



# Peer and Self Dictation to Encourage Oral Productive Practice and Reflection on Language Use

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| journal or publication title | Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review   |
| volume                       | 24  |
| page range                   | 55-66   |
| year                         | 2020-02-18  |
| URL                          | <a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10236/00028443">http://hdl.handle.net/10236/00028443</a> |

## Peer and Self Dictation to Encourage Oral Productive Practice and Reflection on Language Use

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### **Abstract**

The EFL teaching environment presents many challenges, not least in providing students with opportunities for developing productive fluency. This seems exacerbated in countries such as Japan that have a history of treating English as an object of study (Hagerman, 2009). Japanese students sometimes develop extensive knowledge of English but struggle to use it productively. Further, students often hesitate to use English as it can make them appear “ostentatiously different from the norm” (Kozaki & Ross, 2001, p.1330). Investigating tasks that help overcome these obstacles and encourage learners to use English with confidence is, therefore, important. This paper examines university students’ reactions to an impromptu speech and dictation/modification task under self and peer dictation conditions. Six intact classes ( $N = 146$ ) were given a list of 16 potential topics. For each treatment, students were shown a topic from the list and given 10 seconds to plan before delivering a 1-minute speech. Speeches were recorded, and students subsequently dictated their own or another student’s. They also created a modification of the speech, correcting any linguistic mistakes. Treatments were conducted once a week over a period of eight weeks. A survey was administered to ascertain engagement and perceived value of the activity following the final treatment. Chi-square tests of independence were conducted on the survey answers, with results indicating significant differences between the answering patterns of the two groups for the majority of items. Students under the peer dictation

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condition tended to agree more strongly that they spoke to the best of their ability during the impromptu speech and that their listening skills had improved. However, students in the self-dictation group seemed to have a more positive attitude towards the activity in general. Overall, results suggest that the activity has the potential to push learners to use and reflect upon their English.

### **Introduction**

The ability to function in English as a second or other language is increasingly important in the globalized world. It can enhance work opportunities and access to education, while also expanding the range of places and people that it is possible to interact in and with. Developing the English skills of a population is also seen as a way to increase economic effectiveness (Hashimoto, 2018) and it is therefore unsurprising that English language proficiency is tested as part of Japanese university entrance exams and that many universities have a required English language component for students of any major. However, while the ultimate aim of English education within the Japanese system is to help create individuals who can play a role on the world stage, the nature of the university entrance exams, in particular, has created an environment in which English has become a subject to be learned (Hagerman, 2009) rather than a skill to be developed. English language education at the secondary level often focuses on the development of explicit knowledge needed to pass university entrance exams rather than communicative competence; a focus on accuracy and knowing the “correct” answer rather than understanding how to apply knowledge in new ways. For this reason, many learners arrive at university with a great deal of receptive knowledge of English, but with low productive abilities.

Developing learners’ productive English capacity is therefore of key import for many English instructors at the tertiary level. Helping learners to use English with more confidence and in a greater range of situations is essential if learners are to become independent language users once their formal education has been completed. This means that students need activities that push them to put receptive knowledge into productive use (Nation & Newton, 2001) and use language under real-operating conditions, i.e. those that make use of language as “a tool for engaging in effective communication” (Batstone & Ellis, 2009, p.199). For spoken interaction in particular, they need to focus on conveying a message successfully rather than the linguistic accuracy or succinctness of vocabulary choice; to recognize that understanding is co-constructed through interaction and perseverance.

Rephrasing, rewording, or reconstructing ideas to help an interlocutor

understand is something that many Japanese students seem to find particularly difficult whether delivering or receiving information. Learners may not recognise that an interlocutor has reformulated an idea or changed what they are talking about. Equally, learners can struggle to provide an alternative wording for a concept that has not been understood by their interlocutor or use circumlocution when a vocabulary item is unknown. Learners need opportunities to learn how to deal with real speech that contains false starts, reformulations, and other features of unplanned discourse (Rost, 2011), and also recognize that speech of this type is common in regular interaction.

