

The Effect of Input Based on the MERRIER Approach for Learners' Production — Focusing upon the Effect of Example and Redundancy —

by

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Introduction

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of input based on the MERRIER Approach (Watanabe, 1995) for subsequent learners' production. Example and Redundancy in the MERRIER Approach were especially focused upon. In a story-telling centered activity, both the control and the experimental group listened to the same story twice. However, the experimental group was given much Redundancy or Example, the second time. Students' oral productions were analyzed in the light of quantity and quality. The result was that the experimental group yielded more plentiful production than the control group. It showed the importance of creativity in teacher talk for subsequent learners' production.

1. Teacher Talk based on the MERRIER Approach

In previous studies, the importance of giving elaborated input for learners' comprehension or production has been claimed (Chaudron,1983., Gass and Varonis,1985., Chaudron and Richards,1986., Doughty,1991., Yano., Long and Ross,1994). Those studies, however, discussed the modification of input only partially, not thoroughly. According to Watanabe (Watanabe et, 1988., Watanabe, 1992), MERRIER Approach was designed for giving comprehensible, creative input to learners. It especially deals with the quality of input in the light of comprehension from a cognitive side. Moreover, it could give useful points of view for making full use of textbooks in the classrooms. The MERRIER Approach has the following seven features:

Model/Mime: To give students a model by gesture or visualization

Example: To make abstract expressions practical

Redundancy: To paraphrase with other expressions or ideas

Repetition: To repeat key expressions

Interaction: To make efforts to have interaction with students

Explanation: To expand the students' answers

Reward: To praise their answers as often as possible

Among those features, Example and Redundancy were particularly important for learners to understand the stories' content and to avoid misunderstanding.

Example

About the sentence "Be careful of wild animals (on the road)...." (SUNSHINE ENGLISH COURSE 2. page 17), this doesn't stimulate their thinking enough. More concrete images by giving them examples are needed for their creative thinking. Through Example, the sentences can be elaborated as follows:

"Be careful of wild animals. In Japan animals like kangaroos, and koalas are found in zoos. They are in cages. They stay there for people to enjoy watching them. So we don't meet them on roads. But in Australia, they live in a complete natural setting. While you drive on roads, you can see animals crossing. So, you must take care."

Redundancy

Paraphrase with as many different expressions or ideas as possible. For example: "Be careful of wild animals." and Redundancy are provided such as: "Slow down to 30 kilometers per hour." "Open the window and take a careful look."

2 . Method

1) Subjects

Subjects were 36 junior college students. They were taking a Listening course and were at the beginner level. Their proficiency level was measured on a comprehension test at the beginning of the first semester. There was no significant difference among the groups ($p = 0.78$ n.s.). No students went to conversation schools or were taking extra English lessons outside the college.

2) Material

A story was chosen from “Elementary Steps for Understandings” by L.A. Hill (1980). This book contains a number of short stories. A story consists of approximately 160 words. It is designed for students to understand and reproduce what they have listened or read.

3) Task

Both groups were asked to listen to the same story twice. The quality of the story input was manipulated between the groups. While the control group was given the story twice, and in exactly the same way as the text, the experimental group listened to the story elaborated by abundant Example or Redundancy in the MERRIER Approach, during second reading. After they listened to the whole story, they were required to reproduce the whole story through writing.

4) Data

The written production data was analyzed in terms of the length and the creativity. Mean length was calculated by the total number of the words per c-unit and the subordinate clauses per T-unit. It is based on the analysis of the speech performance in Mehnert’s study (1996). The T-unit can be described as one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses and words attached to or embedded within it (Mehnert,1996). Creativity was measured by the number of original words the learners used and syntactic changes.

Table 1. The language data of learners’ reproduction

	experimental (N=18)			control (N=18)			t
	pre	post	gain (SD)	pre	post	gain (SD)	
Total words	35.69	95.00	59.31 (20.1)	41.44	77.19	35.75 (16.94)	3.59 **
Sub-clauses	0.13	0.56	0.44 (0.89)	0.19	0.56	0.38 (0.62)	0.23 n.s.
Original words	0.5	3.25	2.75 (4.42)	1.00	2.13	1.13 (4.56)	1.02 n.s.
Syntactic change	0.38	0.75	0.37 (0.63)	0.19	0.56	0.38 (0.62)	0.28 n.s.

