

Heidegger on Poets for a Destitute Time

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Abstract

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger's later work includes his attention to the nature of language, and this in relation to the poetic verse of ranking poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Stefan George. In this essay, I engage Heidegger's thinking as he seeks to elucidate the "neighboring" of thinking (*Denken*) and poetry (*Dichtung*), and doing so in the context of what, since the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, becomes the anti-metaphysical discourse heralding "the death of God" and, thus, humanity's destitute time. Following Hölderlin, the question at issue is: "what are poets for, in a destitute time?" ("*...wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*"). If we discern the answer to this question, we place ourselves before the possibility of a transformative experience.

The Poet as Thinker

In a lecture entitled "What are poets for?" (*Wozu Dichter?*), the German philosopher Martin Heidegger commemorated the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (b. 1875, d. 1926) on the twentieth anniversary of his death, thus highlighting the philosophical significance of Rilke as a poet (Heidegger, 1971a, pp. 89). Rilke

comes to the fore of Heidegger's thought in relation to the poet Friedrich Hölderlin's question "*...and what are poets for in a destitute time?*" ("*...wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*"), that appears in Hölderlin's elegy "Bread and Wine." Heidegger decried that, "We hardly understand the question today."

Why is our time destitute? For Hölderlin, it is the time of the "default of God," of "the world's night," the era "defined by the god's failure to arrive" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 89). Heidegger paints a more dire picture, however: "Not only have the gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history." And, as far as humans are concerned, the time is all the more destitute because they "can no longer discern the default of God as a default."

The word 'default' here points to a lack of ground (*Abgrund*) for the world of human concern that once was thought to be secure (indubitable and unshakeable) in its foundation as thought by Western metaphysics, especially that of modernity since the time of the French philosopher René Descartes. The lack of foundation is not a thoroughly hopeless condition, however, as Heidegger proposes: "In the age of the world's night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 90). And who are they? Heidegger cites Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne," wherein the poet speaks of "mortals" who reach into the abyss sooner than the heavenly powers who cannot do all things. It is the poet as poet who perceives "the traces of the fugitive gods" and thus reaches into the depths of the *Abgrund*.

Problematic for ordinary mortals, Heidegger opines, is the fact that, "Traces are inconspicuous, and are always the legacy of a directive that is barely divined." But the poet divines the directive. Hence, "We others must learn to listen to what *these* poets say..." (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 92)-and our listening must not be a mere "aesthetic flight" to their poetizing, since

something much more fundamental is at issue here. It is thus that Heidegger asks in his remembrance: "Is Rainer Maria Rilke a poet in a destitute time? How is his poetry related to the destitution of the time? How deeply does it reach into the abyss? Where does the poet get to, assuming he goes where he can go?"

To answer these questions, Heidegger turns to Rilke's *Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus*. It is here that it is clear Rilke is one of those mortals who as a poet, inquires poetically and reaches into the abyss: "Along the way Rilke comes to realize the destitution of the time more clearly. The time remains destitute not only because God is dead, but because mortals are hardly aware and capable even of their own mortality" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 94). But, notwithstanding, there is language, in the poet's song:

...
Suffering is not discerned,
neither has love been learned,
and what removes us in death,
nothing unveils.
Only the song's high breath
Hallows and hails.

Thus, despite most mortals failing to discern what is destitute about their time, the poet, Rilke in particular, finds the song that hails us while also *hallowing* the time. The poet discerns what yet calls out to mortals from the traces of the holy.

As a philosopher, Heidegger is attentive to "the basic words of Rilke's valid poetry," which are to be "understood only in the context of the realm from which they were spoken" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 95). What is that realm? Heidegger answers: "That realm is the truth of particular beings, as it has developed since the completion of Western metaphysics by Nietzsche" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 95). It is in his pronouncement in the nineteenth century, i.e., in late modernity, that Nietzsche declares "God is dead" ("*Gott ist tot*") (Nietzsche, 1974), thus

denying the legitimacy of the certitude once granted to the reality of the transcendent and its governance over meaning that humans found thereby.

Despite the anti-metaphysical assertion that 'God is dead,' one may yet appropriate language in its significance, i.e., in its disclosure of the truth of particular beings. Rilke's poetic word attends to that task. Heidegger is pointing the would-be interpreter of Rilke away from the merely aesthetic to the metaphysical: "We are unprepared for the interpretation of the elegies and the sonnets, since the realm from which they speak, in its metaphysical constitution and unity, has not yet been sufficiently thought out in terms of the nature of metaphysics" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 96). This assessment is likely rather odd for one accustomed to read poetry and offer analyses in view of an aesthetic measure. Nevertheless, if Heidegger is correct in his guiding proposition here, one may undertake a reading of Rilke's poetic word in terms of the nature of metaphysics.

Heidegger intends to stress the relation between poetry (*Dichten*) and thinking (*Denken*), i.e., the dialogue between the two. But that presumes much: "Who today," Heidegger asks, "would presume to claim that he is at home with the nature of poetry as well as with the nature of thinking and, in addition, strong enough to bring the nature of the two into the most extreme discord and so to establish their concord?" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 96). If one is to read Rilke in terms of the nature of metaphysics and not merely aesthetically, then one must achieve some clarity about the nature of poetry and the nature of thinking, thereby allowing for the possibility of dialogue between the two.

For that dialogue, Heidegger turns to "improvised verses" Rilke wrote in 1924, which appeared in 1934 under the title "*Briefe aus Muzot*." It is with these improvised verses that Heidegger proposes, "the making of poetry, too, is a matter of thinking." Let us read the 16 lines that make up the

improvisation Heidegger engages, bearing in mind that in doing so one initiates a dialogue between thinking and poetry:

As Nature gives the other creatures over
to the venture of their dim delight
and in soil and branchwork grants none special cover,
so too our being's pristine ground settles our plight;
we are not dearer to it; it ventures us.
Except that we, more eager than plant or beast,
go with this venture, will it, adventurous
more sometimes than Life itself is, more daring
by a breath (and not in the least
from selfishness) There, outside all caring,
this creates the pure forces' gravity rules; in the end,
it is our unshieldedness on which we depend,
and that, when we saw it threaten, we turned it
so into the Open that, in the widest orbit somewhere,
where the Law touches us, we may affirm it.
(Heidegger, 1971a, p. 97)

Immediately Heidegger identifies Rilke's attention to the human manner of being, contrasted to that of plant and beast. To contrast is to identify and differentiate. Nature "ventures" all-plant, beast, human. The differentiation is manifestly salient to our appreciation of our plight: "we, more eager than plant or beast, go *with* this venture, will it, adventurous more sometimes than Life itself is, more daring by a breath..." 'Nature'-as "pristine ground"-is here understood to mean "the incipient power gathering everything to itself, which in this manner releases every being to its own self" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 98). Beings as a whole are ventured, each to be released to its own manner of being. All have the same ground even as all are ventured; but, each is ventured to a different "releasement," each according to its own manner of being.

The human being is ventured, but with a daring-more

daring by a breath this being goes *with* the venture, *wills* it according to a will to will that is at once a will to power. Thus, there is nothing passive here about the human manner of being. To speak of 'plight' and 'unshieldedness' here is to point to the *danger* of the daring the human undertakes from the origin of the venture that is the ground of its being. In this way, the human is the endangered being more so than is the plant and the animal, each of the latter ventured to its "dim delight." In contrast to that of the plant and animal, the human venture relates to human consciousness of "Nature"- "Man places before himself the world as the whole of everything objective, and he places himself before the world. Man sets up the world toward himself, and delivers Nature over to himself" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 107). Objectification of the whole of nature entails that even the human being becomes an object of human inquiry and disposition.