Some researchers (e.g. Swain, 2005) also argue that output is a key component of language learning. Output provides learners with opportunities to both notice what they do not know and experiment with language but this requires them to monitor their output which is challenging due to limitations on the human attentional system (Izumi, 2003). This can be particularly problematic during interaction if learners are focused on conveying meaning or developing fluency. Equally, if learners monitor their output too heavily, the interaction might become frustrating for interlocutors, or lose some aspects of authenticity. It is therefore important to consider how to balance the opportunities for learning that output provide, and whether learning is likely to occur given other task elements.

As with all teaching situations, motivation is also an important consideration. Kozaki and Ross (2011) suggested that for learners who perceive an activity as requiring them to behave differently from their peers, motivation to participate is likely to decrease. A possible way to overcome this is to increase opportunities to learn and explore language use in a more private setting. Crabbe (2007) suggested that “private learning opportunities” (p.120) can encourage learners to manage their learning and engage more fully with tasks. If learners can determine their own language learning goals, they not only develop a greater ownership of their learning, but also start to become a more autonomous language learner.

### **The Activity**

As explained in the previous section, it is important to ensure that learners are pushed to develop productive language skills. However, this can be a challenge if learners are hesitant to speak with each other or revert to using a shared L1 when struggling to convey meaning. Further, while monitoring of output is necessary to learn through this modality, it is difficult due to limitations on cognition, while over-monitoring can restrict opportunities for fluency development. The activity at the centre of this research was designed to overcome some of these issues while helping learners to become more confident in their ability to speak in English with minimal preparation.

### *Impromptu Speech*

The first part of the activity is a one-minute semi-impromptu speech. At the beginning of the semester, students were told that they would be asked to give a one-minute speech in response to a prompt at the start of each lesson. Potential topics were listed on the university LMS so students had the opportunity to think about them in advance, though they did not know which topic would be selected in any given lesson. Students could make notes relevant for each topic, but they were not permitted to use these when giving the speech itself.

The impromptu speech was the first activity in class each week. As attendance was taken, students logged onto their computers and opened Audacity, an audio program. When all students were ready to start, the speech prompt was shown on the main screen to the whole class, along with a 10-second countdown. When the countdown finished, students started recording their speech, using the inbuilt timeline on Audacity to determine when one minute had passed. Students were instructed to keep recording for the entire time, even if they could not think of more to say. Equally, students were told to stop speaking at the one-minute mark, irrespective of whether their speech was “complete” or not. Audio files were saved as an mp3 with file names including the speech number and student’s name for identification purposes. These files were then submitted to the teacher through CoLabo, the classroom management program used in computer rooms at the university.

### *Dictation and Modification*

Following the one-minute speech, students were then required to dictate the speech as accurately as possible using Microsoft Word. They were asked to include all repetitions, any Japanese that had been used, and fillers such as “Err,” “Umm,” and “えっと.” When students had completed this and checked the dictation for accuracy, they noted the number of words spoken using the Word Count function.

Once the dictation was complete, students copied and pasted this text beneath the original. They then had to modify the speech to improve it. They were encouraged to imagine that the speech was going to be given again, and think about what changes would make it better. This was suggested to include removing any repetitions, filler words, or mistakes that they found, in addition to adding more details where appropriate. Students were also asked to translate any Japanese words that had been used. Any changes made at the modification stage were done using the Track Changes function on Word. This was to help learners and the instructor to see exactly where the original speech had been changed.

Dictations and modifications were completed as homework if not finished during class time, and submitted through the university LMS.

While the impromptu speech itself was implemented to give learners an opportunity to produce language in a controlled, private environment, it was thought that the post-task dictation and modification activity might result in different responses to the activity overall depending on whether students dictated their own speech, or another student's. For students assigned to the peer condition, learners were given the audio data of a randomly assigned peer. If a student could not understand what their partner said during a speech, they were asked to make a comment to that effect using the Comments function in Word. Pairs varied from lesson to lesson, and submitted dictations and modifications were made available to the original speakers.

