

Journal of English Language  
Teaching and Learning  
Tabriz University  
No. 17, 2016

## **The Influence of Affective Variables on the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency in L2 Oral Production: The Contribution of Task Repetition\***

**Mohammad Amir Yousefi\*\***

Assistant Professor of TEFL, University of Isfahan

### **Abstract**

The main purpose of the study reported in this paper was to examine the interrelationships between L2 risk-taking, English learning motivation, L2 speaking anxiety, linguistic confidence, and low-proficiency English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' speaking complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). A secondary purpose was to test whether task repetition can influence the level of the mentioned affective variables as well as to study its effects on the development of CAF in L2 oral production. To this end, a questionnaire designed to measure the affective variables was given to 142 Iranian female pre-intermediate EFL learners. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of two groups: task repetition or control. The participants in the task repetition group were required to do an interactive story telling task on five occasions, each one week apart. Meanwhile, the participants in the control group were required to perform the task only on occasions one and five at an interval of three weeks. The questionnaire was given to them at the end of the study too. The findings suggest that: (1) learner variables influence the development of L2 proficiency components (CAF) and (2) task repetition can help EFL learners work on their language problems in a familiar setting and hence help them develop their interlanguage.

**Keywords:** affective variables, task repetition, complexity, accuracy, fluency

---

\* Received date: 2015/10/20    Accepted date: 2016/06/06

\*\* **E-mail:** M.Amiryousefi@fgn.ui.ac.ir

### **Introduction**

Fundamental to research in the area of second language acquisition is that L2 proficiency and performance are aspectual and should be considered in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (henceforth CAF) (Ellis, 2003; Vercellotti, 2015). Complexity is defined as the degree to which language learners' output is elaborate and varied, and the degree to which language learners are willing to risk using their interlanguage structures that are “cutting edge, elaborate and structured” (Ellis, 2003, p. 113). Accuracy is, on the other hand, characterized as the degree to which language learners' output is based on the rule system of the target language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). It refers to language learners' ability to handle their interlanguage complexity to avoid producing erroneous structures (Ahmadian, 2011; Ellis, 2003). Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) argued that language learners who give priority to accuracy try to have control over the elements they have already internalized and are cautious and conservative toward L2 use. Finally, fluency is defined as language learners' ability to process the target language at the speed natural to its native speakers without unnecessary pauses. It happens when language learners give primacy to meaning over form.

However, Housen, Kuiken, and Vedder (2012, p.9) asserted that the development of L2 proficiency components (CAF) are influenced by a number of factors such as learner variables, including anxiety and motivation, and identifying such factors can be important for understanding the nature of CAF components. To date, research studies on the influence of learner variables such as anxiety, risk taking, confidence, and motivation (e.g., Chu, Lin, Chen, Tsai, & Wang, 2015; Pyun, Kim, Cho, & Lee, 2014; Rueckert, 2013; Saglamel & Kayaoglu, 2013; Zhang, 2013) have mainly focused on language proficiency and language skills such as speaking in a general and broad sense. They have failed to examine if these variables influence CAF components differently, and if different tasks and activities can influence the level of these variables.

Repetition in its recent conceptualization has also attracted some attention. In its new conceptualization, it is not seen as an exact replication or the verbatim repetition of the cues over and over, but as an iteration that can help learners with their subsequent performance of

the task and hence can lead to syntactic variation (Larsen-freeman, 2012). Task repetition as an educational practice oftentimes employed in language classes involves asking language learners to repeat the same task or a slightly different task at intervals. Current research points to the positive effects of task repetition on the cognitive dimensions of language learners such as increasing working memory and processing capacity (Ahmadian, 2011; Hawkes, 2011). Task repetition is, consequently, expected to be especially beneficial to learners at low-proficiency levels, because these learners have more limited processing capacity (Ellis, 2005). However, research studies on task repetition have mostly focused on intermediate language learners. Furthermore, Larsen-freeman (2012) denoted that task repetition gives a sense of security to language learners, because they have something to hold onto in the subsequent performance of the task. A sense of security is specially needed by language learners with a heightened state of anxiety and a lower state of risk-taking, confidence, and motivation. Task repetition is, therefore, expected to influence language learners' affective aspects as well. However, this area of inquiry has been to date under-researched.

The present study is, therefore, an effort to fill the mentioned gaps in the literature by studying the relationships between L2 risk-taking, English learning motivation, L2 speaking anxiety, linguistic confidence, and L2 speaking CAF. Additionally, it inquires whether task repetition can influence the development of CAF in low-intermediate EFL learners' L2 oral production and the level of the mentioned affective variables.

