KONAN UNIVERSITY

Learning Through Interaction — Colouring and Chatting

Learning Through Interaction: Colouring and Chatting

Ayako KOBAYASHI

要旨

この論文では、教室外での日本人大学生の英語でのインタラクション能力を育成するための
タスクを二つ紹介する。一つ目は、有名な引用を聴いて書き取るタスクで、二つ目は、'塗
り絵とおしゃべり'というタスクである。最初に、タスクについて定義し、タスク型教授法
について述べる。日本で英語を学ぶ環境・文脈についても少し触れる。次に、レッスンの概
要と二つのタスクについて記述する。第3セクションでは、タスクの手順について述べ、第4
セクションでは、それら手順の理論的根拠を社会・文化理論の視点から論じる。

English has become the global language. In order to communicate with people in
the world, it is important for Japanese university students to be able to
communicate in English. However, in an EFL environment, such as Japan, there
appears to be very few opportunities to use English outside the classroom.
Generally speaking, even inside the classroom, the use of English seems limited. In
such a situation, students do not have confidence in interacting in English with
each other. Outside the classroom, interacting in English with other students
would be extremely challenging for them. Therefore, it would be important to
provide them with opportunities for interacting with each other in English not
only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom. In order to provide them
with the opportunity to interact in English with each other, I have created a
workshop called "Colouring and Chatting (C & C)" for students who visit a self-
access learning centre. One of the main purposes of the centre is to provide
students with the opportunity to improve their English skills outside the classroom
(Kobayashi, 2018). In this workshop, students will enjoy famous quotes in English
as a warm-up task. For the main task, they are guided to interact with each other
in English while colouring in a paper. How these tasks facilitate learning through
interaction are described in this paper.

There are various definitions of *task* (see Ellis, 2003, p. 4; Bygate, Skehan, & Swain,
2001, pp. 9-10; Nunan, 1989, p. 5), though, Skehan (1998) proposes five key
characteristics of task, drawing on other writers (e.g., Nunan, 1989). First, a task is

a communicative activity. Therefore, its focus is primarily on meaning. Second, a task contains some communication problems to solve. Third, a task should be realistic; there is some relationship to the real world. Fourth, a task should be completed. Fifth, the assessment of the task is by means of outcome. These five characteristics are compatible with other writers' definition of task, for example, Willis's (1996). Her definition of task is that "…tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (1996, p. 23).

Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching (TBLLT) has two main aims. First, TBLLT aims to improve learners' communicative ability. Tasks can offer learning opportunities through interaction, especially, when they are conducted in pairs or groups. For instance, some tasks require learners to communicate in English in order to solve problems. Other tasks can provide learners with chances to get to know each other well. Positive peers' reaction will also increase their motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Such pair or group work gives them more opportunities to use the target language (see Ellis, 2003, p. 267, Willis, 1996, pp. 35-36). Thus, TBLLT offers learning opportunities and learners can improve their communicative ability by doing tasks (e.g., Skehan, 1998). Second, TBLLT aims to improve learners' linguistic knowledge. Through interaction (e.g., negotiation of meaning), students can improve their interactional competence. Interactional competence is "the ability to mutually coordinate our actions" (Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011, p. 2). Through tasks, various kinds of cognitive processes such as "noticing" and top-down and bottom-up processing will promote language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). Thus, using tasks could activate learning processes and develop learners' linguistic knowledge.

In order for TBLLT to be successfully conducted, not only how to select tasks but also how to implement tasks are extremely important (Ellis, 2010). For successful instruction, human mediation would play an essential role (Kozulin, 2003). The teacher's role in TBLLT is crucial and requires more experiences and greater expertise than the traditional approach (Long, 2016). In TBLLT, oftentimes the teacher needs to diagnose the situation appropriately and react quickly by unforeseen various learner reaction in various situations. TBLLT can be challenging, though, as Long states it can be intellectually fun and rewarding. Although procedures will be described later, as Long (2016, pp. 7-8) mentions, selection of appropriate pedagogic procedures is best left to the teacher, who is

usually the expert on local circumstances.

