p*
Complexity	1	**2,0770**	,4354	,259	,103
(clauses/C-unit)	2	**1,8180**	,2156		
Accuracy	1	**,5790**	,3926	,238	,068
(errors/C-unit)	2	**,3410**	,1669		

Table 4

Dependent t-test

Complexity and accuracy measures

Recapitulating, the first and second research questions guiding the present study asked whether: (1) *there was a difference in learners' performance in focused and unfocused tasks in terms of fluency, complexity and accuracy and which aspects – fluency, complexity and accuracy – seemed to be most benefited in each of the conditions.* In the light of the aforementioned statistical results it can be said that there are no statistically significant differences in terms of participants' fluent, complex and accurate speech irrespective of the nature of the task performed. Thus, to make a very general claim, it might be said that the optimization of performance conditions, that is, previous preparation for the task through teacher-led planning sessions, time to prepare their performance, and performance of familiar tasks (narrative tasks) made all learners, in both performances, capitalize their resources to all aspects of speech performance (Xhafaj, Muck & D'Ely,

2008), a fact that is, indeed, a positive one, especially because it brings support to the treatment of the speaking skill in a controlled fashion in classroom environments (Bygate, 2001).

Nevertheless, despite the lack of statistically significant differences between participants' performance, a fact that might signal the beneficial effect that the combination of performance conditions might impinge on learners, these results merit further inroads on the issue of focused and unfocused tasks and the conditions under which participants performed.

As regards fluency, in line with D'Ely's (2006) results, that did not find differences in fluency (measured by speech rate unpruned) across groups[15], the measure itself might be a too general one for differences in fluent performance to be perceived. According to Goldman Eisler (1968), an impact on speed fluency, which is the dimension at play in this study, might also be dependent on how learners manage the use of filled and unfilled pauses when performing, and this measure was not under scrutiny in the present study. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that seven out of the ten participants had an increase in their speed of speech delivery, while only three experienced a decrease, as depicted in table 5 that shows learners' raw scores in each of the tasks.

	FOCUSED TASK 1 - DINNER			UNFOCUSED TASK 2 - LOVE STORY		
Learners	Total number of semantic units (A)	Total amount of speech in seconds (B)	Speech rate unpruned (A) /(B) x60	Total number of semantic units (A)	Total amount of speech in seconds (B)	Speech rate unpruned (A) /(B) x60

15 It is important to bear in mind that in the present study the groups are composed by the same participants, and that the independent variable is the nature of the task, that is a focused and an unfocused task.

1Madonna	352	358	58,99	532	274	116,50
2Mad Hatter	346	331	62,72	597	410	87,37
3Carol	209	150	83,60	252	146	103,56
4Dan	288	230	75,13	240	171	84,21
5Denver	536	473	67,99	436	373	70,13
6Flor	395	235	100,85	586	342	102,81
7Kitty	235	149	94,63	326	245	78,84
8Simon	324	203	95,76	373	220	101,73
9Mana	303	203	89,56	124	87	85,52
10Rock	313	119	157, 82	441	282	93,83

Table 5

Raw scores

Fluency measure/ speech rate unpruned

> score > speech rate

As shown in table 5, in their second performance, while participant 1 almost doubled the number of words produced per second, participant 10[16] experienced substantial losses.

Participants 2 and 3 increased their performance substantially, producing almost 20 words more per second, while participant 7 performed in the opposite direction. Finally, participants 4, 5, 6 and 8 presented minor increases while participant 9 performed in the opposite direction. All in all, the picture shown reveals, on an individual basis, an impact on fluency in the second task, a fact that might reflect the impact of strategic planning, that enables learners' to activate the vocabulary and structures needed to perform the task prior to performance, and the teacher-led sessions, which focused on the structures of narrative and on the vocabulary needed to do the task. These two variables possibly had an impact on the process of message conceptualization and formulation (Levelt,1989, 1995), and, therefore, maximized the processes of lexical

16 This learner had a terrible cold in the time of data collection, and talked in a more calm pace and coughed during her performance, thus this probably helped in decreasing her speech rate in the second task.

searchers on-line. Thus, when performing, rather than using their rule based system, which requires more time and attention capacity, learners made use of their lexically stored knowledge (Skehan, 1998), a fact that led to a more fluent performance.

