

Close the task, improve the discourse*

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Este artículo trata de un estudio comparativo entre tareas abiertas y cerradas en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, llevado a cabo con hablantes no nativos del español.

La evidencia obtenida tiende a indicar que las tareas cerradas favorecen una producción oral más compleja, sin que por ello se pierda precisión.

Los resultados preliminares de la investigación sugieren que es conveniente incorporar tareas cerradas entre las actividades pedagógicas de los programas de lenguas extranjeras.

This article reports on a study of open versus closed tasks in foreign/second language instruction with non-native speakers of Spanish. Evidence suggests that closed tasks lead to more complex speech without compromising accuracy. The preliminary results of the investigation suggest that closed tasks be incorporated in pedagogical tasks developed for foreign language curriculum.

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In this paper, I first review the literature on task-based language teaching and then report on a study of open versus closed tasks as used for foreign/second language instruction. An open task is an activity or problem that has many possible solutions, while a closed task has just one correct answer or solution. Long and Crookes believe that closed tasks will produce more complex language and more attention to detail, yet will not impair target like usage. For this study, 20 intermediate level Spanish students (10 dyads) were given both task types to perform and their conversations were analyzed for target like usage of the subjunctive and a personal, complexity as measured by s-nodes per t-unit, and recycling of the input. It was found that the closed task produced more complex speech and dependence upon the input, while having no significant effects on target like usage.

In the past five to ten years language teaching has been slowly moving away from synthetic syllabuses towards analytic syllabuses, or in less technical terms, away from materials and courses which call for teaching of the of the language as a series of grammatical bits to be put together by the learner, and towards courses with a communicative approach, in which the materials designers see language as an entity that could be taught as a whole. However, the communicative approach has become an umbrella term used to sell any method, and many books that claim to be communicative are just reworded grammar translation texts (Manheimer 1991, Azevedo 1978). Most text, including those that claim to follow a notional functional syllabus, still see language as something to be learned bit by bit and then synthesized by the learner. Not only are they using antiquated methods, but they are not following the findings of second language acquisition research, notably that there are fixed learning sequences and that error production is a natural part of language learning, and therefore, of passing through these developmental stages (see Pieneman and Johnson, 1987). One approach to foreign language teaching that is backed by second language acquisition (SLA) research, and sees the target language as a whole which should not be broken into convenient bits, is task based language teaching. This approach sees materials as something that should result in an accomplishment or an end product.

At this point, I would like to examine what SLA research can show us about developing a curriculum. First of all, it is no longer acceptable to present materials in haphazard order decided upon by a textbook writer. There is now evidence of universal orders in learning particular languages. For details of these implicational scales, see Pienemann 1984, and Pienemann and Johnson 1987. It is unprofessional to try to force students to learn grammar that they are not yet ready to learn. It is also accepted knowledge that in acquiring a second language, learners are going to make systematic errors based on their interlanguage grammar.

Instead of this focus on forms. Long suggests a focus on form, or in other words using "pedagogic tasks and other methodological options which draw students' attention to aspects of the target language" without returning to a linguistically-based syllabus whose content is isolated forms (Long & Crookes in press, p.25). This re-

quires teachers to understand why learners make errors, and what those errors mean in terms of the learners' progress. This focus on form requires error correction when it will benefit the learners (see Tomasello and Herron 1989, and Carroll, Roberge, and Swain 1990). However, this error correction need not be overt nor come from the teacher. It can just as easily come from another student who does not understand the production, and instead of overt correction can consist of a simple "huh?".

Due to the fact that language learning' passes through universal patterns, we must now examine ways of helping the students advance from one stage to the next. We know that language instruction does make a difference in this advancement (see Pienemann 1984, White 1991, Long 1983 and 1985, or Doughty 1991), which should lead us to dismiss the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrel 1983) and parts of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985).

We have now rejected traditional structural-based syllabuses because they fail to take into account learnability of structures or implicational scaling, and because they typically present a structure and demand its immediate error-free production; which SLA research also contradicts. Likewise, we must treat the Input Hypothesis and its cousin, the Natural Approach with caution due to their failure to instruct the learners and give corrective feedback. We must now examine what effective alternatives are left. It appears that the first tiling we must address is what is to be done with the language. Just as a learner cannot be expected to synthesize bits of grammar and come out speaking fluently, we cannot expect a learner to function in a second language in the real world if her training does not reflect what she will use the language for. Therefore, a materials designer must start with a needs analysis, which should lead to useful language being presented to the students. Also, it would appear that focus of the foreign language classroom does not have to be the actual language, but can be some type of content course (see Early, Mohan, and Roper 1988), students' interests (see Breen 1984), or tasks (see Prabhu 1984, Long 1989, Loschky and Bley-Vroman 1990, and Nunan 1989).

