



Effectiveness of authentic learning on Japanese honorific speaking skills of Japanese major students in Thailand

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were: (1) to study Japanese honorific speaking skills of students who learn with authentic learning activities; (2) to compare the pre-test and post-test of Japanese honorific speaking skills; and (3) to study the level of confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics for students after using authentic learning activities. Authentic learning (AL) is an accepted strategy which involves the constructed learning situation based on the real world for learners to gain robust knowledge to enable to transfer to real-life and enhance speaking skills. This study integrated teaching the modalities of Japanese honorific speaking with AL activities to 20 fourth year Japanese major students at Naresuan University in Thailand. Research instruments were lesson plans designed following AL strategy, Japanese honorific speaking tests and a questionnaire about confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics. Data were analyzed by using rubric of honorific speaking skills test, descriptive statistics, *t*-test (dependent) and contents analysis. The research results showed: (1) AL was effective in enhancing Japanese honorific speaking skills; (2) AL could significantly increase Japanese honorific speaking skills; and (3) Students gained high level of confidence of speaking honorifics through AL. Therefore, AL may well be an effective teaching strategy to increase Japanese honorific speaking skills.

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Introduction

The number of institutions where learners are able to study Japanese language has increased to 142 areas,

covering 134 countries and 8 regions. In Thailand, there are 659 institutions, the 8th in the world, and 184,962 learners, the 5th in the world (Japan Foundation, 2018). In addition, according to World Economic Outlook Databases of International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2021), Japan has the 3rd largest economy in the world with a GDP of \$5,048,690 million in 2020. According to the survey of JETRO Bangkok (2021), there were 5,856

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Japanese companies in Thailand as of 2020. Therefore, learning Japanese language will have a big advantage to businesses with Japanese people and companies.

For Japanese learners in Thailand, especially Japanese major students at university, one of the reasons why they study Japanese language is to be an interpreter at a Japanese company in Thailand. For that, a high level of speaking skills including honorifics is required. However, Japanese honorifics are one of the most difficult areas to acquire for foreign learners. They are called '*Keigo*' and generally classified into three categories: *Sonkeigo*, *Kenjougo*, and *Teineigo*. The linguistic system of Japanese honorifics is complicated, and the Japanese honorifics are used depending on lots of factors such as various physical and psychological factors, the relationship of in-group and out-group, the conversation scene and so on (Toda & Oyaizu, 2012). In most cases, Japanese learners who stay outside of Japan have opportunities to use Japanese only in the classroom. Furthermore, at Naresuan University, Japanese major students don't have enough time to practise to speak *Keigo* with the image of the situation in the class, so as a result, they cannot speak *Keigo* well and with confidence.

Boonkit (2010) mentioned that in the Thai context of learning English, foreign language teachers regularly wonder why most students are unable to speak English with confidence, especially for communication in real situations. According to her, one of the reasons is lack of confidence, and the development of confidence and occasions to communicate for enhancing speaking skills are important. Similarly, it is assumed that Japanese learners also have the same problem as learning and constructing the confidence of speaking will lead them to enhance Japanese speaking skills.

According to Ozverir, Herrington, and Osam (2016), in many cases, foreign language learners have a lack of opportunity to access the authentic use of the target language because there are restrained activities implemented in class, and they cannot practise to use the target language in real situations. As a result, they cannot use the target language for communication in unstructured, ill-defined contexts outside the class. Therefore, if they can learn the target language in real life or real situations with proper learning strategies, they will be able to improve their language skills, especially the speaking skill. In addition, Bennet, Harper, and Hedberg (2002) mentioned that authentic learning (AL) activity will be useful to help

learners develop an understanding of the complexities of real-life situations. Moreover, it will give opportunities to practice speaking more with solving complex problems under the mimic or similar real situations. Therefore, the researcher supposed that AL activities constructed based on real situations including honorific contents would be effective for Japanese honorific speaking skills essential to Japanese interpreter and lead to student's confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics.

From the above reasons, the researcher focused on Japanese honorific speaking skills and designed AL activities based on the elements of AL which Reeves, Herrington, and Oliver (2002) described in three situations (Reception, Request and Telephoning), which graduates often experience in Japanese companies from the study of Onodera, Yi, and Kanakubo (2004). In this study, the researcher investigated the effectiveness of AL in enhancing Japanese honorific speaking skills of students and explored their confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics after using AL activities.

Literature Review

Authentic Learning and the Technique

AL has instructional theories focus on authentic tasks that help learners integrate required knowledge, skills and attitudes coordinate personal skills composed of complex tasks, and transfer their learning to real-life or work environments (Rule, 2006). From educational research by Curtin University (2015), AL experiences give the ability to turn information into useful transferable knowledge and build professional identity. AL potentially also builds learners' capacity in four domains of learning: cognitive, affective, psychomotor and conative, so AL is a useful learning approach for preparing students for work in the 21st century. In this study, from the various AL techniques, the most appropriate one was chosen respectively for delivery of each lesson effectively according to the suitability of each topic content with the technique of AL. The three techniques of AL used in this study are shown as follows: (1) *Simulation-Based Learning*: Simulation was "originally used as a learning technique in business and military training" and it can be defined as a "structured set of circumstances that mirror real life, and participants act as instructed" (Javid, 2013). Besides, according to

Hyland (1993), simulations provide a realistic setting for more extensive interaction in which learners can get more personally involved. They are given a task to implement or problem to solve using the necessary background information and the environmental restraint together. He states that it has four steps of processes like preparation, introduction, activity and debriefing; (2) *Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL)*: IBL is one of the effective strategies that can be applied in classroom activities. According to Lombardi (2007), IBL can lead students to identify and research issues and questions to develop their knowledge or solutions. By using additional questions, the instructor helps learners continue to think flexibly about applying their newly acquired skills to other solutions. Rejeki (2017) defines IBL as “Students ask questions and find the answers by themselves with some help from the teacher, technology, and their learning community.” She mentions about the process that Bruce and Davidson proposed in the education field. It has five steps: asking, investigating, creating, discussing, and reflecting; and (3) *Student-Created Media*: Student-created media is the learning strategy that students individually or in groups, work on researching, recording, directing, storyboarding, scripting, practicing and performing, editing and other post-production activities through creating a short video (Henderson et al., 2010). Lim, Pellett, and Pellet (2009) recommended that the length of students-created video is usually three to five minutes. They use the six steps of the process like: (1) Give a clear explanation of the assignment and expectations from the lesson; (2) Participate in brainstorming, researching and developing ideas; (3) Submit a project proposal to the instructor; (4) Upon the approval, incorporate a storyboard to develop created video; (5) Film scenes, import and edit video clips with narration, titles, transitions, music and so on; and (6) Export the video to file and share with classmates.

Authentic Learning and Speaking Skills

As far as the author knows, no previous research has investigated effectiveness of AL for Japanese speaking skills. Prior studies of AL were mostly conducted for English speaking skills. Some typical examples are cited as follows. Javid (2013) examined the effectiveness of using simulation in developing students’ English oral skills. He analysed the pre and post intervention scores in

students’ oral communication. This study supported the positive effects of using simulation in language classrooms strongly, and the results proved that there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group about oral proficiency. Irawan, Syahrial, and Sofyan (2018) investigated how IBL strategy could affect students speaking skills by analyzing pre-test and post-test. They focused on four aspects in speaking ability such as vocabulary, grammar, fluency and pronunciation. From the result of the study, it can be concluded that IBL strategy affected students speaking ability with average increasing score covering the four aspects of speaking and sufficiently significant on students speaking ability. Kirkgoz (2011) investigated designing and implementing a speaking course based on Task-Based learning blended with use of video recording. In the study, the data were obtained from pre & post-speaking task and the end of course evaluation. Fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary accuracy and task accomplishment were assessed according to the oral test rating scale. The study indicated that the speaking course had a considerable influence on each student’s speaking performance. In addition, it was found that the impact of integrating videos into the class was very significant in helping students overcome their anxiety, gain fluency and useful communication strategies.

Confidence of Speaking Target Language

As there are various studies about self-confidence and success (Gurler, 2015), self-confidence and performance (Hanton, Mellalieu, & Hall, 2004), the positive correlation between self-confidence and speaking skills was found in Gulaer’s research. Similarly, according to the study by Tridinanti (2018), self-confidence has a significant correlation with speaking achievement of English as a second language, that is, students who have self-confidence will have higher achievement. She mentions that for better speaking achievement, it is also important for instructors to help students cultivate their confidence and handle demanding speaking tasks in the context of real life and the class.

Methodology

A quasi-experimental design (One group pretest-posttest design) was used in this study. The data were collected by Japanese honorific speaking skill tests administered as pre-test and post-test. Class speaking tests (CT) were also administered during the study. In addition, a questionnaire about confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics was conducted after all lessons were finished. This study was conducted for a duration of five weeks, totaling 20 hours. Table 1 shows the details of lessons with AL techniques used. Moreover, the overall flow of each lesson, Pre-test & Post-test, CTs and questionnaire is shown in Figure 1.

Participants

The participants in this study were 20 students who enrolled in elective subject “Japanese Conversation for Business” for 4th year Japanese major students in the first semester of the 2020 academic year at Naresuan University in Thailand.