The same pattern of results emerge for complexity, in the sense that there were no statistically significant differences in learners' performance in the first and second task. Before going on to the discussion of this result, I would like to observe that there might be a need for a complexity measure that captures not only syntactic complexity but which also takes into consideration the occurrences of verb forms, tense, modality, voice and aspect of both finite and non finite verbs (see Foster & Skehan, 1996; D'Ely, 2006). Moreover, the use of coordination as a means of eliciting syntactic complexity should also be considered. Therefore, caution is the word at play before raising claims in relation to lack of differences in complex language use.

It is important to bear in mind that in both tasks learners produced complex narratives. Therefore, to start with, due to the fact that learners' speech samples were already complex in the first moment there might have been little room for improvement[17] between the first and second trials (Woltz, 1988). Moreover both tasks, in spite of being different in the expected outcome, since an unfocused task aims at eliciting general samples of language whereas a focused task is designed to elicit a specific linguistic structure (Ellis, 2003), were similar in the sense that they were there-and-then tasks. According to Robinson (1995), there-and-then tasks elicit greater complexity and accuracy, and, thus, this might be one of the reasons why significant differences did not arise. The following excerpts from the first and second tasks of learner XX illustrate the use of subordinate clauses in each moment.

17 This claim has to do with a power law of learning, first put forward by Woltz (1988) and to put it simple it means that the less a person know the more room for improvement this person will display. In this case because the learners had already produced a high index of complexity, it may be expected a smaller impact of treatment or learning.

Excerpt 1 – P 10 – 1st task
ahm Well … if the woman had known about her husband's nasty thoughts/ she probably would have run away/ and left him /because his thoughts were very violent and very aggressive/ and XX well ahm … she probably wouldn't * like to keep being married to someone /that has thoughts / of killing her
7 clauses – 2 c-units

Excerpt 2 – P 10 – 2nd task
And (…) XXX latter Tom ahm … he signs a lot of contracts/ promising X all he has in life X even the leg and * arm and (…) XX/to buy a car/ to impress the kitty.
4 clauses – 1 c-unit

In spite of the fact that the first task was a focused task and aimed at giving learners the opportunity to use the third conditional, a complex structure, it was expected that such task would yield more complex narratives. In fact, despite the lack of statistically significant differences, if we inspect the results of the raw scores (see table 6 for raw scores on complexity), the performance in the first task was indeed more complex for six learners, whereas four learners produced slightly more complex narratives in the second task. It is important to notice that when participants produced more complex language, such as participants 2, 3, 4, and 7, there were minor increases, while the level of complexity suffered a more drastic loss for learners 8 and 10, and there were minor losses for participants 1, 5, 6 and 9.

	FOCUSED TASK 1 - DINNER			UNFOCUSED TASK 2 - LOVE STORY		
Learners	Total number clauses (A)	Total number of C-units (B)	Clauses per C-unit (A) /(B)	Total number clauses (A)	Total number of C-units (B)	Clauses per C-unit (A) /(B)

1Madonna	352	358	58,99	532	274	116,50
2Mad Hatter	346	331	62,72	597	410	87,37
3Carol	209	150	83,60	252	146	103,56
4Dan	288	230	75,13	240	171	84,21
5Denver	536	473	67,99	436	373	70,13
6Flor	395	235	100,85	586	342	102,81
7Kitty	235	149	94,63	326	245	78,84
8Simon	324	203	95,76	373	220	101,73
9Mana	303	203	89,56	124	87	85,52
10Rock	313	119	157, 82	441	282	93,83

Table 6
Raw scores
Complexity measure/ number of clauses per c-unit
> score > complexity

This result might signal one important issue, the nature of the task learners performed: the narrative there-and–then focused task. Although Ellis (2003) states that it is the learner who determines which aspects of performance will be prioritized, taking this result into consideration, it could be argued that the nature of the task may push learners to engage in certain linguistic operations. In this sense focused tasks may play an important role in developing learners' risk taking attitude towards producing more complex speech, a fact that, in the long run, might lead to interlanguage developments. Thus, performing a focused task has a pedagogical value since it may provide the opportunity to teach and lead learners to use specific features communicatively, under 'real operating conditions' (Johnson, 1988 in Ellis, 2003).

