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Developing a Second Language Ego with the Aid of Audio/ Visual Recording Technology in the ESL Classroom: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This research explores the use of audio/visual recording devices in conjunction with prepared lesson themes and questions in an effort to both cultivate a second language ego and foster intrinsic learning in English as a second language (ESL) learners. In addition to a review of literature, a practical experiment was conducted over the course of a 15-week term at a Japanese university. At the end of the experiment, ESL learners who participated were surveyed regarding their perception of the efficacy of this learning method. The survey results proved positive regarding both the teaching method and its ability to foster intrinsic learning. Although, these initial findings are quite promising, further research will be undertaken to produce more conclusive results.

ESL教室におけるオーディオ/ビジュアル記録技術の 助けを借りた、第二言語自我の開発：探索的研究

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要 旨

本研究では第二言語（ESL）学習者の第二の自我の育成のための調査記録である。レッスンの準備とテーマをオーディオ録音及びビデオ撮影し記録された。文献の概観に加えてこの実用的な実験は15週間の長期にわたり日本の大学で実施された。実験が進むにつれ参加したESL学習者の学生たちはこの学習方法の有用性をはっきりと認識するようになった。この実験結果は教鞭をとる教師側にも学ぶ生徒側にもこの方法を通して第二の自我育成が促進されるところを証明した。これらの最初の発見は非常に有望的であるがさらなる研究が決定的な成果を实らせることとなるだろう。

Introduction

One of the alluring aspects of human speech is the speaker's ability to become a linguistic chameleon of sorts depending on a given situation and the speaker's aptitude for ego permeability. This may be very obvious to people with a high fluency in a second language, but anyone can relate to this concept from within the parameters of their own native language. Let's take English for example. Within the English language there are many various accents and ways of speaking that can completely change the listener's perception of the speaker regardless of whether the speaker's mode of speech is intentional or not. A monolingual example of this phenomenon would be that of a white American youth of mid-socioeconomic means who chooses to speak in a Black Vernacular English as reflected in popular music due to its overall fashionability or in an effort to gain acceptance and influence among a social group inclined to use that style of spoken English. In other words, as an intelligent human being with a permeable ego, the language practitioner is capable of changing listeners' perceptions of his ego in much the same way as stage actor would change his mask or "persona".

Discussion and Literature Review

Ego permeability, as recognized by Guiora (1972), is the speaker's ability to venture outside of their preconceived notions of who their ego dictates they be. Guiora further points out that pronunciation ability and empathy are profoundly influenced by the permeability of ego boundaries. Highly permeable egos are most readily observed in young children. Their developing minds have not yet formed rigid boundaries in their quest to determine the nature or ego of the person they have come to embody. It would seem that ego permeability is a natural tool in the development of human psychology. As a child observes the world it's been born into, its capacity for ego permeability allows the child to experiment with different sounds, words, tones, body and facial cues, and other modes of human expression. It is through this process of mimicry and experimentation followed by a process of accepting or rejecting the discovered behaviors that the child begins to build an ego that is key to their

survival in a human culture. Ehrman (1993) explains that this concept of language ego is developed from many perspectives, such as how a speaker is perceived, how they are limited, and how they feel about themselves within the context of a language. If this natural capacity for ego permeability can be properly developed and harnessed, the benefits in the field of second language acquisition may prove to be overwhelming positive.

This awareness of a changing linguistic mask present in human language brings us to the concept of the language ego as it relates to the field of second language acquisition. Benveniste (1958) cleverly states that “‘ego’ is he who says ‘ego’”. This may seem a bit impermeable at first, but it strikes at the heart of the ego’s role in the acquisition of a second language. In his exploration of affective variables in second language acquisition, Brown (1973) considers the perspective that the self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-confidence of the language learner, all of which are components of “ego”, could have everything to do with success in language acquisition. Guiora et al. (1972) conceived of the idea of “language ego” as the very personal, egoistic nature of language acquisition. Guiora and company further state that in order to become competent at a second language a person has no choice but to take on a new identity, and thus the development of a second language ego.

