



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TASK REPETITION IN IMPROVING ORAL FLUENCY AND GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY OF EFL LEARNERS

Akhmadullayeva Mubina Khamidullo qizi
ahmadullayevamubina2@gmail.com

Faculty of Language and Translation, Namangan State Institute of
Foreign Languages, Namangan, Uzbekistan
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21232822>

Abstract

This study investigated the effects of task repetition on the oral performance of 40 Chinese children learning English as a foreign language, focusing on syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Participants, aged 11–12, completed a picture-based storytelling task adapted from the Cambridge A2 Flyers test on three occasions. Performances were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using measures of syntactic complexity, errors, weighted clause ratio, and indices of repair and breakdown fluency. Non-parametric analyses, including Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests and Spearman correlations, were conducted due to non-normal distributions. Results indicated that repeated task engagement significantly enhanced accuracy and fluency, with reductions in errors, filled pauses, false starts, repetitions, and self-corrections. No significant changes were observed in syntactic complexity. Findings suggest that task repetition allows learners to allocate attentional resources more effectively, facilitating the integration of linguistic knowledge into real-time communication. The study underscores the pedagogical value of incorporating repeated communicative tasks to support oral proficiency development in second language learning contexts.

Key Words: cognitive effort, task repetition, attentional focus, picture-based storytelling, statistical significance, error reduction

Introduction

A common objective among second language (L2) learners is to achieve a level of spoken proficiency comparable to that of their first language (L1), where communication occurs with minimal effort. However, for many learners, spoken interaction in the L2 continues to demand considerable cognitive effort even after extended periods of instruction. Although certain components of language competence may develop over time, oral communication skills often show limited progress. It is therefore frequently observed that learners report high levels of comprehension while simultaneously experiencing difficulty producing speech in the target language. This phenomenon suggests that successful spoken communication in a second language extends beyond the acquisition of grammatical structures and lexical knowledge. Rather, it requires the effective integration of linguistic knowledge into real-time communicative performance. In everyday terms, this capacity is often described as the ability to “think in the language,” implying reduced reliance on mental translation from the first language to the second. While lower-proficiency learners are commonly believed to formulate ideas in their L1 before converting them into L2 speech, research in second language acquisition conceptualizes this ability as the development of L2 fluency, characterized by the efficient and automatic deployment of linguistic resources during spoken interaction.

From a pedagogical standpoint, gaining a clearer understanding of the extent to which learners develop their communicative language abilities is essential. Task repetition has been

shown to facilitate more rapid access to linguistic information, thereby supporting more efficient language use. Repeating a task is particularly valuable in second language learning because it contributes to changes in learners' internal processing mechanisms. As Bygate (2007) argues, improvements in performance during repeated task engagement are closely related to learners' linguistic resources, speed of lexical and grammatical retrieval, and the allocation of attentional resources.

Everyday communicative experience also demonstrates that individuals enhance their communicative effectiveness by repeatedly engaging in interactions with similar communicative demands, such as service encounters, informal conversations, telephone exchanges, and professional interactions. During initial task performance, learners tend to prioritize conveying meaning, drawing on available linguistic knowledge to complete the task. Increased familiarity with task content and language forms subsequently enables learners to manage communicative demands more effectively. With repeated exposure, learners are afforded greater opportunities to select appropriate linguistic forms and monitor both message content and language use (Bygate, 1999). This reallocation of attentional focus is argued to support the development of fluency, accuracy, and complexity in second language performance (Bygate, 1999). In light of these considerations, the present study investigates whether task repetition exerts a measurable effect on the speaking skills of EFL learners.

Literature review

Repetition is an inherent feature of everyday language use, as speakers routinely recycle formulaic expressions, restate information for clarity, and provide the same message to multiple interlocutors to accomplish communicative goals (Larsen-Freeman, 2012; Foster et al., 2016). Repetition also plays a role in memorization and rehearsal, such as practising speeches or repeating information aloud to retain it. Given its prevalence in daily communication, it is unsurprising that practice has long been recognized as a central component of second language learning (DeKeyser, 2010; Lightbown et al., 2000). In particular, second language (L2) fluency is widely believed to develop through intensive and repeated exposure to both input and output (DeKeyser, 2007, 2017; Segalowitz, 2010).