To say 'disposition' here is to intend a human will to power, a "self-assertion" that "reframes" or "redispases" of Nature: "Man *produces* new things where they are lacking to him. Man *transposes* things where they are in his way. Man *interposes* something between himself and things that detract him from his purpose. Man *exposes* things when he boosts them for sale and use...Over against the world as the object, man stations himself and sets himself up as the one who deliberately pushes through all this producing" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 108, italics added). In all this producing that reframes and redispases things, even the human being, all beings are no longer permitted releasement into their own manner of being. In sum, Heidegger declares, "The whole objective inventory in terms of which the world appears is given over to, commended to, and thus subjected to the command of self-assertive production" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 109).

On Language and Reality: From Stefan George to Rilke

In his interpretation of Rilke, Heidegger works to disclose the poet's insight into the human plight inasmuch as thinking and poetry are in dialogue in Rilke's thoughtful, poetic word. The poet discloses the human self-assertion that is thereby also the human's self-endangerment in his daring venture, even as none has special protection from Nature. There is anticipation here of what emerges on the horizon: "The design of self-assertion," Heidegger says in his disquiet, "itself extends the realm of the danger that man will lose his selfhood to unconditional production" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 113). That is the "menace" of the venture the human undertakes in the modern period of Western metaphysics and the ostensible progress of philosophy into the sciences and technology.

If the human is more daring in his venture than the plant or animal, such that his daring installs the human into a self-assertive production wherein the human manner of being is itself endangered, then the poet is needed to be yet more daring, to be most daring of all mortals. The poet is more daring in daring the word that relates language and reality. The poet understands that it is *in language* that we disclose the world, that disclosure either *letting things be* in their self-disclosure or *re-presenting them* through what modernity discloses in the language of objectification. The poet, in contrast to the metaphysician, appropriates language without objectifying it. Such is the character of Rilke's improvised verses that Heidegger engages; and, such would be the dialogue of poet and thinker as long as the verses are not engaged epistemologically, i.e., not according to the rules of aesthetics.

Rilke stands before our destitute time to speak a language that is more daring than the language of the metaphysician of modernity. The poet does not merely poetize. Instead, "The mark of these poets is that to them the nature of poetry becomes worthy of questioning, because they are

poetically on the track of that which, for them, is what must be said" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 139). What is it that Rilke thinks must be said? One who understands the nature of poetry tells us when and how it is that a song, i.e., poetic verse, "sings essentially." Heidegger clarifies: "If Rilke is a 'poet in a destitute time' then only his poetry answers the question to what end he is a poet, whither his song is bound, where the poet belongs in the destiny of the world's night. That destiny decides what remains fateful within his poetry" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 139).

Heidegger ends his comments about Rilke with these words, leaving his intimations of Rilke's place in Western poetic thinking undecided. He presents his point by way of a conditional proposition-'*if* Rilke is a poet in a destitute time....' If one accepts that he *is* such a poet, then Rilke himself discerns *to what end* he is a poet. And, as such a poet, Rilke discerns further that he is a poet who *belongs* in the destiny of the world's night, this night that hails all mortals to discern their plight and yet to hallow that night. Yet, more daring than all other mortals, as poet Rilke understands that it is this destiny that decides what is fateful within his poetry, within the language he appropriates in and for his disclosure of reality in a way that is other than that of modern metaphysics and its objectification of the whole of beings. In this way, Rilke understands why poets are needed in a destitute time-what poets are for, as Heidegger puts it.

In a destitute time one needs both poets and thinkers. Just as there remains a task for thinking at the end of philosophy (metaphysics) (Heidegger, 1977), there remains a task for poets of stature such as Rilke. But, perhaps what Heidegger has in mind is to be found also in the poetry of Stefan George, especially in his poem "*Das Wort*" ("The Word"). Moreover, if we are properly attentive and attuned to George's poetic verse, we can find in Rilke's poetic insights what matters so as to answer what Heidegger leaves undecided.

In a discussion on "The Nature of Language"

(Heidegger, 1971b, pp. 57) in the volume *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger engages George's poem. Heidegger is keen to emphasize that an experience with language can be transformative. Thus, he proposes, "To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 57). Whether the language is that of poetry or thinking, one is claimed by it such that "an experience we undergo with language will touch the innermost nexus of our existence," Heidegger says. Hence, both poetry and thinking have their effect on human existence. The question, of course, is-how so?

A poet, Heidegger claims, maybe "compelled-in his own way, that is, poetically-to put into language the experience he undergoes with language" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 59). This would be so for any poet of rank-Hölderlin, Rilke, and, as will be illustrated in what follows, George. Taking this as our cue, what Heidegger does not settle about Rilke can be resolved through Heidegger's commentary on George's poem *Das Wort*, published in the volume of his poetry entitled *Das Neue Reich* (*The New Realm*) in 1928. Heidegger engages the following lines:

The Word

Wonder or dream from distant land
I carried to my country's strand
And waited till the twilit norn
Had found the name within her bourn-
Then I could grasp it close and strong
It blooms and shines now the front along...
Once I returned from happy sail,
I had a prize so rich and frail.
She sought for long and tidings told:
"No like of this these depths enfold."
And straight it vanished from my hand,
The treasure never graced my land ...

So I renounced and sadly see:
Where word breaks off no thing may be.

Clearly, the final line captures our attention, as it signals the poet's poetic thinking as he seeks to share his momentous experience by bringing it to word. One is moved to ask: Why does the poet speak thus? What does he mean?

If one shifts from the poetic verse to a proposition of thinking, as Heidegger points out, one has the statement: "No thing is where the word breaks off." In other words, "No thing is where the word is lacking, that word which names the given thing" (Heidegger, 1971b, pp. 60-61). Language, we can say, is *disclosive* of being, of reality, with the word bringing all beings, all things, into the clarity of the word, without which it cannot be. What is in concealment without the word emerges into the open, into being, with the word. Important here is that the poet's poetic thinking is neither science nor philosophy (e.g., in the way in which one speaks of linguistics or metalinguistics).

But, singular focus upon the final line of the poem removes us from the full import the poet seeks to convey. He speaks of "wonder" and "dream," something he "carried" from a "distant land;" something he labored to apprehend by bringing it "close" as it "bloomed" and "shined." Yet, that which was grasped was "frail" though "rich;" and, in that frailty it "vanished." Alas for the poet's hope-that which he carried, that which was his "treasure," never graced his land. But, thereby, in that experience the poet has "sadly" seen what was of import not only to him but also to those from his "land," even as he "renounced": "Where word breaks off no thing may be." What is of import here? Heidegger opines:

By learning that renunciation, the poet undergoes his experience with the word's lofty sway. He receives primal knowledge of what task is assigned to the poetic saying, what sublime and lasting matters are promised to it and yet withheld

from it. The poet could never go through the experience he undergoes with the word if the experience were not attuned to sadness, to the mood of releasement into the nearness of what is withdrawn but at the same time held in reserve for an originary advent. (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 66)

Heidegger points out the task of the poet in his poetic thinking. The poet receives "primal knowledge" through the word that is granted to him to say. However, the word may be granted or may be withdrawn, withheld. Where the word is given, the thing may be; where the word is withdrawn, withheld, the thing may not be. Yet, the poet stands in the nearness of the word even as it is withdrawn. As poet he apprehends that what is in the moment withheld may yet be granted. For the moment, the word, and hence the being of the thing, is held in reserve "for an originary advent."

