The impact of individual and peer planning on the oral performance of advanced learners of English as a foreign language

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Abstract: *Research on planning in the task-based approach has become a niche of research in its own. The present study attempted to shed some light on the effects of peer-planning by comparing the oral performance of 16 learners of English as a foreign language attending the 7th semester of a Letras Program, who performed a monological task in either an individual or a peer planning condition. Learners' performance was quantitatively analyzed in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy, revealing no statistically significant differences between the groups. Besides that, post-task questionnaires were administered so as to unveil learners' impressions regarding the processes they embarked on while planning and their opinions about the conditions in which they planned. Overall, participants reported to embark on the processes of message organization and formulation, and perceived the planning condition, be it individual or collaborative, as beneficial.*
Keywords: *Planning; task-based approach; collaborative work.*

INTRODUCTION

The framework proposed by Skehan (1996; 1998) for the design and implementation of tasks for second language (L2) acquisition is comprised of three phases – pre-, middle-, and post-task. Still, so far, research has been conducted mainly on the pre-task phase; and, more specifically, with regards to one particular kind of pre-task: strategic planning (Skehan, 2007). While the studies have addressed a number of issues related to planning, such as the impact of task type (Foster; Skehan, 1996), different lengths of planning time (Guará-Tavares, 2004; Mehnert, 1998;), planning conditions (D'Ely, 2006), and level of proficiency (Kawauchi, 2005), among others, a variable that has been overlooked is the support learners have when planning.

Ortega (2005) points out that some of her participants felt frustrated when planning individually since, at times, they could not retrieve even simple vocabulary. Moreover, results from studies conducted in the Brazilian context (D'Ely, 2006; Guará-Tavares, 2008) showed a limited effect of planning on learners' performance. If, as the sociocultural theory of mind claims, cognition and knowledge are dialogically constructed (Vygotsky, 1997; Wertsch, 1980, 1985, both in Swain; Brooks; Tocalli-Beller, 2002), one way to end the frustration potentially caused by individual task planning and maximizing the possible effects of planning on learners' performance is by allowing learners to plan with a peer. Indeed, the beneficial effects of collaborative work have already been documented (e.g., Basturkmen; Loewen; Ellis, 2002; Figueiredo, 2007; Swain; Lapkin, 1998, 2002; Vidal, 2007). To the best of our knowledge, so far, only one study has examined the *source* of planning (Skehan; Foster, 1999, in Ellis, 2005). Still, in this study, the authors only compared individual planning to teacher-led and group-led planning.

Thus, in an attempt to fill in this gap in research, the present study aims at (1) comparing the performance of learners planning an L2 oral task individually to the performance of learners planning with a partner, as well as (2) unveiling the differences in the processes that each group reports to embark on while planning, and (3) eliciting the participants' opinion about the performance conditions.

Besides this introductory section, this article has other four sections. The Review of Literature lays the theoretical background for the study and presents the research questions. Next, a detailed description of the design of the study is provided, along with the statistical techniques used in order to analyze the data. The following section readdresses the research questions, reporting and discussing the results obtained. Finally, a summary of the main findings of the present endeavor, limitations, and pedagogical implications are presented.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Strategic planning

According to Skehan and Foster (2005), the most influential psycholinguistic account for using tasks is anchored on the concept of focus-on-form (Long, 1991) and assumes that (1) humans are limited-capacity processors so that when attending to one area of speech, other(s) will be somehow neglected (Schmidt, 2001, in Skehan, 1998) and (2) due to this limitation, when under pressure, speakers will tend to prioritize meaning in order to get the task done (VanPatten, 1990, in Skehan, 1998). Since teachers and task-designers cannot prospectively manipulate a variety of learner-related variables that will affect performance, one way to manipulate the task so that focus-on-form is more likely to occur might be allowing for strategic planning time prior to task performance, which can potentially reduce the burden imposed by the pressure of producing language "from scratch" online (Skehan, 1998).

Ellis (2005) defines strategic planning as allowing the learners to prepare for a task; that is, allowing them time to look at the task materials and consider what they will say and how they will do that. In this study we enlarge the scope of Ellis' definition and define strategic planning as "a metacognitive process 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).

In the last two decades, strategic planning has constituted a niche of research in its own right, and a variety of studies have been conducted (Ellis, 1987, in Crookes, 1989; Foster; Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998; Mochizuki; Ortega, 2008, to mention but a few) signaling a positive impact of planning particularly on learners' fluency and complexity, rather than on accuracy. The lack of gains in accuracy might be dependent on (1) learners' focus of attention while planning, (2) learners' effectiveness on implementing pre-planned intentions on-line, (3) the existence of trade-off effects, and (4) the strong relationship between strategic

planning and the cognitive demands that task type may impose on learners (see D'Ely, 2006).

