

Self-Regulation in Speaking Class: Is it Necessary?

by Anandari Christina

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Preface

The Organizing Committee are delighted to present the proceedings of the ³Language and ³Language Teaching Conference (LLTC) 2014, which is to be organized by the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University or Prodi Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (Prodi PBI) Universitas Sanata Dharma (USD) on 20 June 2014. There are around 40 full papers in the proceedings, covering various topics in language learning-teaching, linguistics and literature.

Editors



Table of Contents

Cover page	i
Editors page	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	v
An Analysis of Characters` Maxim Violations in The Prince and the Pauper Movie By Antonius Waget	1
The Use of Authentic Materials to Teach Structure By Bernardine Ria Lestari	9
Foreignization Strategy in Woku Manadonese Restaurant Menus By Vinny Raranta	13
The Influence of Learning Strategies and Critical Thinking to Reading Comprehension Ability By Ngaliah	19
7 Short Video Clips as Language Input for EFL Speaking Practice By Paulus Widiatmoko	27
"Where Is Waldo?", Technique of Identifying Main Verb to Help Solve Subject-Verb Agreement in English Competence Test By Yune Andryani Pinem	33
Language Choice among Students of the English Letters Department: A Study on Code Switch as a Communicativ Strategy By Dewi Widyastuti and Arina Isti'anah	41
The Role of Pragmatic Competence in Avoiding Miscommunication for EFL Classroom By Doni Alfaruqy	49
Instructional Support While Resolving English Language Barriers Faced by Arab Learners By Salma Wyne	55
Foreignization and Domestication in Translating Fish Names: A case Study of a Bilingual Menu By Meyke Jayanti K	63
4 Expressing Love through Metaphors: A Corpus-Based Contrastive Analysis of English and Indonesian By Ignatius Tri Endarto	69
The Contribution of Pragmatics in the Translation of Movie Subtitle By Latif Amrullah	79
Employing Scaffolding Strategy to Facilitate Students with Different English Circumstances By Adesti Komalasari, S.Pd., M.A. and Yuseva Ariyani Iswandari, S.Pd., M.Ed.	85
The Effectiveness of Round Table in Teaching Writing to the Eighth Grade Students of SMP 1 Kartasura Viewed from Their Creativity (An Experimental Study) By Yusi Rahmawati	95

Violation of Maxims of Quantity and Maxims of Relevance in Peanuts Comic Strip By Maria Septiyani	107
Liquid Sounds in Indonesian Phrases Produced by Korean Speakers By Aprilia Kristiana Tri Wahyuni	113
The Realization of Cohesion in Reading Texts Used on Text in Action By Lilia Indriani	119
<i>Pen Your Ideas</i> : Scaffolding Students' Writing Argumentative Paragraph Employing a Lexical Approach By Marwito Wihadi, M.Pd	127
English Discoveries Online (EDO) as an Authoring Tool To Improve Students' English Proficiency By Taufik Akbar Alfajri	135
Indonesian ELT practitioners writing in Australia: previous writing experience and negotiation to dominant writing practices By Nova Ariani	141
Developing Rural EFL Elementary Students' Speaking Skills by Using Collaborative Learning to Promote Character Building By Sri Sarwanti	153
Hidden Ideologies in an EFL Textbook: A Critical Analysis By Neng Priyanti	161
Teachers' Questioning in Reading Lesson By Lailatur Rohmah Ma'arif, S.Pd.	171
ESL Teaching in Malaysia: Review and Recommendations By Ilyani Abd Khalid	179
On Problems in Applying Games in EFL Classrooms: Ways to Maximize Its Application By Ika Sulis Setianingsih, S. Pd.	187
A Hybrid Self: the Third Meaning of Turkey's Identity in Orhan Pamuk's Snow By Sri Hariyatmi	195
Improving the Students' Comprehension of Genre through Self-regulated Learning By Siti Aimah, Muhimatul Ifadah.....	201
Using Narrative as a Mediation Tool for Unpacking the Experiences of a Language Learner By Hasti Rahmaningtyas	207
Application of Multimedia into English Semantics Teaching By Siyaswati	215
Evaluating Translation Equivalence Using Immediate Constituent Structure Analysis By Adventina Putranti	221
Classroom Power Negotiation: Students' Sharing By Dewi Nur Suci & Yazid Basthomi	227
Students' attitudes towards the integration of teaching critical thinking skills in reading comprehension	