Results for accuracy follow the same trend as those of fluency and complexity; however, as regards the measure of error per c-unit, though statistical significance was not attained, it was approached. As already said in the beginning of the discussion of these results, the impact of the teacher-led sessions, the opportunity to strategically plan the performance, coupled with the familiarity with the planning process and the

type of task itself, led learners to perform more accurately. Thus, the optimization of performance conditions plus practice in the previous encounter with a similar task seem to have enabled the proceduralization of declarative knowledge (Bygate, 2001b; D'Ely, 2006), a fact that made learners work with larger chunks, freeing up their attentional resources and allowing them to focus on not making mistakes.

Considering learners' individual performance in the second task, it can be perceived (see Table 7 for raw scores for accuracy) that eight out of the ten learners produced more accurate performance in the second task. This is in itself an important result because, according to Ellis (2005), accuracy is the dimension of performance which is less amenable to changes, and in the case of task two learners performed more fluently and accurately.

	FOCUSED TASK 1 - DINNER			UNFOCUSED TASK 2 - LOVE STORY		
Learners	Total number errors (A)	Total number of C-units (B)	Errors per C-unit (A) /(B)	Total number errors (A)	Total number of C-units (B)	Errors per C-unit (A) /(B)
1Madonna	17	27	0.62	18	60	0.30
2Mad Hatter	5	30	0.16	23	42	0.54
3Carol	15	17	0.88	5	22	0.22
4Dan	3	17	0.17	8	21	0.38
5Denver	14	38	0.36	6	36	0.16
6Flor	10	37	0.27	12	55	0.21
7Kitty	9	20	0.45	10	30	0.33
8Simon	24	18	1.33	16	30	0.53
9Mana	20	19	1.05	6	10	0.60
10Rock	9	18	0.50	5	35	0.14

Table 7

Raw scores

Accuracy measure/ number of errors per c-unit

< score > accuracy

To sum up, results have signaled that learners' performance is impacted by the very nature of the task they perform, the measures used to asses the different dimensions of speech performance and the combination of performance conditions. Moreover, the teacher-led sessions allied with familiarity with the planning processes might have minimized the trade offs among the different aspects of speech performance and led learners to perform at their best on both occasions. Therefore, caution has to be exercised before making strong claims in relation to the use of focused as opposed to unfocused tasks[18] so as to perceive language development (Ellis, 2005).

Undoubtedly, it has to be borne in mind that in the present study learners were engaged in metacognitive processing, undergoing pre-task teacher–led sessions with the purpose of preparing them to perform the tasks and having the opportunity not only for strategic planning, but also for getting familiar with this process. In this sense, this might be an optimal process of task planning since, on the one hand, pre-task teacher led sessions diminish the cognitive load of the task to be performed (Skehan, 1998), and on the other, strategic planning, besides making learners more comfortable with the task (Ortega, 1999; 2005), provides them the opportunity for focusing on form. Moreover, due to the fact that learners had already solved 'problems' in relation to message conceptualization and formulation, they could better cope with simultaneously attending to the different dimensions of speech performance when performing on-line.

Furthermore, all these processes were part of their daily classroom routine; thus, the results for both performances have also to be understood as a byproduct of a series of pedagogical

18 In the task-based paradigm there is an extensive tradition for using unfocused tasks as a tool for unveiling learners' speech production, thus, researchers have been using general measures to assess participants' speech production. Due to the fact that there is not a specific focus on a pre determined linguistic structure, Ellis (2005) states that the results derived from these studies cannot bring claims regarding acquisition because there is not evidence for the correct incorporation of the structure in learners' linguistic repertoire. Therefore, he advocates the use of focused tasks.

actions. In this sense I believe that the conservative scope for defining acquisition brought by Ellis (2005) can be enlarged in the sense that, if opportunities for strategic planning seemed to make learners more strategic when planning, if this process seemed to make them have more control over already learned forms as it seemed that they could effectively implement planned ideas on-line and incorporate some new linguistic structures into their repertoire, acquisition may have been triggered.

