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Original Articles

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**Impact of Retelling Task on English Learners' Speaking Performance:  
A Focus on Peer Evaluation, Target Grammar Use, and Paraphrasing**

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**【Abstract】**

This quasi-experimental study examines the effects of retelling practice on the speaking skills of Japanese learners of English, focusing on target grammar use and paraphrasing skills. Peer evaluation results revealed improvements in fluency and content criteria, whereas teacher evaluation results revealed no significant improvement. The number of times learners used the target grammar item (gerunds) increased from the first to the second retelling task, with the difference approaching significance. Most learners were able to use the grammar items twice, even in the first task. Learners' paraphrasing behavior differed between the first and second retelling tasks with qualitative differences noted. High-proficiency learners tended to use paraphrases more frequently and at the phrase level than low-proficiency learners who used paraphrasing at the word level.

**Key words:** peer evaluation, speaking, retelling, grammar, paraphrasing

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研究論文

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**再話課題が英語学習者のスピーキングパフォーマンスに与える影響：  
ピア評価、文法事項、パラフレーズの観点から**

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**【要 旨】**

本研究は、再話練習が日本人英語学習者のスピーキング力に与える影響を、ピア評価、ターゲット文法、パラフレーズに焦点を当てて検証した。ピア評価の結果からスピーキングの流暢さと内容の評価項目で向上が見られたが、教師評価においてはどの評価項目においてもスピーキングに向上は見られなかった。ターゲット文法項目である動名詞の使用回数については、再話練習前後で増加したが、その差は有意傾向にとどまった。その理由としては、学習者の多くが第1回の再話時ですでにターゲット文法を使用して再話を行っていたことが挙げられる。熟達度の高い学習者は句レベルでパラフレーズを多く使用していた一方、熟達度の低い学習者は単語レベルでのパラフレーズが見られた。

**キーワード：**ピア評価、スピーキング、再話、文法、パラフレーズ

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## 1. Introduction

Nurturing students' speaking skills has been the focus of English education in Japan. Teachers at lower and upper secondary schools in Japan tend to spend considerable time explaining target grammar items and providing grammar exercises in class (Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2016). Minimizing such instruction, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2017) recommends that teachers provide students with additional opportunities to use their learned grammar items in authentic communication activities so that they can use them in real life.

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), an integrated skills approach that incorporates listening, speaking, reading, and writing has become a new trend. It is an effective approach for developing students' communicative competence and their ability to use English to gain access to social, vocational, educational, and professional opportunities.

Among the various classroom activities aimed at enhancing language learners' speaking skills, retelling is a promising integrated task. Linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar must be learned through language activities to allow students to use them effectively in actual communication settings. Retelling can provide students with opportunities to use the learned grammar items and practice paraphrasing. This study aims to examine the practice effect of retelling tasks on EFL learners' speaking performance by focusing on the use of grammar and paraphrasing.

## 2. Literature Review

### 1) Retelling Tasks

Retelling enhances comprehension of text information (Gambrell et al., 1991; Wilson et al., 1985). In terms of language learning, retelling is an activity in which, a student reads a story and retells the story without referring to the text to a listener who does

not know the story (Ito, 2021). Retelling can be considered an authentic speaking task with several advantages for learning English. First, they can be an effective tool for understanding students' text comprehensibility and strengthening their acquired knowledge by allowing them to reproduce what they know (Hirai & Koizumi, 2009). Second, it is a suitable way for learners to produce the target language. Third, it can effectively encourage learners to use the target grammar items and phrases (Hirai & Koizumi, 2013). Instructors can easily provide context for learners to use the acquired vocabulary and grammar in their outputs. Fourth, it applies to learners at all proficiency levels. Instructors can select texts or modify their level of difficulty and length according to their English proficiency. Thus, the retelling task is a practical activity for language instructors as preparing texts suited to their students is relatively easy (Hirai, 2015; Koizumi & Hirai, 2012).

Several studies examined the effectiveness of retelling tasks for language skills. Nagasaki (2013) used a retelling task to improve junior high school learners' speaking skills by having students work on the retelling task to prepare them for a presentation. Nagasaki concluded that the retelling practice helped students acquire the target vocabulary and use it in the subsequent presentation. Lin (2010) used retelling activities to improve EFL university students' reading comprehension abilities. The results revealed that the retelling tasks significantly enhanced participants' reading comprehension and helped them discriminate between general and specific concepts.

### 2) Grammar Instruction in Speaking Practice

Grammatical knowledge is essential and various opinions and methods of grammar instruction have been proposed. Grammar can be learned through explicit explanations, exercises, consciousness-raising

activities, and feedback (Nation & Newton, 2009). It is essential to provide learners with a clear target language structure while focusing on communication (Brown & Lee, 2015). Ellis (2006) mentioned that the distinction between input- and output-based grammar instruction is not necessary because learners may produce target grammar in their minds while receiving input-based grammar in practice.

Moeen et al. (2019) investigated the impact of grammar teaching using both implicit and explicit approaches; they applied the scaffolding technique to the EFL learners' speaking abilities. The learners were divided into three groups: (1) a group that received implicit grammar instruction; (2) a group that was instructed using the explicit grammar approach; and (3) a control group that did not receive any grammar instruction. The instruction lasted for one semester and all participants took pre- and post-speaking tests. Participants' speaking abilities, including accuracy, fluency, and complexity, were analyzed and compared across all groups. In their study, implicit instruction was significantly more effective in improving fluency.

