
Pre-task Planning and During-task Oral Performance: Two cases of task performance with adult Chinese EFL learners

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Introduction

How do tasks influence language learning and performance? Some second language acquisition (SLA) studies (e.g., Ellis, 1987; Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996) have indicated that pre-task planning can have effects upon the nature of task performance. This research has its roots in cognitive SLA research paradigms in which variables such as conditions under which a task is done and types of tasks are isolated in order to explore what contributes to learning.

Researchers (e.g., Foster & Skehan, 1999; Crookes, 1989) argued whether planning time could affect a learner's second language performance on the aspects of complexity, accuracy and fluency. Other studies also focused on exactly what aspects would be affected and how they would be affected by having pre-task planning. Crookes (1979) did a study with two groups of 20 Japanese English learners. One group had 10 minutes of preparation time and one group had no preparation time. Similar to his design, Foster and Skehan (1996) explored learners' performances based on three tasks (personal, narrative and decision making tasks) and two levels of planning (unguided planning and guided planning). Unguided learning refers to 10 minutes' solitary planning time, in which learners were required to take notes, but the notes were taken away at the end of planning time. On the other hand, guided learning refers to 10 minutes' planning time with guidance of the language that would be needed, the discourse and the content of the tasks. Crookes found that students with 10 minutes' planning produced more fluent language than no-planners. However, even though Foster and Skehan (1996) also reported that planning helped improving learners' complexity performance, the guided planning condition produced greater complexity than that achieved by unguided learners, especially in narrative and decision-making tasks. Considering of learners' accuracy performance, Crookes (1989) concluded that learners' accuracy was not affected by planning time. However, Foster and Skehan (1996) had different results in accuracy in their study. Foster and Skehan (1996) reported that planners produced more accuracy

than non-planners, and the unguided planners produced the most accuracy of all. Researchers agreed that planning time could help improving fluency. Foster and Skehan (1996) pointed out that the guided planning condition produced slightly more fluency than the unguided condition.

From previous studies such as these, factors that can affect learners' language complexity, accuracy and fluency are various and complicated. The aim of this study is to explore on a small scale, with two adult EFL learners, the influence of planning time as well as two types of planning: individual planning and group planning. This study will also compare the complexity, accuracy, and fluency between the two learners on two different tasks: narrative task and comparison task.

Literature review

For this literature review on pre-task planning, I used the library search tools to search for relevant article and journals. My key words were “task planning”, “interlanguage”, “fluency”, “accuracy” and “complexity”. I looked for articles with participants who were EFL or ESL students because those participants are most similar to my participants and setting. I looked for articles from 1989 to present so I could get a better idea of the past and current studies on this topic. However, what I found most effective in obtaining quality resources was using the reference section from the journal articles, literature reviews and case studies which most closely matched my topic and participants.

Language performance and measuring it

Fluency. Skehan and Foster (1999) defined the language fluency as “the capacity to use language in real time, to emphasize meanings” (p. 96). In recent years there has been a growing interest in L2 fluency from the standpoint of the speaker, as is evident in the research of Foster and Skehan (1996), Lennon (1990, 2000), Skehan and Foster (1999), Towell, Hawkins, and Bazergui (1996), Riggenbach (1991, 2000), Wennerstrom (2000), and others. Studies have focused on a variety of factors that affect fluency, such as task type (e.g., Bygate, 1996; Ejzenberg, 1992; Skehan & Foster, 1999), preplanning (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998; Ortega, 1999;

Wigglesworth, 1997), online planning (Yuan & Ellis, 2003) and the planning process (Ortega, 1999) In this study, I will only focus on how planning may affect language fluency.

To measure fluency, previous studies used to distinguish breakdown fluency (Skehan, 1999) between repair fluency (Skehan, 1999). Breakdown fluency refers to number of pauses and amount of silences, while repair fluency refers to repetitions, self-corrections, false-starts and reformulations. Foster and Skehan (1996) measured these two kinds of factors separately in their study, and they further divided the two categories into six parts:

- Reformulations: Either phrases or clauses that are repeated with some modification to syntax, morphology, or word order.
- False starts: Utterances that are abandoned before completion and that may or may not be followed by a reformulation.
- Repetition: Words, phrases or clauses that are repeated with no modification whatsoever to syntax, morphology, or word order.
- Replacements: Lexical items that are immediately substituted for another.
- Pauses: A break of 1.0 second or longer either within a turn or between turns.
- Silence total: The sum of pauses in each transcript (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 230).

By having so many categories of repair, we can assume that students repair their utterances for different purposes. However, I think sometimes it is hard to tell what a learner exactly wants to do. For example, for the sentence: “From the Mexico family, 20% of their food are bread and 10% sugar, 70% fruits, and barely, just very few eggs, and others, and other things. Very few eggs and vegetables.” It is hard to tell the phrase “very few eggs and vegetables” is a reformulation of the previous part, or a new turn. Also, a break of 1.0 second between turns could be hard to measure. It is natural for speakers to have pauses between sentences, so it is hard to tell whether learners pause intensively or not.

Complexity. Language complexity is “the capacity to use more advanced language, with the possibility that such language may not be controlled so effectively. This may also involve a great willingness to take risks, and use fewer controlled language subsystems” (Skehan & Foster, 1999, p. 96). Studies on this topic almost always focus on whether pre-task planning can improve language complexity. Most researchers agree with the idea that planning can improve language complexity (Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998).

With 66 intermediate-level adult English learners, Foster and Skehan (1999) examined different sources of planning (teacher-led, solitary, group-based) as well as different foci for planning (i.e., towards language or towards content). Foster and Skehan (1999) used C-unit to measure complexity. C-unit refers to each independent utterance providing referential and pragmatic meaning (Foster & Skehan, 1999). According to Foster, Tonkyn & Wigglesworth (2000), C-unit is more semantic focus. However, the identification of semantic units based on information/meaning chunks is never easy and some times impossible to establish with certainty (Foster, Tonkyn & Wigglesworth, 2000). Considering of this limitation, in this study, I will use AS-units to measure syntactic complexity.

Accuracy. According to Skehan and Foster (1999), language accuracy is “the ability to avoid error in performance, possibly reflecting higher levels in the control of language as well as conservative orientation, that is, avoidance of challenging structures that might provoke error” (p. 97). There has been a debate on whether pre-task planning will improve accuracy. Crookes (1989) suggested that planners produced language that was more fluent and complex than non-planners, but no more accurate. However, Ellis (1987) suggested that planned discourse might influence the level of accuracy. Ellis (1987) claimed that in order to study the relationship between planning and accuracy, it was important to distinguish different types of planning. Foster and Skehan (1996) explored language performance based on different tasks and they reported interesting results for accuracy. Planners produced more accurate performance than non-planners, and the most accurate performers of all were the unguided planners.

In Foster and Skehan's (1996) research, the main accuracy index was the proportion of clauses that were error free, and additional measures were used to relate accuracy to the length of clause that could be handled without error (see Skehan & Foster, 2005, for additional discussion of this measure). However, in this frame, I think there are some problems in this measurement. It is difficult to consider a complex sentence as grammatically correct or not by only looking at its clauses. Sometimes, even though the clauses are totally correct, there might be errors in the sentence. For example, for the sentence "I leave home when I was young", even though the two clauses "I leave home" and "when I was young" are correct, the whole sentence is problematic. I am unsure whether other researchers encountered this problem, but I feel measuring sentences is more accurate than measuring clauses. I will further discuss this issue in the data analysis section.

Measuring oral language

In order to study students' oral language, measurements are important. To measure language fluency, complexity and accuracy in a quantitative research, key ideas include of the definitions of "clauses", "breakdowns" and "AS-units".

Clauses. Clauses can be used to measure language accuracy and complexity. A primary division for the discussion of clauses is the distinction between main clauses (i.e., matrix clauses, independent clauses) and subordinate clauses (i.e. embedded clauses, dependent clauses) (Crystal, 1997). A main clause can stand-alone - it can constitute a complete sentence by itself. A subordinate clause (i.e. embedded clause), in contrast, is reliant on the appearance of a main clause; it depends on the main clause and is therefore a dependent clause, whereas the main clause is an independent clause. In this study, I will look at independent clauses as well as subordinate clauses.

Pauses and repairs. Fulcher (1996), investigated variables that arguably determine how fluent speech is perceived—factors that may cause hesitation phenomena (e.g., pauses) as well as their effects on raters' perceptions—and developed a fluency rating scale. Using the transcribed data from 21 oral interviews, Fulcher created eight categories as possible explanations for learners to pause (e.g., end-of-turn pauses, grammatical planning hesitation, expressing propositional uncertainty, etc.).

In Skehan and Foster's (1996) research, repair fluency seems more connected to moment-by-moment decisions during performance, reflecting adjustments and improvements that are feasible within the pressure of real-time communication. Skehan and Foster (1996) measured repairs through six categories, which were categorized by their functions on syntax, lexis, simply repetition and so on. These categories were reformulations, false starts, repetitions, replacements and pauses.

AS-units. AS-units are also called Analysis of Speech units (Foster, Tonkyn & Wigglesworth, 2000). An AS-unit is a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with either (Foster, Tonkyn & Wigglesworth, 2000). AS-units can be used to measure language complexity. For example, in Skehan and Foster's (2013) research, complexity was calculated by dividing the data into syntactic clauses and Analysis of Speech-units (AS-units; Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000) and expressed as the ratio of clauses to AS-units. In other words, the more average clauses per AS-unit, the higher the complexity score. In this frame, complexity will be measured similar to how Foster and Skehan (2013) measured complexity in their study.

Factors that may influence language performance

Researchers have been focused on different factors that may influence language performance.