Having brought the results from the quantitative analysis, which attempted to explain from a cognitive stance the intricate relationship between the performance of focused and unfocused tasks, pre-task teacher-led planning, the planning processes and familiarity with this processes, I shall now turn to the third and forth research questions which asked whether (3) *teacher-led planning and familiarity with the planning condition seem to play a role in affecting learners' oral performance and how do learners perceive the impact of these two conditions.*

As previously stated, taking into account the results from a cognitive perspective, I have speculated that pre-task teacher-led planning, the planning process and familiarity with the process itself have played a positive role in impacting learners' performance due to the various cognitive processes that these activities might have triggered. For the majority of the learners familiarity with the planning condition seemed to be a positive process. However, concerning the role of teacher-led planning, only a minority said to perceive the sessions as fruitful in spite of the fact that it can be noticed, in their narrative, the use of vocabulary, expressions, and grammar structures that were dealt with in class, not to mention their high level of complexity in the first task, and fluency and accuracy in the second performance.

Irrespective of what was verbalized, the fact of reflecting upon the processes that they had experienced, being able to verbalize them, and having taken some new actions derived from

this reflection on their previous learning experiences appears to be in itself beneficial. According to Efklides (2005), it is important to unveil learners' assessment of the process that they embark on while learning. Some of the metacognitive[19] actions that can be included are their judgment of learning, and their feeling of difficulty as well as their feeling of confidence since learners' awareness of their cognitive abilities is of paramount importance as they can be used purposefully and strategically to improve skill performance (Wenden, 1987).

Having briefly reflected on the overall scenario brought by the learners, the positive impact of familiarity with the planning condition and the perceived lack of impact of teacher led planning still merit further thoughts. To start with, in order to better understand why learners have viewed familiarity with the planning process as beneficial, and thus seemed to take advantage of this process when performing it, is important to unfold how learners have perceived this process, since as Ortega (2005) states, "learners' own perceptions of pre-task planning is an important piece in helping us understand how and why planning worked, and in what ways it may not have worked for everyone, at least not to the same degree" (Ortega, 2005, p.87).

From the learners' perspectives, planning helped in conceptualizing the message (Dan - *Being faithful to the story line*, Delta - *It impacted on the story itself*, Flor - *It also helped with the structure of the story*, Mana - *It helped me to organizing thoughts*), formulating the message (Madonna - *It especially helped me with the words and grammar to do the task*, Flor - *It helped with my lexical choices*, Mana - *It helped organizing expressions*), in performing on line as it maximized their retrieval process (Carol - *I did not have a hard time remembering the words I needed to do the task*, Flor - I*t impacted upon my fluency*, Simon

19 Metacognition may be defined as the ability humans have to "reflect on our own cognitive condition, to asses how successfully our own memory and thought process are operating" (Ashcraft, 1994, p.77).

- *It helped me in remembering the facts, I was able to maintain the ideas fresh in my mind*, Mana - *remembered the sequence of events*, Rock - *It helped me in remembering the order of facts*).

The learners' answers are in line with previous studies in the area (D'Ely, 2006, Guará-Tavares, 2008a, Ortega, 1999, 2005), in which learners viewed planning as beneficial. This positive attitude towards planning can also be perceived when learners of the present study acknowledged that familiarity with the planning condition helped not only to diminish the burden of performing on line (Simon - *I did not get so embarrassed*, Delta - *The more you practice, the better you are*, Kitty - *The first time I was really scared, as I was not used to record. Now it comes much more natural)*, but also aided in the task of planning itself (Delta - *I've improved my planning skills*, Flor - *I already knew what I had to do so I was more focused*, Carol - *I learned how to plan more quickly*, Rock- *I already knew what do in order to be effective when planning, what kind of notes that would help her in the task,* Kitty - *I knew that I had to keep the ideas in my mind so that I would be able to remember everything on line,* Mad Hatter – *The more you practice, the more you improve, I learned how to plan in a better way specially getting to know what to do with the short time I had to plan*).

