Investigating the Impact of Dictation Post-Tasks on Production: A Pilot Study

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発言的能力に与えるディクテーションの影響：試験的研究

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Abstract

Developing fluency in an EFL environment is challenging as learning opportunities can be restricted to the language classroom. This is exacerbated in countries such as Japan, where there is a history of treating English as an object of study (Hagerman, 2009). Therefore, investigating tasks that might provide learners with effective opportunities to develop productive fluency is important in this context. This paper investigated the effect of an impromptu speech task and dictation/modification post-task on students' spoken fluency. Students in six intact classes ($N = 139$) were assigned to dictate either their own or a peer's 1-minute impromptu speech each week over a period of eight weeks. The first and last speeches were taken as pre- and post-tests to examine changes in fluency. While students under the self-condition improved their fluency, additional research using larger groups and stricter group controls is necessary to understand more nuanced differences between these tasks.

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　日本のような EFL 環境で流暢さを身につけることは、学習の機会が教室内に限られてしまうため、困難を伴う。そのため、学習者が流暢に発表できるような課題を検討することが重要である。本論文では、即興スピーチとディクテーション・修正の課題が、生徒の流暢な発言能力に与える影響を調査した。6 つのクラスの学生（$N = 139$）に、8 週間にわたり、毎週、自分または仲間の 1 分間の即興スピーチをディクテーションさせ、最初と最後のスピーチを使用して流暢さの変化を調査した。その結果、自分のスピーチをディクテーションした学生は流暢さを向上させたが、より細かな違いを見分けるためには、さらに厳密な条件を追加して研究を行う必要がある。

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Background

Task-based language teaching and research has become an increasingly popular field and form of pedagogy over the past thirty years. Ellis (2009a) states that an activity can be considered a task if it fulfills four characteristics – the focus is on meaning; there is some kind of information gap; learners must use their own linguistic resources to complete the task; and there is a non-linguistic outcome. Tavakoli and Wright (2020) write that the efficacy of tasks in language learning results from the fact that they not only help learners to develop their interlanguage, but also strengthen pre-existing syntactic and lexical knowledge whilst encouraging the development of interactional skills. Batstone & Ellis (2009) also argue that learners need to use language under real-operating conditions to ensure they learn how to use language communicatively. As tasks are closer approximations to real-world language use than other language activities, they are thought to provide opportunities that fulfill this criterion. They also provide opportunities for learning through meaning-focused input and output, and through interaction. Further, they give learners opportunities to learn how to deal with features of unplanned discourse, including repetitions, reformulations, and false starts. Learning to deal with these features of natural speech is an important part of developing listening skills (Rost, 2011), but difficult to do with textbook-based listening texts.

One of the key areas within task-based research has been how the task demands affect the type of language produced while engaged in the task. This often focuses on the interplay between complexity, accuracy, fluency, and more recently, lexis (CALF). Researchers have argued that limits on cognitive capacity have a bearing on a learner's ability to focus on all these elements simultaneously. For example, when importance is placed on the accuracy of output, fluency, or complexity, or both, will suffer. Task effects have been found to depend on planning (See Ellis, 2009b), repetition (e.g., Bygate, 2001; Lambert, Kormos, & Minn, 2017), whether the task is monologic or dialogic (e.g., Tavakoli, 2016), and the degree of structure in the task (e.g., Foster & Tavakoli, 2009) along with many other task conditions.

While improvement in all CALF measures is necessary for balanced linguistic development, fluency is particularly important to consider as this is the goal of many language learners, especially when considering speaking. Being able to use a language fluently makes communication easier, less stressful, and ultimately encourages further use of the language once interacting with others in the language has become an enjoyable experience. Fluency is also often used as a benchmark for proficiency in a language, with

governmental language and teaching policies around the world considering fluency a key feature of proficiency in a language, specifically with regard to speaking (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Proficient language users are able to utilize the knowledge they have of the language quickly and accurately; less proficient users often struggle to find the lexis or grammar they need, especially when under time constraints. These differences in an individual's language proficiency are often evident when fluency is examined.

Developing fluency is also an important part of learning a language. As productive fluency develops, the cognitive processes underlying phrase formation become more automatized (Kormos, 2006). In the early stages of acquisition, learners must laboriously access the lexical-grammatical features of the language that they need. This requires high levels of attention with the process of grammatical encoding taking place serially, as opposed to automatically and in parallel with other processes (Kormos, 2006). Becoming more fluent frees up cognitive resources that can be used for higher level processes like planning and consideration of sociolinguistic norms, or use of more complex language. Improved fluency also increases an individual's ability to adapt and modify speech that has not been understood by an interlocutor (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Higher levels of fluency therefore facilitate the acquisition of additional, and highly necessary, language skills.