The majority of language classroom work is done as teacher-class lockstep work or individual work (Long 1989, p. 9). There is justification for these types of work, but not to the near exclusion of small group work. Small group work allows the learners more time to practice the language, offers more timid students a friendlier environment in which to make mistakes, is more realistic in that real world conversations are more frequently in pairs or small groups than in class-sized groups, allows more opportunities for real conversation instead of teacher-fronted drill type questions, allows for different types of conversation based on different students' interest and needs, gives each student more opportunity to have her input adjusted to her particular $i + 1$, and most importantly, does not lower the grammatical accuracy of the learners' output (Long and Porter 1985, Long 1989).

For many adult learners, then, the best method of foreign language instruction appears to be task-based language teaching requiring practical uses of the langua-

ge. There are many different models that fit this description, the most notable by Long (1985 & 1989), Long and Crookes (1987 & in press), Prabhu (1984 & 1987), Breen (1984), Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1990), and Nunan (1989). These researchers can be divided into two camps. The first still see structures as the backbone of a curriculum (Loschky and Bley-Vroman and Nunan); the other sees the language as a whole, with products, tasks, or the process of communicating in the language as the backbone of the curriculum.

Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1990) agree with many of Long's arguments about the values of tasks. They claim that tasks must be closed rather than open, be comprehension-based before asking for production, and have production or comprehension of certain grammatical structures as a clear target in completing a task. For Loschky and Bley-Vroman, "(t)he goal in a grammar-based production task is to focus the learner's processing capacities on the meaningful function of a specific structure. Thus, the problem for the designer is to manipulate the task so that the comprehensibility of the learner's output to an interlocutor depends on structural accuracy" (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1990, p. 183). Their structure dependency can be seen in their belief of the essential factor in a task. "The tenn is intended to suggest not only that the task cannot be completed without the grammatnical point, but also that the grammatnical point itself is the essence of what is to be attended to" (ibid, p. 181).

Their ideas are well thought out, and their arguments are grounded in SLA research. For example, even though their syllabuses would be strictly grammar-based, they cite studies of implicational scaling and claim that structures would only be taught when the learners are cognitively ready to learn them. Therefore, their theory has a finner base than most structural syllabuses, yet it still follows an acquired entities approach to language learning. They still see language as an accumulation of different structures and lexical items which can be broken down into separate bits and learned. The first task that they give as an example shows this belief. The task, to choose which picture represents the sentence "Mr Fat expects Mr, Thin to paint himself", requires knowledge of reflexive pronouns, but is not at all a practical or real world task. A teacher must ask herself what this has to do with the language needs of a student once he or she is outside the classroom.

Nunan (1989) has taken task to be an integral part of more traditional syntactic syllabuses. In his book *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, Nunan defines task as "a piece of work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form" (Nunan, 1989, p. 10). This definition is not carried out in his writing. An example is the section on creating task, where, as an example of a course objective, he gives "At the end of the course learners will be able to use the present continous tense to describe actions, in progress" (ibid, p. 137). From this objctive the teacher then must develop tasks to facilitate the lear-

ning of this structure. Hence, a great deal of SLA research is being ignored, and he continues to support an accumulated entities approach.

The works of Prabhu and of Long call for a radical departure from traditional grammar-based language teaching. Prabhu, in his work with the Bangalore project, defines his method as a procedural approach. His reasons are the following:

We have to focus not on what language to teach at this point or that, but on how to cause deployment in the classroom and how to ensure that deployment that takes place is genuine. A precondition for genuine deployment is mind engagement and the resultant need to communicate a genuine preoccupation with understanding, thinking out, doing or saying something. The focus here for the course designer is entirely on what to do in the classroom, not on what (piece of language) to teach; and the only syllabus that is compatible with such teaching and can be supportive to it is a specification not of language-items but of kinds of classroom activity -that is to say, a process-based syllabus...

There is therefore no syllabus in terms of vocabulary and structure, no preselection of language items for any given lesson or activity and no stage in the lesson when language items are practised or sentence-production as such is demanded. The basis of each lesson is a problem or task, and the conduct of the lesson consists of setting the task, demonstrating ways of tackling it and in the process giving some pupils a chance to attempt it, then getting all pupils to attempt it and finally giving each pupil a rough indication of the measure of his or her success (Prabhu 1984, pp. 275-276).