Having come to understand “language ego” as an inseparable component of the language acquisition process, we can begin to consider the possible benefits of shaping one’s second language ego toward a desired ego type. People decide to learn a second language for truly myriad reasons. Some students may be studying for the sake of using a second language in business, some may wish to travel, some may want to emulate their favorite Hollywood actor or actress, and yet others may be single-mindedly interested in meeting and conversing with members of the opposite sex. For each one of these prospective motives, the informed student can consider what sort of ego type best suits their desired result and aim to incorporate those ego traits into their intentionally constructed second language ego. From the perspective of both a language instructor and that of a learner, this approach to second language learning is extremely exciting. To paraphrase a statement made by Zukowski/Faust (1997), we can teach students to be effective users of a language as opposed to merely parrots.

Methodology & Practical Application

How does an instructor get the second language learner to realize that: 1) they are in the process of creating a new second language identity or ego, and 2) that they can manipulate this new ego to the advantage of their own language acquisition? One possible solution could be to get them to record themselves speaking in that second language, watch it, and explore the idea that they are perceived as a different ego in their second language. To help learners towards this realization the instructor could present them with a platform that allows them to transform and improve this malleable identity. A viable platform from which to start this process of awakening a second language ego could be activities

centered around the transcription of self-recordings combined with self-critiques and the setting of practical goals.

Basic Lesson Structure

In the interest of intentionally molding learners' developing second language ego, researchers created a basic lesson structure aimed at implementing recording and transcription activities. In order to build up to a stage in which recordings can be utilized there must first be a foundation of repetition and reinforcement. The researchers postulated that there should be consistent repetition of set discussion questions, as well as a session in which the learners are granted the opportunity to review and reinforce the grammar and vocabulary needed to accomplish the proposed goals of the actual recording activities.

Repetition & Task Preparation

Research subjects repeated the same discussion questions in groups of 3–4 people 3 times within a 10 minute period over the course of 3 lessons. Six discussion questions corresponding to the unit topics ranged on a scale from easy to difficult. (Changing the number of questions and the level of difficulty in accordance with varying teachers' discretions regarding the learners' needs should pose no threat to the efficacy of this exercise.) The researchers found that discussion questions among groups were of premier importance in preparing the students for the recording activities. The discussion questions had the effect of providing the learners with a bank of their own previously expressed ideas and stories from which they could draw. Additionally, through this repetitive discussion activity the learners had the opportunity to hear other second language learners' ideas and stories, giving them more exposure to a variety of possible replies to the set task questions. This repetition exercise was the rehearsal for the later recording performance.

Language & Ego Reinforcement

During the repetition practice of the discussion questions, the actual lesson materials and focus aim at strengthening any grammar and vocabulary that the learners could plausibly use to answer the discussion questions. This is the beginning of ego reinforcement. This reinforcement strategy gives the students an arsenal of options with which to converse during the discussion groups. It also allows learners to foster a sense of confidence regarding their ability to convey the ideas they want to express while consciously donning their desired ego type. This heightened sense of confidence allows for the second language learner to participate more fully in the discussion groups by quelling anxieties

they may have concerning their inability to answer the discussion questions. Reading activities involving current events and news articles, as well as language tasks that facilitate the creation of new conversation scenarios or the satisfaction of goals that correspond to the discussion questions' topics, could also be included in the this preparation method. These supplementary learning points can be integrated in to the lesson at instructor's discretion.

Recording & Transcription Preparation

For this research project, a two week period contained four sessions in which the researchers and second language learners could meet. The first three lessons were designed to practice and repeat the discussion questions that would be used during that week's recording session. At this point in the experiment, researchers encouraged participants to focus on the vocabulary and grammar that would be necessary to discuss that week's discussion questions. Having had three previous sessions to prepare, the second language learners had a reasonable enough level of confidence to record a conversation incorporating the practiced discussion questions. To test this method, researchers designated the fourth lesson to recording and transcribing the second language learners' conversations regarding the discussion questions. In this research model, the recording and transcribing session was held during the final lesson of the unit. This final session should serve as a chance for the students to showcase their acquired language, knowledge of the unit, as well as act as a platform from which to practically apply their desired language ego.

Recording Session

The research subjects were told in advance that they would be recording their speaking session during the lesson, and thus they were expected to bring their discussion questions and smartphones with them to class. At the beginning of the lesson the students were put in pair groups. Time was then allowed to check that all the recording devices were in proper working order. Due to the abundance of personal smartphones, tablet computers, and laptops this activity was more than amply equipped for this method's results to be monitored. The researchers started the activity with a 5-minute recording time. In an effort to gradually acclimate the second language learners to speaking in the second language for extended periods, the recording session was increased by 1 minute every two weeks, eventually arriving at a 10 minute recording session. After the second language learners finished recording their conversation, they watched their video together in its entirety. Having watched the video of their speaking performance, the research participants chose a 1 minute segment of the video to transcribe.