As regards learners' perceived lack of impact of teacher led planning, it can be speculated that it was due to the vocabulary problems learners faced. One problem mentioned was in retrieving vocabulary that was learned in class (Rock – *I really couldn't remember most of the structures and vocabulary that were dealt in class*, Flor – *I did not use much of the love vocabulary dealt in class*, Madonna - *I did not think of these issues while planning*, Delta - *It did not really help because I was so nervous that I have forgotten to think of what was done is class*). Another problem was related to the learner's lack of perceived validity of the teacher-led sessions, that was verbalized by only one of the learners (Mana - *I could not really see the relation between what*

was discussed in class and the tasks because, at the end, I did not use the 'forms'). On the other hand, and somewhat surprisingly, those who acknowledged the value of teacher-led planning have highlighted its positive impact especially on the optimization of the retrieval processes in relation to vocabulary (Carol – *I could use new vocabulary and remembered the expressions*, Kitty - *It helped a lot, especially the vocabulary*, Simon – *It helped a lot with the vocabulary*). In general, it can be said that learners' voices are in line with theoretical insights postulated in the task-based paradigm and an information processing view of speaking (Bock, 1995; Goldman Eisler, 1968; Levelt, 1989). First, previous preparation for the task might indeed diminish the cognitive load of the task (Skehan, 1998) and thus maximize learners' performance. Second, such preparation might have an effect on message formulation – the core of speech production process (Levelt, 1989, 1995). Therefore, when performing in an L2, the processes that take place in the formulator require more control (Fortkamp, 2000, Poulisse & Bongaerts, 1994) as knowledge of the language is incomplete, maximizing lexical searches on-line might have also maximized learners' oral performance. Nevertheless, it has to be highlighted that learners' perceptions are idiosyncratic in nature, and learners have reported facing difficulties, despite the fact that overall performance was positively affected. This is an issue that deserves further scrutiny and has implications both for designing teacher-led activities, as well as making learners perceive its connection to future classroom actions.

To put it in a nut shell, regarding the perceived impact of familiarity with the planning condition, from the participants' perspectives it can be said that it has positive effects regarding affective and cognitive variables. In relation to the former, it diminishes the burden of performing on-line; regarding the latter, it encompasses actions such maintaining the focus while planning, implementing rehearsal strategies, undertaking effective actions while planning and optimizing planning time. Concerning

teacher-led planning, both the perceived lack of its effectiveness and its positive impact are mainly related to cognitive aspects. In the first case, the core of the problem lies in retrieving what was previously learned, whereas in the second its usefulness lies in maximizing the process of lexical searches on-line. All in all, irrespective of the perceived impact of the processes under scrutiny, the fact that learners embarked in self-assessment and the results that derived from it, can be seen as positive and possibly as catalysts of learners' development (Wenden, 1987).

5 Concluding remarks

The objective of the present study was twofold: first it aimed at bringing some clarification on the role of familiarity with the planning condition and teacher-led planning through the quantitative inspection of learners' speech samples on two oral tasks – a focused picture-cued narrative and an unfocused video-based narrative. Second, it attempted to unveil learners' perceptions on the impact of being familiar with the planning condition and the teacher-led instructional sessions conducted prior to the performance of the tasks.

Concerning the quantitative results, there were no statistically significant differences between the performance on focused and unfocused tasks. These results were explained under a cognitive perspective, signaling the positive role that familiarity with strategic planning may have played in maximizing the process of planning itself, thus diminishing the burden of performing on-line in both tasks. This fact corroborates the potential of pre-task preparation (i.e. strategic planning and/or teacher-led planning) in fostering the process that takes place in the conceptualizer and formulator in on-line performance.

Regarding the qualitative analyses, on the one hand, there is a perceived feeling of the usefulness of the planning process,

derived from familiarity with it in terms of cognitive and affective variables. It has made learners more skilful at planning, besides promoting a feeling of comfort for the performance of the task. On the other hand, concerning teacher-led planning, either its effectiveness or lack of it is perceived on a cognitive basis as learners either acknowledge problems with retrieving processes, or advocate in favor of the maximization of the process that takes place in formulating the message as a byproduct of previous preparation.