There are some gaps in Prabhu's theories. First, there is no logical ordering grading of the tasks. Prabhu gives an example of a sequence of six tasks that are related, but there is no explanation of why one is more difficult than the previous one. The first task is closed in the sense that there is only one right answer, and the last is open in that it asks for students to express their opinions on the optimal sites for various buildings. This lack of an ordering based on difficulty leads to a problem of knowing how to design a suitable follow-up task that will be more difficult than the previous one. Prabhu's only explanation on ordering is that "a suitable task is one on which success seems to learners to be difficult but attainable -whether or not they succeed in it in the actual event" (Prabhu 1984, p. 77). He continues by saying that a measurement of a reasonable task is that at least half the class be successful with at least half the task. This seems like a high failure rate, which could discourage the students. Long and Crookes (1990) criticize this facet of Prabhu's theories in that task achievement becomes nonn-referenced, when tasks are either successfully completed or not and should be so judged, which calls for criterion-referenced testing. A minimal passing grade for many criterion-referenced tests is 70%, but obviously the cut-point is dependent upon the types of task. It would not be wise to set

a cut-point of 70% for a test measuring foreign pilots' ability to understand instructions in English on what runway to land on.

The second serious flaw in Prabhu's design of tasks is they are not based on any observed or identified needs. Without a needs analysis, it is quite possible that what is being taught is as useless in the real world as what is taught in a grammar translation approach. Prabhu makes no mention of the ESP movement, and disregards functional syllabuses because the categorization involved would group relevant items, and he opposes that type of order. Also, there is no final goal or target task, and thus his syllabus appears to be more of a meandering through the secondary school curriculum.

Long and Crookes are perhaps the most real-world oriented in their views of material design and language teaching. Long (1985, p. 89) defines a task as:

A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of task include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a cheque, finding a street destination and helping someone across a road.

In other words, by "task" is meant the one hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. "Tasks" are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists.

Crookes (1986, p.1), likewise, describes task as "a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, or at work."

From these real life tasks, which must be identified through a task-based needs analysis (see Long 1985, or Dictionary of Occupational Titles), the curriculum designer must draw together similar tasks and prepare pedagogical tasks that would help in the acquisition of the language necessary for carrying out these tasks. Such a pedagogical task may be an activity on telephoning clients. These pedagogical tasks would not restrict the input to lexical items or syntactic structures that the students have already been taught.

Long reports on three characteristics of designing tasks for them to lead to maximum acquisition or "stretching of the learners' interlanguages (Long 1989)." The first is that the task be two-way (as opposed to one-way). A two-way task is one where each person involved has specific information that the other partner does not have. Therefore, for the task to be successfully completed, the missing information must be communicated and comprehended (Long 1980, Crookes and Long 1987, Long 1989). The second characteristic is that the learners be given time for planning their strategies and language to be used (Long 1989, Crookes 1989). The third characteristic is that the tasks be closed (as opposed to open). A closed task is

one which only has one correct answer or solution, while in the open task, the students know there are a wide range (or infinite number) of correct solutions or answers (Long 1989).

An example of one-way and two-way tasks may be helpful. A task in which one person describes a picture and the other has to draw it based on the first speaker's description and instructions would be considered one-way. This is because the first speaker is the only one supplying information. A task which requires its participants to pool different information in order to successfully complete the task would be two-way. An example would be a task in which each student had different information about a company, its sales and breakdown of sales by region, transportation costs from various locations, land costs in various cities, and other pertinent information regarding taxes and government regulations in these different cities. From this information, the students would have to pool their data in order to decide where to build a new factory. Doughty and Pica (1986), although using slightly different definitions than Long's, found two-way tasks produced more negotiation and conversational adjustments than one-way tasks.

The second tenet of Long's proposal is that giving students planning time will increase the quality of their speech. Crookes (1989), when measuring discourse from the same task in planned and unplanned versions, found increased complexity for the planned version in terms of subordinate clauses per t-unit (a t-unit is defined as "any syntactic main clause and its associated subordinate clauses" (Chaudron, 1988)), subordinate clauses per utterance, s-nodes per utterance (an s-node can be defined as a conjugated verb (Crookes, 1990)), words per utterance, and words per subordinate clause. However, measures of target-like usage (TLU) of certain structures and error free t-units did not show significant differences between task types (Crookes 1989, pp. 377-78). This suggests that teachers should incorporate some tasks that allow for planning time.

The third tenet of Long's proposal is that closed tasks will also create more complex language than will open tasks. Once again, it may be helpful to give examples of open and closed tasks. A task in which learners are given information about a murder and all of the suspects and their alibis, and for which there is only one *correct* answer to the question of whodunnit, would be a closed task. On the other hand, a task asking a group of students to agree on a list of ten famous people to invite to dinner would be an open task. The open task has many possible outcomes, so the students are not forced to negotiate. On the contrary, the closed task has only one correct solution, so the students are forced to negotiate for meaning.