Figure one shows the basic structure of the activity for both the self- and peer-conditions.

| Self  | Peer   |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Topics provided on university LMS for review before the start of class.</li> <li>2. Students prepare to record using Audacity.</li> <li>3. Random topic displayed on Power Point with a 10 second countdown.</li> <li>4. Students record a 1-minute speech based on the topic, save, and submit the audio file.</li> </ol>  |  |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students assigned a random partner; download appropriate audio file.</li> </ul>                           |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Students dictate the speech using Microsoft Word.</li> <li>6. Students copy and paste completed dictation into the same document and modify. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correct any mistakes they find</li> <li>• Add/change the speech to improve it</li> </ul> </li> <li>7. Students submit the dictation/modification (completed as homework if necessary).</li> </ol> |  |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitted files uploaded to LMS so original speaker can access the file based on their speech.</li> </ul> |

**Figure 1 Outline of the activity for self- and peer-conditions**

The aim of the impromptu speech was to give learners regular opportunities to produce spoken output. As speeches were given simultaneously, it was also a guaranteed time in which everyone could speak each lesson. Further, it gave learners an opportunity to experiment privately with language without the pressure inherent in either speaking in front of others, or with interlocutors. Meanwhile, the dictation and modification provided learners with a clear, language-focused post-task activity that encourages noticing and attention to form, and how best to convey meaning. The dictation, particularly in the peer condition, also provides listening practice that contains more natural, messy, speech. The use of track changes in the modification gives learners an opportunity to see what types of mistakes they might make regularly and be able to correct on future occasions, and teachers an insight

into students' understanding of how the language works.

### Research Questions

1. Do students consider the impromptu speech and dictation activity useful, and if so, to what extent?
2. Do the peer- and self-dictation conditions result in different responses to the task?

### Methods

#### Participants

Six intact classes of first- and second-year university students ( $N = 146$ ) studying science majors at a private university in Western Japan took part in the study. The first-year groups were chemistry and informatics students; the second-year groups were studying mathematics, physics, human system interaction, and chemistry. The largest class was 32 students, and the smallest 20. Students' ages ranged from 18-25 years old. Students had three 90-minute English classes per week; one reading class, one writing, and one communication, for a period of 14 weeks. This study took place within the communication class. Table 1 provides details of numbers assigned to the different conditions.

**Table 1** Number of Students Assigned to Different Conditions

| Condition | First Year Students | Second Year Students | Total |
|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Self      | 27                  | 57                   | 84    |
| Peer      | 17                  | 55                   | 72    |

#### Procedure

Students were given information about the procedure for the activity and where to find the potential topics in the first class of the semester. In the second lesson, students were asked to record a short practice speech to ensure they could record and save their audio data on Audacity. This was followed by the first speech. In subsequent lessons, a microphone check was conducted before the speech prompt was shown. Students were given 10-15 minutes each lesson to work on their dictations and modifications. The completed dictations and modifications were submitted for homework before the start of the following lesson. Students completed a total of eight speeches and dictations/modifications in consecutive weeks. If students were absent or there was an issue with the submitted audio data, another student's speech was assigned for them to dictate and modify.