Skill acquisition theory has been used to explain how fluency develops (e.g., de Bot, 1996; DeKeyser, 2007; Segalowitz, 2010; Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). This theory suggests that practice leads to the development of fluency as declarative knowledge is proceduralized. de Bot (1996) argues that through repeatedly accessing declarative lexical-grammatical knowledge, the connection between lemmas and their associated linguistic procedures, i.e., how the lemma can be used, is reactivated, strengthened, and leads to proceduralization. However, procedural knowledge is very narrow and therefore skill specific (DeKeyser, 2007). This means that to develop procedural knowledge, and therefore fluency, the aspect of language that one wants to become more fluent in is the one that needs to be practiced. Thus, if a learner wants to improve their fluency when speaking, they must practice speaking; only reading, listening, or writing will not be sufficient.

As becoming fluent with language requires practice, it is essential that sufficient emphasis is placed on practice of the four major language skills within a curriculum (Nation, 2014). Unfortunately, this aspect of language development is often overlooked in the classroom. This is a particular issue for developing English productive skills in Japan as curricula decisions are based on university entrance exams, the English component of which encourages a focus on developing explicit knowledge of English rather than the ability to necessarily use the language communicatively. The focus on listening and reading for the exams also results in unbalanced receptive and productive skills. This

can be frustrating and/or embarrassing for students who feel unable to use the language despite years of study (Finch, 2014).

The traditional Japanese education system also seems to encourage a focus on knowing a single, "correct" answer. This is problematic for language education when there a multitude of ways to express ideas as it seems to make students hesitant to produce language that they are uncertain about. This reduces the amount of output, thereby limiting the development of productive skills, and the other aspects of language acquisition that output promotes. In particular, the lack of experimentation with language use limits the degree to which learners' interlanguages develop as testing and receiving feedback about the accuracy of one's language use is one of the main benefits of learning through output (Swain, 2005). Output practice also pushes learners to process syntax (Izumi, 2003), resulting in practice that strengthens knowledge of the grammatical system.

For language educators at the tertiary level in Japan, it is often important to help learners develop their productive language use. Students have receptive knowledge from their earlier education, and to develop their productive skills, this knowledge must be put to productive use (Nation & Newton, 2009). However, this too can be challenging as students do not want to appear "ostentatiously different from the norm" (Kozaki & Ross, 2011, p. 1330) or suggest that they are better than their peers by voluntarily using their English skills. This creates a catch-22 situation whereby students are often not willing to engage in speaking activities as they are embarrassed to speak in English, but by acting in this way they cannot improve the skill that is causing them to be embarrassed. Crabbe (2007) suggests that one way to overcome this is by providing learners with private learning opportunities to increase task engagement. This gives students a chance to work on and develop skills independently, which in turn can help build the confidence necessary to overcome any concerns about how their language might be judged by peers.

Private opportunities for learning can also be used to help learners build speaking self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) suggests that mastery experiences are key to developing self-efficacy. For students who have had little experience of speaking at school, it is not unsurprising that feelings of insecurity arise when they are asked to speak, especially when combined with the issues mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Ensuring that learners have the chance to experience mastery when speaking is therefore very important. Mastery experiences can lead to higher levels of self-efficacy and a greater willingness to engage in productive practice, thereby encouraging the development of the productive speaking skills that students need and desire.

A Task for Improving Spoken Production

One task that can be used to help learners improve their speaking is an impromptu or semi-impromptu speech task. This type of task is easy to conduct regularly, thereby providing opportunities for output practice, and discourages the use of pre-prepared notes. If conducted privately, e.g., students do their speeches concurrently rather than in front of the class, it should also be able to reduce performance anxiety. An additional advantage of a speech (a monologic task) is that output is not affected by interlocuters. This reduces the effect that a disbalance in language abilities, willingness to communicate, and/or task engagement has on other participants. It also places the emphasis of the activity firmly on speaking as students do not need to be concerned with listening comprehension at the same time. Further, if speeches are done simultaneously, the overall time for the task is reduced, making it easy to incorporate into lessons.

Recording the speeches also allows for post-task activities that can enhance learning opportunities. One such activity is a dictation and modification post-task in which students transcribe their speech and then make corrections and/or otherwise improve the speech. This provides learners with an offline opportunity to notice issues with their language use, and hence for learning. Alternatively, the speech could be transcribed and corrected by a peer. While opportunities for noticing remain, this also gives students an opportunity to practice listening to real speech. Under both conditions, the dictated speech can be used to calculate the number of words said. Just as learners might do for fluency reading or writing (Nation, 2014), these numbers can be recorded and graphed to push students to say more in the future.