Transcription Session

Having chosen a segment of their recorded speaking performance to transcribe, the second language learners then set to the task of watching their video and writing down everything that was said within that segment. It took most pairs of research participants about 15 to 30 minutes to transcribe the chosen segment. In the interest of strengthening second language learners' confidence in their ability to transcribe longer periods of conversation, this research started with the transcription of a 1 minute video segment, increasing by 30 seconds every 2 weeks until reaching a maximum transcription segment of 3 minutes.

The research participants were instructed to transcribe absolutely everything, including repetitions, reformulations, replacements, false starts, pauses, mispronunciations, stuttering, and Japanese utterances. The researchers contended that such diligent transcription would allow the second language learners to receive the most realistic picture of their current communicative English level including fluency, complexity, accuracy, vocabulary and content. After having transcribed the chosen video segment, the research subjects were instructed to find three errors that they or their partner had made, and correct them. It should be noted that there was concern that correcting all the errors would take too much time and possibly have a negative effect on the second language learners' confidence as well.

The research subjects were then instructed to find and list all of the conversation strategies that they used. Next, they were asked to make a list of the things that they wanted to improve for the next conversation session. These lists included goals and concerns pertaining to grammar, vocabulary, error correction, content, conversation strategies, and style of speaking. For the sake of practicality, these post-transcription self-analytical tasks could be assigned as homework if circumstances don't allow for enough time in class. However, in the interest of both developing fluency in the second language and developing their target language ego, it is imperative to review these points of difficulty in some form before the next recording in order for the second language learners to realize their oversights and implement the improvements necessary to better express their desired language ego.

Fostering Intrinsic Motivation in Learners

The researchers found an increased sense of intrinsic motivation among the second language learners when taking part in these activities. These recording and transcription activities should, in theory, act as a starting point for second language learners to begin their journey towards developing a usable language ego by letting the learners take control of their goals and the direction of their own improvement. It is to be stressed that the learners' goals, such as a desired ego mask or specific fluency achievement, are to be decided upon by the learners themselves. This method makes it

possible for the second language learners to integrate the conversation strategies and improvements they wish to realize while being allowed the added advantage of getting to watch the video evidence of their successes, and document it in detail.

Survey Results

A survey was given to the research subjects at the end of a 15 week term to gauge their opinions regarding the efficacy of this learning model, including the preparation, recording, and transcription activities. The survey was given to 74 research subjects between the ages 18 to 20 years old of varying English abilities. The most notable result realized from this is that when asked if the recording and transcription activities helped to improve their English, 58 students replied “YES” these activities were felt to be of benefit, 16 students replied “SO-SO”, indicating some benefit. There were no students who felt that this method had no benefit in regards to improving their English ability.

(Survey 1a)

Questions		NO		SO-SO		YES	
		#Students	Percentage	#Students	Percentage	#Students	Percentage
<i>Did you enjoy these activities?</i>	DQ	4	5.4	15	20.3	55	74.3
	R & T	7	9.4	29	39.2	38	51.4
<i>I think these activities improved my English.</i>	DQ	2	2.7	10	13.5	62	83.8
	R & T	0	0	16	21.6	58	78.4

DQ = Discussion Questions, R & T = Recordings and Transcriptions

Conclusion

According to the data gathered over the course of this research, the use of audio/visual recording devices as a means to cultivate a second language ego is a viable method of language acquisition. The activities covered in the scope of this research do seem to promote intrinsic learning. The research subjects were given a platform from which to view and critique their own performance, note improvements which need to be made, and then mold their spoken English into an ego image that fits their needs. However, due to the relatively small sample of research participants surveyed, it is imperative that further research into the efficacy of this ESL learning method be undertaken. In this regard, further research is planned to assess research subjects’ perception of the second language ego mask they created, whether or not they feel a more profound association with the ego types or popular identities they chose as models, as well as the effect of differing task preparation strategies on the learners’ fluency, accuracy, and linguistic complexity.

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