The Effect of Task Repetition and Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing: A Pilot Study

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There is great interest in the role of task planning on learner performance and L2 development (for a review, see Ellis, 2009). In this line of research, the question of whether or not repetition of the same oral/written task—repeating as a type of task planning—is pedagogically useful for second language (L2) learning is an intriguing one both for second language researchers and educators. In particular, it is of empirical and practical interest to explore to what extent task repetition helps learners to produce improved language output with less cognitive burden inside and outside of the repetition cycle, and how this contributes to the development of multiple dimensions of L2 spoken or written proficiency in the short- and long-term. With this in mind, findings from previous research suggest that implementation of task repetition with or without additional treatment (e.g., reformulation, or feedback) may be beneficial for learners to some extent (e.g., Adams, 2003; Bygate, 1996, 2001; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres, & Fernandez-Garcia, 1999; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Sheppard, 2006; Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

However, such positive effects reported in the literature have often come with limitations regarding their range of benefits. First, the learners generally showed improvement on fluency and complexity, but showed less or no improvement on linguistic accuracy (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2006). The second limitation of the effect is that the positive effects found during the repetition cycle were less likely to be extended to learners’ subsequent performance in a new task. Taken together, these limitations suggest that no clear evidence is yet available that task repetition can ultimately lead to L2 development and/or acquisition of certain linguistic forms. There have been a few suggestions proposed to clarify the unclear relationship between task-repetition and L2 acquisition. For example, Bygate (2001) recommended that a large amount of practice through repetition may be necessary in order for repetition to have a significant effect on accuracy. Ellis (2009) provided an alternative suggestion, which is that it may be necessary for learners to receive some type of feedback on their initial performance before repeating it.
Taking these limitations and suggestions into account, the current study aims to investigate the effect of task repetition, corrective written feedback, and the interaction between the two on the L2 academic writing performance by L1 Korean ESL learners, specifically on their accuracy, complexity, and fluency. It is also important to note that, to date, task repetition research has heavily focused on learners’ performance on oral tasks with little attention to performance on written tasks (Robinson, 2011). Given this lack of research on the effect of task-repetition on the writing performance, it is another goal of this study to fill this gap in the literature.

Theoretical background

The theoretical background of this study is closely associated with the following questions:

- What specific processing procedures do writers go through to write?
- What are the potential cognitive obstacles L2 learners might encounter as they write and what are the consequences of these obstacles on their complexity, accuracy, and fluency?
- How can task-planning, in particular, task-repetition, assist learners to overcome such obstacles?
- How can the provision of written corrective feedback help learners to improve their writing performance?

According to Kellogg’s (1996, 2001) cognitive model of writing process, the writing process entails 3 components consisting of 6 basic sub-processes: formulation [planning & translating], execution [programming & executing], and monitoring [reading & translating (see Table 1 for a description of the components). Kellogg also discussed the role of working memory in this model. That is, while the three components are activated concurrently during the process of writing, all the sub-processes (except the executing sub-process) need to compete for a working memory that includes limited attentional resources in the central executive (the control system of limited attentional resources) in Baddeley’s (2003) working memory system. Therefore, it may be necessary for L2 writers to manage their limited attentional resources effectively in various competition contexts during ongoing interactions of the sub-processes.

As a number of SLA researchers have suggested, however, it seems very likely that the competitions between the process components may impose a heavy processing burden that exceeds learners’ limited attentional capacities, especially with time pressure (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Skehan, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1996). In the same vein, Skehan (1996) further argued that three aspects of language production—namely accuracy, complexity, and fluency—may be likely to be forced to compete with one another to compensate for limited processing ability, possibly resulting in a trade-off effect. (e.g., better accuracy at the expense of complexity, or fluency; but see also Robinson, 2001, who proposed that complex nature of a task would increase both accuracy and complexity).
Table 1. Kellogg’s (1996) model of writing process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formulation</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Goal setting, idea generation, and organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translating</td>
<td>Selecting linguistic items at the lexical &amp; syntactic level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execution</td>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>Conversion of translated item into the output modality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executing</td>
<td>Production of sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading of his/her written texts for review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>Editing at the micro- and macro-level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the limited attentional capacity is obviously one of the potential obstacles language learners face in the process of their writing, a number of studies have examined whether the provision of a certain type of task planning can compensate for learners’ limited processing abilities and thus assist them to produce improved L2 output (Ellis, 2005). This study focuses on the effect of task-repetition, among other types of task planning.