By Phan Thi Tra Khuc and Pho Phuong Dzung	235
2 Experimental Study: The Effectiveness of Hedwig Strategy in Content Subject in Large Language Class By Yulia Hapsari and Devinta Puspita Ratri	253
Self-Regulation in Speaking Class: Is it Necessary? By Christina Lhaksmita Anandari	261
Gender Roles and Representations of the 2013 English Textbook for Grade 7 By Ouda Teda Ena	269
The Benefits of Creative writing for EFL Learners By Henny Herawati	277
Language, Linguistics and Literature: Meaning Aspects By Barli Bram	289

Self-Regulation in Speaking Class: Is it Necessary?

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Abstract

Speaking in public using a foreign language as a medium can be a stressor for many foreign language learners. This condition was also found among the 24 Public Speaking students (semester 5) of class A at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. From the preliminary observations, it was found that the belief that unpreparedness was the source of anxiety and failure and opportunities to do self-reflections were not sufficient. In other words, self-regulation was not applied much in the class activities although self regulation has the dominant role in creating successful learners (Zimmerman, 2001). Therefore, this research aimed to reveal two things: the students' self regulative strategies and the benefits of self regulation to help the students map their learning process in Public Speaking class. The data were collected from 2 journals, i.e. 1 journal on their planned strategies and 1 self-reflection based on their video recorded performances. The result showed that these students indeed had unconsciously used self-regulative strategies in enhancing their public speaking skills. The research also showed that the students' comprehension on their self-regulation helped them in becoming better speakers of English. Benefits of doing self-regulation were also suggested in this research.

Keywords: self-regulation, self-reflection, speaking skills

Introduction

After performing a one-minute speech about her family background, this student said, "I knew that I should not have said that, but I don't know why I keep doing the same mistakes over and over again. I just can't seem to say what I wanted to say!" The feeling of always doing the same mistakes numerous times is very common among the English language learners. For them, this is like de ja vu. The fear of making mistakes, be it the mistakes in grammar, word choice, or pronunciation, haunts many of the learners at many different levels and thus the errors and anxiety can vary. Many of these learners have another commonality however, i.e. they did not spend much time reflecting back on their speaking performances. Of course, this can be one of the hindrances for them to find possible solutions to their problems because they do not have a clear mapping of their learning process. Thus this research aims to: (1) provide an insight on how self-regulatory processes may help English language learners to discover their learning styles to enhance their speaking ability and (2) provide benefits of self-regulation in speaking classes.

Speech production is an on-going process that all speakers experience. The speech itself is so complex that it takes a large amount of time to breakdown it into several elements. Douglas (1997) provides an illustration of what a speaker is going through when he/she is producing a speech:

[S]peech production is one of the most complex processes. The speaker must monitor what she has just said to determine whether it matches her intention

while she is uttering her current phrase and monitoring that simultaneously planning her next utterance and fitting that into the overall pattern of what she wants to say, and monitoring as well the reception of her performance on a listener. (p. 3)

For English language learners, this complex process becomes more complex and challenging because they have to produce the English language elements such as structure, vocabulary and pronunciation. They also need to combine English words into meaningful sentences and to ensure the audience understands them. As a result, due to these complexities, many of these learners fail to produce a good speech in English language and unfortunately, the blame is put on their nervousness. Although it is true that at some point of the learning process nervousness is a source of complexities, learners do not come to the realization that nervousness happen for a reason. As such, learners were not given the sufficient amount of time to conduct in-depth reflective activities which can help them evaluate their learning process.

Erdogan and Yurdabakan (2011) provide a concept that self-reflection provides a great and meaningful activity for the students to evaluate their own speaking performances. In their investigation, the students feel that by knowing their weaknesses and strengths, they are enabled to set goals and steps that they need to do to become better speakers. Boud (1999) in Özdemir-Çatagay, (2012) reveals a similar result in that through the self-reflection the students are able to map their goals and potentials. Unlike in literacy skills, in speaking skill, self-reflection can be done through recording their own performances. The video recording can be a powerful source because it shows their real time performance. Nguyen (2012) discovers that there are many benefits of doing self-reflections based on the recorded performances. The students feel that by watching themselves perform enable them to provide a more detailed and significant reflections. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) also provides a significant information in that through self-reflections, the students are “accepting the need for self worth protection” (p. 42). This means that the students gain much information since they can identify their weaknesses and strengths and thus can minimize mistakes.