The present study is to be seen as a modest, tentative and preliminary attempt to shed some light on the learning outcomes of classroom practices that have aimed at incorporating the process of strategic planning and teacher-led instructional sessions. Therefore, the findings should be taken with a great deal of caution as a number of limitations can be accounted for. Considering the most commonly cited ones in quantitative studies, I shall start mentioning the limited sample size that should be enlarged for claims to be generalized; the constraint regarding the participants' level of proficiency, as it is known to impact on how learners approach performance; the use of other tasks rather than monologic ones to provide a more naturalistic context for data collection; and finally the use of statistical techniques which would should include a multiple component analysis so as to allow for establishing the independence of the different dimensions of speech performance.

For the present study it is especially important to mention that due to the fact that there was not control for task effects, the claims for the lack of differences between focused and unfocused task merits further research. Another relevant issue concerns the inclusion of a more qualitative and discursive approach for assessing learners' speech. As for fluency, the functions that pauses and hesitations may perform in L2 speech could be examined. In relation to complexity, the incidence of framing, which contemplates complexity of discourse could be

investigated. Finally, regarding accuracy, a set of criteria could be established to determine which mistakes hamper communication and thus should be considered as such.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it should be highlighted the existing paradox of conducting quantitative studies in real classroom settings, as there will always be the tension between achieving ecological validity and the severe control of an array of variables, a fact which is not always possible. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that there might be a very thin line separating the constructs of focused and unfocused tasks, as it is the learner, after all, the one who decides how to communicate his/her communicative intentions irrespective of the requirements of the task itself.

To conclude, the feeling that I have when reporting research results always leave me with the impression that much more important than the answers that have been provided are the questions that remain open for further scrutiny. In this sense, I believe that the findings of the present study may serve as a pathway for signaling the possibility of building an interface between theoretical and pedagogical issues. Ellis (1995) has stated that SLA and Language Pedagogy have different agendas, and that this relationship is still unbalanced. I truly believe that the research on tasks might be a conciliatory niche in which practice may be informing theory building in the broad field of Applied Linguistics.

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APPENDIX A

Summary of SLA studies on strategic planning

Study /Major objective	Operation-alization of Planning	Task- Type	Subjects	L1/L2	Measures employed	Main findings
Ellis (1987) The effects of planning on learners' accurate performance	Write Write and tell Tell	Two story retellings	17 Post beginners	Various/ English	Accuracy: SOS regular past, SOC irregular past, SOC copula	Beneficial aspect of planning on accuracy in both planned written and planned oral performance, depending of the target item being tested and the nature of the linguistic feature
Crookes (1989) The impact of planning on learners' oral performance	Tell plan and tell (10')	2 Lego tasks 2 Map tasks	40 (20 per group) TOEFL 430-650	Japanese/ English	Complexity: Words/utterance, Subordination/T-Unit, Subordination/ utterance Lexical range Accuracy: Words/ error-free T-Unit	Planning time led to more fluent and complex output
Ortega (1999) Planning triggering learners' focus of attention to form and the expansion of such focus during on-line performance	Tell Plan and tell (10')	2 story retellings	64 (32 dyads) Advanced	English/ Spanish	Fluency: pruned speech rate per second Complexity: words per utterance/ type-token ratio (number of different words) Accuracy: target like use of nouns and articles	Planning led learners to focus on form, resulting in the use of more complex language but not to significant gains in accuracy