The role of task repetition

Task-repetition studies (both oral and written) thus far have primarily focused on two issues: whether learners show better writing performance as they perform the same writing task a second time, and whether learners show better writing performance in a new task after they participate in a task-repetition activity. One study that tested these two issues together is Gass et al. (1999), which assumed that increased familiarity of the content from the repeated oral task would provide learners with a better opportunity to attend more to linguistic resources. In their study, English speaking learners of Spanish watched video clips 3 times with 2 to 3 days' break in between, and then watched a new video clip after 1 week. In simultaneous oral production tasks while watching the video clips, learners in the task-repetition group showed improvement in overall proficiency, as it was measured via the magnitude estimation procedure, morpho-syntax (limited to the Spanish copulas ser and estar), and lexical complexity; however, such improvement did not carry over to a new task when the learners were given a new video clip for oral production. Gass et al. speculated that learners in the same content group (i.e., repetition group) in their study might have lost their interest at some point during repetition (but, see Hawkes, 2009, for the opposite claim regarding the relationship between task-repetition and motivation). Bygat (2001) also reported similar results in terms of the task-repetition effect on complexity, fluency, and accuracy; improvement in fluency and complexity, but not accuracy when it was measured by average number of errors per t-unit.

There are also a few studies that used both written and oral production modalities in the rehearsal and repetition respectively, or vice versa. Larsen-Freeman (2006), for example, explored 5 L1 Chinese-speaking ESL learners’ performance on a writing task, then oral narrative repetition tasks over a 6-month period. While the author found performance variability between individual
learners across time, the results from the quantitative analyses revealed that accuracy (operationalized as error-free t-unit /total t-unit ratio) decreased when the participants repeated the task for the second time. In contrast to this finding, Ellis (1987), who also implemented a mixed written-oral repetition task, found a positive effect of task repetition on accuracy, specifically on English regular past tense. However, this study differs from Bygate (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (2006) in that the oral repetition task was given immediately after the written task of the same content. As a result, it was not clear whether the improved accuracy was due to the virtue of short-term memory or by acquisition of the form.

Taking these issues into consideration, this study aims to investigate the effect of task repetition, corrective feedback, and interaction between the two on ESL learners’ academic writing performance. The research questions of the study are as follows:

**Research Questions**

1. Does fluency, complexity and accuracy increase when learners repeat the same L2 academic writing task?
2. Does corrective feedback on learners’ academic writing result in increases in fluency, complexity and accuracy in a repeated task as well as in a new writing task?
3. Does repeating the same writing task and receiving corrective feedback result in increased fluency, complexity and accuracy in a new writing task?

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants in this pilot study were 8 L1 Korean-speaking learners of English as a second language (ESL) who were enrolled either in an ESL program (4 participants) or a degree program (1 undergraduate and 1 graduate) at a large Midwest university in the United States (see Table 2). Two of the participants attended only the first session and did not return for the later sessions, and consequently only the results obtained from the 6 participants are reported in this paper. English proficiency of the participants was evaluated in two ways: Participants’ self-rated proficiency in writing and the administration of the Grammar section of MTELP (Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency). The reported self-rated proficiency of the participants ranged from low-intermediate to high-intermediate, and the MTELP results showed variation to some degree across the participants (50-72.5% accuracy on 40 test items). Participants were also asked to take an online typing test (www.typingtest.com) for two minutes to ensure their typing skills are comparable to each other. After completing the proficiency test and the typing test, the participants were then randomly assigned into 4 groups; Group 1 (Repetition with feedback), Group 2 (Repetition with no feedback), Group 3 (No repetition with feedback), and lastly Group 4 (No repetition with no feedback).
Table 2. Summary of the participants’ bio-data, proficiency, and typing speed results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-rated Proficiency</th>
<th>Grammar Score (%)</th>
<th>Typing Speed (wpm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>R-FB</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>24 (60.0)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>R-FB</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Low-intermediate</td>
<td>20 (50.0)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>R-NFB</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>High-intermediate</td>
<td>29 (72.5)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>R-NFB</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Low-intermediate</td>
<td>19 (47.5)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>NR-FB</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>28 (70)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>NR-NFB</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>High-intermediate</td>
<td>26 (62.5)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. R: Repetition / NR: No Repetition FB: Feedback / NCFB: No Feedback