There has been only one study comparing open tasks to closed tasks, and that was carried out by Rankin (1990). Rankin measured language complexity in s-nodes per t-unit and suppliance of relative clauses, attention to input (see Schmidt, 1989), and target-like usage of articles. For suppliance of relative clauses and inclusion of input in the discourse, he found significant differences favoring the closed

tasks, a trend was found for s-nodes per t-unit, and no significant differences were found for accuracy measures.

The present study replicates Rankin's study. The tasks were the same but were translated into Spanish. The subjects of this study were enrolled in Spanish as a foreign language classes, while Rankin's subjects were ESL students. Also, there are a few differences in what was measured and how.

The hypotheses were the following:

- 1) Due to their nature, closed tasks require more negotiation and attention to detail than do open tasks. This will cause a) more complex speech as measured by s-nodes per t-unit, and b) more repetition of the input in the discourse of the closed tasks.
- 2) Even though closed tasks force a stretching of the interlanguage, there is no reason to believe that accuracy or target-like usage will be impaired in such tasks. Therefore, between task types there will be no significant differences in target like usage grammatical structures. This will be seen in a) the *a personal*, and b) the subjunctive.

METHOD

The study was conducted with non-native speakers of Spanish performing two types of pedagogic tasks: open and closed. Their conversations were transcribed and were analyzed for complexity (s-nodes per t-unit), accuracy in target-like usage of the subjunctive and the *a personal*, and attention to input as measured by use of the input cues in discourse.

Subjects

In this study, 20 subjects, in 10 dyads, completed both tasks. The subjects were all enrolled in third year writing-intensive courses in Spanish as a foreign language at the University of Hawai'i, and all were native speakers of English. The subjects were randomly assigned a partner from their class with whom they were to work. Eighteen of the twenty students were undergraduates, and the other two were undeclared graduate students. All of the subjects were arts and letters majors or undeclared. Eight were majoring in Spanish.

Materials

The only materials the students were given were the written version of the tasks. There were two tasks, as in Rankin (1990), one open, which called for the students to decide whose life should be saved from a crashing plane, and the other closed.

which had the students solve a mystery murder. The tasks were actually Rankin's translated into Spanish. Each task had a small (8.5 by 1.5 inches) instruction sheet, which was paper-clipped to an envelope containing five 8.5 by 2.75 inch slips of paper which each contained five sentences giving details about one of five fictitious students. Both tasks were one-way in that both subjects had the same information, and convergent, which required that the partners agree on the final suspect or student.

In the open task, the students were presented with a situation in which an airplane with five fictitious passengers from the University of Hawaii was going to crash. The dyads had to agree as to whom they would give the one parachute on board the aircraft. The subjects were supplied with a description of the students' majors, interests, likes, dislikes, and some positive and negative contributions they made to society (see Appendix A). The subjects did not have to convey missing information, but arrive at an agreement of opinion as to who should be saved.

The closed task, like the open task, presented the students with a situation and five fictitious students from the University of Hawaii. However, this time the task called for the solving of a murder mystery. The information given to the dyads introduced the five fictitious students and gave information about their whereabouts the night of the murder, motives, possession of a firearm, relationships with other suspects, and alibis (see Appendix B). Sufficient information to solve the murder was provided to both partners, so, as with the open task, no exchange of information was necessary for solving the task.

Since the discourse to be produced was based on the task cues or input and the subsequent discourse was to be analyzed for complexity and accuracy of two grammatical structures, the input had to be controlled. Both sets of written input had similar complexity in s-nodes per t-unit (open task = 1.306, closed = 1.302), the same amount of subjunctives (1 each), and a similar amount of the *a personal* (open task 5, closed task =4).

Procedures

As noted earlier, the dyads were randomly formed and randomly counterbalanced so that five of the ten dyads performed the closed task on the first day and the open task a few days later, while the other five dyads performed the open task the first day and the closed task a few days later. This counterbalancing of the order was done to control for a practice effect.

The subjects carried out the tasks in an empty classroom. They were seated at a table with a tape recorder and microphone and were then given brief verbal instructions followed by the envelopes containing the task input.

The subjects were given three minutes to silently read the information for their tasks and were then asked if they had any questions about the vocabulary or the

task itself. After answering any questions, the researcher started the tape recorder and left the room. The subjects had ten minutes to complete the task, and were instructed that if they completed their task before the ten minutes had elapsed to turn off the recorder. The dyads returned for the second task 48 to 72 hours after completing the first task.