When the word is held in reserve it is guarded, protected. In this way, the poet guards the word that is held in reserve, or, better said, held in the *preserve* of language. This is the poet's experience. But at issue here is whether we, too, may enter into this experience, as Heidegger asks. The poet is transformed by his experience, as the final line makes clear. But, what more is to be said of his experience? Heidegger (1971b, p. 68) offers his insight:

At first, and for long, it seems as though the poet needed only to bring the wonders that enthrall and the dreams that enrapture him to the wellspring of language, and there in unclouded confidence let the words come forth to him that fit all the wonderful and dreamlike things whose images have come to him...[No] more was necessary than that his art now also find the word for them to describe and present them...

But in the end the moment comes for Stefan George when the conventional self-assured poetic production suddenly breaks down and makes him think of Hölderlin's words:

But what endures is founded by poets.

For at one time, the poet-still filled with hope after a happy sail-reaches the place of the ancient goddess of fate and demands the name of the rich and frail prize that lies there plain in his hand. It is neither "wonder from afar" nor "dream." The goddess searches long, but in vain. She gives him the tidings:

"No like of this these depths enfold."

This is the poet's experience as he seeks the word in language. "The frail rich prize, already plainly in hand," Heidegger interprets, "does not reach being as a thing, it does not come to be a treasure, that is, a poetically secured possession of the land" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 69).

Heidegger's interpretation is careful not to over-think George's insight into the relation of word and thing even as George connects his poetic thought to that of Hölderlin without being overly dependent on the latter. George has his own essential poetic experience even as he links it to the poetic insight of Hölderlin. Furthermore, Heidegger's engagement of the poets Hölderlin, Rilke, and George is such as to appreciate the import of the poetic word separate from the approach of the philosopher, i.e., the aesthetic method, thus either scientific or philosophical. Poetry and thinking belong together, especially when one has in mind poets for a destitute time.

Rilke as Poet for a Destitute Time

As we noted above, Heidegger had left his review of Rilke's improvised verses with a conditional proposition: 'if Rilke is a poet in a destitute time....' Heidegger did not commit himself to an affirmation. If so, however, then Rilke, too, apprehends the significance of the poetic word in the destitute time that concerned him; and, like George, Rilke could discern the preserve in which the word may be granted or withheld.

Indubitably, the poetic word is essential to a destitute time, to seeing our way about, our way through and beyond, that time. George's experience points to what is essential: "Where

word breaks off no thing may be." This line, Heidegger explains, "points to the relation of word and thing in this manner, that the word itself is the relation, by holding everything forth into being, and there upholding it. If the word did not have this bearing, the whole of things, the 'world' [in all its significance], would sink into obscurity, including the 'I' of the poem, him who brings his country's strand, to the source of names, all the wonders and dreams he encounters" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 73).

But, it is salient that George recalls Hölderlin's encouraging word: "But what endures is founded by poets." What endures, what is founded by poets, does so in their poetic words, as they disclose what emerges from concealment into the light of the word. In a destitute time, a poet may ask, as Rilke did: "[How] is it possible to live when after all the elements of this life are utterly incomprehensible to us?" (*Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, n. d.*). Life is perhaps indeed incomprehensible when one confronts what seems to be the darkness of the time, the flight of the gods removing in that moment all former meaning and security of human existence. Where is one to seek what one yearns to know? Where is one to find the word that, though concealed, may yet be spoken by the poet?

In his "Elegy 1," Rilke asked: "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies? and even if one of them suddenly pressed me against his heart, I would perish in the embrace of his stronger existence." There is no answer to be found there, for such an embrace is terrifying: "Each single angel is terrifying." Where, then, to turn? "Not angels, not humans; and even the knowing animals are aware that we feel little secure and at home in our interpreted world" (Rilke, "Elegy 1," n. d.). The time is destitute when the human feels homeless (*heimatlos*) in a world that has its meaning only in its interpretation, and even then still remains inexplicable.

Notwithstanding, Rilke wrote in his "Fear of the Inexplicable" that, one must be "ready for everything," excluding

nothing, "not even the most enigmatical," thereby to "draw exhaustively from his own existence" (Rilke, "Fear of the Inexplicable," n. d.). One is to do so even as one is to draw from the depths of one's life experience—"and not be strangers to the unspeakable terror of their abode." The terror of the depths is "unspeakable," not given to word, as sometimes the fitting word is lacking. However, what remains in concealment may yet have its originary advent. There is a "principle" to be found here, Rilke proposes: "And if only we arrange our life according to that principle which counsels us that we must always hold to the difficult, then that which now still seems to us the most alien will become what we most trust and find most faithful. *Perhaps*, just perhaps... "Perhaps," he adds, "everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us." Help from "us," the poets, that is; for, it is the poet who fathoms the depths of language and thereby the depths of being, reaching deeply into the abyss, as Heidegger intuited, the poet evermore daring in his venture than other mortals can be.

Perhaps Rilke understood as much when he wrote his poem, "At the Brink of Night." Therein he speaks of being "awake upon the darkening land," while he (as poet) is "a string stretched across deep surging resonance." He speaks of "things" as "violin bodies full of murmuring darkness." He speaks of his task as imperative, what he *should* do: "I should release my silver vibrations: then everything below me will live, and whatever strays into things will seek the light that falls without end from my dancing tone into the old abysses around which heaven swells through narrow imploring rifts" (Rilke, "At the Brink of Night," n. d.). The poet gives way to song, to his "silver vibrations," yielding the word where a thing may be by emerging from the murmuring darkness, the word through which everything "will live." Mere mortals may be attuned to the surging resonance if they hearken to the word of the poet, placing themselves as mortals in "the neighborhood of poetry,"

as Heidegger puts it: "As soon as we consider that what is named here"-i.e., "Where word breaks off no thing may be"-is the relation between thing and word, and with it the relation of language to an entity as such, we have called poetry over into the neighborliness of thinking."

For Heidegger the task of thinker is connected essentially to the task of the poet, including for him principally Hölderlin, Rilke, and George, as he ponders the nature of language. The word of the poet and the word of the thinker are not identical, but poet and thinker recognize each other as neighbors. It is critical for the future of humanity that poet and thinker engage each other in dialogue; for, it is thus that they manifest their guardianship of language and thereby of the whole of being. Problematic in our destitute time, Heidegger reminds, is that:

...modern thinking is ever more resolutely and exclusively turning into calculation, it concentrates all available energy and "interests" in calculating how man may soon establish himself in worldless cosmic space. This type of thinking is about to abandon the earth as earth. As calculation, it drifts more and more rapidly and obsessively toward the conquest of cosmic space. This type of thinking is itself already the explosion of a power that could blast everything to nothingness. All the rest that follows from such thinking, the technical processes in the functioning of doomsday machinery, would merely be the final sinister dispatch of madness into senselessness. (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 84)

By 'modern thinking' Heidegger here refers to the metaphysics of modernity, calculative thinking (*rechnendes Denken*) dominating the modern disposition to the exclusion of the meditative/essential thinking (*besinnliches/wesentliches Denken*) that Western humanity needs as the former heightens

the installation of the planetary rule of technology and its corresponding technocratic order. Without the essential dialogue with the poet, Heidegger avers, we move uncannily, homelessly, about, "perhaps as the monstrous creatures of technology, assimilated to machines" (Heidegger, 197b, p. 85). The poet does not speak *about* language but, apprehending the nature of language, speaks from *within* language, Heidegger opines.

