THE IMPACT OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION CASE-BASED TASKS ON BUSINESS ENGLISH LEARNERS’ ORAL FLUENCY AND GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY

A Thesis Submitted to
Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by
Nashwa Abdelkader Elyamany

May/2011
The American University in Cairo

The Impact of Business Communication Case-Based Tasks on Business English Learners’ Oral Fluency and Grammatical Accuracy

A Thesis Submitted by

Nashwa Abdelkader Elyamany

to

Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)
English Language Institute (ELI)

May, 2011

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

has been approved by

Dr. Amira Agameya
Thesis Committee Chair/Adviser: _________________________________
Affiliation: The American University in Cairo

Dr. Lori Fredricks
Thesis Committee Reader/Examiner: _________________________________
Affiliation: The American University in Cairo

Dr. Phyllis Wachob
Thesis Committee Reader/Examiner: _________________________________
Affiliation: The American University in Cairo

________________     ________________    ______________    ______________
Department Chair/Program Director    Date    Dean    Date
DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents and twin sister
who have been there for me in every step of the way
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deep-felt gratitude and appreciation go to Professor Amira Agameya for her sincere support, guidance, patience, and feedback throughout the multiple stages of thesis writing. I am also grateful to Dr. Wachob whose insightful suggestions and detailed feedback were of great help to the study. Thanks are also extended to Dr. Fredricks whose prompt and profound feedback and directions for data analysis shaped the study to a great extent. Last but not least, special thanks go to Dr. Gebril who has “the attitude and substance” of a researcher. His valuable advice for data analysis, suggestions for studies to consult prior to data collection and analysis, and above all his friendly and modest dispositions are very much appreciated.

Thanks are due to the Management team at the College of Management and Technology, the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, & Maritime Transport (AASTMT), Cairo. Their cooperation, enthusiasm, and sincere help facilitated the process of data collection and analysis. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Mohamed Abdel Salam, Dr. Mohamed Ezzat, and Mr. Mahmoud Abdelraouf for their help in doing the statistical analysis of the study. Their commitment and “engagement” with the data accelerated the process of analysis; had it not been for their persistence and dedication, this dissertation would not have been completed on time.

Special thanks also go to my friends and colleagues in the Institute for Language Studies (ILS), AASTMT, Alexandria, whose suggestions and quick tips were instrumental at the preliminary phase of the study. Thanks are extended to Dina El Dakhs, Gihan Othman, Aliaa Salah, Reem Sohdy, Marwa Abdullah, Howaida Omar, and Mahmoud Ahmed. I am also grateful to my MA/TEFL colleagues who helped in proofreading and reviewing my feasibility study, thesis proposal, and the final dissertation document. In this regard, I am indebted to Ahmed Awaad, Esmet Abdelwahhab, Mark Landsman, Mahmoud Ahmed, and Howaida Omar. I am also grateful to Ms. Noha Khafagy who believed in me and constantly sent positive vibes to keep me on track. Finally, to the coders who participated in the data analysis of the study, I am speechlessly grateful for the dedication, promptness, and precision they manifested. We have worked exhaustively together for over seven weeks in collaboration with the statistical analysis team; words fail to express how grateful I am to each and every one of you. God bless you!

To my wonderful parents, twin sister, and big brother, thank you all for believing in me and supporting me in all the thesis writing stages.
ABSTRACT

Communicative proficiency is the ultimate goal most Business English learners strive to achieve in their academic courses and eventually in the workplace. To help learners effectively engage in oral business interactions of different levels of formality and compete well in the dynamic business world after graduation, Business English practitioners strive to develop instructional materials and tasks in their pursuit of optimizing authentic opportunities for oral proficiency development in business settings. The impetus for excellence in oral business communication has further motivated business schools worldwide to adapt curricula and instructional designs that embrace formal courses of instruction on and practice of oral skills to meet the versatile needs of the workplace (Dunbar, Brooks, & Kubicka-Miller, 2006). Hence, the purpose of the present study was to examine the impact of business communication case-based task design on Business English learners’ oral fluency and grammatical accuracy.

In this exploratory study fluency was measured in terms of speech rate (number of words per minute) and accuracy was measured by means of ratio of error-free T-units in relation to the total of T-units per oral response. A cohort of ten intermediate ESP learners constituted the sample for the study. All participants engaged in performing three cognitively complex tasks, manipulated along resource-directing “reasoning” demands in both a pretest and a posttest. Depending on the degree of the cognitive complexity of the task, the participants were to perform individually, in pairs and in a group of five. Their oral responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in regards to the measures of fluency and accuracy. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis and interpretation.

Results indicated statistically significant improvement in Business English learners’ oral fluency and accuracy in regards to the measures used. A number of moderating variables, namely
gender, familiarity with topic, interactional pattern on task, level of task cognitive complexity, interrelationship between members, and affective attitudes may have mediated the impact of the case-based design on learners’ L2 oral performances in business situations. Pedagogical implications included studying the effectiveness of case-based tasks following an experimental design where both control and comparison groups are used for drawing conclusions on their inherent benefits. The joint interactional effect of task design and other intervening variables needs to be further researched in both classroom and assessment situations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Research Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Rationale for the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 Sub-questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Definitions of Constructs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1 Theoretical definitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2 Operational definitions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Definitions of Variables</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.1 Independent variable</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.2 Dependent variables</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Delimitations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Importance of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Conceptual Background</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Tasks and Second Language (L2) oral performance</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1.1 Task planning</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1.2 Task design and performance conditions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The Influence of Planning on L2 Task-Based Oral Performance</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 The Influence of Task Design, Complexity, and Difficulty on L2 Oral Performance</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 The Impact of Task Design on L2 Oral Performance in Assessment Settings</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Implications for Task-Based In-Class Practices and Assessment Situations</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Contribution of the Present Study</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Research Design</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Participants</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Materials</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Treatment</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Instrumentation</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Coder Training</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Data Collection</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2 Procedures</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Data Analysis</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 RESULTS</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Fluency</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

1. Participants’ Type of Planning and Performance on Oral Assessment Tasks.............. 51
2. Measure of Fluency: Words per Minute in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)....... 54
3. Measure of Fluency: Words per Minute in the Pair Task (n=10 participants).............. 54
4. Measure of Fluency: Words per Minute in the Group Task (n=10 participants)........... 54
5. Standard Deviations and Means of Fluency Measure (Words per Minute) in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 55
6. Standard Deviations and Means of Fluency Measure (Words per Minute) in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 55
7. Standard Deviations and Means of Fluency Measure (Words per Minute) in the Group Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 55
8. Fluency Measure: Results of the Pretest-Posttest One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (n=10 participants)................................................................. 56
9. Total Number of T-units per Response in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)...... 57
10. Total Number of T-units per Response in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)......................... 57
11. Total Number of T-units per Response in the Group Task (n=10 participants)............ 57
12. Measure of Accuracy: Ratio of Error-Free T-units per Oral Response in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 58
13. Measure of Accuracy: Ratio of Error-Free T-units per Oral Response in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 58
14. Measure of Accuracy: Ratio of Error-Free T-units per Oral Response in the Group Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 59
15. Standard Deviations and Means of the Accuracy Measure in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 60
16. Standard Deviations and Means of the Accuracy Measure in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 60
17. Standard Deviations and Means of the Accuracy Measure in the Group Task (n=10 participants)................................................................. 60
18. Accuracy Measure: Results of the Pretest-Posttest One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (n=10 participants)................................................................. 60
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Effective business oral communication is one essential competency for candidates seeking rewarding entry-level positions or advancements in their career paths (Hyne & Nahtia, 1996; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997; Plutsky, 1996; Ramsey, 2004). Communicative proficiency is therefore the ultimate goal most Business English learners strive to achieve in their academic courses and eventually in the workplace. To help learners effectively engage in oral business interactions of different levels of formality and compete well in the dynamic business world after graduation, Business English practitioners strive to develop instructional materials and tasks in pursuit of optimizing authentic opportunities for oral proficiency development in business settings. The impetus for excellence in oral business communication has further motivated business schools worldwide to adapt curricula and instructional designs that embrace formal courses of instruction on and practice of oral skills to meet the versatile needs of the workplace (Dunbar, Brooks, & Kubicka-Miller, 2006). The situation is no different at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, & Maritime Transport (AASTMT).

Large-scale surveys were administered in the Fall semester of 2010 by content courses lecturers with students at the College of Management and Technology, AASTMT, in regards to their perceptions of and attitudes toward the existing Business English courses and their expectations of a proposed Business English oral proficiency course. The feedback obtained centered on two problematic issues pertaining to current courses. First, the development of oral performance in meetings, presentations, debates, pitches, proposals, and other important modes of oral interaction in real-life situations (away from set coursbooks) was not given due attention. What the textbook-based courses students cover in their freshmen year fail to capture the most is
the authenticity of materials and tasks required for proper immersion into the target language, culture, and contexts. Another drawback is the lack of instruction in the wide spectrum of oral skills. The existing courses place more emphasis on reading and writing skills at the expense of oral skills which are indicators of success in the competitive workplace of today. Second, because they were intermediate-level learners, learners expressed their dire need for an oral communication course that aims to enhance their oral proficiency in terms of fluency and grammatical accuracy.

In the light of the feedback obtained from the surveys, the proposed Business English Oral Communication (BEOC) course was developed, piloted, and modified to integrate into the Business English program as a means of oral proficiency development in real-life business interactions.

1.1 Research Problem

The lack of a rigorous Business English oral proficiency course that prepares students for the competitive and dynamic workplace of today through communicative tasks has recently compromised the College of Management and Technology’s students’ oral performance in their academic courses and their chances of getting proper employment due to poor oral skills. After graduation, the students typically possess at best mediocre oral presentation skills with low levels of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. This has led the researcher to review the literature on Task-Based Language learning (TBLL) and Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA) in relation to L2 oral proficiency in order to identify effective task designs that aligns with the pedagogical objectives of the proposed course and can therefore be conducive to oral proficiency development in real-life business situations.
On reviewing the literature, a plethora of insightful research studies were found to have explored ESL/EFL learners’ oral production across different types of tasks and their impact on learners’ fluency and accuracy (Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Elder & Iwashita, 2005; Elder, Iwashita, & MacNamara, 2002; Ellis, 2005, 2009b; Ellis & Yuan, 2005; Foster & Skehan, 1999; Gilabert, 2007; Gilabert, Barón, & Llanes, 2009; Iwashita, McNamara, & Elder, 2001; Kawauchi, 2005; Leeser, 2004; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2007; Ortega, 2005; Park, 2010; Rahimpour & Yaghoubi-Notash, 2007; Robinson, 2005, 2007; Sanguran, 2005; Skehan & Foster, 1999, 2005; Taguchi, 2007; Tavakoli, 2005, 2009; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). A diversity of task types ranging from description tasks, to narrative tasks, to decision-making tasks were explored in learning and assessment contexts at different task planning stages. Task design and the internal features of tasks such as complexity along several dimensions were manipulated. Sequencing and repetition of tasks, influence of affective and social factors, and the role of gender were among other variables under study in the literature. However, none of the reviewed studies addressed the task type and design that best fits English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instructional contexts, where L2 learners strive to practice the language in the target contextual situations.

### 1.2 Rationale for the Study

The case-study method has been adopted in business education since the late nineteenth century and, ever since, has been extensively incorporated into content courses of business schools, namely Harvard Business School (Breslin & Buchanan, 2008; Rippin, Booth, Bowie, & Jordan, 2002; Rodgers 1993). The case-study method is an approach that “places emphasis on students’ preparation and discussion of real business situations, culminating in the requirement to make a managerial decision.” (Ballantine & Larres, 2004). One major advantage of this method
is its capacity to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Dorn, 1999; Rippin, Booth, Bowie, & Jordan, 2002). Another advantage is that it helps develop learner’s higher order cognitive and affective skills (Wood & Anderson, 2001). An additional advantage of deploying this instructional mode is the engagement of students in learning groups rather than the nurture of passive reception. In doing so, students become autonomous learners, collaboratively working out cases in the classroom rather than being the passive recipients of teacher-led case presentations (Rogers & Rymer, 1998; Roselle, 1996). In the light of these educational gains, case studies are characteristically effective media for enhancing oral communication skills.

A case study is defined as “…a partial, historical, clinical study of a situation which has confronted a practicing administrator or managerial group. Presented in a narrative form to encourage student involvement, it provides data—substantive and process—essential to analysis of a specific situation, for the framing of alternative action programs, and for their implementation, recognizing the complexity and ambiguity of the practical world.” (Barnes et al. as cited in Rippen et al., 2002). Since they naturally and readily function as forms of immersion, case studies have evolved as catalysts for effective hands-on experiential learning (Ballantine & Larres, 2004).

In their investigation of contemporary issues in real-life authentic contexts, case studies provide learners with “a slice of life”, thus making learning more relevant, contextualized, and meaningful (Rippin, Booth, Bowie, & Jordan, 2002). They typically involve delving into actual business dilemmas composed as extensive presentations of a given firm, detailing its market, strategic decisions, and the twists and turns it faces (Kreps, 1984; Roselle, 1996). They are developed in this manner in order for decision-makers to rise to business challenges emerging from authentic contexts, enhance critical and strategic thinking, and promote problem-solving
Over the past decades, the acknowledged benefits of the case-study method in business education have been transferred to language learning and pedagogy (Boyd, 1991; Dinapoli, 2001). Daly (2002) and Dinapoli (2001) accentuate the significance of incorporating business communication cases in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula, particularly Business English courses to promote communicative competence. There has been a substantial increase in the introduction of these cases in the language classrooms and their effectiveness has been documented (Bonet, 1997; Cotton & Owen, 1980; Dow & Ryan, 1987; Piotrowsky, 1982; St. John, 1996; Uber Groose, 1988; Westerfield, 1989, as cited in Dinapoli, 2001).

The business communication cases introduced in the language classrooms are different from those used in business schools in two fundamental ways. First, they are fictional and dramatized scenarios that require students to assume, identify with and personalize certain roles while performing role-plays, simulations, and other communicative tasks (Dinapoli, 2001). Dramatization is one effective and creative way of making Business English learners “practice reflection-in-action while playing the role of a professional” (Boyd, 1991). Second, the cases used in the language classrooms are written by language teachers, rather than business professionals, in an attempt to create contexts for enhancing communicative competence and oral proficiency in business settings (Daly, 2002).

Despite the popularity of business communication cases in the language classrooms, no studies were found in the literature to date on how they are manipulated and integrated in Business English instructional designs to promote oral communication skills, what type of tasks can trigger better oral/written output, and what type of interaction learners need to engage in to
make full use of their potential. The present study therefore examined the effectiveness of case-study scenarios and scenario-based tasks on Business English learners’ oral communication skills.

In the writing of the business communication cases, the researcher paid attention to the inherent attributes typical cases should possess for success as effective learning media with the aim of enhancing communication skills on the part of learners in mind. These assumed attributes are inspired by Rippin, Booth, Bowie, & Jordan’s (2002) and Rogers and Rymer’s (1998) articles on the business cases as well as Boyd’s (1991), Daly’s (2002), and Dinapoli’s (2001) reflections on case studies in the language classrooms. They are listed as follows:

1. Furnishing a business setting;
2. Focusing on the discipline in the case study (e.g., airline industry, banking firm, etc.);
3. Zeroing in on a critical contemporary issue;
4. Crafting an engaging scenario using appropriate context-specific jargon;
5. Providing ample features and detail for study and synthesis;
6. Calling for prompt action and informed decision-making; and
7. Functioning readily in classrooms and other media (e.g., virtual worlds, on-the-job situations, etc.).

The instructional and learning media proposed (i.e., business communication cases coupled with case-based tasks) and the dire need to help Business English learners develop effective oral communication skills have been the driving force behind the present study.
1.3 Research Questions

The present study aimed to answer the following primary research question:

What is the impact of business communication case-based tasks on Business English learners’ overall oral proficiency?

1.3.1 Sub-questions.

To explore the impact of the proposed task design on Business English oral proficiency, with the componential approach to oral proficiency in mind, two dimensions of L2 oral production (which are of concern to the present study) were examined separately: oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. The study therefore aimed to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What is the impact of business communication case-based tasks on Business English learners’ oral fluency in terms of speech rate (number of words per minute)?

2. What is the impact of business communication case-based tasks on Business English learners’ grammatical accuracy in terms of ratio of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per oral response?

1.4 Definitions of Constructs

1.4.1 Theoretical definitions.

Case study is “…a partial, historical, clinical study of a situation which has confronted a practicing administrator or managerial group. Presented in a narrative form to encourage student involvement, it provides data - substantive and process - essential to analysis of a specific situation, for the framing of alternative action programs, and for their implementation, recognizing the complexity and ambiguity of the practical world.” (Barnes et al. as cited in Rippen et al., 2002).
Business communication case is a fictional, dramatized case study written by ESP teachers in attempt to create contexts for enhancing learners’ communicative competence and oral proficiency in professional and/or occupational settings (Adapted from Daly (2002) and Dinapoli (2001))

Business communication case-based tasks are tasks based on narrative scenarios; tailored to elicit context-bound and meaning-focused linguistic patterns; carried out to perform specific discourse functions; and, in turn, designed to enhance language production in situations that simulate real life. (Based on Reategui, Polonia, and Roland’s (2007) definition of scenario-based learning).

Oral proficiency is a speaker’s ability to verbally communicate in the target language in a functional and accurate manner while applying linguistic resources to new contexts and situations. (Ommagio, as cited in Stein, 1999).

Oral fluency refers to a learner’s automaticity of speech and capacity to produce language in real time to communicate meanings without unnecessary pauses or hesitations (Ellis, 2009b; Yuan & Ellis, 2003).

Grammatical accuracy is a learner’s ability to produce language in conformity with the target language norms hence manifest high command of error-free structures (Ellis, 2009b; Yuan & Ellis, 2003).

T-unit is an utterance that includes one main clause and may have one/more subordinate clauses attached to or embedded in it (Hunt, as cited in Beers & Nagy, 2009).

1.4.2 Operational definitions.

Business communication case-based tasks are tasks designed to elicit simulated oral responses with an average of 2-4 minutes per oral response, depending on the speaker’s
interactional pattern - whether performing individually, with a partner, or in a group. These oral responses are audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify development of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy in terms of speech rate and ratio of error-free T-units, respectively.

*Oral fluency* is determined by the increasing speech rate (number of words per minute) in each of the speaker’s oral responses.

*Grammatical accuracy* is determined by the increasing ratio of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per oral response.

1.5 Definitions of Variables

1.5.1 Independent Variable.

*Business communication case-based tasks* are the independent variable in the study that elicit speech samples of various lengths. These speech samples are audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to determine the utterances indicating change in oral fluency and grammatical accuracy.