Mehnert (1998) The influence of different amounts of planning time in learners' oral performance.	Tell Plan and tell (1,5 and 10') 	Phone messages Instructions task Exposition task	31 Early intermediate	Various/ German	Fluency: Unpruned, pruned speech rate/ Mean length of run/ Number of pauses Complexity: words/c-unit (lexical density) Accuracy: Errors/100 words Error-free clauses:	10' planning – a progressively greater effect on fluency/ optimal for complexity 1´planning impacts on accuracy
Foster and Skehan (1996) The effects of different planning condition- detailed/ undetailed – under three different task types – narrative, interview and problem solving	Tell Detailed plan and tell (10') Undetailed plan and tell (10')	Personal information exchange Narrative (mixed pictures) Decision making	62 (31 dyads) Pre intermediate	Various/ English	Fluency: reformulations/ pauses Complexity: Clauses/ c-unit Accuracy: % error free clauses	Task type – planning impacted the performance of less familiar tasks Planning conditions – a linear effect on complexity and fluency/ an unlinear effect in terms of accuracy Trade-off effects among fluency, complexity and accuracy
Sklehan and Foster (1995) The effects of planning time and post-task activity on learners' oral performance	Tell +/- Post task Plan and tell (10') +/- Post-task	Personal information exchange Narrative (mixed pictures) Decision making	40 Pre intermediate	Various/ English	Fluency: Number of pauses Complexity: Clauses/ c-unit Accuracy: % error free clauses	Planning positively influenced all measures Post task condition did not necessarily lead to an accurate performance

Wigglesworth (2001) The impact of task variation on learners' performance in informal classroom assessments.	Tell Plan and Tell	Giving instructions Negotiating to obtain info Negotiating to obtain good and services Obtaining info through a telephone inquiry Negotiating a complex/ problematic spoken exchange	80 Various levels	Various/ English	External rating/ experienced raters + learners evaluation 1. Subject performance (grammar/fluency/ cohesion/vocabulary/ intelligibility/ communicative effectiveness 2. Task difficulty 3. Subjects evaluation of task difficulty	More complex performance at the expense of fluency and accuracy A complex relationship between task characteristics and task conditions

Study /Major objective	Operation-alization of Planning	Task- Type	Subjects	L1/L2	Measures employed	Main findings
Yuan & Ellis (2003) The effects of strategic planning and on –line planning on learners' oral performance	NP - Non-planning (no pre-task planning + time pressure to perform- 5 PTP - Pre-task Planning (10' undetailed planning + time pressure to perform – 5' OLP - On-line planning (no pre-task planning + no time pressure to perform	Picture –cued narrative task	42 EFL intermediate learners	Chinese/ English	Fluency- speech rate unprunned. speech rate pruned Complexity – number of clauses/ c-unit, total nº grammatical verb forms, mean segmental type-token ratio Accuracy- % error free clauses,% accurately used verbs On-line planning – length of time taken to accomplish the task, nº syllables produced, total nº syllables minus all repeated, replaced ore reformulated syllables	PTP impacts upon fluency and complexity OLP impacts upon accuracy

Ortega (2005) Strategic undelatied planning under a process-product perspective	Plan and Tell (undetailed strategic planning)	narrative	44learners Different proficiency levels	Spanish/ English	Qualitative analysis of post-task interviews	Central role of rehearsal and retrieval operations during pre-task planning. Planning plays a crucial role in learners' organization of thoughts, their access to lexis and grammar and, their elaboration of content and vocabulary. Individual differences and learners' language expertise mediates learners' perception of planning and how they may benefit form it.
Sangarun (2005) 1. The impact of strategic planning under different foci- minimal SP, meaning-focus, form focus and meaning-form focus	Minimal strategic planning Meaning focus planning Form focus planning Meaning-form focus planning	Instruction task Argumentative task	40 intermediate EFL learners	Thai/ English	Fluency- speech rate unprunned, speech rate pruned, % total pausing time Complexity – nº clauses/T-unit, nº words/T-unit, nº subordinate clauses Lexical complexity – nº types per performance Accuracy – past tense markers	Manipulating learners' focus of attention to meaning + form seems to be more effective than when the focus is either on meaning or on form The impact of planning on different dimensions of learners' oral performance varied according to task type

Kawauchi (2005) 1.the impact of different forms of strategic planning combined with repetition 2. The role proficiency level plays in impacting the process of strategic planning	Plan- Rehearse-Tell .Planning . as writing Planning as rehearsal Planning as reading	Oral narrative here-and-now task (3 different sets of 4 pictures Library, Jogging, Hiking	40 EFL learners (16 intermediate, 12- high intermediate and 12 advanced	Japanese/ English	Fluency – speech rate unprunned, % of repeated words Complexity – nº clauses / T-unit, nº words /T-unit, nº subordinate clauses Accuracy – past tense markers	Great impact of planning on fluency, complexity and accuracy for the High intermediate group. Level of proficiency plays a role in impacting learners' oral performance. Different types of planning did not influence learners' oral performance. Overall, availability of planning time leads to some improvement
Skehan & Foster (2005) 1.Confirmation for previous research results 2.the impact of on-line planning 3. the influence of length of time 4. the use of additional measures of fluency and accuracy	Plan and Tell Undetailed strategic planning condition Detailed strategic planning condition Surprise condition	Decision making tasks Four situations	61 ESL intermediate L2 learners	Various/ English	Fluency - % total silence, end of clause pause, mid clause pauses, filled pauses, mean length of run Complexity – nº clauses/AS-units Accuracy - % error free clauses, proportion of error free clauses greater than 5 words	Detailed strategic planning produces the highest accuracy levels. There's a marked effect of time – learners cannot maintain high levels of performance

Study /Major objective	Operation-alization of Planning	Task- Type	Subjects	L1/L2	Measures employed	Main findings
Elder & Iwashita (2005) The role of strategic planning in impacting learners' oral performance in a testing context Learners' perception of task difficulty and their attitudes towards the task	Focus on the planning condition	narratives	193 EFL learners	Various/ English	Same measures of Foster & Skehan(1996)	Little support for the beneficial effects of strategic planning on learners' performance may be due to (1) task characteristic, (2) the conditions under which learners planned, (3) the presence of a practice of a fatigue effect. Overall, the testing situation itself might constraint the positive effects of planning
Tavakoli & Skehan (2005) Task structure and learners' proficiency level affecting learners' planning process Learners' perception of task difficulty	Plan/Tell	Here-and-now structured and unstructured picture cued narrative Football task (more structured) Picnic Task Unlucky Man Task Walkman (less structured)	80 EFL elementary and intermediate adult female learners	Farsi/ English	Fluency – mean length of run, speech rate, number of pauses, mean length of pauses, total amount of silence, false starts, reformulations, replacements and repetitions Complexity – n[a] clauses/ AS units Accuracy - % error free-clauses	Performance on structured tasks was more fluent than performance on unstructured tasks. Regarding accuracy the two structured tasks yielded more accurate language than the two unstructured ones. Only one of the structured tasks generated greater complexity. In relation to the effects of planning, the three dimensions of performance are significantly advantaged. In relation to learners' proficiency level, there is advantage of the intermediate group upon the elementary group

Guara-Tavares (2005) The relationship between WM capacity , learners' planning processes and its impact on oral performance	Tell Unguided planning / Think aloud protocols/ Tell	There-and-then picture cued narrative tasks (a series of 8 pictures) (Restaurant, Gift)	12 EFL intermediate adults learners	Portuguese/ English	Fluency – speech rate unprunned and pruned	Rehearsal and retrieval operations are at the core of the processes triggered by strategic planning. Participants with a higher WM capacity produce more accurate speech when performing under a non-strategic planning condition. No differences between higher and lower spans participants emerged in performance under the strategic planning condition. Overall, strategic planning seems to have minimized individual differences in WM.

We interact in the world according to the diverse modes of knowledge which are built – and, simultaneously, are built on – through language. The implications of such complex dynamics, interweaving both the referentiality and the self-referentiality of language, have been at the core of all fields of knowledge, notwithstanding institutionalized frontiers. They have also been at the core of recent studies in Applied Linguistics – and, specifically, in the teaching and assessment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

As Lêda Maria Braga Tomitch points out in her Introduction, the four articles comprising this volume converge in their view that language is socially constructed. They also offer a broad view of contextualized practices in EFL teaching and assessment through a wide range of issues and debates: test design sensitive to prior knowledge diversity; distance teaching concerned with the socio-cultural aspects of academic writing; reflective reports as a textual genre constituted by contextual configuration and modality features; and the impact of familiarity and strategic task planning on the oral performance of EFL.

This volume will undoubtedly contribute to scholarship that involves contextualized practices in the teaching, learning, and assessment of L2, given the breadth and relevance of the issues examined herein from the view of *language as an ongoing, socially-constructed process*.

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