Hence, returning to the final stanza of George's poem, Heidegger attends to the significance of "the word." If, as the poet relates, no thing may be where the word is lacking, then what of the status of the word itself? "Whatever bestows being," Heidegger asks, "must it not 'be' itself, all the more and before all else, be most in being, more so than all the things that are? We cannot see it any other way as long as we calculate, that is, compute the sufficient reason which rationalizes beings as the result of reason, reason's effects, and thereby satisfies our conceptualizations" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 86). But, Heidegger would have us beware of such a calculative move in thought, thus to undermine the poet's insight. "Word and thing are different, even disparate," Heidegger instructs. What then is one to say of the poet's experience here? "What, then, does the poetic experience with the word show as our thinking pursues it? It points to something thought-provoking and memorable with which thinking has been charged from the beginning, even though in a veiled manner. It shows what is there and yet 'is' not. The word, too, belongs to what is there-perhaps not merely 'too' but first of all, and even in such a way that the word, the nature of the word, conceals within itself that which gives being" (Heidegger, 1971b, pp. 87-88).

It is in the nature of language to *grant* the word but also to *withhold* it, to *conceal* within itself what may, but perhaps also may not, have its originary advent and thereby, in that advent, in that emergence, "give" "being." The poet apprehends this even as he discerns and appropriates his task as poet. Thinking

poetically, then, Heidegger clarifies: "If our thinking does justice to the matter, then we may never say of the word that it is, but rather that it gives-not in the sense that words are given by an 'it,' but that the word itself gives. The word itself is the giver" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 88). Thus, the word is not a thing in the usual sense. The word governs the emergence of the thing as thing, whether one speaks of the human, plant, or animal. It is the guardian of being. Language is the guardian of being. And, the poet and the thinker, together in dialogue, are guardians of language. Accordingly, it matters to the future of humanity, to those who recognize their plight in this destitute time, that they preserve the word, the fitting word, for its originary advent.

Like the poet in his poetic thought, the thinker is to appropriate his task of thinking, of a meditative/essential thinking, when otherwise modernity's calculative thinking would dominate even to the exclusion of poets, not realizing what poets are for in a destitute time. Like the poet, we may seek the poetic experience, even if in doing so we find "the prize" to which George refers "does withdraw into the mysterious wonder that makes us wonder." One ought not shy away from the neighborhood when the word is lacking; for, like the poet, we are capable of singing "nothing less than the intuited secret of the word, which in denying itself brings near to us its withheld nature" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 89).

Since the time of Greek antiquity, Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a3-5) denominated the human being that "living being" (*zoon*) who is "capable of speech" (*logon echon*), 'speech' here more than mere 'voice' (*phone*). It is in and through this capacity for language, for meaningful language, that the human becomes fully human, but also relates the human manner of being to the manner of being of his life-world (*Lebenswelt*). As Heidegger reminds: "For man is man only because he is granted the promise of language, because he is needful to language, that he may speak it" (Heidegger, 1971b,

p.90). But, *how* we speak matters immensely, especially in a destitute time when speaking is dominated by the words of calculative thinking, when the living beings capable of speech become insidiously "technicized" animals (*technisierte Tiere*). But, there is nothing necessary about this seeming fate as the calculative thinking of Western humanity installs the global reign of technology and thereby draws the whole of humanity into its governance.

Our task is to pit meditative thinking (with its focus on *meaning*) decisively against calculative thinking (with its focus on *utility*) -and, like Heidegger, make our own "way" into "the neighborhood of poetry and thinking, underway on the lookout for a possibility of undergoing an experience with language" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 92). In this way, one and all, severally and jointly, may find a genuinely transformative experience that moves us along a way of self-discovery (*Selbstbefindlichkeit*), away from the "idle chatter" of the anonymous "they-self" (*das Man-Selbst*) that ever leaves us "inauthentic" (*uneigentlich*). Seeking such an experience, each may become what s/he must truly be-an authentic self (*eigentlich Selbst*). It is thus that we may find our home (*Heimat*) upon the earth as earth and that is never merely some element of cosmic space where the human becomes "worldless." Rather, in the neighborhood of poetic experience, we come to know, as Hölderlin does. Consider Hölderlin's poem titled "In lovely blue..." Therein we find these lines that refer to "the gods":

...

May a man look up
From the utter hardship of his life
And say: Let me also be
Like these? Yes. As long as kindness lasts,
Pure, within his heart, he may gladly measure
himself
Against the divine. Is God unknown?

Is he manifest as the sky? This I tend
 To believe. Such is man's measure,
 Well deserving, yet poetically
 Man dwells on this earth. But the shadow
 Of the starry night is no more pure, if I may
 say so,
 Than man, said to be the image of God.
 Is there measure on earth? There is
 None.

The poet calls us to our task: poetically to dwell upon this earth. How humanity has its sojourn matters to a common future. The human is both measure and the one who measures, and does so even in the time that is destitute in the flight of the gods. If mortals neglect to make a place for poetic experience, then they yield irretrievably to calculative thinking, to the point that there is not to be found a measure on earth, as the poet says, in what should give us pause and cause us a ponderous disquietude. It is only when humanity appropriates the nature of language as does the poet that the measure may be restored. Then, and only then, may the poet *say* and so have it be: *poetically-only* poetically-man *dwells* on this earth.

Drawing near, then, to the neighborhood of poetry and thinking, mortals are called to the wonder that initiates an originary advent of the poet Hölderlin's mysterious word:

*Full of merit, yet poetically, man
 Dwells on this earth.*
 (Hölderlin, 1984, pp. 249-253)

Indeed, would that humanity would endure, as Hölderlin proposes. But, as Hölderlin and Rilke both intuit and together say, such endurance is possible only through the lofty word the poet alone finds, especially in a destitute time. The lofty word has already been spoken, however, by such as Hölderlin, Rilke, and George. Do we hearken? Are we attuned? If we hearken and are attuned to the poet's word, then we ourselves are capable of

speaking anew. "Man first speaks," Heidegger asserts, "when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal" (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 214). The poet's verse is ever a primal appeal, since it speaks from out of the abyss from where the word may emerge to make its originary advent. Hölderlin speaks of humans full of merit, dwelling poetically, on the earth. Thus, as Heidegger says so as to avert misinterpretation, "Poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling." At a time when calculative thinking dominates to the exclusion of meditative/essential thinking, thereby to alienate the human from the earth as home, as the site of his dwelling, it is the poet who speaks to preserve the possibility of an authentic human sojourn. Our ever present task is to hearken and find our own most attunement, thus to find our way beyond this destitute time.

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Why Should Rubrics be used to Evaluate Oral Presentations?

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Abstract

'Why should instructors use rubrics to evaluate oral presentations?' Assessing oral presentations is a complex ritual, as it involves multiple activities that need to be monitored simultaneously. A rubric is an assessment tool that is transparent and can also transcend the subjective bias of English language instructors. While using rubrics in evaluating oral presentation is nothing new, the few available studies in the Bangladeshi context suggest that this practice might not be very familiar to instructors and learners, particularly in an EFL country like ours. The primary focus of this paper is to find out the potential of rubrics in evaluating English oral presentations in Bangladesh, especially in private universities. At the same time, this paper looks at teachers' perspectives regarding rubrics in evaluating oral presentations. The outcome of this study, on the one hand, suggests that the proper use of rubric can have a positive effect on learners' preparation and performance of oral presentations by gradually increasing their metacognitive awareness, and on the other hand, benefits EFL instructors in terms of justifying students' evaluation and providing constructive feedback.