Previous research focused on this task/post-task activity (see Custance, 2020) indicated that students felt the activity was worthwhile and that their speaking ability had improved, irrespective of the post-task condition (self- or peer-dictation). However, the research was survey-based, and the actual production of students was not examined. The aim of the present research is to examine the extent to which the students' reported feelings of improvement might be related to quantifiable changes in their output as measured by improvements in fluency, and whether there are differences depending on whether the post-task activity requires self- or peer-dictation.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions that guided this study.
1. Does the impromptu speech task & self-dictation/modification post-task activity have an effect on fluency?

2. Does the impromptu speech task & peer-dictation/modification post-task activity have an effect on fluency?

3. Are there differences in changes in the amount of output depending on task condition (peer- or self-dictation) ?

Methods

Participants

The study was conducted with six intact classes of first- and second-year university students and a total of 146 students. Of these, 139 students gave permission for their data to be used in this study. Students were science majors at a private university in Western Japan. The first-year groups were physics, environmental science, and human system interaction students; the second-year groups were nanotechnology, environmental science, and human system interaction students. Class sizes ranged from a maximum of 35 students to a minimum of 17. Students were assigned an English class based on a placement test when they joined the university. Unless they tested out of the English program, students remained in the same group for both their first- and second-year English classes. These consisted of three 90-minute English classes per week; one reading, one writing, and one communication class, for a period of 14 weeks each semester.

Data for this study was collected within second semester communication classes. Students also completed the activity during the first semester under the counterbalanced condition, so they had some experience with the activity, described in more detail below.

Procedure

The students' English communication classes were conducted in computer rooms where each student had a laptop computer with an attached headset including headphones and a microphone. These computers were connected to the instructor's computer using CoLabo, a classroom management system. All computers had Audacity, an audio program, and Microsoft Word installed. They also had Internet access.

The task and post-task activity were conducted in eight lessons each semester.

Task – Impromptu Speech

In the first class of the year, students were informed that they would be asked to give a recorded one-minute speech in response to a prompt at the start of each lesson. Potential prompts were posted on the university's LMS so that students could check they understood them and think about them in advance, but they did not know which prompt would be used in each lesson. Prompts were a mixture of general questions and more

specific topics related to the class textbook, Contemporary Topics 1 (Solóranzo & Frazier, 2017). Students were permitted to make notes to help them prepare for each topic but were not allowed to use the notes while giving the speech itself.

At the beginning of each lesson, students logged onto their computers and opened Audacity. They checked that their microphone was working correctly and informed the instructor of any issues. When students were ready to start, the speech prompt was shown to the class using PowerPoint. The PowerPoint also included a 10-second countdown. When the countdown finished, students started recording their speech. They used the inbuilt timeline on Audacity to determine when one minute had elapsed. Students were instructed to stop recording at the one-minute mark, whether they had "completed" their speech or not. Students who stopped speaking early were also asked to record for a full minute rather than stop recording prematurely.

The audio files were saved in mp3 format. The file name included the speech number and student's name for identification purposes. CoLabo was used to collect the audio data immediately after the speech had been completed.

Post-Task Activity – Dictation and Modification

Once the speech was completed, students started to work on the post-task activity. First, they had to dictate the speech that had just been given. Students under the self-condition dictated their own speech, whilst those under the peer-condition dictated that of a randomly assigned partner. For classes under the peer-condition, the audio files were uploaded to the university LMS, from which they could be accessed and downloaded. Students used Microsoft Word to dictate the speeches and were asked to include all repetitions and any Japanese that had been used. After checking the dictation for accuracy, they used the Word Count function to calculate the number of words spoken.

Once the dictation was complete, students worked on the modification. Students were asked to imagine the speech would be given again, and to modify the original speech so as to make it better. They copied and pasted the dictation text beneath the original and used the Track Changes function on Word so that it was easy to see what changes had been made. Students were asked to remove any repetitions, filler words, or mistakes they found, and to translate any Japanese that had been used. Modifications had to be a minimum of 75 words (first year students) and 100 words (second year students).

Students were given approximately 10 minutes each lesson to work on their dictations and modifications. Remaining work was completed for homework, with the dictation and modification Word file submitted to the university LMS before the following class. As with the audio files, filenames included student names and speech numbers for identification. For students under the peer-condition, filenames included the names of both

students, with submissions made available for the original speaker through the LMS.