1.5.2 Dependent Variables.

There are two dependent variables in this study: speech rate and error-free T-units.

*Speech rate* is the number of words produced per minute in each of the speaker’s oral responses (Bell, 2003; Ginther, Dimova, & Yang, 2010).

*Error-free T-unit* is a T-unit free of morphological and/or syntactic inaccuracies that typically result from mother tongue interference or poor command of the target language grammar system.
1.6 Delimitations

The present study was limited to exploring the effectiveness of business communication case-based tasks in an ESP instructional design - a Business English oral communication course - at the university level. Other educational settings or EAP/EFL programs were not within the scope of the study. Second, a small cohort of upper-intermediate learners of Business English constituted the sample for the study; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized until further research is carried out with a more representative sample of different proficiency levels.

Third, the proposed study examined only one business communication case and four corresponding tasks as supplementary, extension learning media for developing oral proficiency. If more cases and case-based tasks were used with progressive levels of contextual sophistication and complexity, further evidence on the possible effectiveness of the proposed task design could have been obtained. Finally, the study examined learners’ overall oral proficiency in business interactions with special focus on only two dimensions of oral proficiency (fluency and accuracy) in terms of one measure pertaining to each. Other measurements of these dimensions as well as the dimension of lexical and grammatical complexity were not under investigation.

1.7 Importance of the Study

Oral proficiency is one skill EFL/ESP learners strive to develop in contexts simulating real-life interaction. That explains why proficiency-oriented courses place more emphasis on oral skills development and target optimal oral practice. In fact, the impetus for the continuous interest in oral proficiency development and assessment has motivated researchers to propose and explore a diversity of task types of different difficulty levels for the purpose of promoting L2 oral performance. These tasks range from pedagogic tasks to real-life role-plays/simulations.
They are either implemented by individuals or groups of learners as part of classroom instruction or performance assessment situations.

Since the ability to function adequately in speaking continues to be an important goal of most L2 learners, it is highly incumbent upon EFL/ESP practitioners to identify effective instructional strategies and learning tasks for teaching oral skills in the classroom with the aim of maximizing opportunities for proficiency development. In the light of this, what the present study aimed to offer Business English learners is a contextualized type of task design that may help promote learners’ oral performance. In their approximation to real life, this task design was intended for immersion into the target language and enhancement of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy of learners’ oral output in business contexts that simulate real-life encounters.

The business communication case represented the occupational and professional context for the oral tasks Business English learners carried out. Effective manipulation of contextual and linguistic features in this case, in conjunction with other moderating variables, seems to have helped trigger better oral output and hence developed oral proficiency on learners’ parts. The study is hoped to be a contribution to the literature on Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) and Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA) in relation to L2 oral proficiency development and assessment in an ESP context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AASTMT</td>
<td>Arab Academy for Science, Technology, &amp; Maritime Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEOC</td>
<td>Business English Oral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>English for Specific Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMAT</td>
<td>Graduate Management Admission Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Second Language Acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBLA</td>
<td>Task-Based Language Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBLL</td>
<td>Task-Based Language Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBLT</td>
<td>Task-Based Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>University of Wales Institute, Cardiff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present literature review is primarily concerned with the investigation of recent research on Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) in relation to L2 oral proficiency development and assessment in university-level settings. A plethora of research studies were found to have explored learners’ oral production across different types of tasks and their impact on learners’ fluency, accuracy, and complexity. A diversity of tasks was explored in learning and assessment contexts at different task planning stages. Internal features of tasks such as cognitive complexity and structure were other variables manipulated across a variety of task types. Studies where samples of different sizes, contexts (e.g., English and non-English majors at university level, undergraduate and graduate learners, etc.), educational backgrounds, genders, age-groups and proficiency levels were chosen to examine the significance of findings and draw conclusions. The wide range of studies retrieved was filtered and downsized to a set of eight studies and one literature review for the purpose and focus of this study.

This review comprises two major sections: conceptual background and literature review. The first section introduces the basic tenets of Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) and Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA) and other relevant concepts in relation to L2 oral production. The second section reviews the studies that inform the present research. The literature review comprises three main categories of studies depending on their foci of research. Each of the reviewed set of studies ends with a summary and comparison of findings. The review concludes with implications gained from the studies reviewed and contribution of the present study to the research areas of Task-Based Language Learning and Task-Based Language Assessment and L2 oral proficiency development.
2.1 Conceptual Background

2.1.1 Tasks and Second Language (L2) oral performance.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach to language teaching that emerged from Communicative-Language Teaching (CLT) and drew several principles from it. TBLT takes the task as the central unit of planning and instruction in language pedagogy and in so doing tasks are regarded as vehicles for transforming real-world tasks into pedagogical tasks (Ellis, 2009b).

Over the past few decades, Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) has interested Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers, course designers, teachers, test-makers, and teacher-trainers (Branden, 2006).

Several definitions of “task” are found in the literature to date on TBLT and although these definitions slightly vary, there is a common consensus that a task is an activity carried out using language. Some of these definitions emphasized that tasks are “language learning goals” (e.g., Bachman & Palmer (1996), Bygate et al. (2001), Carroll (1993), Crookes (1986), and Long (1985), as cited in Branden, 2006). Other researchers defined tasks as “educational activities” (e.g., Bygate et al. (2001), Candlin (1987), Breen (1987), Ellis (2003), Krahneke (1987), Lee (2000), Nunan (1989), Prabhu (1987), and Skehan (1998) as cited in Branden, 2006). The latter definitions do not divorce tasks from the real world; rather, tasks are regarded as genuine opportunities for language output in meaningful, authentic contexts which in turn have a significant impact on L2 acquisition (Branden, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Ellis (2003; 2009a) outlined a number of features a task should possess, namely goal, input, conditions, procedures, and predicted outcomes to be efficient, otherwise, unfocused tasks will be the unintended outcome. In their engagement in the communicative task completion, multi-
faceted focused activities, learners are interactively involved in “authentic”, “pragmatic” and “contextual” use of language and negotiation of meaning. In the literature to date, a wide spectrum of studies examining the impact of task on L2 oral performance have explored tasks from different perspectives, namely task planning, task design, and performance conditions as well as other variables that moderate its impact on learners’ oral performance.

2.1.1.1 Task planning.

Task planning is one major variable extensively researched in Task-Based Language Learning and L2 oral performance. Task planning is “essentially a problem-solving activity; it involves deciding what linguistic devices need to be selected in order to affect the audience in the desired way.” (Ellis, 2005: 3). It takes place at two different stages: before and during task implementation. Two broad types of task-based planning have been identified and investigated in the literature: pre-planning (which in turn includes rehearsal and strategic planning) and within-task planning (unpressured vs. pressured) (Ellis, 2005: 4).

As for pre-planning, rehearsal normally takes place when learners are given the opportunity to “do” the task before the actual performance on the task—which may entail task repetition. Strategic planning has to do more with preparation for the content to be delivered in carrying out the task. Within-planning (interchangeably used with “on-line planning”), on the other hand, takes place during task implementation and, depending on the amount of time allotted for preparation, it can be either unpressured or pressured. In an unpressured performance, learners engage in careful language use and so produce more structured and complex discourse that reflects greater accuracy. Pressured performances manifest otherwise.

There is a substantial body of research on the interrelationship between various types of planning and L2 task-based oral performance and has been premised on multiple theoretical
frameworks, namely cognitive models of L2 performance and language learning, drawing on the constructs of “attention and noticing”, “limited working memory capacity”, and “focus-on-form” (Ellis, 2009b). Pre-task planning and unpressured on-line planning were found to have variable influence on the three aspects of L2 production (fluency, accuracy, and complexity). This is later presented and discussed in the literature review.

2.1.1.2 Task design and performance conditions.

Over the past two decades, task design and task performance conditions have been extensively studied by SLA researchers following two distinct approaches: the interactional approach and the cognitive approach (Skehan, 1998; Tavakoli, 2009). From an interactional perspective, task-based research has centered on how effective pair- and group-interaction is in the development of learners’ interlanguage systems and how meaning is collaboratively negotiated and co-constructed by learners in their interaction (Tavakoli, 2009). Research following this approach has been mostly limited to classroom settings rather than assessment situations. From a cognitive perspective, and in the light of Robinson’s (1995) and Skehan’s (1998) frameworks, recent studies have examined the impact of manipulating task cognitive demands along diverse dimensions on learners’ (and test-takers) attentional resources and thus oral performances in both classrooms and assessment situations (e.g., Elder, Iwashita, & McNamara, 2002; Gilabert, 2007; Iwashita, McNamara & Elder, 2001; Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Taguchi, 2007; Tavakoli, 2009).

According to the Cognition Hypothesis, effective manipulation of task complexity may impact L2 performance and assist interlanguage development (Robinson, 2007). Robinson (1995) indicated that task complexity can be manipulated in terms of resource-directing demands (e.g., number of elements in a task, reasoning demands of a task, immediacy of prompts
in a given task, etc.) and resource-dispersing demands (e.g., planning time, number of tasks, etc.). Manipulating some factors rather than others affects the cognitive demands (attentional resources, working memory capacity, reasoning, etc.) imposed by the task and therefore varies learners’ oral performance with respect to the aspects of fluency, accuracy, and complexity (Gilabert, 2007). These three features of language production “draw on different systems of language. Fluency requires learners to draw on their memory-based system, accessing and deploying ready-made chunks of language, and when problems arise, using communication strategies to get by. In contrast, accuracy and complexity (in particular) are achieved by learners drawing on their rule-based system and thus require syntactic processing.” (Ellis, 2005:15).

It can then be concluded that certain task types call for more attention to fluency at the expense of other aspects of L2 oral production while others may require more attention to form and hence jeopardize fluency, etc. Learners manifest varying degrees of emphasis on each of the three aspects in L2 production and sometimes this fact is triggered by the inherent characteristics of tasks. In this regards, increasing the cognitive demands of a task along resource-directing variables calls learners’ attention to form, triggers output, and entices learners to use more complex forms. Michel, Kuiken, and Vedder (2007) and Gilabert, Barón, and Llanes (2009) showed how increased levels of cognitive complexity helped enhance interaction and develop learners’ interlanguage system. Increased task complexity was found to have positive impact on accuracy and negative effect on fluency (Michel, Kuiken, and Vedder, 2007).

Skehan (1998), on the other hand, proposes that “code complexity”, “cognitive complexity”, and “communicative stress” are the three dimensions that define task complexity. Code complexity encompasses learners’ linguistic resources and variety; cognitive complexity refers to information processing that is dependent on familiarity of the topic, the genre, and the structural
organization of the task; and communicative stress underlies task implementation conditions in terms of planning time, the task prompt, the number of participants on a task, and the oral output expected. According to Skehan’s model, tasks of greater complexity focus learners’ attention on the context rather than the form. As such, simple tasks trigger more fluency and accuracy whereas complex tasks generate greater complexity and less fluency and accuracy.

In the present study, the researcher designed the tasks and decided on the implementation conditions in the light of several concepts pertaining to both approaches.

2.1.2 Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA)

There is an increasing interest in examining the impact of task design, task difficulty, and task implementation conditions in relation to L2 performance in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and just recently in language testing (Elder et al., 2002; Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Bonk, 2002; Tavakoli, 2009). This emerging interest in Task-Based Language Assessment arises from the need to align this type of assessment with TBLL, to generate positive washback effects on the language curricula, and more importantly to address the inadequacy of decontextualized, discrete-point skills assessment (Elder et al., 2002; Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2002). It is hard for construct-based, discrete-skill test results to be predictive of test-takers’ ability in performing language tasks in the real world; dynamic interaction between linguistic, cognitive, contextual, social, and other intervening factors almost invariably impact learners’ performances in real-life situations. Byrnes (2002) further states that employing TBLA in instructional designs helps teachers, course designers, and test makers within educational settings draw relationships between the existing curricula, relevant pedagogical objectives, and projected outcomes on language learners’ performances.
Task-Based Language Assessment is defined as “the process of evaluating, in relation to a set of explicitly stated criteria, the quality of the communicative performances elicited from learners as part of goal-directed, meaning-focused language use requiring the interaction of skills and knowledge” (Brindley, as cited in Mislevy, Steingberg, & Almond, 2002). Long and Norris (as cited in Norris et al., 2002) further state that Task-Based Language Assessment, as distinct from other types of assessment, “…..takes the task itself as the fundamental unit of analysis motivating item selection, test instrumentation construction, and the rating of task performance. Task-based assessment does not simply utilize the real-world task as a means for eliciting particular components of the language system, which are then measured or evaluated; instead, the construct of interest is performance of the task itself.”

The two definitions above carry important implications and pose several challenges for language teachers and testers alike. TBLA fosters real-life complex situations and genuine opportunities for test-takers’ engagement in communicative performances (Norris, 2002), generation of meaningful discourse on their part, and assessment of their performances in authentic tasks (Bachman, 2002; Elder et al., 2002). The authenticity of these tasks does not stem only from presenting authentic activities for students to carry out. It also stems from calling for the integration of diverse language skills required for task implementation (Ke, 2006) in addition to employing their sociolinguistic, pragmalinguistic, and socio-pragmatic knowledge of the target language. The interplay of these language skills and knowledge is integral of communication in real-life situations and is therefore transformed into tasks aimed to trigger genuine involvement in social interaction.

TBLA presents a number of caveats and challenges. First, test-takers interact with assessment tasks and, it follows, their performances are manifestations of their language aptitude
as influenced by the inherent features of tasks as well as other variables (Bachman, 2002). Since
tasks comprise multiple features, they should not be perceived as one entity (Bachman, 2002).
Understanding the influence of assessment tasks is important for test designers responsible for
devising performance assessment tests that are both construct-based and task-based and can
hence trigger representative speech samples of a learner’s real language ability.

Second, TBLA tests comprise three major components: “tasks”, “implementation
procedures”, and “performance assessment measures” (Ellis, 2003: 286). In this regard, different
inherent features of tasks differentially impact different aspects of oral performance (fluency,
accuracy, and complexity) and this is mediated by task implementation conditions and
procedures (e.g., planning time). How the oral performances produced are assessed and rated is
another issue of significance testers and raters should be wary of. The features of performance
being assessed should be reflected in the scales’ statements to indicate the range of levels likely
to be attainable in a proposed course of instruction (and the time allotted). This helps raters tell
the differences between the ascending series of levels and hence differentiate superior
performances from advanced or upper-intermediate ones.

Despite the fact that manipulation of task type, task cognitive complexity, and task
implementation conditions result in differences in L2 oral performance and perceptions of task
difficulty, task inherent features have not yet been regarded as key variables that influence
learners’ production in assessment situations (Iwashita et al., 2001; Tavakoli, 2009).
Accordingly, test developers need to develop this awareness and identify a set of task
characteristics which serve particular assessment situations and target the assessment of specific
aspects of language ability—i.e., fluency, accuracy, or complexity (Elder et al., 2002).
Operationalising the definitions of these different dimensions of language production should be
cautiously made to more reliably investigate the impact of task on learners’ performances in regards to these componential features. That is one key issue the present study is attempting to address within an ESP instructional setting.

2.2 The Influence of Planning on L2 Task-Based Oral Performance

Previous research on pre-task planning documents positive influence on learners’ fluency and complexity (with varied results in regards to accuracy) whereas unpressured on-line planning has a clear effect on accuracy and complexity. For the purpose of the present study, only a set of two studies and one literature review are chronologically introduced and discussed. Key findings, recommendations, and implications for classroom and assessment contexts are then presented.

Foster & Skehan’s (1999) examined the relationship between pre-task planning and L2 oral task-based performance from two different perspectives: “Source” and “focus” of planning. In their study, Foster & Skehan explored the efficacy of “teacher-led”, “solitary”, and “group-based” planning as well as language-oriented vs. content-oriented planning on learners’ oral performance in a decision-making task (a balloon debate) that called for sufficient pre-task planning time. Their research was driven by three hypotheses. They hypothesized that manipulation of the source of planning would influence the participants’ performance on task and that language-oriented planning would result in greater accuracy whereas content-directed planning would assist complexity.

A group of 66 intermediate, college-level EFL learners of various language learning background and different age groups, in their six intact classrooms, constituted the sample for the study. The task was carried out in six classrooms under six conditions, using a 2x2 research design, in a way that allowed for comparison between source of planning and focus of planning using descriptive statistics on the measures used to assess fluency, accuracy, and complexity.
Fluency was measured in terms of reformulations, false starts, repetitions, replacements, pauses and silence total. Accuracy was measured in terms of error-free clauses and complexity in terms of c-units.

The focus of planning did not have any significant impact on task-based oral performance in this study. Key findings related to only the source of planning. Besides providing evidence in support of the positive impact of pre-task planning on the measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity, whether this type of planning was done individually, with the teacher’s guidance or within a group seemed to lead to a noticeable change of results. Group planning had no significant effect on participants’ oral performance. However, while solitary planning was found to boost greater fluency and complexity, teacher-led planning had remarkable impact on learners’ accuracy. The study thus indicated that the teachers’ role in the pre-task planning stage may have been as instrumental as learner-dependent planning. The teacher’s intervention in terms of organization and instruction delivery may have aided the participants to focus on form, produce more error-free utterances, and thus assisted their accuracy without compromising the other features of oral production (fluency and complexity). In this way, teacher-led pre-task planning may be regarded as a way of creating a balanced improvement in the three measures of oral performance (fluency, accuracy, and complexity).

This finding stands in contradiction with prior research studies on Tradeoff Effect which state that one of these measures of oral proficiency is generally enhanced at the expense of the other two. Foster & Skehan argued that their contradictory results were due to the fact that accuracy and complexity were introduced together in the teacher-led condition by the teacher himself. It is the “teacher’s role”, not the task demands, that led the participants to perform consistently in regards to accuracy and complexity. An important implication for the language
classroom setting can be obtained from this study. Teachers need to develop an understanding of both task type and condition best fit for striking a balance in the development of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Teachers’ contribution during the pre-planning stage is significant in that it helps learners draw on complex structures and focus attention and use of language of pedagogic relevance to the task.

Yuan & Ellis (2003) is another study that investigated the impact of planning on L2 task-based oral performance. Unlike Foster & Skehan’s (1999), Yuan & Ellis studied the impact of both pre-task planning (specifically strategic planning) and on-line planning on L2 monologic oral performance on a picture narrative task in regards to the same aspects of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. They carried out their study with a homogenous sample of 42 Chinese undergraduate, 18-to-20-year-old learners with similar English language learning background and proficiency level. The sample was divided into three groups; each group was required to carry out the task under a different planning condition in a language laboratory.