Keywords: Rubrics, oral presentation, transparency, feedback

1. Critical Implication

A rubric, with its multifaceted implications, is widely used as an assessment tool in teaching and learning. Supported by strong evidence of benefitting both teachers and students, this assessment tool may be used for formative and summative purposes. On the other hand, oral presentations benefit tertiary level learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) context to a great extent as it essentially plays a crucial role in grooming and developing English proficiency for academic and professional purposes. The medium of instruction of all the 107 private universities of Bangladesh is English, where individual or group presentations are an integral part of the taught courses in graduate and undergraduate programmes, irrespective of the discipline. This is how effective an oral presentation is in private universities of Bangladesh; therefore, it needs to be evaluated so that the learners can make the most of this skill. Oral presentations, if evaluated by using rubrics, can document the process of evaluation, help the students perform better by notifying them about the expected criteria beforehand (Jonsson, 2014; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Kerby & Romine, 2009; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013) and provide constructive feedback after the performance (Jonsson & Panadero, 2016; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Reddy, 2007).

Even though using rubrics for evaluation is quite prevalent in higher educational institutions, very few studies on this topic are available in an EFL country like Bangladesh. Therefore, this paper aims to find out whether teachers use rubrics as an assessment tool to evaluate English oral presentations in Bangladeshi private universities, and if they explain the criteria of rubrics to their students beforehand, and keep a record of the evaluation process. It also delves into

information if the students can perform better by knowing about teachers' expectations and gradually improve their English oral communication skills through teachers' feedback based on the documented record. In other words, this paper looks at the significance of using rubrics in evaluating oral presentations in English in private universities of Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

This section looks at the relevant literature on rubrics pertaining to oral presentations in English as a foreign language (EFL) context at the tertiary level. Furthermore, it looks at the benefits of using rubrics in providing transparency as an evaluation tool and the benefits of feedback.

2.1 Significance of rubrics for assessing oral presentations

Assessment and evaluation go hand in hand in education. The use of rubrics in higher education marks a significant development towards a better understanding of assessment and evaluation (Brookhart & Chen, 2015; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Rubrics not only specifies the levels and criteria for evaluating a task or any performance but also provides the necessary information to the students about what is expected from them, thus simplifying the complexities of the evaluation process and eventually leading to a successful assessment (Brookhart, 2018; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Thus, it might even be termed as tangible evidence.

Being a determinant of measuring students' progress, assessment in education has a profound impact on students' gradual improvement (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Studies have shown that formative assessment provided with constructive feedback can positively improve students' future performance (Black & William, 2010; Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Dolin, Black, Harlen, & Tiberghien, 2017). However, evaluating a task or performance, especially in the classroom, as a part of formative

assessment can sometimes be tricky, as it requires considerable attention to multiple aspects simultaneously. Furthermore, students perform better when they know how their performance will be evaluated (Brookhart & Chen, 2015; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Wolf & Stevens, 2007). In such cases, the use of rubrics has shown its effectiveness by acting as guidelines for both the teachers and the students (Brookhart & Chen, 2015; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Uddin, 2014).

Oral presentation being a speaking activity frequently practiced for formative assessment, is an acknowledged way to develop oral communication skills (Brooks & Wilson, 2014; Harun, Islam & Rahman, 2016). Effective oral communication skills have impacts on both academic and professional fields (Brooks & Wilson, 2014; Harun et al., 2016; Jahan & Jahan, 2008; Tsang, 2017; Živković, 2014). However, when the presentation is conducted in a foreign language as a part of an academic assessment, it becomes quite challenging for a non-native student to express through a language which he/she does not use on a regular basis (Harun et al., 2016, p. 137). Nevertheless, this particular practice may improve students' English oral communication skills, especially public speaking skills, to a great extent when it accompanies an analysis of performance. Rubric, being a document for both keeping record of students' performance and providing feedback, can be a potential tool to provide such an analysis of performance (Jonsson & Panadero, 2016; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Reddy, 2007; Wollenschlager, Hattie, Machts, Moller, & Harms, 2016).

2.2 Private Universities in Bangladesh

At present, both public and private universities in Bangladesh are functioning side by side towards common ends, that is, to ensure higher education to the ever-growing population. Public universities are government-funded institutions, whereas private universities are privately funded.

Before 1992, higher education had been only limited to the public sector of Bangladesh (Ahmed, Iqbal & Abbasi, 2018). The increasing demand for higher education and the infrastructural limitations of public universities created a serious 'demand-supply gap' that ultimately resulted in opening the private sector in higher education (Ahmed et al., 2018, p. 4). The enactment of the Private University Act in 1992 led to the inception of private universities in Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2018). However, to cope with emerging issues concerning quality assurance, transparency, and accountability within the administrative bodies of private universities, the Private University Act of 1992 was subsequently replaced in 2010 (UGC Profile, 2016, p. 34). North South University, the first private university of Bangladesh was established in 1992 (see Monem & Baniamin, 2010) and the continual establishment of private universities successively outnumbered the public universities over the course of the next couple of decades. Currently, there are 107 private, 49 public, and three international universities in Bangladesh (UGC, 2020). The medium of instruction of public universities is primarily Bangla, the national and official language of this country. The medium of instruction of all private and international universities in Bangladesh is English, and oral presentation is an essential part of private higher education in this country, as already mentioned earlier. Furthermore, with the exception of National University of Bangladesh (which operates through the 2300 colleges) and Bangladesh Open University (the only distance learning institution of this country), and Islamic Arabic University (which provides BA and MA madrasah programs), more students study in private universities of Bangladesh than public institutions of higher learning (excluding colleges and madrasahs) (see Chowdhury, Absar & Quader, 2020).

2.3 Assessment and Evaluation at Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

The National Education Policy 2010 proposes several strategies regarding assessment and evaluation at tertiary education in Bangladesh. These strategies include uniformity in the evaluation system for both public universities and private universities, prioritizing continual evaluation and assessment, and a uniform grading system (NEP, 2010). 'Continual evaluation, homework and mid-term examination' mentioned in National Education Policy (2010) are part of formative assessment in tertiary education, whereas summative assessment denotes the overall end-of-semester or end-of-year examination (Dolin et al., 2018). Even though formative assessment or assessment for learning seems to be emphasized more in higher education, both formative and summative evaluations are significant to assess the students continually (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Evaluation at the tertiary level in Bangladesh lacks transparency, and in most cases, evaluators are not held accountable for their evaluation process (Islam & Arefin, 2017; Nurunnabi, 2018). Furthermore, a unified standard among the higher education institutions to improve the quality of higher education has still not been set because of the 'lack of understanding of the current state of education quality and mainly due to the gap between public and private universities in terms of education quality (Mazumder, Karim & Bhuiyan, 2012). Thus, there is a visible difference in the quality of tertiary level education catered by various higher education institutions of Bangladesh (Mazumder et al., 2012).