There are various grammatical structures that learners need to learn. Kamiya (2020) argued that focusing on verbs is important because it is the chief part of speech and core of sentence structure. Its use in the form of infinitives and gerunds has been the focus of previous studies on teaching gerunds, and the infinitive distinction is a problematic area in EFL/ESL instruction (Schwartz & Causarano, 2007).

### **3) Paraphrasing**

Speakers use paraphrasing skills for conversation modification, and to provide comprehensible input to others when they notice that the listener is not understanding them (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Language learners use paraphrasing as a speaking strategy. If they cannot remember vocabulary immediately, they often paraphrase it using a lexical item

with a similar meaning, or describe the concept in words (Fulcher, 2003). Paraphrasing practice is an effective classroom activity and a productive exercise that requires high-level cognitive ability to comprehend and linguistic capability to express ideas without copying the original model (McLeod, 2020).

Studies on learners' paraphrasing skills in L2 have mostly focused on writing. Kamimura (2019) targeted Japanese university EFL students and compared written summaries of a narrative in cases where participants referred to or did not refer to the original text. The results revealed that, when students referred to the original text, they produced detailed summaries of long and syntactically complex sentences; and students who wrote concise summaries with less complex sentences focused on the chief idea units, although they produced extensive paraphrasing. Thus, teachers may select the condition based on the type of summary they require from students, because the summary writing quality would differ between the participants' reference and non-reference to the original text. Karbalei and Amoli (2011) focused on the effect of paraphrasing strategy training on the reading comprehension of ESL university students. They provided instructions to improve learners' paraphrasing skills and found that paraphrasing training was effective in improving their reading comprehension. Paraphrasing requires a high level of linguistic skill, and different conditions may promote different summary writing skills. Learners can paraphrase effectively when their anxiety levels are low.

### **4) Peer Evaluation of Speaking Skills**

Self-assessment and peer assessment have been recognized as important evaluation methods in the classroom, because performance assessment takes much more time than listening and reading assessments (Joo, 2016; Koizumi, 2022). Most studies use the terms "assessment" and "evaluation" interchangeably.

eably (Cheng & Warren, 2005).

Peer evaluation helps learners to enhance their autonomy and provides various types of feedback. Consequently, it facilitates learning processes and positively affects learners' speaking skills (White, 2009). According to Au and Bardakçi (2020), students who received teacher and peer feedback significantly improved oral performance compared with when they did not receive any feedback. Karpovich et al. (2021) reported the specific effects of peer assessment on speech performance. They conducted a study using mixed methods and concluded that the use of monologue speaking tasks paired with peer interaction and feedback helped EFL learners improve their speaking skills.

In addition to the positive impact on students' speaking skills, many scholars emphasize that encouraging student involvement in the assessment process helps teachers decrease their feedback time and increase the quality and quantity of comments (e.g., Ballantyne, et al., 2002; Topping, et al., 2000). However, as a disadvantage, students may not prefer peer evaluation because of the potential bias caused by peer pressure; or may lack the ability to evaluate each other (White, 2009). Cheng and Warren (2005) investigated the reliability and benefits of incorporating peer assessment into English language programs. They focused on students' attitudes toward peer speaking evaluation and reported that they were unsure about the aspects of English proficiency because they considered their linguistic skills to be insufficient for evaluating others.

Some studies have examined the compatibility of peer evaluation with teacher evaluation. Patri (2002) investigated the agreement between teacher, self-, and peer assessments. Results revealed that university students' peer assessments were comparable to those of teachers when assessment criteria were firmly set. However, other scholars have highlighted the inadequacy of peer evaluations. Cheng and Warren (2005)

found that students tended to mark within a narrower range than their teachers. They concluded that students and teachers had different marking behaviors and interpretations of oral and written language proficiency.

Peer assessment is highly valued for classroom low-stakes testing, considering its benefits, despite its differences from teacher evaluation. Therefore, this quasi-experimental study used peer and teacher evaluations to examine the effects of retelling practice on learners' speaking skills, particularly their target grammar use and paraphrasing skills. This study is significant because few studies have focused on the practice effect of retelling tasks on learners' speaking performance. Moreover, practicing grammar and rephrasing during retelling tasks is a highly feasible classroom activity and the practical effects of this activity are worth examining.

This study addresses three research questions (RQs).

- RQ1. Does the retelling practice improve learners' speaking skills based on peer and teacher evaluations?
- RQ2. Does the retelling practice improve learners' target grammar use?
- RQ3. Does the retelling practice affect learners' paraphrasing skills?

### 3. Method

#### 1) Participants

A total of 44 first-year Japanese university students majoring in humanities and culture, social and international studies, or informatics participated in this study. The students took required English classes taught by the same instructor once a week in the second semester, and the experiment was conducted during class hours. They undertook a placement test developed by the university to which they belonged, which comprised reading and listening questions. The students were first divided

based on their majors and then placed in different classes based on their scores on the placement test, based on which proficiency levels ranged from CEFR A2 to B2. The students undertook the same English classes as required. They voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and provided written informed consent prior to data collection.

## 2) Materials

### (1) Retelling Speaking Test

In preparing stories for retelling, the gerund was selected as the target grammar. Gerund is one of the basic grammar items that Japanese students learn in junior high school and is a problematic area in EFL instruction (Schwartz & Causarano, 2007). The passage included four phrases that use a focused grammar item (i.e., the gerund), which were in bold and underlined in the story text to emphasize their grammatical expressions to the participants when reading the story and thus encourage them to use such phrases when retelling the story (see Appendix 1).