The recordings were transcribed and analyzed for s-nodes per t-unit, tokens of verbalization of written input (a string of four or more words from the input or noticeable reading vocalization in recording), and target-like usage of the subjunctive and the *a personal*. The input that was noticeably read aloud was only counted for incorporation of input and not for the other three analyses (s-nodes/ t-unit, and TLU of the *a personal* and subjunctive). However, when a chunk of the input was a natural part of the subjects' output, it was counted in the other three analyses.

As the researcher is a non-native speaker of Spanish who speaks a Catalan-influenced variety of Spanish, it was decided to have two separate native-speaker judges for measuring interrater reliability. The first rater measured s-nodes, t-units, and tokens of recycling the input. The second rater judged target-like usage of the subjunctive and the *a personal*. They measured both task types for one dyad, and the percentage agreement can be seen in the following table.

Table 1
Interrater reliability

1.1 S-nodes/t-unit and token of inrout						
CLOSED				OPEN		
	Judge 1	Judge 2	% agree	Judge 1	Judge 2	% agree
s-nodes	90	92	98%	100	101	99%
t-units	63	68	93%	82	74	90%
text tokens	24	24	100%	8	7	88%
1.2: TLU of Subjunctive						
CLOSED				OPEN		
	correct	indicat.	overused	correct	indicat.	overused
Judge 1	0	2	0	0	6	0
Judge 3	0	3	0	0	5	0
1.3: TLU of A Personal						
CLOSED				OPEN		
	correct	not used.	overused	correct	not used	overused
Judge 1	6	3	0	15	1	2
Judge 3	7	2	0	15	3	3

Analysis

Both descriptive statistics and tests of significance are given for these data. A t-test was used to measure the significance of the differences in language complexity, chi-square was used to measure the significance of the differences in incorporation of the input in discourse, and, as the occurrences of the structures examined was not great, descriptive statistics are used to show the similarities in target-like usage. For all tests of significance, alpha was set at .50. As Rankin (1990) showed a trend favoring complexity of language produced by closed tasks, a one-tailed t-test was used for these data.

Even though the subjects had the same amount of time to complete each task, the paired tasks did not always produce the same quantity of discourse. Of the ten dyads, six produced more speech in the closed tasks and the average word counts were 586 for the closed and 506.7 for the open. This difference would not allow an unbiased chi-square, so the longer conversations were shortened to the length of their comparison tasks and the quantity of chunks of input were counted from the smaller samples.

RESULTS

Eight of the ten dyads showed an increase in s-nodes per t-unit in the closed condition, while only one dyad showed more complex speech in the open condition, and that dyad had much more limited speech (105 word average per task, while the other dyads averaged 595.39 words per task), and the lowest s-nodes per t-unit scores. (For descriptive statistics, see Table 2). Also, nine of the ten dyads showed greater incorporation of input in the discourse. As noted earlier, as this is frequency data, the conversations were made equal lengths before counting the tokens of input. For descriptive statistics of the incorporation of input, see Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics' tor Complexity and Incorporation of Input				
Dyad	Open S-nodes / T- unit	Closed S-nodes/ T- unit	Open Incorporation of input	Closed Incorporation of input
1	1.22	1.43	8	22
2	1.13	1.27	3	10
3	1.09	1.00	0	10
4	1.15	1.33	4	11
5	1.32	1.32	2	27
6	1.36	1.40	14	13
7	1.13	1.23	5	17
8	1.08	1.17	18	23
9	1.18	1.27	17	24
10	1.07	1.20	13	44
Totals	11.75 $\bar{X}=1.17$ $s = .10$	12.63 $\bar{X}=1.26$ $s = .14$	85 $\bar{X} = 8.50$ $s = 6.45$	201 $\bar{X}=20.10$ $s = 10.50$

For s-nodes per t-unit, the measure of complexity, the averages are 1.20 for the open task, and 1.28 for the closed task, which is statistically significant ($t = 3.16$, $df=9$, $p < .0057$, see table 3). The closed task also produced significantly more incorporation of input. After shortening the transcriptions to have equal length passages, there were still three times as many incorporations in the closed tasks, which a chi-square showed to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 553.65$, $df=9$, $p < .0001$, see table 4).

Table 3

T-test for Complexity as Measured by S-nodes per T-unit			
Paired t- test x 1 closed y 1: open			
DF	Mean X - Y:	Paired t value	Prob. tl-tail):
9	.09	3.16	.0057

Table 4

Chi-Square for Incorporation of Input in Discourse		
One Group Chi-Square x 1: closed y 1: open		
DF:	Chi-Square:	Probability:
9	553.65	.0001

The preceding two tables support both hypotheses 1a and 1b, that closed tasks will produce more complex speech with more attention paid to the input. Next we will focus on hypothesis 2, that there will be no difference in accuracy or target-like usage across tasks. Two structures were analyzed for TLU; the *a personal* and the subjunctive, both of which are taught in first year courses (see Manheimer 1991 and Azevedo 1978), and both of which have been noted to be difficult for second language learners.