2.4 Oral Presentation in EFL Context

As a speaking activity, oral presentation in English can significantly improve the language proficiency of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners (Farabi, Hassanvand, & Gorjian, 2017; Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010). Several studies in the EFL context demonstrate that even though oral presentation in

English is quite challenging for the EFL learners, it positively impacts their English language learning (Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, & Taki, 2015; Harun et al., 2016; Jahan & Jahan, 2008). According to Harun et al. (2016), oral presentation in English has a phenomenal effect on developing EFL learners' language proficiency as it makes them autonomous, confident and motivates them to present their oral communication skills before others. In the tertiary education sector of Bangladesh, English oral presentation is highly regarded because having oral proficiency in an EFL context like Bangladesh is prioritized in the competitive job sector (Harun et al., 2016). Higher educational institutions in Bangladesh, especially the private universities, thus, include an oral presentation in English from the very beginning of tertiary education to prepare the students for the professional sector (Harun et al., 2016; Islam & Ahmed, 2018; Jahan & Jahan, 2008). However, students of tertiary level education in Bangladesh generally find English oral presentations quite challenging and at the same time, the teachers also perceive that most of the students' oral presentation performance is not up to standard (Harun et al., 2016; Jahan & Jahan, 2008). Jahan and Jahan (2008) identified some major reasons why the EFL learners have difficulty in English oral presentation. In a study (2008) on tertiary level students of Bangladesh, they pointed out that lack of speaking assessment in previous levels of education, students' lack of practice, and teaching techniques are mainly responsible for Bangladeshi EFL learners' difficulty in oral presentation in English. Similarly, Harun et al. (2016) mentioned that oral proficiency in English is neglected in primary and secondary levels of education in Bangladesh. The study (2016) also shortlisted some major challenges freshers face at the tertiary level when performing oral presentations in English. The challenges include stage fright, fear of speaking English and lack of fluency in English-some of which might be overcome through practicing oral presentation (Harun et al., 2016).

2.5 Evaluation of Oral Presentation

Evaluation of oral presentation in English can be done either subjectively or objectively (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010). Subjective evaluation can sometimes be biased and thus, it may lack credibility, whereas objective evaluation is more credible than its subjective counterpart (Holmes & Smith, 2003). In order to increase the credibility of evaluation in case of oral presentation in English, it is necessary to fix evaluative criteria based on which presentation would be evaluated (Otoshi & Heffernan, 2008). Furthermore, to ensure transparency of evaluation and improve students' performance of oral presentation in English, the teachers must give their students a clear idea about the evaluative criteria beforehand (Otoshi & Heffernan, 2008). Evaluative criteria for oral presentation in English may vary in accordance with the learning outcome of the oral presentation. To ensure validity, reliability and consistency in evaluation, the use of various assessment tools like rubrics, rating scale, checklist, etc., has been proved to be effective (Brookhart, 2013; Kerbi & Romine, 2010; Mazdayasna, 2012).

Some factors have been found to have a close association with the evaluation process. If taken into consideration while evaluating oral presentation, these factors can benefit both the teachers and the learners in attaining objective evaluation. Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero (2017) argue that in the case of improving oral presentation, peer assessment and feedback with the help of a rubric can be more effective than teacher's assessment. Otoshi and Heffernan (2008) opined that to increase the reliability of assessment, oral presentation needs to be evaluated by both teachers and learners.

2.6 Rubrics

Rubric, in general, refers to a set of instructions (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). In the education sector, it has a number of meanings (Dawson, 2015; Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

Rubric has been interpreted in various ways depending on its usage (Dawson, 2015). It can be commonly defined as a student-centered assessment tool having a set of definite criteria with descriptive performance levels for those criteria (Brookhart, 2013, 2018; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). It assists the assessors in distinguishing the quality of performance (Panadero & Jonsson, 2020) and at the same time facilitates both the assessor and the learners in achieving the desired outcome. A rubric has two distinctive features, namely evaluative criteria and description of various performances from lower to upper levels or upper to lower levels (Brookhart, 2013, 2018).

2.7 Rubrics in Evaluation

Rubrics are used for multiple purposes including scoring, guiding instructional design, providing feedback and ensuring transparency (Wolf & Stevens, 2007), but first and foremost rubrics are used for evaluation purposes (Brookhart, 2013). Rubrics help teachers evaluate objectively by giving structure to observation instead of judging haphazardly (Brookhart, 2013, p. 5). Thus, the evaluation process gains more credibility (Dickinson & Adams, 2017). Furthermore, the use of rubrics has been reported to have increased the validity and reliability of assessment to a great extent (Brookhart & Chen, 2014; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). In a review of rubric studies, Brookhart and Chen (2015) found numerous instances of empirical research which show positive results of rubrics in achieving consistent and reliable judgment. The study (Brookhart and Chen, 2015) also shows considerable evidence of rubrics producing valid and useful scores for grading and evaluation.

2.8 Rubrics in Transparency

Sharing assessment criteria with students either for the sake of accountability or for communicating expectations has

become commonplace in the education sector (Jonsson & Prins, 2019). This practice along with making the students aware of the assessment purpose, is often considered as transparency (Jonsson, 2014, p. 840). Through specific evaluative criteria, rubrics make teachers' expectations regarding any particular assessment accessible to the students and thus it enhances the transparency in evaluation (Jonsson, 2014). Studies on rubrics confirm that transparency in evaluation through the use of rubrics has a positive impact on students' performance (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade & Du, 2005; Jonsson, 2014; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Kerby & Romine, 2010; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). In a review on empirical research on rubrics, Jonsson and Svingby (2007) concluded that one of the significant benefits of using rubrics is that they make 'expectation and criteria explicit' to the students and such transparency in turn promotes learning. Another study also supports the positive effect of transparency (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Even though there is the possibility of 'criteria compliance' replacing learning and the chance of promoting 'instrumentalism' as consequences of transparency through assessment criteria (Torrance, 2007), transparency has more positive values than the negative ones and issues such as criteria compliance and instrumentalism can be avoided if teachers implement transformative approach in assessment (Balloo, Evans, Hughes, Zhu, & Winstone, 2018).

2.9 Rubric as a medium of feedback

Feedback based on rubrics is specific and constructive (Stevens & Levi, 2005), and thus it becomes more effective than general feedback. Several studies on rubric feedback demonstrate that rubrics make student-learning effective by aiding in the feedback process and rubric feedback has a positive impact on students' performance (Jonsson & Panadero, 2016; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Reddy, 2007; Wollenschlager et al., 2016). Rubric feedback can develop self-regulated learning

because it helps learners self-assess (Reddy, 2007; Sterling et al., 2016). Wollenschlager et al., (2016) gave evidence that rubric feedback becomes quite beneficial to the students when a rubric can answer students' learning goal, their current performance, and most importantly, how they can improve their performance in the future. They (2016) further argued that even though transparency of learning goals is the primary aim of a rubric, it is not enough to improve students' performance; rather, rubric feedback benefits students most when it provides information related to improving individual performance.

As one of the significant aspects of formative assessment is to promote effective learning through feedback (Black & William, 2010; Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Dolin et al., 2017, p. 58), many a time rubrics have been used in formative assessment (Jonsson & Panadero, 2016; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007).

2.10 Rubrics in Bangladeshi Context

Rubrics, both in practice and research, seem to be still quite an unexplored area in the academic context of Bangladesh. Only one empirical study on rubrics in Bangladeshi context has been found. In a quasi-experimental study, Uddin (2014) found a noticeable impact of rubrics on students' performance. Both the teachers and the students seemed to have a positive attitude towards the use of rubrics (Uddin, 2014). Another study (Chowdhury, 2019) discusses some basic details of rubrics and its application in teaching, emphasizing how it impacts assessment, feedback and learning. Other than these studies, hardly any virtual evidence has been found on the practical use of rubrics in Bangladesh. Those include a small number of workshops for promoting the use of rubrics that have been reported to take place in a few universities (BELTA, 2019; BRAC University, 2009, 2014).