To counterbalance, two stories were prepared: Story A “Camel milk” and Story B “Taking violin lessons.” The gerunds used in Story A were *start selling*, *advise drinking*, *enjoys selling*, and *consider buying*. The gerunds used in Story B were *enjoyed taking*, *practice playing*, *stop taking*, and *start playing*. Half of the students read Story A and the remaining half read Story B. Table 1 presents the readability and vocabulary level of the passages. Their readabilities were set at the similar levels of approximately 6 FKGL and 70 FRE as measured by the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL) and Flesch

Reading Ease (FRE), respectively. The FKGL measures the readability of the text in line with the school grade level in the United States, while the FRE assesses the readability of texts based on the lengths of texts. Vocabulary level was measured using a CEFR-based Vocabulary Level Analyzer (CVLA) (ver. 2.0). The CVLA assigns CEFR levels to words based on the CEFR-J Wordlist (Tono, 2020). CVLA indicates that Story A is at A1.3 and Story B is at A2.1. The number of words in the passages ranged from 120 to 130. Thus, these stories were relatively easy for the participants' proficiency levels, which were CEFR A2 to B2.

The retelling speech test comprised two parts. The first part contained practice exercises for the target grammar items and the introduction of a story. A grammatical practice exercise is a translation task that uses gerunds. In the introduction, story and comprehension questions were provided. The second was a retelling task. Five keywords from the story were used in the retelling task.

### (2) Speaking Test Criteria

The evaluation scale for the speaking test comprised five criteria: (a) fluency; (b) target grammar; (c) grammar and expression (linguistic accuracy, except target grammar); (d) content; and (e) pronunciation (See Appendix 2). Each criterion had four levels (0, 2, 4, and 6), except (b), the target grammar, which had three levels (0, 2, and 4), because the focus is limited to the usage of the target grammar. For each criterion, the lowest possible score was 0.

**Table 1** Readability and Word Count of the Passages

	Readability		Vocabulary level	Word Count
	FKGL	FRE	CVLA	
Story A: “Camel milk”	5.2	72.7	A1.3	123
Story B: “Taking violin lessons”	6.7	69.9	A2.1	130

### (3) Procedure

The experiment was conducted in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) classrooms, where participants took a retelling test. Figure 1 illustrates the steps involved in the test. Before the retelling test, all students practiced retelling using the same procedure. During the practice session, the instructor explained the criteria for speaking tests, they worked on the retelling test, recorded their own speech, and evaluated their classmates' speech.

One week after the practice session, the participants participated in the experiment. In the first step, participants worked on grammar practice questions (see Appendix 1). In grammar practice, the test-takers were required to translate four Japanese sentences into English using the target grammar item, gerund. All sentences were translations of excerpts from the story. Thereafter, they were asked to check their answers by reviewing the story.

In the second step, they read the story silently for two minutes, during which the target grammar was included, and then read it aloud once. After the second reading, they read aloud the three comprehension questions and answered them orally. When answering the questions, they were able to refer to

the story and read aloud the parts related to the answers. By reading the questions aloud or answering them, the students had the chance to use the target expressions. In the third step, they were asked to retell as much of the story as they could in English for 1 minute and 40 seconds without looking at the story. To facilitate retelling, students were allowed to glance at five keywords presented on a sheet. All utterances were recorded. In the fourth step, they evaluated their classmates' speeches. The instructors divided the participants in pairs. They exchanged seats and listened to their partners' speeches recorded on their PCs. After completing the evaluation, they exchanged the evaluation sheets with each other. The instructor collected evaluation sheets after the experiment. In the final step, after one week, they worked on the same story-retelling and peer evaluation tasks. The same procedure was used for the first and second speaking tests.

### 3) Data Analyses

#### (1) Analyses of Peer and Teacher Evaluation

The students' peer evaluation data from the students were collected at the end of the experiment. Two Japanese English teachers rated the participants'

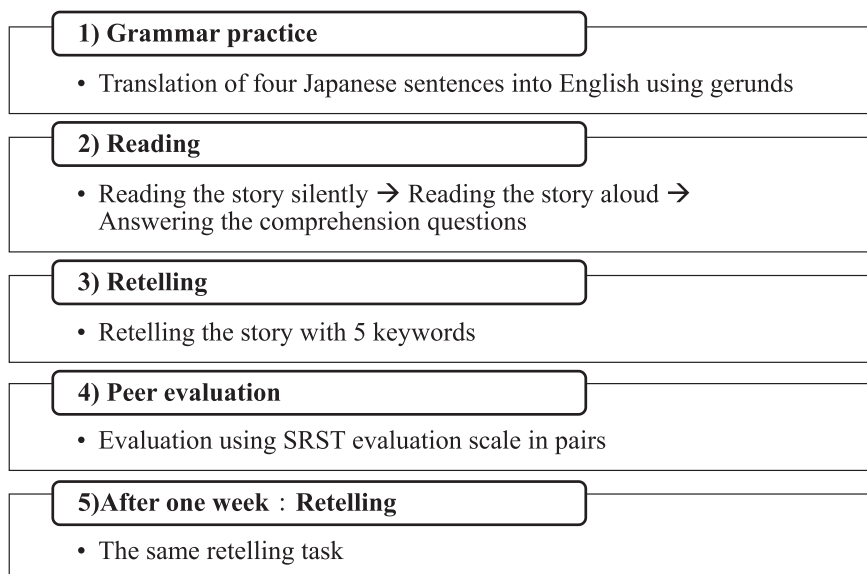


Figure 1. Experimental Procedure

utterances. One teacher, who had completed her PhD in linguistics and had five years of experience teaching English, conducted the experiment, and the other teacher had completed his Master's degree in linguistics and had two years of experience teaching English. They used the same evaluation scale as students. They rated five utterances randomly selected from the students' speeches and discussed and modified their ratings if substantial differences were noted. Thereafter, each of them rated half of the speeches individually, owing to time constraints.