There is a great deal of variation in use of these structures across dyads. Dyad 5 accounts for 11 of the 34 total occurrences (32%) of the subjunctive in the open tasks. Also, dyad 1 accounts for 17 of the 60 occurrences (28%) of the *a personal* in the open task. As can be seen by the standard deviations in tables 5 and 6, there is much more variation in the open task than in the closed. There is also a greater frequency of the TLU structures in the open tasks. The data in these tables was gathered before collapsing the longer tasks which was done for the measurement of incorporation of input. If collapsed, the differences would be even greater.

Table 5

Subjunctive TLU								
Dyad	open correct	open indicative	open overuse	open TLU	closed correct	closed indicative	closed overuse	closed TLU
1	0	6	0		0	2	0	
2	0	1	0		2	2	0	
3	0	0	0		0	0	0	
4	0	1	0		0	2	0	
5	5	5	1		2	1	0	
6	0	2	0		0	3	0	
7	2	1	0		1	0	1	
8	1	2	1		0	0	0	
9	0	1	0		0	3	0	
10	2	3	0		2	1	0	
Totals	10	22	2	29%	7	14	1	32%
means	1.00	2.20	0.20		0.70	1.40	0.10	
sd	1.63	1.93	0.42		0.95	1.17	0.32	

As can be seen in the preceding table, differences in TLU between the tasks is minimal. There is much greater variation within task. The descriptive statistics show a slight advantage for the closed condition, but this difference is so small that it can be considered negligible. Also, as can be seen in table 6, the TLU of the *a personal*, this slight advantage is easily shifted in the open task.

Table 6

A Personal TLU								
Dyad	open correct	open without	open overuse	TLU open	closed correct	closed without	closed overuse	TLU closed
1	14	1	2		2	3	0	
2	3	4	0		4	1	0	
3	3	0	0		1	0	0	
4	0	0	0		2	0	0	
5	2	1	0		3	2	0	
6	3	2	0		1	1	0	
7	4	3	0		3	1	0	
8	6	2	0		4	0	2	
9	2	0	1		1	1	1	
10	7	0	0		4	0	0	
totals	44	13	3	73%	25	9	3	68%
means	4.40	1.30	0.30		2.30	0.90	0.30	
sd	3.92	1.42	0.67		1.37	0.99	0.67	

The preceding data support hypotheses 2a and 2b, that accuracy will not significantly differ between task types. The logic behind this is straightforward: a learner's interlanguage is fairly stable. Therefore, in two situations where the learner does not have greater time to monitor or plan her speech for one of the conversations, the accuracy of the interlanguage should remain fairly even.

DISCUSSION

This study has given some evidence that closed tasks lead to more complex speech without compromising accuracy. This is not due to the fact that closed tasks are inherently better, but probably because they restrict the learners' ability to find easy ways of performing the task, and therefore the learners work towards the upper end of their capabilities. The closed tasks, therefore, have less variation than the open tasks. This can be seen in incorporation of input into conversation, where the closed task outperformed the open in nine of ten cases, with one of the dyads in the open version having no incorporation at all. The same can be said of speech complexity. The students were all capable of complex speech, but they were more likely to be lazy in the open tasks, where the task did not demand more complex structures. The open tasks, due to their openness, allowed the students a great deal of flexibility in how they solved the problem and how long they took in doing so. This

allowed the students to perform with no need for being precise and accurate. Whereas the closed task required reviewing all of the evidence and clues in order to converge, the open task strictly asked for opinions. A good example of these points can be seen in the conversations of dyad 2. This dyad performed the closed task on day one, and it is worth examining how they began their two conversations.

S1: ¿Qué piensas? ¿Quién puede ser aquí? El que... ¿del equipo femenino de vólibol? ¿Su novio?

S2: Estoy prácticamente perdido.

S1: Yo también

S2: Este describe un alumno graduado de Corea que sacó una nota D, ¿verdad? en su clase de inglés ciento o cien y tiene miedo de que su padre lo sepa, ¿verdad? (reads input aloud)... Antes de medianoche y esto pasó después entre ¿cuándo?...

S1: Hubo un asesinato en la Universidad de Hawaii. Alguien mató a un profesor entre las doce... ¿Dónde fue matado el asesino el profesor? No fue en la discoteca, ¿verdad?

S2: No sé

S1: No se sabe.