The first group performed the task after they were introduced to a series of pictures for only half a minute (with no planning time). The second was given a ten-minute preparation time prior to task implementation under time pressure. Finally, the third group, granted only half a minute for studying the pictures, was given unlimited time to monitor their oral production while performing the task (flexible on-line planning time). A number of one-way ANOVAs were administered on the three measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Fluency was measured in terms of number of syllables per minute and accuracy in terms of error-free clauses and correct verb forms. Complexity was measured in regards to syntactic complexity (ratio of clauses to T-units), syntactic variety (total number of different verb forms), and Mean Segmental Type-Token Ratio. Moreover, to identify the participants’ attitudes toward task completion under
different conditions, an open-ended questionnaire was administered and an interview was conducted with a few of them.

Results showed that pre-task planning advanced the participants’ complexity of oral production but had no effect on their fluency—contrary to the prior body of research that documented the positive impact of pre-task planning on fluency. Yuan & Ellis argued that this contradictory result was the outcome of performing under time pressure. In previous studies, time was not manipulated and participants were given flexible time to carry out the tasks. Moreover, Yuan & Ellis found that pre-task planning did not lead to greater accuracy; the narrative task was too demanding for the participants to prioritize accuracy at the expense of organization and content preparation within the time limit imposed. What made it more challenging for the participants is the lack of on-line planning time that could have helped them focus on form and thus boost accuracy. On the other hand, unpressured on-line planning was found to have assisted accuracy and complexity at the expense of fluency.

These two major findings on pre-task and on-line task planning accord with the widely accepted claim in the literature to date: the Tradeoff Effect. The type of planning employed forces learners to prioritize different aspects of oral performance at the expense of others. What this study contributes to the literature on planning and task-based performance is that if learners are granted opportunities of both pre-planning (which accounts for fluency and lexical variety) and on-line planning (that helps advance accuracy), they may pay adequate attention to the different dimensions of oral proficiency.

Ellis (2009b) has conducted a wide-scale review of studies on planning in relation to L2 task performance. Ellis’s review comprised twenty-two studies; three of them examined the impact of pre-planning (both rehearsal and strategic planning) and the other nineteen studies
investigated the influence of on-line planning on second/foreign language learners’ performance on oral narrative tasks in classrooms, laboratories, or assessment settings. In these studies, the participants were of different proficiency levels, implementing tasks of various types (monologic or interactive) of diverse complexity levels. Task complexity was manipulated in regards to degree of familiarity, context, structure, and other inherent features. Interestingly, these studies examined the task planning variable in terms of length (which varied from classroom to testing conditions) and guidance during planning stages (the presence/absence of instructions to focus on form, meaning, or both). Various measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity were employed across this range of studies.

Ellis drew several substantial conclusions in relation to the three aspects of oral proficiency (fluency, accuracy, and complexity). As for fluency, manipulation of task complexity was found to interact with planning and measures of fluency; planning was found to be significant in boosting fluency in simpler tasks. In this respect, Ellis also found that longer planning time assisted fluency and that guided planning (but not in all studies) generated high levels of fluency depending on learners’ proficiency level and task type. In terms of accuracy and complexity, results were mixed and not conclusive in regards to the variables that correlated with fluency.

Overall, the studies that focused on rehearsal, as one type of pre-task planning, documented enhanced levels of fluency, accuracy and complexity. The positive impact attributed to rehearsal was found to be dependent on the nature of intervention (the task) and is therefore not consistent across all types of treatments. Second, strategic planning was shown to positively advance fluency, with mixed results for accuracy and complexity. Learners’ proficiency level, task structuring, implementation conditions (instructional/assessment situations) and learners’ attitude toward planning were among the key variables that accounted for these discrepancies. Finally,
on-line planning was found to have positive impact on complexity and accuracy without having a negative effect on fluency.

Ellis’s literature review offers important implications for future research in the area of planning and task-based performance. First, the impact of task planning on learners’ oral production should be examined in conjunction with other intervening factors (e.g., task type, proficiency level, anxiety level, attitude toward planning, etc.) that are likely to alter performance on task. Second, how learners plan for the task is another issue of concern. Perhaps think-aloud protocols can be integrated to get a glimpse of how planning materializes before and during task implementation. Third, no study in the literature to date studied the joint effect of pre-task and within-task planning. This is a major area of research that needs to be tapped into.

To conclude, the findings, implications, and recommendations obtained from the studies and literature review introduced and discussed above are of significance to both language teachers and testers. Sufficient pre- and within-task planning time need to be ensured to more objectively assess the impact of planning stages on the three aspects of learners’ L2 oral performance. This can further help obtain evidence as to whether task planning may lead to language acquisition—an issue that was raised in the previous body of research. The joint effect of the two types of planning has been under-researched and needs to be examined in relation to the componential features of L2 oral production. Moreover, teachers need to develop and/or manipulate task types and task implementation conditions to not only assist fluency, accuracy, and complexity, but also enable learners to provide meaningful output in authentic situations.

Despite their insightful implications for classroom and assessment settings, the reviewed studies explored only a few task types, namely decision-making tasks, narrative tasks, and description tasks performed individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Role-plays and simulations
were barely introduced to learners and hence the potential influence of variables like task design, complexity, and difficulty were only restricted to a number of extensively researched types of tasks. Role-plays/simulations were shown to be better measurements of L2 learners’ oral competence by virtue of their characteristics of (as well as their approximation to) real-world settings (Halleck, 2007; Kormos, 1999). However, none of the studies reviewed integrated these forms of interaction and examined their effect on L2 oral proficiency.

2.3 The Influence of Task Design, Complexity, and Difficulty on L2 Oral Performance

In line with the previous discussion, task-related variables, namely cognitive complexity and difficulty were examined in recent studies on TBLL, TBLA and L2 oral performance. For the scope of the present study, a set of four studies (Gilabert, 2007; Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Taguchi, 2007) are introduced and discussed. Key findings, recommendations, and implications for classroom and assessment contexts are then presented.

In his research project, Gilabert (2007) examined the impact of manipulating the cognitive complexity of three different oral tasks (a narrative task, an instruction-giving task, and a decision-making task) on the grammatical accuracy of learners’ L2 oral output. He investigated how different degrees of task complexity influenced learners’ (of different proficiency levels) attention to form and rate and amount of error detection and self-repair across these different monologic tasks. The cognitive demands of each task type were manipulated differently: The narrative task in terms of the presence/absence of Here-and-Now, the instruction-giving task in regards to the presence/absence of elements and the decision-making task in terms of the presence/absence of reasoning. Gilabert hypothesized that tasks implemented under complex conditions would increase the rate and number of self-repairs and that different levels of oral proficiency would be of no significance across all task types and implementation conditions. He
further assumed that self-repairs would be of a higher level during narrative and instruction-giving tasks and of a lower level on the decision-making task.

A cohort of 42, lower-intermediate EFL volunteers from two different educational settings and aged 18 to 40 was the sample for the study. Each participant carried out six oral tasks in total. In the narrative tasks, participants were initially instructed to narrate a story in the present time while having access to the pictures’ prompt; on another occasion they were asked to narrate a story in the past tense in the absence of the pictures. During the instruction-giving task, they were first asked to give directions to a friend with reference to a map with few landmarks and then were challenged by having a more complex map to use in the course of task implementation. Finally, in the decision-making task, the participants were required to make a decision based on a situation and then were challenged to make a series of informed decisions and draw relations between them. Prior to the implementation of each task under its two different conditions, all the participants were given an up-to-one-minute pre-task planning time.

Descriptive statistics and repeated measures ANOVAs were used to identify the differences between the different degrees of complexity across the different task types in measurement of accuracy (in terms of self-repairs) and one-way ANOVAs were used to determine potential difference across proficiency levels. Gilabert found that manipulation of the cognitive demands of tasks along resource-directing variables enhanced learners’ attention to form and self-repair behaviors, but of varying degrees depending on the task type. It cannot therefore be generalized that more cognitive task demands positively impact focus-on-form and accuracy; it is dependent on the task type and its inherent features. Moreover, the level of proficiency was not found to be a determining factor in the rate of self-generated repairs.
These findings have crucial implications for task design and task sequencing for both classroom practices and assessment purposes on the basis that learners behave differently on different task types of varying degrees of cognitive complexity manipulation. Learners tend to pay attention to different aspects of oral proficiency depending on task type, type of cognitive demands manipulated, and how these demands are manipulated (along resource-directing variables or resource-dispersing variables). Moreover, learners’ perception of task difficulty does not correlate with task cognitive complexity; it simply differs from one task type and design to the other as well as other intervening variables such as working memory capacity, intelligence, etc.

Another study that investigated the impact of manipulating cognitive complexity on learners’ L2 oral performance is Robinson’s (2007). In this study, Robinson manipulated the “resource-directing reasoning demands” of three interactive narrative tasks; all the participants were required to perform on three levels of these tasks (simple, medium, and complex). The study was based on several hypotheses. On using general measures of oral production, accuracy and complexity were hypothesized to be improved while fluency hindered on complex tasks compared to their simpler version whereas on using specific measures there would be noticeable increase in complexity on complex tasks compared to their simpler versions. Moreover, complex tasks were hypothesized to trigger higher levels of interaction and uptake and hence perceived as more difficult than their simpler versions. Finally, participants’ oral performance on tasks, interaction, and uptake were hypothesized to be determined by participants’ “individual differences in input” and “processing and output anxiety” across the three levels of tasks carried out.
All the forty-two, 20-to-23-year-old participants were college-level Japanese EFL learners of similar English language learning background. They performed the narrative tasks in dyads in different sequences. Each seven dyads performed the tasks in a different sequence: Seven dyads following the simple-medium-complex sequence, the other seven dyads in the medium-simple-complex order and the last seven dyads followed the complex-simple-medium arrangement. On each dyadic task performance, one participant decided on the sequence of a picture narrative and told the story to his partner in order for the latter to sequence the pictures in accordance with the narrative heard. The storey-teller in each dyad was given optional task-relevant phrases to guide them in story-telling if they wanted to. No planning time was allotted for participants on all the narrative tasks of all simple-to-complex versions.

General measures of L2 oral proficiency aspects were used in this study. Fluency was measured in terms of syllables per second and words per C-unit and accuracy was measured in terms of percentage of error-free C-units. Type-token ration was used to measure lexical complexity, clauses per C-unit for syntactic complexity, and finally words per turn for the complexity of turns taken. Repeated-measure analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and a paired t-test were administered for data analysis. Specific measures were used to identify the effect of the conceptual and linguistic demands of tasks (depending on the level of the task) on storey-tellers’ complexity.

Robinson found that increased levels of cognitive complexity of tasks were shown to positively enhance interaction and promote uptake. However, manipulating resource-directing reasoning demands across the three narrative tasks did not have significant effect on fluency, accuracy, or complexity of L2 oral production. Robinson indicated that this last finding related to the synergetic influence of manipulating two different dimensions rather than one dimension of
task complexity. In this study, resource-directing reasoning demands as well as resource-dispersing demands (in terms of absence of planning time and presence of two participants in a given task) were manipulated. The latter type of manipulation has been found to lower levels of fluency, accuracy, and complexity—unlike manipulation of resource-directing demands that tend to positively impact accuracy and complexity. If sufficient planning time was made available, results could have been different.

Another noteworthy finding in Robinson’s study was that learners’ individual perceptions of task difficulty interacted with task complexity. Similar to Gilabert’s (2007) study findings, Robinson found that learners’ perception of task difficulty did not consistently relate to task complexity; that is, more complex tasks were not necessarily perceived as more difficult. Learners’ individual variation in regards to language aptitude, reasoning abilities, and output anxiety influenced their interaction and hence varied their oral performance from one task to the other. A major implication for future research derives from Robinson’s study. The interaction between learners’ cognitive and affective individual variations (and which determine learners’ perceptions of task difficulty) and task complexity is important for researchers to examine.

Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder’s (2007) study also examined the impact of manipulating task complexity along resource-directing demands on learners’ L2 oral production with respect to the measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The resource-directing demands were manipulated in terms of the presence/absence of few elements in a task under two different task implementation condition (whether it is monologic or dialogic). Possible joint effects of both task cognitive complexity and task implementation condition was further investigated in the study. Michel et al.’s study was based on three hypotheses. Increasing levels of task complexity along the variable manipulated was hypothesized to increase accuracy and complexity while
decreasing fluency. Also, in interactive task condition, the participants were predicted to manifest lower levels of complexity and fluency, but increased accuracy. The interactional effect of both task complexity manipulation and change in task implementation condition was further hypothesized to be found; Michel et al. predicted that in dialogic performances the higher the complexity level of the task, the greater the accuracy and the lower the complexity and fluency.

Michel et al. carried out their study with a group of 44 intermediate-level adult L2 learners of Dutch two different nationalities. The sample was divided into two groups: one group of 22 participants performing monologically and the other group of 22 participants performed dialogically. All the participants performed the two versions of the oral task (+few elements version and –few elements version). In the simple version, the participants were given a leaflet with two electronic gadgets, and in the complex version, they were given a leaflet with six gadgets. All gadgets differed in terms of seven item-specific features. In the monologic group, the participants were required to give a friend advice on which device to purchase by leaving a message on his/her answering machine. In the dialogic group, each two participants discussed together which of these gadgets they would purchase.

Multiple measurements were used for the three aspects of oral production. Fluency was measured in terms of speech rate (the number of syllables per minute). Accuracy was measured in terms of 1) the total number of errors per AS units and the number of lexical errors and number of omissions in relation to the number of AS units, and 2) percentage of self-repairs in relation to the number of errors and the total number of words. Finally, complexity was measured in two ways: for syntactic complexity, the number of clauses per AS unit was obtained, and for lexical complexity, Guiraud’s Index of Lexical Complexity and the percentage of lexical words in relation to the total number of words were both used.
Using a 2 X 2 design and repeated measures MANOVAs, along with descriptive statistics, to examine the influence of task complexity and task condition variability on learners’ oral performance, Michel et al. reached interesting results. First, the complex versions of the task were shown to result in more accurate and complex speech in terms of total numbers of errors per AS units and percentage of lexical words, respectively. Overall fluency was reduced. Second, task implementation condition, monologically or dialogically, did not have a statistical significance on the measures of fluency, accuracy, or complexity. However, on comparing the participants’ performance under these two task conditions, it was found that unlike monologic performances, dialogic interactions resulted in greater fluency and accuracy. Finally, no joint interactional effect of task complexity and task condition manipulations was found in the study except for measures of accuracy. In the monologic oral performances, more complex tasks boosted greater accuracy. Michel et al. put forward one relevant recommendation for future research. They called attention to further studying the interactional effect of task complexity and task condition in a more detailed manner.

The three studies reviewed above examined the effect of task complexity manipulation (in different task types) on learners’ oral performance, with two of them focusing on how learners’ perceptions of task difficulty do not necessarily correlate with task complexity. Another important study to present and discuss at this point in the literature review is Taguchi’s (2007) that examined task complexity from a pragmatic perspective. Taguchi investigated the impact of manipulating pragmatic-oriented task complexity on learners’ L2 oral production of speech acts. He aimed to observe how manipulating the social demands and interpersonal task conditions may vary task demands, call for different type of processing and hence influence learners’ oral production of speech acts across different proficiency levels.
The three social demands manipulated in two different conditions of task implementation were "power relationships”, “social distance”, and “degree of imposition between interlocutors”. In the first condition, the interlocutors shared equal power relationships (P), little social distance (D), and low degree of imposition (R), i.e., a PDR-low situation. In the second condition, these contextual elements were increased; the listener had more power, the interlocutor social distance was greater, and the degree of imposition was high, i.e., a PDR-high situation. The study was carried out with a sample of 20 native speakers of English and 59 EFL university-level Japanese learners of two different proficiency levels. They were asked to perform role plays that trigger two different speech acts (requests and refusals) under these two task implementation conditions.

To examine the influence of manipulating the social situation on learners’ oral performance with regards to their respective proficiency level, a number of repeated-measures ANOVAs were used to measure the participants’ L2 oral output in terms of pragmatic appropriateness, pre-task planning time, and speech rate. Pragmatic appropriateness was measured with reference to a developed rating scale; speech rate and pre-planning time were determined using temporal measures.

Data analyses showed that the task situational condition significantly influenced learners’ level of pragmatic appropriateness and speech rate. Contrary to the native speakers who performed the task well under both conditions, the EFL learners, regardless of their proficiency level, found the PDR-high speech acts more cognitively demanding and complex to produce fluently. They required more production time to effectively draw appropriate expressions from their repertoires and use face-saving rather than face-threatening expressions and so fluency was hindered. This significant finding in the study brings back the importance of task-planning time into focus. Previous studies on planning time documented positive effect on measures of fluency,
accuracy, and complexity. However, in this study, providing sufficient pre-task or on-line planning time did not seem to trigger more appropriate and fluent speech act production. The nature of pragmatic tasks, as opposed to other types of tasks (be it narrative, decision-making, or descriptive), called participants’ attention to employing other types of “linguistic”, “contextual”, and “sociocultural” resources and so behaved differently.

Another finding of significance relates to the quality of speech acts produced in relation to the participants’ proficiency level. The low-proficiency group produced pragmalinguistically ineffective speech acts on account of their limited linguistic resources as well as interference of mother-tongue pragmatic conventions and so failed to meet the pragmatic demands of the task. However, familiarity with the task situations in the native language and culture could have been another factor that positively influenced the low-proficiency group’s high performance on the PDR-low task condition. It follows, different situational conditions of pragmatic tasks, and the type of demands they impose on participants, interact with various proficiency levels.

Two important implications for classroom and assessment settings are drawn from Taguchi’s study. First, pragmatic-oriented tasks are different from other types of tasks; manipulation of these tasks along “pragmalinguistic” and “sociopragmatic” parameters determines their level of complexity and hence varies learners’ oral performance of speech acts. Second, teachers need to design success-oriented pragmatic tasks that should be introduced earlier in a given syllabus before other complex type of tasks that call for employing higher cognitive and pragmatic skills are provided. Taguchi calls for further researcher to be done on different types of pragmatic tasks, the impact of individual affective and cognitive variables on fluency, and different measurements of pragmatic competence.
To summarize, the four studies reviewed in this section focused on how manipulation of task complexity in terms of resource-directing and resource-dispersing demands influenced L2 oral performance in regards different measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Pragmatic tasks were found to be of a different nature and so have variable impact on learner’s L2 oral output. The key findings and recommendations of these studies offer multifaceted implications for both language teachers and testers. First, since language learners behave differently in tasks of various types and different levels of complexity, they are likely to manifest superior performances on one task, average on another, and perform poorly on a third one. For success-orientation in classroom practices and both valid and reliable performance assessment in testing situations, learners’ performance on multiple tasks of increasing complexity levels need to be monitored. This is to obtain representative samples of speech and help raters reach reliable interpretations as to their proficiency and performance levels.