3. Methodology

Methodology is often the backbone of an empirical study, and needs to be comprehensively documented and explained. This section mainly focuses on the research design, participants and sampling technique, theoretical framework, instruments, and data collection procedure.

3.1 Research Design

The focus of the study was to find out how oral presentation in English is being evaluated in the private sector of higher educational institutions in Bangladesh. It emphasized the use of rubric in evaluating English oral presentations in an attempt to explore how the evaluation process is being conducted in private universities of Bangladesh and whether rubric is used while evaluating or not. The study followed the qualitative paradigm and used a triangulation method of data collection which includes class observation, course instructors' interviews, and students' focus group interviews. As this research focused on the evaluation process at tertiary level education, data was collected from university teachers and students, and through their class observation. The classes that were chosen to be observed were the ones in which individual students gave short oral presentations in English for about two to five minutes without using multimedia facilities.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the research were 10 teachers and 48 students from 5 private universities of Bangladesh. All the teachers had been conducting English oral courses at the undergraduate level and the students had been enrolled in those English oral courses. The students were part of the eight classes observed, and those classes were taken by the teachers who had been previously interviewed.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The collected data of this study was analysed using a theory, a concept associated with a theory and a feature of rubrics. The concept of "scaffolding" (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) which is associated with Vygotsky's idea of ZPD (1962, 1978) had been used to analyse data of this research. According to this concept, the students perform better when their instructor assisted them in performing any specific task (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Rubric, if provided to the students before performing any task, can be regarded as guidelines for them. As the study attempted to examine whether or not the students get proper instruction with or without the help of rubrics before performing oral presentation and if they are getting benefitted by it, the theory of scaffolding had been used to analyze how far the students are assisted by their instructors and to what extent their performance is being improved with the scaffolding.

Flavell's (1979) "metacognitive theory" is the theory that has been applied to analyse the data of this study. According to this theory, an individual learner's awareness of his/her cognition usually improves his/her performance (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Rubrics, if appropriately applied, can be used as an effective tool for providing feedback. This study looked into whether the teachers give constructive feedback to the students after their performance of oral presentation and how the students view the feedback. Through the metacognitive theory, the data related to providing and receiving feedback has been analysed to understand whether it helps develop students' metacognition.

"Rubric as a means of providing transparency in assessment" (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade and Du, 2005; Jonsson, 2014; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Kerby & Romine, 2010; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013)-derived basically from rubric's distinctive feature of stating evaluative criteria with descriptive levels of performance-is the evidence-based characteristic of the

rubric that had been applied in this study for analyzing data. This particular characteristic of rubrics emphasizes that rubrics play a significant role in clarifying the demands of any particular assessment and give the students a clear idea regarding what the assessment is about, how the evaluation works and what are being expected from them (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade and Du, 2005; Jonsson, 2014; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Kerby & Romine, 2010; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Data concerning teachers' instruction on oral assessment and students' understanding of the assessment and its specification from the given instruction had been analyzed through this characteristic of rubrics.

3.4 Instrumentation

Interview questions were used as an instrument to collect data from both the teachers and the students. Two specific sets of questions had been made for them. The interview questions were informal and semi-structured. There are eight questions for the university teachers' interview and seven questions for university students' focus group discussion. Another instrument for the research was a checklist for class observation.

3.5 Data Collection

The study employed a triangulation method of data collection that included course instructors' interviews, students' focus group interviews, and class observation. The teachers were asked the interview questions and their answers were audio recorded. In the same way, students' focus group interviews were recorded. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their identity. In the case of class observation, necessary notes were taken while observing the classes.

4. Findings

The research findings had been divided into three parts

according to the sources of the data and then the overall findings had been accumulated and analyzed to find out to what extent they matched. The three parts are-

(a) Findings from the teachers' interview:

(i) Using scripted or unscripted criteria: All of the teachers mentioned that they use some specific criteria for evaluating oral presentation. Among them, one teacher specifically mentioned that s/he uses rubrics for evaluation. However, two of them said that they do not strictly follow the criteria. Even though the teachers confirmed that they use criteria for evaluation, only some of them (3 out of 10) use scripted criteria, whereas the others use unscripted ones.

(ii) Informing the students about the evaluative criteria: All the teachers unanimously said that they make sure that the students know about the criteria for evaluating oral presentation beforehand. Two of them also mentioned that they give rubrics to their students.

(iii) Giving feedback on performance: All of the teachers said that they give feedback to the students on their oral presentation performance. Most of the teachers (6 out of 10) mentioned that they give individual feedback. Some of the teachers (2 out of 10) give overall feedback, while others (2 out of 10) give both individual and overall feedback.

(iv) Keeping record of the evaluation process: During the interview, the teachers were asked if they keep a record of the process of evaluating the students' oral presentation. Most of the teachers (6 out of 10) mentioned that they keep a record of the evaluation process by taking notes when the students perform in the classroom. The rest of them (4 out of 10) said that they only keep a record of the formal presentation which will be marked.

(v) Using assessment tools for evaluating oral presentation: When the teachers were asked if they use any kind of assessment tool for evaluating oral presentation, five of them said that they use rubrics. Among the rest, three teachers use

checklists and two teachers said they use personalized tools, which they have adapted from assessment tools like rubric and checklist.

(vi) Advantages and disadvantages of using assessment tools: In the interview session, the teachers were asked to give their opinion about the usefulness of using assessment tools in evaluating oral presentation-whether they find it beneficial or not. In answering this question, most teachers (7 out of 10) said that they find the assessment tools beneficial. In their opinion, the advantages of using assessment tools in evaluating oral presentation can be divided into three sections, namely advantages in terms of transparency, in terms of scaffolding and in terms of metacognition. Other than these, some of the teachers also mentioned that assessment tools could be helpful for providing feedback and they can be beneficial for the novice teachers and help the teachers understand where to focus. However, three teachers opined that using assessment tools like rubric or checklist has more negative effects than positive ones as such assessment tools can hinder students' spontaneity and potentiality.

(b) Findings from the focus group discussion:

(i) Taking preparation for oral presentation: Most of the students (66%) said that they prepare for oral presentation and practice before their performance. The rest 33% (16 out of 48), mentioned that they do not practice their speech instead only focus on the content.

(ii) Getting guidelines from teachers: The students were asked if they get guidelines from their teachers regarding the evaluative criteria beforehand. Most of them (66%) said that their teachers notify them about the evaluative criteria beforehand. However, the rest of the students (33%) mentioned that they do not have a clear idea about the evaluative criteria before giving an oral presentation.

(iii) Following teacher's guidelines: 58% students stated

that they follow their teachers' guidelines while preparing for oral presentation, while 42% mentioned that they either do not follow the teachers' guidelines or do not get explicit instructions from their teachers.

(iv) Getting feedback from teachers: Majority of the students (90%) informed that they get feedback from their teachers on their oral presentation performance. However, 10% of the students said that they do not get any kind of feedback from their course instructor regarding their oral presentation performance.

(v) Types of feedback: Among the students who get feedback from their teachers, 56% mentioned that their teachers give them individual feedback; 14% get overall feedback and the rest 30% get both overall and individual feedback from their teachers.

(vi) Opinion about receiving feedback: When the students were asked about their opinion on receiving feedback from their teachers, 79% said that they found the feedback helpful. Teachers' feedback on their performance of oral presentations makes them motivated. However, 4% of students do not find the feedback helpful; rather, they feel embarrassed when they get negative feedback. The rest 17%, did not give any opinion, mainly because they did not receive any feedback from their teachers.

(c) Findings from Class Observation:

(i) Teachers' instruction: Generally, an oral presentation is evaluated based on some specific criteria. Therefore, the teachers must give proper instructions to the students regarding the oral presentation. Majority of the teachers (75%) were seen to give instructions to the students before starting the oral presentation. On the other hand, 25% of the teachers did not give any instruction regarding the oral presentation.

(ii) Teachers' activity during the presentation: During class observation, it had been noticed that most of the teachers

(62.5%) were taking notes while the students were performing oral presentations. The rest 37.5% only observed the students' presentation. However, one teacher only marked the presentation but did not seem to take any other notes regarding their performance.

(iii) Giving feedback: It had been observed that apart from a few teachers (25%), most of the teachers (75%) gave feedback on students' performance in the classroom. Among the teachers who gave feedback, three teachers (37.5%) gave overall feedback and the other three (37.5%) gave individual feedback. However, one of the two teachers (T3) who did not give feedback asked the students to meet him/her during office hours to get feedback on their performance. The other teacher (T7), who did not give any feedback, marked the students on their oral presentation performance and disclosed the marks at the end of the class as the presentation was part of their exam.

4.1 Discussion

Oral presentation is quite essential in the EFL context for both academic and professional purposes. In Bangladesh, the emphasis on academic oral presentation starts from the tertiary level (Harun et al., 2016; Jahan & Jahan, 2008). The private universities of Bangladesh include this assessment from the very beginning of university education (Harun et al., 2016). It is necessary to make sure that an assessment such as oral presentation in English is being evaluated in such a way that both the teachers and the students are benefitted by the process. The research suggests that using rubrics in evaluating oral presentation in English at the tertiary level has significant value for both teachers and students. Not only do rubrics clarify the teachers' demand to the students by specifying evaluative criteria with description and value judgment, but it also serves as a document to record students' performance based on which the teachers can give necessary feedback later. Rubrics have been

proved to be an effective means of providing transparency in evaluation because of its nature of relaying information about teachers' expectations (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade & Du, 2005; Jonsson, 2014; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Kerby & Romine, 2010; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Rubric as a document on specific evaluative criteria might work as a scaffolding to help students learn independently and such self-regulated learning in turn helps them perform better than they could have been able to perform all by themselves (Carson & Kavish, 2018; Jonsson, 2014; Panadero & Jonsson, 2020; Panadero & Romero, 2014; Ragupathi & Lee, 2020; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010). Besides being an assisting tool ensuring transparency and a means of scaffolding for students, rubric plays a significant role in giving feedback. Based on students' performance on oral presentation in English and teachers' interviews, it can be said that feedback given from the rubric tends to be specific, constructive, and informative. Such feedback has a positive impact on students' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. It drives students' metacognitive knowledge through self-reflection (Reddy, 2007; Sterling et al., 2016).

The purpose of the research was to determine the significance of using rubric in English oral courses at the tertiary level. To get necessary information regarding this matter, university teachers who conduct English oral courses and university students who had taken such courses were interviewed, and classes on oral presentation in such courses were observed. Apart from a few contradictions, data from these three sources shows several benefits of using rubrics in English oral courses at the tertiary level. Primarily it was found that 50% of the teachers use a rubric, 30% of the teachers use checklists and the rest 20% use personalized tools for evaluating oral presentations. Majority of the teachers (70%) think that assessment tools are beneficial. It was found that all the teachers

generally evaluate oral presentations based on a few criteria; most of the teachers inform the students about those criteria beforehand; several of them keep regular records of their evaluation of students' performance, and a majority of them give feedback focusing on those criteria. To be more specific, data from teachers' interviews and students' focus group discussion indicate that 100% of the teachers use a format of criteria, either scripted or unscripted, to evaluate oral presentation. All the teachers (100% from the teachers' interview) claimed to notify their students about the evaluative criteria beforehand. However, in this regard, contrast was noticed between the data found from the teachers and the students. 67% of the students informed that they were properly notified, but the rest 33% of the students mentioned that they were partially notified. 58% of the students informed that they prepare according to the criteria or instructions given by their teachers. As for documenting the students' performance evaluation, 60% of teachers keep regular records, and the others keep records occasionally during exams. Data also revealed that the majority of the teachers (100% claimed by the teachers and 75% found during class observation) give either overall or individual feedback on students' performance and 90% students also confirmed that they receive feedback about their performance from their teachers. Moreover, 79% of the students seemed to have a positive attitude towards the feedback they receive from their teachers and they think that the feedback helps them improve their performance.

From the teachers' opinion, several advantages of using assessment tools have been found. Those advantages were categorized in three sets, namely in terms of transparency, in terms of scaffolding and in terms of metacognition. Under the category of transparency in evaluating oral presentation, assessment tools were found to be effective means of specifying as well as verifying the evaluation process, clarifying the grading process, demonstrating students' errors and mistakes, ensuring

impartiality in scoring, and making the outcome of evaluation accessible to the students. Advantages of assessment tools in terms of scaffolding include making the students aware of how they are going to be evaluated, working as guidelines for the students, and guiding them specifically about what to do and what not to do. The third category, advantages in terms of students' metacognition, includes making students aware of how they have been evaluated and making them understand their strengths and weaknesses through specific and constructive feedback. Apart from these three categories of advantages, some other advantages of using assessment tools were found, such as their role in helping the teachers understand where to focus and also helping in providing feedback. The tools are said to be particularly beneficial for teachers who have zero experience in evaluating oral presentations.

In general, assessment tools, especially rubrics, help the students understand their teacher's expectations, assist teachers in gathering and recording data about students' performance, and make it easier for them to give feedback to the students. These data show a number of aspects regarding how a rubric can positively affect students' preparation of oral presentation and how it can help them improve their performance of oral presentation gradually, and how it can benefit the teachers in terms of justifying students' evaluation and providing constructive feedback. Therefore, it is quite evident that both the teachers and the students can be benefitted by implementing assessment tools, especially rubrics for evaluating oral presentation.

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to find out rubrics' potential for evaluation process concerning oral presentation in Bangladesh, especially in the private sector of higher education. At the same time, it investigated the teachers' view towards the use of

assessment tools, particularly rubrics, in evaluating oral presentations. For this purpose, teachers and students and oral presentation classes were observed from private universities of Bangladesh. The data was analysed by incorporating Flavell's metacognitive theory (1979), the concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and the underlying feature of rubrics.

If used appropriately, a rubric can be an effective tool for monitoring and evaluating English oral presentations in private universities of Bangladesh. This versatile tool has the potential to ensure better evaluation as it plays a key role in increasing transparency in assessment. Comprehensive knowledge and sound understanding of the evaluative criteria rubrics can work as scaffolding and help learners perform better through self-regulated learning. This learning is fostered through instructors' feedback, which generates learners' metacognitive awareness. In order to cater to job market necessities, universities in the 21st century, whether focusing on outcome-based education or living curriculum, are exploring client-based learning and/or learner-centered education. This trend is emerging in private higher education of the youngest South Asian nation, which has just turned 50. In keeping with this trend, the pragmatic implications of employing rubrics to evaluate English oral presentations in private universities of Bangladesh cannot be understated, and must be explored further.

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