## Data Collection

In order to answer the research questions, an anonymous survey about the activity was administered. The survey was conducted online using the university LMS and took place during class time after the final speech and dictation/modification session. The survey was given in Japanese and most items made use of a 5-point Likert scale. Figure 2 lists an English translation of the survey questions. The original Japanese items can be found in the appendix.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I came to class without thinking about the impromptu speech topics.</li> <li>2. I spoke to the best of my ability during the impromptu speeches.</li> <li>3. I enjoy doing impromptu speeches.</li> <li>4. I feel that my speaking ability has increased.</li> <li>5. I feel that my listening ability has increased as a result of dictating speeches.</li> <li>6. I noticed English mistakes while dictating speeches.</li> <li>7. I enjoy dictation.</li> <li>8. I thought about my English ability while correcting speeches.</li> <li>9. I feel my English skills improved after doing dictation and modification.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly agree</li> <li>• Agree</li> <li>• Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>• Disagree</li> <li>• Strongly disagree</li> </ul> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. How much time do you think is necessary to complete the dictation and modification?</li> </ol>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 minutes</li> <li>• 10 minutes</li> <li>• 15 minutes</li> <li>• 20 minutes</li> <li>• &gt;20 minutes</li> </ul>                  |

Figure 2 Survey questions

## Results

Tables 2 (Self-Condition) and 3 (Peer Condition) show student responses to the survey. The number in each column represents the number of students who selected that response for a particular item, with the number in brackets giving the percentage. The averages were calculated by assigning a point value to the Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5 ~ Strongly Disagree = 1).

Results for the students under the self-condition indicate a neutral or positive agreement with all items, while students under the peer-condition tended to a slight disagreement with items #1 (not thinking about topics), #3 (enjoying speeches) and #7 (enjoying dictation), but agreement with all other items. With the exception of item #8 (thinking about English ability during dictation), for all items indicating agreement, students under the peer-condition had a slightly stronger degree of agreement on average than those under the self-condition. The amount of time that students felt was necessary to complete the dictation/modification part of the task also differed depending on the condition, with 52% of students under the peer-condition, versus 26% of students under the self-condition, indicating that this



**Table 2 Student Responses to Survey Questions (Self-Condition)**

| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree   | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | No Answer | Average |
|------|----------------|---------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1    | 16(19)         | 29(35)  | 28(33)                     | 10(12)   | 1(1)              | 0(0)      | 3.6     |
| 2    | 25(30)         | 35(42)  | 19(23)                     | 4(5)     | 0(0)              | 1(1)      | 3.9     |
| 3    | 6(7)           | 19(23)  | 32(38)                     | 22(26)   | 4(5)              | 1(1)      | 3.0     |
| 4    | 4(5)           | 26(31)  | 41(49)                     | 11(13)   | 1(1)              | 1(1)      | 3.2     |
| 5    | 2(2)           | 22(26)  | 46(55)                     | 8(10)    | 4(5)              | 2(2)      | 3.0     |
| 6    | 14(17)         | 46(55)  | 20(24)                     | 2(2)     | 2(2)              | 0(0)      | 3.8     |
| 7    | 2(2)           | 28(33)  | 41(49)                     | 12(14)   | 1(1)              | 0(0)      | 3.2     |
| 8    | 11(13)         | 50(60)  | 20(24)                     | 1(1)     | 1(1)              | 1(1)      | 3.8     |
| 9    | 2(2)           | 28(33)  | 43(51)                     | 8(10)    | 2(2)              | 1(1)      | 3.2     |
|      | 5 min.         | 10 min. | 15 min.                    | 20 min.  | >20 min.          | No Answer |         |
| 10   | 3(4)           | 16(19)  | 42(50)                     | 15(18)   | 7(8)              | 1(1)      |         |