Second, learners’ individual and collaborative performances need to be more systematically studied. Interactivity during task performances may impact learners’ oral production and may variably impact measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Third, as outlined earlier in the first section of the review, preparation time is instrumental in task performance. None of the studies reviewed offered the participants pre-task planning or on-line planning time, except for Taguchi’s (2007). The joint effect of task-planning, task complexity, and task implementation conditions needs to be further researched.

2.4 The Impact of Task Design on L2 Oral Performance in Assessment Settings

So far in the literature review, learners’ oral performance was examined in relation to task type, task planning time, and task complexity. The two studies examined L2 oral performance under testing conditions, with the variables discussed above as part of their research design and
methodology (Iwashita, McNamara, & Elder, 2001; Tavakoli, 2009). These studies are chronologically introduced and discussed. Key findings, recommendations, and implications for assessment contexts are then presented.

Iwashita, McNamara & Elder (2001) investigated the impact of manipulating task cognitive complexity on learners’ oral production (in measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity) and perceptions of task difficulty in their performance of monologic narrative tasks on a semi-direct test format. The oral tasks were built on a series of picture prompts and were manipulated along the dimensions of “perspective”, “immediacy”, “adequacy”, and “planning time”. These dimensions were examined as predictors of participants’ perceptions of task difficulty in an assessment context.

All participants in the study, a group of 193 pre-university ESL learners, were randomly divided into four experimental groups; in each group, all the participants were asked to carry out a total of eight tasks with a recess between the first four tasks and the remaining four tasks. Each participant narrated the series of stories from their own as well as someone else’s view (perspective); in both the presence and absence of prompting pictures (immediacy); with the full set of pictures and then with an incomplete set (adequacy); and finally in the absence and presence of sufficient pre-task planning time (planning time). Several hypotheses with respect to each of the four dimensions were formulated. Stories narrated from a personal view, or in the presence of the pictures prompt, or with the help of the full set of pictures available were predicted to result in higher fluency and accuracy and lower complexity than in the corresponding alternative task implementation conditions. Moreover, ensuring sufficient pre-task planning time was hypothesized to improve fluency and accuracy and decrease complexity.
Discourse analysis of participants’ speech samples was initially performed to obtain measurements of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Fluency was measured by means of the number of repetitions, false starts, reformulations, hesitations, and pauses in relation to the stretches of speech produced. Accuracy was measured by means of the percentage of error-free clauses in relation to the total number of clauses produced per oral response. Finally, complexity was measured by dividing the number of clauses by the number of c-units. Repeated measures MANOVA statistical analyses and IRT-based program FACETS and Rasch analyses of the participant’s corresponding test scores then followed. Students’ oral performances were scored in accordance with an analytic rubric of multiple rating scales for fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Interestingly, Iwashita et al. found no relationship or systematic variation between task implementation condition, perception of task difficulty, and oral performance in measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity—and therefore failed to align these results with those documented in the literature to date. This could have been partly due to problems in the operationalization of the four dimensions manipulated. The use of a task type commonly used in standardized testing situations which by default barely calls for complex structures could have been another reason. Iwashita et al.’s study, in this respect, offers implications for performance-assessment situations and test designers and raters. Had communicative tasks that simulate real-world interaction been integrated in this test format, results could have been more accurate and valid. Inconsistency of results may have also stemmed from learners’ feelings of anxiety under testing conditions that could have been one variable decreasing their complexity of speech; perhaps under testing conditions, accuracy was prioritized at the expense of fluency and complexity. Further research needs to be done to reach more reliable conclusions of task
complexity manipulation in relation to learners’ performances in oral proficiency assessment situations.

In the literature to date on TBLA, Tavakoli (2009) is the most recent investigation of the influence of manipulating narrative task complexity on L2 oral production in regards to fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Tavakoli studied two under-examined dimensions of task complexity in language testing: “narrative structure” and “storyline complexity”. He aimed to identify whether tasks with both foreground and background storylines triggered greater complexity than versions with only a foreground storyline, and whether more structured tasks had a more positive impact on measures of fluency and accuracy than in the less structured versions.

Six narrative tasks were used in this study. The first three tasks had only a foreground storyline and the other three tasks had both foreground and background storylines. In each set of tasks, one task was problem-solving in structure; the second task had a schematic and sequential structure with clear beginning, series of events, and ending; and the last one was less structured and had a number of events not tied together with a timeline. Across all the six tasks, enough task planning time to prepare for the oral narratives was ensured. A group of 60 intermediate-level EFL Iranians aged 19 to 45, of similar English language learning background, volunteered to participate in the study. They were assigned randomly to two groups; each group carried out a set of three narrative tasks manipulated differently along the dimensions of storyline complexity and structure in different sequences to bypass the carryover of practice effect.

Analytic measurements of the three aspects of oral performance (fluency, accuracy, and complexity) were used. Fluency was measured by means of repetitions, total amount of silence, and speech rate; accuracy was measured in terms of the percentage of error-free clauses in relation to the whole number of clauses per oral response; and complexity by means of the
percentage of subordinate clauses in each AS unit for syntactic complexity and D for lexical variety. Repeated measures MANOVAs and other statistical analyses were adopted by the researcher to answer the research questions. Interestingly, Tavakoli found that narrative tasks with both foreground and background storylines triggered more syntactically complex speech; the type of tasks employed in the study did not seem to elicit more complex lexical variety. Tavakoli concluded that other type of tasks manipulated along other dimensions could account for lexical diversity other than narrative tasks manipulated in terms of structure and storyline complexity. Moreover, the participants’ performance in more structured tasks, in either storyline version, manifested greater accuracy and fluency in regards to certain measures.

Several implications for performance-based assessment research can be obtained from this study. Contrary to the results outlined earlier in Iwashita et al. (2001) and in the research study of Elder, Iwashita, & McNamara (2002), Tavakoli showed that task design has clear impact on L2 oral performance in assessment situations with respect to measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. He attributed the inconsistency of results in those studies to the use of assessment rubrics and raters in standardized tests; both of them fail to capture variation in task features and conditions. Despite the fact that manipulation of task type, task cognitive complexity, and task implementation condition result in differences in oral performance, task inherent features have not yet been regarded as key variables that influence learners’ production in assessment situations. Another issue of concern is the reliability of test scores and the interpretations based on them. If certain features of task design affect different aspects of L2 oral output, then the test-takers’ scores will not only indicate their linguistic ability; rather, the scores will reflect their language aptitude in relation to particular task designs. Further research is still needed on the potential effects of task design on L2 performance.
In summary, the two studies reviewed above examined how task complexity manipulation along various dimensions influences L2 oral performance in measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Although the two studies have contradictory results, their findings present test-designers and raters with important implications and challenges for language testing. Task inherent features need to be acknowledged in the language testing literature as potential variables likely to vary test-takers’ performances by virtue of the fact that manipulating some features rather than others calls test-takers’ attentional resources to one or more dimension of L2 oral production but not the other(s). Accordingly, several task types of different designs are crucial to integrate in one test format to elicit more valid and reliable speech samples and obtain more reliable scores representative of their real linguistic ability.

2.5 Implications for Task-Based In-Class Practices and Assessment Situations

Several implications for classroom practices and assessment situations are obtained from the previous literature review; these implications were carefully interwoven into the present study and they can be summed up as follows:

1. Sufficient pre-task and on-line planning time in practice and assessment situations should be ensured in order for tasks to be more valid measurements of L2 oral output in regards to fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

2. The teacher’s role in the pre-task planning stage is instrumental in guiding learners and focusing their attention to form, meaning, or both, prior to task implementation.

3. Effective language courses and reliable and valid test formats that integrate tasks of multiple cognitive complexity levels - manipulated along resource-directing or resource-dispersing demands or other demands - should be designed. Since manipulation of various task inherent features significantly impacts oral performance and calls attention
to aspects of oral production other than others, different task designs should be incorporated to obtain representative speech samples of learners’ proficiency level.

4. Using a variety of task types that foster L2 genuine involvement and require both individual and collaborative performances in authentic situations is crucial.

5. Test formats that ensure interactivity and comprise several assessment tasks sufficient to obtain representative samples of speech should be cautiously developed.

2.6 Contribution of the Present Study

None of the studies reviewed in this study addressed task type design in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instructional settings, where L2 learners strive to practice the language in the target contextual situations. Little is therefore known about what task type or design can trigger better oral proficiency - with positive impact on fluency and accuracy - and can serve as valid and reliable assessment tools of their oral performance. The study is therefore hoped to be a contribution to the literature on Task-Based Language Learning and Task-Based Language Assessment.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The present exploratory study employed descriptive and interpretive statistics to identify the influence of the business communication case-based task design on Business English learners’ overall oral proficiency and the two dimensions of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. The participants’ oral responses to the case-based tasks as well as the pretest-posttest assessment tasks were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and then analyzed in regards to the measures of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. Oral fluency was examined in terms of speech rate (number of words per minute) and grammatical accuracy was examined in terms of the ratio of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per response. The results obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA).

3.2 Participants

The study was carried out at the College of Management and Technology with a group of students enrolled in the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) Program at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, & Maritime Transport (AASTMT), Cairo, Egypt. Students are admitted in the UWIC classes based on their scores on an institutional English language proficiency test. In their freshmen year, students typically enroll in two business English coursebook-based requisite modules (Business English I and II) that help develop their language skills, vocabulary and structure, and study skills in business settings.

Given time and logistical constraints, the researcher followed the information-rich sampling paradigm to draw a purposeful random sample (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Perry, 2005). This sample served both the purpose and context of the study. Permission had been obtained to use a
sample of 10 intermediate learners of Business English, 5 males and 5 females, 19 to 22 years of age Egyptian sophomores of diverse EFL learning background. All the participants agreed to receive the Business English Oral Communication (BEOC) course and sit for the tests in non-regular class times. Student informed consent forms (See Appendix A) were obtained prior to the implementation of the study. It is worth noting that proper incentives for the participants were provided. Their active participation is acknowledged by offering them a Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) 60-hour preparation course to be taken at the time best convenient for them during the Summer of 2011.

3.3 Materials

The materials used in this study are part of a twelve-week Business English Oral Communication (BEOC) course developed by the researcher in the summer of 2010, under the supervision of the Head of Language Studies, for the Business English students enrolled in the UWIC Program at AASTMT. The BEOC course encompasses two levels with six weeks, 60 hours of classroom instruction each. Level 1 comprises 5 weeks of instructions (50 hours of teaching) and one week of supplementary material (the business communication case and case-based tasks) which takes up the remaining 10 hours of this level. This level includes four units on meetings, debates, presentations, and pitches. Level 2 comprises 4 weeks of instruction and 2 weeks of supplementary materials (two more business communication cases with more advanced case-based tasks) and includes three units on job interviews, proposals and reports. All BEOC course materials were piloted with a group of 6 sophomores in the Summer and Fall semesters of 2010. Some modifications were made to the materials based on the feedback obtained; changes were geared toward optimizing the opportunities made available for oral proficiency enhancement in real-life business situations.
The materials build on the Business English I and II courses introduced to students in their freshmen year and help learners embark on realistic opportunities of oral proficiency development in extended business settings beyond the set coursebook. They included authentic resources (e.g., newspaper articles, live meetings with business icons, podcasts downloaded from business magazines official Websites and Business English Websites, etc.) and a few adaptations from textbooks in conformity with the fundamentals of business communication as outlined by Thill and Bovée (2008).

The nature of business communication has evolved over the past decade from Business Communication 1.0 to Business Communication 2.0 to foster the new Web 2.0 media and techniques professionals use in the business world of today, namely video-conferencing and tele-presence, podcasts, wikis, web-based meetings, and electronic whiteboards (Bovée & Thill, 2009). These new media are incorporated into the BEOC course on a narrow scale to help learners keep up with the new trends in business communication in the digital world of today.

3.4 Treatment

One business communication case and a set of four case-based oral tasks constituted the treatment (See Appendix B). It was introduced in week 6 of Level 1 and lasted for a whole week (10 hours of in-class instruction) after formal teaching and practice of different modes of oral communication had been thoroughly done. The case-based tasks are cognitively complex, manipulated along resource-directing “reasoning” demands. They are preceded by prompts that call for different degrees of reasoning, negotiation of meaning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills hence imposing cognitive load on learners. Depending on the degree of the cognitive complexity of the task, the participants performed individually, in pairs or in a group of five. This sequence was intended by the researcher to monitor learners’ performances across
different levels of complexity and how effective collaboration with partners is in facilitating fluency and accuracy.

3.5 Instrumentation

A pretest and a posttest (See Appendices C and D) were administered to compare the participant’s oral performance before and after receiving the treatment. These are parallel-form, criterion-referenced tests, different from general English oral proficiency tests in terms of format, oral prompts, task types, and implementation conditions.

The rationale for not using the interview format in this study is three-fold. First, oral interviews have been criticized for not eliciting speech samples representative of candidates’ real oral competence on account of the interviewer’s effect. Interviewers’ forms of intervention during candidates’ oral interactions (e.g., ways of probing or formulating questions, accommodations of their speech rate or level to match that of the candidates, and participation in topic development and interaction management), despite proper training, may inevitably affect learners’ responses hence compromise the validity and reliability of oral proficiency assessment (Brown, 2003; Halleck, 2007; Kormos, 1999; Salaberry, 2000). Second, during interviews, the followed assessment procedures harness genuine involvement, negotiation of meaning and social interaction in the target language in settings that simulate the real world. A series of elicitation questions and cliché role-plays (with the interviewer as one participant) are not valid measurements since they do not elicit natural oral output in the target language, nor can they be effective indicators of candidates’ L2 communicative competence and oral proficiency level.

Therefore, in the present study the examiners did not assume interviewer’s roles; rather, they served as agents for task introduction, instructions delivery, prompt clarification, oral response preparation/delivery time-keeping, and speech sample audio-taping. Moreover, each
two-and-a-half-hour test form comprised a set of three caselet prompts and corresponding tasks; each test required the test-taker to perform in three different interactional patterns. All participants performed individually where no prompting or guidance was offered by peers and then interacted in two collaborative tasks (in a dyad and then in a group of five) where all members collaborated at varying degrees.

In keeping with the tenets of TBLA, the pretest and posttest assessment tasks were designed to foster genuine involvement and interaction in real-world simulations (Bachman, 2002; Byrnes, 2002; Elder, Iwashita, & McNamara, 2002; Gan, 2010; Ke, 2006; Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2002; Norris, 2002; Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Bonk, 2002). These tasks are inherently characterized by “authenticity”, “content relevance” and “representativeness” of the real world (Bachman, 2002; Gan, 2010).

As for task implementation, enough pre-task planning and on-line planning time for each of the tasks was ensured. The pretest-posttest caselet prompts and tasks were piloted on a group of 4 students before data collection; modifications were made in regards to dilemma formulation, task preparation and delivery time, instructions, and task-based role-plays/simulations.

### 3.6 Coder Training

To ensure accurate analysis of the verbal data, a team of three coders had a ten-day, 20-hour training (in the first two weeks of the BEOC course). That contact period with coders ensured accuracy of transcribing and coding speech samples of various types (individual, pair, or group responses). All coders were graduates of the MA/TEFL program at the American University in Cairo (AUC) with sufficient experience in coding and analyzing verbal data. During training sessions, nine speech samples were used for coders to transcribe and code using a rubric of two
codes: Speech Rate (number of words per minute) and Error-Free T-units (number of error-free T-units per oral response).

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 Introduction.

During the first five weeks of the BEOC course, students practiced running meetings of different types, holding meaningful debates, and delivering effective presentations and pitches. Formal teaching of how these different modes of business communication should proceed was delivered using authentic materials and a few adaptations from textbooks. A number of grammatical structures were reinforced in these four units, namely subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, conditional sentences, relative clauses, modal verbs and phrasal modals, and phrasal verbs. Several communicative tasks were incorporated into each unit to provide contextualized opportunities of meaningful practice. Relevant role plays and simulations were carried out in real business settings.

The ten participants successfully gave two promotional 25-minute presentations in a national banking firm and posted three online one-minute pitches on a marketing agency customer service team’s Website. They also generated two 30-minute debates with an insurance company senior staff about types of insurances and their legality from Islamic perspectives. Finally, they held a 40-minute crisis meeting after doing a SWOT analysis at the College of Management and Technology in attempt to provide quality education for business students. In completion of these tasks, the participants had sufficient time to work cooperatively and collaboratively in class and from home using a self-generated wiki and online chats on Skype.

At this point in the course, all participants felt comfortable with employing technology-enhanced media in carrying out their assigned roles in the pre-task planning stage. Their fluency
level noticeably increased; they were keen on using L2 during classroom communication, informal campus discussions with their instructors and peers, online interaction, and task implementation in the above mentioned settings. However, in their attempt to enhance flow of communication, they seem to have paid attention to fluency at the expense of accuracy during this five-week period of instruction. That may account for the fact that their fluency improved significantly whereas their accuracy was still low. Although they were good at using the grammatical structures reinforced so far in the course, in their several modes of oral interaction, ill-formed utterances were still detectable; these errors were minor, though, and did not, for the most part, hinder communication.

The treatment was then introduced in week 6 of the BEOC course. In the first three sessions of week 6, the researcher pursued Menna’s (2010) approach to case analysis—i.e., “Situation Analysis”, “Major Problem”, “Decision Criteria”, “Alternatives”, “Analysis of Alternatives”, “Decision”, and “Implementation”. The participants were encouraged to engage in active negotiation of meaning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making and use higher-order cognitive skills with the help of the researcher. That helped them identify with the dilemma and analyze the case from different perspectives depending on the characters they identified with in the scenario. Formal teaching and practice of several grammatical structures and discipline-related vocabulary and expressions were an integral part of the instructional input in the course of the detailed examination of the case.

In the pre-task planning stage, the researcher engaged in active in-class discussion with the participants as to how they planned to carry out the case-based tasks. Guidance in regards to what steps to follow in task completion; which grammatical structures to use and focus on during task implementation; and how pre-taught vocabulary of words and idiomatic expressions could
serve their tasks were among the key assistance modes offered by the researcher. That type of awareness-raising guidance seemed to have elevated their attention to accuracy during pre-task and on-line planning stages of subsequent tasks. The participants communicated online in preparation of the tasks and finally carried them out in class in the last two sessions of the week. The transcribed and coded data of the participant’s verbal responses to the case-based tasks indicated improvement in fluency and accuracy at varying degrees.

3.7.2 Procedures.

Data collection procedures began at the end of week 5 of the BEOC course and lasted until the start of week 7. In the last session of week 5, all the ten participants sat for a pretest (See Appendix B) to measure their overall oral proficiency level in business interactions and determine their levels of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy separately. Sufficient pre-task and on-line planning time was ensured. Their oral responses to the assessment tasks (of approximately 85 minutes in total) were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed by a team of three coders to calculate the measures of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy.