To compare the differences between the first and second retelling tasks, a t-test was conducted on the levels of the five criteria, and the effect size was examined. The t-tests were conducted on the teacher and peer evaluation data.

## **(2) Analyses of Target Grammar Use**

We manually transcribed all learners' utterances. Using the transcripts of the speech, we analyzed the students' target grammar use with two analytical methods. First, as the quantitative method, we counted the number of times the target grammar items were correctly used in the first and second retelling tasks. Thereafter, the data on target grammar use were statistically compared using the Wilcoxon test and the effect size was examined. Second, the target grammar use was examined qualitatively. The way the participants used the target grammar was analyzed to identify any tendencies or characteristics. The focal points for the qualitative analysis include how target grammar use changed between the first and second retelling tasks and whether they used the target grammar differently from the original text.

## **(3) Analyses of Paraphrasing**

The paraphrasing analysis focused on two factors. The first was a comparison between the first and second tasks to determine whether there were any changes in their use of paraphrasing skills. The

second was a comparison of students with high and low scores. Using a qualitative analytical method, students' paraphrasing skills were examined by comparing their transcripts with the original text. If certain words and phrases were not used in the original text, they were highlighted and the list of paraphrased words or phrases was made. The words and phrases were examined to determine how the original text was paraphrased. All students' paraphrase use in the first and second retelling tasks was compared.

Next, the transcripts of the students who received high and low scores on the evaluations were thoroughly examined. This analysis aimed to determine qualitative similarities and differences in the paraphrasing of high- and low-scoring students, as paraphrasing requires a high level of linguistic ability (McLeod, 2020). The second analytical method compared the paraphrases observed in the utterances of ten high-scoring and ten low-scoring learners. The sum of the teacher and peer evaluation scores was calculated and ordered from the lowest to the highest scores. Students in the top 10 were categorized as high-proficiency students and those in the bottom 10 were categorized as low-proficiency students.

## **4. Results**

### **1) Teacher and Peer Evaluation**

Regarding teacher evaluation, the t-test results revealed no statistically significant differences between the first and second retelling tasks for all five criteria (see Table 2 and Figure 2). The peer evaluation result revealed a significant difference on the fluency criterion with a medium effect size ( $t[43] = -2.30$ ;  $p = 0.027$ ;  $d = 0.46$ ; see Table 3 and Figure 3). In the fluency criteria, the mean score of the first task was 3.46, which increased to 4.00 in the second task, suggesting that the students who evaluated their peers considered their peers' fluency to have improved. In peer evaluation, the scores for

**Table 2** Differences in Teacher Evaluation Score between the First and Second Speaking Tasks

	First time		Second time		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
(a) Fluency	3.73	1.26	3.59	1.53	0.57	.570	0.10
(b) Target grammar	2.88	1.59	2.98	1.41	-0.29	.772	0.01
(c) Grammar & expression	3.58	1.48	3.91	1.69	-1.02	.313	0.21
(d) Content	4.32	1.49	4.64	1.35	-1.36	.181	0.23
(e) Pronunciation	3.68	1.29	3.32	1.55	1.54	.132	0.25

**Table 3** Differences in Peer Evaluation Score between the First and Second Speaking Tasks

	First time		Second time		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
(a) Fluency	3.46	1.09	4.00	1.29	-2.30	.027	0.46
(b) Target grammar	3.84	0.53	3.77	0.64	0.52	.607	0.12
(c) Grammar & expression	4.30	1.08	4.65	1.29	-1.70	.096	0.29
(d) Content	4.96	1.18	5.36	1.12	-1.78	.083	0.36
(e) Pronunciation	4.17	1.46	4.57	1.35	-1.63	.111	0.29

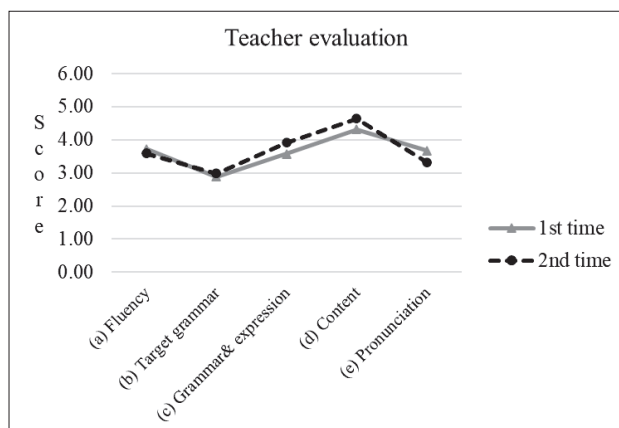


Figure 2. Teacher Evaluation Results

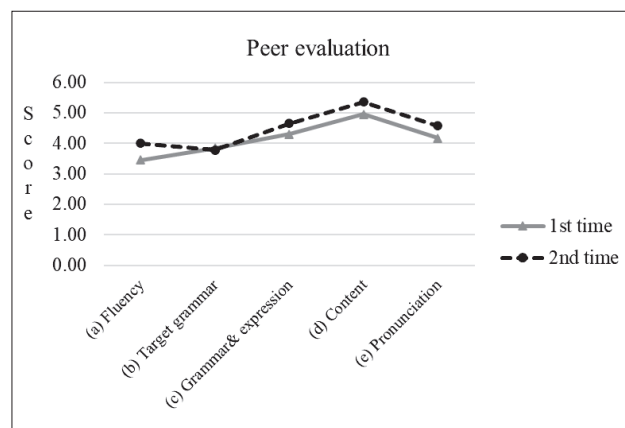


Figure 3. Peer Evaluation Results

the content criteria also increased from 4.96 to 5.36, although the differences were not statistically significant, with a small-to-medium effect size ( $p = 0.083$ ;  $d = 0.36$ ).