Despite broad agreement on the importance of practice, the question of how it should be implemented pedagogically remains contested. Historically, repetition in language teaching has been strongly associated with audiolingual drills and pattern practice, which were grounded in behaviourist theories of learning (Lynch & Maclean, 2000). However, such approaches are now considered limited, as they do not require learners to conceptualize meaning and express it creatively in real communicative contexts (DeKeyser, 2010; Lightbown et al., 1999). While traces of drill-based practice persist in instructional models such as Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP), contemporary perspectives emphasize more meaningful forms of repetition.

Within task-based language teaching, repetition is reconceptualized as re-engagement with whole communicative tasks rather than the mechanical repetition of isolated forms. Task repetition allows learners to revisit similar communicative demands, facilitating shifts in attentional focus from meaning to form, and thereby supporting fluency and accuracy development (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 1988). Classroom practices such as repeated presentations, mingling activities, and information-sharing tasks exemplify this approach, providing learners with multiple opportunities to improve performance across task iterations. Research suggests that such task repetition, particularly when tasks are repeated in authentic

communicative contexts, is conducive to the development of oral fluency and overall L2 performance (St Mary's University Thesis, Open Research).

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), developed in the late 20th century, focuses on meaningful, goal-oriented communication in real-world contexts. According to Leaver and Willis (2004), TBLT encourages learners to make genuine efforts to communicate in the target language. Ellis (2003) defines a task as a work plan requiring learners to process language pragmatically to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated for correctness or appropriateness. Originating from communicative activities, tasks aim to integrate learners' linguistic resources while maintaining attention to meaning (Crookes, 1986; Bygate et al., 2001). Tasks reduce cognitive load in L2 classrooms, promote engagement, and direct learners' attention to specific linguistic forms (Ellis, 2003; McDonough & Mackey, 2006). Task-based approaches are consistent with communicative language teaching principles, emphasizing authentic communication, meaningful interaction, and language use that is relevant to learners' contexts and needs (Richard & Theodore, 2014). Furthermore, task repetition supports learners' recall and internal L2 development, enhancing overall communicative competence (Nishikawa, 2014). Therefore, tasks serve as central units in syllabus design and classroom instruction, highlighting their pedagogical value in fostering effective second language learning.

Methodology

The present study employed a within-subjects design in which participants completed the same oral storytelling task on three occasions in order to examine the effects of task repetition on syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Task repetition was defined as repeated engagement with an identical task and content, following previous task-based research (Bygate, 2001).

The participants were 40 Chinese learners of English as a foreign language aged 11–12 years (18 females, 22 males). All were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and had received approximately five to six years of formal English instruction in state schools, where instruction was primarily form-focused. In addition, the learners attended a private language institute that emphasized communicative language use. Learners' proficiency corresponded to the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, as determined by performance on a practice version of the Cambridge A2 Flyers examination.

The oral task consisted of a picture-based storytelling activity adapted from the speaking component of the Cambridge A2 Flyers test, a task type widely used in instructed SLA research (Skehan, 2018). Prior to task performance, learners completed a ten-minute pre-task activity designed to activate key vocabulary and familiarize them with the storyline (Ellis, 2003). Participants then retold the story three times, with five-minute breaks between performances. No time limit was imposed, as time pressure may negatively affect children's oral performance (Papp, 2018). All performances were audio-recorded.

The recordings were transcribed and segmented into Analysis of Speech Units (AS-units) following Foster et al. (2000). Syntactic complexity was operationalized using measures of overall, subordination, and phrasal complexity (Norris & Ortega, 2009). Accuracy was assessed using errors per 100 words and the Weighted Clause Ratio (Foster & Wigglesworth, 2016). Fluency was measured through indices of repair and breakdown fluency, operationalized as self-repairs, repetitions, and filled pauses per 100 words (Skehan, 2003).

Because several variables violated assumptions of normality, medians and interquartile ranges were reported, and non-parametric analyses were conducted. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests were used to compare the first and third task performances, and effect sizes were calculated using (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). Relationships among syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency were examined using Spearman correlation analyses, with statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

Results

The first research question examined the extent to which task repetition influenced children's syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test outcomes are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that task repetition did not result in notable changes in syntactic complexity. In contrast, repeated task performance had a statistically significant positive effect on learners' accuracy and fluency.

