

A Semi-Autonomous English-Learning Activity Utilizing Transcription, Self-Correction, and Memorization: A Pilot Attempt at Development

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Jin-ai University's English Education Center ('the center') was established in April of 2011 as an organization having three main purposes: 1) coordinating curricula for English I, English II, and English III classes, 2) providing opportunities for all students to engage in English-learning related extracurricular activities, and 3) acting as a bridge to the international and local communities in promoting participation in international programs and offering educational activities to the general public through classes and seminars. The facilities of 'the center' consist of: 1) the E-Lounge (Room E301); a multi-purpose study area, 2) a Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Lab (Room E303), and 3) the Office (Room E302) doubling as a consultation space. Though 'the center' exists for the improvement of everyone's English skills, many students carry heavy schedules and are not able to fully utilize 'the center'. The creation of programs tailored for busy students would provide opportunities for all interested parties. Thus, an attempt is being made to create a semi-autonomous activity for study.

Keywords: transcription, self-correction, memorization

Introduction

Jin-ai University's English Education Center's staff is on hand to assist students in improving their English skills through small-group classes in English conversation and preparatory lessons for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), and to disseminate information on various international programs, among other services. Though much is available for students' use, there are a number of students who are unable to avail themselves of 'the center' due to their busy schedules. For this reason, the instructors of 'the center' have been brainstorming ways to accommodate such students. Aside from opening the E-Lounge at lunchtime as a venue for watching DVDs or other prerecorded programs in English while eating and chatting with the instructors, or scheduling a host of activities in the evening hours and some on weekends, the instructors have been devising ways for students to improve

their English with only brief visits to 'the center' at their own convenience; hence, the development of a semi-autonomous English-learning activity for busy students. Much literature on the effectiveness of transcription and learner self-correction exists and this report does not purport to prove or dispel any of that research. The purpose of this report is to outline a step-by-step explanation of an activity which, when further developed, promises to allow even the busiest of students plenty of opportunities to improve their English skills at their own pace and at their own individual levels. The students won't have to attend any regularly scheduled classes and they will begin at a level of English at which they are comfortable. The only requirement will be the willingness to participate whenever time allows.

Participants for pilot attempt

Six Jin-ai University students volunteered to take part in

the pilot attempt at developing the activity. As the difficulty of the activity coincides with the individual English level of each student participating, no attention was paid to the volunteers' levels of English beforehand. Any and all volunteers were welcome.

Impromptu speech

Each participant was given a topic just one minute before recording their impromptu speech on an IC recorder provided by 'the center'. The topics of the speeches were decided by the instructors and randomly assigned to the participants. After stating their name and stating their topic, the participants were given a full minute to make their impromptu speech.

Though one participant (Participant C) obviously experienced trouble with making the speech, there was an average of approximately 63 words per speech. Speech lengths ranged from 18 to 89 words; some with several pauses of three seconds or more as indicated by "... " in the transcriptions below.

Participant A:

Today I would like to talk about my favorite holiday.
My favorite holiday is Christmas.
There are two reasons.
First, my mother makes a delicious food such as cake and turkey.
Second, I can get many present from my parent and my friends.
Every year I spend wonderful . . . a wonderful Christmas with my family and my friends.

(57 words)

Participant B:

My favorite season is autumn.
I have two key points.
First, I like sweet potato.
In this season I can eat many, many sweets made by sweet potato.

Second, there are many events in this season . . . especially there is my birthday on October.
. . . and . . . give me presents and . . . I can spend . . .

(51 words)

Participant C:

I would like to be a cat because a cat is very cute and . . . cat is . . . smart . . . and . . .

(18 words)

Participant D:

My favorite sport to watch is baseball.
I have two reasons.
First, baseball . . . professional baseball have many professional teams such as Tigers and . . . Giants, Swallows and so on.
And, second, in summer Koshien championship is held . . . in August.
Many high school baseball . . . many baseball teams of high school join this championship.
And, it's very interesting and exciting, so I like baseball.