The treatment was then administered throughout week 6 of the course. The participants’ oral responses on three case-based tasks (of approximately 95 minutes in total) were also audio-recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed in regards to the measures of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. Finally, the participants sat for the posttest (See Appendix C) at the start of week 7, in the first class meeting of Level 2. In the same manner, sufficient pre-task and on-line planning time was secured and the participants’ responses to the tasks (of approximately 110 minutes in total) were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed to obtain the measures of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy.
As indicated in the table that follows, the participants planned for and performed on the three oral assessment tasks of the pretest and posttest in three distinct ways. In the individual task, each participant worked individually during the planning stage and then performed individually on task. In the pair task, the two participants worked collaboratively and cooperatively during task preparation and then interacted dialogically on task in the form of a one-on-one discussion. In the group task, all the five participants scaffolded one another during the collaborative preparation stage then each participant performed his share of the presentation or talk individually. The main aim of the five participants was to establish cohesion between the different parts of their group oral response. In any of the task performances, the participants were informed that they may (but not necessarily) use their pre-task planning notes while performing.

Table 1
Participants’ Type of Planning and Performance on Oral Assessment Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Planning</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Task</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Task</td>
<td>Pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Task</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8 Data Analysis

All the ten participants in the present study performed three tasks of different interactional patterns (individually, in pairs, and in groups) in the pretest, during the administration of the treatment, and in the posttest. Each of the audio-recorded oral responses obtained was transcribed and coded according to the rubric of codes used; number of words per minute was used for oral fluency and number of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per response was used for grammatical accuracy.

In each of the individual tasks, each participant’s response lasted from one to two minutes. Some of the participants had a period of silence of a few seconds before starting to respond (as
indicated in the transcribed data samples in Appendices E and F); others responded immediately with no hesitation or silence. In the paired tasks, none of the two participants dominated the floor (as instructed in the pre-task planning stage and as trained during the administration of the treatment). Accordingly, the time allotted for the response was fairly distributed between them; each participant spoke from two to three minutes per response and hence allowed their partners to share the floor and do the discussion posed by the task. No period of silence was noticed before starting to respond to each task on either the pretest or posttest. Pair group responses ranged from 3.5 to 4 minutes long.

Finally, in the group task, all the five participants worked collaboratively in the pre-task planning stage, then cooperatively to make sure each of them had a fair share of talking time in the oral response. The time allotted for the group task was 20 minutes; each participant was given a four-minute share of the overall response. Each participant preformed monologically with no interaction between group members. Similar to the pair task, no noticeable pauses or silence periods preceded their oral responses. The transcribed data from the pretest were approximately 85 minutes long; the transcription from the scenario-based tasks was 95 minutes long; and the transcribed data from the posttest were 110 minutes long.

All the coded data obtained was entered into SPSS statistical analysis software. Descriptive statistics and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to measure within-participant variation in oral performance between the pretest and the posttest.
To answer the research questions in the present study, the participants’ oral performances in the pretest and posttest tasks were compared in regards to the measures of fluency and accuracy (number of words per minute and percentage of error-free T-units per response, respectively). In each test, the participants carried out three tasks; the time allotted for each task preparation and performance differed. For the individual task, each participant was granted 15 minutes to prepare and 2 minutes to perform; for the pair task, the pre-task planning preparation time was 25 minutes and the talking time was 5 minutes. Finally, for the group task, preparation lasted for 45 minutes and the time allotted for the whole group’s performance was 20 minutes. Not all the participants consumed the time allocated for performance; other participants (who needed more preparation time) consumed a few seconds of their performance time as part of their pre-task planning preparation.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis and interpretation. Within-participant and between-participants comparisons of oral performance across all three task performances with respect to the measures of fluency and accuracy were then drawn. Results of data analysis pertaining to fluency and accuracy are sequentially introduced and illustrated with reference to several sets of tables. These tables show 1) the coded data in terms of numbers or ratios, 2) information on sample size, standard deviations and means, and 3) the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) with alpha=0.05.

4.1 Fluency

In each analysis of the participants’ oral performances, fluency was measured by means of the number of words per minute to identify the effect of the treatment on learners’ oral fluency in
terms of speech rate. Tables 2, 3, and 4 draw pretest-posttest comparisons in regards to the participants’ speech rate on the individual, pair, and group tasks.

Table 2  
*Measure of Fluency: Words per Minute in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Individual Task</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  
*Measure of Fluency: Words per Minute in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Pair Task</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4  
*Measure of Fluency: Words per Minute in the Group Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Group Task</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>117</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tables above demonstrate a change in the participants’ speech rate across all task performances which indicate noticeable fluency improvement. Although there are varying degrees of change among the participants’ speech rate, within-participant fluency development as measured by speech rate is clearly seen.

Descriptive statistics, as outlined below in Tables 5, 6, and 7, illustrate the variance from the mean among participants’ speech rates as indicated by the means and standard deviations (SD) in both the pretest and posttest. Results further reveal there were clear individual differences among participants.

Table 5
Standard Deviations and Means of Fluency Measure (Words per Minute) in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>108.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Standard Deviations and Means of Fluency Measure (Words per Minute) in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7
Standard Deviations and Means of Fluency Measure (Words per Minute) in the Group Task (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>99.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To identify whether the results yielded from employing descriptive statistics are statistically significant, given the small sample size examined, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out. Table 8 illustrates the results obtained.

Table 8  
*Fluency Measure: Results of the Pretest-Posttest One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)*  
*(n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Task</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Task</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Task</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

As indicated above, the ANOVA results were statistically significant and so the null hypothesis was refuted. This suggests that the results were not due to sampling errors; rather, the treatment probably had an effect on accelerating the participants’ level of fluency as measured by speech rate (number of words per minute). There is a significant difference in the participants’ speech rate between the pretest and posttest with a \( p=0.000 \) in both individual and pair tasks and a \( p=0.001 \) in the group task (i.e., with an overall \( p \) value less than 0.05).

Overall, data analysis and interpretation indicate that speech rate (number of words per minute) is a valid measurement of oral fluency and an indicator of oral performance development on account of administering the treatment under investigation in the present study.

**4.2 Accuracy**

The present study also aimed to investigate the impact of the case-based tasks on the participants’ accuracy level as measured by the ratio of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per oral response. Prior to carrying out statistical analysis of the error-free T-units in each oral response, the total number of T-units per response on the individual, pair, and group tasks in both the pretest and posttest was first calculated (See Tables 9, 10, and 11 below).
Table 9
*Total Number of T-units per Response in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Individual Task</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10
*Total Number of T-units per Response in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Pair Task</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11
*Total Number of T-units per Response in the Group Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Group Task</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Then, the number of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per response was obtained and represented by means of ratios as indicated in Tables 12, 13, and 14. These tables draw pretest-posttest comparisons in regards to the participants’ ratios of error-free T-units on the individual, pair, and group tasks.

Table 12
*Measure of Accuracy: Ratio of Error-Free T-units per Oral Response in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Individual Task</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>81.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>87.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>87.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>72.73</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>72.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>84.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>88.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13
*Measure of Accuracy: Ratio of Error-Free T-units per Oral Response in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Pair Task</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57.89</td>
<td>86.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>47.62</td>
<td>80.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>84.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>56.25</td>
<td>73.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>47.06</td>
<td>63.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>57.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.63</td>
<td>76.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14
*Measure of Accuracy: Ratio of Error-Free T-units per Oral Response in the Group Task (n=10 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Group Task Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>40.82</td>
<td>86.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>58.54</td>
<td>90.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>47.37</td>
<td>86.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>48.72</td>
<td>85.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47.73</td>
<td>80.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>55.32</td>
<td>87.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>62.00</td>
<td>82.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>54.90</td>
<td>85.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>73.81</td>
<td>86.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.16</td>
<td>82.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, the tables indicate a significant increase in each participant’s ratio of error-free T-units across all task performances—which are indicators of greater accuracy in their posttest oral performances. Despite variation in the ratios of error-free T-units among the participants, within-participant accuracy improvement is visibly clear. Possible reasons for this high increase in accuracy level will be discussed in the next chapter.

Descriptive statistics were then carried out, as demonstrated in Tables 15, 16, and 17, to more clearly illustrate the variance among participants in terms of ratios of error-free T-units; this variance is indicated by the means and standard deviations (SD) in both the pretest and posttest. Results indicate that not all the participants improved in the same rate, probably due to individual differences or other moderating variables. This shows that the group of participants was not a homogenous group; their performance varied from one task to the other with varying degrees of improvement.
Table 15  
Standard Deviations and Means of the Accuracy Measure in the Individual Task (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>54.14</td>
<td>11.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>81.30</td>
<td>8.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16  
Standard Deviations and Means of the Accuracy Measure in the Pair Task (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>53.24</td>
<td>7.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>72.82</td>
<td>11.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17  
Standard Deviations and Means of the Accuracy Measure in the Group Task (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>55.14</td>
<td>9.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>85.37</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To identify whether the results obtained from carrying out descriptive statistics are statistically significant, given the small sample size examined, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out. Table 18 illustrates the results yielded.

Table 18  
Accuracy Measure: Results of the Pretest-Posttest One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (n=10 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Task</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Task</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Task</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

As shown above, the ANOVA results were statistically significant, indicating that business communication case-based tasks may have resulted in better accuracy as measured by ratio of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per oral response. There is a significant difference in the participants’ accuracy measure between the pretest and posttest with
a \( p \) value less than 0.05 across all tasks. The null hypothesis was then refuted and the results were not due to sampling errors. Overall, data analysis and interpretation indicate that ratios of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per oral response are a valid measurement of grammatical accuracy and so an indicator of oral performance development as a result of the treatment administered.

4.3 Summary of Results

The present study investigated the impact of business communication case-based tasks on Business English learners’ oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. In this respect, the results obtained from the statistical analyses carry a two-fold significance. First, the measures used for fluency and accuracy are valid measurements and indicators for a change in the participants’ oral performances. Second, the participants’ improvement of fluency and accuracy may have been due to the administration of the treatment. These results are further discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In this study, the researcher aimed to examine the effectiveness of business communication case-based tasks in a Business English proficiency course and the influence of this task design on learners’ fluency and accuracy as key dimensions of oral proficiency. Results indicated that case-based tasks, in conjunction with other variables mediating their effect, may trigger greater fluency and accuracy as measured by speech rate and ratio of error-free T-units. The participants’ fluency and accuracy measures increased as demonstrated earlier in the pretest-posttest comparisons, regardless of the type of interactional pattern on task (i.e., individual, pair, or group tasks). In this chapter, the results pertaining to fluency and accuracy, as obtained from data analysis, are sequentially discussed, interpretations and major conclusions are then drawn, and finally the results are compared to major findings in the literature to date on Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL), Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA), and L2 oral performance.

5.1 Fluency

The participants’ oral fluency was measured by means of speech rate (number of words per minute). As previously outlined in Tables 2, 3, and 4, the comparisons between the pretest and posttest results indicated that participants’ speech rate substantially increased in all task performances. Moreover, the results from between-participant pretest-posttest comparisons in terms of speech rate (See Tables 5, 6, and 7) further showed individual differences among participants in performances across task types. The results of the statistical analysis were significant, too.
It is worth noting at this point in the discussion that the participant’s fluency level witnessed gradual improvement throughout the BEOC course. By the end of the five weeks of instruction, their speech rate substantially improved (as indicated in the pretest results). Moreover, during the intensive exposure to and practice during the treatment, the participants enthusiastically used L2 during class meetings, in their online meeting places for task preparation and rehearsals, and during informal discussions with their teachers. The nature of the treatment and the challenges attributed to effective implementation of the case-based tasks enticed learners to experiment more with the language, hence frequently and effectively use the target language. The posttest results further indicated higher rates of improvement. Overall, fluency was one aspect of L2 oral performance that was accelerated throughout the contact period with the participants. Nevertheless, between-participants differences as shown in the pretest-posttest comparisons were detected.

These differences may have been due to the type of interaction on task, task cognitive complexity level, gender, attitude toward the task, quality time on task during the pre-task planning stage, and other mediating variables. Familiarity with the caselet topic may have been another issue for some participants, too, which may have hindered their speech rate and therefore accounted for frequent pauses or hesitations before or during oral performance. Interactional patterns and interaction management strategies in pair or group tasks are another possible variable that probably moderated the effectiveness of the treatment. Performing monologically vs. dialogically encompassed different types of planning (individually vs. collaboratively) and different form of interaction among participants among peers. These different task implementation conditions may have also had an influence on promoting the participants’ oral fluency.
Therefore, despite the statistical significant results obtained from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) in Table 8, the results obtained from this study should be cautiously interpreted. Drawing absolute conclusions on the effectiveness of the treatment is an overstatement. The study was carried out with a small cohort of participants and no control group was used. Perhaps the presence of a comparison group may have highlighted whether this enhancement in fluency was attributed to the treatment or not. Controlling for the above mentioned variables may have also produced more telling results.

5.2 Accuracy

Grammatical accuracy was measured by means of ratios of error-free T-units in relation to the total number of T-units per oral response. Tables 12, 13, and 14 in the previous chapter, in which pretest-posttest comparisons were drawn, indicated a substantial increase of within-participant accuracy levels in all task performances. However, discrepancies among participants were seen in the pretest and posttest across all task performances (as shown in Tables 15, 16, and 17). The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) as indicated earlier in Table 18 showed that these variations among participants were statistically significant.

As noted earlier in the “Data Collection” section of Chapter 3, the participants during the first five weeks of the works placed more emphasis on improving their fluency at the expense of accuracy. That may be an explanation why the ratio of error-free T-units on the pretest was strikingly low. However, not all participants’ errors were of the same gravity and led to breakdown in communications. Some of them were due to either excessive focus on content or their attempt to manifest higher fluency (which is often confused for proficiency). By the time the treatment was administered, teacher’s intervention (during the case study and the pre-task planning stage case-based tasks) was cautiously introduced to develop better attitude toward
accuracy. This helped draw the participants’ attention to the importance of using correct forms and using correct structures to convey the right meaning. The participants practiced this tactic (structures selection) during their online preparation stages of the treatment; their oral performances in the case-based tasks in terms of accuracy substantially improved.

However, not all the participants have responded in the same manner and degree to the teacher’s intervention and the tactic of “structure selection”; discrepancies in the pretest-posttest comparisons may be attributed to this. Teacher’s intervention is likely to be one moderating variable that mediated the effectiveness of the treatment on the participant’s accuracy levels. This supposition aligns with Foster & Skehan (1999)’s proposition that teacher’s interventions in the pre-planning stage assist learners’ attention to form and elevate their accuracy level. On the other hand, task complexity may have placed more cognitive load on and posed communicative stress to some of the participants, hence, decreased their accuracy level. Other variables like gender, attitude toward the task, perception of task difficulty, and interactional pattern on task may have also mediated the impact of the treatment of the participants’ accuracy levels.

Several interesting observations were noted from the coded data transcripts (See Appendix E and F for examples). First, in the pretest and posttest tasks, particularly in the individual tasks, the participants tended to rely on short, simple sentences in their oral responses which accounted for higher accuracy at times. They used a number of cliché phrases and questions that are typically correct—which may have been false indicators of potential improvement in accuracy level. Examples include “you know”, “answer me”, “Is that what you want?”, and “I promise you that”. However, in the pair and group tasks, subordination and use of relative clauses were frequently used. Some of the participants produced ill-formed utterances whenever they resorted
to subordination of all types. They seem to have made more errors when trying to use more complex sentence structures. Example sentences are:

1. “We know how to budgeting and balance and so we will pay all the money received from you and you will make money too” (S#6, sample group task response, pretest)
2. “our designs are comfortable and cool and suits all the ages” (S#7, sample group task response, posttest)

Another intriguing observation is that when comparing a single participant’s erroneous T-units in, for instance, the pretest and posttest group task, no consistent pattern of errors can be seen. For example, the errors S#7 made in the pretest group task mostly related to “articles” and “comparative forms”, whereas in the posttest group task, the errors mostly concerned “subject-verb agreement”. Accordingly, it was hard to identify patterns of errors in the pretest and detect improvement in regards to these ill-structured utterances in the posttest performances. It is therefore difficult to attribute higher ratios of error-free T-units in the participants’ oral responses to improvement in prior problematic structures. Nor is it plausible to claim that the treatment had positive effect on the high accuracy shown in the posttest results. The participants probably engaged in conveying meaning and maintaining fluency while directing their attentional resources on forms but failed to devote equal balance to the three aspects of L2 oral performances (fluency, accuracy, and complexity).

Accordingly, despite the statistical significant results obtained from the analysis of variance (ANOVA), the results obtained from this study should be cautiously interpreted. Making clear-cut conclusions that the treatment accounts for the leap in accuracy development from the pretest to the posttest is not plausible. The study was carried out with only ten participants in the
absence of a comparison group. If a quasi-experimental design was used, whether the enhancement has positive effect on promoting accuracy would only then be evidenced.

5.3 Fluency, Accuracy, and Task Planning

In the present study, the joint interaction of pre-task and on-line task planning time seems to have positively mediated the impact of the treatment on the participants’ measures of fluency and accuracy. This finding is consistent with previous research studies on task planning and L2 oral performance in both classroom settings and assessment situations which document positive effects of pre-planning on learners’ fluency and accuracy and within-task planning on accuracy. Following Yuan & Ellis’s (2003) key finding on the negative impact of pre-task planning under time pressure, sufficient pre-task planning was ensured in the present study. This finding further aligns with one of Ellis’s (2009b) major conclusions in his review; the longer the planning time, the greater the fluency. Another important observation in the present study pertains to the pair and group task results. Working collaboratively with a partner and particular in a group during the pre-task planning stage had a positive effect on participants’ oral performances. In the pre-task preparation stage, the participants scaffolded one another, offered suggestions in regards to content and language, and, in this manner, had a positive rather than negative impact on learner’s performances. This finding contradicts Foster & Skehan (1999) who found no impact of group pre-task planning on oral performance.

To conclude, in the present study, the participants engaged in performing tasks of various degrees of cognitive complexity and planning. Making both types of planning available for the participants supported the widely accepted notion in the literature to date: each type forces learners to prioritize aspects of oral performance at the expense of others, and employing both types of planning in the study resulted in substantial improvement in both fluency and accuracy.
5.4 Fluency, Accuracy, and Task Design

As indicated above, the participants engaged in performing tasks of various degrees of cognitive complexity. These tasks were manipulated along resource-directing “reasoning” demands and preceded by prompts that called for different degrees of reasoning, negotiation of meaning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, hence imposing cognitive load on learners. Depending on the degree of task complexity, the participants were required to perform individually, in pairs, or in a group of five. This sequence was intended by the researcher to measure learners’ oral performances across different levels of complexity and how effective collaboration with partners can be in assisting fluency and accuracy.

