

# ‘Play it again, Sam!’ The value of task repetition

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Nigel [20 months]: try eat lid

Father: What tried to eat the lid?

Nigel: try eat lid

Father: What tried to eat the lid?

Nigel: goat ... man said no .... goat try eat lid ... man said no

Then, after a further interval, while being put to bed:

Nigel: goat try eat lid .... man said no

Mother: Why did the man say no?

Nigel: goat shouldn't eat lid ... (shaking head) goodfor it

Mother: The goat shouldn't eat the lid; it's not good for it

Nigel: goat try eat lid ... man said no ... goat shouldn't eat lid ...  
(shaking head) goodfor it

The story is then repeated as a whole, verbatim, at frequent intervals over the next few months.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1975) *Learning to Mean: Explorations in the development of language*. New York: Elsevier. p. 112



‘My system was simple. On my way down to the subway, I would look for older people who didn't seem in a hurry and I would ask them how to get to an address. They tried to explain, and almost always they would ask me who I was, where was I from , and what was I doing in New York. Each time I understood little more and I could answer a little better.’

Kreutzberger, M. (2007) ‘Don Francisco’s Six Steps to Better English,’ in Miller, T. (ed.) *How I learned English*, Washington, DC: National Geographic (p. 60).

<b><i>First attempt</i></b>	<b><i>Third attempt</i></b>
<p>J: They went to the park by car and he go with his dog and he take lunch box and I have sandwich and hamburgers.</p> <p>T: champagne ...</p> <p>J: champagne, sandwich and very peaceful but later many people will come, will come, ... many people came here and one people played football and the dog is barking there ...</p> <p>N: <i>They were fed up</i> ... a man listening to music ...</p>	<p>T: It was a nice sunny day so Tom and Victoria decided to go to picnic in the countryside. They went to picnic by car with their dogs, his name is Jim. They had lunchbox and champagne, sandwiches and hamburgers.</p> <p>N: They found a nice place near the lake .... very peaceful.</p> <p>J: Felt relaxed, but later one family come and the man was playing football, the girl singing, the dog was barking and the man listen loud music.</p> <p>T: <i>They were fed up</i>. They decided to go home.</p>

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'There is a strong effect for task repetition... The evidence strongly supports the view that previous experience of a specific task aids speakers to shift their attention from processing the message content to working on formulations of the message.'

Bygate, M. (2009) Effects of task repetition of the structure and control of oral language.' In Van den Branden, Bygate, Norris (eds). *Task-based language teaching: a reader*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, p.270.

‘It is important to note that what must be repeated is the whole set of mental processes involved in the planning, assembling, and execution of the speech act, and this must occur within genuinely communicative contexts.’

Segalowitz, N. (2010) *Cognitive bases of second language fluency*. London: Routledge, p. 176.

Swain (1985) elaborates on what she means by ‘push’, in arguing that output should be

“pushed towards the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed *precisely, coherently* and *appropriately*. Being "pushed" in output ... is a concept that is parallel to that of the  $i + 1$  of comprehensible input.”

Swain, M. (1985) Communicative competence: some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In Gass, S. and Madden, C. (eds.) *Input in second language acquisition*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House (p. 249).