With planning time or without planning time. Crookes (1989) discovered in his study that pre-task planning did influence students' fluency and complexity, but not accuracy. Crookes (1989) mentioned that for non-native speakers, planned speech differed from unplanned speech in some same aspects as it did for native speakers. In addition, there seemed to be differences, such as suppliance of morphology, which did not appear in comparisons of native-speakers' planned and unplanned language, but could be implicated in IL change toward target forms (Crookes, 1989). Considering these findings, Crookes wanted to explore second language learners' interlanguage with and without planning time. Crookes (1989) did a study with two groups of 20 Japanese English learners, with one group having 10 minutes' preparation time and one group having no preparation time. In his study, he gave learners 10 minutes' planning time prior

to their completion of two information-gap tasks. He suggested that planners use the planning time to complete the task, but this time also could help improve language accuracy. This study shows the influence of planning. However, it also had some limitations. For example, it only had 1 planning condition. In the 10-minute planning, learners were told to plan words, phrases and ideas independently. If there could have been more detailed instruction on how to prepare and if students could have prepared in groups, there could have been different results.

Types of planning: Guided or unguided. In response to Crookes' study, Ellis (1987) argued that it was important to distinguish the types of planning the participants did. Inspired by this idea, Foster and Skehan (1996) changed the design of Crookes's (1989) study. In Foster and Skehan's (1996) study, planning was operationalized at two levels. In the first level, there were 10 minutes' solitary planning time, in which subjects were required to take notes, but notes would be taken away after planning. In the second level, participants were given guidance as how they might use the 10 minutes' planning time. Guidance might include form suggestions (e.g., structures that need to be pay attention to) and content suggestions (e.g., the discourse and the content that the task might have) of the task. Foster and Skehan (1996) concluded in this research that a guided planning condition produced more complexity than unguided planners, and slightly greater fluency, but the most accurate performers of all were the unguided planners. The authors speculated that unguided planners could have achieved greater accuracy because they had less complexity, and thus gave themselves an easier task to do. In other words, they used their planning time to formulate simple, but accurate sentences.

The length of planning time. Another factor that may influence the language performance is the length of the planning time. Both Wigglesworth (1997) and Mehnert (1998) have focused on this issue. Because Wigglesworth's (1997) setting is in the context of language testing, which is different from the context of this study, her research was somehow unsuitable for this study. Mehnert (1998) investigated the effects of systematically manipulating planning time. She divided her participants into four groups. The first group didn't have planning time, the second group had 1 minute's planning time, the third group had 5 minutes' planning time and the fourth group had 10 minutes'

planning time. The study showed that accuracy, fluency and complexity of language were all affected by the opportunity to plan, but in different ways. More planning time had a monotonic effect upon fluency, but this effect was progressively reduced. An effect for accuracy was only shown between non-planners and all the planning conditions. At the same time, there was no difference in complexity among the groups. This study shows that the length of planning might not have an effect on language performance (at least for complexity). I believe that it is more important to get to know the different ways second language learners used the time for planning, some in quite sophisticated ways. For example, Ting asked me to play her last record because she wanted to review her utterance first, after that she would prepare for content or language, and she would always leave one minute to practice speaking.

The types of the tasks. Skehan and Foster (1997) focused on the effects of planning with three task types. In this study, the three types were: (i) a personal experience task, (ii) a narrative task and (iii) a decision-making task. The authors explained that the first two types were easier because they asked for students' own experiences and they were more structure oriented, while the decision-making task could be more complicated. It was clear that with planning time, students could get greater complexity or accuracy, but not both of them. Foster and Skehan concluded that planning opportunities had large effects on fluency, but the effects on accuracy and complexity were slightly less clear-cut. Accuracy and complexity were affected on the personal task, but planning produced significantly superior performance only on the narrative task for accuracy, and on the decision-making task for complexity. The authors used trade-off effects, which refers to the trade-off between accuracy and complexity, to explain the different results of the narrative task and the decision-making task. According to the authors, the more a planned task pushes subjects into attempting complex language, the weaker the control over language form. Since the narrative task allows less attention on language form (Skehan & Foster, 1997), students could demonstrate more accuracy. On the other hand, since the decision-making task requires more attention on language form, such as how to give advices and how to defend ideas, students ended up having less

progress in accuracy and more improvements in complexity. These results can show the potential effects that task types may have on language performances.

Communication strategies

According to Coupland et al (1991:3), communication strategies are used to overcome breakdowns, gaps or problems in communication. Appearing in literature first in the early 1970s, the term ‘communication strategies’ within a second language context was coined by Selinker (1972), to connect communication strategies with ‘errors in learner’s interlanguage system’. Researchers also focused on the functions of communication strategies. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) state that by allowing them room to maneuver in times of difficulty, communication strategies provide the learners with more language input and also a sense of security in the target language. Apart from this, according to Rababah (as seen in Jamshidnejad, 2011, pp. 3758), communication strategies can also lead to learning by eliciting unknown language from an interlocutor or from their own language knowledge. In this study, communication strategies also helped participants to overcome difficulties and led to the improvements of their oral language. For example, participants would change their utterances when they recognized problems. Also, by negotiating with each other, learners turned out to have better accuracy performance.

There are actually many other factors that may influence second language performance. Those mentioned above are among the factors that have been discussed most in the literature. I will use this literature to help form my own study. The first three parts actually gave me a general idea of what to do in my study and how to analyze my data. The last part introduces some previous studies on the topic of how planning time influence adult English learner’s language complexity, accuracy and fluency. Even though I won’t be able to cover all possible factors that can influence learners’ language performance in complexity, accuracy and fluency. In my study, I think it will be good to keep those factors in mind when analyzing data. Definitely, the studies reviewed above also have some limitations, but they can tell me what to look at in my own data.

In this study, there are three research questions:

1. What are the complexity, accuracy and fluency of two English learners of

different proficiency levels on two tasks?

2. How does individual planning time affect participants' fluency, accuracy and complexity on two tasks?

3. How does pair work affect participants' fluency, accuracy and complexity?

Research question No.1 will be measured by comparing the two English learners' complexity, accuracy and fluency when they did the two tasks without planning time.

Research question No.2 will be measured by comparing the two English learners' complexity, accuracy and fluency when they did the two tasks with individual planning time and without planning time. Research question No.3 will be measured by comparing the two English learners' complexity, accuracy and fluency when they did the two tasks with group planning time and with individual planning time.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this case study are two adult Chinese EFL learners. Both of them are adults, and they each have a bachelor degree.

Ting. Ting (pseudonym) is a housewife. She came to the US with her husband, who was an undergraduate student in the university. In the interview, she mentioned that she started learning English at a quite young age, but her English was still limited. In order to learn English, she was taking language courses from a church. I would like to say that this woman seemed to be a good language student with high learning motivation. She was quite accepting of feedback and took every chance to practice her language. She said that she wanted to improve her English proficiency as quickly as possible and hoped one day she could pass the TOEFL test to apply for Nursing School.

Wang. Wang (pseudonym)'s language proficiency level is higher than Ting. He was taking courses with MELP (Level 3), the Minnesota English Language Program, and he had taken TOEFL and GRE test before. Unlike Ting, Wang was a full-time student at the time of the study and he wanted to apply for the PhD program in the University of Minnesota's Archeology Department. Wang said he usually went to bookstores or libraries when he had free time. He enjoyed reading, but his English level was a limitation. Wang's

personality is also quite different from Ting's. In terms of language learning styles, he told me that he was not that comfortable with negative feedback, especially when it came from a partner with lower levels of proficiency than him.

Data collection

In order to do the study, I collected students' oral language through video recording. I did the transcription work as soon as possible, so I could have a clear memory of it. Also, when analyzing data, I discussed with my participants again to check their understandings and behaviors when they did the tasks.

I asked my participants to do two tasks: a narrative task and a comparison task. Each task was done three times. The first time, participants were asked to speak immediately, without planning time. The second time, participants had 5 minutes' individual planning time. The last time, I changed the task materials and they had 5 minutes' pair planning time. Ting and Wang were partners during the paired task.

Narrative Tasks. For the narrative tasks, I used the *Grocery Store* story and the *Snow Day* story (see Appendix 1). The first time, they told the Grocery Store story without any time for planning, but they could look at the pictures during speaking. The second time, approximately one week later, I gave them 5 minutes to prepare by themselves first, and then asked them to tell the same story again, without looking at the pictures during speaking. The planning was done in an unguided way. Even though I asked them to think about what structure to use and take notes when needed, I didn't exactly teach them the correct structure and discuss the story with them. I didn't take their notes away at the end of the planning, so they could still refer to them while speaking. Also, I told them they could listen to their previous recording if they asked, but the recording would only be played once. The third time for this narrative task, usually another one week later, I used the *Snow Day* story. This time, I gave them 5 minutes' group planning time first, and then they told the story with the pictures of the story. Before group planning, I asked them to communicate with each other and think about what grammatical forms to use and what details they could use from the pictures. Also, I didn't directly teach them the form or the content. The two learners discussed by

themselves and took notes whenever needed. I didn't allow them to listen to their previous recording because I didn't want any of them to feel awkward by having their recordings played in front of another student. Table 1 shows my instructions of the Narrative Task in a clearer way:

	No preparation	Individual preparation	Pair preparation
Length of preparation	0 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Instruction of the task	<p>This is a narrative task. There are 4 pictures telling a story. Please look at the pictures and tell this story. You don't have any time for preparation, but you can look at the pictures during speaking. So, please start speaking as soon as I count 3. OK? 1, 2, 3. Start.</p>	<p>Now, we will do the narrative task again. There are 4 pictures telling a story. Please look at the pictures and tell the story. Please remember that you need to tell a story rather than simply describe the pictures. This time you have 5 minutes to prepare. You can take notes whenever you want and refer to it later, but you cannot look at the pictures during speaking. You can think of what form to use in order to tell a story and what the story is. I can play your last record for only one time if you ask me to do so.</p>	<p>This time we will do another narrative task. This is a new story. The pictures are used to tell this story. This time, you have 5 minutes to prepare with your partner and have a discussion. You can talk about what the story is or what form to use to tell a story. You are allowed to take notes and refer to it during speaking. This time, you cannot ask to listen to your previous records. Also, you need to discuss who goes first during</p>

		But it will take your preparation time. Please start preparation as soon as I count 3. OK? 1, 2, 3. Start.	preparation. One of you needs to leave this room while the other one is speaking. Please start preparation as soon as I count 3. OK? 1, 2, 3. Start.
Guidance of preparation	No guidance	Remind them to think of forms and content, but no direct instruction.	Remind them to think of forms and content, but no direct instruction.
Possible assistance	The pictures	Their previous records Notes	Their partners Notes The pictures

Table 1: Instruction chart of the Narrative Task

Comparison task. This task was done in a way similar to the narrative task. Participants also needed to do this task for three times. The first time, I gave them two pictures from *the Hungry Planet* (see Appendix 2). Without any preparation, they had to compare the similarities and differences, and guess the cultural viewpoints behind the pictures. The second time, approximately one week later, I had them do the comparison again. They needed to answer the same questions, but this time they had 5 minutes to prepare individually. Before planning, I asked them to think about what forms to use to do comparisons and what details they could find in the pictures. They were allowed to take notes and could refer to their notes during speaking. Also, they could ask to listen to their previous recording for one time if they thought it was necessary. I didn't give direct instruction to the language form and task content. The third time, usually another week later, I did this task with the *Houses* pictures (see Appendix 2). This time, they had 5 minutes to prepare in pairs first, and then they answered the same questions. To prepare, I asked them to communicate with each other and think about what grammatical forms to

use and what details they could use from the pictures. Also, I didn't directly teach them the form or the content. The two learners discussed by themselves and took notes whenever needed. I didn't allow them to listen to their previous recordings because I didn't want any of them to feel awkward by having their recordings played in front of another student. Table 2 shows my instruction of the Comparison Task in a clearer way:

	No preparation	Individual preparation	Pair preparation
Length of preparation	0 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Instruction of the task	<p>This is a comparison task. These two pictures came from a series of pictures called: <i>the Global Planet</i>. These pictures show two different families' food for one week. As you can see, the two families came from different countries and different cultures. You need to compare the similarities and differences of the two families. Also, you need to guess the cultural backgrounds of the two families behind</p>	<p>Now, we will do a comparison task again. We will still use the pictures that you compared last time. You need to compare the similarities and differences of the two families. Also, you need to guess the cultural backgrounds of the two families behind the pictures. This time you have 5 minutes to prepare. You can take notes whenever you want and refer to it later. You can think of what form to use in order to make comparisons and what content you can notice from the pictures. I can</p>	<p>This time we will do another comparison task. There are two pictures. The pictures show two different houses. You need to compare the similarities and differences of the two families. Also, you need to guess the backgrounds of the two families behind the pictures. This time, you have 5 minutes to prepare with your partner and have a discussion. You can talk about what details you can notice or what form to use to make</p>

	<p>the pictures. You don't have time to prepare this time. Please start speaking as soon as I count 3. OK? 1, 2, 3. Start.</p>	<p>play your last record for only one time if you ask me to do so. But it will take your preparation time. Please start preparation as soon as I count 3. OK? 1, 2, 3. Start.</p>	<p>comparisons. You are allowed to take notes and refer to it during speaking. This time, you cannot ask to listen to your previous records. Also, you need to discuss who goes first during preparation. One of you needs to leave this room while the other one is speaking. Please start preparation as soon as I count 3. OK? 1, 2, 3. Start.</p>
Guidance of preparation	No guidance	Remind them to think of forms and content, but no direct instruction.	Remind them to think of forms and content, but no direct instruction.
Possible assistance	The pictures	<p>Their previous records</p> <p>Notes</p> <p>The pictures</p>	<p>Their partners</p> <p>Notes</p> <p>The pictures</p>

Table 2: Instruction chart of the Comparison Task

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, I measured the participants' oral language fluency, complexity and accuracy in English, and compared the results to see if planning could make any difference in their interlanguage performance and if group planning was

better.

Fluency. Fluency was measured by calculating the average number of mid-clause pauses and the average number of reformulations, standardized by 50 words. In this study, inspired by Foster and Shehan (1996) breakdown fluency was measured through in-clause pauses and repairs was measured through the sum number of reformulation (for syntax, morphology and word order issues), repetition (simply repetition of words, phrases and clauses) and replacement (for lexical replacement). For example:

1. She take a handbag... em...and...she put the handbag in a shopping cart.

(Ting, Narrative Task without planning time).

2. The...chi...the child sit on the shopping cart. (Ting, Narrative Task without

planning time). The highlighted area was counted as 1 repair.

To answer the No. 1 research question, which refers to fluency of two English learners of different proficiency levels on two tasks, I compared Ting's number of in-clause pauses and repairs with Wang's number of in-clause pauses and repairs under the condition of no planning plan.

To answer the No. 2 research question, which refers to the effect of planning time on Ting and Wang's language fluency, I compared Ting and Wang's number of in-clause pauses and repairs under the condition of individual planning time with their numbers of pauses and repairs under the condition of no planning time.

To answer the research question No.3, which refers to how group planning affects learners' fluency. I compared Ting and Wang's number of in-clause pauses and repairs under the condition of group planning time with their numbers of pauses and repairs under the condition of individual planning time.

Complexity. Language complexity was measured by calculating the number of clauses used per AS-unit. "An AS-unit is a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, with any subordinate clause(s) associated with either" (Foster, Tonkyn and Wigglesworth, 2000, p. 365). For example:

3. The two ladies talk a lot, and...but they ignore the little girl. (Wang, Narrative

Task with no planning time) = 2 clauses/2 AS-units

4. When she walked, she saw she saw her friend. (Ting, Narrative Task with individual planning time) = 2 clauses/1 AS-unit.

When measuring complexity, I preferred to ignore syntactic errors. That is to say even though there might be grammatical mistakes in a clause, I regarded it as a “correct” clause if it had a predicate.

To answer the No. 1 research question, which refers to complexity of two English learners of different proficiency levels on two tasks, I compared Ting’s number of clauses per AS-unit with Wang’s number of clauses per AS-unit under the condition of no planning plan.

To answer the No. 2 research question, which refers to the effect of planning time on Ting and Wang’s language complexity, I compared Ting and Wang’s numbers of clauses per AS-unit under the condition of individual planning time with their numbers of clauses per AS-unit under the condition of no planning time.

To answer the research question No.3, which refers to how group planning affects learners’ complexity. I compared Ting and Wang’s numbers of clauses per AS-unit under the condition of group planning time with their numbers of clauses per AS-unit under the condition of individual planning time.

Accuracy. Skehan and Foster (2005) claimed that accuracy could be measured according to the length of clause that could be produced without errors. However, instead of measuring clauses, I thought it might be better to measure sentences because sometimes correct clauses doesn’t mean correct sentences. For example:

5. One day Hamad woke up and opened his eyes and find he’s already late.

(Wang, Narrative Task with group planning time)

In this sentence, there are actually two clauses and both of them seem to be syntactically correct when considered by themselves. However, even though there are no grammatical errors in the two clauses, we cannot say that the whole sentence is totally unproblematic. Because of cases like this, in this study, accuracy was measured according to the percentage of correct sentences that could be handled without errors. Also, sentences were categorized by length in terms of words, such as three-word sentences, five-word sentences and ten-word sentences. By categorizing sentences and calculating the

percentage of correct sentences in each category, it was possible to see whether participants improved their language accuracy by creating short sentences. To explore the potential influence that pre-task planning may have on participants' language accuracy, I compared the results when they did the task without planning with the results when they did the task with planning. To explore whether participants' speaking accuracy improved more when planning was done in pairs, I compared the results when participants did the task with individual planning with the results when participants had group planning time.

Findings and Discussion

Learners' behaviors during task preparation time

Narrative Task.

Ting. During her individual planning time, she asked me to play her last recording. Ting also tried to practice telling this story during individual preparation time. For the third time of doing narrative task, Ting and Wang prepared together. During preparation, they first figured out the content of the story. Ting told the story in Chinese first, and Wang would add some details that he thought might be helpful. Ting asked Wang what grammar structure to use and asked Wang some new vocabulary, such as "free car" and "slicker". Ting always listened to Wang's suggestions and wrote them down onto her notebook.

Wang. During Wang's individual planning time, he asked me to play his last record. He didn't take notes while he was listening. After that, Wang focused on the pictures and practiced speaking. He didn't take any notes and asked me if he could start speaking right now. I refused his request of cutting down the planning time. In this case, he practiced speaking for one more time and focused on the four pictures again. He didn't take any note during the whole preparation. When Wang did group planning with Ting, he was the one that had more proficiency. For example, Ting would ask him clarification questions like: "Is it right?" or "Do you agree?" Wang would answer Ting's question and taught her new vocabulary and structures. Wang had notes this time, and he was the first one to speak.

Comparison Task.

