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Learning Design to Enhance EFL Learners' Own Knowledge Utilization in Speaking

Kae NAKAYA
Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies, the University of Tokyo, Japan
knakaya@iii.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Abstract: Many of intermediate EFL (English as a foreign language) learners cannot speak English effectively, although they may have effective English reading or listening skills. Few researchers have discussed way to improve "English speaking skills by utilizing more effectively and smoothly what learners have already learned," which comprises "grammatical encoding" and "known word retrieval". Therefore, I proposed a learning design that combines self-study speaking using a mobile application developed in this research to improve grammatical encoding, and paired reflection activity to improve known word retrieval. In this learning design, learners can decrease the frequency of repair in speaking English and add more phrases to elaborate on what they want to say.

Keywords: Technology enhanced language learning, speaking skill, utilizing knowledge

1. Introduction

Many of intermediate EFL (English as a foreign language) learners cannot speak English effectively, but they may have effective English reading or listening skills (ALC PRESS INC., 2016). In other words, their speaking skills could be improved by utilizing their own English knowledge more smoothly and in a better manner. Although many researchers have proposed learning systems or designs for learners' speaking skills (e.g., Hwang et al., 2016), they did not discuss learning design to improve "English speaking skills by utilizing more effectively and smoothly what learners have already learned".

Based on Levelt's model (1989), in order to improve such kind of skills, learners must focus on known word retrieval and encode with known grammar. According to the model shown in Figure 1, when people say something, (a) they conceptualize what they want to say, (b) retrieve the necessary words from Lexicon, and (c) encode the words grammatically. As people utilize their own knowledge in (b) and (c) (known word retrieval and grammatical encoding), it is necessary to support learning activities by focusing on these two processes.

The final goal of my research is to design a learning model for improving "English speaking skills by utilizing more effectively and smoothly what learners have already learned." To accomplish this goal, I developed a learning design comprising the following two aspects: (1) a mobile application for a summary speaking task by self-study (MAST), which I developed in order for learners to concentrate on grammatical encoding, and (2) a paired reflection activity using a worksheet, motivating learners to focusing on retrieving better words from their knowledge. In the learning design, learners practice English speaking by self-study using MAST, and then they subsequently conduct reflection in pairs.

2. Mobile Application for Summary Speaking Task by Self-study (MAST)

Using MAST, learners read an English text and enunciate its summary. After reading the text and before speaking its summary, learners participate in a short question-and-answer practice session focusing on grammatical encoding. In the practice, the learner needs to answer questions related to the main points of the summary. MAST vocalizes the question, the learner answers it, and MAST then shows the sample answer and offers the next question, like a pseudo-interactive conversation

with a virtual tutor. By repeating these steps, MAST provides support with regard to the summary points (conceptualization, Figure 1 (a)) and necessary words (Word retrieval, Figure 1 (b)) so that the learner can concentrate on grammatical encoding (Figure 1 (c)) in enunciating the summary.

In order to observe the effectiveness of MAST, we conducted the following experiment. We compared the oral performance of learners using MAST with the performance of learners who conducted reading-aloud tasks that did not focus on grammatical encoding. The analysis revealed that MAST was effective in decreasing the frequency of repair in speaking English. The results implied that speaking tasks that make it easier for leaners to focus on grammatical encoding might promote automatic and faster grammatical encoding by utilizing their current English knowledge.

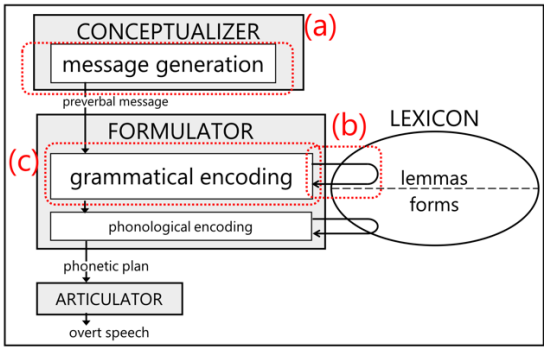

Figure 1. Speech production model based on Levelt (1989)

3. A Learning Design Combining Self-study with MAST and a Paired Reflection

In the learning design, learners practice summary speaking using MAST in advance. Then, they reflect on their speech in pairs, using a worksheet. The steps are as follows. First, a learner (a speaker) enunciates a summary speech that she or he had practiced using MAST. During the speech, the peer listener draws a picture on the worksheet that shows what the peer could understand. In the second step, the pair reflects on the speech. They check what the listener could understand and what she or he could not understand based on the picture. Subsequently, they discuss and write down other phrases within their own knowledge that enable the listener to comprehend the summary speech more extensively. The reflection aims to focus on known word retrieval for expressing precisely what they want to say.

To observe the effectiveness of this learning design, I used it in an English class for four weeks and investigated the students' learning records pertaining to self-study, description of worksheets, and short speech in pre- and post-tests. The learners who focused on grammatical encoding during self-study English speaking using MAST could reflect on their speech in terms of other phrases for listeners' better comprehension, and they were then able to add more phrases to express what they wanted to say. In contrast, learners who did not focus on grammatical encoding, but memorized the text in self-study, tended to pay attention to irrelevant phrases in their reflection and did not improve their speech.

4. Conclusion and Future Research

The results revealed that learners who focused on grammatical encoding in self-study speaking could modify their speech by retrieving known words and then elaborate their speech by utilizing their own English knowledge. In future research, I will improve upon this learning design, to sufficiently enable more learners to focus on activities related to grammatical encoding and known word retrieval.

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