**p<.01

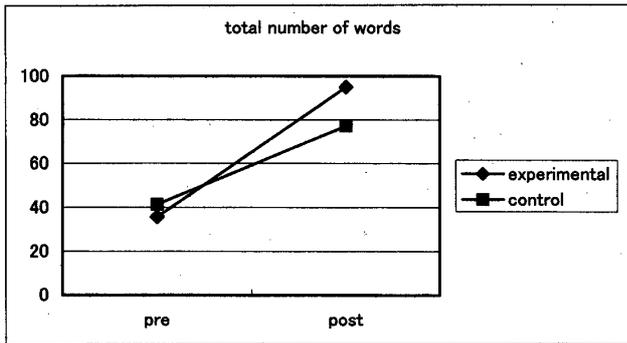


Figure 1. Gains of the total number of words

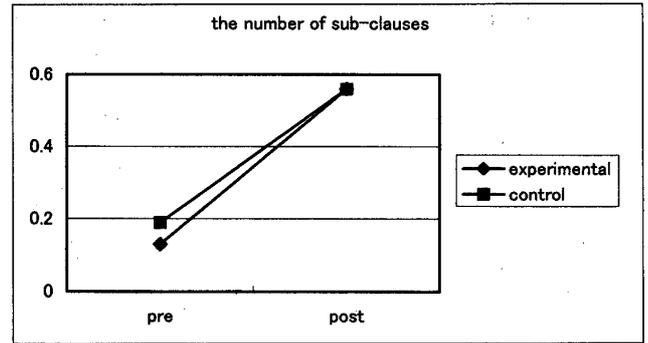


Figure 2. Gains of the number of sub-clauses

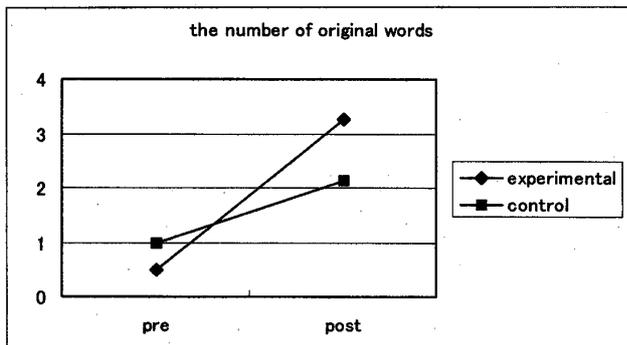


Figure 3. Gains of the number of original words

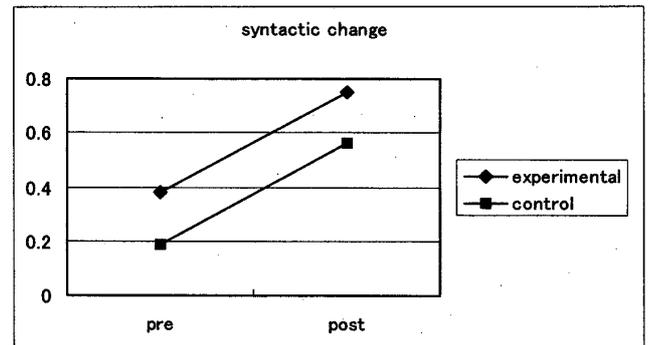


Figure 4. Gains of the number of syntactic change

3. Results

A T-test was carried out on their written data. The result is given in Table 1. As a result, the experimental group had a significantly higher gain of total number of words. On the other hand, the number of sub-clauses, original words, and syntactic change had no significant difference between both groups.

4. Analysis

The followings are the examples of the learners' reproduction (The grammatical errors made by the learners were left uncorrected).

Total words

Ex. 1

Text: "Mr. Smith goes to work at eight o'clock every morning from Monday to Friday."

The control group:

- Mr. Smith working every morning from Monday to Friday.