Ting. This time, Ting didn't ask me to play her last record. She thought her last

record didn't help her too much because she still didn't know what to say and what went wrong after listening. During individual preparation, Ting focused on similarities first. She listed some similarities on her notebook. After that, she searched for differences and had a different list of differences on her notebook. She used most of her time focusing on details of the two pictures and practice speaking once at the end of preparation. When Ting prepared with Wang, she preferred to ask Wang's opinions first. They easily reached agreements on some similarities and differences. Ting also asked Wang new vocabularies like "garage" and "fence". Ting volunteered to speak first this time.

Wang. When doing his individual preparation, Wang asked me to play his last record because he said he liked the way he used to do comparisons last time, and wanted to double check the percentage numbers and structures he used. Wang wrote down a series of percentage numbers on his notes. After taking notes, Wang used his last minute practicing speaking. During group planning, Wang listed several differences and similarities. He asked Ting about her opinion after listing. After that, Wang told Ting that the family in one picture was richer than the other one because this family had a car and a garage. Wang also explained the meaning of "garage" to Ting when he noticed his partner couldn't understand this new word.

Fluency

Narrative Task. Table 3 shows Ting and Wang's fluency performance in the Narrative Task. The first two conditions (without preparation and with individual preparation) were connected to the *Grocery Store* story, while the last condition was connected to the *Snow Day* story. In this chart, numbers means how many times each learner had pauses or repairs. In this case, higher numbers means less fluency.

	Without Preparation			With individual preparation			With pair preparation		
	In-clause pauses	Repairs	Total	In-clause pauses	Repairs	Total	In-clause pauses	Repairs	Total
Ting	3	2	5	1	2	3	1	1	2
Wang	0	2	2	2	3	5	0.5	1.5	2

Table 3: Narrative Task's In-clauses pauses and reformulations/50 words at T1 (3 conditions)

Under the condition of no planning time, Ting had 3 pauses and 2 repairs. When she did the task after self-planning, she had only 1 in-clause pause, standardized by 50 words. Even though she still had the same number of repairs, Ting produced somehow more fluency when she had time for individual preparation. Under the condition of group planning time, Ting had 1 in-clause pause and 1 repair. In this case, Ting seems to produce more fluency when she had the opportunity to prepare, and she appears to have the most fluency under the condition of group planning.

At the first time of doing the narrative task, Wang had 0 in-clause pauses and 2 repairs. With higher proficiency level, Wang had somehow more fluency than Ting did under the first condition. However, when Wang did the task again after individual planning, he had 2 in-clause pauses and 3 repairs. In other words, Wang was somehow less fluent under the condition of individual preparation. When Wang did the task with pair/peer preparation, he had 0.5 in-clause pauses and 2 repairs. In this case, Wang produced the most fluency under the condition of pair preparation, but individual planning time didn't help improve his language fluency.

Summary. In the narrative task, the data show that the learner with higher proficiency was more fluency when they did the task without preparation time, but the two learners had different results under the other two conditions.

Comparing the first time when Ting did the task without preparation time with the second time when she told the story with individual planning time, Ting had fewer pauses but same times of repairs. The fact was, when Ting did the task without preparation time, she was just describing the pictures rather than telling the story. In that case, when Ting was told to tell the story for the second time, she used her preparation time mainly on figuring out how to form a story and she used most of her planning time practicing telling a story. In other words, Ting focused on using her known information to tell a story, rather than trying to add more detailed content or fixing grammatical errors when she did the task with individual time. Being familiarized with the content, Ting got less in-clause pauses for the second time.

However, the result was different for Wang, who had more in-clause pauses and more repairs when he did the task with individual preparation time. The fact was

Wang produced 8 clauses when he did the task without planning time, but he produced 12 clauses when he did the task with individual planning time. The increasing number of clauses shows that Wang had more content when he did the task for the second time, or in other words, he focused on details during his preparation time. Moreover, Wang had more repairs at the second time. From Wang's output, the interesting thing here is that Wang's repairs always come after pauses. For example:

6. "They talk...um...they are very exciting to talk with each other and they ignored the little girl." (Wang, Narrative Task with individual preparation);

The possibility here is that Wang paused to monitor his utterances, and when he noticed something went wrong, he would switch to a more familiar way to express his meaning. In order to monitor, he must have put his attention more on accuracy when he did the task for the second time.

Both of the learners had fewer pauses and repairs when they prepared the task in pairs. Facts that could influence learners' fluency performance might include of their discussion during preparation time. During preparation time, they both agreed that they needed to use simple past tense to tell this story and some details they needed to take care of. Being influenced by this discussion, both Ting and Wang had in-clause pauses and repairs due to monitoring the use of verb tense in their utterances. For example:

7. "One day, Hamad woke up late because his alarm clock...umm...**WAS** broken." (Ting, Narrative Task with pair preparation)

8. "He want to...**WANTED** to catch the bus." (Ting, Narrative Task with pair preparation)

9. "He put on his clothes very fast and finally he find...umm...**FOUND** he couldn't find his key." (Wang, Narrative Task with pair preparation)

Their data proved that both of the two learners had spent time on making sure that they were using simple past tense. Compared with what they focused on when they were preparing individually, pair preparation seems to give them more ideas of the task. Especially for Ting, who was at a lower level and mainly focused on how to make a story when she prepared by herself, she was fully influenced by her partner and finally learnt to use past tense to tell a story.

Comparison Task. Table 4 shows Ting and Wang's fluency performances in the Comparison Task. The first two conditions (without preparation and with individual preparation) were connected to pictures from the *Hungry Planet*, while the last condition was connected to pictures from the *Houses*. In this chart, numbers means how many times each learner had pauses or repairs. In this case, higher numbers means less fluency.

	Without preparation			With individual preparation			With pair preparation		
	In-clause pauses	Repairs	Total	In-clause pauses	Repairs	Total	In-clause pauses	Repairs	Total
Ting	1	1.5	2.5	2.25	1	3.25	0.5	2	2.5
Fang	0.33	2	2.33	0.2	1.4	1.6	0	5	5

Table 4: Comparison Task's In-clause pauses and reformulations/50 words at T2 (3 conditions)

Ting produced 1 in-clause pause and 1.5 repairs when he did the comparative without preparation. Being a lower level student, she still produced somehow less fluency than Wang under this condition. When she had the chance to do individual preparation, Ting had 2.25 in-clause pauses and 1 repair. In other words, under the second condition, Ting had more in-clause pauses and fewer repairs. Also, since she had 3.25 in-clauses pauses and repairs in total, which was more than what she did when she had no planning time, Ting produced less fluency under the condition of individual preparation. When Ting did preparation with Wang, she had 0.5 in-clause pauses and 2 repairs. However, even though Ting produced more fluency than the second condition, she had the same level of fluency with the first condition. In this case, preparation time seemed to have no beneficial effects on Ting's fluency under this setting.

Wang had 0.33 in-clause pauses and 2 pairs under the first. After 5-minute of individual preparation, Wang had 0.2 in-clause pauses and 1.4 repairs. In this case, Wang produced more fluency under the condition of individual preparation time. However, when Wang did the task for the third time, he had 0 in-clause pauses and 5 repairs. In other words, Wang had the least fluency under the condition of group planning.

Summary. The data shows that Ting and Wang had quite different results under the three conditions. Ting had less fluency than Wang when they didn't have any time for

preparation because her language proficiency was lower than Wang. However, it turned out that Wang benefited from the individual planning time, but Ting didn't. Apart from this, pair preparation didn't affect Ting's fluency too much, and even had bad influence on Wang's language fluency.

In the comparison task, Ting had more pauses when she had time for individual preparation. Ting offered more information when she did the task after individual preparation. For most of the time, she paused for details. For example:

10. "From the picture, I can see the Mexico's family's food...umm...includes lots of coca colas, beers and...lots of fruits." (Ting, Comparison Task with individual preparation)

Ting's data show that she noticed more detailed content during preparation and she also tried to produce more information when she did the task for the second time. With more details being produced, Ting turned out to have more in-clause pauses.

Wang's data is quite different. It turned out that Wang had fewer in-clause pauses and repairs at the second time. The interesting fact was Wang did the task with more information and better fluency. When he was preparing for this task, Wang wrote down several percentage numbers. Those percentage numbers show that he was focusing on detailed content during preparation. With the help of those numbers, Wang compared the two families easily by simply comparing the different percentages. For example:

11. "Err... first is drink. 50% of the Mexico's are coke and 40% are beer, and milk and juice just less 10%. But in American...but in America family, the beer is just 20%...10 to 20, and the milk and juice are 50." (Wang, Comparison Task with individual preparation)

If we only focus on fluency and ignore the other issues like accuracy and complexity here, Wang's strategy of using percentage numbers was somehow successful because he had better fluency than the first time.

When doing the comparison task with pair preparation, Ting had the same number of in-clause pauses and repairs and Wang had more repairs compared with the first time. It turned out that pair preparation didn't help improve their fluency performances in comparison task, especially for Wang. One possible reason here is that I

used new pictures for them to prepare. As I have mentioned before, both of them focused on details and content in the comparison task. In this case, the new picture meant they needed to figure out all the content from the very beginning again. With more new information being mentioned, fluency was affected.

Complexity

Narrative Task. Table 5 shows the students' language complexity in the narrative task under three different task conditions. The first two conditions were connected to the *Grocery Store* story, while the last condition was connected to the *Snow Day* story. Complexity was measured through the number of clauses produced per AS-unit. Usually, higher ratio means more complexity.

Narrative Task	No preparation			Individual preparation			Pair preparation		
	Clauses	AS-units	Ratio	Clauses	AS-units	Ratio	Clauses	AS-units	Ratio
Ting	19	15	1.2	18	14	1.2	22	14	1.5
Wang	8	7	1.1	12	8	1.5	26	17	1.5

Table 5: Clauses/AS-unit in Narrative Tasks (3 conditions)

Ting produced 1.2 clauses per AS-unit when she did the task with no planning. After 5-minutes of individual preparation, her ratio of clauses per AS-unit had no obvious improvement. In this case, individual planning time didn't have too much effect on Ting's complexity in narrative task. When the preparation was done in pairs, Ting produced 1.5 clauses per AS-unit. In other words, she produced the most complexity under this condition.

