

Effects of Preparation to Enhance Japanese University Students' Participation in ELF Dyadic Discussions

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Abstract

The recent trend of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) research expects second language learners to actively participate in conversations as global citizens. In this so-called ecological CALL environment, it is common to use English as Lingua Franca (ELF), but because the participants have different levels of language proficiency, it can be difficult for less proficient learners to fully participate in the conversation. A similar problem is pointed out in the field of English Medium Instruction (EMI). Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a concept that can affect learners' participation in ELF conversations. This research focuses on state WTC and evaluates whether considering the topic content in their native language (i.e., Japanese) before ELF dyadic discussions results in increased utterances by local students. An experiment was conducted with 20 participants from a university in Japan, each of whom was paired with an international student. Participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group focused on the content of the topic in Japanese, while the control group studied English phrases and vocabulary before discussions. A subsequent *t*-test, calculation of effect size, and analysis of the participants' use of communication strategies implied that focusing on topic content in Japanese was to some extent, more effective.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, English as a Lingua Franca, English Medium Instruction, Willingness to Communicate

1 Introduction

There have been some changes in the trend of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) research over time. Chun [1] proposed the fourth stage of CALL starting in the 2010s in addition to Warschauer's [2] three stages capturing the changes in the CALL trend. In the fourth "ecological CALL" stage, language learners are expected to autonomously use learning opportunities in multilingual contexts and actively participate in conversations with their identities as global citizens [1]. Language learners in recent years need to develop not only linguistic communicative competence but also all kinds of skills and social practices that are required to be productive members of civic society [3].

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dyadic and group activities, the interlocutors' communicative behaviors, demographic features such as gender, ethnicity, and L2 proficiency, and the relationship between the student and the interlocutor may act as influencing factors. Objectives refer to a student's perception of tasks, of which task-interest, task-usefulness, and task-difficulty are considered important. They are based on situation cues related to the activity, including the type of activity (e.g., dyadic, group, or whole-class), task preparation time, and assessment. Another situation cue here is the thematic category of topics which highlights the relevance of content knowledge and topic-related L2 vocabulary to task perception.

This study seeks an effective way of implementing the findings of this situational WTC model by examining the effects of intervention. Of the 35 papers that Zhang et al. [19] examined, only four studies involved intervention experiments [26] [27] [28] [29]. These studies revealed, respectively, the effects of out-of-class speaking practice, online chatting, class sizes, and the interlocutors' WTC levels on the learners' WTC.

According to Figure 2, one of the situation characteristics that affect state WTC is the learner's perception of tasks, which is influenced by factors such as content knowledge and preparation time. In conventional classes, many students are made to study and practice English in order to use the language verbally, but the above model also suggests the importance of focusing on topic content. The four experimental studies previously mentioned did not check the effect of topic content or what to do during the preparation time prior to face-to-face conversation. Therefore, we defined the research question addressed in this study as follows:

Does the amount of utterance in ELF increase when the learner prepares for discussion by considering the topic content in their native language beforehand?

Since the previous studies examined by Zhang et al. [19] mainly focused on university-level English learners, the authors would like to examine the above research question in the context of English learners in Japanese universities conducting dyadic conversations with international students.

3 Method

The authors conducted an experiment to examine the effect of preparing for conversations by considering the topic content in their native language. The participants were 20 non-English major students studying at a private university in Japan. Six of them were seniors, two were juniors, seven were sophomores, and five were freshmen. All of them belonged to a specific seminar and regularly carried out fieldwork for their research. They were divided into two groups: an experimental group where the participants prepared for the conversation by considering the topic in Japanese, and a control group where the participants prepared by studying English phrases and vocabulary items. Each participant was paired with an interlocutor, an international student studying at a Japanese university, for conversations in English. The details of the experiment are provided in the following sections.

3.1 Discussion topic

Based on Zhang et al. [19], the discussion topic was chosen to fulfill three criteria: task-confidence, task-interest, and task-usefulness. In order to make the participants feel task-interest