Taking into consideration the results derived from a process-oriented perspective towards strategic planning, Ortega (2005) pointed out the central role of retrieval and rehearsal processes in strategic planning. These findings bring support to the fact that strategic planning optimizes operations at the level of the conceptualizer and the formulator (Levelt, 1989). Thus, it impacts upon the very nature of learners' speech processes.

Bearing in mind recent studies on the role of strategic planning, results have signaled a myriad of variables that might interact and possibly affect learners' planning process. In this vein, it can be mentioned: (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), (4) learners' ability to plan effectively (Iwashita; Elder, 2005), (5) learners' approach to task type and task structure (Foster; Skehan, 1996; Tavakoli; Skehan, 2005), (6) learners' reaction to the context in which they are inserted (testing vs. teaching context) (Elder; Iwashita, 2005)**,** (7) learners' ability to cope with time pressure while performing (Ellis; Yuan, 2005; Yuan; Ellis, 2003;), (8) learners' working memory capacity (Guará-Tavares, 2005), (9) learners' age and availability of time while planning (Philp; Oliver; Mackey, 2006), (10) learners' level of proficiency and learners' performance in focused tasks (Mochizuki; Ortega, 2008), (11) learners' familiarity with the process of planning itself (D'Ely, 2006), and (12) learners' educational histories, encompassing issues such as learners' identity, social context and learning culture (Batstone, 2005).

The aforementioned results indicate that more research is needed, and of special interest might be the issue that simply allowing time for planning does not necessarily leads to gains in performance, so, perhaps the best is to provide assistance to learners, especially when they are still beginners (Mochizuki; Ortega, 2008). Furthermore, as pointed out by D'Ely (2006), the individual character of planning could be expanded to

encompass peer planning and teacher-led planning sessions so as to provide the learner, in the long run, with the tools to perform a task. Indeed, collaborative work has been a line of research for some time already and the next subsection is devoted to some of the theoretical bases for it and also the findings of empirical studies.

Collaborative work

One of the claims of a sociocultural theory of mind is that cognition and knowledge are dialogically constructed (Vygotsky, 1997, Wertsch, 1980, 1985, both in Swain *et al*, 2002). Following that, Swain and colleagues claim that learning occurs through collaborative dialogues (Swain; Lapkin, 1998, 2002) where language works as a psychological tool, facilitating the task by mediating between the learner and the accomplishment of the task, possibly changing the nature of the activity and, thus, its outcome (Swain *et al*, 2002). Swain and Lapkin (1998), for example, noticed, in the interaction of their participants, that at times language was not used to communicate but to hypothesize or confirm.

According to Vygotsky (1978, 1986, in Nassaji; Swain, 2000), learning emerges through interaction between a novice and an expert within the zone of proximal development (ZPD)[1] and although in Vygotsky's proposal the expert is usually imagined as a teacher or parent, recently, the idea that peer-peer interaction can also lead to learning has been finding support (Tudge, 1990; Wells, 2000, both in Swain; Lapkin, 2002). What was found, by Brooks and Swain (2001, in Swain; Lapkin, 2002), for example, is that in this kind of interaction, the role of expert is frequently shared between learners. Moreover, according to Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2002), explicit comments on form

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[1] "[T]he distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, in Nassaji; Swain, 2000, p. 36)

involving metalanguage[2] are one of the ways to accomplish focus-on-form (Long, 1991). Additionally, Figueiredo (2007) advocates that during collaborative work learners also exchange learning strategies.

There are a considerable number of studies which come to corroborate the claims for the impact of peer-peer dialogue on L2 learning made above[3]. Brooks and Swain (2001, in Swain; Lapkin, 2002), for example, found that when learners discussed a grammatical item between them, they usually incorporated the form they agreed as correct in their repertoire[4]. Similarly, Swain and Lapkin (1998) found that the pairs of subjects who produced more language-related episodes while carrying out a jigsaw task were the same ones who did best in the posttest[5]. Storch (1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, in Swain *et al*, 2002) had her participants perform a series of grammar-focused activities and observed that accuracy improved more when the work was done collaboratively than individually. Lynch and Maclean's (2001) weakest participants modified their speech, improving it, cued by the speech of their interlocutors. Qi and Lapkin (2001, in Swain; Lapkin, 2002) observed that the more the peers discussed a point, the best they recalled it, and the more improvement there was in their rewritten texts. In the Brazilian context, Vidal (2007) had her participants write a text individually and, then, later evaluate it with the help of a partner and found that although there were instances when a problem could not be solved individually, it could be later resolved with the help of a colleague. According to the author, while languaging[6] about the

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[2]   "[L]anguage used to analyze or describe language" (Johnson; Johnson, 1998, in Basturkmen; Loewen; Ellis, 2002).