Instructional Context

My target students for the tasks are Japanese first-year university students. The main task would work best if the group consists of three (including the teacher) to eight or nine. If there are more than ten students, the teacher should divide the group into smaller groups. My target students' majors vary. Their level of English proficiency also varies, but the average level is considered to be intermediate or lower-intermediate. They have little experience in using English outside the classroom as they live in Japan. Very few students come to the centre voluntarily. The majority of the students come to the centre compulsorily as part of their grades. Some of my students who attended the centre commented that they did not want to communicate with students they did not know at the centre. Even in Japanese, they do not want to communicate with "strangers", so in English it is even more discouraging for them. Although I suggested that they could visit the centre with their friends, they commented that it was not easy to adjust their schedules. Thus, many students visit the centre by themselves, feeling rather nervous. In this situation, colouring in could benefit them. There are a large number of benefits of colouring (ColorIt Support, 2016). For one, colouring is therapeutic. It relieves students' stress. Even if students are nervous about interacting in English with strangers, allowing them to be silent but colour creates calmness and reduces their stress. Second, colouring is uplifting. Students see the value of play by engaging in stress-free entertainment. Third, colouring encourages creativity and self-expression skills. After all, colours and how to colour need to be chosen and self-expressed. Similarly, what to say and how to say it need to be selected and self-expressed in interaction. Both creativity and self-expression skills are important interaction skills in life.

Although Japanese university students seem to have 'explicit knowledge' of rules/ grammar, they seem to lack interaction skills (i.e., lack of 'implicit knowledge', see, Ellis, 2010 for implicit learning). Although they have learned English for six years previously, it should be noted that even if they had been taught English for six years, the average teaching time they received would have probably been about less than one month in total (if they had had English lessons four hours a week for six years). Torikai (2017) argues that before six or seven-year-old children start

interacting with each other in a native language after learning basic rules, they have been exposed to the language for 30,000 hours (about three and a half years). Thus, it would be challenging for Japanese university students to interact in English with only a month of training. Therefore, in order to improve their interaction skills, an open task like the main task described below would be useful as it requires them to use implicit knowledge. In the following section, the lesson outlines and descriptions of the two tasks are briefly illustrated.

Lesson Outlines and Descriptions of the Tasks

Table 1 below shows the outline of task 1 (i.e., task's design key features and its brief descriptions) (see Appendix A for example materials). Table 2 shows the outline of the main task (i.e., task's design key features and its brief descriptions) (see Appendix B for an example colouring paper). How long these tasks last is up to the teacher and students. I recommend the teacher should spend on task 1 for approximately 15 minutes and task 2 for about 35-45 minutes if one hour is available.

Table 1. Outline of Task 1

Theme: Sharing quotes and creating positivity	
Design feature	Description
1. Goal	To promote learner autonomy, to facilitate learning, to increase confidence in English, to improve English skills
2. Input	Famous quotes
3. Conditions	One-way
4. Procedures	Individual→Pair→Whole-group (see, *Steps of the procedures* in the following section)
5. Predicted outcome	A list of quotes which increase positivity

Table 2. Outline of Task 2

Theme: Colouring and Chatting	
Design feature	Description
1. Goal	To improve interaction skills
2. Input	Model questions and answers, students' own questions based on their interest
3. Conditions	Open
4. Procedures	Individual (planning time allowed)→Group work (see, *Steps of the procedures* in the following section)
5. Predicted outcome	A list of questions and interaction in English

Implemental Procedures

In this section, the implemental procedures of the tasks described above are shown in detail. T indicates a "teacher" and Ss indicate "students".

Task 1 (Option task)
Steps of the procedures.
Step1: The colouring book I used for workshops happened to contain famous quotes. If the colouring papers contain quotes, T does not need to prepare beforehand. If the colouring book does not contain quotes, you can find quotes on the Internet. T has each student choose a paper which contains one famous quote. T says, "Let's share some of the famous quotes as each colouring paper contains an excellent quote. I'm going to read one quote aloud, so please write it down at the back of your sheet. Ready?" T reads a quote aloud, using pauses (e.g., Never love anyone who treats you like you're ordinary. By Oscar Wilde). Students often ask some words they have missed or their spellings. T can repeat or other students can tell each other. The latter is better as students can see their peers' initiative.