Regarding the target grammar criterion, the average score for teacher evaluation was higher in the second retelling task ( $M = 2.98$ ) than in the first ( $M = 2.88$ ). However, the scores for these two occasions did not differ significantly. Similarly, peer evaluation scores showed no improvement on the target grammar criterion between the first and second

tasks.

Among the five criteria, content had the highest average score for both peer and teacher evaluations. In the teacher evaluation, the mean score of the content criteria was 4.32 in the first task and 4.64 in the second task. In the peer evaluation, the mean scores of the content criteria were even higher at 4.96 in the first task and 5.36 in the second task, respectively.

## 2) Number of Target Grammar Use

We examined the transcripts of the participants' retelling utterances in the first and second tests. The average number of times the participants used the four target grammar items to retell the passages was 1.82 in the first task and 2.23 in the second retelling task (see Table 4). The Wilcoxon test results revealed a marginally significant difference in the number of times participants used grammar items. The effect size of  $|0.28|$  was medium ( $z = -1.86$ ;  $p = 0.062$ ;  $r = -0.28$ ). Specifically, an increase from 1.82 to 2.23 indicates that the participants used the target grammar expressions twice or more.

## 3) Qualitative Analyses of Target Grammar Use

The participants' target grammar use was also analyzed qualitatively, resulting in three findings. First, most participants used the target grammar at least once during their first retelling. Additionally, even those whose overall output was small were able to produce the target grammar items. Transcript (1) presents Student 3's utterances in the first task. The number of words was 58, which is approximately half of the original text, with an average score of 3.5 out of 6 in teacher and peer evaluations. However, as the underlined phrases demonstrate, Student 3 used all the four target grammar phrases. Therefore, the student used the target grammar features well in the first retelling task.

### (1) Student 3's Utterance (First Time)

He have one camel, and he started selling camel's milk. Camel's milk is popular by many people, because the doctor advised drinking it. Camel's milk is very expensive but people want to drink

camel's milk. He enjoyed selling camel's milk, and camel's milk selling much. He considered selling another camel. Camels milk have very vitamin, and very better.

Second, certain participants used verbs that were focused on target grammar sentences but did not use gerunds. As Transcript (2) illustrates, Student 10 retold the story in the second retelling task using three words from the target grammar phrases: "started," "enjoyed," and "practice." However, as the underlined phrases indicate, the student did not use gerunds. Her utterances were grammatically correct, but failed to use gerunds although one of the tasks included in retelling was to retell the story using gerunds.

### (2) Student 10's Utterance (Second Time)

Rena started to take lessons of violin when she was child. When she was child, she enjoyed it. However, after that she tired of it. Her teacher said that she should practice violin every day. And her parents said that if she don't practice violin she has to quit the lessons. In the end, she quit the lessons. After that she...

Third, in certain cases, the target grammar phrases were replaced with paraphrased expressions. Some participants retold the story well, resulting in a high score in the content criteria, however, did not use the target grammar items, as presented in Transcript (3) of Student 23's utterance in the second retelling task. The underlined parts indicate that rather than saying "start playing the violin" as in the original text, the student paraphrased the sentence to "take

**Table 4** The Number of Times the Participants Used the Target Grammar

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
The first retelling task	1.82	1.13	-1.87	.062	-0.28
The second retelling task	2.23	1.33			

violin lessons again.” Overall, Student 23 covered the story’s content well in his retelling, although only one point was awarded for the target grammar criterion.

(3) Student 23’s Utterance (Second Time)

.... So Rena quitted her lesson. Several years later she went to concert with her parents and she was impressed by the beautiful music beautiful sound of the music. So she decided to take take lessons take violin lessons ag again. Now she never missed a day of practice and she hopes one day she will be able to play the violin like the professional violinist.

#### 4) Qualitative Analyses of Paraphrasing Use

##### (1) The Comparison of Paraphrase Use Between the First and the Second Task

The participants’ use of paraphrasing was analyzed qualitatively by comparing their first and second utterances. Paraphrased words and expressions were examined, including synonyms and phrases not found in the original text. Some similarities and differences in the use of paraphrasing were found between the first and second retelling tasks. Overall, some used paraphrases almost similarly in the first and the second tasks, whereas others used paraphrases differently in the first and the second tasks.

Transcript (4) demonstrates no significant difference in paraphrase use between the first and second tasks. Student 13 used “young” and “after that” to paraphrase “a little girl,” and “several years later,” respectively.

(4) Student 13’s Utterances

1. First Time

When Rena was young, she enjoyed taking violin lessons and her teacher said that she should practice playing the violin every day. But, she was tired of it. ... and after that, she

stop taking lessons but she decided to practice playing the violin again when she went to a concert by famous violinist ....

2. Second Time

When Rena was young she enjoyed taking violin lessons but after a while she was getting tired of it. ... But after that when she went to the concert by famous violinist ....