The experimental group:

- Mr. Smith works every morning on Monday to Friday. *Another days are freetime.*

Ex. 2

Text: “Their neighbors are nice people.”

The control group:

- Their neighbors are good people. They are nice.

The experimental group:

- Their neighbors are nice. So, Mr and Mrs Smith liked them.

The example shows that the experimental group added elaborated information as “Another days are freetime” or “So, Mr and Mrs Smith liked them” to the baseline. It can be guessed that the learners had a tendency to add more information to the baseline because the Example or Redundancy richly given broadened the learners’ mental representation of the text sentences. As for example. 1, Redundancy or Example was given to the learners as follows: “Mr. Smith goes to work at eight every morning from Monday to Friday. (Redundancy and Example →) Another days, I mean, Saturday and Sunday is free. So they go shopping, go on a hike, do sports....”, “Their neighbors are nice. (Redundancy and Example →) They often talked about their children, news, weather and so on. They enjoyed talking with or to each other. So, they liked their neighbor.” It is considered that the learners remembered the text information well because they heard them with the abundant concepts given by Redundancy and Example.

Sub-clauses

As for the number of subordinate clauses, there was no significant difference between both groups ($p = 0.82$). This result shows that the learners didn’t yet reach the level where they could manage sentences with complicated structure. At the same time, the fact that text passages consisted of sentences with short, simple

structure will be given as the first factor.

Original words

There was no significant difference between both groups ($p=0.31$). However, the experimental group showed some expressions that were formally apart from the text sentences while retaining the same meaning. On the other hand, the control group had a tendency to use the exact words in the text.

Ex.

Text: "The old lady in the house opposite Mr and Mrs Smith died."

The control group:

- Old lady in the opposite house died.

The experimental group:

- The old lady of the house across the street.

That showed the experimental group focused on sentence meaning rather than language structure. Chida (1998) investigated the relationship between the way of providing input and subsequent learners' reproduction. The result showed that input with well-established representation contributed to the plentiful reproduction. However, learners who received such input once got apart from the exact words in the story, still retaining representation. Then, they reproduced the story using their own words. On the other hand, learners who reproduced the exact words retained the sentences literally rather than through representation. It can be guessed that Through Example and Redundancy learners comprehended the sentence meaning with abundant representation.

Syntactic change

While both groups had a little tendency to segment a complicated sentence into two simple sentences, there was no statistical difference between both groups ($p=0.78$). It means their production level was not at the level where they could change sentences syntactically.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of Example and Redundancy in the MERRIER Approach for subsequent learners' production. Because it was applied for only three months, a dramatic change was not seen. However, it was found that the number of words which the learners used was increasing. As such, it is possible to say that they understood the input deeply through Example and Redundancy. It shows that using this approach continually will lead to giving creative input to the learners, while at the same time, make a great contribution to the foundation of learners' output.

Acknowledgment

This study was assisted by Waseda University grant for special research projects.

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(2001年9月28日 受理)

MERRIER Approachによるインプットが学習者の発話に及ぼす効果

— ExampleとRedundancyに注目して —

千 田 誠 二

概 要

本研究は、英語教育におけるTeacher Talkの手法の一つ、MERRIER Approach (渡辺,1995) の効果を調べたものである。中でもExample (例示) とRedundancy (発想を変えた言い換え) に注目し、この手法による教師の英語インプットを吸収した学習者が、後にどのような発話をするに至ったかを量と質の両面から分析した。

教材はショートストーリーを用いて、統制群・実験群ともに2回聞かせた。ただし、実験群には2回目にMERRIER ApproachのExampleとRedundancyを多用して聞かせた。その後学習者にストーリーの内容を書き出させ、量的な観点からは総語数と従属節数、質的な観点からは独創的語彙数と統語変換数それぞれの伸びを測った。その結果、実験群すなわちMERRIER ApproachのExampleとRedundancyを通してストーリーを聞いた学習者は、総語数の伸びが統制群よりも有意に高いことを示した。一方、他のデータに有意な差は見られなかった。

本結果から、MERRIER Approachによるインプットを学習者に与えることで、ストーリーの内容が深く理解され、発話の面にも好影響を及ぼすことがわかった。