(61 words)

Participant E:

I want to work by using English; for example teaching English to child . . . children or . . . I want to share the joy of studying English.
. . . so . . . or . . .
I want to helps . . . foreign people from all over the world by using English . . . to . . . so that the foreigner can live peacefully in Japan.
Thank you very much.
That's all for my . . . speech.

(59 words)

Participant F:

My favorite meal is 'udon'.
It is Japanese, Japanese noodles.
I like them . . . I like it because it is my favorite food since I was child, childhood.

It is easy to eat and cook, so I can cook very easily.
And, also it is good for my stomach . . . and, also I can . . . I
can topping many things or I can eat them for very kind . . .
various kinds of . . . various kind of . . . ways . . . I can put
on . . . put on . . . put on eggs or . . . fried . . . and so on . . .
and so . . . I like them.

(89 words)

Creating the revised version

The instructors transcribed the speeches and pointed out hints for correction and suggested the use of additional vocabulary related to the content, as shown below. Only a few minutes were spent with each student discussing areas of correction (indicated in **bold**) and suggesting other vocabulary (in *italics*) before tasking them with rewriting their own speeches.

Participant C's lack of content in the speech actually created an opportunity for more interaction with and more input from the instructors.

Participant A:

Today I would like to talk about my favorite holiday.
My favorite holiday is Christmas.
There are two reasons.
First, my mother makes **a delicious food** such as cake and turkey.
Second, I can get many present from my parent and my friends.
Every year I spend wonderful . . . a wonderful Christmas with my family and my friends.

*These dishes make us happy.
precious presents*

Participant B:

My favorite season is autumn.
I have two key points.
First, I **like** sweet potato.
In this season I can eat many, many sweets made **by** sweet potato.

Second, there are many events in this season . . . especially there is my birthday **on** October.
. . .
and . . . give me presents and . . . I can spend. . .

*cake shop
spend this season*

Participant C:

I would like to be a cat because **a cat is** very cute and . . .
cat is . . . **smart** . . . and . . .
*kitten, jump high, stroll on the roof
master, play with toys, foxtail*

Participant D:

My favorite sport to watch is baseball.
I have two reasons.
First, baseball . . . professional baseball **have** many professional teams such as Tigers and . . . Giants, Swallows and so on.
And, second, in **summer Koshien** championship is held . . . in August.
Many high school baseball . . . many **baseball teams of high school** join this championship.
And, it's very interesting and exciting, so I like baseball.
*Hanshin, Yomiuri, Yakult
47 high school baseball teams*

Participant E:

I want to work by using English; for example teaching English to child . . . children or . . . I want to share the joy of studying English.
. . . so . . . or . . .
I want to helps . . . foreign people from all over the world by using English . . . to . . . so that **the foreigner** can live peacefully in Japan.
Thank you very much.
That's all for my . . . speech.
*wonderful experiences studying English.
non-native speakers of Japanese*

Participant F:

My favorite meal is 'udon'.

It is Japanese, Japanese noodles.

I like **them** . . . I like **it** because it is my favorite food since I was **child, childhood**.

It is easy to eat and cook, so I can cook very easily.

And, also it is good for my stomach . . . **and, also** I can . . . I can **topping** many things or I can eat **them** for very kind . . . various kinds of . . . various kind of . . . ways . . .

I can **put on** . . . **put on** . . . **put on** eggs or . . . fried . . . and so on . . . and so . . . I like them.

*simple is best, digestible,
I can eat 'udon' even if I am sick.*

Memorizing and reciting the revised version

Based on the correction hints, suggested vocabulary and conversations with the instructors about their topics, students wrote the final version of their speeches as shown below. The instructors did make a few minor changes before having the students memorize their speeches at their own leisure, and having them recite their speeches while again recording them on an IC recorder.

Students were able to easily memorize an average of approximately 79 words (from 71 to 91) per speech and confidently recite their speeches in an average of 72 seconds (from 45 to 94) with no discernable pauses.

Participant A:

What is my favorite hobby, and why?

Today I would like to talk about my favorite holiday. My favorite holiday is Christmas. There are two reasons. Firstly, my mother always makes delicious foods, such as cake and turkey. These dishes make my whole family happy. Secondly, I can get many presents from my parents and my friends. Those presents are my precious treasures. Of course, I enjoy giving presents, too. I spend a wonderful Christmas with my parents and my friends each year.

(83 words @ 63 seconds)

Participant B:

What is my favorite season, and why?

My favorite season is autumn. I have two key points on why I especially like autumn. Firstly, I like sweet potatoes. In autumn I can enjoy eating many sweets made with sweet potatoes. So, I often go to a cake shop with my friends. Secondly, my birthday falls in autumn. My friends give me a present every year. I always look forward to autumn.

(71 words @ 45 seconds)

Participant C:

What animal would I like to be, and why?

I would like to be a cat because cats are very cute, especially kittens. They are loved by everyone. Also, cats can jump high. If I were a cat, I would jump up on a roof and stroll around. Then, I could enjoy seeing beautiful views from the rooftops. Furthermore, if I were a cat, I would enjoy playing with toys with my master. I would like to enjoy chasing a foxtail. For these reasons, I would like to be a cat.

(91 words @ 94 seconds)

Participant D:

What's my favorite sport to watch, and why?

My favorite sport to watch is baseball. I have two main reasons. Firstly, Japanese professional baseball has many teams, such as the Hanshin Tigers, the Yomiuri Giants, the Yakult Swallows, and so on. Secondly, the Japanese high school baseball championship is held at Koshien Stadium every summer involving 47 baseball teams from around the country. The tournament is very exciting. So, I love to watch baseball.

(74 words @ 49 seconds)

Participant E:

What kind of work would I like to have, and why?

I have two key points about my ideal future job. Firstly, I want to share the joy of studying English. I have had numerous wonderful experiences studying English. I would like others to experience those feelings. Secondly, I would like to help English-speaking foreigners who are having trouble living in Japan. For these reasons I would like to have a job dealing with the study of English.

(78 words @ 89 seconds)

Participant F:

What is my favorite meal, and why?

My favorite meal is udon, a type of Japanese noodles. I have eaten udon since I was a child. I usually eat it plain, without toppings. Simple is best, I think. Because of udon, I can make my favorite meal easily and quickly. Furthermore, it is an easily digestible food. Even if I were sick, I could eat it. For these reasons, udon is my favorite food.

(74 words @ 47 seconds)

Reactions from the participants

A simple questionnaire (See **Appendix.**) was administered shortly after the participants recited their speeches in order to get their reactions.

As for the first two questions regarding the time it took to complete the activity, four chose '11 to 20 minutes', one chose '1 to 10 minutes' and one chose '21 to 30 minutes' in answer to how long it took to rewrite the first draft of their speech. That's an average of 20 minutes or less per participant in rewriting the speeches.

Three participants answered that it took '1 to 10 minutes', two answered '11 to 20 minutes' and another answered that it took '31 to 40 minutes' to memorize the speech. That's an average of approximately 20 minutes for each participant in memorizing the speeches.

As it took only a few minutes for participants to think

about and make their speeches and only a little over a minute to recite each of them, it can be safely said that the activity took less than an hour to complete, even including the consultation with the instructors before rewriting.

Making the impromptu speech was the most difficult aspect for the participants. One participant may have said it best with, "... impromptu speech is too difficult. It makes us confuse (sic) and panic." However, most participants felt that the activity is or could be an effective learning tool.

*) What was the most difficult aspect of participating in the activity?

Making the impromptu speech:

"Thinking time was little short, so I couldn't talk detailed area."

"My topic is difficult for me to make speech."

"I have not so much time to come up an idea. Also, it takes me long time to translate."

"The impromptu topic is not common in my daily life."

"I could not organize the opinion or thinking in short time."

Reciting the rewritten speech:

"I'm not good at memorizing something."

*) What was the least difficult aspect of participating in the activity?

Rewriting the impromptu speech.:

"I just added more detail, so it was the easiest."

"I had base of document and just rewrite or change a little."

"I did not need to think a lot."

Memorizing the rewritten speech:

"It is just memorizing."

"Before memorizing, I could look at a character. I could remember my speech."

Reciting the rewritten speech:

"Just memorize so I could. No problem."

*) Do you think this would be an effective tool for studying English? Why? *or* Why not?

"Yes. Because we must choose simple English to talk immediately and we can learn more vocabulary or how to use by rewriting."

"I think this is an effective tool for studying English. But, it

has strong influence for not speaking but writing.”

“I think so, because we can learn from our weak point of studying English.”

“I think memorizing is good to study English. However, impromptu speech is too difficult. It makes us confuse and panic. It's not good.”

“Yes, I do think so. However, this tool takes time. So if a person have time, it is a valuable way for him.”

“I do not think so because I concentrate only memorizing without checking grammatical point when I reciting the rewritten speech.”

Future considerations

Considering that from the initial impromptu speech through the revision and on to the recitation took at most just a little less than an hour on average for the participants, this pilot attempt can be considered a success in its purpose to create a method for even the busiest of students to improve their English skills. The participants were able to create their own original short speeches in English at their own levels and memorize and recite them in just three short visits to ‘the center’.

As making the impromptu speech seemed to be the most difficult aspect for the participants, it may relieve the stress if more time was given to allow the participants to think about their speeches beforehand.

Furthermore, though it will definitely add more required time to complete the activity, transcription of the speeches by the students should be included in the process. Transcribing their own speeches would allow participants to discover their own errors and make self-corrections as necessary. The instructor would only have to monitor whether the mistakes were corrected. However, adding the burden of transcription and self-correction may cause disinterest in repeating the activity. These are two immediate considerations concerning the activity.

If this method of English study does prove viable as an ongoing activity of ‘the center’, it could be further extended to include students creating their own series of impromptu speeches, and adding their own comprehension exercises,

i.e., cloze exercises, true-or false quizzes, or other reading exercises; a sort of self-made textbook as it were.

Quite possibly the most important merit of the activity is the fact that students are creating and memorizing speeches in English at their own levels and at their own pace, using the English they have already learned.

These and other aspects of this activity warrant further research.

Suggested readings

Chandler, Jean. The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fluency of L2 student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, Volume 12 / August, 2003 / pp. 267 - 296

Lynch, Tony. Seeing what they meant: transcribing as a route to noticing. *ELT Journal* Volume 55 / April 2, 2001 / Oxford University Press / pp. 124 - 132

Makino, Taka-Yoshi. Learner self-correction in EFL written compositions. *ELT Journal* Volume 47 / October 4, 1993 / Oxford University Press / pp. 337 - 341

要 約

仁愛大学英語教育センターは2011年4月に設立されました。英語教育センターは皆さんの英語力を向上させるために在りますが、多くの学生はスケジュールが詰まっており、センターを十分に使いこなすことができていません。忙しい学生に合わせたプログラムを生み出すことは、英語力の向上に興味を示す全ての学生に機会を与えます。したがって、試みは英語を学ぶための半自律的な活動を生むために作られています。このレポートはそのプログラムの発展について説明します。

Appendix

*) How much time did the first rewrite take?

1 to 10 minutes • 11 to 20 minutes
21 to 30 minutes • 31 to 40 minutes
41 to 60 minutes • more than 60 minutes

*) How much time did it take to memorize the revised version?

1 to 10 minutes • 11 to 20 minutes

21 to 30 minutes • 31 to 40 minutes

41 to 60 minutes • more than 60 minutes

*) In order of 1 to 4 (1 is most and 4 is least), rank the difficulty of the following:

making the impromptu speech _____

rewriting the impromptu speech _____

memorizing the rewritten _____

reciting the rewritten speech _____

Please briefly explain your choice for the most difficult aspect:

Please briefly explain your choice for the least difficult aspect:

*) Do you think this would be an effective tool for studying English? Why? Why not?

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

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