Figure 1 shows the basic structure of the activity for both the self- and peer-conditions in both semesters.

Self	Peer
1. Topics provided on university LMS for review before the start of class. 2. Students prepare to record using Audacity. 3. Random topic displayed on Power Point with a 10 second countdown. 4. Students record a 1-minute speech based on the topic, save, and submit the audio file.	
	• Students assigned a random partner; download appropriate audio file.
5. Students dictate the speech using Microsoft Word. 6. Students copy and paste completed dictation into the same document and modify. • Correct any mistakes they find • Add to/change the speech to improve it 7. Students submit the dictation/modification (completed as homework if necessary).	
	• Submitted files uploaded to LMS so original speaker can access the file based on their speech.

Figure 1 *Outline of the Activity for Self- and Peer-Conditions*

Data Collection

Both audio and text data were collected for all students as completing the tasks and post-task activities were part of students' classwork. After the last impromptu speech in each semester, a survey about the activity was conducted. This included a request to use the audio and text data for research purposes. Data for students who either requested to be removed from the study or who did not complete the survey were removed from the data set. For students under the peer condition, this included any submissions by the partner(s) of students who had requested that their audio data was not used.

Analyses

For this study, the first and last speeches of the second semester were taken as pre- and post-tests. To analyze the amount produced by each student, the first and last dictation and modification Word files were utilized. The dictations were copied from the Word file into a text file and labelled by person, condition, and pre- or post. These files were used to calculate the number of words using SiNLP (Crossley et al., 2014). Because each speech was one minute in length, the number of words in the dictation was taken as a measure of fluency, defined as the total number of words said in one minute.

If students did not complete the pre- or post-test, they were removed from the data set. In addition, for students under the peer condition, if a dictation for either the pre-

or post-test had been produced by a student who had not agreed to take part in the study, they were removed from the data set. This resulted in a total of 61 students under the self-condition, and 34 under the peer-condition. As the group sizes for the different conditions differed substantially, 27 students were randomly selected and removed from the self-condition in order to balance the group sizes. This was necessary so that it was possible to run the independent samples t test, which require similar n sizes (Green & Salkind, 2014). In total, 68 students were included for analyses.

JASP (JASP Team, 2020) was used to compare the conditions. Two paired sample t tests were run to establish if there was a change in fluency within a single condition. One independent samples t test was run to examine if there were differences between the conditions.

Results & Discussion

Self-Condition

The first research question asked if the impromptu speech task and self-dictation/ modification post-task activity influences fluency development. To answer this question, a paired-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the pre- and post-test values for number of words said under the self-condition were significantly different. The results indicated the mean number of words for the pre-test ($M = 35.47$, $SD = 10.60$) was significantly different to the mean words for the post-test ($M = 40.15$, $SD = 12.30$), $t (33) =$ 2.61, $p = 0.014$, $d = 0.41$. The difference between the means was 4.68 words. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the self-condition.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Students Under the Self-Condition

	Pre	Post
Mean	35.471	40.147
Std. Deviation	10.595	12.302
Minimum	8.000	13.000
Maximum	54.000	70.000

While the results were significant and there was a positive increase in the mean number of words produced, not all students increased. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the change in number of words for the self-condition. Approximately 35% of students (12 individuals) said less in the post-test than the pre-test. This suggests that while the treatment under the self-condition is effective for some students, it is not for everyone.
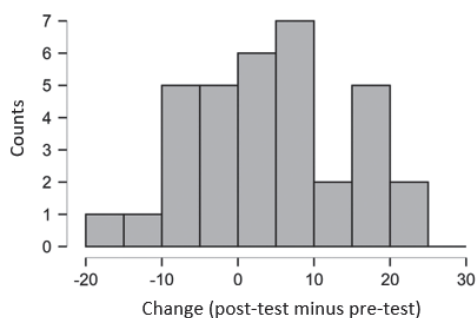
Figure 2 *Distribution of the Change in Words Spoken for the Self Condition*

Peer Condition

The second research question asked if the impromptu speech task and peer-dictation/modification post-task activity influences fluency development. To answer this question, a paired-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the pre- and post-test values for number of words said by students under the peer-condition were significantly different. The results indicated the mean number of words for the pre-test (M = 34.27, SD = 11.93) was not significantly different to the mean words for the post-test (M = 35.12, SD = 13.60), t (33) = 0.36, p = 0.725, d = 0.07. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for the peer-condition.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics for Students Under the Peer-Condition*

	Pre	Post
Mean	34.265	35.118
Std. Deviation	11.925	13.595
Minimum	16.000	11.000
Maximum	74.000	76.000