Transcript (5) demonstrates Student 2’s utterances in the first and second retelling as an example of the different ways in which paraphrases were used. Paraphrased phrases and words are underlined, demonstrating that Student 2 used paraphrases in the first and second tasks in different ways. For example, in the first task, the phrase “it makes his family life become good” is used to paraphrase the original text “It may bring a better life for his family.” In the second task, the phrase “He can make his life more better” is used. Although “more” is not necessary here, the student attempted to use “better” in a sentence structure different from the original text.

(5) Student 2’s Utterances

1. First Time

Hassam came to Islamabad. And he started to sell camel’s milk. This is very good business.... And he enjoys selling camel’s milk because it makes his family life become good. He consider buying another camel because it enable his and daughter go and enter school. So his camel’s milk is good for his life.

2. Second Time

Hassan came to Islamabad. He started selling camel’s milk. In Islamabad, camel’s milk is not popular but his camel’s milk began to be popular and even doctor advise people drinking camel’s milk. He enjoys selling camel’s milk because selling it became him and his family’s

livelihood. ... He consider buy another camels to save money for children to go to school. He can make his life more better by selling camel's milk. His camel's milk contain many vital vitamins. So many people love his camel's milk. He...

## (2) The Comparison of Paraphrase Use Between High- and Low-proficiency Learners

The second analytical method compared the paraphrases observed in the utterances of 10 high-proficiency and 10 low-proficiency learners. Differences were observed in frequency and manner of paraphrasing. First, regarding frequency, high-proficiency learners used paraphrases more frequently than low-proficiency learners. Transcript (6) illustrates the speech of Student 8 in the low-proficiency group. Student 8 received a score of 2 for teacher evaluations in the first and second tasks. Regarding peer evaluation, her fluency score was 2 in the first task and 4 in the second. She used paraphrasing for one or two words, the first and second times. The underlined words indicate paraphrases and they are "bought" and "big business."

Transcript (7) illustrates the speech of Student 7 in the high-proficiency group. Her fluency score was six in all tasks for teacher and peer evaluations in the first and second tasks. Student 7 used paraphrases more frequently and with more words. She began the story with "The main character's name is..." and used some paraphrases such as "for one bottle" and "he can make a lot of money."

### (6) Low-proficiency student's utterances

(Student 8)

#### 1. First Time

Hassum came to Islamabad four years ago. He bought his camel in Islamabad and his camel milk starting selling. .... And he consider to one more camel and big business.

#### 2. Second Time

Hassan came to Islamabad four years ago. He bought camel and he started selling camel's milk. It is not popular camel, but his camel milk is getting famous.....

### (7) High-proficiency student's utterances

(Student 21)

#### 1. First Time

The main character's name is Hassam, and he came to Islamabad with his camel, and he start selling camel milk every day. ...So many people prefer to buy it, even if it is expensive compare to any other kind of milk. And so he makes a lot of money, by selling the milk, so... he..oh..and he wants to save many money for his family. So he is considering getting another camel. That's all.

#### 2. Second Time

The main character's name is Hassam. .... It is ah the camel milk the camel's milk costs one dollar for one bottle. Thus, he can make a lot of money by selling camel milk. He wants to save a lot of money for his family for his family ah especially he wants to send his children to school. Uh so he considers buying another camel.

Second, differences were observed in the manner in which they were paraphrased. Low-proficiency students tended to use paraphrases at the word level, whereas high-proficiency students used paraphrases at the phrase level. These characteristics can be found in Transcripts (6) and (7), however, Transcripts (8) and (9) also illustrate the differences between the two proficiency groups. Student 1 in the low-proficiency group scored 2 on the fluency criterion in the first and second tasks of the peer and teacher evaluations. In contrast, Student 25 in the high-proficiency group, as illustrated in Transcript (9), scored 6 on the fluency criterion, the highest score by peer and

teacher evaluators in the first and second tasks.

Salient differences were observed in how each student paraphrased the original text. Student 1 used paraphrases primarily at the word and phrase level, such as “however” and “a lot of” rather than “but” and “full of,” respectively. Student 25 also used paraphrases at the word and phrase level, however, paraphrases extended at the longer phrase or sentence levels, such as “in order to do this” or “they are living far away they are OK and buy.”

(8) Low-proficiency student’s utterances

(Student 1)

1. First Time

... The milk is expensive. However, many people prefer it to other kind of milk because the milk has a lot of vitamins and It’s good for health. Hassam wants to save many for his children. So he considers buying other camel.

2. Second Time

... Camel’s milk was not famous there; however, although he was selling it famous for people in the country. Camel milk is expensive but people want to get it because it is good for the health. ...

(9) High-proficiency student’s utterances

(Student 25)

1. First Time

.... Camels were not so much popular animal in the city, but his camel’s milk was really famous. Everyone know that the milk is very healthy and everyone tried to buy it even if it’s really expensive or even far away. Hassam is trying to send his kids to schools, so he’s trying to save money. In order to do this, he’s considering buying a new another camel.

2. Second Time

.... And even though camel’s milk is expensive people love to buy the milk. Because it was

really healthy that ah doctors also recommend. Ah the camel’s milk is has a lot of vitamins. Ah people buy even expensive. Although... they are living far away they are OK and buy. Uh Hassam is trying to save his money. So ah he’s considering to ah buy another milk no milk ah buy another camel in order to send his children to school.

## 5. Discussion

### 1) RQ 1: Does the Retelling Practice Improve Learners’ Speaking Skills Based on the Peer and Teacher Evaluations?

Peer evaluation results revealed statistically significant improvements in the fluency criterion, whereas the content criterion remained marginally significant. Thus, learners perceived an improvement in their peers’ fluency and content in their speaking performance. However, none of the four criteria in teacher evaluation demonstrated any significant improvement, indicating that the teachers tended to evaluate more strictly.