In the present study, collaboration with partners even under testing conditions (and in the presence of sufficient task planning time) had a two-fold advantage. First, it was found to promote interaction and interaction management techniques on the participants’ part. This finding aligns with Robinson’s (2007) claim that increased levels of cognitive complexity of tasks positively enhance interaction and promotes uptake. Second, it helped decrease the cognitive load of task complexity and relieve the communicative stress imposed by the task and thus assisted both fluency and accuracy. This finding is consistent with Michel et al.’s (2007) that stated: unlike monologic performances, dialogic interactions resulted in greater fluency and accuracy.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, the results of this study were discussed in detail. Based on the findings obtained from descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, several interpretations were made. These interpretations were further discussed in the light of the major findings in the literature pertaining to TBLL, TBLL, and L2 oral performance. Business communication case-based tasks
were found effective media for practice in realistic settings; however, it is difficult to conclude
that they have a great impact on boosting learner’s fluency and accuracy. Their effectiveness was
probably mediated by a number of moderating variables, namely, individual differences,
cognitive and affective variations among participants, perceptions of task difficulty, gender,
interactional patterns on task, and interrelationship among participants. If the study used both
control and comparison groups, where these moderating variables were manipulated or
controlled for, results would have been more dependable.

5.6 Conclusions

This study was an attempt to put a new task design to the test and identify its effectiveness
in boosting Business English learners’ oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. A pretest and a
posttest were administered to draw within-participant comparisons as far as their oral
performances on cognitively complex tasks (manipulated along resource-directing “reasoning”
demands) are concerned. The degree of cognitive complexity determined the interactional pattern
they engaged in; that is, simple tasks were done individually and more complex tasks were done
in pairs and groups. This sequence helped the researcher measure the participants’ performances
across different levels of complexity and how effective collaboration with partners was in
facilitating fluency and accuracy. Overall, the results indicated substantial improvement in
Business English learners’ oral fluency and accuracy. However, this type of improvement may
have been due to the treatment or the treatment in conjunction with other moderating variables.

5.7 Pedagogical Implications

The results obtained from the current study and discussed in the light of major findings in
the literature to date on TBLL, TBLA, and L2 oral performance, have multiple implications for
ESP classroom practices and assessment situations. First, business communication cases and
case-based tasks were shown to be effective media for situating Business English learners in realistic business dilemmas that call for social interaction and engagement with the target language. If business communication cases (of progressive levels of difficulty) are carefully written with the help of content courses instructors and integrated into ESP curricula, teachers can bring the real business world “in miniature” within classroom walls and turn their classrooms into motivated communities of practice.

Second, Business English course designers and test makers need to be wary of what constitutes task complexity and task difficulty and how the inherent features of tasks (e.g., cognitive demands, storyline, structure, etc.) interact with other moderating variables in their effect on learners and test-takers’ oral performances. Affective (motivations and attitudes) and social (relationships among peers) variables moderate learners’ and test-takers’ perceptions of task difficulty and hence impact their oral productions. Moreover, course designers and test makers need to pay attention to several issues which can be summed up as follows:

1. Task design. Manipulating different task inherent features calls learners’ attention to certain aspects of oral production (i.e., fluency, accuracy, or complexity). This can be a great opportunity for designing and selecting tasks manipulated along certain dimensions to address certain problematic areas pertaining to learners’ oral performance.

2. Sequencing of tasks. Tasks should be introduced from the simpler to the more complex. Task complexity, in turn, is determined by the type of features manipulated in relation to other moderating variables (task implementation conditions, cognitive and social demands, etc.)
5.8 Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Despite the promising effectiveness of business communication case-based tasks in a Business English oral proficiency course, the results in the present study should be cautiously interpreted. The study was limited to a small sample size. Generalizations of findings cannot be made until further research is carried out with a greater sample size and in the presence of both control and comparison groups. Second, the participants involved in the study were intermediate language learners. Results could have been different if a greater sample of different proficiency levels were included. Second, the posttest was administered immediately after receiving the treatment; if a delayed posttest was administered, a posttest-delayed posttest comparison may have provided different results.

Third, only one business communication case and case-based tasks were examined. If more business cases with different degrees of contextual sophistication and case-based tasks were used, their effectiveness in relation to L2 oral performance may have been indicated. Further research therefore needs to be done in the light of these limitations to obtain more generalisable findings on the effectiveness of the proposed task design in ESP classroom practices and assessment settings.
REFERENCES


Fulcher, G., Davidson, F., & Kemp, J. (2011). Effective rating scale development for speaking
tests: performance decision trees. *Language Testing, 28*(1), 5-29. doi: 
10.1177/0265532209359514

Longman.


Gilabert, R. (2007). Effects of manipulating task complexity on self repairs during L2 oral 
production. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 45*(3), 215-
240.

and its impacts on learners’ interaction during oral performance. *International Review of 

temporal measures of fluency and oral English proficiency with implications for automated 

and Gaming, 38*(1), 91-106. doi: 10.1177/1046878106298268


proficiency test? Exploring the potential of an information-processing approach to task 


Skehan, P., & Foster, P. (2005). Strategic and on-line planning: the influence of surprise information and task time on second language performance. In R. Ellis (Ed.), *Planning and


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent for Students

Project Title: The Impact of Scenario-Based Tasks on Business English Learners’ Oral Fluency and Grammatical Accuracy

You have been asked to take part in the research project described below. If you have any queries, please feel free to e-mail Nashwa Elyamany on nelyamany@aucegypt.edu. You may also call me on (+2) 0104354445.

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of a new task design on business English learners’ oral proficiency.

Your participation in the study will involve taking a six-week oral proficiency course, carrying out tasks, sitting for a pretest and a posttest, and providing samples of your speech. Participation in this study will not affect your course grades.

Your part in this study is confidential. This means that all the data records obtained from your participation is private and exclusively accessible to the researcher.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. If you decide to participate and change your mind you have the right to drop out at any time without losing any legal rights or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you agree to participate, please print and sign your name below and return the form.

You are at least 18 years old. You have read the consent form and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

________________________________________________  ___________________________  __________________
Printed Name                                                Signature                              Date
Appendix B: Case Study Scenario (1) and Scenario-Based Tasks

Pharos Airline: survival of the fittest!

Background

Conventional wisdom

One fine March morning in 1985, Ahmed El-Werdany overheard a chat between male and female business travelers. While pretending to be watching the gas pump dials spin as he had his Mercedes filled up at the neighborhood Exxon station, what he heard shocked him right down to the core of his wallet! “What is going on with TEEBA AIR? No remedy for these hassles? A single airline monopolizing the industry with lavish ticket pricing, low-quality food service, constant cancelled or delayed flights, damaged or lost luggage with no proper compensation, dangerous landing, and outrageous in-flight treatment! Won’t people ever have the guts to take action, file some complaint and sue the airline? Can’t they fight back all these wrong doings? Enough is enough!” said the infuriated woman.

The words lingered with him as he entered his leading maritime transport company in El-Maadi. Walking down the corridor leading to his office, he paused for a moment to contemplate Al Gore’s funny quote that his wife framed and hang on a nearby wall: "Airplane travel is nature's way of making you look like your passport photo"—a quote that, for him, added insult to injury. Perhaps, he mused, he could do a favor to the airline industry by proving otherwise. Companies all over Egypt covet the title "the nation's first and greatest" and he was no different. El-Werdany had set out to rightly claim that title in the airline industry in a matter of five years. Having concocted a business plan on the window of his room with a marker pen – a plan that he had later shared with four of the finest leading businessmen in the country—they all had made it to the drawing board.

From idea to reality: a runway success

“We create wowing moments”! With that simple slogan and the accompanying red rose symbolizing warmth and care, Ahmed El-Werdany unveiled Pharos Airline in 1990—headquartered in the cosmopolitan city of Cairo—beginning operations with two Boeing 737s, two pilots, and a handful of engineering staff. In its inaugural year, it saw humble revenues, not bad considering the new service! At first, most people did not give Pharos much of a chance; its strategy completely countered the industry’s conventional wisdom. Planes flew from “point to point” rather than the “hub and spoke” pattern that is the backbone of major airlines. This allowed more flexibility to move planes around based on demand. Pharos served no meals, only cool snacks. It did not charge passengers a fee for changing same-fare tickets. It had no seat assignments. It had no electronic entertainment, relying on comic flight attendants to entertain passengers. This later appealed to
many people who were not impressed with luxurious services. Creating a “no-frills” experience had the potential to win over cost-conscious consumers and lure other customers away from TEEBA AIR. Coupled with the utilization of the internet for customer referral, Pharos became a trend having much lower costs than its competitor and was able to crush the competition with low fares. Air travel previously deemed too expensive has now become affordable. It seems that developing a low-cost model fit for Egypt’s economy paid off eventually!

By the late 1990's, it was all about Pharos that adopted the basic no-frill low-price strategy and the performance of TEEBA AIR paled in comparison. As the company neared the end of its first decade, it had more cheerleaders than naysayers. Little Pharos was no longer little. Pharos by then had a fleet of 38 different aircraft and flew to around 43 destinations worldwide and 12 destinations nationwide (including off-the-beaten-path locations). In 2005, the company hit number 1 on Egypt Today's Hot Growth list of fast-expanding start-ups. Founder and CEO Ahmed El-Werdany won Fast Company's Customer-Centered Leader Award. Pharos has experienced periods of superb financial performance. The company achieved record-breaking revenues and earnings growth throughout the early 2000’s. Annual revenues reached 65 million Egyptian pounds for 2005 and grew at a steady and predictable 10 percent annually. Community Times had run a feature article on Pharos and the low-cost, yet satisfactory, service had been the subject of numerous talk shows and articles in various popular press and trade publications.

Along with all this growth, the company's stock price has reached a historic peak since it went public in the November of 1990. To top things off, the company's Internet reservations sales exploded. The expected success has finally materialized. One airline was expanding at a dizzying pace, on track for what appears to be nation’s domination of its industry! It became the automatic first choice carrier that set benchmarks for TEEBA AIR to match! Whew! That's an impressive list of achievements. Yet, how did a small start-up mark a surging success and achieve such accolades?

**Why did the legendary recipe work?**

One cannot understand Pharos the airline without taking a look at El-Werdany the man! He is a humble, stout, self-composed, fifty-year-old Upper Egyptian patriot, with a “straight A” academic and professional track record; an AUC-graduate who pursued his Master’s and PhD degrees at Harvard Business School and the University of Toronto, respectively; and a multi-lingual prodigy with divine mental faculties who registered 7 patents in the USA, 6 in Canada, 5 in Sweden, 3 in Finland and 2 more in Egypt in the electronics turf. He is the leading electronics icon that the country prides itself on. Not only is he a “Genius” in running his maritime company – a field he also excelled at besides electronics – but when it
comes to the nuts and bolts of what makes an airline a success, he is a “Whiz”. He is, in very simple terms, a Jack-of-all-trades – who masters all!

"You can't buy that kind of brand loyalty, but you can cultivate it," is part of the company’s credo that he scripted himself. “The company's credo is more than just words on paper. We deliver on our promises!” he has often reiterated. He is viewed by the Board of Directors as the full-time devotion strategic visionary who has made this concept work. But his success as a CEO has derived from more than just extraordinary business skills; he attributes his success to "never forgetting what it's like to be a customer" and in so doing he turned Pharos into a customer-centric organization. The real magic lies in the company's obsessive dedication to its mission.

Through newsletters, web forums, and a referral rewards program, Pharos has built a community of delighted customer evangelists whose word-of-mouth testimony has proven more effective than mounting an expensive advertising campaign. They targeted all customers from “fickle teens” to “40-something, well-heeled professionals” who travel extensively and cherish individualized services—freeing them from the tyranny of high fares. All of this leisure-and-business-traveler delight has paid off handsomely creating what is essentially a voluntary customer sales force. By all accounts, it has lived up to its ambitious customer satisfaction promise. The company has further gone to extremes to fulfill frequent flyers' expectations through its rewarding Frequent Flyer Program (FFP) and by coddling big spenders, too. It tops not only the Power Quality ratings but also customer-satisfaction ratings, with a secure hold on air travel market. To keep up with the competing market, El-Werdany set up a high-powered, centralized strategic planning unit, charged with seeking out and nurturing new growth opportunities and setting the company's strategic path. Yet, staying too close to short- and long-haul premium passengers will become more of a challenge as the company grows!
The Case

Success is sweet but competition is bitter!

When the comparatively small new venture is able to take on the major national player in an extremely competitive industry in two decades’ time, gain market share, please customers and employees alike, it is natural for TEEBA AIR to take notice—and emulate. Despite its storied short-term golden era, numerous factors combined to create a dismal situation for Pharos as 2009 unraveled. Pharos’s fortunes had taken a turn for the worse; it faced a new challenge that would require it to rethink and perhaps redesign its business strategy. It was beaten by TEEBA AIR. By early 2007, TEEBA AIR embarked on a huge milestone shake-up, pleasing both leisure and business travelers alike. It joined Star Alliance as a full member, hence offering affiliated customers seamless perks: better lounge/airport facilities, privileged access to more destinations, more options for departure times, shorter travel times thanks to optimized transfers, lower prices due to lower operational costs and much more rewarding FFP’s. Customer analysis revealed that its customers fell into five segments: medium-to-high-income business travelers, suburban moms and dads, air travel enthusiasts, young family men on a budget, and teens – in a nutshell, the whole Egyptian family.

With the wind now at its back, TEEBA AIR further adopted Pharos-like strategies and trumped Pharos’s low fares by adding amenities such as free TV and free XM satellite radio at each seat (an additional extra offered only in the USA and Canada). While these sound like small add-ons, in actual fact they are not. How would air travelers feel when favorite music, shows and movies are readily available on demand?! Although it cost TEEBA AIR millions to have these add-ons installed on board from nose to tail across all classes, it did reap the fruits shortly. Serving both “angels” (profitable customers) and “demons” (customers it loses money on) alike—rather than exorcising the latter—has helped increase its market share, online reservations and annual revenues. “Is this seat taken?” are words no longer heard on board TEEBA AIR planes; not a single first, business or economy class seat can be seen “untaken”. Virtually, almost all seats in each flight were occupied by satisfied travelers. TEEBA AIR became more than an overnight sensation; it became the number # 1 choice of the Egyptian family.

Craving more nation-domination acclaim, it began new promotional tactics. It launched local TV spots on popular shows such as “Al-Qahera Elyoum”, “90 Minutes” and “Al-Ashera Masa’an” keeping the citizens on the same page of the success it is marking. Pharos, in combat, has to roll out novel strategic formulas for survival.

As El-Werdany peacefully sat down at his desk, he realized he needed to rethink his marketing strategy. Perhaps he had missed something or made some blunder that was causing them to "fade away". “How does
a successful company ensure that its hot sales don’t cool off? One way is to sell more to existing customers. Another is to find other customers. We are doing plenty of both in our quest to be the best. So what can we do to gain our visibility back?” he thought aloud. After days of introspection (and retrospection) El-Werdany had a revelation.

**Crisis management: low on ammunition**

In March 2010, El-Werdany addressed his employees via a Webcast. “TEEBA AIR is coming for one reason: to kill us. If they beat us now, they won’t beat us AGAIN!” El-Werdany fervently exhorted his employees, emphasizing that Pharos has to repel—or die. A day later, he called for a meeting with the Board of Directors. “What TEEBA AIR is doing turned the tables on us, in no time. We are becoming what they used to be!” said El-Werdany. “No, we are not. We know people shop first for fares, and we’ve got the fares. Our industry is a customer-service business, and we have the best people to provide that special customer service,” stressed El-Alfy, a pretentious sleazy member who acts as a major shareholder rather than a creative contributor.

“That’s our core advantage. We have excelled at on-time performance, baggage handling, fewest complaints, and fewest cancelled flights. Besides, we’re still the low-cost producer and the low-fare leader in Egypt. We have no intention of conceding that position. We are still the HEALTHIEST airline in the business.” boastfully replied El-Saadany, a complacent member satisfied with the status-quo. “It’s like saying it’s the least sick patient in the hospital,” retorted El-Kassabgy, infuriated by what El-Saadany bragged about, “and as the other patient gets better, Pharos must have to find a new medicine.” El-Kassabgy, a forty-five-year old perfectionist seeking ground-breaking success for Pharos, added. “You are right,” confirmed El-Werdany. “We need the best company shake-up. We need a repositioning campaign that must be met with striking success. And it won’t be an ad campaign; it would be a brand campaign. We need to build influence. It’s time to go back to the drawing board.”

On hearing these resounding words, the board members excluding El-Kassabgy—and including the spell-bound fifty-two-year-old El-Husseiny who typically utters not a single word during meetings (perhaps now considering selling his share and resting in peace)—were wondering whether Pharos would stand a chance and maintain the very characteristics that have distinguished it since its inception. They did not expect the tide to shift for them in a year’s time as El-Werdany desired. It would take more than some quick-bake recipes with well-mixed ingredients for them to be back on their feet again! Which magical recipe on earth would mushroom and work wonders to help them soar high and be on cloud nine as before?! At the back of their minds, they preferred “a decent merger of two airlines” and a creation of a “powerful private
“cartel” than going the mile for a lost battle!

Management gurus at work

The organizational leadership style of Pharos is worth reflection for a few minutes. It is an upside-down pyramid, where the top management is at the bottom and the wide base of employees (the experts, as Pharos labels them) is at the top. Pharos is staffed with the top Egyptian and foreign graduates of AUC and Harvard Business School, interned in the USA and Canada on effective airlines management. This unorthodox pattern in which the top management supports its prodigies—calling for decisions to be made by every savvy in the company, not just the head executives—has created and instilled corporate loyalty among devoted staff since Pharos’s inception. Webcasted “SOS” messages to all staff were not uncommon at Pharos and when El-Werdany broke the bad news for all the company members, everyone dashed back to their desks assessing the situation and marathon-brainstorming formulas for survival.

Right after the Webcasting and board meeting, El-Werdany called for a “crisis” meeting with the Sales and Marketing Executive (Osama Kamal), two prodigy marketing seniors (Saleh Fouad and Ibrahim Khalil) and the P&Q Advertising Agency CEO (Omar Fahmy). The marketing and advertising mastermind team knew that their mainstream competitor was waging war to stick to its niche. They knew they needed the most unorthodox campaign and marketing strategy in the company's history that have to be innovative, edgy, urban and underground to mark an impact. Taking a few deep breaths, El-Werdany sat down, leaned back in his chair prayerfully wishing for the tide to change. He starts the meeting…
Scenario-Based Oral Tasks

Task # 1 Crisis Meeting (20 Minutes) (Role-play)

Prompt: Having received a memo from Pharos’s CEO Personal Assistant, you are summoned for a crisis meeting.