This passage shows comprehension checks (¿verdad?), exploration of details, recycling of the input, and asking the other for exact information. The open task, on the other hand, does not show these features.

S1: ¿Qué piensas?

S2: Yo escogería a esta persona que ulnn es almno de bioquímica.

S1: Trabaja en el, oh sí.

S2: Hace investigaciones.

S1: ¿Por qué?

S2: Bueno, yo lo escogí porque los demás, parece que todos están metidos en alguna algún pleito o algo así.

S1: Sí, pero eso ese también.

S2: ¿Para decirles qué?

S1: ¿Para decir? Lo que hacen y lo que dicen del gobierno chino.

S2: Bueno. OK.

This passage has 10 turns and the closed passage 6, yet this passage shows no comprehension checks, and very little detail or recycling of the input. The only turn showing these characteristics is seen in S2's asking "¿Para decirles qué?", and this clarification check is most likely due to his reading the slip about the student that they were discussing. This group finished the open task very quickly (267 words versus 698 words for the closed task), and there was little argument between the students.

The open tasks also allowed for drifting from the topic. This can be seen in the near monologue in dyad 5's open task.

S1: No sé en realidad. Para mi no es correcto no es bien a decidir una persona que pueda vivir y los otras que tengan que morir porque una persona y otras personas son iguales.

S2: Y las vidas de todas son

S1: No importa si alguien es presidente o si es un pobre, son o somos seres humanos.

S2: Yo estoy de acuerdo también, pero pienso que en esta situación tenemos que escoger algo que o alguien que tiene la vida más importante.

S1: No, no creo así. Uhm si hay alguien que que que no ha vivido una vida saludable o ha sido un criminal algún tiempo, no quiere que no quiere decir que es una persona mal y que no tiene que no tenga derecho a vivir.

The first speaker continued to speak about her personal viewpoints, and the dyad did not complete the task. The speech here was complex in terms of s-nodes per t-unit, but the task became a near monologue of the first speaker's opinions while the second continuously tried but failed to bring her partner back to the task at hand.

Regarding target-like usage, or accuracy, Rankin states that the hypothesis that one's accuracy would diminish is not congruent with the psycholinguistic literature on this topic (Rankin 1990, p. 18). Also congruent with SLA research and Crookes' 1989 findings in particular, one cannot expect a learner's interlanguage to greatly vary in similar condition. The accuracy of the two structures examined were similar

for tasks, with 73% TLU of the *a personal* in the open version narrowly outperforming the 68% TLU of the closed version. On the other hand, the closed task narrowly outperformed the open task in TLU of the subjunctive 32% to 29%. These differences are too small to appear important. However, it is interesting to note that in these two tasks the *a personal* was used almost twice as often in the open tasks as in the closed task (60 occurrences to 37). According to Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1990), this would be a desirable feature of the open task.

The other phenomenon examined was attention to the input or text. Some people may see this as being of secondary importance, or even as a negative aspect of the tasks in that they would be interested in their students producing language on their own instead of repeating someone else's words. However, if SLA theorists like Schmidt (1990) are correct, paying attention to the input makes it easier for the learner to convert input into intake (what the learner notices), and this intake is what is needed to push a learner to the next stage of acquisition. Both tasks had the students read the input, but in all of the dyads except one, the closed version produced more than twice as many cases of reading the input aloud or repetition of a string of four or more words from the input. The totals showed three times as many incorporations in the closed tasks as in the open, and, as is seen in the passage from dyad five's open task (see above), the open task allows for the students to virtually pay no attention to the input. This dyad had 27 incorporations in the closed task versus two in the open.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support Long's proposal and are broadly consistent with Rankin's 1990 results. The closed task forced the students to perform at a higher level than did the open task, and it led to more attention to detail and to the input. At the same time, there were no disadvantages associated with a lessening of target-like usage. In fact, the target-like usage was quite stable across task type. These results are by no means conclusive, and only represent a small study. There are still many unanswered questions, such as how proficiency level affects task type. If the input comes in other forms (i.e. spoken, visual, etc.), would there be the same text dependency? Will there be even more advantages found using two-way closed tasks than two-way open tasks?

Obviously, there is still a great deal of research to be done on this topic, but the preliminary results provide a clear indication that closed tasks can be a valuable part of a foreign or second language curriculum. Language teachers and material designers must now develop pedagogical tasks that will focus the learners' attention on life-like tasks and in so doing, have them notice and produce lexical items and grammatical structures which they are ready to learn. This focusing will allow the learners to spend more time hearing, noticing, using, and learning the target forms.

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Appendix A: Open task

Estas cinco personas están en un avión que va a chocar y solamente hay un paracaídas. Tienen que decidir a quién van a dar el paracaídas.