### **Review of the literature**

#### **L2 risk-taking**

Risk-taking is one of the affective factors tied to personality. Risk-taking in the context of language learning is defined as the willingness to try out the language and not being afraid of mistakes and embarrassments (Pyun et al., 2014). Pyun et al. (2014, p.56) argued that risk-taking “enables the student to experiment in the L2, implement intelligent guesses, learn from mistakes, and overcome a fear of communicating in a foreign language”. Brown (2014) also asserted that language learners with a good level of risk-taking can be more successful, because language learners need to gamble a bit and get out

of the safe zone of their mother tongue to be able to communicate in the language being learned. In the same vein, Jonassen and Grabowsky (1993) concluded that students who are risk-takers are process-oriented, have a higher degree of tolerance for errors, are more willing to try out new elements, tend to use more complex structures in their L2 production, and are less accurate than cautious students. Similarly, Samimy and Tabuse (1992) and Luft (2007), as cited in Pyun et al. (2014), denoted that risk-taking influences L2 performance and can be a determinant of language learners' final grades especially at lower levels.

### **Linguistic confidence**

Linguistic confidence is defined as language learners' perceptions of their language competence (Pyun et al., 2014). Yu and Shen (2012) argued that linguistic confidence is very important, because it determines whether one must communicate or not. The results of their study showed that there was a positive correlation between linguistic confidence and foreign language competence. Dörnyei (2008) also argued that linguistic confidence is a very strong motivational factor in language learning, which influences language learners' desire for communication and their integration with L2 culture. It is also found that language learners with a high level of self-evaluation of their language proficiency have a higher level of willingness to communicate (Hodgson, 2014). Moreover, Öz, Demirezen, and Pourfeiz (2015) found that linguistic confidence affects a language learner's desire to communicate and his/her capacity to achieve his communicative goals. Similarly, Fallah (2014, p.2) contended that linguistic confidence “is positively related to L2 proficiency, communication frequency, L2 motivation, willingness to communicate, extraversion, and openness to experience and negatively to communication anxiety in EFL context”.

MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) outlined two important components for linguistic competence: (1) lower level of language use anxiety and (2) self-perceived L2 skills. The first component is affective and deals with the discomfort experienced when using an L2; language learners who have a higher degree of language use anxiety perceive themselves as less competent, regardless of their actual competence, and engage in fewer attempts to use L2. The second component, perceived L2 competence, is cognitive and corresponds to

self-evaluation of one's competence in the target language skills; language learners who have a high level of linguistic competence, regardless of their actual competence, involve themselves in higher attempts to develop their L2 system and communicate in it. It can, consequently, be hypothesized that linguistic confidence can have a positive influence on L2 attainment and communication.

### **English learning motivation**

Another affective variable that incontrovertibly plays a major role in foreign or second language learning is motivation (Fallah, 2014; Yu & Shen, 2012). Dörnyei (2000) concluded that motivation affects three interrelated aspects of human behavior: "the choice of a particular action, persistence with it, and effort expended on it" (p. 520). Similarly, Amiryousefi and Tavakoli (2014, p. 38) defined language learning motivation as "a derive, a desire, or an emotion which has three major components namely, motivational intensity, a desire to learn, and a positive attitude which fuels L2 learners to strive to learn". As such, language learning motivation can be considered as a force that can help language learners start, regulate, and sustain their language learning efforts (Pyun et al., 2014).

Motivated language learners, therefore, find language learning very enjoyable and have a strong desire to be successful in it. Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) denoted that motivated language learners have a positive attitude toward the L2 community and have a higher willingness to communicate in it. In the same way, Murray, Gao, and Lamb (2011) argued that motivation is crucial in learners' autonomous learning, can encourage language learners to express their identities through the language they are learning, and can make what they learn part of what they are. Motivation can, therefore, be a strong determinant of L2 attainment (Gardner, 2010). However, motivation is believed to be a complex and multifaceted construct consisting of different types and layers (Pyun et al., 2014). Motivation, as used in the present study, is defined as language learners' desire and commitment to learn English.

### **L2 speaking anxiety**

Language learning anxiety is defined as a feeling of uneasiness, apprehension, and nervousness experienced by language learners while learning or using a language (Papi, 2010). Language learning anxiety is

a notorious affective variable, which is believed to have negative effects on language learners such as making them avoid to communicate via L2 and to participate in the related activities. It is also believed to impede language learning process (Brown, 2014; Papi, 2010; Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). Brown (2014), however, argued that L2 anxiety can be both debilitating and facilitative. Facilitating anxiety is considered to be a positive force, which can make language learners deal with the task at hand in a more rational way and try to do it in a more accurate and more interpretive way. Debilitative anxiety, on the other hand, is considered to be a negative force, which can lead to avoidance behaviors. Based on the results of the studies done on L2 anxiety, Brown (2014) concluded that anxiety up to a specific degree can contribute to L2 learning process.

Some research (Horwitz, Tallon, & Luo, 2010; Pyun et al., 2014) has shown that language learners experience the highest amount of anxiety when they are required to have oral production. This type of anxiety is called L2 speaking anxiety, which is defined as the apprehension associated with real or anticipated communication through L2. Language learners who have this kind of anxiety “tend to feel reluctant to risk expressing themselves, fear making mistakes, and be afraid of being less competent than their peers” (Pyun et al., 2014, p. 55). L2 speaking anxiety is believed to affect language learners’ L2 oral production and can make them avoid interpersonal communication (Woodrow, 2006).