[3]   For a detailed review, see Swain, Brooks and Tocalli-Beller (2002).

[4]   That is, when they rewrote their original story which was the subject of the discussion with the colleague.

[5]   A tailor-made test built based on the learners' oral interaction while conducting a jigsaw task.

[6]   This term was coined by Swain herself, as a substitute for "collaborative dialogue" and is defined as the "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (Swain, 2006, p. 151, in Vidal, 2007, p. 4).

language, individuals "construct, reconstruct [and] co-construct their interlanguage" (p. 9).

Still, there are no guarantees that peer work will always be beneficial and have a positive impact for all kinds of learners, considering learners' individual differences, such as learning style and the use of learning and or communicative strategies, for instance. Grabe and Kaplan (1996, in Villas Boas, 2007) advocate that for peer work to be successful, learners need to be motivated. Unfortunately, what Kinsella and Sherak (1998, in Figueiredo, 2007) observed was that many students tend to only trust the teacher and thus do not get too enthusiastic about working in pairs. As Lynch and Maclean (2001) observed, even if a learner notices that the production of his/her partner is different from his/hers s/he may decide that the partner's version is inaccurate. Tang and Tithecott (1999, in Swain *et al.*, 2002) found that while learners were comfortable with receiving feedback, not all were comfortable with giving it. Some researchers encountered a rather more positive attitude towards peer-peer collaboration. In Figueiredo's (2001, in Figueiredo, 2007) study, although there was some uneasiness concerning giving/receiving feedback[7], participants declared that peer correction was beneficial since they could reflect on their production as well as help a colleague. Souza's (2007) participants also enjoyed the collaborative work, with 90% of them reporting that it was helpful to conduct the activities in pairs, mainly because they could discuss their doubts with their partner. Taking these studies into consideration, it might be that having the opportunity to plan with a partner will bring benefits that cannot be achieved through individual planning.

Finally, since within the task-based approach there have also been some studies which attempted at unveiling what learners do while they are planning, one other issue we wanted to investigate, besides the impact of individual vs. peer planning, was the potentially different processes learners embarked on when they were planning with a partner, as opposed to the

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[7] Lack of confidence in the colleague, difficulty in finding mistakes, doubts, and errors induced by the colleague were listed as the negative side of pair work.

processes learners tended to engage in when they were planning alone. In the studies which have investigated this issue, what has been found is that learners tend to use the planning time to organize the content (D'Ely, 2006, 2009; Wendel, 1997, in Ellis, 2005; Guará-Tavares, 2004, 2005, 2006), to solve lexical problems (D'Ely, 2006; Guará-Tavares, 2005, 2006), to rehearse (Guará-Tavares, 2005, 2006; Ortega, 1999), to memorize (Ortega, 1999), to remember facts (Guará-Tavares, 2004), to solve grammatical problems (D'Ely, 2006; Guará-Tavares, 2005), to avoid problems (Guará-Tavares, 2006), and to think about word order (D'Ely, 2006; Guará-Tavares, 2006). Thus, planning time seems to be used to improve overall performance and to play a great role in the process of message organization and formulation (D'Ely, 2006; Guará-Tavares 2006; Ortega, 1999).

Taking the issues reviewed into consideration, the present research aimed at (1) comparing the performance of learners planning an L2 oral task individually to the performance of learners planning with a partner, (2) unveiling the differences in the processes that each group reported to embark on while planning and (3) eliciting the participants' opinion about the performance conditions through the following research questions:

1. Is the performance of the peer-planning group more fluent, accurate, and complex than the performance of the individual-planning group?

2. What do participants from the peer-planning group report to do differently from the participants of the individual-planning group?

3. What are the two groups' reported opinions about the planning condition under which they performed?

METHOD

This section will provide the criteria for the selection of the participants and a thorough description of the data collection and data analyses procedures.

Participants and setting

The participants were a group of students attending the 7th phase of the *Letras-Língua Inglesa e Literaturas* undergraduate course[8] at *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, who were selected according to the following criteria. First, this undergraduate course at this university is mostly[9] taught in English, which allows for a good amount of contact with the target language. Second, the 7th phase students were chosen because they were the most advanced[10] group at the moment of data collection[11]. Third, all students that attended class on the day that the researchers collected data agreed on engaging with the task, i.e., there was no selection of specific students.