Step 2: T asks, "Do you know about Oscar Wilde, anyone?" Some students will answer. If not, T talks about him briefly (e.g., He was an Irish poet and playwright. I love his play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.).

Step 3: Pair-work/Group-work: T encourages Ss to share their understandings of the quote. T says "Now, let's think about the meaning of this quote. With the person around you, please talk about it."

Step 4: T asks Ss about their interpretations of the quote. T asks Ss whether they liked this quote or not. T makes some comments on the quote, too (e.g., I like this quote. It's positive.).

T encourages a student to share a quote (by letting him/her read it aloud). T repeats the Steps above, diagnosing students' reaction. It should be noted that sharing a quote or two would be appropriate for this task. Otherwise, it can be repetitive.

Task 2 (Main task)

Steps of the procedures.

Step1: First, T distributes colouring papers to students. Each student chooses one colouring paper. T explains the activity briefly (i.e., In this workshop, you will suggest a few topics that you would like to talk about or you are interested in. When your turn comes, you will pick a topic card and talk about it in English. While chatting, you will colour your colouring papers.).

Step 2: T has students write down some questions/topics they would like to talk about or they are interested in. T distributes little pieces of papers (depending on the number of students, T distributes two or three pieces of papers to each student) so that they can write down. I usually use coloured paper (e.g., green and light blue) for this as it looks more playful than white paper.

T gives example questions. T can give easy questions or difficult questions, depending on the level of the students. T says, "For example, you can write down, What are you going to do this summer? What is your favourite animal? Why? Please describe how to cook your favourite pasta". Individual planning time is allowed (5 minutes).

Step 3: T collects everyone's question cards (i.e., the papers that contain students' questions and T's), shuffles them and lays them face down on the desk. T explains how to do the task. T says, "When your turn comes, you pick up a card and read aloud the question on it and answer that question. The persons sitting next to you will ask you follow-up questions or make some comments. Other students can enjoy colouring, but they can also ask or make some comments anytime, and we take turns. OK?" T demonstrates. "Let me do this, first. It's my turn". T picks a card and reads the question aloud and answers (e.g., Who is your favourite artist? and Why? Oh, I love Picasso. I like his oil paintings. I think his paintings are cute and powerful). When students' writings/questions contain mistakes, T can give feedback (it can be done implicitly, depending on the situation). For example, T can recast by saying a correct version of the sentence. T encourages two students sitting next to her to ask her follow-up questions or make comments. When each students' turn comes, T joins in whenever appropriate so that students can observe how the T interacts with students in English. T encourages Ss to join the conversation freely. It depends on groups of learners, but some students can take

the initiative and ask questions or make comments after they notice that they can jump in the conversation freely and are encouraged to do so.

Step 4: T has a student pick up a card and read it aloud and answer. They take turns. T observes students. When students' questions contain mistakes, either T or students correct them. If they need more help, T helps.

Step 5: T-Group. T asks Ss whether the activity was useful and if they enjoyed the activity or not.

Step 6: T-Group (option). T can encourage Ss to write down what they have learned (e.g., new words or expressions).

Rationale for the Tasks and Procedures

Task 1

The key design feature is to increase positivity through uplifting, famous quotes. This can be challenging for low-proficiency learners, but they can still learn with support from peers or teachers when the task is successfully conducted. The key implemental feature is to scaffold students and to increase their self-confidence. Step 1 and Step 2 are to give students teacher modelling and scaffolding. Teacher modelling can increase learners' self-confidence (Schunk, 2003). T can encourage students to read another quote. Usually students volunteer to read even if they are not instructed to do so after observing T's demonstration. Through interaction between T and the whole group, learning occurs socially from a socio-cultural theory perspective. In other words, the teacher is creating a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is the zone where learners can learn and grow under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more competent peers. Another implemental feature is to reduce anxiety and to create opportunity for success.

Step 3 is to reduce anxiety by letting students discuss with their peers before sharing their understandings as a whole group. By letting students make sure their interpretations/understandings are correct, they are more likely to feel confident about their understandings. Accordingly, they can answer publically with more confidence. Also, quotes are like music lyrics and they are open for various interpretations, so their candid talks are encouraged.