Task & Procedure

All research activities took place on campus in a research lab equipped with a PC where individual participants composed an essay using the designated computer. Three writing topics were selected from a list of iBT TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) independent essay writing prompts provided by Educational Testing Service (ETS). Topics A and B were both topics in which participants had to discuss whether they preferred to get up early or late (Topic A), or whether they preferred living in a big city versus a small town (Topic B). Topic C was an argumentative prompt, and participants were asked to discuss the role of television in human communication. (See Appendix A for the complete prompts). The writing task was administered using Microsoft Word word-processing software and the participants were instructed to complete their essays in 30 minutes. Participants’ writing process was recorded simultaneously by the screen recording software Camtasia Studio (Ver. 8.0, TechSmith Corp.) for qualitative analyses. The overall procedure is summarized in Figure 1.

On day 1, the two repetition groups (Group 1 & 2) composed an essay about Topic B, which they wrote about again in Session 2 on Day 7 (i.e., task repetition). The other two groups wrote an essay on Topic A on Day 1, and then they completed an essay on Topic B on on Day 3 (i.e., no task repetition). The third composition on Topic C could not be administered in this pilot study mainly due to time constraints.

A review and revision session either with or without feedback was administered on Day 3 between the two writing sessions. The type of feedback in this study was unfocused direct corrective written feedback with brief meta-linguistic explanation on their lexical, morphological, and syntactic errors. No feedback was given to the participants regarding its logicality, idea, or organization. The two feedback groups (Group 1 and Group 3) were asked to review the given feedback and then revise their essays for 15 minutes without access to the feedback they reviewed. In the meantime, the no-feedback groups (Groups 2 & 4) were asked to review and revise their own written essays (with no feedback) for the same amount of time.
Dependent variables

Following the convention of task-planning research, three dimensions of L2 proficiency—accuracy, (grammatical) complexity, and fluency—were measured respectively as dependent variables for the main analyses. First of all, accuracy in this study was operationalized as the ratio of the number of error-free clauses to the total number of clauses in the essay (e.g., Foster, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1996). Additionally, the average number of errors per 100 words was separately calculated as a supplementary measure of accuracy (e.g., Mehnert, 1998; Sanguran, 2005). The rationale for this addition is that the error-free clause ratio does not account for frequency of errors in a clause. Secondly, grammatical complexity was operationalized as the average number of clauses per t-unit (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2006). All accuracy and grammatical complexity coding procedures, including the identification of ‘clause’ and ‘t-unit’, were guided by Polio’s (1997) “guideline for t-units, clauses, word counts, and errors” (p. 138-140). Lastly, the measure of fluency in the present study was operationalized as the average number of words produced per minute (e.g., Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008). Along with these three dependent measures, two raters rated participants’ essays in a holistic way using the iBT integrated writing rubrics (scoring standards), which was to examine how the two independent variables (i.e., repetition and feedback) affect overall quality of the learner essays.

Data Analysis (not reported in this paper)
Prior to the main analyses, it may be necessary to check how comparable the English writing proficiency levels of the 4 groups are at the onset of their participation. For this reason, 4 separate sets of one-way ANOVAs with each dependent variable (i.e., accuracy, complexity, and accuracy) will be conducted in order to determine if proficiency should be treated as covariate in the main analyses.

For the main analyses, two sets of 2 x 2 x 2 mixed design ANOVA will be carried out on each dependent variable: a 2 (task repetition condition) x 2 (corrective written feedback condition) x 2 (time: Day 1 and Day 7) mixed design ANOVA to answer RQ 1 and RQ 2, and a 2 (task repetition condition) x 2 (corrective written feedback condition) x 2 (time: Day 7 and Day 14) mixed design ANOVA answer RQ3.

Results

I was not able to conduct any statistical analyses to answer the research questions, mainly due to the small sample size (n = 6) and the fact that the experimental procedures were incomplete in that they included only Session 1 and Session 2 as a part of the pilot study, and not Session 3. For this reason, only descriptive analyses of individual participant performance are reported in this paper, specifically their accuracy, complexity, and fluency on the first two essays they composed in Session 1 and Session 2.

Accuracy
The two raters (the researcher and one native English speaker who has years of ESL teaching experience) identified any lexical (e.g., missing article, or misuse of prepositions), morphological (e.g., missing plural or tense marker), and syntactic errors (e.g., number agreement, inappropriate word order, or sentence fragments) on each essay. After the error coding, a total of 399 clauses were identified from the whole essay data. The coding results showed 88.97 percent agreement on error-free clause identification, which included if the raters were in agreement about whether or not a) a clause was error-free, and b) the raters identified the same number of errors from each clause. For more precise inter-rater-reliability, the coded data were submitted to SPSS to calculate Cohen’s Kappa coefficient, through which a high inter-rater reliability of .82 was obtained.

Table 3 provides a summary of written performance in terms of learners’ accuracy. Overall, it seemed that the accuracy data showed no clear effect of the two independent variables of the study, namely task-repetition and corrective written feedback. Although three out of the four participants showed slightly improved accuracy in Session 2, two participants in the no-repetition groups (#105 and #108) displayed even greater improvement (18% and 13% increase in accuracy ratio, respectively) through their writing in Session 2. Similarly, the effect of feedback also seemed to be limited since all groups showed improvement regardless of the feedback condition. The accuracy patterns were similar when it was assessed using the average number of errors per 100 words.
### Table 3. Summary of accuracy results of learners in Session 1 and Session 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject ID</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Error-free C / Total C</th>
<th>Accuracy ratio</th>
<th>No. of errors per 100 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Session 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>R-FB</td>
<td>16 / 33</td>
<td>14 / 35</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>R-FB</td>
<td>16 / 24</td>
<td>15 / 21</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>R-NFB</td>
<td>23 / 44</td>
<td>31 / 53</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>R-NFB</td>
<td>9 / 39</td>
<td>16 / 41</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>NR-FB</td>
<td>11 / 27</td>
<td>17 / 29</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>NR-NFB</td>
<td>10 / 27</td>
<td>13 / 26</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** R: Repetition / NR: No Repetition FB: Feedback / NFB: No Feedback

### Complexity

The average number of clauses per T-Unit was calculated to observe how different task repetition and corrective feedback conditions affect learners’ written production in terms of complexity. A clause in this study was defined as a clause that contains both the overt subject and finite verb, following Polio (1997). Consequently, any clause including ellipses, tag questions, and infinitives were not counted as a clause. Other clause types included are as follows: noun clauses (e.g., *it is easy to for people to think that a big city provides diverse places...*; Subject #104, Session 2), relative clauses (e.g., *they may have more mistakes than others who works constructively:* Subject #108, Session 1], and adverbial dependent clauses (e.g., *When I study in a quiet place, I can concentrate more on my reading:* Subject #102, Session 2).

The comparison of complexity across the participants showed somewhat interesting results, in that the participants who wrote an essay on the same topic in Session 2 (i.e., repetition) showed slight increases in their complexity index with the exception of Subject #102, whereas the participants who wrote an essay on a different topic in Session 2 showed slight decreases (see Table 4).

### Table 4. Summary of grammatical complexity results of learners in Session 1 and Session 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject ID</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average number of clause per T-Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Session 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>R-FB</td>
<td>1.59 (.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>R-FB</td>
<td>1.33 (.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>R-NFB</td>
<td>1.15 (.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>R-NFB</td>
<td>1.26 (.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>NR-FB</td>
<td>1.38 (.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>NR-NFB</td>
<td>1.18 (.39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fluency

As stated earlier, fluency was operationalized as the average number of words that were produced per minute. One potential confound when using this measure is the length of words. One way of resolving this potential issue is using the average number of syllables per minute (e.g., Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Alternatively, however, I calculated the average length of words by dividing the number of characters (including spaces between words) in each essay by the total number of words. The results from this procedure showed no clear difference among the participants in terms of the mean length of words they produced; the mean length of individual words across the participants ranged from 4.3 to 4.6 characters per word in Session 1, and from 4.2 to 5.1 characters per word in Session 2. Based on this analysis, word length did not seem to function as a compounding variable when fluency was measured using the number of words.

The comparison of fluency data among the participants showed some positive effect of task repetition. Indeed, those who repeated the same task (subject #101, 102, 103, and 104) showed relatively greater improvement than those who did the different task (subject #105, 108) (see Table 5). However, no clear effect of feedback was found, in that all participants displayed similar ranges of improvement in Session 2.

Table 5. Summary of fluency results of learners in Session 1 and Session 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject ID (Group)</th>
<th>Total number of words</th>
<th>Composition Duration (minutes)</th>
<th>Number of words per minute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Session 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 (RFB)</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102 (RFB)</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103 (RNFB)</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104 (RNFB)</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105 (NRFB)</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108 (NRFNFB)</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The first goal of this pilot study was to investigate whether ESL learners can produce improved written output and minimize trade-off effects, if any, if they are given a chance to rehearse the written task (Session 1) before performing the main task (i.e., repetition in Session 2). The preliminary observations of the descriptive data showed at least some positive effect of task repetition. For example, the two participants in the no-repetition groups (subject #105 & #108) showed some trade-off effects between Session 1 and Session 2. That is, the no-repetition group displayed
slightly lower complexity indexes in Session 2 compared to those in Session 1, whereas their performance regarding accuracy and fluency improved slightly.

On the other hand, the participants who repeated the same task in Session 2 produced slightly more complex sentence structures more accurately and more fluently. One exception was subject #102, who showed improved accuracy (from 67 to 71 percent of error-free clauses), but displayed lower complexity (from 1.33 to 1.17 clauses per minute) at the same time. One possible explanation for this exception would be that it is not clear if this participant repeated the same task twice. Note that the writing task in this study provided the participants a chance to choose one of the two options from the prompts (e.g., Option 1: prefer to live in a small town versus Option 2: prefer to live in a big town). With this in mind, the other three participants in the repetition condition picked the same preference options both in Session 1 and Session 2, whereas subject #102 selected different preference options between Session 1 and Session 2. Therefore, although the subject might have been more familiar with the topic itself, the contents of the essay in Session 1 were very different from those in Session 2.

This study also aimed to explore the effect of corrective written feedback. The preliminary results from the 6 participants, however, failed to provide clear evidence of a feedback effect. To be more specific, although those who received feedback showed slight improvement in accuracy, those who did not receive any feedback also showed a comparable amount of improvement in Session 2 at the same time within the same repetition conditions (i.e., a comparison of subjects #101-102 and #103-104, and a comparison of subjects #105 and #108). One possible reason for such results would be that the participants might not have received sufficient time to review the given feedback. During the review session, the participants in both the feedback and no-feedback conditions were given only 15 minutes to review their essay with/without feedback and then revise them. Furthermore, the type of corrective feedback implemented in this study was unfocused direct corrective feedback plus meta-linguistic information. Given this lack of time and the type of feedback, the participants might not have had enough time to pay their attention to a number of unfocused target forms before they started revision. Therefore, in future research, it may be better to select specific target structures such as English articles or tense/number agreement and provide more focused feedback on the targets.

Based on the results reported in this pilot study, there are several points that need to be reconsidered and changed to further develop the research design and procedure. First of all, as mentioned earlier, one participant who was in the repetition group did write his second essay choosing a different preference option. Therefore, it may be helpful to provide more elaborated instructions asking them to choose the same option as they write the essay for the second time.

Secondly, it may be more accurate and informative to operationalize and measure the three dependent variables—complexity, accuracy, and fluency— in multiple ways.
For example, the accuracy result of subject #101 showed a decrease from 48 percent to 46 percent when it was operationalized as the error-free clause ratio; however, when accuracy was defined as the number of errors per 100 words, the result demonstrated the opposite pattern in that the subject showed slight improvement (from 6.3 to 5.8 errors per 100 words). Therefore, measuring the variables in more than one way would provide more precise results.

Lastly, I would assign a shorter composition time in the future research. In this study, I gave the participants a 30 minute time limit to complete their essay, following the ETS administration guidelines. However, I found at least two potential problems of this way of administration. First, considering the fact that some participants have to write the same essay more than once, the tasks may be too boring for them. In fact, two out of the four participants who repeated the task (subjects #101 and #102) spent only 23 and 28 minutes respectively on the task in the second session whereas the others spent the full amount of time. Furthermore, subject #102 reported that he wrote his second essay choosing a different preference option because he felt it was boring to write the same content again. Another potential problem is that both Kellogg’s model of writing and Skehan’s cognitive model assume limited attentional capacities in the writer’s working memory system under time pressure. Therefore, it seems to be difficult to observe natural aspect of cognitive function with less time pressure since participants’ limited attentional resources will be likely to be compensated by the virtue of more time.

Shortening the composition time also will make it possible for the researcher to add more repetition cycles in the research design, which I believe would more clearly show the effect of task repetition (if any; e.g., Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Sheppard, 2006, as cited in Ellis, 2009), as well as the effect of corrective written feedback.

Lastly, I hope to add a part of qualitative analyses in the future research. In particular, qualitative analyses on how participants responded to the target structures from the feedback during their revision will be able to provide crucial evidence regarding the effect of corrective feedback. In addition, observing recorded writing process will also provide meaningful information. For example, examining whether or not learners make longer pauses at a point where they have to use certain structures that were corrected previously would be able to inform if they pay more attention to the form (regardless its accurate usage). It will also be useful to examine if learners produce certain chunks of words more fluently (e.g., shorter pauses) when they repeat those chunks during the repetition session(s).

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether task repetition in second language writing can help learners to manage their limited attentional resources more effectively, and thus produce improved written output in a repeated task as well as in a new task. The preliminary analyses of the descriptive data suggested that the L2 learners performed better at least within the task-repetition cycle and they showed no trade-off effect as their
performance was assessed by accuracy, complexity, and fluency. The question of whether such positive effects can be transferred to a new task is left for future research.

However, the current study failed to find any effect of corrective written feedback, which might have been partly due to the limited time assigned to the participants for the review of the written feedback. In addition, under such time constraints, unfocused feedback on a number of unspecified structures might have made it difficult for the participants to manage their attention to the target structures effectively. Finally, keeping all the issues and problems discussed in this paper in mind, I hope to further develop its research design and procedures.

1 By (performance) outside of task-repetition, I mean performance on a new task followed by task-repetition activities.
2 Note that discussion of such a pattern on proficiency measures is limited to the task-repetition type of task planning. Foster (1996) found increased accuracy when participants were given unguided task planning time. Yuan and Ellis (2003) and Ellis and Yuan (2004) also found increased accuracy when the planning type was unpressured online-planning.
3 Note that Kellogg’s writing model assumes writing in L1. For native speakers, it might not be necessary to bring attention for the execution of sentence production, presumably because their handwriting or typing is fully automatized in general. Ellis (2005), however, argued that for some L2 learners, especially for those whose L1 uses different scripts from L2, may need to pay extra attention in this stage.
4 See also Hayes’s (2006) writing model that added social/environmental factors into the model, in addition to working memory and long term memory.
5 Note, however, that those two targets, according to the authors, had been a heavy focus of instruction in class prior to students’ participation in the study. Thus, it is not clear if the improved accuracy on this specific grammar component is due to task repetition or significant instruction.
6 To my best knowledge, no previous studies in L2 writing measured the typing speed when the modality of writing was by computer. However, different levels of typing skills may potentially function as an intervening variable, particularly with respect to fluency. In addition, relatively poorer/slower typing skills will affect participants’ performance on accuracy and complexity as well because they have to take up more attentional resources for typing, compared to those whose typing skill is better (Ellis, 2005).
References


writing (pp. 57-71). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Appendix A. ETS iBT Writing Topics

[Topic1. Preference 1 — Life style]
Some people prefer to get up early in the morning and start the day’s work. Others prefer to get up later in the day and work until late at night. Which do you prefer? Use specific reasons and examples to support your choice.

[Topic2. Preference 2 — Living style]
Some people prefer to live in a small town. Others prefer to live in a big city. Which place would you prefer to live in? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.

[Topic3. Argument — Communication]
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Television has destroyed communication among friends and family. Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.

Repetition Group : Topic 2 – Topic 2 – Topic 3
Non-Repetition Group : Topic 1 – Topic 2 – Topic 3