Number of Participants: 5

Meeting Participants: Pharos’ CEO; the Sales and Marketing Executive; two prodigy marketing seniors; and the P&Q Advertising Agency CEO.

Task: Simulate an effective twenty-minute crisis meeting, using the agenda prepared beforehand. You are requested to come up with two Pharos’ survival missions that all (or the majority of) attendees have reached consensus on.

Task # 2 60-second Pitch (1 Minute) (Solo)

Prompt: Right after Webcasting, Pharos’ staff is encouraged to give a 60-second pitch for a better company shakeup that leaves their competitor behind. Creativity of ideas and brevity of proposals are assets.

Number of Participants: 6

Roles:

- a savvy staff member (Pitch Maker)
- Pharos’ CEO and the board of directors (Panelists)

Task: Create a 60-second pitch that is passionate, enthusiastic, succinct, fast and adds magic dust, highlighting the potential your ideal holds for Pharos. Present your pitch to the panel (the company CEO and Board of Directors) who will vote for the best one and weed out the non-creative and tried-before. Panelists will evaluate the pitch in regard to interest, clarity, persuasion, and response to questions on a 1-5 scale (1= lowest; 5= highest) for each of the four criterion then give a total score out of 20.

Task # 3 Podcast (2 Minutes) (Dyad)

Prompt: Now that the crisis meeting is over and informed decisions are made, Pharos releases a podcast through which El-Werdany and his Personal Assistant address the audience in regard to their new mission statement, the innovations the company is embarking on, etc.

Number of Participants: 2
Roles:
- Ahmed El-Werdany (Pharos CEO)
- Sara El-Shamy (CEO’s Personal Assistant)

Task: Prepare a two-minute podcast that will be part of a free downloadable leaflet from Pharos’ official Website. Remember, your audience is expecting a new runway success plan not just words!

Task # 4
OPTION A: Advertising Campaign Presentation (10 Minutes) (Triad)
Prompt: After the crisis meeting was held, the P&Q Advertising Agency CEO, Omar Fahmy, hurried back to his office in Pharos headquarters to draw up a new brand campaign plan and present it to the panel in five business days’ time.

Number of Participants: 6

Roles:
- P&Q CEO and two of his team members (Presenters)
- Pharos’ CEO and two of his Board of Directors (Panelists)

Task: Draw up a brand campaign outline that builds brand value and influence, using modern advertising technologies and present it to the panelists for approval or dismissal back to the drawing board! Use posters, audio files, videos, etc. to better sell your idea during the presentation. Keep in mind the target audience, highlight the competitive advantage, establish a corporate image, and diversify.

OPTION B: Business Plan Executive Summary Presentation (10 Minutes) (Triad)
Prompt: After the crisis meeting was over, the Sales and Marketing Executive, Osama Kamal, rushed back to his office, racking his brains for an out-of-the-box business plan with a new marketing-mix strategy to present to the panel in five business days’ time.

Number of Participants: 6

Roles:
- Sales and Marketing Executive and two of his team members (Presenters)
- Pharos’ CEO and two of his Board of Directors (Panelists)
Task: Sketch out the new marketing business plan for Pharos; a plan that reflects a new marketing mix strategy. Present the plan to the panel. Use posters, audio files, videos, etc. to better sell your idea during the presentation. Keep in mind the target audience, highlight the competitive advantage, establish a corporate image, and diversify.

Three Writing Tasks Required for Oral Task # 1

Crisis meeting memo, agenda and minutes

Prompt: Before the crisis meeting was held, El-Werdany’s Personal Assistant, Sara El-Shamy, sent a memo for the meeting members along with the meeting agenda, to eliminate the guess work during the meeting.

Instructions: Using proper formats create a memo and an agenda pertaining to the crisis meeting, to be sent to the meeting participants before holding the meeting. During the meeting, take proper minutes for summarizing discussion and making action plans; these minutes will be later shared with all the company’s staff.
### Business English Oral Proficiency Pretest

**Time Allotted: 2.5 hours**

**Instructions:**

This test measures your ability to communicate in Business English in contexts you are likely to encounter in your academic courses or in the business world of today. There are three caselets on this test with one oral task each. In response to these tasks, you will perform individually, then interact in a dyad and finally in a group of five. Your responses are based on reading the different prompts and synthesizing the information needed for your response.

In each task you will have the opportunity to read the prompt and prepare for the task required. You may take notes at the preparation stage and use these notes in response to each task.

All your responses will be audio-recorded. The stopwatch used by the examiners shows the remaining time for each task.

Your speaking will be evaluated in terms of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. Typically a good oral response will require all of the response time and the answer will be completed by the end of the response time.
Caselet # 1: “Does everyone have to be a team player?”

Prompt
You are a production manager at a multinational petroleum company. One of your newest employees is Sally Tawfiq, who has a Bachelor’s degree in engineering and a master’s in business. You recently hired Sally out of college for a position in supply chain management.

You’ve recently been chosen to head up a cross-functional team to look at ways to reduce inventory costs. This team would essentially be a permanent task force. You’ve decided to have team members come from supplier relations, cost accounting, transportations, and production systems. You’ve also decided to include Sally on the team. While she has only been at your company for four months, you’ve been impressed with her energy, smarts, and industriousness. You think this would be an excellent assignment for her to increase her visibility in the company and expand her understanding of the company’s inventory system.

When you called Sally into your office to give her the good news, you were quite surprised by her response. “I’m not a team player,” she said, “I didn’t join clubs in high school. I was on the track team and I did well, but track is an individual sport. We were a team only in the sense that we rode together in the same bus. In college, I avoided the whole sorority thing. Some people may call me a loner, but I don’t think that’s true. I can work well with others but I hate meetings and committees. To me, they waste so much time, and anything you’re working on with a group, you’ve got all these different personalities that you have to adjust for. I’m an independent operator. Give me a job and I’ll get it done. I work harder than anyone I know—and I give my employer 150 percent. But I don’t want my performance to be dependent on the other people in my group. They may not work as hard as I will. Someone is sure to shirk some of their responsibilities. I just don’t want to be a team player.”

Oral Task
What would you do? Should you give Sally the option of joining the inventory cost reduction team? Is it unethical for you to require someone like Sally to do his or her job as part of a team? State your opinion, defending your view using reasons and details in support of your response.

Preparation time for response: 15 minutes

Response Time: 2 minutes
Caselet # 2: Exception or Donation?

Prompt

*Falcon Telecom* is a leading Egyptian firm based in Cairo and reputable for supporting smart community projects. In recent years it has increased its corporate giving. The firm has also recently defined its giving strategy, particularly in how it relates to their business objectives. As part of this overall effort, *Falcon* clarifies its giving guidelines. There are three broad funding areas (Job training, economic development, and education) and grants are ideally awarded to organizations within the company's service area.

Arts and cultural organizations, which are not included in the funding areas, have received few grants in recent years in the country. Numerous arts organizations have been turned down with the explanation that the company is focusing its resources in its strategic funding areas. Requests from other organizations are turned down because they are outside the utility's defined service territory.

Contributions Manager, Mohannad Samy, has recently received two funding requests from high-level managers within the company. The first is to provide a large (up to 100,000 L.E) grant to an arts center in a small town in the service territory. The governor’s wife serves on the art center’s board. The second request is for a grant to a non-for-profit organization outside the service territory, but within the district of a very influential judge in the country.

Both organizations are deserving of funding, and the activities to be funded are reasonable. Though no linkage of any kind is asked for, offered, or implied by the governor or the judge, the internal promoters of the grants feel these contributions will provide opportunities for contact, relationship building, and good will that would serve the company well.

However, both grants are clearly outside the company's guidelines. And making an exception in either case could prove awkward and raise expectations among other organizations that do not meet the guidelines. On the other hand, granting funds for these two commendable projects could help their respective communities and create positive fallout for the company.

**Oral Task: One-on-one meeting**

Simulate a 5-minute emergency meeting between *Falcon Telecom* founder and CEO, Salman El Ezzaby, and Contributions Manager, Mohannad Samy, who meet up to discuss the dilemma at hand and reach consensus on the best measure to take in regards to the requests filed. The two of
them are trying to make an informed decision that will help create better fallout for the company, without jeopardizing their code of ethics and policy of corporate giving.

*Preparation time for response:* 25 minutes  
*Response Time:* 5 minutes

---

**Break: 15 minutes**

---

**Caselet # 3: Do men and women lead differently?**

**Prompt**

Are there gender differences in leadership styles? Are men more effective leaders, or does that honor belong to women? Even asking those questions is certain to evoke reactions on both sides of the debate. The evidence indicates that the two sexes are more alike than different in the way they lead. Much of this similarity is based on the fact that leaders, regardless of gender, perform similar activities in influencing others. That’s their job, and the two sexes do it equally well. The same holds true in other professions. For instance, although the stereotypical nurse is a woman, men are equally effective and successful in this career.

Saying the sexes are more alike than different still means the two are not exactly the same. The most common difference lies in leadership styles. Women tend to use a more democratic style; they encourage participation of their followers and are willing to share their positional power with others. In addition, women tend to influence others best through their ability to be charmingly influential. Men, on the other hand, tend to typically use a task-centered leadership style. This includes directing activities of others and relying on their positional power to control the organization’s activities. But surprisingly, even this difference is blurred. All things considered, when a woman is a leader in a traditionally male-dominated job (such as that of a police officer), she tends to lead in a manner that is more task centered.

Further compounding this issue are the changing roles of leaders in today’s organizations. With an increased emphasis on teams, employee involvement, and interpersonal skills, democratic leadership styles are more in demand. Leaders need to be more sensitive to their followers’ needs and more open in their communications; they need to build more trusting relationships. And many of these factors and behaviors that women have typically grown up developing.
Oral Task: group presentation

So what do you think? Is there a difference between the sexes in terms of leadership styles? Do men or women make better leaders? Would you prefer to work for a man or a woman? What’s your stance? Defend your stance and opinion using strong details, reasons, and strong arguments.

*Preparation time for response:* 45 minutes

*Response Time:* 20 minutes

THIS IS THE END OF THE ORAL TEST
Appendix D: Business English Oral Proficiency Posttest

**Business English Oral Proficiency Posttest**

**Time Allotted: 2.5 hours**

**Instructions:**
This test measures your ability to communicate in Business English in contexts you are likely to encounter in your academic courses or in the business world of today. There are three caselets on this test with one oral task each. In response to these tasks, you will perform individually, then interact in a dyad and finally in a group of five. Your responses are based on reading the different prompts and synthesizing the information needed for your response.

In each task you will have the opportunity to read the prompt and prepare for the task required. You may take notes at the preparation stage and use these notes in response to each task.

All your responses will be audio-recorded. The stopwatch used by the examiners shows the remaining time for each task.

Your speaking will be evaluated in terms of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. Typically a good oral response will require all of the response time and the answer will be completed by the end of the response time.
Caselet # 1: “Must attitudes and behaviors align?”

Prompt
You work for a large international organization that manufactures and sells computer drivers. In your position as a recruiter, you have the primary responsibility to hire individuals to fill entry-level positions in the company. Your organization focuses on recent college graduates for these entry-level manufacturing and marketing positions. In doing so, the company has an opportunity to hire individuals who have the latest knowledge in their fields at a discounted price.

Your job requires you to travel extensively. In fact, over the past several years, you have made visits to 35 college campuses on three different continents during a semester. Your performance evaluation rests primarily on one factor—how many people you have hired.

Over the past several months, you have noticed a surge in open positions. These are not new positions but replacement for employees who have quit. A little investigation on your part finds that, after about three years with the firm, entry-level employees quit. There is no upward mobility within the firm and these employees burn out after working up to 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Furthermore, you know that the benefits of entry-level employees—especially sick and vacation leave—are not competitive with those offered by similar firms in the industry. So you think you know why these employees quit.

On the other hand, almost everyone who has quit has gone on a bigger, better-paying job with more responsibility. To get the most productivity out of these employees, your firm invests heavily in their training. Almost all workers in these positions received over 40 hours of specialized training each year and have jobs that offer excellent learning opportunities but little advancement. Top management believes it is better to hire new people than to pay the higher salaries that seniority and experience demand. Although you do not totally agree with management’s treatment of these employees, you recognize that the company is giving many of them a great career start.

Oral Task
What would you do? Should you disclose to college recruits during interviews that the jobs they are being considered for are dead-end positions in the organizations? Why or why not? Would your response change if you were evaluated not only on how many people you have hired but also on how long they stay with the organization? Defend your view using reasons and details in
Caselet # 2: “Who should I protect?”

Prompt

Walid Khaled, an insurance claims adjuster in Star Insurances, has the day off. He is playing with his 7-year-old daughter Salma when the telephone rings. At the other end of the line, Walid’s supervisor, apologizing for interrupting his time off, pleads for his help. Will Walid please visit a woman in his neighborhood who has made claims for bodily and mental injury resulting from a car crash with a person insured by Walid’s company? The woman has consented to a visit from their adjuster to assess the injuries to her nose and mental state. (Apparently the crash has caused her to relapse into a condition of paranoia and manic depression, previously stabilized.)

The claims adjuster in charge of the case has called in sick—scheduling the appointment has been difficult. Will Walid please fill in? Walid agrees readily, but asks if he could bring his daughter—it is their day together while his wife worked. Walid’s supervisor gratefully assures him that bringing the little girl along is no problem. When Walid arrives at the woman’s house, he discovers no one at home, so he and his daughter wait in the car. Eventually, the woman arrives, parks, and emerges from her car, at which point Salma cries happily, “It’s Miss Laila!”

“Who is Miss Laila?” asks her father with surprise. Miss Laila turns out to be Salma’s teacher. Walid conducts a short interview with the woman on the front steps of her home, satisfying himself that she does indeed have some facial injuries and that she is taking prescription medicine for her mental problems.

Following the interview, Walid realizes that he has a real dilemma. Insurance ethics mandates that claims investigations are completely confidential. An insurance professional with knowledge of a claims case is expected to keep silent and to refrain from using the knowledge for personal benefit. On one hand, to uphold his industry’s code of ethics, he is not to discuss or act on the information he has received about Miss Laila’s situation. On the other hand, he does not want his daughter, and her classmates, under the care of a person who is undergoing treatment for mental illness and who might be dangerous. Walid’s wife, Hoda, is also an
insurance claims adjuster, working for a separate company. Still, even if Walid tells her, she is bound by the same professional code of ethics.

**Oral Task: One-on-one discussion**

Simulate a 5-minute discussion between Walid and Hoda who are desperately trying to resolve the dilemma in a way that neither jeopardizes their careers nor compromises the safety of their daughter and schoolmates

**Preparation time for response:** 25 minutes

**Response Time:** 5 minutes

---

**Break: 15 minutes**

---

**Caselet # 3: “Who will be the next Gucci?”**

**Prompt**

You watched a two-minute podcast on the Internet for a national corporate finance firm bringing together foreign investors and Egyptian entrepreneurs; a firm granting increased credits for promising new ventures that are “the engine of job growth in Egypt and should therefore be at the forefront of recovery from recession”. Only early proposals with winning formulas will get through!

**Who are you?**

You are five savvy Egyptian Entrepreneurs who want to enter the retail fashion market and start up the most innovative fashion retailer in New Cairo, following a new approach in the industry: riding two of the winning retail trends – being in fashion and low prices – a formula fit for the Egyptian community. You have got the expertise and determination to turn this small start-up into an “icon” thriving business, craving to be the country’s flagship, and hoping to be the next Zara, Benetton or Gucci!

**Business challenge**

In the fast-paced world of fashion, success for retailers hinges on being able to put the right item in the right style or size in the customer’s hand at the right time — a simple concept that is difficult to execute!
Oral task: Group Presentation

Seize the chance and present your “new venture” – some quick-bake recipe with well-mixed ingredients to cover in a ten-minute interview with a panel of venture capitalists, pitching your proposal in a passionate, enthusiastic, concise and convincing manner.

Preparation time for response: 45 minutes

Response Time: 20 minutes

THIS IS THE END OF THE ORAL TEST
Appendix E: Sample Transcripts from the Pretest Oral Tasks

(C = T-unit / EF = error-free)

Sample Individual Task Responses

S # 1: Response time: one minute
Total number of words per minute = 90
Total number of T-units per response = 12
Total number of error-free T-units per response = 7

C: I think…..(EF)
C: If I were the manager…… I still insist give her a chance!
C: My reasons for that would be (EF)
C: I will tell you what (EF)
C: She is energetic and hard worker after all, isn’t she? (EF)
C: She is asset
C: So why didn’t I make use of that in my team?
C: My team would in need for her enthusiasm
C: I mean…(EF)
C: I have to assure join this team will be golden chance to hit the glass ceiling
C: She will learn about our system (EF)
C: If she can’t do it when other (End of minute 1) people are collaborating I have to make it clear for her that keeping her cards close to her chest, won't help the company improve (EF)

S # 2: Response time: one minute
Total number of words per minute = 86
Total number of T-units per response = 9
Total number of error-free T-units per response = 5

C: I don’t know (EF)
C: I would never include sally in my team (EF)
C: If she forced into join us, she is capable of wreck the whole project out!
C: She is a failure and won’t make it in our company (EF)
C: She doesn’t have what it takes to join the team (EF)
C: She could be pain when dealing with others and breaks deals
C: Being head-strong and independent can spoil up everything! (EF)
C: We don’t pamper employees, I will ask her leave
C: She is just got to leave and look for another job

Sample Pair Task Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S#1</th>
<th>S#3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words in minute 1</td>
<td>Total number of words in minute 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 51</td>
<td>= 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of T-units per response</td>
<td>Total number of T-units per response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 19</td>
<td>= 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of error-free T-units per</td>
<td>Total number of error-free T-units per</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response = 11</td>
<td>response = 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Response time: 2:23

S#1
C: We have received two funding requests from two organizations doesn’t belong to our strategic funding areas.
C: What is tempting is the outcome of increasing our corporate giving. (EF)
C: It’s chance to get creative, focus on make difference, while spending less cash and establishing ourselves as top corporate charity.
C: We need think proper.