Regarding the specificities of this group of 16 participants (12 women and four men), they were all native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese, with ages ranging from 19 to 31 years, and almost all of them – except for one – had already been in a situation where they had been given a set amount of time to plan their oral performance. The majority of the students (nine) reported that they had already been to an English-speaking country (up to four months)[12], and most of them (11) reported to speak English outside class hours. In the peer-planning group, six learners had studied English between three and a half and nine years and two participants had studied between ten and 15.5 years. In the individual-planning group, four participants

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[8] This program provides degrees on Teaching and/or Bachelor on English Language and Literature.

[9] At least in the curriculum that the participants were following (which no longer is the curriculum adopted), the classes tended to be taught in English, except for some disciplines taught in the Portuguese language, which are not specifically related to the English language, such as Latin and Brazilian Literature, for example.

[10] In regards to command of the English language.

[11] The *Letras-Língua Inglesa e Literaturas* undergraduate program encompasses a total of eight phases (semesters), which means that the participants of this study, all of them at the end of the seventh phase, should graduate by the end of the following semester.

[12] Four of these participants planned individually and five planned with a partner.

had studied up to nine years and the other four had studied up to 15.5 years.

Tasks and procedures

The participants performed one of the two following narrative tasks: leaving a message at a friend's answering machine or leaving a message at a teacher's answering machine. Half of the participants in each group should leave a message to friends apologizing for their absence in a group meeting. In order to increase the complexity of the task, the story should contain the following words: *house, to bring, red, money, to know,* and *umbrella* (in any order they wished). The other half should leave a message to a teacher apologizing for not having handed in an assignment and the words *bus, to meet, green, computer, to understand,* and *chair* (in any order) had to be used.

The design of the tasks was inspired on Mehnert (1998) (actually, the first of the tasks described, which we will call "the project work task", is exactly like Mehnert's). The other task – "the assignment task" – was designed by the researchers, following Mehnert's model. The reason for choosing this kind of task was that, according to Mehnert, it is normal in our daily lives to plan our speech and have it recorded when we leave messages in answering machines[13]. Thus, this kind of task is more ecologically valid than other tasks carried out in laboratories. Another reason for us to choose this specific kind of activity to collect data was the fact that although it is a "simple" or "easy"[14] task, it has the mandatory words which add some extra burden and, according to Skehan and Foster (2005), reporting on Skehan and Foster (1997), when planning is carried out before more complex tasks, it has a greater effect.

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[13] Although, nowadays, with the advent of cell phones, it seems that people have been using answering machines less often.

[14] While Skehan (1996, 1998, 2001) talks about "task difficulty", Robinson (2001) distinguishes between "task complexity" (equivalent to Skehan's "task difficulty") and "task difficulty" which would depend both on the complexity of the task and on learners' factors.

The task was performed under two different conditions: half of the participants planned individually (i.e., only being able to resort to one's own knowledge) and the other half planned with a colleague (i.e., collaboratively). Both groups were given 10 minutes to plan *what* to say and *how* to say it, before recording their task. They were asked to make written notes in English, although they were oriented not to write out everything in detail since they had to perform without the notes[15]. Those who planned with a colleague were told that although they would plan with their partner, they had to perform the task individually.

Participants also answered two questionnaires: one where they provided relevant information so that we could build their profile and one where they offered their opinions concerning the task conditions in which they worked and their procedures while planning their performance – the post-task questionnaire (see Appendix[16]).

As regards the general procedures of data collection, two researchers (with previous permission of the teacher) went to the classroom, invited the students to participate in the study, asked for their signed consent form and randomly divided the class into two different groups, that proceeded as follows. The group who planned individually first performed the task (in the laboratory), then (in the classroom) answered the post-task questionnaire and, finally, the profile questionnaire. The group of participants who planned with a partner started by answering the profile questionnaire (in the classroom), then they performed the task[17], and, after that, answered the post-task questionnaire (in the laboratory). Both groups performed the tasks accompanied by one of the researchers.

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[15] Although they were allowed to look at the instructions.

[16] Observe that the questionnaire provided in the appendix is the one used for the participants who planned in pairs. For the ones who planned individually, the questionnaire was exactly the same, with the exception of the expressions "together with your partner" and "with your partner".