Step 4 aims to create the opportunity for evaluation of the activity. It is important for students to see themselves (e.g., their level of English, difficulty of the task) as English learners (Kobayashi, 2016).

Main Task (Task 2)

These are the key design features: (a) the task is an open task (but it is not 'free conversation' task). Because students have difficulty in asking questions, they are given opportunities to ask follow-up questions or make comments; and (b) the task is not a one-way task. Accordingly, more interaction will occur.

The key implemental features are: (a) to provide students with opportunities to ask follow-up questions under a less pressured environment while listening to someone interacting with each other in English; and (b) to provide students with opportunities to focus on form.

Step 1 aims to make sure that students know what success in the tasks involves (Dörnyei, 2001). Having a sense of direction makes students feel more comfortable.

Step 2 aims to promote learner autonomy and to open up a ZPD by modelling. In Step 2, learners are encouraged to bring their own ideas, which can be challenging but more fun. When they aim to interact with each other in English, try to achieve, monitor, and reflect on, their learner autonomy can be executed (Little & Thorne, 2017). They will also receive linguistic input from the teacher and other students so that they can take the initiative and create questions in English. Asking questions in English is a useful practice to improve interaction competence (e.g., Torikai, 2017).

Step 3 is to provide students with opportunities to observe the examples. In other words, T is creating another ZPD by modelling. This phase is crucial for learners who have little experience of interaction in English. Through colouring, students are allowed to be quiet and observe or to listen closely to other human beings interact in English. Through observing, students might be able to take the initiative, "imitate" the teacher, and jump in the conversation (Lantolf, 2003). Such observation and action can facilitate learning (Kozulin, 2003).

Step 4 is to provide students with opportunities to use the target language fluently and accurately with the help of the teacher or more advanced peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Interaction can work as affordance (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) and it can develop students' implicit knowledge. In essence, the task aims to increase interaction, focusing on meaning, which is more likely to increase motivation as students can probably have successful experience in communicating in English.

When monitoring, T might notice gender differences in their way of interaction (e.g., male students tend to talk about themselves when they are encouraged to make comments for other students). It might be a good idea that T states why interaction (asking appropriate questions or making comments in the target language) is important when they are passive.

Step 5 aims to provide students with opportunities for reflection.

Step 6 aims to provide students with opportunities to develop their explicit knowledge (through corrective feedback for accuracy) so that students can learn the target language (Willis, 1996).

Additional Tips.

While open tasks can facilitate more "natural" interaction and language acquisition, closed tasks can facilitate more language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). Although task 2 presented above requires students to interact with each other in the target language, students might repeat the same comments their peers have stated or they might avoid asking follow-up questions when they face difficult topics. On the contrary, closed tasks require students to maintain their conversations and recycle words and phrases. Therefore, depending on learners' needs and wants or level, teachers can adapt the main task and make it as a focused practice. For example, if students have difficulty in using hypothetical conditionals although they have been taught before, T can choose hypothetical conditionals as a task. First, T can prepare for a list of phrases that contain hypothetical conditionals. The examples are given below.

Examples:
If I were a bird,
If I won a billion yen,

If I had superpower,
If I could meet a famous person,
If I could meet any historical person,
If I knew I would die within a year,

T demonstrates how to do the task, using a slip (see Appendix C), completing a sentence. For instance, picking up a slip, T says, "If I knew I would die within a year, I would go to see my friends around the world". If this is too challenging for Ss, T can prepare for a list of answers first to make the task more accessible. Then, T can have Ss match the hypothetical conditional phrases with the answers before the task. To make the task more accessible, during the task, T can encourage Ss to use their original answers only for the underlined words. Students can pick up a slip to complete the sentence. If it would not match the hypothetical conditional phrase, they can pick another one to complete the sentence.

Examples:
I could <u>fly to you</u>.
I would <u>buy lottery tickets</u>.
I would save <u>animals in the wild</u>.
I would save <u>half of the money</u>.
I would save <u>the earth</u>.
I would travel <u>around the world</u>.
I would buy <u>a big house</u>.
I would like to meet <u>Oscar Wilde</u>.
I would like to meet <u>Ed Sheeran</u>.
I would like to <u>be invisible</u>.
I would like to <u>stop the time</u>.