### **Task repetition**

Task repetition is defined as repeating the same or a slightly different task at intervals (Ahmadian, 2011). At first glance, task repetition may seem to be one of those verbatim practices or replications used by the followers of behaviorism. However, task repetition in its new conceptualization does not involve imitation or copying something as it is, rather it involves repeating both content and form and saying something again and again (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). During the first repetition or encounter with a task, language learners can have the opportunity to organize the content and select the lexico-grammatical elements required (Mojavezi, 2013). Most of the conceptualization, formulation, and articulation are also done during the initial performance of the task; this can help language learners free up some

attentional resources to be allocated to other aspects and dimensions of L2 production during the subsequent performance or repetition of the task (Bygate & Samuda, 2005).

Task repetition is proved to have beneficial effects on language learning. It can increase memory capacity and can, consequently, be an aid to working memory, can develop automaticity in and faster access to language components, can free up processing space and hence leads to a focus on form in the subsequent performance of the same task, can result in a change to the underlying procedures employed and hence leads to variation, and can even give language learners a sense of security, because they have something to hold onto during the subsequent performance of the task (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). The concept of task repetition is based on the fact that human beings have limited attentional capacity and cannot focus on both meaning and form at the same time. Because in communicative tasks meaning has primacy over form, language learners may choose to focus on meaning during the first performance of the task (Loewen, 2015; Mojavezi, 2013). Through task repetition, language learners buy time not only to do mental processing on what they want to communicate but also to access and (re)generate morphosyntactic elements more efficiently, effectively, and accurately (Ahmadian, 2011).

The effects of task repetition in its new conceptualization have been explored by several experts (Ahmadian, 2011; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Mojavezi, 2013; Saeedi & Rahimi Kazerooni, 2013). For example, Lynch and Maclean (2000) collected the relevant data through a communicative task called 'poster carousel' in which the participants who were 14 participants on English for Cancer Conferences for oncologists and radiotherapists took turn visiting the posters they had already made, asking questions with regard to the posters, and responding to the questions. By repetition, Lynch and Maclean (2000) meant keeping the communication goals constant with variations in content based on the visitors' questions. The results of their study revealed that task repetition in the sense used in their study can make some linguistic changes and can help language learners develop their interlanguage. Bygate and Samuda (2005), on the other hand, asked the participants who were 14 English medium students at a British university to watch a short video and then retell it to an

‘interested’ listener on two occasions that were 10 weeks apart. The results of their study showed that repeated encounters with the same task can help language learners attend to different aspects of oral production, do the things that they are not used to doing in L2, work on their language problems in a rather constant context, and help teachers identify the gaps in their learners’ linguistic repertoire. However, the effects of task repetition on the task performance of low-proficiency language learners through other task types (e.g., interactive storytelling task) has received little attention.

### **Research questions**

The current study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What are the relationships between L2 risk-taking, English learning motivation, linguistic confidence, L2 speaking anxiety, and pre-intermediate EFL learners' speaking CAF components?
- (2) Can task repetition influence the level of pre-intermediate EFL learners' L2 risk-taking, English learning motivation, linguistic confidence, and L2 speaking anxiety?
- (3) Can task repetition affect pre-intermediate EFL learners' speaking CAF components differently when performing an interactive story telling task?

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants of the study were 142 pre-intermediate female EFL learners from three branches of a language learning institution in Iran. Their age ranged from 14 to 21, and their native language was Farsi. The majority of the participants (78%) were high school students, and the remaining were either university students (14%) or housewives (6.5%). Participation in the study was voluntary. The students in the experimental and control groups did not meet each other during the study and did not know that their performance would be compared.

Ellis (2005) argued that language learners at low proficiency levels have a lower processing capacity, and accessing and encoding their linguistic knowledge is very difficult and demanding for them. Task repetition can, therefore, reduce the burden and can help them maximize their language competence in the subsequent performance of the task by increasing their processing and attentional capacity. The



reason why pre-intermediate language learners were selected was to examine this idea.

### **The questionnaire**

To measure the affective variables, the modified version of the questionnaire developed and validated by Pyun et al. (2014) was used in the present study. Pyun et al. (2014) used this instrument to examine the influence of affective variables on Korean as a foreign language learners' oral achievement. This instrument contains 28 items classified under four categories that measure: (1) language learning motivation (containing 8 items that measure L2 motivational intensity, desire to learn L2, and attitudes toward learning L2); (2) perceived linguistic confidence (containing 8 items that measure the degree to which language learners are confident about using their L2 knowledge to communicate with others); (3) L2 speaking anxiety (containing 6 items measuring L2 speaking anxiety); and (4) L2 risk-taking (containing 6 items that measure the willingness of L2 learners to initiate an interaction and try out new and/or unfamiliar linguistic elements at the risk of mistakes and embarrassment). Pyun et al. (2014) found a high level of internal consistency for this instrument with  $\alpha$ s of .86, .94, .85, and .79 for English learning motivation, perceived linguistic self-confidence, L2 speaking anxiety, and L2 risk-taking respectively.

To ensure its suitability for EFL settings (the focus of the present study), the questionnaire was subject to review by four experts in the field of English teaching and learning, and some changes were made to the wording of the instrument (e.g., word "friend" was changed to "classmate", and the item "I feel anxious if I am asked a question by my teacher" to "I feel anxious when my English teacher asks me a question in English"). The final format was then translated into Farsi (the native language of the participants) and was piloted with 131 EFL learners. The obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients by the present researcher were .76 for English learning motivation, .79 for L2 speaking anxiety, .77 for perceived linguistic confidence, and .84 for L2 risk-taking indicating that all the scales had acceptable internal consistency reliability for an English learning context as well. The participants rated the items based on the anchor points of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

### **Task**

An interactive storytelling task was designed and used in the present study. The task involved two picture stories selected from *Can You Believe It? Book 3* (Huizenga & Huizenga, 2000), which is designed for low-intermediate English learners. The first picture story is entitled “Emu Falls Madly in Love”. It is about a bird that showed up at the home of a man and fell in love with him. The second picture story is entitled “Boy Fights Lion Tooth and Nail”, which is about a boy who survived his friend by fighting a lion. In the book, each picture story consists of 8 pictures depicting 8 major scenes of the story accompanied by the story itself and a list of useful words and expressions. However, only the picture stories were given to the participants without the accompanying information. The picture cues in the picture stories formed a coherent storyline. The reason why picture stories were selected was to preclude learners from taking advantage of the immediate exposure to authentic language. The participants were asked to narrate the given parts of the picture stories with the help of their partners immediately after seeing them.

### **CAF measures employed in the present study**

To assess the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of the participants' L2 oral production, their narrations were analyzed by using the measures used by Ahmadian (2011). The model used by him is as follows:

- Complexity measures:

1) Syntactic complexity: the amount of subordination which is the ratio of AS units to clauses. An AS unit is defined as an utterance consisting of an independent clause accompanied by any subordinate clause(s) associated with it. Czwenar (2014) contended that an AS unit refers to an utterance that contains:

- 1) an independent clause including a finite verb ...,
- 2) a main clause together with its subordinate clause(s)...
- 3) an independent sub-clausal unit including one or more phrases which can be elaborated to a full clause...
- 4) a minor utterance, defined otherwise as an irregular sentence...
- 5) a coordinated clause...
- or 6) two or more coordinated clauses if they have the same subject, and are separated by a pause of less than .5 s ... (p. 89).

2) Syntactic variety: the total number of different grammatical verb forms used in language learners' performance. The grammatical verb forms taken for analysis in the present study were tense (e.g., simple present, present continuous, and present perfect) and modality (e.g., can, should, must, and may).

3) Overall complexity: the mean length of AS-units in language learners' speech which is obtained by counting the mean number of words per AS-unit.

● Accuracy measures:

1) Error-free clauses: the number of error-free clauses, i.e., the number of the clauses that were not deviant from standard norms with respect to syntax, morphology, and/or lexicon.

2) Correct verb forms: the number of all verbs that are used correctly in terms of tense, aspect, modality, and subject–verb agreement.

● Fluency measures:

1) Rate A: the number of syllables produced per minute of oral performance; it is measured by counting the number of syllables within each narrative divided by the articulation time used to complete the task and multiplied by 60.

2) Rate B: the number of meaningful syllables per minute of speech; it is measured by the use of the procedures used in Rate A, but all syllables, words, and phrases that are repeated, reformulated, or replaced should be excluded.

### **Procedure**

To answer the research questions, a pretest–treatment–posttest design was employed. Around 178 of female EFL learners learning English at three different branches of the institute in pre-intermediate levels were invited to take part in the study. The reason why only female students were contacted was that they outnumber male learners in the institute, and the institute does not let co-educational classes. 151 of the students contacted agreed to participate. They were given the Oxford Placement Test (2004) to control their level of proficiency. 142 EFL learners who had the same level of proficiency were randomly assigned to one of two groups: experimental group ( $n = 72$ ) and control group ( $n = 70$ ). As the English lab at the institute has facilities (cabins, headphones, and recorders) for only 25 students, the participants in each group were also divided into three groups. All the participants were given the

questionnaire at the beginning of the study. To respond to the items honestly, the participants were not required to write down their names on the questionnaires. Instead, the questionnaires were coded based on the cabin numbers and given to the participants. They were asked to go through the items carefully and rate them based on the anchor points available. After the questionnaires were completed and collected, the names of the participants were written on them.

Then, the students in each group (experimental and control) were divided into groups of two, and each student was given one part of the picture stories mentioned earlier to be narrated to her partner; student A was given the first half of picture story number one, and student B was given the second half of it. For the second story, their roles were, however, reversed; student A was given the second half of picture story two, and student B was given the first half of it. They cooperated with each other to narrate the story. To make the process more natural and real, the partners were changed each session, meaning that the participants had to narrate the assigned parts of the stories to five different partners in the experimental group, and to two different partners in the control group. The purpose was to increase the interactional authenticity of the task (Ellis, 2003, p.6). That was the first time that the students were given the picture stories, and the students did not have any preparation or pre-task introduction. The students did not know that they would have the same picture stories in any future occasions. Their oral performance was recorded using the digital facilities available in the English lab. The participants in the experimental group repeated the task on five occasions, each one week apart, while the participants in the control group did it on two occasions; at the beginning and at the end of the study at an interval of three weeks. The questionnaire was given to the participants at the end of the study too. The study lasted five weeks. The performance of both groups on the first task was considered as pretest, and their performance on the last task (Task 5 for the experimental group and Task 2 for the control group) was considered as posttest. The recorded narrations were transcribed and analyzed using the measures stated earlier by the help of two experienced researchers. The inter-rater reliability reached above .86.

### Results

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics for the scores obtained on the pretest and posttest. Question number one inquired whether there are correlations between L2 risk-taking, English learning motivation, linguistic confidence, L2 speaking anxiety, and the participants' scores on all CAF components. To answer this question, a number of Pearson correlation tests were conducted to test whether the results were significant. The participants' scores on the pretest (Time 1) were taken to explore the relationships between the mentioned affective variables and the participants' CAF scores. At this stage, all 142 participants were considered collectively.

The results of statistical analysis showed that there was a strong correlation between motivation and syntactic complexity ( $r = .80$ ), syntactic variety ( $r = .88$ ), overall complexity ( $r = .87$ ), error-free clauses ( $r = .83$ ), and correct verb forms ( $r = .79$ ) and a moderate correlation between motivation and Rate A ( $r = .52$ ) and Rate B ( $r = .54$ ). There was also a positive correlation between linguistic confidence and syntactic variety ( $r = .68$ ), L2 risk-taking and syntactic variety ( $r = .60$ ), and a moderate correlation between L2 speaking anxiety and correct verb forms ( $r = .58$ ). Thus, there is good evidence to suggest that the development of L2 proficiency components can be influenced by these affective variables.

Question number two, on the other hand, asked if task repetition can influence the level of the affective variables under study. To answer this question, a number of Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests were conducted to assess the significance of the differences in the responses of the participants to the questionnaire from Time 1 (pretest) to Time 2 (posttest) to examine the possible effects of task repetition on them.

The results of statistical analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the responses of the participants to the questionnaire in both experimental and control groups from Time 1 to Time 2. Thus, this result indicates that task repetition did not affect the participants' level of English learning motivation, L2 speaking anxiety, linguistic confidence, and L2 risk-taking.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics of pre- and posttest scores*

	<b>Experimental</b>				<b>Control</b>			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1 SC	.639	.036	.656	.048	.648	.032	.626	.045
SV	26.50	1.59	28.99	1.67	25.93	1.80	27.78	1.85
OC	7.107	1.12	8.039	1.93	6.690	1.06	8.595	1.88
2 EFC	15.50	1.66	15.44	1.63	15.06	1.28	16.32	1.68
CVF	13.51	1.85	17.10	2.39	13.65	1.99	15.40	2.53
3 Rate	71.42	6.93	72.59	8.14	69.09	8.65	70.31	6.97
A								
Rate	59.56	6.048	59.85	7.00	58.24	6.81	62.30	7.89
B								

Note: 1 = complexity, 2 = Accuracy, 3 = Fluency, SC = Syntactic complexity, SV= Syntactic variety, OC = Overall complexity, EFC = Error-free clauses, CVF = Correct verb forms

Finally, question number three inquired whether task repetition differently affects the participants' speaking CAF components when they perform an interactive story telling task. To answer this question, a number of independent-samples t-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to compare the performance of the participants in the control group with the performance of the participants in the experimental group on the pretest and posttest. The results of statistical analysis (Tables 2 and 3) showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of the pretest (Task 1) scores obtained on all CAF subdimensions. Thus, this result shows that the groups were comparable in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency in L2 oral production at the beginning of the study.

Table 2

*Results of the independent-samples t-tests for pretest scores*

		<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>
Complexity	SC	-.856	140	.397	<b>-.008</b>
	SV	1.135	140	.263	<b>.575</b>
Accuracy	EFC	.990	140	.328	<b>-.139</b>

CVF	-.243	140	.809	<b>4.745</b>
-----	-------	-----	------	--------------

Note: SC = Syntactic complexity, SV = Syntactic variety, EFC = Error-free clauses, CVF = Correct verb forms

Table 3

*Results of Mann-Whitney U test for pretest scores*

		U	Sig.	Mean ranks (experimental)	Mean ranks (control)
Complexity	OC	226.5	.539	71.85	<b>74.20</b>
Fluency	Rate	167	.051	76.24	<b>69.09</b>
	A				
	Rate	183	.109	76.04	<b>69.80</b>
	B				

Note: OC = Overall complexity

However, the results of statistical analysis (displayed in Tables 4 and 5) indicated that the participants in the task repetition group significantly performed better on the posttest in terms of syntactic complexity,  $t(140) = 2.127, p = .039$ ; syntactic variety,  $t(140) = 2.295, p = .027$ ; and correct verb forms,  $t(140) = 2.304, p = .026$ . Thus, there is good evidence to suggest that task repetition can positively affect the development of complexity by affecting syntactic complexity and syntactic variety, and accuracy by affecting the number of correct verb forms in low-intermediate EFL learners' L2 oral production.

Table 4

*Results of independent-samples t-tests for posttest scores*

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Complexity	SC	2.127	140	.039	<b>.029</b>
	SV	2.295	140	.027	<b>1.205</b>
Accuracy	EFC	-1.781	140	.082	<b>.880</b>
	CVF	2.304	140	.026	<b>1.692</b>

Note: SC = Syntactic complexity, SV = Syntactic variety, EFC = Error-free clauses, CVF = Correct verb forms

Table 5

*Results of Mann-Whitney U test for posttest scores*

		<b>U</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Mean ranks (experimental)</b>	<b>Mean ranks (control)</b>
Complexity	OC	2313.000	.397	68.63	<b>74.46</b>
Fluency	Rate	2095.000	.081	77.40	<b>65.43</b>
	A				
	Rate	2147.000	.126	66.32	<b>76.83</b>
	B				

Note: OC = Overall complexity

### Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the present study was twofold: (1) to explore the relationships between English learning motivation, L2 speaking anxiety, linguistic confidence, L2 risk-taking, and the Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' speaking CAF dimensions and (2) to examine the effects of task repetition on the participants' speaking CAF dimensions and on the level of the mentioned affective variables. The present study was different from the previous studies in the literature in several ways. First, it explored the influence of some learner variables on the participants' speaking CAF dimensions. There is a paucity of research on this important domain in the literature. Second, it examined the effects of task repetition on L2 oral production of learners at low-proficiency levels. Previous studies (Ahmadian, 2011; Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Mojavezi, 2013; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Saeedi & Rahimi Kazerooni, 2013) have mostly focused on intermediate learners. Finally, a novel task, namely an interactive storytelling task, was used in the present study to collect the related data. Movie retelling tasks in monologic speaking contexts have, however, been used by most of the previous researchers (Ahmadian, 2011; Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Bygate, 1996; Mojavezi, 2013; Saeedi & Rahimi Kazerooni, 2013).

The results overall showed that: (1) there were positive relationships between English learning motivation and all CAF subdimensions, and between linguistic confidence, L2 risk-taking, and the syntactic variety in the participants' L2 oral production and (2) task repetition positively affected the participants' L2 speaking complexity by increasing the level of syntactic variety and syntactic complexity,



and speaking accuracy by increasing the number of correct verb forms. However, the results did not provide any evidence for the effects of task repetition on the participants' speaking fluency and on the level of the mentioned affective variables. The results can be interpreted in the light of the previous studies available in the literature.

Scholars (Clement et al., 1994; Dörnyei, 2000; Fallah, 2014; Murray et al., 2011; Pyun et al., 2014; Yu & Shen, 2012) argue that language learning motivation acts like a force that makes language learners more willing to achieve a higher level of language attainment. Motivated language learners find language learning more interesting and try to increase their linguistic and communicative skills to be able to communicate in the language being learned. To do so, they seek out communicative opportunities around and communicate in them; this can help these language learners develop their L2 speaking abilities. Moreover, the results of the studies in the literature (Dörnyei, 2008; Fallah, 2014; Hodgson, 2014; Jonassen & Grabowsky, 1993; Öz et al., 2015; Pyun et al., 2014; Yu & Shen, 2012) show that language learners with a high level of linguistic confidence and risk-taking are more willing to try out new structures, are less afraid of making errors, and tend to produce more complex utterances. This is why the participants with a high level of linguistic confidence and L2 risk-taking in the present study produced more complex utterances by using different grammatical verb forms. Brown (2014) also believes that anxiety up to a specific level can be facilitative and can help language learners do the pedagogical tasks in a more accurate way. The results of the present study seem to suggest that a moderate level (.58) of L2 speaking anxiety can help language learners be more accurate by using more correct verb forms. However, it should be pointed out that the affective variables in the present study were measured through self-report methods, which are less reliable compared with other methods.

The results are also in accord with the idea put forth by Bygate and Samuda (2005). They believe that during the first encounter with a task, language learners have a lot of new things to do. They need to make decisions regarding how to do the task, what message to produce, and how to conceptualize it. However, "on repeating a task, the learner has valuable experience to draw on; s/he has already internalized the information content, organized it into communication units, found

relevant language to convey the meanings, and pronounced it” (p. 38); this can help language learners free up some attentional capacity to be devoted to generating more sophisticated output during subsequent encounters with the same task. This is why the participants in the task repetition group produced more complex and accurate speech on the posttest.