In the effort to conduct a meaningful self-reflection and successful learning, self-regulatory processes is one means to apply. In self-regulation, self-awareness, self-motivation, and behavioral skill are very important to achieve a successful learning. Therefore, Zimmerman constructs three phases of learning, i.e., the forethought phase, performance phase, and self-reflection phase (2002: 67). The first phase enables the learners to map their planned strategies to achieve the goals. The second phase, i.e. the performance phase, is the moment where learners practice by using their planned strategies which was developed in the forethought phase to obtain control of the learning process. In this phase, learners are also given the opportunity to check whether or not their planned strategies help them achieve the goals. In the final phase (self-reflection phase), learners conduct a self-reflection on their performances. During a learning process, a learner ideally should already have a specific goal of what he or she wish to achieve. However, this condition can alter every now and then due to many factors, such as emotional condition, changing mindsets, high-level of discipline, and vigilance.

Research Methods

Participants and Setting

The research was done from August – December, 2013 at the English Language Education Study Program Sanata Dharma University. The participants were 24 Public Speaking students from the English Language Education Study Program. The students aged between 18-25 years old. There were 5 male students and 19 female students. Four of the students were in their mid-twenties because they were Brothers and Nuns who were sent by their congregations to pursue a bachelor's degree in English Education.

At the time the research was done, these students were in their fifth semester and had passed speaking classes in the previous semesters. The nature of the Public Speaking class was to help them speak and explain their notions and opinions on certain topics related to the theories of education. In one semester, each student should perform three speeches with three different genres, i.e. argumentative, persuasive, and demonstrative. Although each performance was assessed and evaluated for their mid tests and final scores, the three self-regulatory phases (forethought, performance, and self-reflection phases) were not applied for each performance.

The students conducted the forethought phase in the first 4 meetings in order to achieve a strong ground on their comprehension of public speaking. The second phase, i.e. the performance phase, was conducted in meetings 5, 6 and 7 after they self-record their performance and discussed their performances in pairs. The last phase was conducted in the last meeting of the semester. It should be noted that after each of their performance, students conducted whole-class reflections. The purpose of these was to assist the students to focus and to refresh their memories of the lecturer's expectations and classroom standards.

Findings and Discussion

The first phase to increase the students' level of awareness on what they were learning was the forethought phase. This stage was conducted in the first 4 meetings in which it was the appropriate time for the students to set their goals for their first performance. In order to identify the students' awareness on what it took to be a good public speaker, the provided reflective questions mainly focused on the students' effort to achieve the goal.

The question for the first journal before the performance was as follows: Describe your planned learning strategies. The students' answers were analyzed in order to identify whether their forethought phase contained the sub-elements of forethought phase, i.e. task analysis and self-motivation beliefs.

Strategic planning in task analysis was evident in the students' answers. All of the 24 students stated that they would practice before the presentation, and the major purpose of the practice was to polish their grammar, pronunciation, organization of ideas, and to control their gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. The answers were basically based on their previous experiences before presenting in the speaking classes in the previous semesters. However, in order to polish those elements, it was found that 12 of the students would choose to practice alone and 12 others prefer to start to practice alone and follow it with practicing in front of their classmates and friends outside the class.

The 12 students who planned to practice alone had similar reasons, i.e. they were not comfortable having people watch and assess them during their practice sessions. These students described that they need not add more stress during their exercise sessions by having other people watch them in the practice sessions. In other words, having other people watching them practice would reduce their concentration. As an example, Student 14 stated

that “[I] needed to be alone...[because]... I felt that being alone helped me to concentrate more.” Similar to Student 14, Student 11 chose to practice alone because by practicing alone, she would have the ability to focus more on the topic that she tried to present although in fact she felt that there would be some benefits in practicing with classmates. These students agreed that practicing with a group of people would give them the opportunity to receive feedback, however, based on their experiences in the previous speaking classes, they felt that they were more comfortable practicing alone. Thus, individual practice before presentations was the type of practice they would choose in this class.