Conclusion

This paper has described the two types of tasks for Japanese university students in Japan. These tasks can be suitable for any level of English proficiency. Although both tasks can be challenging, they would facilitate learning through interaction. Especially, through the main task learners can get used to asking follow-up questions. It seems that Japanese university students are often not confident in asking follow-up questions or making comments in English in daily lives, so this

task would give them useful opportunities. At the end of the main task, opportunities for reflection are provided. Therefore, learners can gain useful linguistic knowledge as well as awareness of themselves as language learners. In conclusion, this paper has described how the tasks could facilitate learning. By observing others and participating in communicating in the target language, interaction competence can be developed. I hope that other teachers would enjoy these tasks and I look forward to receiving feedback from them.

References

Bygete, M., Skehan, P. and Swain, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Researching pedagogic tasks, second language learning, teaching and testing.* Harlow: Longman.

ColorIt Support. (2016, Feb 5). Amazing benefits of coloring for adults. Retrieved from https://www.colorit.com/blogs/news/85320388-amazing-benefits-of-coloring-for-adults

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (2010). 'Focused Tasks and Language Learning' Notes, Kansai University.

Hall, J. K., & Pekarek Doehler, S. (2011). L2 interactional competence and development. In J.K. Hall, J. Hellermann, & S. Pekarek Doehler (Eds.), *L2 interactional competence and development* (pp. 1—15). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Harper, V. (2016). *Creative coloring mandala expressions.* Tokyo: Boutique-sha.

Kobayashi, A. (2016). Examing a metacognitive instruction model. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, *13*, 117—137.

Kobayashi, A. (2018). Thoughts on making our self-access learning center more accessible to every student. *The Journal of the Institute for Language and Culture, 22*, 183—189.

Kozulin, A. (2003). Psychological tools and mediated learning. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev, & S. M. Miller (Eds.), *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context* (pp. 15—38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lantolf, J. P. (2003). Intrapersonal communication and internalization in the second language classroom. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev, & S. M. Miller (Eds.), *Vygosky's educational theory in cultural context* (pp. 349—370). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Little, D., & Thorne, S. L. (2017). From learner autonomy to rewilding: A discussion. In M. Cappellini, T. Lewis, & A.R. Mompean (Eds.), *Learner autonomy and web 2.0.* (pp. 12—35). Sheffield: Calico.

Long, M. H. (2016). In defense of tasks and TBLT: Nonissues and real issues. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 36*, 5—33.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schunk, D. H. (2003). Self-efficacy for reading and writing: Influence of modeling, goal-setting, and self-evaluation. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 19*, 159—172.

Torikai, K. (2017). *Hanasu tameno eigo ryoku* [English ability for speaking]. Tokyo: Kodansha.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow: Longman.

Appendix A. Example materials for Task 1 (Harper, 2016)

Never love anyone who treats you like you're ordinary.

— Oscar Wilde

あなたを平凡に扱う人を決して愛してはならない。

オスカー・ワイルド

Do something amazing.
素晴らしいことをしよう。

① Hope is putting faith to work when doubting world be easier
   by Thomas S. Monson
② Nothing can dim the light that shines from within.
   by Maya Angelou
③ Be magnificent. Life's short. Get out there. You can do it. Everyone can do it.
   by Andy Serkis

Appendix B. An example colouring paper for Task 2 (Harper, 2016)

© Valentina Harper, www.valentinadesign.com

Appendix C. An option worksheet

✂

If I were a bird,
If I won a billion yen,
If I had superpower,
If I could meet a famous person,
If I could meet any historical person,
If I knew I would die within a year,
Others:
Others:
I could <u>fly to you</u>.
I would <u>buy lottery tickets</u>.
I would save <u>animals in the wild</u>.
I would save <u>half of the money</u>.
I would save <u>the earth</u>.
I would travel <u>around the world</u>.
I would buy a <u>big house</u>.
I would like to meet <u>Oscar Wilde</u>.
I would like to meet <u>Ed Sheeran</u>.
I would like to <u>be invisible</u>.
I would like to <u>stop the time</u>.
Others:
Others: