

The Impact of Classroom Assignments on Students' L2 Speech Production at Atomi University

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of a classroom speech assignment on Students' L2 speech production at Atomi University. The paper examines the variability in student oral pr of 23 EFL students enrolled in compulsory English courses at Atomi University over a 15-week semester. In this study, facing foreign language anxiety in a gradual and consistent manner is the way to overcome speech anxiety through implementing two methods from behavioral psychology. Analysis of the student linguistic performance resulted in higher rates of complexity, reduction in accuracy and mixed patterns in fluency. The results contribute to task-based literature.

Keywords: Speaking, accuracy, variability, fluency, complexity

Introduction

Despite a long history of English education in Japan, results have been surprisingly poor, particularly in terms of communication abilities in the second language. On standardized English tests such as the TOEFL and the TOEIC, Japanese students continue to score the lowest of any country in Asia (Takahashi, 2005; Nikonova, 2008). Japan has made significant investments in English education, but its students still perform poorly (ETS, 2009). Many language educators have concluded that Japanese students struggle the most with the development of their speaking abilities (Ellis, 1990; Farooq, 2005; Roger, 2008; Takanashi, 2004). Ellis (1990), for instance, pointed out that graduates from Japanese high schools and colleges lacked a good command of the English language, particularly in terms of their sociolinguistic ability. Even Japanese EFL learners at the survival level, according to Farooq (2005), struggle to communicate with native speakers in casual conversations. The findings of the new TOEFL iBT, which included a speaking test, have also shown that Japanese students struggle with their oral language skills on a fundamental level (ETS, 2009). Hidasi (2004) argues that there are a variety of factors that could make learning a foreign language difficult. One of the reasons was that the students aren't particularly motivated or interested in learning or using the target language.

Motivation is vital for acquiring second-language proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). There is a connection between motivation and learning: “motivation can stimulate learning, and learning can produce motivation” (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017, p. 17). Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished between two types of motivation for second language acquisition: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is the desire to study the L2 for some type of material benefit or advantage, such as boosting one’s employment prospects or earning more money; integrative motivation is the desire to learn the L2 in order to “participate in the culture of its people” (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012, p. 232). However, Japanese learners experience learning difficulties due to a lack of exposure to the target language outside of the classroom. Minimal L2 exposure is a barrier to language learning and makes it difficult for Japanese students to achieve proficiency in L2 language. For example, Wang (2009) argues that a greater exposure to writing practices than speaking practices of the L2 is a significant barrier to the improvement of Chinese students’ speaking performance.

Anxiety and lack of confidence are additional obstacles on the path to second-language mastery. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) recognized “foreign language anxiety” (p. 125) as a specific type of anxiety experienced by students. Anxiety levels influence the student’s performance in the target language when speaking. Goh and Burns (2012) noticed that anxiety has a negative impact on students and makes them anxious. This type of anxiety creates obstacles for students and drives them to withdraw from speaking activities. Speakers also fear being laughed at by their audiences (Horwitz et al., 1986). As a result, they stay unprepared to take chances and place themselves in a precarious position.

The fundamental objective of oral language tests is to sample the language’s behavior so that it can be generalized to the speaker’s performance in other contexts. During the language test integration phase, the sample component of the analyzable language building blocks is infeasible, and the investigation of the larger language chunks is recommended. In addition, the integrated method frequently emphasizes the speakers’ prediction skills in addressing language redundancy. This predictive ability, considered basic to language processing, is based on different parts of the language system (syntax, semantics, and pragmatics), as well as on-going language comprehension and production.

Variability is one of the most fundamental and pervasive aspects of language and a very productive field of study in linguistics. Sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics have always focused on differences in language usage. In psycholinguistics, the elements and cognitive mechanisms involved in speakers’ choices are examined, those involved in listeners’ adaptation to linguistic input diversity. However, task-based variation has been strictly limited to task elicitation methods, in which the

teacher solicits information from the students as opposed to delivering it for them. Linking language variability research to language testing substantially facilitated Ellis's explanation of several paradigms for evaluating variability (1985). Ellis (1988) adds various competences paradigms to Tirone's three paradigms: homogenous competencies, dual competencies, and ability continuity.

Krashen (1981) pointed out that performance based on learning and acquisition provides two distinct degrees of accuracy, making learning-based and monitoring performance syntax simple to comprehend and apply. Nonetheless, for variability investigations, the third and fourth paradigms are more applicable to language testing. The nature of the continuum of style ranges is dependent on the variable and categorical grammar rules that overlap at each location along the continuum. The range of styles is limited at one end by the language, and speech is given little consideration. There is also a formal style that emphasizes speech the most. Acquisition occurs from forms spontaneously formed in the native language or through the diffusion of new forms first generated in formal style, but not formalized. Ellis (1985) established the fourth paradigm, multiple competence, based on Selinker and Douglas in Skehan (1996). It suggests that the acquisition of a second language entails the formation of many interlanguages that are distinct but overlap as systems. Due to the fact that such systems are domain-specific, we must identify areas of language use that require distinct investigation. Consequently, sampling must encompass the pertinent domain. Theoretically, such an approach would evaluate English for specific objectives, places where it is difficult to get the right level of specificity (Criper, 1982; Skehan, 1996), and domains that are clearly demarcated. The aforementioned four paradigms provide a very useful framework for highlighting the challenges faced by language testers when deciding how to collect representative data. According to Tarone (1983), the homogenous ability and dual knowledge approaches are relevant on their own, but less so when considering variability. The ability continuum and various competence techniques are far more beneficial when acquiring a comprehensive assessment of an individual's performance in scenarios requiring sampling. In light of this, this paper investigates the language variability in one-minute speaking performance among EFL students enrolled in a compulsory English course at Atomi University.

Literature review

Research on the acquisition of the second language (SLA) has looked at the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of spoken language (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Egusa and Yokoyama (2004) investigated two distinct task types, a "decision-making challenge" and a "gap in knowledge" task. The results showed that while the decision-making process became more precise

and difficult with time, the information gap role became simpler as time went on. Both positive and negative effects of trade-offs were observed in this study. Cognitive psychology suggests that judgments to favor fluency frequently come at the expense of accuracy and complexity (Skehan, 1998; VanPatten, 1990). Even if improving fluency is the goal, this is still true due to the fact that speaking with fluidity requires more time than speaking with a broad or focused vocabulary.

In their 2003 study, Yuan and Ellis looked at the impact of pre-task preparation, the capacity to structure a speech before giving it, and planning while doing the activity. Preparing in advance enabled students to structure their thoughts before giving a presentation or speech. The results showed that planning in advance increased complexity, whereas planning while a task was being performed increased accuracy and complexity. However, cross-sectional research techniques were used in these studies, as well as the vast majority of others that were conducted on this research theme.

There hasn't been much research conducted on how second languages evolve over time (Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Ortega & Ibarra-Shea, 2004; Vercellotti, 2017). This is due to a number of factors. First, it is extremely challenging to maintain participants' interest in the study over time and encourage them to take part in numerous studies (Egusa; 2009; Kosuge, 2011). The English curriculum is likely to include extracurricular activities such as international travel, public speaking, participation in English-language summer camps, and other extracurricular activities. As a result, it is difficult to determine how performance improves just based on classroom studies. Another factor is that it's possible for students to be expected to study English in a variety of settings during the course (Koizumi & Katagiri, 2007). The focus of research in junior high and senior high schools in Japan has been speaking, despite the fact that it is associated with a number of difficulties (Egusa, 2009; Koizumi & Katagiri, 2007, 2009; Koizumi & Yamanouchi, 2003; Kosuge, 2002, 2004, 2007; Takiguchi, 2003). During the 2003 academic year, Koizumi and Yamanouchi assessed the progress of 71 second-grade students at a junior high school's speaking abilities. Three activities were engaged in by the participants: describing an image, shopping, and pair conversations. Not only did the number of vocabularies utilized increase over the course of five months, but also the fluency. Additionally, the total number of spoken vocabulary words increased, but the speakers' accuracy remained unchanged. A total of 17 second and third grade students were monitored throughout Taniguchi's 2003 study. Students' writing was more fluid and had more complicated grammar, but it was incorrect. Egusa (2009) observed the progress of four senior high school students over the course of three months while they participated in a speaking exercise. The findings showed an increase in lexical and syntactic complexity, but once more, accuracy remained the same. Egusa (2009), in contrast, looked

at how much 32 first-year high school seniors' speaking abilities changed over the course of 11 months. He found that their writing improved with time in all respects, including accuracy, fluency, and complexity.

The most recent research was done in 2007 by Koizumi and Katagiri, who looked at the growth of first- and second-year high school students over a period of 1.5 years. There were 39 students who took part in the competition. They all received diplomas from Super English Language High Schools accredited by the Ministries of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. The findings did, however, show a pattern that was similar to what Egusa found in 2009: a greater degree of speaking performance in terms of fluency, accuracy, syntactic complexity, and lexical complexity.

Methodology

One-minute speech task

In 1890, William James conducted research on the connection between people's perceptions of time. This study has revealed that there are sixty seconds in a minute that can define our attention duration. He claimed that anyone can stay conscious for any amount of time between a few seconds and one minute. The idea that one minute is the typical unit of time for measuring mental operations is supported by contemporary functionalist theories of mental capacities and higher-order theories of consciousness.

The vast majority of Japanese students experience social anxiety, which makes it challenging for them to take chances and speak in front of their peers. Japanese students' behavior in the classroom is commonly characterized as unresponsive, passive, shy, unmotivated, and inactive. Japanese students are known for being too critical of themselves. They tend to be hard on themselves for the mistakes they make more than admiring themselves for their success (Kurman et al. (2003).

The one-minute speech assignment inspired from a combination of Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), and Self-disclosure (SD) methods has been designed by the researcher who found it that highly motivates Japanese learners to produce much better-spoken and written output because of the challenging environment, and timed self-generated speeches. Each class began with peer-to-peer evaluation for student written scripts using a rubric included speech writing format, topic sentence, supporting sentences, supporting details, concluding sentences, unity, and accuracy.

Graded exposure

Stage 1

After the peer-to-peer evaluation for student written scripts using the scoring rubric, several ranges

from 20-30 students in each class delivered their individual speeches by reading aloud their pre-prepared written scripts while sitting in their seats in the classroom as shown in figure 1. Students delivered different speech each week on a class discussion prompts, demonstrating their ongoing language improvement.



Figure 1: Stage 1

Stage 2

Students were asked to read aloud their pre-prepared written speeches while standing next to their seats in the classroom as shown in figure 2. Standing up for one minute made the student more visible to his classmates and the teacher and gradually provided more confidence to the student.

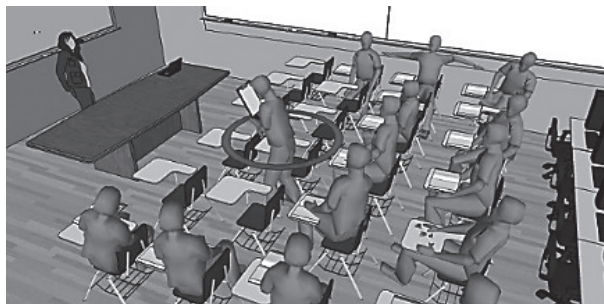


Figure 2: Stage 2

Stage 3

Students were asked to read aloud their pre-prepared written speeches while standing in the teacher position in front of all students in the classroom as shown in figure 3. Standing up in the teacher position provided signals of leadership to the student subconscious mind. This gradually led to a feeling of excitement and taking control, which in turn will trigger the desire to impress his listeners.

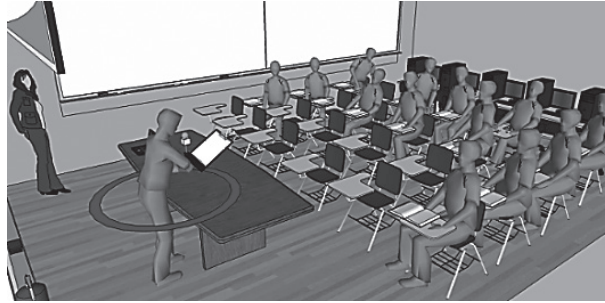


Figure 3: Stage 3

Stage 4

Students were asked to generate their speeches without reading their scripts and deliver them while standing in the teacher position in front of all students in the classroom using eye contact and body language as shown in figure 4. However, students could use notes if needed.

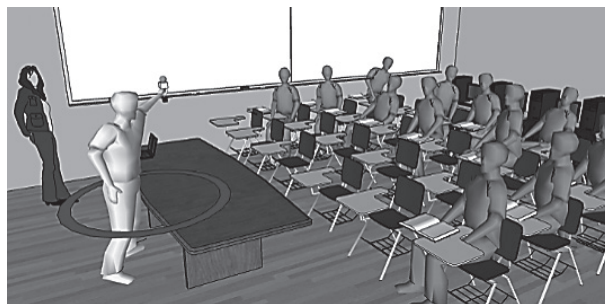


Figure 4: Stage 4

Stage 5

Japanese Karaoke is a form of popular entertainment, originally from Japan, in which recordings of the music but not the words of popular songs are played, so that people can sing the words themselves using a microphone and public address system. At the start of the semester, students were asked to use microphones to amplify all speeches. The microphones will provide a feedback loop through Q&A with the teacher and other students in two minutes time after each speech that will help students to monitor themselves and others as speakers and listeners and behave individually and together in ways, they feel focused and productive discussions possible as shown in figure 5.



Figure 5: Stage 5

Figure 5 shows how the graded exposure phases of the lesson plan boosted the students' levels of self-confidence. The smallest details must be carefully attended to, and students must learn to work independently. When speaking about themselves in front of their students, they want to come across as knowledgeable, capable, and competent. They are motivated to take the desired action as a result. The exercises make use of the idea of task diversity and create links between classroom-based instruction and learning that students begin on their own. The objective is to persuade the student that she should tell herself, "I'm delighted that my teacher and classmates listen to me, read my comments and postings, and appreciate them. They enable me to express who I am. Therefore, I'll show them the best of my ability." In this study, facing fears in a gradual and consistent manner is the way to overcome fears and foster autonomy through implementing two methods from behavioral psychology. The first is Exposure and response prevention (ERP), and the second is Self-disclosure (SD) graded exposure stages shown in Figure 6. Students gradually acquired the ability to deliver speeches with confidence that lead to the last interactional stage of Q&A throughout the semester.

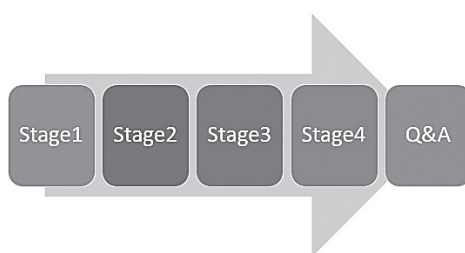


Figure 6: Graded exposure stages

Data collection

Data collection included recorded one-minute speeches from 23 EFL students enrolled in a compulsory English-speaking course at Atomi University. The researcher's intervention was minimal during data collection except in the preparation of a digital recording device. In this study, three main variables were analyzed. The flow is represented by three indicators. Reformulation per minute as

“repair flow” (Skehan, 1996), pause per minute as velocity (1 pause > 0.5 seconds), and speech rate per minute (The number of syllables divided by 60 then by 6 to calculate the rate for every 10 seconds). The complexity was based on the organizational quality of voice performance. Using measures in minutes and words, the amount of subordination and vocabulary density were assessed, respectively. Accuracy was assessed by measuring error-free clauses per minute (main and/or error-free subphrases), grammatical errors per minute, and lexical errors per minute.

Results

All of the 23 data samples were manually recorded and transcribed according to a coding scheme developed by the researcher. The “onset phase,” which lasted thirty seconds, and the “cutoff phase,” which also lasted thirty seconds, made up the length of each transcript. Each stage lasted one minute in total. The average frequency scores obtained using each of the three distinct methods for evaluating fluency are shown in Table 1 including the number of times students rephrased a sentence as well as the total words they produced in a minute. Reformulations are rated according to the continuously increasing frequency with which they occur at the conclusion of the performance. This increase in frequency affected the final output. The most valuable time interval is between 40 and 50 seconds, whereas the least valuable is between 20 and 30 seconds. The number of pauses per minute decreased, which is a sign of undesirable fluency (Skehan, 1996), particularly at the beginning (seconds 1 and 20) and end of the audio file (seconds 50 and 60). There was a noticeable change in the rate of speaking between the hours of 20 and 30, which is a temporal interval. Instead, the time period’s minutes 40 to 50 had the most development. The results of the subordination analysis are shown in Table 2, along with the total number of words found in each T-unit. The terms word count and word count are used to indicate the degree of detail and the number of words in a sentence. Table 3 presents the findings and categorizes the clauses into three groups according to their accuracy level: clauses with no errors, clauses with grammatical errors, and clauses with lexical errors.

Variable/10 seconds	Onset Phase				Cutoff Phase			
	1-10	10-20	20-30	%	30-40	40-50	50-60	%
Reformulations	0.20	0.28	0.45	5.15	0.54	0.74	0.80	11.51
Pauses	1.59	1.40	1.26	11.37	1.03	0.93	0.75	5.29
Speech rate	20.40	20.50	20.12	7.22	20.30	24.70	25.40	9.44

Table 1: Mean scores for fluency measures

Variable/10 seconds	Onset Phase				Cutoff Phase			
	1-10	10-20	20-30	%	30-40	40-50	50-60	%
Subordination	0.04	0.06	.08	4.80	0.13	0.15	0.19	11.86
Words/T-unit	2.07	2.26	2.44	7.17	2.65	3.07	3.26	9.49

Table 2: Mean scores for complexity measures

Variable/10 seconds	Onset Phase				Cutoff Phase			
	1-10	10-20	20-30	%	30-40	40-50	50-60	%
Error-free Clause	0.11	0.08	0.07	10.58	0.06	0.05	0.04	6.07
Gram. Errors	0.38	0.54	0.74	6.52	0.83	0.88	0.89	10.14
Lexical Errors	0.09	0.17	0.41	3.65	0.67	.005	0.88	13.01

Table 3: Mean scores for accuracy measures

Discussion

It was found that student oral production improved as the time limitation was increased, even when complexity was considered. This held true despite the complexity being present. However, formal accuracy stood in opposition to informal accuracy. Participants in the study were unable to concentrate evenly on all three aspects of performance at once due to the increasing demands of their engagement and the constrained amount of time available. When the test results are compared for each period during the two time periods, it becomes clear that complexity and, to a lesser extent, fluency, have gradually displaced accuracy as the main concerns. This can be seen by looking at the test results. This can be determined by tracking the evolution of the scores over time. This viewpoint suggests a shift away from a careful, rule-based approach and toward a more relaxed, risk-taking method of processing language.

The current study offers proof in favor of the assertion that the notion of variability in SLA research has to be redefined using these results as a point of departure. The study adopts a processing-based approach (Saehan, 1998) to create a fine-grained definition of variability that goes beyond the early uses suggested by Tirone (1983, 1985, 1988). The findings of this study support a psycholinguistic interpretation of variability that views it as proof that one performance area is being given more attention than another. This is a significant departure from variationists' original classification, which called for a restriction on form-focused attention. The early descriptions of variationists, on the other hand, presupposed that attention to form was a growing resource. The

degree to which the tasks' varying effects are felt throughout this type of allocation technique is seen as a determining element. Robinson (1995) concluded that attention can both deplete and divert resources, which is supported by empirical evidence, and this conclusion lends support to the data-driven idea of variability. The results of this study showed that, albeit to a smaller extent for fluency, the magnitude of the effect was similar for both high levels of complexity and high levels of fluency. This is consistent with what Robinson found, which is that the favorable benefits on fluency and complexity are stronger the more challenging the cognitive activity is. The study's results provide more proof that the trade-offs that result from having a constrained attention capacity constrain the relationship between the three performance categories. In other words, performance in the accuracy-related domain declined as overall complexity grew. The results of the fluency test did not, however, seem to support this kind of divided attention. Fluency results, however, were more of a challenge. On the one hand, the quantity of reformulations is often referred to as "undesirable fluency". On the other side, there were less pauses and the speech speed increased. There is a likelihood that the various, potentially distinct components that make up fluency can be used to explain this seeming contradiction. The possibility that this can be achieved is strong, which supports this. The performers had to rely less on pauses and speak more frequently after hesitating and rephrasing their words in order to keep the pressure constant. This kind of processing pattern can be explained by a shift in behavior, which starts out as form-focused conservatism with high accuracy and ends up as a risk-taking engagement associated with various details.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it appears likely that SLA studies should modify how they quantify variability. In contrast to Tirone's earlier research, this study used a processing-based methodology (Skehan, 1998) and a definition of variability (1983, 1985, 1988). Prior to this point, a changeable impact size and a task component were both taken into consideration when deciding how to design assignments. We need to look at the results of every speaking task that has been administered over the past three decades before we can investigate the potential association between speaking activities and task-based variability. To determine the kind of activity that can lead to a specific outcome, additional research is needed to take into account the effects of timed activities, individual differences, and other factors.

Learners must work harder to increase their vocabulary, enhance their pronunciation, and correct their grammar errors. However, teachers need to use techniques that have been proven to be successful in order to encourage their students in the development of their language abilities. An

outside aspect that might affect students' motivation is the way that information is presented to them. Students are more likely to feel less anxious (Horwitz et al., 1986), have more self-efficacy (Piran, 2014), and be motivated to study when instructors use engaging and student-centered strategies (Horwitz et al., 1986). The lesson design and teaching guidelines must instruct students on how to interact with one another more effectively. This could be accomplished in line with Littlewood and William's (1981) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, which aims to assist students become more proficient in spoken language.

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