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Development and Validation of Skill-Integrated Tasks in EAP Contexts:  
A Focus on Input Processing Facilitation

Kyoko Hosogoshi

Abstract

Recently, the importance of teaching the four skills synthetically has been acknowledged in English education worldwide and in Japan so as to develop students’ English proficiency. At the tertiary level where university students commonly learn English for Academic Purposes (EAP), skill-integrated tasks have been implemented as well. The dissertation argues for promoting them since such tasks offer students some opportunities to practice English in a more authentic, academic condition than skill-independent tasks that solely treat only one of the four skills. Meanwhile, students sometimes struggle with the high demands of skill-integrated tasks, possibly due to their limited language experience in English as a foreign language. Therefore, an empirical study would be needed to address how to scaffold students’ learning during the tasks.

This dissertation proposes a model of skill-integrated tasks for Japanese EAP students. In addition to general skill-integrated tasks that consist of input (i.e., listening and/or reading) and output (i.e., speaking and/or writing), the proposed model includes input scaffolding, such as captions and subtitles, and advance organizers. The study discussed in this dissertation conducted four major experiments to examine appropriate conditions of input scaffolding and to explore the significance of the proposed model for students’ English skills development. The four main research questions addressed in the dissertation are as follows:

1. Do captions and subtitles scaffold perceptual processing in a listen-to-speak task? If so, how?
2. Do different types of advance organizers scaffold input processing in a listen-to-write task? Is there any different trait according to students’ proficiency?

3. How do students perform in an EAP course utilizing the model of skill-integrated tasks? Is there any different trait according to students’ proficiency?

4. Can students develop their English skills through an EAP course utilizing the model of skill-integrated tasks?

Chapter 1 introduces the overview of the dissertation. Reviewing recent trends in English education in Japan which has shifted toward more integrative teaching of the four skills, the chapter points out that empirical study of the skill-integrated tasks is anticipated. It discusses the problem of the gap between the high-demands of the tasks and students’ low-proficiency as the major issue. To address the issue, the chapter proposes a novel model of skill-integrated tasks for Japanese EAP students. The chapter sets four research questions to investigate the efficacy of the proposed model and then provides an outline of the following chapters.

Chapter 2 reviews previous research related to the dissertation. Firstly, the features of EAP are summarized, referring to theoretical frameworks of academic listening as its example. Secondly, prior research on skill-integrated tasks is described to discuss their efficacy for EAP instructions. Thirdly, the chapter defines the concept of input scaffolding and reviews previous literature on its implementation for language education, including captions and subtitles, and advance organizers. Fourthly, the chapter discusses some limitations of the past research on input scaffolding. Process-oriented research regarding captions and subtitles and careful investigation into the types of advance organizers are claimed to be especially anticipated for skill-integrated tasks. Finally, the chapter argues the need for further investigation of adequate input-scaffolding during skill-integrated tasks for Japanese EAP students.
Chapters 3 to 6 report the experiments conducted for the study of the dissertation. Chapter 3 describes an experiment regarding the first research question concerning the role of captions and subtitles for a listen-to-speak task. In the experiment, three different kinds of input scaffolding were compared for their efficacy on phonological processing during a listen-to-speak task. A total of 17 Japanese EAP students were assigned to listen to lectures with the help of either (a) English captions, (b) Japanese subtitles, or (c) no-text, and to orally repeat some phrases from the lecture input after listening them again separately. The three groups’ performance in the task was analyzed in terms of overall correct reproduction rate, content or function words, and parts of speech. The result suggested that those who listened to lecture input with captions remembered the most variety of parts of speech except adjectives and contracted words. While subtitles were also generally more helpful than no-text for remembering words in input, they were insignificant for articles and modal verbs. From the above results, the chapter argues that captions are stronger input scaffolding than subtitles and no-text, and that even subtitles could serve as such support for phonological processing during skill-integrated tasks.

Chapter 4 examines the second research question about the function of various advance organizers for a listen-to-write task. For the experiment, a total of 66 students were assigned to listen to a lecture and write a summary of it. Before the skill-integrated task, they were provided with one of the three different advance organizers: (a) organization, (b) keywords, and (c) difficult words from the lecture input. Completed summaries from the task were compared among the three groups for the degree to which they covered the original input. The results indicated that presenting top-down information, such as the organization of the lecture could enhance the informational quality of the summaries the most while bottom-up information, such as difficult words may hinder the replication of main ideas. To discuss the results, each group was then further divided into two proficiency levels regarding
grammatical knowledge. The results indicated that presenting lecture organization could enhance the informational quality of the summaries the most regardless of the students’ proficiency. The functions of keywords and difficult words scaffolding seemed to differ according to the students’ proficiency levels. Based on the results, the chapter proposes employing top-down input scaffolding for low-proficiency students and bottom-up input scaffolding for high-proficiency students.

In response to the third research question, Chapter 5 introduces an experiment that applies the proposed model of skill-integrated tasks in an EAP course. The experiment planned one semester-long EAP course which utilized the model of skill-integrated tasks. The course included four sets of skill-integrated tasks which consisted of listening to a lecture, reading an accompanying text, and making an oral or written summary of both sources. Based on the findings from the two experiments discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the course employed input scaffolding, such as captions and subtitles, and advance organizers, for the initial stage of the tasks: listening to a lecture input. Aiming at exploring students’ learning experience throughout the skill-integrated tasks, the chapter analyzed the quality of the completed summaries from the tasks in terms of three different proficiency levels. As a result, regardless of their proficiency, most participants succeeded in input processing, such as mining the source texts for ideas, and output producing including paraphrasing and organizing ideas. Participants at the middle- and low-proficiency levels sometimes had difficulty with qualitative aspects of input processing, such as identifying main and supporting ideas and synthesizing multiple sources. The chapter concludes that these results reveal the overall efficacy of input scaffolding not only for input processing, but also for output producing during skill-integrated tasks.

Chapter 6 reports the results of the fourth experiment, which addresses the final research question on the verification of the classroom application of the model discussed in
Chapter 5 from the perspective of students’ EAP skill development. For the purpose, TOEFL listening tests were carried out before and after the above course, and the results were compared as a whole and at three different proficiency levels. The results indicated that students could develop their academic listening skills, especially for listening to longer monologs like lecture through the EAP course with skill-integrated tasks. In other words, the chapter verifies that the proposed model of skill-integrated tasks with input scaffolding would be appropriate for nurturing students’ input processing skills possibly due to offering them to externalize their own cognitive process.

Chapter 7 summarizes the results of the study and argues the possibility of the proposed model of skill-integrated tasks for Japanese EAP students both from the students’ and teacher’s sides. From the students’ point of view, the chapter points out that the proposed model can enhance their motivation to learn by providing authentic learning tasks which meet the level of their intellectual maturity. From the teacher’s side, the chapter maintains that the model would manage individual differences among students within one classroom since the study suggests that the function of different input scaffoldings may vary during skill-integrated tasks. The chapter concludes the dissertation by claiming the significance of skill-integrated tasks for input skill development, which has not yet been discussed sufficiently in the previous literature, as its major theoretical implication.