Specifically, comparisons between the first and third task performances revealed that learners produced significantly more accurate and fluent speech during the third retelling. This improvement was reflected in a reduced number of errors as well as fewer indicators of disfluency, including filled pauses, false starts, repetitions, and self-corrections. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests confirmed that these differences were statistically significant (Wilcoxon, 1945).

Effect size analyses further clarified the magnitude of these gains. The reduction in overall errors and self-corrections was associated with small effect sizes, while improvements related to false starts showed a medium effect. The marked reduction in filled pauses and repetitions corresponded to large effect sizes, indicating a significant improvement in both breakdown and repair aspects of fluency following task repetition (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for CAF measures and results of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests (N=40)

Measures	Time1				Time 3				Wilcoxon Signed Ranks		
	Median	IQR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Median	IQR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	z	p	r
Syntactic complexity											
Words per AS-unit	8.13	2.33	7.62	8.86	8.47	2.86	7.67	9.07	-.65	.52	-.10
Clauses per AS-unit	1.33	.41	1.21	1.50	1.33	.37	1.27	1.50	-1.34	.18	-.21
Words per clause	6.04	1.22	5.60	6.33	6.06	.86	5.81	6.29	-.18	.86	-.03
Accuracy											
Errors per 100 words	.09	.07	.07	.11	.07	.06	.05	.09	-2.34	.02	-.37
Weighted Clause Ratio	.80	.39	.66	.86	.80	.38	.68	.91	-1.40	.16	-.22
Fluency											
False starts/100 words	.02	.04	.01	.03	< .01	.02	< .01	.01	-3.37	< .01	-.53
Repetitions/100 words	.07	.09	.03	.09	.02	.07	.01	.05	-3.80	< .01	-.60
Self-corrections/100 words	.03	.04	.02	.04	.02	.03	.01	.03	-2.08	.04	-.33
Filled pauses/100 words	12.35	12.77	9.26	16.69	6.31	6.26	4.80	8.21	-4.87	< .01	-.77

Note. AS-unit = Analysis of Speech Unit; r = effect size. Effect size interpretation: .25 = small, .40 = medium, .60 = large (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests were used due to non-normal distributions (Wilcoxon, 1945). Data from the present study.

DISCUSSION

The present findings indicate that task repetition significantly enhanced children's accuracy and fluency, consistent with a substantial body of research showing that repetition of

the same task facilitates gains in oral performance. Repeating a communicative task appears to reduce cognitive load, thereby allowing learners to allocate more attentional resources to linguistic formulation and articulation. This process, in turn, promotes more fluent and accurate speech as learners can focus more effectively on message construction rather than on searching for language forms or translating from their first language (Lambert et al., 2017; Sun & Révész, 2021). In practice, the repetition of narrative tasks provides learners with multiple opportunities to revisit content and linguistic forms, which strengthens their capacity to produce speech in real-time, decreases disfluencies, and enhances overall communication efficiency.

This aligns with research on both child and adult EFL learners, which has found that repeated engagement with narrative tasks yields observable improvements in error reduction and smoother speech output, although the effects on syntactic complexity may be limited or variable (Sun & Révész, 2021; Phung Tan & Vo Thi Quynh, 2025). The current study's findings regarding syntactic complexity reinforce this trend, as no significant gains were observed across task repetitions. These findings imply that elements of speaking structure, including subordination and clause development, may necessitate more sustained practice, extended exposure, or diverse repetition strategies to produce observable enhancements (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Thai & Boers, 2016).