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the change in number of words for the peer-condition. The range of difference between pre- and post-tests was large, at over 80 words, and over half of the students (18 individuals) showed a negative change in the number of words produced. As no statistically significant results were found, this suggests that the treatment under the peer-condition might not be effective for helping students to improve their fluency as measured by number of words spoken.
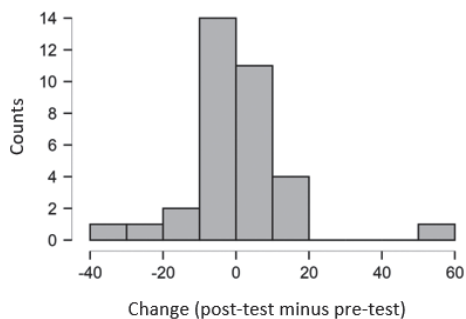
Figure 3 *Distribution of the Change in Words Spoken for the Peer Condition*

Comparison

The third research question asked if there are differences in changes in the amount of output depending on task condition (peer- or self-dictation). To answer this question, an independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a statistical difference between the change in words output between the pre- and post-test under the self- and peer-conditions. The test was not significant, t (66) = 1.274, p = 0.207. Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the comparison while Figure 4 shows the change in mean values for the pre- and post-tests.

Table 3 *Descriptive Statistics Comparing the Self- and Peer-Conditions*

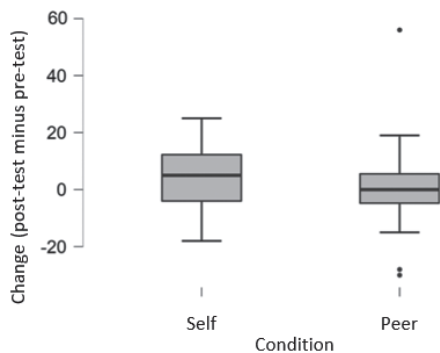|	Change	
	Self	Peer
Mean	4.676	0.853
Std. Deviation	10.455	14.026
Minimum	−18.000	−30.000
Maximum	25.000	56.000

Figure 4 *Change in Words Spoken Between the Pre- and Post-Tests for Both Conditions*

Given significance was found in the results for the self-condition, this is a somewhat surprising result. A possible explanation for the lack of significance is the nature of the data. For a small sample size such as this one, the non-normal distribution of the data could have affected the results (Green & Salkind, 2014). While this means that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, it does not mean that the groups are necessarily the same, just that it is not possible to confirm that they are different with this test. The answer to the third research question is therefore inconclusive.

Based on the results for each group, it is possible that students under the two conditions focused on different aspects of production during the task. Students under the self-condition were aware that they were the only person (except for the instructor) who would hear the speech or read the transcript. As such, they might have been less concerned with the accuracy of what they were saying, especially as they had an opportunity to "correct" it during the modification stage. This could lead to more effort being placed on saying as much as possible, resulting in an increase in fluency. Students under the peer-condition, on the other hand, would have been very aware that others would listen to their speech. This might have resulted in greater attention being paid to both the actual contents of what was said and ensuring that it was easy to understand and therefore transcribe. This would limit students' ability to develop fluency. A more detailed analysis to determine if, for example, there were differences in levels of accuracy between the two groups could provide some elucidation on whether the condition of the post-task activity encourages different types of language development.

Limitations

The results of the study are not conclusive and there are additional limitations that must be considered. Firstly, data from the first semester was not analyzed. The decision to collect and analyze data from the second semester was made to reduce the impact that becoming familiar with the task, as opposed to linguistic development, might have had on results. It was presumed that after the first semester, students would be sufficiently familiar with the task that this type of influence would be mitigated. However, having a fluency measure for the start of the academic year would have been useful. In addition, Bygate (2001) suggests that learners might suffer from task fatigue or boredom if asked to do the same activity repeatedly. While the topics were varied, it is possible that student engagement in the activity waned over the course of the two semesters, and it is not known to what extent this had an impact on development.

A further important limitation is how the word counts used in the study were obtained. Student dictations were used to obtain the number of words spoken in the pre- and post-test. As this was a pilot study, limited checks were made on the accuracy of students' dictations. While students under the self-condition might be presumed to be able to transcribe their own speech accurately as they know what they were saying, this is not necessarily the case for students under the peer-condition. As such, the accuracy of word counts provided by students for the dictations, on which the analyses were conducted, might have been reduced. An additional step whereupon the accuracy of dictations is calculated by the researcher would be necessary if the study is repeated.

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