**Table 3 Student Responses to the Survey (Peer Condition)**

| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree   | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | No Answer | Average |
|------|----------------|---------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1    | 4(6)           | 16(26)  | 17(27)                     | 15(24)   | 10(16)            | 0(0)      | 2.8     |
| 2    | 21(34)         | 36(58)  | 3(5)                       | 2(3)     | 0(0)              | 0(0)      | 4.2     |
| 3    | 2(3)           | 10(16)  | 24(39)                     | 20(32)   | 6(10)             | 0(0)      | 2.7     |
| 4    | 4(6)           | 19(31)  | 29(47)                     | 9(15)    | 1(2)              | 0(0)      | 3.3     |
| 5    | 4(6)           | 17(27)  | 30(48)                     | 9(15)    | 1(2)              | 1(2)      | 3.2     |
| 6    | 15(24)         | 35(56)  | 11(18)                     | 1(2)     | 0(0)              | 0(0)      | 4.0     |
| 7    | 4(6)           | 11(18)  | 23(37)                     | 22(35)   | 2(3)              | 0(0)      | 2.9     |
| 8    | 14(23)         | 31(50)  | 9(15)                      | 8(13)    | 0(0)              | 0(0)      | 3.8     |
| 9    | 9(14)          | 17(28)  | 23(37)                     | 11(18)   | 1(2)              | 1(2)      | 3.3     |
|      | 5 min.         | 10 min. | 15 min.                    | 20 min.  | >20 min.          | No Answer |         |
| 10   | 0(0)           | 6(10)   | 23(37)                     | 21(34)   | 1(2)              | 1(2)      |         |

aspect of the activity required 20 or more minutes.

To further examine differences between the two conditions, chi-squared tests of independence were conducted for each item to determine if patterns of response were different between the two conditions. Results indicated that there were significant differences in response patterns between the two conditions for all items except #4 (speaking ability has increased) and #6 (noticing mistakes while dictating speeches). Figure 3 shows the distribution of different responses for each item and the results of the chi-squared tests of independence.

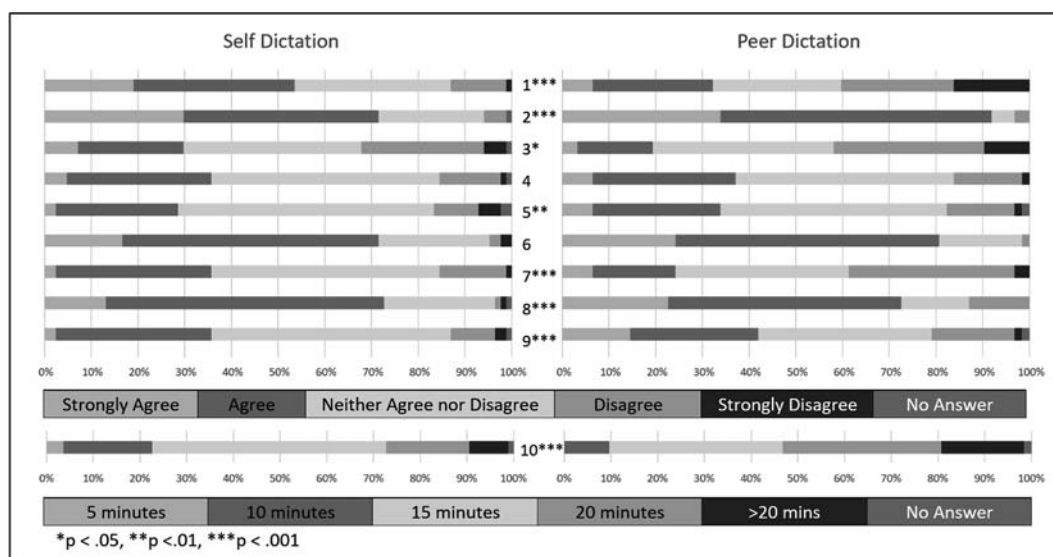


Figure 3 Response patterns for survey items for students under both conditions

## Discussion

While there were differences in answering patterns for many items, overall, students under both conditions tended to agree that they felt their English skills had improved, with those under the peer condition tending to agree slightly more strongly. This suggests the activity overall is perceived as being worthwhile whether the dictation and modification aspect of the activity is completed by oneself or a peer.

In addition, it is interesting to note that responses that did not show significant differences in answering patterns, item #4 (speaking ability has improved) and #6 (noticing mistakes) required students to use similar language skills. For students under both conditions, the impromptu speech element of the activity was the same and provided students with the same type of output practice. Equally, when learners were completing the dictation/modification part of the task and asked to make improvements to the accuracy of the original speech, under either condition they had to rely on metalinguistic knowledge. The tendency towards higher levels of agreement for item #6 under both conditions also suggests that the activity effectively provides learners with opportunities for noticing, and therefore has the potential to help language development.