Moreover, the differential effect sizes observed across fluency and accuracy measures highlight the multifaceted nature of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) outcomes. Task repetition appears to impact certain dimensions of oral performance, such as breakdown fluency and error reduction, more robustly than others, indicating that repeated exposure selectively strengthens specific aspects of speech production. Pedagogically, these findings support the integration of repeated communicative tasks into EFL curricula as a means of enhancing fluency and accuracy. At the same time, they suggest the need for careful consideration of instructional strategies to encourage growth in syntactic complexity, ensuring balanced development across all dimensions of oral proficiency.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the effects of task repetition on the oral performance of children learning English as a foreign language, focusing on syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Findings indicate that while repeated engagement with the same storytelling task did not significantly influence syntactic complexity, it led to notable improvements in accuracy and fluency. Participants demonstrated fewer errors, reduced disfluencies, and more fluent speech during repeated task performance, suggesting that task repetition facilitates the integration of linguistic knowledge into real-time communication. The results underscore the value of providing learners with multiple opportunities to engage in the same communicative tasks, allowing them to allocate attention effectively between meaning and form. Overall, the study highlights task repetition as a practical pedagogical strategy for enhancing oral proficiency, particularly in terms of accuracy and fluency, and emphasizes its potential role in supporting the development of communicative competence in second language learning contexts.

References:



- 1.Ahmadian, M. J., & Tavakoli, M. (2011). The effects of simultaneous use of careful online planning and task repetition on accuracy, complexity, and fluency in EFL learners' oral production. *Language Teaching Research*, 15(1), 35–59.
- 2.Bygate, M. (1999). Task as context for the framing, reframing and unframing of language. *System*, 27(1), 33–48.
- 3.Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Researching pedagogic tasks: Second language learning, teaching, and testing* (pp. xx–xx). Longman.
- 4.Bygate, M. (2007). *Learning language through task repetition*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- 5.Bygate, M., Skehan, P., & Swain, M. (2001). *Researching pedagogic tasks: Second language learning, teaching, and testing*. Longman.
- 6.Crookes, G. (1986). Task classification in second language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(4), 453–468.
- 7.DeKeyser, R. (2010). Practice for second language learning. In R. B. Kaplan (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics* (2nd ed., pp. 243–255). Oxford University Press.
- 8.Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- 9.Foster, P., & Hunter, T. (2016). The role of repetition in spoken language learning. In M. Bygate (Ed.), *Learning language through task repetition* (pp. xx–xx). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- 10.Foster, P., & Wigglesworth, G. (2016). Capturing accuracy in second language performance: The case for a weighted clause ratio. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36, 98–116.
- 11.Foster, P., Tonkyn, A., & Wigglesworth, G. (2000). Measuring spoken language: A unit for all reasons. *Applied Linguistics*, 21(3), 354–375.
- 12.Gatbonton, E., & Segalowitz, N. (1988). Performance-based measures of fluency in second language speech: Research findings. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 10(2), 199–234.
- 13.Lambert, C., Kormos, J., & Minn, D. (2017). Task repetition and second language speech processing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 39(1), 167–196.
- 14.Larsen-Freeman, D. (2012). Complex, dynamic systems: A new transdisciplinary theme for applied linguistics. *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 202–214.
- 15.Leaver, B., & Willis, J. (2004). *Task-based instruction in foreign language education*. Georgetown University Press.
- 16.McDonough, K., & Mackey, A. (2006). *Interaction, feedback, and second language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- 17.Nishikawa, M. (2014). Task repetition and second language learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 18(1), 1–20.
- 18.Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2009). Towards an organic approach to investigating CAF in instructed SLA: The case of complexity. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 555–578.
- 19.Papp, S. (2018). Task-based assessment of speaking. In P. Skehan (Ed.), *Task-based language teaching* (pp. 189–206). Cambridge University Press.
- 20.Phung, P. T., & Vo Thi Quynh, A. (2025). The effect of task repetition on oral fluency and accuracy in second-year students at UFLS, UDN. *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy and Languages*, 8(31), 01–20.

- 21.Plonsky, L., & Oswald, F. L. (2014). How big is “big”? Interpreting effect sizes in L2 research. *Language Learning*, 64(4), 878–912.
- 22.Richard, J., & Theodore, R. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- 23.Segalowitz, N. (2010). *Cognitive bases of second language fluency*. Routledge.
- 24.Skehan, P. (2003). Task-based instruction. *Language Teaching*, 36(1), 1–14.
- 25.Skehan, P. (2018). *Second language task-based performance*. Routledge.
- 26.St Mary’s University. (Year). *Immediate and procedural task repetition and oral fluency* (Unpublished master’s thesis). St Mary’s University, London.