Wang produced 1.1 clauses per AS-unit. Being a higher-level student, Wang had less complexity when he did the narrative task with no preparation time. However, Wang produced 1.5 clauses per AS-unit, which means the individual planning time somehow helped improving Wang's complexity in narrative task. Under the third condition, when the task was done in pairs, Wang also produced 1.5 clauses per AS-unit. In this case, Wang produced a same level of complexity under the two conditions.

Summary. In the narrative task, both individual and pair preparation time helped Wang produced somehow more complexity, even though there was no big differences between these two conditions. However, for Ting, she turned out to slightly produce more

complexity only under the third condition.

Ting didn't progress with individual preparation. There could be two reasons. First of all, since Ting didn't have enough English proficiency, it was hard for her to come up with so many complex sentences if she prepared only by herself. Apart from that, as I have mentioned before, Ting focused on how to tell a story rather than how to tell this story with more details. In this case, because her English background was somehow limited and she wasn't trying to use complex sentences to provide more information, her complexity performance didn't change too much when she did the task with individual preparation time. However, things went different when the task was done with pair preparation. Under that condition, Ting had obvious progress in complexity and she turned out to have more complexity sentences than Wang. During preparation, Ting discussed with Wang in terms of detailed content, and she also clarified what structures to use by asking her partner. For example, she would produce a sentence and asked her partner if it was correct. In this case, Ting learnt a lot from her partner and further expanded her English knowledge. With more content being noticed and with the progress in English, she produced more complex sentences.

Wang improved a lot of complexity when the preparation was done individually. As I have mentioned before, Wang focused more on detailed content and grammar during his preparation time. Also, being a MELP Level 3 student, he had already learnt some complex structures such as relative clauses. In order to give more information, Wang needed to produce either more sentences or more complex sentences. With the help of his English knowledge, he finally chose to produce more complex sentences. However, even though his complexity also improved under the condition of pair preparation, pair-work didn't seem to be more efficient than individual preparation. During the discussion, Wang discussed the story with his partner and used most of his preparation time helping his partner with structures and words. Because his partner was at a lower level than him, Wang did not seem to learn new things from Ting. With Wang's own knowledge and the details they noticed, pair preparation did the same job as individual preparation. In this case, the effect of the third condition was the same as that of the second condition..

Comparison Task. Table 6 shows learners' complexity performances in the

comparison task in three different conditions. The first two conditions were connected to pictures from *the Hungry Planet*; while the third condition was connected to pictures connected to *the Houses*. Learners' complexity was measured through the number of clauses produced per AS-unit. Usually, higher ratio means more complexity. For both of the two learners, they mostly focused on comparing differences and similarities and seldom answered the question of guessing cultural background behind the pictures.

Comparison Task	No preparation			Individual preparation			Pair preparation		
	Clauses	AS-units	Ratio	Clauses	AS-units	Ratio	Clauses	AS-units	Ratio
Ting	13	11	1.1	30	26	1.1	17	13	1.3
Wang	21	15	1.4	37	28	1.3	12	6	2.0

Table 6: Clauses/AS-unit in Comparison Tasks (3 conditions)

In the comparison task, Ting produced 1.1 clauses per AS-unit when the task was done without planning time. Because her English level was lower than Wang, she produced less complexity under this condition. When the task was done with individual planning time, Ting also had 1.1 clauses per AS-unit, which means she had the same complexity as that of the individual preparation condition. However, after pair preparation, Ting's ratio of clauses produced per AS-unit reached to 1.3. Under this condition, preparation had beneficial effects on Ting's complexity performance.

Wang had better complexity than Ting did when he did the comparison task. He produced 1.4 clauses per AS-unit. However, his ratio of clauses produced per AS-unit dropped to 1.3 when he had time for individual preparation time. In this case, individual preparation time seemed to have no beneficial effect on Wang's complexity. Under the third condition, after 5-minute pair preparation, Wang had 2.0 clauses per AS-unit. In this case, under the last condition Wang produced the most complexity.

Summary. It is interesting that the two students' levels of complexity on these tasks turned out to be quite different in the two kinds of tasks. In the narrative task, both of them could produce more complex sentences if they had time for preparation. However, in the comparison task, preparation time, especially individual preparation time, turned out to have fewer beneficial effects on learners' complexity performance. What might leads to more complexity on this task is addressing how they hypothesize

about the cultural causes. However, it turned out that both of them mainly focused on comparing but ignored answering the question of cultural causes. Also, when doing the comparison task, Ting and Wang had different strategies to do the comparison. It might be possible that their strategies had influenced their performances of complexity.

For Ting, she preferred to describe the pictures directly. For example,

12. “From the picture, I can see the Mexico’s family’s food...umm...includes lots of coca colas, beers and ...lots of fruits... And...the other picture...on the other picture, the US family have lots of milk, vegetables and meats.” (Ting, Comparison Task with individual preparation)

For Ting, because she was just trying to describe the two pictures, for most of the time, she only used simple sentence structures like “I can see” and “they have...” In this case, even though she had noticed more content during individual preparation, her linguistic fluency and her own use of strategies didn’t help support her to use more complex structures. This was similar to her results in the narrative task; individual preparation time only helped Ting to notice more details, but couldn’t help her figure out how to produce complex sentences.

However, for Wang, the reason for not having more complexity with individual preparation time seems to be different. As I have mentioned before, he preferred to use percentage numbers to show the differences and still preferred to use this method when he did the task for the second time. For example,

13. “Err...first is drink. 50% of the Mexico’s are coke and 40% are beer, and milk and juice just less 10%. But in American...but in America family, the beer is just 20%...10 to 20, and the milk and juice are 50.” (Wang, Comparison Task with individual preparation)

For Wang, he used percentage numbers almost in his entire passage. During the individual preparation time, he made no attempt to change method and try to produce more complex sentences. In this case, even though his English proficiency could support him with more complicated structures, because he didn’t try to focus on this issue during preparation, his complexity didn’t improve under the condition of individual planning time.

However, when Ting and Wang did the comparison task with pair preparation, they changed their strategies. It was interesting that the two learners used similar strategies at this time. For example,

14. “The similarities are they all have two levels and there are some trees around them and there...they also have grass in front of them.” (Wenting, Comparison Task with pair preparation)

15. “And, the differences is...differences are one house is more beautiful and more expensive, don’t have...doesn’t, doesn’t have the fence, but the other one have, has the fence but doesn’t have the garage.” (Fang, Comparison Task with pair preparation)

Different than before, both of them chose to use a long sentence to conclude all similarities or differences. By doing this, they must have had a discussion on figuring out how to make comparisons. If we ignore the accuracy issue here, by using this strategy, the two learners did produce more complicated sentences. On the other hand, since neither of them used this strategy when they did the task with individual preparation, it might be the pair preparation time that helped them figuring out a “better” way to do the task.

Accuracy

Narrative Task. Table 5 shows Ting and Wang’s accuracy performance in the narrative task. The first two conditions were connected to the *Grocery Store* story; while the last condition was connected to the *Snow Day* story. Accuracy was measured through the percentage of correct sentences produced. Usually, the higher the percentage number is, the better accuracy the learner has. Length of sentences was also measured to see if learners had more accuracy by producing shorter sentences. Detailed data with length of sentences can be found in the Appendix 3 (Table 6 and Table 7)

Table 5: Accuracy Performances in Narrative Tasks (3 conditions)

Narrative Task	No preparation			Individual preparation			Pair preparation		
	Sentence number	Correct sentences	%	Sentence number	Correct sentences	%	Sentence number	Correct sentences	%
Ting	11	1	9%	12	5	41.6%	10	7	70%
Wang	4	0	0%	6	1	16%	11	6	54%

From the data, it is obvious that her accuracy definitely improved when the task was done with preparation. When the task was done without preparation, she produced 11 sentences with 9% accuracy. However, when she did this task again with individual preparation time, she produced 12 sentences with 41.6% accuracy. When the preparation was done in pairs, she produced 10 sentences, with 70% accuracy. Moreover, from the data, we can see that she could handle more long sentences when she had time for pre-task preparations.

With higher proficiency level, Wang seemed to have less accuracy than Ting did under the three conditions. When the task was done without preparation time, Wang produced 4 sentences, but none of them was grammatically correct. Under the second condition, with individual preparation time, Wang produced 6 sentences and with 16% of sentences correct. His accuracy improved a little bit at this time. For the last time, after pair preparation, Wang produced 11 sentences with 6 of them were correct. In this case, Wang had the most accuracy under the third condition. His data show that preparation helped him improve his accuracy, especially for pair preparation.

Summary. Both Ting and Wang had better accuracy performance when they had preparation time. It turned out that the two learners had the most accuracy after pair preparation. However, it is interesting that Wang had less accuracy and fewer progresses than Ting. I will discuss this issue later.

Comparison Task. Table 6 shows Ting and Wang's accuracy performance in the Comparison Task, under three different conditions. The first two conditions (when the task was done without preparation time and with individual preparation time) were connected to the pictures from *the Hungry Planet*, while the last condition (when the task was done with pair preparation time) was connected to the pictures from *the Houses*. Accuracy was measured through the percentage of correct sentences produced. Usually, the higher the percentage number is, the better accuracy the learner has. Length of sentences was also measured to see if learners had more accuracy by producing shorter sentences. Detailed data with length of sentences can be found in the Appendix 4 (Table 8 and Table 9).

Comparison Task	No preparation			Individual Preparation			Pair Preparation		
	Sentence number	Correct sentences	%	Sentence number	Correct sentences	%	Sentence number	Correct Sentences	%
Ting	11	5	45.4%	22	14	63.6%	12	10	83.3%
Wang	10	3	30%	20	10	50%	7	4	57%

Table 6: Accuracy Performances in Comparison Tasks (3 conditions)

In the comparison task, Ting still produced better accuracy than Wang. When the task was done without preparation time, Ting produced 11 sentences with 45.4% of them were correct. After individual preparation, Ting produced 22 sentences, and she had 63.6% correct sentences at this time. In this case, Ting actually produced more sentences with better accuracy. Under the third condition, with pair preparation, Ting produced 12 sentences with 83.3% of them were correct. Also, from Table 8 (Appendix 4), we can see that Ting could handle longer sentences with better accuracy at this time. Preparation time seemed to have beneficial effect on Ting's accuracy, especially for pair preparation.

Wang had less accuracy than Ting did in this task, but his accuracy also improved when he had time for preparation. When the task was done with no planning time, Wang produced 10 sentences with 30% of them were grammatically correct. Under the second condition, when the task was done with individual preparation time, Wang produced 20 sentences with 50% of them were correct. In this case, Wang produced more sentences with better accuracy at this time. For the last time, after pair preparation, Wang produced 7 sentences with 53% of them were correct. Preparation time did help Wang improve his accuracy performance in the comparison task, and he benefited benefitted approximately equally from both individual and pair preparation.

Discussion. The data reflect many of interesting phenomena regarding how preparation influences the two participants' English performance. It is clear that preparation time could help improve their accuracy on these tasks.

It is surprising that Ting has more accuracy than Wang. Considering of their language background, Wang was more advanced than Ting because he came to the United States earlier and was taking classes with MELP; however, Ting didn't have a

chance to take ESL classes because she was busy taking care of her husband. Apart from that, when I was interviewing the two learners, I noticed that Wang could express his opinions but Ting mostly produced short sentences. In this case, even though their proficiency levels were similar, Wang was still more advanced than Ting did. If Wang was more advanced, he should have more accuracy than Ting. Because Ting actually had better accuracy performance than Wang, there should be other factors that influenced Wang's performances. I will further discuss this issue in the conclusion part.

Conclusion

Will Planning Time Help Improve Participants' Language Fluency, Accuracy and Complexity?

Crooke (1989) claimed in his research that pre-task planning could help improve students' language fluency. Most of the data in this study supported this statement. However, because there were also some unexpected findings, I think this statement needs to be further explored.

In previous studies, researchers have discussed some factors that may influence students' language performance. Skehan and Foster (1997) reported that planners paused less than non-planners in the narrative task, while repairing more than non-planners in the decision-making task. From our data, we can see that Ting had fewer pauses when she did the narrative task with individual planning, but Wang had more pauses and more repairs under this condition. Considering these results, I would say that task type is not the only factor that may influence fluency. Skehan (2003) mentioned in his article that during preparation time, learners usually use the planning time to reinterpret the content of the task, in such a way that they make the task more complex, and this pushes them to need more advanced language. As a consequence, there will be a gap between their interlanguage and the language needed. In this case, since their interlanguage is somehow limited, more pauses will appear. Based on the data, Fang focused on comparing the details in the pictures, when they were preparing individually, so he had more pauses when he did the task with individual preparation time.

As is discussed by researchers, participants' language complexity obviously

improved overall when they did the tasks with preparation time. However, interesting things happened in the Comparison Task. Students' language had less complexity when they did the task with individual planning. During the preparation, students focused more on the content and wanted to tell more details. However, as I mentioned before, since they had already chosen their strategies to do this task, they were not trying to use complex sentences but to use the simplest way to do comparisons. Students chose their strategies according to their preferences and language background. Ting preferred to use simple sentences and Wang preferred to use percentages. Both of them felt more comfortable of doing comparison task in this way and they decided their strategies during the preparation time. As a consequence, they had less complexity under this condition.

Researchers disagree on whether pre-task planning can improve language accuracy. In this study, I found that planning helped improve accuracy. There are several factors that may lead to this result. Ortega (1999) argued that learners were able to document a conscious effort to focus on form during pre-task planning. In the present study, because the learners were told to think about what structure to use to tell a story and what structures to use to do comparisons, they had a chance to be aware of and rehearse some specific grammatical structures they needed to use. However, even though they had such a chance, their accuracy performances were still limited by their background language. For example,

13. Two took her ...um... little daughter, who is maybe four or five years old.

(Wenting, Narrative Task with individual preparation)

14. They talk...um...they are very exciting to talk with each other and they ignored the little girl.

The two sentences reflect that, in the narrative task, the two learners still had problems with verb tenses even though they had noticed to use simple past tense to retell a story. In sum, planning time can affect learners' complexity, accuracy and fluency, and the effects have close relationship to learners' language proficiency, what learners' planned and how learners planned.

Will Participants' Language Fluency, Complexity and Accuracy Improve More When Planning Is Done in Pairs?

Even though Foster and Skehan (1999) found in their study that group-based planning was a really unsuccessful condition, I have to say that in the present study, participants' language fluency, complexity and accuracy improved when planning was done in pairs, especially for the lower level student. By doing pair work, the participants could exchange their opinions on form and content. This work can reduce the gap between their own language knowledge and the knowledge that they need to carry out the task.

However, another possibility is that because I introduced new stimulus materials when they did the narrative task and comparative with pair planning time, different difficulty levels and other factors specific to the new materials could also have led to this result. That is to say, even though this study finds that group planning can help improve participants' language fluency, accuracy and complexity, further exploration on this topic still needs to be done. To sum up, for research question No. 3, pair preparation had different results for the two learners. The differences were due to task types, their focuses during preparation, their English proficiency and their different personalities.

Why Did Ting Have Better Accuracy Performance Than Wang?

Another unexpected finding in this research is the lower level student turned out to have better accuracy than the higher level student. In this research, in order to test informally their second language proficiency, I did an interview with each of them. From the interview, they seemed to have similar English learning experiences in China. Both of them stopped learning English after graduating from university and they didn't have chances to use this language in their jobs. However, things went differently when they came to the United States. Wang came to this country earlier than Ting. For most of the time, Wang stayed in the university and learnt English in the MELP program (level 3). Ting came to the United States with her husband. For most of time, Ting stayed at home to do housework, but she was also taking ESL courses from a church. According to the ACTFL oral proficiency levels, Ting was at an intermediate low level because she mostly produced simple sentences during the interview, and Wang was at intermediate high level because he could use series of sentences to express what he wanted to say in the interview. Considering of their personal experiences and language background, Wang

should have better accuracy than Ting because he was at a higher level. However, according to the data, Wang had less accuracy in both narrative and comparison tasks. There might be several possibilities that lead to this result.

The first possibility was related to the complexity performance they had in the two tasks. The data shows that Wang produced more complexity for most time. With more complexity, it is harder to higher accuracy. In this case, Wang had less accuracy than Ting.

The second possibility could be their investment of the tasks. In the narrative task, Ting produced more content than Fang. She also preferred to use all the preparation time. However, Wang seemed to be more confident with his English, so he would start talking before the preparation time was up. In the narrative task, when they had no preparation time and individual preparation time, Wang produced much less sentences than Ting. In this case, Wang might have less investment than Ting under this condition.

The second possibility could be the engagement of the tasks. In the narrative task, Wang produced less sentences than Ting, but he produced as much sentences as Ting did in the comparison task, under the conditions of no preparation and individual preparation time. According to the interview, Wang was interested in sociology and anthropology. To do the comparison task, I chose two pictures from *the Hungry Planet* for the first two conditions. These two pictures had closer relationship with culture and society. In this case, Wang was more interested and engaged to compare those two pictures. However, under the third condition, since I asked them to compare to houses, Wang was not engaged because he thought this one was too easy.

Even though the pictures from *the Hungry Planet* engaged Wang, he still had less accuracy than Ting. In this case, there could be some other possibilities. In the comparison task, when the task was done without preparation time and with individual preparation time, Fang had more complexity than Ting. With more complex sentences, he could have less accuracy.

Some advantages and limitations of this study

Being a small-scale case study with two participants, this case study has limitations. For example, some results from this study cannot be generalized. However,

on the other hand, since this study only had two participants, it was able to observe their behaviors closer and got more accurate results from them. Also, being different from previous studies, this study considered several factors that might influence participants' oral performances in complexity, accuracy and fluency. The study includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis so that learners' data could provide more detailed and convincing results.

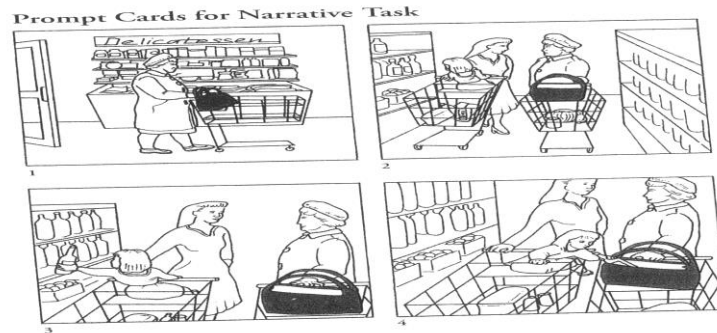
However, there are other factors that could influence learners' oral performances indirectly. For example, since I used different story and pictures in the two tasks, I might have also changed the difficulty level of the two tasks. With different difficulty levels, learners' could have different results.

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Appendix 1: Materials for the narrative task

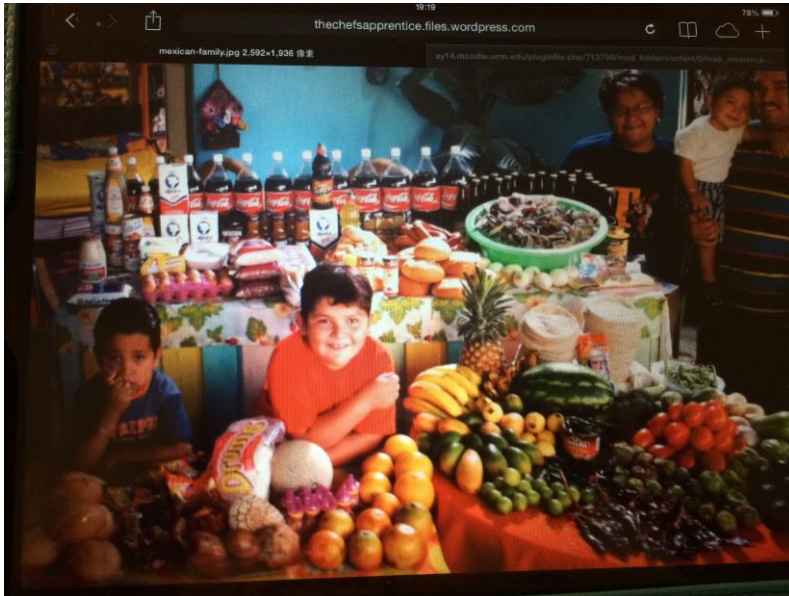
*The Grocery Store story*





The Snow Day story

Appendix 2: Materials for the comparison task



the Hungry Planet



The Houses

Appendix 3: Ting and Wang's detailed accuracy performance in Narrative Task (Table 6 and Table 7)

Sentence length	No preparation		Individual preparation		Pair preparation	
	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced
3	-	-	2	0	-	-
4	1	0	-	-	-	-
5	1	1	-	-	1	0
6	-	-	1	0	1	1
7	-	-	3	1	2	1
8	-	-	1	0	-	-
9	4	0	-	-	1	1
10	-	-	1	1	1	0
11	1	0	1	1	-	-
12	-	-	1	1	2	2
13	1	0	-	-	-	-
14	-	-	1	0	-	-
15	1	0	-	-	1	1
19	2	0	-	-	-	-
20	-	-	1	1	-	-
24	-	-	-	-	1	1
Total produced	11		12		10	
Correctly produced	1		5		7	
Accuracy percentage	9%		41.60%		70%	

Table 6: Ting's accuracy performance in the Narrative Task

Sentence length	No preparation		Individual preparation		Pair preparation	
	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced
2	-	-	-	-	1	1
3	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	-	-	1	1	-	-
6	-	-	1	0	-	-
7	-	-	-	-	1	1
8	-	-	-	-	1	1
9	1	0	-	-	1	0
10	-	-	-	-	1	0
11	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	1	0	-	-	-	-
13	1	0	-	-	-	-
14	-	-	1	0	-	-
15	-	-	1	0	-	-
16	-	-	1	0	1	0
17	-	-	-	-	2	1
18	-	-	-	-	1	1
19	-	-	-	-	-	-
20	1	0	-	-	1	1
24	-	-	1	0	0	0
Total produced		4	6		11	
Correctly produced		0	1		6	
Accuracy percentage		0%	16%		54%	

Table 7: Wang's accuracy performance in the Narrative Tasks

Appendix 4: Ting and Wang's detailed accuracy performances in the Comparison Task
(Table 8 and Table 9)

Sentence length	No planning		Individual planning		Group planning	
	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced
2	-	-	1	1	-	-
3	1	0	-	-	-	-
4	1	1	5	4	2	2
5	1	1	1	1	2	1
6	-	-	4	3	-	-
7	2	-	2	2	2	2
8	1	1	-	-	-	-
9	-	-	1	0	2	2
10	1	0	-	-	1	1
11	2	1	3	1	-	-
12	1	0	1	0	1	1
13	1	1	-	-	-	-
14	-	-	1	0	-	-
16	-	-	-	-	1	0
17	-	-	1	1	-	-
18	-	-	1	0	-	-
20	-	-	1	1	-	-
24	-	-	-	-	1	1
Total produced		11	22		12	
Correctly produced		5	14		10	
Accuracy percentage		45.4%	63.6%		83.3%	

Table 8: Ting's accuracy performance in the Comparison Task

Sentence length	No preparation		Individual preparation		Pair preparation	
	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced	Produced	Correctly produced
2	-	-	-	-	1	1
3	-	-	1	1	1	1
4	-	-	2	1	-	-
5	1	1	2	1	-	-
6	1	1	1	1	1	0
7	1	0	1	1	-	-
8	-	-	-	-	1	0
10	-	-	1	0	-	-
11	-	-	1	0	-	-
12	2	0	1	1	-	-
13	1	0	1	1	-	-
14	1	0	-	-	-	-
16	1	0	2	0	-	-
17	-	-	3	1	-	-
19	-	-	1	0	1	1
20	1	1	1	1	1	1
21	-	-	1	0	-	-
24	1	0	1	0	-	-
25	-	-	-	-	1	0
Total produced		10	20		7	
Correctly produced		3	10		4	
Accuracy percentage		30%	50%		57%	

Table 9: Wang's accuracy performance in the Comparison Tasks

M: me T: Ting W: Wang

Wenting:

Interview:

M: OK. So..er..Talk about your previous English learning experience.

T: OK. Em... I come here maybe... one month ago. Em...I come here because my . husband, he is a student of the university...er... he is a student in the University of Minnesota. Em..his major is Bio-system..Bio..er..Bio-product and Engineering.

M: OK

T: Emm...Er...(45s) I want [tə] improve my English more quickly. Emm...then I want get a degree. Emm...

M: Get a degree in what major?

T: Emm...Nursing.

M: Nursing?

T: Em. (Nodding)

M: OK.

T: Emm...And...

M: Why do you want to learn nursing?

T: Emm...Because..en..I...I like care other people.

M: Oh. You like caring other people?

T: Yeh. And...er... I think nurse is a very... emm...[grit]...[grit]

M: Great job?

T: Yeh. Great job.

M: OK.

T: Emm...and...I like care some babies, so... so... Emm... and...Now I have lot of time. I 'm no working... Emm... I just speak with somebody cooking... Emm... No. I don't know what I do.

T: (laugh)

T: Every day.

M: Every day?

T: Yeh. Now I'm a housewife.

M & T: (laugh)

M: You like being...?

T: (interrupt me) Full time.

M: Full time housewife?

T: Yeh.

M: Do you like being a full time housewife?

T: Emm... I think it's very... emm... [bo..]

M: Boring?

T: Oh, yeh! Boring. Boring.

M: Ok. So you...

T: (interrupt me) I don't like this.

M: Ok.

T: I want have a work.

M: You want to have a work.

T: Yes

M: OK. So how did you learn English in China?

T: Emm...How? How did you..?

M: Yeah. How did you learn?

T: How did you LEARN?

M: Right.

T: Err....

M: You went to school? Or... ?

T: Oh! Emm... Maybe... six years old, I... I think... I remember... at six years old, emm...
I go to a part-time school.

M: A part-time school?

T: Yeh. Then I started learn English from a teacher. Emm... She is very beautiful.

M: Beautiful?

T: Yeh.

M: All right.

T: Emm... After that... may be... emm... in middle school, first time.

M: OK

T: How to say “Zhengshi” in English? (this question was asked in mandarin)

M: Formally.

T: Formally. Formally learn English. But when... after my graduate, I don't use my English.

M: Any more.

T: Yeh.

M: OK. Alright, so...

T: So, I put my English back to my teacher.

M&T: Laugh

M: OK, OK. So..Em... What did your teacher teach you when you were China?

T: Em... Maybe...Lots of time, all the classmates with me...er...learn in the lesson?

M: In the class?

T: In the class. And do the homework.

M: What did you learn?

T: Emm...

M: Vocabularies?

T: Vocabularies, grammar. Maybe in one class, a little grammar, a little vocabulary, a little translation.

M: So that is a combination.

T: Yes, yes.

M: How did you like those classes?

T: What?

M: How did you like them? Did you feel they are interesting?

T: I am very hate English.

M: Oh, you hate it?

T: I don't like language. So my English very poor. I remember when I in the high school, my English get sixty points in an examination. I don't think I have a day must be use English, but now I must be use English.

M: So you must learn English now.

T: I am very regret. If I learn it very well before, now may be I am easily come here.

M: You mean you will be easier now?

T: Easier.

M: OK. Thank you.

Wang:

Interview

W: My name is Shen Fang. I came from China, Tianjin. In the past fifteen years, I study English in school. I study English in middle school, high school and undergraduate. After that in...in the graduate school I never learnt English. So, at last when I decide to come to the United States, emm, I go to the New Ordinary.

M: New Ordinary?

W: Yes, New Ordinary.

M: What is that?

W: Emm.. Xin Dongfang.

M: Oh! New Oriental.

W: Yes, New Oriental. Sorry about that.

M: It's fine.

W: After that, I join the test of TOEFL and GRE, but very low score.

M: OK.

W: Then, because I have the master degree, so I came here just... em... little easier to get the MELP. In China, it's not...sometimes it's not easy to get MELP here.

M: MELP?

W: Yes.

M: Oh, you mean the English program?

W: Yes.

M: OK. What do you mean by "it's hard to get MELP in China"?

W: Because...er...if I want to learn MELP ...

M: Want to learn English?

W: Yes, English.

M: OK.

W: The MELP means if I want to come to the United States in the ESL class, it is not so easy, because the government, the United States government always believe the students want to have some ideas to... emm...

M: Immigrate?

W: Yes. Immigrate. So, because I have the master degree...That's easy. And, when I came...I came here in the January and back to China for three months. During I stay..ed (there is a short pause here) in the United States, in the MELP's class, I learn about... a lot of things about United States, but not about English.

M: OK. You mean just about the country not the language?

W: Yes. About the country much more than language.

M: OK..SO... For example?

W: For example, it's about, you know, when I come to the bookstore, I know...yes that's right that the new books...the new books in the United States is very very expensive, but the second hand is so cheap. And... at the same time, the...the...study in the US is so different. In China, we always need to go to the classroom, but in US we can study everywhere. And, you know, almost every one have a computer in their hand. In China, no. We always take books. That's the first point, and the second. In US, it's so easy to survive.

M: Survive?

W: Yes, to live here. And the foods and lot of things really cheap. Not just... I don't mean the price cheaper than China. I mean...the...you can handle that, you can afford. After that, em, when I go to the... I go to the three libraries here

M: The libraries.

W: Yes, I went there. Em, this most helpful than China. The libraries are most helpful. You know, the stu...the libraries of the Minnesota always have some books on sale. One dollar for paper-back and two dollars for hard-back. That's really good. I already have a lot of books.

M: OK. What kinds of books?

W: Em.. Archeology, art and history, and...phetography, right?

M: Photography?

W: Yes, photograpy. And...because, em, my language is still very...very disappoint, so I cannot buy... I cannot buy some books about, em, mathematics, about nature science. Just buy books with lot of pictures.

M: Ok.

W: My problem is... in English is about vocabulary. I can read a lot, but just... I cannot reaction to the words... the meanings. Sometimes I can read the words, but I don't know the meaning. So you notice I use the wrong words. This is the problem for now. Maybe after that I will have problems about my subjects or my major.

M: OK. So, how is your English program here?

W: My English program is... I think they are effective.

M: What do you always do?

W: We always... in the class, read the textbook, and...listen, listening from the teacher and classmates. They always speak English, but they are very very different. I thought I use this to practice my listening to understand different country's people speak English.

Narrative task without preparation:

Ting:

Umm...I look four picures. The first one, ...umm...I think... the woman in the supermarket. Umm... She want to buy something about cooking class...er...yeh, about cooking. Umm... She take a handbag| ... umm...and...she put the handbag in a shopping cart. And the two picture is another woman and his baby. The baby is maybe three or four years old. The...chi...the child sit on the shopping cart and two woman talking about may be...umm... something about lives, I think. And the child is so younger,| so...umm...she play with herself...and...she looked...she...she look around herself. The third picture... in the third picture, the child hold a bottle of something...I don't know what's that. And... the two woman talking very interesting. In the four picture, umm... the little children, the little child put the bottle in the women's handbag, but the woman don't know.

Wang:

One day an old lady go to a supermarket. And, during she is in the supermarket, she met her neighborhood, met her neighborhood, and the child. The two ladies talk a lot, and...but they ignore the little girl. The little girl took a bottle of wine and she put that in the old lady's bag, and they left.

Narrative task with individual preparation:

Ting:

There are two women. One's name is One. The other one's name is Two. Umm... One day, One go to the grocery... went to the grocery. Umm... Maybe she want buy something about cooking. Umm... She take a hand.... she took a handbag on her cart. When she walked, she saw....she saw her friend, Two ...Umm... Two took her ... err... little daughter, who is may be four or five years old. Umm... One and Two talked about several things: their husband and maybe themselves. And the little girl... umm... is... was interested in the bottles of wine... Umm... And the little girl took one bottle of wine in his hand... in her hand. After that... umm... she thought it's very interesting... and ... She put one bottle into the One's handbag, but the two women... don't know ... didn't know.

Wang:

An old lady goes to shopping. She is in a supermarket. And during she is shopping, during her shopping, she met her neighborhood: one young lady and her daughter. They talk a lot and they walked to the wine...umm...to find some wine, red wine. They talk...umm...they are very exciting to talk with each other and they ignored the little girl. That girl are...that girl is very very unhappy, so she take a bottle of red wine, and put it... and put it in the baggage of the...of the old lady.

Narrative task with pair preparation:

Ting:

One day, Hamad woke up late because his alarm clock...umm...was broken. Umm... his watch was 8:15, but the alarm clock was 5:15. He couldn't find something, maybe his key. After that, he go out. He want to... wanted to catch the bus. He ran after the bus, but the bus gone. Umm... he want to find a free car. When Sam was driving through, he saw Hamad and ...umm...stopped his car. After that, Hamad go to... went into Sam's car, but Sam took a slicker and went out of his car because the snow was too heavy... When Sam come....came back to his car, he saw a man in his car.

Wang:

One day Hamad woke up and opened his eyes and find he's already late. The alarm clock is 5:15, but the watch is 8:15. It's already late. He put on his clothes very fast and finally he find...umm...he found he couldn't find his keys. He searched everywhere, but actually it is... was vanished. And he went out to catch up with the bus, but the bus didn't wait him. In the big snow, Hamad couldn't find any taxi, so he wanted to find a free ride. He think...he thought he was succeed because one car stopped. The driver came out with a slicker . Hamad got into the car immediately. When the driver cleaned the window, he was surprised to find Hamad in his car.

Comparison task without preparation:

Ting:

Umm... I think this picture, they come from Asia, or maybe Mexico? I don't know. Umm... and... they like drink cola... Coca Cola and beer. I think Coca Cola is cheap And, they have three children. So in their family, they...err...have five people. The same as this, five people. And...in the American family, the house is very...maybe bigger than the Mexico family. And the American family has less fruit, only banana, small grape and apple. But the Mexico family has lots of fruits: pineapples, oranges, water...watermelons. And the Mexico family wear cheaper clothes than the American family. And the...err... cable bigger than the Mexico family.

Wang:

First, population. The number of the family is five people: two parents, three children.

And, the second is... a...a week's... the food for the whole week are so different. Very very... different. The first picture, there is very much food, so many food. And the different part is the... the Mexico family, I guess, drink lot of beers and sodas, but the American ... the American family don't have much soda. They have juice and milk. And the same part is, all of them, both of them have eat a lot of fruit: at least 40% for a week. And next ...umm... the healthy is so different. You know, in Mexico family, all of them are fat. But in the American family, they are not. They have more meat and eggs. There are more bread and sugar and beers. So they are fat. And I guess, about American food maybe the organic, the Mexico food are not. So the Mexico family, maybe the low price, maybe the low place, and the American family maybe the middle place.

Comparison task with individual preparation

Ting:

There are two families. One comes from Mexico. The other one comes from US. Umm... From the picture, I can see the Mexico's family's food... umm... includes lots of coca colas, beers and... lots of fruits. Maybe the fruit ...umm...that plant from their country, so it's very cheap. The Mexico family have three children...Umm... They all wear T-shirts. And their home is very small. Maybe it's an apartment. And on the wall, there are some decorations ... that made by themselves. And...the other picture... on the other picture, the US family have lots of milk, vegetables and meats. I can see some...umm...ham...umm...some cheese and some eggs, but I can't see the beers and cokes. And they have three children. The children wear... high quality T-shirts, and the man wear a shirt, the woman wear a white dress. The... and... their home is very big and have large windows. Outside the window there are big trees. And the room is very bright. And on the wall, there are ...umm...several pictures. And they have cro...microwave oven. I think the US family is richer than the Mexico family. And... the...umm...the US family's host looks more education than the Mexico host. That's all.

Wang:

These two pictures show us about two families come from two countries. One is Mexico and one is America. The Mexico family...umm...both of them, both of them have five people. But the different is the Mexico family are very fat, but the American family are thin. I think the American family will more healthy than the Mexico. And let's see their foods. Err...first is drink. 50% of the Mexico's are coke and 40% are beer, and milk and juice just less 10%. But in American... but in America family, the beer is just 20%...10 to 20, and the milk and juice are 50. I am not sure the exact number, but I guess it looks close. The second part is food. From the Mexico family, 20% of their food are bread and 10% sugar, 70% fruits, and barely, just very few eggs, and others, and other things. Very few eggs and vegetables. But in American family, they have just 15% of the bread, 5% of sugar, 20% fruits and 5% eggs and vegetables. But they have nearly 50% of meat, so many different kind of meat, pork, beef and fish. I have to say, from the biology and anthropology, the American family is better...is much more better than the Mexico's. Not just because...not just from the body, they looks thin or fat. I think we can see some reasons from the food that American family get more education. But Mexico family just think: "oh, I can eat a lot of food and I can drink a lot of sugar water. It's a good life."

Comparison task with pair preparation:

Ting:

There are two houses. The similarities are they all have two levels and there are some trees around them and there...they also have grass in front of them. And...they all have window...windows, doors. And outside the houses, the walls are white. The differences is ... one house is bigger than that one. And there is a garage and a car in front of them... in front of it. And it has more windows than the other. And...and the big house may be have two rooms upstairs, but the other one have one room. Umm...and... the small house's fence is too old. The color is too old. Maybe somewhere is broken. Umm... The other house looks more...advantage...advanced than this one.

Wang:

Similarities and differences. First, similarities. The two houses have two floors and grass. Environments are same, are similar. And, the differences is... differences are one house is more beautiful and more expensive, don't have... doesn't, doesn't have the fence, but the other one have, has the fence but doesn't have the garage. ... Other differences... are... not so much. But, I am sure the family in the house with a garage is rich, but the other is really poor. That's all.