Moreover, the results of the present study further support the results of the previous studies (Amiryousefi, 2016a; Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Bygate, 2001) by providing empirical evidence for the trade-off hypothesis. The results of the present study showed that there was a trade-off effect between complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The participants improved some aspects of their speaking complexity and accuracy but not their speaking fluency. Hence, this finding can lend support to Skehan’s (2009, p. 511) idea that there is a trade-off effect between form (complexity and accuracy), on the one hand, and fluency, on the other, meaning that language learners cannot pay attention to both of them at the same time. This is because human mind has a limited processing capacity and certain linguistic processes require a significant amount of time (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). At lower levels, language learners according to Long (2015) are mostly obsessed with filling the gap existing between their interlanguage system and L2 linguistic system by analyzing L2 input they receive and getting engaged with consistent mapping and hypothesis testing. After several trials and during the next developmental stages, they will be able to gain automaticity in specific forms and structures; this will help them reserve some processing capacity to be devoted to other components such as fluency and sub-components such as error-free clauses and overall complexity, which require working on more complex structures (clauses and length of AS units) and hence involving a higher degree of mental processing (Gass et al., 2013; Long, 2015).

The current study has important theoretical and pedagogical implications to the field. From the theoretical perspective, it provides further evidence for the fact that low-intermediate language learners have limited processing capacity and cannot attend to all speaking components at the same time. It, consequently, supports the tenet behind the trade-off hypothesis that attending to one proficiency aspect

limits the attention to other aspects. From the pedagogical perspective, the results pointed to the beneficial effects of task repetition for low-proficiency language learners. It can help them work on their language problems in a familiar context, develop their interlanguage system, and produce more elaborated language.

The current study also contributes to the research in the area of learner variables by providing evidence for the mediating influence of English learning motivation, L2 speaking anxiety, linguistic confidence, and L2 risk-taking on language learners' task performance. It, therefore, supports Housen et al.'s (2012) idea that learner variables such as motivation and risk-taking affect the development of L2 proficiency components (CAF). These factors can help language learners be less obsessed with mistakes and errors, risk using new structures, and hence produce more elaborated language. Scholars argue that these factors can be triggered among language learners in different ways. The first one is group cohesion, which is defined by Clement et al. (1994) as the strength of the relationships existing among the students in a class. They believe that the relationship among the students can be strengthened through activities such as games and group works. These activities can establish a friendly and supportive relationship among the students, and can hence increase their confidence and risk-taking to be more engaged with the tasks. The next factor is involving students in decision and choice making (Murray et al., 2011). It can be achieved by giving them a voice to express their feelings, needs, and interests and to consider their voices in the selection of classroom activities and materials. In this way, they will find a relevance between what they do and what they want to be and hence will be more motivated and engaged. Finally, students' motivation, risk-taking, and confidence are influenced by class atmosphere. Teachers should try to establish a friendly and supportive environment in the class and try not to be intimidating by using appropriate types of feedback and behaviors. In this way, language learners' confidence and risk-taking will be increased. Teachers should also show that language learners' engagement with different tasks is important and is taken into consideration. It will motivate language learners to be more involved (Amiryousefi, 2016b).

