

DOES RETELLING TECHNIQUE IMPROVE SPEAKING FLUENCY?

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Abstract: This paper is based on a study on speaking fluency performed by six low level students using retelling technique. The aim of the study is to find out the effect of retelling on the students' speaking fluency and to know the strategies used by those students while retelling a story. The data were the speaking transcripts which were analyzed to see the progress after six-time treatment was given. The result reveals that the speaking fluency of the students increased in some areas as shown by the improvement on their vocabulary and comprehensibility.

Key words: fluency, speaking, retelling, low level students

Learning a new language is both an autonomous process and a collaborative one. It is autonomous when a learner learns independently, while it is collaborative when learners and a teacher work together. Lindsay and Knight (2006) point out that the language learning process itself can be divided into five stages:

Input → Noticing → Recognizing Patterns and Rule Making → Use and Rule modification → Automating.

Lindsay and Knight (2006) further explain that input of the target language is essential for learners; it can be an exposure to the language in either oral or written forms, in formal or informal settings. The next stage is noticing in which learners become aware of the language to which they are exposed. Teacher's role in helping learners know the gap in their learning is

also countable in this process. Once learners have the capability of noticing the rule patterns of the target language, they will start to apply their knowledge in writing or speaking activities. At a certain point learners will begin to use the target language intuitively more like the way they use their first language (L1). At this stage, the target language has been stored in their memory so that it is immediately accessible and remains there.

Though individuals have similar process of learning a language, they have different capability of processing the input they get. Students in one class have different abilities in absorbing the knowledge as well as in performing the competencies in the target language. Therefore, teacher often finds a number of students who have low proficiencies in producing the target language they are learning.

Normally, in the English Language Teaching program in Indonesian universities/colleges, the students are trained to be English teachers at elementary to senior high school levels. This means being proficient in English is important as they will be role models for their future students. Therefore, in the first up to the fourth semesters, the students must take some micro skill courses such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. These courses are the pre-requisites before they take the higher level courses.

Knowing that being able to produce both spoken and written English fluently and accurately is important for future English teachers, we decided to focus on students who have low proficiency in English. Speaking class was considered an appropriate class to conduct the study as we could categorize students into different levels based on their performance. The students or respondents in this study were those who had joined Speaking I to Speaking III classes and were taught by the same lecturer. Their ability in producing spoken English was considered 'low' though they had joined the speaking classes. The term 'low' in this case means that when the students were asked to speak there were problems: there were pauses, unnatural speech patterns which were difficult to listen to, incorrect pronunciations and sentence structures, and lack of vocabulary.

One of the goals in an EFL Speaking class is improving students' communicative skill so they can express themselves using the target language appropriately based on its social and cultural contexts. In order to achieve the goals teachers apply different teaching techniques in the classroom. Yet, it is widely known that no best single method or technique to apply in the teaching and learning process; the choice of methods depends on the types of learners, learners' motivation in learning new language, learners' attitudes towards language learning and so on.

Storytelling technique has been known as one of teaching activities in second or foreign language classes. One of the reasons is because it relies so much on words, offering a major and constant source of language experience for children (Wright, 1995 in Xu, 2007). In addition, stories themselves can be considered language treasures to use as models of language for students of different levels and ages.

Kalmbach (1986) in Stoicovy (2004) states that retelling is a process of re-memorizing what we listened to and read. Further, Stoicovy states that in relation to language teaching, retelling technique can be used as a way to promote students' comprehension and understanding of discourse.

Stoicovy (2004) also points out that based on several studies, retelling has positive influence in language learning as it promotes students' ability in rearranging information from the text that they have read. In addition, Brown & Cambourne (1987) mention that during the retelling process students apply and develop their language knowledge through the internalization of the texts' features.

Retelling helps teachers identify the level of students' comprehension of what they listen to or read. In addition retelling is a common way that many people use as part of their communication. To overcome the difficulty in using the target language, telling stories is one of the recommended techniques which can help language learners in improving his knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation. Moreover stories provide various topics for learners to begin a conversation with others (Deacon and Murphey, 2001).

Based on the arguments for the positive influence of retelling in language learning, we decided to see the influence of retelling of students' fluency by conducting this study. The students here were students whose language proficiency was categorized as 'Low'.

METHOD

The research subjects were six English students in a remedial class. The students were placed in this class because they had some speaking problems.

We made use of an English reading text to gain some data in this study. The subjects were required to read a story and then retold it. Their speech was recorded and transcribed. Additionally, a questionnaire was used to support the data found in the transcripts. The questionnaire basically elicited the students' strategies in pre and while 'Retelling'.

To collect the data, we provided the subjects a short reading text to retell. First, each subject read the text for 30 minutes. Then, they had a few minutes to get prepared before retelling the text on their own. While retelling, each subject's speech was recorded. This recording was then transcribed and analyzed to figure out the speaking fluency level and the subjects' comprehension of the text. The last step was to give a questionnaire to all of the subjects to discover the use of speaking strategies in the retelling process.

We gave a total of six reading texts when we conducted the treatments. The procedure of retelling in the treatment period was similar to that in the pre-test and the post-test. The data were analyzed by calculating the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test. After the result was obtained, we used a test of correlation. It was used to find out whether the retelling technique affected the students' speaking fluency significantly.