The other group had a different opinion towards individual practice. These students would prefer to practice alone first and then continue practice session by practicing with their classmates in and outside the Public Speaking class. In their opinion, to start the practice individually would help them in gaining self-confidence. Also, they believed that individual practice would help them in memorizing the speech content, the outline, and the important sentences that would help emphasize the speech content.

Student 7 planned to practice in two manners, individual and group. She had the intention to start her practice individually because she felt that she would need the time to perfect her speaking performance before performing in front of her friends. In her opinion, individual practice would be the best time for her to check her speech content, grammar, pronunciation, and body language. She then would continue her practice by asking a group of friends to watch her performance.

One other student, student 9, had a similar idea with Student 7. Student 9 believed that she would have a great opportunity to gain her self-confidence if she practiced individually before practicing in groups. Her reason for doing this was because she wanted to polish her speech performance so that when she performed in front of her friends she could show them her current ability. Afterwards, she would practice with her friends so that they could give her meaningful feedback on her performance.

Performance phase is the second phase of Zimmerman’s self-regulatory process. This second phase was conducted in the 5th, 6th, and 7th meetings. The purpose of doing the second phase in the middle of the semester was to give the students the opportunity to have a sufficient amount of time to be comfortable with their choice of learning strategies and conducting self-observations.

The main focus of this research was on self-observation. ⁸ At the beginning of the semester, the students were asked to prepare a speech, practice it, and record it before they approach the 8th week of the semester. During the 5th-7th weeks, the students were asked to practice their speech as many times as possible by using their planned strategies from the forethought phase. They were also encouraged to note down any other techniques that they had not mentioned in the planned strategies so that by the end of the performance phase, each student would have a new insight on their learning process.

Throughout the process of conducting the second phase, students were told to constantly monitor their planned strategies in the forethought phase. They were expected to try to practice as many times as possible, be it individually or in groups. Although there were two different groups of students (individual practice and group practice), all came to a realization that their strength was memorization. In their opinion, they were not aware of this strength when they were asked to list their planned strategies in the forethought phase. Thus, they added memorization in addition to the existing planned strategies. As an example, Student 11 described it as follows, “Based on my experience, my strength in speaking is...I

have a long term memory [to] remember all of my concept[s]”. Some other students, Student 2, Student 12, and Student 24, simply stated that they realized that memorization was one of the keys to their success in speaking. Besides the planned strategies in the forethought phase, they came to the conclusion that memorizing the sentences helped them in their speaking performance.

Another beneficial finding from the students’ practice was that doing imageries or visualization and practicing in front of the mirror were the activities done by both students who preferred to practice alone and those who preferred to practice in groups. Visualization and the use of mirror apparently helped them in controlling their gestures, facial expression, and eye contact. As an example, Student 2 who was more comfortable practicing alone, stated that in his effort to prepare for the performance, he somehow realized that visualizing the classroom settings, his friends, where he would stand, and how he would deliver his message would help him in his effort to gain confidence. Thus, besides the planned strategies that he chose before he began practicing, he added the visualizing technique as one of his learning strategies. The use of mirror for Student 2 was also helpful in controlling his gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact.

Student 10 who preferred to practice in groups described that unconsciously she always tried to visualize the classroom condition whenever she practiced her speech when she was alone in her room. This technique was not mentioned in her forethought phase because she did not realize that this was actually one of the effective techniques to help herself to calm down and be confident. Similar to Student 2, the use of mirror gave her tremendous information on her facial expressions, gestures and eye contact.

After practicing for 7 meetings, each student was to record their performance outside the class. In order to challenge them more, the students were to make a different speech from the previous speeches that they had done in the performance phase. The idea was to help the students realize that their planned strategies could be helpful in any circumstances. Once again, each student was encouraged to constantly monitor their speaking practice with the help of their planned strategies.