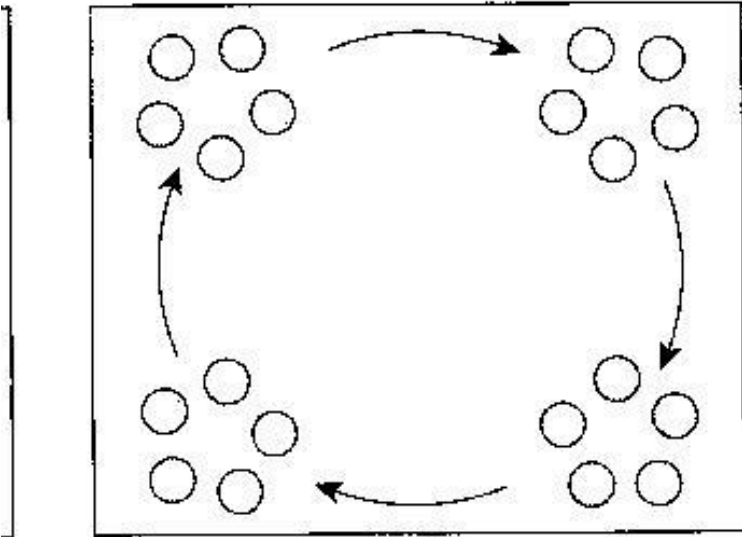


‘Mechanical work is not necessarily monotonous. Automatism, it is true, is acquired by repetition, but this repetition need not be of the parrot-like type. ... The object of most of the language-teaching exercises, drills, and devices invented or developed in recent years is precisely to ensure proper repetition in attractive and interesting ways.’

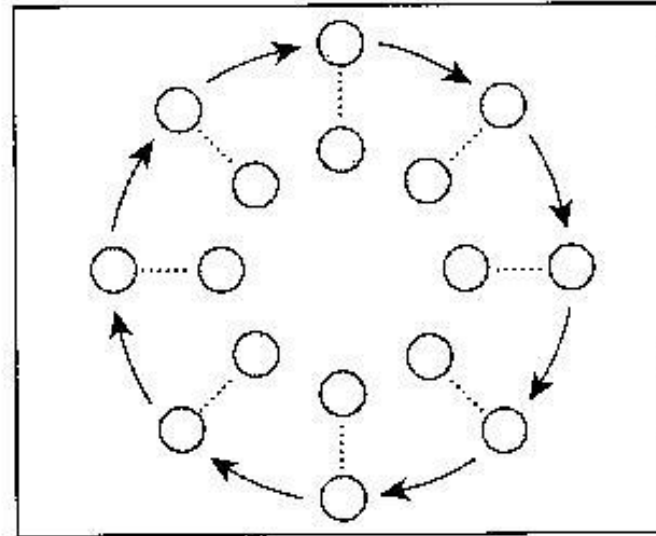
Palmer, H. (1921) *The principles of language-study*. London: George Harrap. (pp. 101-102)

Repetition (or reiteration?) but change one variable, e.g.

- same task – different interlocutor(s)
- same task – different time – e.g. 4 - 3 – 1
- same task – different information – e.g. describe & draw
- same task – different mode – e.g. speaking to writing; video
- same task – different purpose – e.g. fluency to accuracy



**'buzz groups'**  
(people change groups occasionally)



**'wheels'**  
(the outer wheel can move round, changing pairings)

Scrivener, J. (2005) *Learning Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan.

‘Delivering the same talk under increasingly severe time constraints was effective not only in enhancing fluency but also, somewhat unexpectedly, in improving accuracy. ... Note that when we say the ‘same talk’ it is never really the same, nor is it the case that the talk is repeated. It is helpful to distinguish between repetition and recursion in this regard.’

Larsen-Freeman, D. & Cameron, L. (2008) *Complex systems and applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press, p. 212.

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Assisted repeated reading:

‘One group carried out assisted repeated reading (i.e. with audio support) once every day for 5 consecutive days...; the other read the same text once every week for five consecutive weeks ...

The results revealed that intensive practice led to more immediate vocabulary gains but spaced practice led to greater long-term retention.’

Serrano, R. & Huang, H-Y. (2018) ‘Learning vocabulary through assisted repeated reading: How much time should there be between repetitions of the same text?’ *TESOL Quarterly*, 52(4): 971-994.