[17] The planning of the pairs was also recorded so that we could later on have an insight on the way the interaction happened between the pairs. This is important if we want to make claims for the beneficial effects of collaborative planning.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed both statistically and interpretively. The speech of the participants, which served as data for the quantitative analyzes, was tape-recorded and transcribed and analyzed in terms of fluency (speech rate unpruned and pruned[18]), accuracy (number of errors per 100 pruned words and number of errors per c-unit[19]), and complexity (number of clauses per c-unit). In order to compare the performances, independent means comparisons tests (*t*-tests and Mann-Whitney) were run. The data gathered through the questionnaires was grouped into categories, which emerged from the answers, and then employed for qualitative analyses in order to answer Research Questions 2 and 3. The recording done during the peer-planning also contributed with data to help explain the results in Research Question 1.

The next section will bring the results from the analyses as well as a discussion of these results in light of the studies mentioned in the Review of Literature. All quantitative analyses were made using the software SPSS 10.0 for Windows and the α level set for this study was .05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results of the statistical and interpretive analyses conducted in order to answer the research questions posed by the present small-scale research. Each of the research questions will be answered in turn.

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[18] Following D'Ely (2006), among others, for the first measure all words or partial words produced by the speaker are counted and divided by the amount of time the learner spoke. For the count of the second measure, speech rate pruned, verbatim repetitions (unless they are used for rhetorical purposes) are not included.

[19] A c-unit is defined by Foster and Skehan (1996) as "one simple independent finite clause or else an independent finite clause plus one or more dependent finite or non finite clauses" (p. 310).

1. Is the performance of the peer-planning group more fluent, accurate, and complex than the performance of the individual-planning group?

In regards to the comparisons between the two groups for fluency, an independent *t*-test was conducted for each of the variables (speech rate unpruned and speech rate pruned). Through the analyses of the descriptive statistics, it was already possible to see that there was little difference between the means (*M*) of the two groups (peer-planning$_M$ = 147.81 and individual-planning$_M$ = 137.81) for the variable speech rate unpruned. This was confirmed through the *t*-test which showed that the performance of the two groups, although slightly different (with an advantage for the participants who planned collaboratively), was not significantly different (*p*= .353). The same pattern was found for the variable speech rate pruned. Once again, a slight advantage for the peer-planning group (*M*=141.22) over the individual-planning one (*M*= 133.67) could be seen, but this difference was not statistically significant (*p*= .526).

The performance of the two groups also did not differ much in accuracy. The difference in means between them was also small, with the peer-planning group having an average of 3.27 errors/100 pruned words and the individual-planning group an average of 4.23 errors/100 pruned words; this difference was not significant (*p*=.255). Regarding the number of errors per c-unit, the data were not normally distributed and, thus, a nonparametric test was employed (Mann-Whitney U). This time the average number of errors per c-unit for the peer-planning group was .521 and for the individual-planning group was .516. For the first time, the individual-planning group outperformed the peer-planning group but this difference was, yet again, not statistically significant (*p* = .431).

Finally, concerning differences in complexity of speech, the group who planned collaboratively showed a small advantage over the group who planned alone (peer-planning$_M$ = 2.14 – individual-planning$_M$ = 1.98 clauses/c-unit). Still, this difference was not large enough to be significant (*p* = .431).

All in all, the results show a slight advantage for the peer-planning group in all variables but the accuracy measure of

number of errors per c-unit. While this might indicate a trend towards a better performance when planning is done in pairs, the lack of significance does not allow for firm conclusions. One interesting trend that was noticed by the researchers at the time of data collection, and which was later confirmed through statistical analyses, was the fact that the participants who planned with a partner tended to speak for a shorter time, something that is positive when we are dealing with a message to be delivered in an answering machine, which requires concise messages. There was a significant (p = .005) difference in the average length of speech between the two groups with the peer-planning participants speaking for an average of 1min09sec and the individual-planning participants speaking for an average of 2min16sec. It seems that the peer-planners committed to the story agreed upon and tried to deliver it as planned without any attempt at incrementing it or changing it[20]. This might have been the reason for their speech being more concise.

Still, as regards the benefits advocated for collaborative work, the findings are disappointing since the peer-planning group did not outperform the individual-planning group in any of the measures (at least not in a significant way). Yet, this may be explained by two characteristics of the groups who contributed with data: level of proficiency and experience with planning. First, the level of these participants was advanced. As Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) pointed out, the ones who will probably benefit the most from help while planning are beginners. Also, Kawauchi (2005) found that learners who are at the high-intermediate level of command of the L2 might profit the most from planning since learners who are at an advanced level might perform well even when they are not given time for planning. Another reason that might have influenced the results is the fact that 15 out of the 16 participants had already been in a situation of planning (always individually) so perhaps they had already developed skills for planning and this time had to adapt

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[20] As a matter of fact, a cursory analysis of the recordings of the peer-planning allowed us to notice that this seems, indeed, to be the case since the stories planned and the stories told are virtually the same and also do not differ much from one participant (of a pair) to the other.

these skills to the novel situation of planning with a colleague. Perhaps if the group was comprised of people who had never been involved in planning there would be a greater difference between the groups since the peer-planners would be able, as suggested by Figueiredo (2007), to share their strategies, enriching the planning of the colleague.