Es un alumno graduado de Corea y tiene muchos problemas con el inglés.

Su mujer, que todavía está en Corea, acaba de llamarle para decirle que ha nacido su primer hijo.

Al volver a Corea, probablemente tendrá un trabajo importante en el gobierno.

Trabaja hasta tarde cada noche para estar al día en sus clases, y la mayoría de sus profesores están contentos con el.

Hace semanas que ni escribe ni llama a su mujer —tiene una novia.

Siendo un alumno graduado de bioquímica, trabaja haciendo investigaciones.

Este es su segundo semestre aquí en Hawai, lejos de su casa en Beijing.

Su novia acaba de escribirle para decirle que no le puede esperar y que quiere casarse con otro.

El gobierno chino le paga para decirles lo que hacen otros alumnos chinos.

Empieza a sentirse culpable por su trabajo para el gobierno.

Ella trabaja en el laboratorio de química, ganando el dinero para pagar sus estudios.

Le faltan pocas semanas para graduarse - con honores.

A veces, para ganar más dinero, vende drogas ilegales.

A su madre se le han diagnosticado cáncer, y tiene que volver a casa para ayudarle.

Debido a esto, hace meses que está deprimida.

Es de Maui y es muy buen surfista.

Acaba de prometerse con su novia de su pueblo.

Juega en el equipo de fútbol de U.H. - el año pasado fue el MVP.

A menudo hace trampas en los exámenes para poder seguir en el equipo.

Odia a los japoneses - piensa que compran demasiado de Hawaii.

Ella juega en el equipo femenino de vóleybol.

Tiene dos becas, una de deportes y una académica.

Es entrenadora voluntaria en un instituto cercano.

La próxima semana su familia viene de California para verle jugar.

Dijo algunas mentiras sobre otra jugadora al entrenador para estar segura que jugaría mucho cuando sus padres estén aquí.

Appendiz B: Closed task

Hubo un asesinato en la universidad de Hawaii. Alguien mató a un profesor de inglés 100 (inglés avanzado para extranjeros) entre las doce de la noche y las dos de la madrugada. ¿Quién es el asesino?

Es un alumno graduado de la China haciendo investigaciones sobre el cáncer.

Está nervioso viviendo aquí en una ciudad grande, y compró una pistola para protegerse.

Está muy deprimido - acaba de saber que suspendió inglés 100 y perdió su trabajo.

Dice que estuvo toda aquella noche en un bar tomando copas con un amigo que también es sospechoso.

Después de las once y media, salió de su laboratorio del campus para ir al bar.

Escribe para Ka Leo, y trabajó hasta tarde aquella noche en la universidad.

Está enfadado—su mejor amigo, un estudiante graduado chino, acaba de suspender inglés 100.

Dice que salió del edificio de Ka Leo entre las once y doce de la noche y pasó toda la noche en un bar con el amigo que suspendió la clase.

Hace poco compró una pistola en una armería local para defensa personal.

Vio a alguien salir corriendo del laboratorio de químicas a las doce menos veinticinco de la noche.

Trabaja en un laboratorio de química, y normalmente trabaja hasta tarde por las noches.

Dice que fue a una discoteca para bailar con dos de los cuatro sospechosos desde las doce menos cuarto hasta las tres de la mañana.

Despidieron a su novio (un alumno graduado de la China) porque estudiaba demasiado en el trabajo.

El novio acaba de saber que ha suspendido inglés y estaba tan deprimido que rompió con ella.

Se encontró con sus amigos cerca del campus center a las doce menos veinte para salir.

Es un alumno graduado de Corea, hijo de un hombre de negocios importante y está aquí para mejorar su inglés.

La única nota "D" que lia recibido en su vida fue en la clase de inglés 100, y tiene miedo que cuando su padre lo sepa estará muy enojado.

Dice que llegó a una discoteca con dos otros sospechosos un poco antes de medianoche.

Estuvo en el club un poco más de una hora y entonces fue a casa con su novia.

Vio a dos hombres, quizás sospechosos, saliendo de la universidad a las doce menos veinte.

Juega en el equipo femenino de vóleibol.

Ella y su novio nuevo, un alumno graduado de Corea, fueron a bailar con otro de los cuatro sospechosos entre las once y media y las doce.

Después de bailar, ella y su novio coreano se marcharon a la una y volvieron a la casa de él para la noche.

Normalmente lleva una pistola en su bolso pero la mañana después del asesinato había desaparecido.

No le gustan las clases de inglés para extranjeros porque su novio tiene que pasar todo el tiempo en el laboratorio de lenguas escuchando las cintas.