S#3
C: Yes, I have been thinking of fund the two organizations.
C: Establishing good contact with other segments will definitely serve our company and earn wider reputation. (EF)
C: But the money we are asked to donate is too much, we can’t afford it. (EF)
C: Financial problems might slowing down the funding process.
C: What do you think? (EF) **(End of minute 1)**
S#1
C: Do we have any another donation commitments?
S#3
C: Yes (EF)
C: Unfortunately, we have four other project that belong to the company's service area.
S#1
C: Have u checked on the banks we are in contact with?
C: They are so good on raising money and saving it for corporate giving (EF)
C: By the way, they owe money for us since last year.
S#3
C: I have already contacted with them
C: I am afraid the money they owe for us has also been invested in other projects
C: They are no longer into liquidation at the moment! (EF)
C: then I am afraid we have to decline the funding requests! (EF)
C: No other way out. (EF)
C: We may considering it later on but resources are nor low
S#1
C: Wait a second! (EF)
C: I have a better idea. (EF)
S#3
C: Which is? (EF)
S#1
C: Why not we suspend some of our big donations to the company's service area projects now?
C: We would rather divert the money to the new projects. (EF)
C: They are more important to us now. (EF)
C: These organizations in need for our financial support and we have to earn their trust. We need to prioritize sir.
S#3
C: Certainly, this is what I must calling "creative thinking".
C: We already have the best reputation in the service area. (EF)
C: We have never been shortage of money before
C: Definitely they would take this into consideration and agree for the suspension.
C: You would better act upon that right away
S#1
C: I will (EF)
C: I’m glad about we could work it out sir. (EF)
C: Bye (EF).
C: Before I leave I will make sure things go well (EF)
C: I will inform you of changes (EF)

Sample Group Task Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Number of words/minute</th>
<th>Total number of T-units per response</th>
<th>Total number of error-free T-units per response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S# 6: Response time: 3:50
C: First, first of all, I would like to saying I like the questions
C: I have ideas, I have different ideas here (EF)
C: I hope you don’t find it strangely
C: I would like to saying first we’re different in opinions
C: We come from different backgrounds and education (EF)
C: That’s why my view may be different (EF)
C: ……I don’t agree there are different style
C: I don’t agree with this case (EF)
C: …..There are no differences in styles between men and women at work (EF)
C: ….I think it’s something people say to explain why conflicts between men and women in one working place
C: That’s what I believe (EF)
C: Maybe you will disagree with me but it’s my opinion (EF)
C: Women should be the bosses of women
C: Men (End of minute 1) should lead men (EF)
C: …..Why I think so? (EF)
C: I am looking at it from religion idea
C: This is how I see it (EF)
C: In Islam men and women should not working together or be mixing
C: That’s why people of different sex have problem
C: I will not work under men leadership because of that
C: If I have to work in a mixed place, I will chee…I will choose my boss to be female (EF)
C: She will understand my situation (EF)
C: and ….She will appreciating my circumstances
C: She can be a mother or a wife and knows well how I feel when I get married (EF)
C: From the leadership point of view, both male and female can being great leaders
C: well, think of histories
C: Think of Cleopatra and Shagaret el dor (EF)
C: Women can be leaders in anywhere but I think.. but like I said religion comes first (EF)
C: In the business life it’s hard ……it’s hard to segregate (EF)
C: My family thinks at time I will have problems when I graduated
C: I can to deal with male students if I have to but at work no way because I had the choice
C: Back to the question, I will prefer to work with a woman as my boss (EF)
C: ….I can trust her and talk to her about my work problems without embarrass
C: Sometimes I found….sometimes I find women which are too friendly with males not ok
C: They are too open and this is not right at work (EF)
C: ….It creates problems (EF)
C: We hear all the time about women who get divorcing because of her husband loving his colleague (EF)
C: So the idea of females and males together cause problems
C: It can destroy homes (EF)
C: Some of you may think I am silly here but that’s my view (EF)
C: You know what is the problem?
C: We have so many ideas from the West (EF)
C: This is affect our community and mind
C: We can’t see it or maybe we know they are there and pretend they are not there (EF)
C: I wish you don’t think I …I hate others from other religions or countries (EF)
C: It is my idea of works
C: Maybe I am wrong and by time I will change my idea (EF)

S# 7: Response time: 3:47
C: In my opinion……there are no differences at all in leadership styles (EF)
C: There is no male style and female style (EF)
C: There is only business behavior and leadership style without sex (EF)
C: Both can be very successful….but……the problem is ……stereotype (EF)
C: It all comes from society and…… how how people perceiveing gender
C: In Egypt, the situation is complicate
C: You see….(EF)
C: Do you know what is the problem?
C: Men can’t accept female leaders while the opposite is ok (EF)
C: People don’t looking at the talents or skills these people have
C: ……They only focus on their sex (EF)
C: I know people in my family who prefer female leaders………because they (End of minute 1) can accept excuses (EF)
C: And these people are actually men (EF)
C: They think women will be embarrassed to say no to them (EF)
C: They think they will be the most shy to refuse a request from a man
C: Some people think women are most supportive……approachable……sympathetic and rewards good work all the time but men do not
C: …..Some also think male bosses are very direct and critical and do not…….generate creativity (EF)
C: My mother told me once that……women are most democratic at work and care about build relationships and making people feel good about them
C: Father uses a nice term: “synergetic effect” (EF)
C: He is business professor here and you know him
C: He says men create competition at work between employees (EF)
C: He believes that this is number one……one….number one priority at work (EF)
C: I don’t agree on my parent because…..I believe it’s about the managerial skills they have and learn from their study or training or even experience from school or life
C: I am a man myself and I can work with any sex (EF)
C: I’m not working man yet (EF)
C: I mean I don’t have a full-time job (EF)
C: I worked before (EF)
C: I worked part-time in two places…..whom there were…..whom there were male or female bosses
C: I worked in a café before and in that café the manager was a woman (EF)
C: I also worked in a cyber and the cyber……technician was a man (EF)
C: I picture myself working under any leadership style of any man or woman (EF)
C: I am changing my mind when I start having a job
C: I don’t know (EF)
C: I really don’t know (EF)
C: It is difficult to judge..to judge now (EF)
C: I still think we can working with other people of different sexes
C: In Egypt we need to stop be sensitive to having a female boss or male manager (EF)
C: We need to have better attitude
C: Maybe after the revolution, people will start think better from the big picture
C: I still can’t say for sure (EF)
C: I really can’t say (EF)
C: I dream of working abroad with my cousins in the Australia
C: I am not sure this will happening or not
C: Maybe abroad things are not the same here (EF)
C: I have to wait and see for myself (EF)
C: Maybe the case is not Egypt (EF)
C: Maybe it is the natures of peoples surround us
C: That’s confusing (EF)
C: I think a female partner has a different idea from me
C: Maybe that will change my opinion (EF)
Appendix F: Sample Transcripts from the Posttest Oral Tasks

(C = T-unit / EF = error-free)

Sample Individual Task Responses

S # 1: Response time: 1 minute

Total number of words per minute = 112
Total number of T-units per response = 11
Total number of error-free T-units per response = 9

C: Interesting situation! (EF)
C: I will tell you what (EF)
C: As a company recruiter who has been working for long, I would reveal the whole truth about the entry level positions while conducting interviews (EF)
C: you know, it’s all about honesty…. (EF)
C: To win the trust of our future employees, we shouldn’t fool them (EF)
C: They should be aware the government may not offering new jobs to fresh graduates today
C: Well, our jobs are therefore a great opportunity not to miss (EF)
C: I have to highlight the opportunity of doing free training which will improve and develop their skills and prepares them well (EF)
C: this would tempt them to stay longer (EF)
C: honesty is the best policy (EF)
C: Don’t you think so? (EF)

S # 2: Response time: 1 minute

Total number of words per minute = 99
Total number of T-units per response = 10
Total number of error-free T-units per response = 8

C: if I were the recruiter, I would say the pros (EF)
C: that will attract them to the jobs we have (EF)
C: I will try to hide the cons (EF)
C: that’s not lying to them (EF)
C: it’s about showing the good sides first (EF)
C: I think it’s important to show our future employees all benefits are waiting them
C: they should know that at the beginning of careers what matters is training (EF)
C: they shouldn’t waste this chance even if the salary is low (EF)
C: if these are highlight, there won’t be any future problem if we tell them later about the whole truth
C: That’s a good way (EF)

Sample Pair Task Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S#1</th>
<th>S#3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words in minute 1 = 68</td>
<td>Total number of words in minute 1 = 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of T-units per response = 22</td>
<td>Total number of T-units per response = 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of error-free T-units per response = 19</td>
<td>Total number of error-free T-units per response = 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Response Time: 2:15
S#1
C: This is a real disaster Hoda. (EF)
C: You have no idea how dangerous it is. (EF)
C: Can’t you see what means to know your daughter can be attacked or molested?
C: An insane woman can do any harm! (EF)
S#3
C: I know well it is serious but we need to rationalize. (EF)
C: Please calm down, honey, because there is always a way and you know that. (EF)
C: Can’t you realize that it will cost you your job and we have too many commitments? (EF)
C: Is that what you want? (EF)
C: You know how far our company treasures their clients because we got promoted for that! (EF)
S#1
C: But it's my daughter Hoda. (EF)
C: It’s our daughter we are talking over here.
C: I have to protect her. (EF)
C: What job are we negotiating here? (EF)
C: I don’t care if it costs me my job. Its …… (EF) **(End of minute 1)**
S#3
C: Don’t lecture me Waleed! (EF)
C: Salma is my daughter too. (EF)
C: I just want you to be reasonable. (EF)
C: You have been working in this field all your life. (EF)
C: I don’t think it’s fair to put your job and us into jeopardy by speaking out such ….. (EF)
S#1
C: Which is more important to you Hoda?
C: Ha? Earning a fortune from my job or losing our real fortune? (EF)
C: Answer me? (EF)
S#3
C: Of course it’s my daughter, but losing your job is the real disaster Waleed! (EF)
C: We have too many bills to …. (EF)
S#1
C: Then we need to find out a solution! (EF)
C: We can’t stand here arguing and do nothing. (EF)
C: You don’t have to remind me of bill every now and then, ok?
S#3
C: Okay, well … (EF)
C: How about I pay this Ms. Laila or whatever- her- name-is a visit tomorrow at school and I try to find out from her if she is really on medication or not?
C: Maybe she is not on medicate…. (EF)
S#1
C: She is on medication, for God sake! (EF)
C: Stop driving me crazy! (EF)
C: You think I’m imagining all that? (EF)
C: What’s wrong with you? (EF)
S#3
C: I know she is. (EF)
C: Just, let's pretend now she is not. (EF)
C: I will go tomorrow and figure out (EF)
C: I will try to provoke her until she spills the bean about it. (EF)
C: I am skilled in this! (EF)
C: You know that! (EF)
S#1
C: And? (EF)
S#3
C: And I will told the principal right away.
C: I promise you that. (EF)
C: I am a parent, who is concerned about the safety of her daughter, after all. (EF)
S#1
C: Fine then! (EF)

S#3
C: You won’t lose your job about any reason then.
C: It was me who figured this out and it’s our daughter. You are totally out of it! (EF)
S#1
C: Whatever! (EF)

Sample Group Task Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID #</th>
<th>Number of words/minute</th>
<th>Total number of T-units per response</th>
<th>Total number of error-free T-units per response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S# 6: Response time: 3:52
C: Our project is “Fashion at your fingertips” (EF)
C: We target middle class customers. (EF)
C: Our headquarters will be a middle-size store in New Cairo. (EF)
C: We are intended to sell summer and winter clothes at reasonable price and we are expecting a steady increase in sale within four months from our grand-opening.

C: “Fashion at your fingertips” will bring the latest trends in fashion to middle class customers' door-step and at reasonable prices. (EF)

C: No more Gucci, Zara, Mango, or Promode or red tags (EF)

C: From now on they will have no worries (EF)

C: Women, men, and children will have it all at their fingertips (EF)

C: They will afford buying stylish clothes for work and daily use and all those little extras that made life easy and comfortable any more.

(End of minute 1)

C: All they have to do is to read about us in newspapers and magazines. (EF)

C: 80% of the New Cairo inhabitants are middle class citizens (EF)

C: They are obsessed on fashion but complain of the soaring prices.

C: We'll start as retailers and then expand and enlarge. (EF)

C: We can capture market share (EF)

C: Local fashion designers are very eager to work with us. (EF)

C: They always have seasonal leftover stock that needs to be released at any prices. (EF)

C: In fact, we are in desperate need of good marketing. (EF)

C: We need good advertising and promotional campaigns. (EF)

C: We will depend on viral marketing not direct marketing then we will reserve spots on TV channels (EF)

C: We planned a strong marketing mix fit for our start-up (EF)

C: We need to reach out to every middle class citizen in New Cairo, as what really differs us is the quality and the style of clothes we sell!

C: That needs enough funding (EF)

C: That’s why we are here (EF)

C: Indeed, we sell brand new stuff at reasonable prices. (EF)

C: We bring our customers the latest in fashion. (EF)

C: According to our market research, we are the first to open such a store in Cairo. (EF)

C: So we are one of our kind! (EF)

C: We are sure we will make high profits in no time (EF)
C: We are certain we will be the next Zara (EF)
C: “Fashion at your fingertips” will make you think local and feel global (EF)
C: We did self-financing before and made a great success (EF)
C: We know how to budgeting and balance and so we will pay all the money received from you and you will make money too
C: We are ready to go through the seven steps to heaven with your group (EF)
C: We have clear contingency plans (EF)
C: We know we will make it (EF)
C: We have a strong management team (EF)
C: All we need is your trust and fund (EF)
C: Check out our plan and you will see the difference we make (EF)
C: You won’t think twice (EF)
C: We are waiting for your decision (EF)

**S# 7: Response time: 3:08**

C: Every great idea need a manufacturer who is willing to invest to bring it to the market
C: In our case, we need precious business angels like you (EF)
C: We need your investment (EF)
C: We have the power, the determination, and the creativity we need to make our proposal work (EF)
C: Great ideas are not enough (EF)
C: It take experience with the market and perfect management
C: We have a strong track record in the market niche (EF)
C: All the small ventures we began years ago are great and successful now (EF)
C: We have a huge market share and…..we plan to grow more and more (EF)
C: Innovation and sweeping success are our credos (EF)
C: …..“Fashion at your fingertips” will surly sweep the market (EF)
C: …..Why will people (End of Minute 1) go to expensive retailers when we have it all? (EF)
C: Egyptians finally need it! (EF)
C: Don’t you think after the revolution Egyptian wants to feel home?
C: Our projects will make that happen (EF)
C: “From home to home” is another part of our credo (EF)
C: All products are Egyptian from head to tail (EF)
C: Our designs are comfortable and cool and suits all the ages
C: We will be the destination of all (EF)
C: You can take a look at them in our proposal (EF)
C: …..“Fashion at your fingertips” focus on profitability and revenue from the start!
C: We don’t accept losses and we won’t allow failure to happen (EF)
C: We know how to cultivate customer loyalty (EF)
C: We are planning to be …….the number 1 retailer in 2 years (EF)
C: If we didn’t have these financial challenges, we could have self-financed! (EF)
C: That’s why you are needed (EF)
C: You won’t regret it (EF)
C: We promise you that (EF)
C: …..We have a …….realistic plan here for a great idea that can change the future of the retail industry (EF)
C: We are not here to pitch our idea and fools you into buying it
C: We are here to show you we can do it (EF)
C: ……All we need is a real chance (EF)
C: We understand ……..our target customers well and……. studied the market well (EF)
C: ………We don’t expect you to give us your feedback now… but we know you will not turn us down (EF)
C: We know you receive hundreds of plans every week (EF)
C: …Our business plan are different and deserve funding
C: …..We don’t lack market awareness because we are part of the market already (EF)
C: We know “Fashion at your fingertips” have growth potential (EF)
C: Check out your plan and you will see how good we are at mark..at making dreams come true (EF)
Appendix G: IRB Proposal Document

Proposal of Research for Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Title of Project: The Impact of Scenario-Based Tasks on Business English Learners’ Oral Proficiency: Are Oral Fluency and Grammatical Accuracy Enhanced?

Principal Investigator: Amira Agameya, Professor, MA/TEFL program in the English Language Institute

Secondary Investigator: Nashwa Elyamany, MA/TEFL graduate student in the English Language Institute

Description of the Project: Communicative efficiency is the ultimate goal most business English learners strive to achieve in their academic courses and eventually in the workplace. To help learners effectively engage in oral business interactions of different levels of formality and compete well in the dynamic business world after graduation, Business English practitioners strive to develop instructional materials and tasks in their pursuit of optimizing authentic opportunities for oral proficiency development in business settings. The impetus for excellence in oral business communication has further motivated business schools worldwide to adapt curricula and instructional designs that embrace formal courses of instruction on and practice of oral skills to meet the versatile needs of the workplace. The researcher, Nashwa Elyamany, has developed a “Business English Oral Proficiency” course for sophomores at the College of Management and Technology, the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, & Maritime Transport (AASTMT). It is a semester-long course divided into two phases with six weeks, 60 hours of instructions each. All course materials, tasks, and assessment tests were piloted in the Summer and Fall semesters of 2010.

The purpose of this research project is to examine the impact of a proposed treatment (i.e. case-study scenarios and scenario-based tasks) on learners’ oral proficiency and investigate the extent to which, if any, they can help remedy low levels of fluency and grammatical accuracy.

Number of Participants: 10 upper-intermediate students enrolled in the UWIC Program at the Arab Academy for science, Technology, & Maritime Transport (AASTMT), Cairo.

Data Collection Methodology:
The research project will be carried out during the first phase of the “Business English Oral Proficiency” course and so it will last for 6 weeks, with the treatment introduced in the last two weeks. The qualitative data that will be obtained from the study during this semester (Spring 2011) in the form of audio-taped speech samples in response to the treatment tasks and the pretest-posttest assessment oral tasks will be interpreted in two ways. First, the data will be transcribed, coded, and linguistically analyzed in order for the researcher to explore the effectiveness of the task proposed on specific features of fluency and grammatical accuracy and tabulate results in terms of percentages. Moreover, two holistic and analytic performance assessment rubrics (placing learners on rating scales of 1 to 6) will be used to score learners’
performances on the assessment pretest-posttest tasks. The proposed course and tests will both be delivered and administered by the researcher.

All the participants in the study will be asked to sign an informed consent form (see attached) before carrying out the study. They will not be recruited from among current students of the researcher.

All data will remain anonymous and stored on a password protected computer. The data will not be kept for more than 3 years after the time they were recorded.

Questions about the research, participant rights or research-related injuries should be directed to the Principal Investigator, Amira Agameya, at 2615-1918.

If participants have any complaints in relation to this research project, they may contact Graham Harman, Chair of the IRB at gharman@aucegypt.edu.
Appendix H: IRB Acceptance Letter

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

To: Nashwa Elyamany (ELI student); Amira Agameya (ELI)
From: Dr. Graham Harman, Associate Provost for Research Administration, Chair of the IRB
Date: March 27, 2011
Re: approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "The Impact of Scenario-Based Tasks on Business English Learners’ Oral Proficiency: Are Oral Fluency and Grammatical Accuracy Enhanced?", and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" heading.

As you are aware, the IRB suggested some minor changes to the initial proposal. In the IRB’s opinion, the revised version of your proposal adequately addresses their initial questions, and thus the proposal is now approved.

Thank you and good luck.

[Signature]

Dr. Graham Harman
Chair, IRB