Previous studies have reported that a retelling task is an effective way to improve learners’ speaking skills and can be used for practice before a presentation or to promote students’ complex language use (e.g., Nagasaki, 2013). In the current study, the students practiced the target grammar, orally read the story, and answered comprehension questions before the retelling task. These exercises were included in the first and second tests, and may have been effective in retelling the performances on both occasions. Consequently, the two tests did not differ significantly. Thus, repeating the retelling task did not produce a significant difference in the second trial. Students’ speaking performance was not expected to improve significantly in the second trial, without any follow-up practice between the first and second tests. Other follow-up practices before the second test may have helped improve the effective-

ness of the second test.

Another noteworthy point is the content criteria used. Although the statistical differences remained significant, the scores for the content criteria in peer evaluation increased from 4.96 to 5.36. Content scores in both the peer and teacher evaluations were the highest among the five criteria in the first and second tests. Participants were able to convey the story through retelling tasks. Communication aims to convey messages accurately. Retelling tasks are an effective way to assess learners' spoken language abilities (e.g., Koizumi & Hirai, 2012; Nagasaki, 2013).

The student' improvement in the use of target grammar was evaluated mainly by the number of times they used the target grammar properly. Regarding target grammar criterion, ceiling effects were observed. The peer evaluation score on the grammar criterion indicated a notable ceiling effect, reaching 3.84 in the first task and 3.77 in the second task, out of 4 maximum points. Most participants used the target grammar more than once in the first retelling task, and used all target grammar items as instructed in the retelling task. Such ceiling effects may have been caused by the evaluation criteria of the target grammar. Among the evaluation criteria, the target grammar criterion focusing on target grammar use had only three levels (0, 2, and 4), whereas the other criteria had four levels. Participants who used the target grammar at least once received 2 points. If they used most of the target grammar well, they received 4 points, and differences were not noted between those who used the target grammar twice and those who used it more than three times, resulting in improvement in the teacher and peer evaluation not found in the second task.

## 2) RQ 2: Does the Retelling Practice Improve Learners' Target Grammar Use?

The number of times participants correctly

produced the target grammar items increased from the first time ( $M = 1.82$ ) to the second time ( $M = 2.23$ ). The difference was statistically significant, with a medium effect ( $p = .06$ ;  $r = |0.28|$ ). Qualitative analyses showed that even students who produced very little speech still managed to use the target grammar items in their retellings. These results suggest that retelling practice is effective for using grammatical points when learners engage in retelling tasks with target grammar items in mind. This result agrees with previous studies suggesting that retelling practice can effectively help learners produce the target grammar phrases in a text (Hirai & Koizumi, 2013).

Moreover, the qualitative analyses revealed other cases concerning the use of the target grammar items. First, some participants retold the story using verbs focused on the target grammar sentences, however, failed to use the gerunds. Many scholars have reached a consensus that explicitly presenting the target grammar to learners is necessary while maintaining a focus on communication (e.g., Brown & Lee, 2015; Ellis, 2006). Accordingly, the current study explicitly presented target grammar items in bold and underlined target phrases. However, past studies claiming the importance of focusing on verbs have suggested that the use of gerunds is problematic for learners (Kamiya, 2020; Schwartz & Causarano, 2007). Therefore, learners who had problem using gerunds in their speech may have avoided using them in their utterances, suggesting that more specific instructions may be necessary.

Second, certain learners used the target grammar less frequently because they paraphrased the target expressions themselves. Paraphrasing is an important skill required for actual communication and requires high-level cognitive abilities (McLeod, 2020). Therefore, it was difficult for some learners to paraphrase and simultaneously use the target grammar because doing both tasks was too demanding for learners'

cognitive abilities. Consequently, their utterances were grammatically correct, however, scored low on the target grammar criterion. In tasks that focus on target grammar, such as the current tasks, the evaluation criteria are set to assess the students' use of the target grammar, however, it is difficult for evaluators to assess the students' paraphrase tasks and target grammar use simultaneously. Additional criteria may be necessary to add points to those who paraphrased the content but failed to use the target grammar.

### **3) RQ 3: Does the Retelling Practice Affect Learners' Paraphrasing Skills?**

In retelling, speakers use paraphrasing to provide comprehensible input to others. Students' paraphrase use was qualitatively examined. We analyzed the differences between the first and second tasks as well as the differences between the two proficiency levels. The qualitative data suggested that most participants used paraphrases. When learners cannot immediately recall a word, they often paraphrase by using a different word or phrase with a similar meaning (Fulcher, 2003). Therefore, we can argue that the participants in the current study used paraphrasing effectively as a speaking strategy. According to Kamimura (2019), producing summaries without referring to the original text can help develop learners' spontaneous paraphrasing skills. Moreover, the current study revealed that not referring to the original text when retelling can effectively assist learners in paraphrasing.

Furthermore, this study found that learners' paraphrasing techniques varied between proficiency levels in terms of frequency and manner of use. The results indicated that the frequency of high-proficiency learners using paraphrases was higher than that of low-proficiency learners. Moreover, high-proficiency learners tended to paraphrase at the phrase level, whereas low-proficiency learners paraphrased at the word level.

According to McLeod (2020), paraphrasing requires high-level skills and the linguistic capability to express ideas without copying the original text. We argue that proficient learners with high linguistic skills can structure sentences at the phrase level. In contrast, low-proficiency learners used paraphrasing at the word level as a speaking strategy when they could not remember vocabulary immediately.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined the effects of retelling practices on learners' speaking skills, focusing on peer evaluation, target grammar use, and paraphrasing skills. The peer evaluation results revealed improvement only in the fluency criterion and weak results in the content criterion, whereas teacher evaluation revealed no improvement. The results indicated that teachers were stricter in their evaluation than the students.