Two raters did the scoring of the tests in order to achieve inter-rater reliability. Moreover, the data from the questionnaire were also analyzed to figure out the speaking strategies applied during the process of retelling the story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the pre- and post-tests were given, we had the overall scores of retelling performed by the participants along with the calculation of the mean scores.

Table 1. Overall Scores of Pre-Test and Post-test

Pre-Test				Post-test			
Scorer 1	Scorer 2	Mean	Conversion	Scorer 1	Scorer 2	Mean	Conversion
30	17	23.5	D	57	52	54.5	C
17	17	17	E	52	57	54.5	C
17	17	17	E	44	52	48	C
52	43	47.5	C	65	57	61	C
30	17	23.5	D	39	52	45.5	C
9	9	9	E	39	48	43.5	C

Data Analysis

We arrange the data into a table which shows the number and the letter conversion. This is to show whether the retelling techniques given during the treatment gave a significant effect to the participants' speaking fluency.

Table 2 contains of the percentage of the participants' speaking score in the pre-test. It shows that 16.7% of the participants were good at retelling the story. This was proven by 'C', meaning good enough when we converted it into the rubric of assessment. The other participants with the percentages of 33.3% and 50% obtained 'D' and 'E' respectively.

Table 2. The Percentage of the Pre-test

Conversion letter	Frequency	Percentage
A+	0	0
A	0	0
A-	0	0
B+	0	0
B	0	0
B-	0	0
C+	0	0
C	1	16.7%
C-	0	0
D+	0	0
D	0	0
D-	2	33.3%
E	3	50%
Total		100%

Table 3 comprises the percentage of the participants' speaking scores in the post-test. It shows that there was an increase in the participants' fluency in retelling the story. 16.7% of the participants were better at retelling the story compared to the pre-test. In addition, no participants in the post-test obtained 'D' or 'E'.

Table 3. The Percentage of the Post-test

Conversion letter	Frequency	Percentage
A+	0	0
A	0	0
A-	0	0
B+	0	0
B	0	0
B-	0	0
C+	1	16.7%
C	4	66.6%
C-	1	16.7%
D+	0	0

Table continued

D	0	0
D-	0	0
E	0	0
Total		100%

From the scores of the pre- and post-tests, we ran a t-test to see whether significant difference exists in this study. The calculation shows that the t-test value was statistically greater than the t-table value. We came up with the final conclusion that the retelling technique given during the treatment period had a significant effect on the participants' English speaking fluency.

Some aspects in speaking will be discussed in accordance with the participants' progress in retelling the story. The first criterion is comprehensibility. In the pre-test, for example, the sixth participant misunderstood the story. Instead of saying "*He was not very happy*", she said "*He was very happy*". This was fatal, for it changed the content of the story. However, the implementation of retelling technique could reduce the mistake. This was apparent in the transcript of the post test done by the first subject. In the pre-test, the subject could only deal with less than 80% of the whole story, whereas, in the post-test, he was able to finish the story.

Vocabulary is also of importance. This aspect became a consideration when the participants' speaking fluency was assessed. The increase on vocabulary can be seen clearly as all participants showed good progress in retelling the story. Some participants have successfully applied words different from the original text but had similar implied meanings. The following is an example:

They the turtle see many *new things*.

The phrase *new things* was used by the fourth subject to replace the phrase in the sentence "You can see mountains, oceans, and cities-all the things you want to see."

Generally, the strategies used by the participants in retelling a story began with rewriting the text by deleting some unknown words, then memorizing it. When they had trouble recalling the words in their draft, they tried to continue the story in some ways: by skipping the forgotten words, or trying to speak in a halting manner. We argue that what they have implemented is part of strategic competence that they use to negotiate the content of the story. This is in line with the definition of strategic competence as the ability to use strategies such as paraphrasing, repetition, avoidance of the unfamiliar words or terms, and word guessing (Savignon, 1997).

From the abovementioned discussion, we come up with a conclusion that the research subjects or the participants have applied various strategies in the retelling process and those strategies are able to help them speak fluently.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research findings, we draw some conclusions as follows. Retelling is considered a technique which can be applied to improve students' speaking fluency. This is indicated a number of statistical data, First, all of the participants produced higher scores in the post-test than those in the pre-test. Second, before the participants used the technique of retelling, the mean score was 22.9, and after the treatment was given to the participants, the main score was 51.17. Third, the t-score was 7.77. This score was higher than the t-table, 2.571. This shows that the treatment given to the participants affects their speaking fluency significantly. In addition, the study revealed some findings regarding the remedial students' retelling. First, before retelling a story in English, the students made some notes in which there were a list of words, phrases, or simple sentences used as a speaking guide. Secondly, there was a tendency of avoiding unfamiliar words in the texts; instead, they preferred using their own words. Additionally, from the transcripts, it is seen that that strategy was frequently used in retelling the stories.

In accordance with the previous conclusions, we suggest some points for the improvement of speaking fluency quality of English students. First, speaking lecturers are expected to implement the retelling technique more often than usual in order to develop students' speaking fluency. Second, the students themselves need to actively collect short stories to retell in or outside the class. This is advised to be done in pairs or groups. The last suggestion is for researchers to carry out further research that may study the aspect of techniques or methods on students' speaking fluency. Further studies should involve a bigger number of research subjects, be carried out in a longer time frame and consider the length of the text as well as the proficiency level in order that the more valid and generalizable findings can be gained.

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