The last phase was done in the 8th meeting. In this last phase, i.e. the self-reflection phase, students were asked to bring their laptops and their recording to class. They were to sit in groups of 2 or 3 and watch each other’s performances. In this activity, each student was asked to give their personal reflection about his/her performance first so that the partner(s) would know what he/she felt about the result of the recording. After everyone in the group had the opportunity play the recording and gave their opinions on their own performances, they were to discuss the points that they would need to reconstruct. Afterwards, they were to write a journal about how they felt and what they had learned from this activity.

During the self-reflection phase, Student 4 mentioned that although he was not quite satisfied with his recorded performance, he realized that he was able to maintain eye contact, control his body gestures, and produce appropriate facial expressions. However, he also found some weaknesses to his performance, i.e. he made more fillers in his speech and he could see that despite the good control of his body gestures and facial expressions, anxiety was clearly seen in his expression. Some examples of the students’ self-reflection result were as follows.

Student 5 apparently was not quite satisfied with her performance, mainly due to her discomfort in being recorded. Nevertheless, she realized that she needed to polish her pronunciation because she believed that “... [she] [has] to pronounce each word correctly and

precisely.” She also realized that besides her pronunciation, she should be more aware of her head movements, facial expression and enthusiasm. In her opinion, showing enthusiasm in a speech was a difficult task because she rarely had the opportunity to do this activity. In her opinion, voice volume was also an extremely important element to assess. She stated that she did not realize that whenever she felt doubt, she would speak slower and use a low voice volume.

Similar to student 5, Student 13 and 14 was not comfortable to be recorded since she was not accustomed to doing so in her everyday life. However, after watching her own performance, Student 13 she realized that her gesture was more like a statue rather than like a public speaker. She said, “I planned to walk around during the recording time so that my position will not stuck on a certain position. However...I did not walk at all.” She realized that posture is one of the most important elements in producing a successful speaking performance.

Student 14 who also felt discomfort at being recorded was able to see that although she could finish her speech on time, she realized that she did not do well as she would hope. Low voice, unconvincing facial expression, and enthusiasm were some of her dissatisfactions. Student 19 focused his self-reflection more on his body gestures. He mentioned that in the video, he unconsciously did a somewhat provocative gesture during the speech. He was surprised and a bit embarrassed to see his own performance because he did not remember of doing such a gesture. From this video, he realized that gesture was a very important element in producing a successful speech. Similar to Student 19, Student 17 realized that she did some unnecessary gestures in which they were annoying, such as nodding too much. She also realized that her facial expression was not enthusiastic enough.

Another example, Student 22, felt that she was quite happy with the result of her performance. However, she found significant information related to her mimic, i.e. she felt that she had a flat expression. This finding was supported by her partners in the discussion who felt that they could not guess whether she was enthusiastic or not. She did not realize this before because she did not spend time recording her performances and reviewed them.

From the result of the journals, it was evident that students felt the benefits of self-regulatory process in speaking. The first benefit is learning management. Speaking is one of the language skills that is challenging to be self-assessed. The major reason was speaking was focused more on the production and not the process to reach the production. The second benefit is increasing understanding of self. Understanding of self in speaking is an important element because one of the best ways to be a successful learner (in any subjects) is to have a good comprehension of his/her own learning process, strengths, and weaknesses. By applying the self-regulatory processes in the speaking class, students were taught to gain an understanding of their own learning preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. The third benefit is having a clear mapping of the learning process. It is a fact that these students were accustomed to having the idea that speaking is merely about production, and thus this concept influenced the way they learn in speaking class. By using the self-regulatory processes, students were taught to have a clear mapping on the strategies that they use in order to reach the goal.

Conclusion

Based on the result, it was evident that although the public speaking students were not familiar with the theories of self-regulation, they indeed unconsciously applied the phases

in their effort to become better public speakers. The forethought phase assisted them in gaining a full understanding of what it took to become good public speakers. The performance phase enabled them to see their real-time performance in which it helped them to analyze and assess their weaknesses and strengths in speaking. The last phase, the self-reflection phase, was the phase where the students had the opportunity to be honest about their setbacks and achievements during the learning process. The benefits were also evident in the result. This study has its limitations, however. Gender could give a certain amount of influence to the result of the self-regulation. Besides gender, personality and motivation can give a significant influence on the students' effort in conducting the self-regulation.

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