### References

- Ahmadian, M. J. (2011). The effect of 'massed' task repetitions on complexity, accuracy and fluency: does it transfer to a new task? *The Language Learning Journal*, 39(3), 269-280.
- Ahmadian, M. J., & Tavakoli, M. (2011). The effects of simultaneous use of careful online planning and task repetition on accuracy, fluency, and complexity of EFL learners' oral production. *Language Teaching Research*, 15(1), 35-59.
- Amiryousefi, M. (2016a). The differential effects of two types of task repetition on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency in computer-mediated L2 written production: a focus on computer anxiety. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(5), 1050-1066.
- Amiryousefi, M. (2016b). Willingness to communicate, interest, motives to communicate with the instructor, and L2 speaking: a focus on the role of age and gender. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1-14.
- Amiryousefi, M., & Tavakoli, M. (2014). An empirical study into the effects of Iranian test takers' personal attributes on their TOEFL scores: Reading, writing, and listening in focus. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(6), 35-45.
- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). USA: Pearson Education.
- Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Researching pedagogic tasks: Second language learning, teaching and testing* (pp. 23-48). Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Bygate, M. (1996). Effect of task repetition: appraising the development of second language learners. In J. Willis, & D. Willis (Eds.), *Challenge and change in language teaching*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Bygate, M., & Samuda, V. (2005). Integrative planning through the use of task repetition. In R. Ellis (Ed.), *Planning and task performance in a second language* (pp. 37-74). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Chu, W. H., Lin, D. Y., Chen, T. Y., Tsai, P. S., & Wang, C. H. (2015). The relationships between ambiguity tolerance, learning strategies, and learning Chinese as a second language. *System*, 49, 1-16.
- Clement, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1994). Motivation, self-Confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. *Language Learning*, 44(3), 417- 448.
- Czwenar, I. (2014). Analyzing spoken language for complexity, accuracy and fluency: Some methodological considerations. In W. Szubko-Sitarek, S. Lukasz, & P. Stalmaszczyk, *Language learning, discourse and communication* (pp. 81-92). New York and London: Springer.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2008). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. England, Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2000). Motivation in action: Towards a process-oriented conceptualization of student motivation. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70(4), 519-538.
- Ellis, R. (2005). Planning and task-based performance: Theory and research. In R. Ellis (Ed.), *Planning and task performance in a second language* (pp. 219-273). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2005). *Analysing learner language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fallah, N. (2014). Willingness to communicate in English, communication self-confidence, motivation, shyness and teacher immediacy among Iranian English-major undergraduates: A structural equation modeling approach. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 30, 140-147.
- Gardner, R. C. (2010). *Motivation and second language acquisition: The socio-educational model*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Gass, S. M., Behney, J., & Plonsky, L. (2013). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course* (5th ed.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Hawkes, M. L. (2011). Using task repetition to direct learner attention and focus on form. *Oxford ELT Journal*, 66(3), 327-336.
- Hodgson, K. M. (2014). Mismatch: Globalization and native speaker models of linguistic competence. *RELC Journal*, 45(2) 113–134.
- Horwitz, E. K., Tallon, M., & Luo, H. (2010). Foreign language anxiety. In J. C. Cassady (Ed.), *Anxiety in schools: The causes, consequences, and solutions for academic anxieties* (pp. 95-115). New York: Peter Lang.
- Housen, A., Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2012). *Dimensions of L2 performance and proficiency*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Huizenga, J., & Huizenga, L. (2000). *Can you believe it? Stories and idioms from real life* (Book3). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jonassen, D. H., & Grabowsky, B. L. (1993). *Handbook of individual differences, learning and instruction*. Hillsdale, New Jersey Hove and London: Lawrence Erlbaum associates.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2012). On the roles of repetition in language teaching and learning. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 3(2), 195–210.
- Loewen, S. (2015). *Introduction to instructed second language acquisition*. New York: Routledge.
- Long, M. (2015). *Second language acquisition and Task-based language teaching*. UK: Wiley Blackwell.
- Luft, S. (2007). *Language classroom risk-taking behavior in a performed culture-based program*. Unpublished master's thesis, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
- Lynch, T., & Maclean, J. (2000). Exploring the benefits of task repetition and recycling for classroom language learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 4(3), 221-50.
- MacIntyre, P., Clement, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A

situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562.

- Mojavezi, A. (2013). The relationship between task repetition and language proficiency. *Applied Research on English Language*, 3(1), 29-40.
- Murray, G., Gao, X., & Lamb, T. (Eds.) (2011). *Identity, motivation and autonomy in language learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Öz, H., Demirezen, M., & Pourfeiz, J. (2015). Willingness to communicate of EFL learners in Turkish context. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 37, 269-275.
- Papi, M. (2010). The L2 motivational self-system, L2 anxiety, and motivated behavior: A structural equation modeling approach. *System*, 38(3), 467- 479.
- Pyun, D. O., Kim, J. S., Cho, H. Y., & Lee, J. H. (2014). Impact of affective variables on Korean as a foreign language learners' oral achievement. *System*, 47, 53-63.
- Rueckert, D. L. (2013). Fostering confidence and risk-taking in MA in TESOL students via community English teaching. *TESOL journal*, 4(3), 514-533.
- Saeedi, M., & Rahimi Kazerooni, S. (2013). The influence of task repetition and task structure on EFL learners' oral narrative retellings. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(2) 116-131.
- Saglamel, H., & Kayaoglu, M. N. (2013). Creative drama: A possible way to alleviate foreign language anxiety. *RELC Journal*, 44(3), 377 –394.
- Samimy, K., & Tabuse, M. (1992). Affective variables and a less commonly taught language: a study in beginning Japanese classes. *Language Learning*, 42(3), 387-398.
- Skehan, P. (2009). Modeling second language performance: Integrating complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexis. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 510–532.

- Vercellotti, M. L. (2015). The development of complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language performance: A longitudinal study. *Applied Linguistics*, 1-23.
- Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC Journal*, 37(3), 308-328.
- Yu, B., & Shen, H. (2012). Predicting roles of linguistic confidence, integrative motivation and second language proficiency on cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(1), 72-82.
- Zhang, X. (2013). Foreign language listening anxiety and listening performance: Conceptualizations and causal relationships. *System*, 41(1), 164-177.
- Zhang, L. J., & Rahimi, M. (2014). EFL learners' anxiety level and their beliefs about corrective feedback in oral communication classes. *System*, 42, 429-439.