Data-Driven Learning and Learner Interviews in a Japanese Context

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Abstract. This paper outlines the research conducted for the purpose of examining the efficacy of data-driven learning (DDL) tasks and semi-structured interviews implemented in the Japanese tertiary education. Specifically, the attitudes of students, divided into three proficiency levels, towards the tasks in a hybrid language learning course were analyzed. A brief background of this study is provided, followed by the description of DDL in a Japanese educational setting. Then the aims and the results of the present study are explained. The findings suggest that student perceptions of DDL tasks differs significantly according to several major factors, such as an ability to reflect upon their previous learning experiences and differentiate between the benefits and drawbacks of the task. It can be concluded that interviews are effective tools for the instructor to provide different types of students with different instructions for successful implementation of DDL in hybrid learning environments.

Keywords: Data-Driven Learning, Language Learning, Interviews.

1 Introduction

As hybrid learning approaches have significantly developed in many countries, numerous studies have indicated that computer assisted language learning has had an important role to play at the tertiary level [1-2]. One of the language learning methods utilizing computers provides students with a large collection of authentic language, which is a ‘corpus’, and a tool, which is a ‘concordancer’, in order to examine the language data. This approach, called ‘data-driven learning’ (DDL), as defined by Johns [3] can prove effective for students to examine how language works and discover the lexical patterns associated with a specific word or phrase [4-6]. Various types of corpora, which include naturally occurring language data, either written or spoken, have been used in the development of most recent dictionaries and become effective learning tools in the language classroom [7-8]. DDL presents learners with multiple language examples and learners are encouraged to look for lexical and/or grammatical language patterns. In English tertiary education, especially in Europe and China, DDL tasks utilizing corpora have been introduced into the language classroom. The experiences of DDL tasks have proven to be beneficial to the students in the
following three ways. Firstly, DDL allows students to pay close attention to the target word in various contexts and to make valid conclusions about the forms and usages of the target word [9]. Therefore, this approach has been recognized as an effective solution to gain linguistic information beyond that supplied by dictionaries and grammar books [10]. Secondly, DDL activities encourage students’ inductive learning which assists their lifelong learning without the help of the instructor [11]. Thirdly, DDL is expected to enhance student autonomy and support individualized learning [12].

Utilizing DDL tasks as supplement classroom instruction or extra follow-up practices has been prevalent among many countries [13]. It is worth noting that, however, in Japan, relatively little in-depth research has been carried out to address the effectiveness of DDL activities. Furthermore, little has been done to examine a connection between the efficacy of DDL tasks and student perceptions and attitudes toward them, even though the fact that the successful implementation of DDL tasks into the classroom depends on student basic ideas and preferences [11]. This could hamper the sustainable development of DDL activities. In addition, unfortunately, focus has often been placed on a variety of applications of activities with different computer programs [14] rather than on the perceptions of different students with different proficiency levels. For the purpose of making this innovative approach fit easily into the organizational structure of higher education administration [15] in Japanese educational settings, more emphasis should be placed on the development of pedagogical approaches that are suitable for Japanese students and their cultural contexts. Study of specific key factors which affect Japanese students’ perceptions and attitudes towards DDL studies and the data gathered from that is indispensable. This article seeks to address this issue.

2 The Study

2.1 Purpose

The primary aim of this study is to determine how interviews reveal students’ perceptions of DDL tasks in hybrid language learning course. This course was designed to assist students to improve English language by emphasizing the development of lexical skills. The following questions were specifically focused on.

1. What is the impact of DDL tasks in hybrid learning environment on students with different proficiency levels?

2. What do semi-structured interview reveal each student attitudes towards DDL tasks?

How this innovation can activate student prior language experiences will be determined based on the results of semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the course.