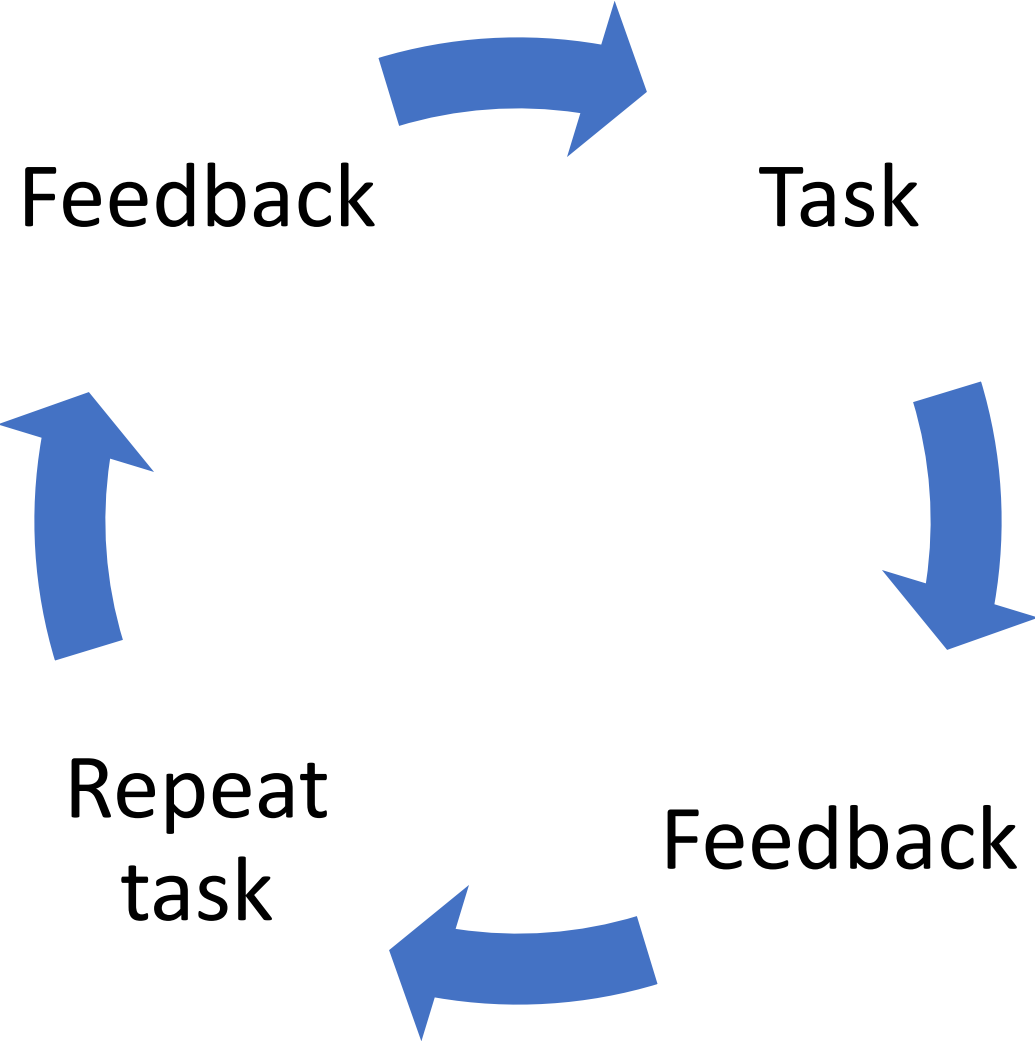
‘Another of my favourite techniques is to tell something to a speaker of the language and have that person tell the same thing back to me in correct, natural form. I then tell the same thing again, bearing in mind the way in which I have just heard it. This cycle can repeat itself two or three times ... An essential feature of this technique is that the text we are swapping back and forth originates with me, so that I control the content...’

Stevick, E. W. (1989). *Success with foreign languages*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, p. 148.

‘A key component of successful learning in contexts using tasks has been found to be the presence of feedback associated with repeated practice.’

Bygate, M. (2018) ‘Introduction’ in Bygate, M. (ed.) *Learning language through task repetition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin, p. 11.





‘Repetition, even of the “same thing”, always produces something new, so that when we repeat an idea, a word, a phrase or an event, it is always renewed’.

Pennycook, A. (2010) *Language as a Local Practice*, London: Routledge, p.43.

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Thanks!

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