Regarding the practice effect of the retelling task, peer and teacher evaluations did not indicate significant improvements in learners' speaking skills, except for fluency and content criteria in peer evaluation. Thus, follow-up instructions before the second retelling task may help improve the effectiveness of the practice.

In terms of the target grammar use, most learners retold the story using the target grammar more than twice. Qualitative analyses indicated that even learners who earned low scores in teacher and peer evaluations were able to retell the story using target grammar structures. Thus, retelling tasks are useful for low-proficiency learners to use target grammar items in speaking.

Qualitative analyses of the learners' paraphrases revealed several findings. First, a comparison between the first and second retelling tasks revealed that some used paraphrases in the same way, whereas others used them differently. Second, the comparison between the two proficiency groups revealed that

high-proficiency learners tended to use paraphrases more frequently and at phrasal levels than low-proficiency learners who used paraphrases at the word level.

The current study has some limitations. Ceiling effects were observed for the target grammar criterion. The peer evaluation average score on the grammar criterion in the first task was 3.84 out of 4 points, showing the grammar score was high even in the first task. As there were no clear distinctions in the criteria between those who used grammar twice and those who used it three or more times, their scores on the target grammar criterion were high in the first task. To assess the use of the target grammar more accurately, clearer rating scales are necessary.

Despite these limitations, the present study has several pedagogical implications. First, retelling is an ideal task for encouraging learners to use the target grammar and paraphrase in speaking. Most learners in the current study used grammar in retelling, regardless of their proficiency levels. Retelling tasks allow learners to practice certain linguistic features, such as grammar and vocabulary. Second, the findings suggest that specific instructions are necessary to improve learners' speaking skills during retelling. In the current study, participants were asked to retell a story twice to determine whether the retelling activity improved their speaking skills. The results revealed only a small improvement, suggesting that the students' retelling practices were insufficient; they needed specific instructions to demonstrate further improvement in retelling. Third, the qualitative study revealed that high-proficiency learners paraphrased longer sentences than low-proficiency learners, suggesting that exercises focusing on formulaic expressions may be effective.

The current study demonstrates that retelling practice can effectively encourage learners to use the target grammar in a setting similar to an actual communicative setting. Further research is required

to examine the effects of retelling task instructions on learners' use of target grammar and paraphrases.

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## Appendix 1 Story Retelling Speaking Test

### Story Retelling Speaking Test

1. Translate the following Japanese sentences into English using the target grammar item, Verb + -ing.”

**Target item:**

Verb + -ing

- 彼はラクダのミルクを売り出した。
- 医者はそれを飲むことを勧めている。
- 彼はラクダのミルクを売ることを楽しんでいる。
- 彼はもうラクダを一頭購入することを考えている。

2. Read the story silently in two minutes; **pay attention to underlined target items (verb + -ing) to use them when retelling. [Note] Words marked with \*are annotated below the story.**

#### Camel Milk

Hassam came to Islamabad\* four years ago. He brought his camels\* with him and **started selling** his camels' milk. Camels were not popular in this city, but his camels' milk is getting famous. Every morning, people stop by to get the milk.

Camel milk is good for the health. It is full of vitamins. Even doctors **advise drinking it**. A bottle of camel milk costs one dollar. This is expensive, but many people prefer camel milk to other kinds of milk. Some people even walk 10 kilometers to get it.

Hassam **enjoys selling** camel milk. It may bring a better life for his family. He wants to save a lot of money to send his children to school. Hassam **considers buying** another camel.



【Note】 camel [kæml]: ラクダ, Islamabad [islá:məbà:d]: イスラマバード。パキスタンの首都。

3. Read aloud the story once.

4. After the signal, read each question aloud and answer it in English.

Q1: What did Hassam do after he came to Islamabad?

Q2: Why do people want to buy camel' s milk even if it is expensive?

Q3: What does he consider doing to save money?

( Other side of the handout)

5. Examine the keywords and retell as much of the story as you can in English in 1 minute and 40 seconds without viewing the story. **Ensure using the target items while retelling.**

**Keywords:**

Hassam,	Islamabad,	camel,	expensive,	save
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**Target item:**

Verb + -ing

**Appendix 2** Speaking Test Criteria

<b>〈 1. Fluency 〉</b>	
There are many hesitations and unnatural poses, making it difficult to understand	0
There are some hesitations and unnatural poses, that interfere with understanding	2
There are a few hesitations and unnatural poses	4
Fluent and natural with almost no hesitation or unnatural poses	6
<b>〈 2. Target grammar 〉</b>	
Target grammar is used properly	0
At least one example of target grammar is used properly	2
Most items of target grammar are used properly	4
<b>〈 3. Expression/grammar (other than target items) 〉</b>	
There are several mistakes	0
There are a few mistakes	2
There are almost no mistakes	4
There are few mistakes and the speaker attempts to use various vocabulary and expressions	6
<b>〈 4. Content 〉</b>	
The content is different	0
It includes only part of the story	2
It lacks parts of the story	4
Almost everything is covered and well-structured	6
<b>〈 5. Pronunciation (including stress and intonation) 〉</b>	
Many mistakes and accents make it difficult to understand	0
There are some mistakes and some accents, however, it is easy to understand	2
It is easy to listen to, with few mistakes and accents	4
Natural speech without any mistakes or accents	6