The key difference between the peer and self-conditions is when learners are engaged in listening to and dictating the speeches. It is therefore unsurprising that student responses to items that seem connected to this part of the task were statistically different between the two groups. Students under the peer condition

tended to agree more strongly that their listening skills had improved (#5) and gave a higher estimate for the time necessary to complete the task (#10). These factors might result from the task requiring students to engage in more intensive listening under the peer condition. Students under the self-condition are already aware of the general contents of their speech and therefore have less information to parse while listening. Conversely, students under the peer condition must process the content more carefully to understand what was said, making the dictation a more cognitively challenging activity.

In addition, poor bottom-up listening skills can make accurate understanding of speech more difficult (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2010). This could be particularly problematic for learners under the peer condition and provides a further explanation for why more time is necessary under the peer condition. Further, it could also explain the higher level of disagreement with item #7 (enjoying dictations). Students under the peer condition must work harder to complete the dictation and might therefore find it less enjoyable. However, this additional challenge might also explain why a higher proportion of students under the peer condition tended to feel their listening had improved.

There were also differences in answering patterns for items concerned with preparation for and behaviour during the speeches. Students under the peer condition tended to prepare more (item #1) and try harder to do their best (item #2), but enjoy doing the speech less (item #3) than those under the self-condition. This could be a result of an increase in anxiety caused by the fact that other students would listen to their speeches. When introjection is used to regulate behaviour, feelings of guilt, anxiety, and other factors relating to self-esteem can become the motivation for action (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Under the peer condition, an increased fear of external judgement could have motivated students to think more about topics before coming to class in order to have more to say, and pushed them to exert more effort during the speech itself. While both groups of students might be intrinsically motivated to improve, this type of external motivation was not present for students under the self-condition.

### **Limitations**

The current study was limited in a number of aspects. In particular, there was no counterbalancing of conditions. The data collection procedures used also made it impossible to investigate individual student responses or remove participants who had either not completed speeches or failed to submit dictations and modifications. Further, though students under the peer condition had access to the dictation and modification produced by their peers, this access was not granted as quickly or

consistently as it should have been.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether students felt an impromptu speech activity with a post-task dictation and modification was beneficial to their language learning, and if there were differences between students who dictated their own speech or a peer's. While results indicate that both groups tended to find the activity useful, there were differences between the two conditions that warrant further investigation. In particular, the extent to which learning takes place through the activity, and if the two conditions result in different types or degrees of learning should be examined. Repeating the study with counterbalanced conditions could also provide greater insight into differences in task motivation and engagement.

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## Appendix

### Original Survey Questions

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Impromptu Speech? のトピックを考えず、授業に来た。</li> <li>2. Impromptu Speech? の時、一生懸命に話した。</li> <li>3. Impromptu Speech をすることが好きだ。</li> <li>4. スピーキング力が上がったと感じる。</li> <li>5. スピーチをディクテーションしたおかげで、リスニング力が上がったと感じる。</li> <li>6. スピーチをディクテーションして、英語の間違えを気付いた。</li> <li>7. ディクテーションをすることが好きだ。スピーチを訂正しながら、自分の英語能力を考えた。</li> <li>8. ディクテーションと訂正の仕組みをして英語力が上がったと感じる。</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 非常に同意できる</li> <li>• 同意できる</li> <li>• どちらともいえない</li> <li>• 同意できない</li> <li>• 全く同意できない</li> </ul> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. ディクテーションと訂正を終わるまで何分が必要だと思う？</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5分</li> <li>• 10分</li> <li>• 15分</li> <li>• 20分</li> <li>• &gt;20分</li> </ul>                   |