A third possibility is that the collaborative work did not yield benefits because it was not collaborative. In Storch's (1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, in Swain *et al.*, 2002) investigations, she observed that collaborative work can display different patterns of interaction being that the dominant/dominant and the dominant/passive ones lead to less co-construction, language-related episodes, extension of knowledge, provision of scaffolded assistance and language development (grammar and lexis) than the real collaborative interaction or the expert/novice interaction. Watanabe and Swain (2007) also observed that when the pattern of interaction was collaborative rather than expert/passive or dominant/passive, participants scored higher in the posttest. Indeed, listening to the recordings of the planning episodes it was possible to observe the patterns of interaction that emerged and in some cases (two out of the four pairs who planned together) it was clear that one of the participants took the lead and dominated throughout the whole planning time. This person was the one who came up with the story and the form it would be told, with the other person basically agreeing or contributing with smaller details. A thorough analysis of the recordings of the peer planning is out of the scope of this paper and will be reported somewhere else. Nevertheless, the pattern of interaction of these pairs seems to deserve further scrutiny and might have contributed to the lack of difference between the performances of the two groups[21].

In addition to these tentative explanation for the lack of significant differences between the groups, another possibility is that, since the beneficial effects of planning have been found

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[21] It is important to mention that, due to time constrains, it was not possible to conduct a within-participants design, a measure which would have enabled us to compare the same participants performing in both planning situations (in pairs and individually).

with learners of different levels, performing different tasks, and with different amounts of planning time (see the Review of Literature Section), what might have happened is that the impact of planning per se was greater than the potential differences in the two kinds of planning (alone or with a partner). That is, being given time to plan is what will really make a difference. Still, to be able to affirm that, we would need a control group which did not plan, and that was not the case. Finally, the reduced number of participants in the present study might have impeded statistical differences from emerging.

2. What do participants from the peer-planning group report to do differently from the participants of the individual-planning group?

In order to obtain data to answer this research question, we relied on data provided as answer to Question 2 in the post-task questionnaire (see Appendix). To begin with, all participants (except for one from the individual group) revealed, somehow, *what* they planned. Both planning groups thought about: the story (six participants in the individual-planning and three in the peer-planning group), the mandatory words (six in the individual group and five in the peer group), the sequence of the story (three participants in each group), the excuse (two in each group), and vocabulary (one participant in each group). The participants of the individual-planning group also mentioned that they planned the genre of the message (two cases), the apology (two cases), the sentences (one case), and the grammar (one case); while the participants of the peer-planning group reported that they planned the ideas (three cases), a story that could be real (two cases), the message (one case), and the expressions they would use (one case). It might be that the participants engaged in the task imagining that they were indeed facing the proposed situation, since besides employing the mandatory words, they were worried about: creating a (real) story, sequencing it, and making it adequate for the genre, with a good excuse and apology.

When asked about the *emphasis* in the moment they were planning, eight out of the ten respondents (three from the

individual group and all the participants from the peer group) revealed that their emphasis was on using the mandatory words. To exemplify, some of the participants' words were: *"The emphasis was on the six words we were supposed to include in our 'excuse'."/ "Our main focus and thoughts were to use all words in our recordings."*[22] This may reveal that we achieved our purpose of adding some extra burden to the task by including these words, especially for the peer-planning group. This might have been due to a greater need for negotiation between the peers. As for the other respondents of the individual group, three placed emphasis on choosing the sequence of events ("*My emphasis was in the sequence of events.*"), one on choosing appropriate vocabulary ("*I was concerned in using good vocabulary*"), and one on elaborating the excuse ("*My emphasis was on the words requested and also on the fact that I was supposed to apologize and use an excuse*").

Regarding the issue of *how* they conducted their planning, some participants reported a chronological sequence of actions and others (from the peer group) reported on their interaction while planning. To start with, seven participants in the individual-planning group provided answers on how they conducted a plan, as shown in the following numbered[23] sequences: I1) story / sequencing / inserting the mandatory words; I2) imagining the actual recording / taking notes; I3) nice apology / inserting the mandatory words / taking notes / memorizing; I4) story / steps of the message / excuse; I5) sequence of facts + mandatory words[24] / genre (message); I6) mandatory words / story / using the plan as a theme for the message (not memorizing it); and I7) mandatory words / story / apologizing / excuse.

As for the participants of the peer-planning group, a total of six answered this question, where half of them offered a

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[22] Language was preserved as produced by the participants of the study.
[23] They were numbered in order to better both visualize and comment on.
[24] Her discourse does not show clearly what the sequence of her actions was. By her report it seems that she did the two actions at the same time as can be seen by her writing: "*I was creating a sequence of facts, focusing on the words I had to include in my speech*".

sequence of planning as follows: P1) story / sequence / vocabulary / expressions; P2) taking notes / rehearsing; and P3) mandatory words / sequence / modifying the excuse; and the other half commented on their peer interaction: P4) "*my ideas complemented my partner's ones*"; P5) "*one started an idea and the other continued it*"; P6) "*we planned it with both ideas. I suggested something and she gave another suggestion*". When comparing the sequences either within or between the groups, we can see that the sequences I5, I6, I7 and P3 have the same two beginning steps. Moreover, regardless of the order within each sequence, the most mentioned steps were the following: six instances for the mandatory words, five for the story, three for taking notes, and three for the excuse. The main focus of those who mentioned their interaction was on sharing ideas.

Finally, concerning their *thoughts* while planning, nine participants (six from the peer-planning group and three from the individual-planning group) offered answers[25]. Probably due to the fact that they had to provide a written answer addressing the four issues (how, what, emphasis, and thoughts), the participants talked about their *thoughts* together with the *emphasi*s and, mainly, with the *how*. Therefore, this answer did not offer new data and was not revealing regarding the differences within and between planning groups[26].

Summarizing, it is possible to say that (1) all participants engaged in planning both at the macro level (i.e., the overall organization of the message) and the micro level (i.e., the words and expressions needed to convey their ideas); (2) most of the respondents from both groups planned with an emphasis on the mandatory words; and (3) all respondents of the individual-planning group reported the way they planned as a chronological sequence of actions, while just half of the peer-

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[25] It is imperative to highlight that we considered as answers only the ones that explicitly stated what they were thinking, i.e., those answers that contained the noun *thought(s)* or the verb *to think* (and its forms).

[26] It is important to observe that most participants answered only three of the four questions asked (what they planned, the emphasis, how, and their thoughts) at the most. This shows that, perhaps, this question was overloaded with information and, in a prospective study, it would be prudent to divide it into four questions.

planning group reported on their interaction while planning and its focus on sharing ideas with the partner.

3. What are the 2 groups' reported opinions about the planning condition under which they performed?

The two groups were asked to express their feelings about the planning condition under which they performed in the first question of the post-task questionnaire (see Appendix). As far as the issue of time is concerned, while all participants of the peer-planning group felt *very happy* (except for one, who was *indifferent*) to have a time for planning, the opinions about the time allotted for planning varied (although they were also positive): four participants were *very happy*, three were *happy*, and one was *indifferent*. All 4 participants explained that they chose the *very happy* face because there was enough time to perform the task. On the other hand, of the three participants who chose the *happy* face, two stated that it was too much time, and one wrote that more time would have been perfect.

Similar results can be found in the individual-planning group regarding both issues. Six participants were *very happy* about having a special time to plan their speech, while two were *happy*; and half of the participants were *very happy*, and the other half *happy*, with the amount of time that was given. From those *happy* ones, two reported that they wanted more time, one wrote that it was too much time, and one said that it was enough time. Therefore, all these issues considered, it is possible to conclude that, in general, the participants had good feelings both towards having a special time for planning and towards the amount of ten minutes of planning time. In addition, no relevant differences emerged when comparing the results between the two planning groups.

Regarding their feelings in relation to the task, the data shows a slight difference between the two planning groups. Among the individual-planning participants two chose the *very happy* face and six chose the *happy* face while five, two and one participant(s) of the peer-planning group chose *very happy*, *happy*, and *indifferent* faces, respectively. It is relevant to highlight that

one *happy* participant of the individual group reported that she "*felt a little nervous*", whereas one *happy* participant of the peer group reported that she does not "*like recording things, but this activity was funny*". Another participant (a *very happy* one) commented the following: "*I don't like very much when I have to think about something and then record it, but with a partner it was better*". These two participants seemed to be less anxious due to the fact that they were working with a partner. The data does not show enough evidence to speculate that peer planning could reduce anxiety; however, this issue could be specifically investigated in a further piece of research.

Concerning the act of planning, most participants (all participants of the individual-planning group and five of the peer-planning group) chose the *very happy* face to represent their feelings towards the planning condition under which they performed. The others from the peer-planning group chose the *happy* face (two participants) and the *indifferent* face (one participant). Moreover, three participants commented about their answer[27]. One participant of the individual-planning group reported that "*It is a good thing to do 'cos you already have in mind what you say, you have less hesitations*", one participant of the peer-planning group wrote "*It's good to plan in pairs, because we can have better ideas by working together*" and his/her peer said "*I like it because sometimes I don't have any idea, so my classmate helps me*". The comments of this pair show that the issue of sharing ideas was very important in their experience of planning[28], a fact that corroborates Souza's (2007) findings, where participants also enjoyed the collaborative work. In this line of thought, we could speculate that peer planning, due to its potential collaborative nature, would offer benefits that individual planning does not.

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[27] Most participants did not comment their face choices, although there was space on the questionnaire for them to comment on and some questions explicitly invited them to explain their choices.

[28] It is important to restate that the peer-planning group worked collaboratively just when planning, i.e., they performed and answered the questionnaires individually.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at comparing the performances and opinions of learners who, prior to engaging in an L2 oral task, were allowed time for planning (either individually or with a peer) their speech. As for the statistic results, although they show a slight advantage for the peer-planning group in all variables (with the exception of the measure "number of errors per c-unit"), there were no statistically significant differences between the groups. In the same way, a qualitative stance towards the participants' answers regarding the planning task did not reveal considerable differences between the two planning groups. These results may indicate that the characteristics of the participants of these groups, such as their advanced level of English and their previous experience of having been in a situation of planning, had a greater impact on their performance than the planning condition experienced. Alternatively, it might be that the limited number of informants did not allow for significant differences between the groups to be found.

On the other hand, the data revealed a number of specific and relevant differences, which were beyond the scope of this investigation but deserve further scrutiny in prospective studies. One of them is that there was a statistically significant difference in the average length of speech between the two groups, with the individual planners speaking for more time. The other one regards the speculation that peer-planning may not have been indeed collaborative. Another issue concerns the specificities of each participant from a pair, i.e., it would be interesting to investigate what individual characteristics may influence synchronized peer work.

Although the overall results of this investigation do not indicate significant differences between peer planning and individual planning, the specificities discussed may hint to some constructive pedagogical implications, in spite of the limitations which are characteristic of a small-scale study. First, the students seem to enjoy this kind of task and profit from it, especially when planning in pairs. Second, the burden of the mandatory words not only shows that they indeed increase the difficulty of

the task, but also seems to increase the negotiation between peers in the peer-planning group. Therefore, it seems that both planning and peer planning could be part of classroom procedures as a pre-task activity, as well as provide opportunities for students to reflect on the process that they embark while planning and their perception of the impact of planning on their performance.

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APPENDIX

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

CENTRO DE COMUNICAÇÃO E EXPRESSÃO

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente

Name:

1- **Mark** the face which best represents your **feelings** towards the following:

How much did you like having a special time to plan your speech?	☺ ☺ 😐 ☹ ☹
How much did you like the amount of time that was given? **Explain why**	☺ ☺ 😐 ☹ ☹
How much did you like the task?	☺ ☺ 😐 ☹ ☹
How much did you like the act of planning together with your partner? **If you didn't like it, tell us why.**	☺ ☺ 😐 ☹ ☹

2- Describe your experience in planning with your partner providing as much information as you can remember (How did you plan? What did you plan? What was the emphasis of your plan? What were your thoughts while planning?)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3- Do you want to say something that was not asked here? What?

_____

_____

Título: *O impacto do planejamento individual e em pares no desempenho oral de aprendizes de nível avançado de inglês como língua estrangeira*

Resumo: *Tendo em mente que a pesquisa sobre o planejamento em uma abordagem baseada em tarefas tornou-se um nicho de pesquisa que se sustenta, o presente estudo comparou o desempenho oral em língua estrangeira de 16 aprendizes cursando a 7º fase de um curso de Letras-Inglês em uma tarefa monológica na condição de planejamento individual ou em pares. O desempenho dos aprendizes foi analisado em termos de fluência, acurácia e complexidade, porém não houve diferenças estatísticas significativas entre os grupos. Além disso, questionários pós-tarefa foram administrados para verificar as impressões dos aprendizes acerca dos processos em que eles embarcaram ao planejar e sua opinião sobre as condições nas quais eles planejaram. Em termos gerais, os participantes reportaram que embarcaram em processos de organização e formulação da mensagem e perceberam as condições de planejamento, sejam elas individual ou colaborativa, como benéficas.*

Palavras-chave: *Planejamento; abordagem baseada em tarefas; trabalho colaborativo.*