Research Instruments

(1) *Lesson plans*: Three lesson plans were designed to build Japanese honorific speaking skills for the confidence of speaking following AL techniques which have necessary components; (2) *Japanese honorific speaking tests*: Pre-test and Post-test were implemented in order to investigate

the enhancement of Japanese honorific speaking skills through AL techniques. Besides, CTs were administered in order to study Japanese honorific speaking skills during the study. For assessment of Japanese honorific speaking skills, a scoring rubric composed of five criteria (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, overall fluency and interaction) was developed by the authors. One test question about each topic was prepared for pre-test and post-test, and two test questions were prepared for each CT. They were different test questions respectively in the same topic. An example of one of the test questions about each topic is shown below in Table 2. The test question of each CT was assigned for each student based on a lucky draw. (3) *Questionnaire about confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics*: The questionnaire was conducted for checking the confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics after having learned through AL. It was composed of 15 items using the Linkert method with 5-rating scale developed by the authors referring to the study of Park and Lee (2005). All research instruments were evaluated by three experts to assure the content validity.

Data Analysis

A scoring rubric using a rating scale of 0–4 was used to assess and evaluate students’ Japanese honorific speaking skills. The paired sample *t*-test was used to compare the scores of pre-test and post-test, while descriptive statistics were used to analyze the score of Japanese honorific speaking tests, and the five-rating scale of questionnaire.

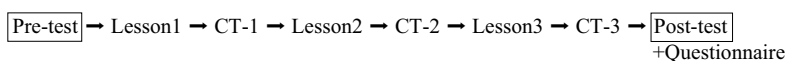


Figure 1 The overall flow of lessons, Pre-test, Post-test and CTs and Questionnaire

Table 1 Lesson topics and the contents, time of lesson period and AL techniques

Lesson topic and the contents	Time period	AL techniques
1. Reception (About simulation-based learning, how to guide the customer with proper expressions including honorifics at reception, learn about talking discourse in reception scene, learn the correct pronunciation, intonation and proper gestures in reception scene)	6 hours	Simulation based learning
2. Request (About inquiry-based learning, how to receive request from boss with proper expressions including honorifics at the office, learn about talking discourse in request scene, learn the correct pronunciation, intonation and proper gestures in request scene)	6 hours	Inquiry-based learning
3. Telephoning (About created media learning, how to receive a phone call from customer with proper expressions including honorifics, learn about talking discourse in telephoning scene, learn the correct pronunciation, intonation and proper behavior in telephoning scene)	8 hours	Created media learning

Table 2 The example of test questions of pre-test, post-test and CTs about each topic

Test type and topic	The example of test questions about each topic
pre-test, post-test and CT-1 (Reception)	A Japanese customer comes to the office. The customer wants to meet the Japanese boss. The boss is on his business, and it will take a little time. Please explain about the boss's situation to the customer and take him/her to the reception room.
pre-test, post-test and CT-2 (Request)	You are in the office. The boss asked you a favor to book an airplane ticket. Please get 3 details of information and confirm them. After you book it, please tell the boss about it.
Pre-test, post-test and CT-3 (Telephoning)	You are in the office and answer a telephone call from a customer. The customer asks you to put your boss on the phone. The boss is out of the office so please tell the customer. Then, the customer asks you to leave the boss a message, so after the telephone call, please deliver the message to the boss.

Results and Discussion

Studying Japanese Honorific Speaking Skills of Students Who Learn with AL Activities

After each lesson was finished, each CT was implemented for assessing Japanese honorific speaking skills of students. The perfect score of each CT was 20 and the score was categorized into six levels such as 'Excellent' (90–100%), 'Very good' (80–89%), 'Good' (70–79%), 'Satisfactory' (60–69%), 'Acceptable' (50–59%) and 'Fail' (0–49%). The mean score of each CT and the level of Japanese honorific speaking skills are shown in Table 3 below.

From the results, each mean score of CT was in the range of 'Very good'. It should be noted that the highest score of CT-1 was 19, CT-2 was 19 and CT-3 was 20. Therefore, the results demonstrated that students could reach comparatively high level of Japanese honorific speaking skills though AL activities and AL would be the effective learning strategy for enhancing students' Japanese honorific speaking skills. This finding is consistent with the previous studies of Javid (2013) using simulation learning, Irawan et al. (2018) using inquiry-based learning and Kirkgoz (2011) using video-recording learning. These are studies on how AL is effective for English speaking skills, but from the results, it was found that AL could be effective for Japanese honorific speaking skills, too.

Comparing the Pre-Test and Post-Test of Japanese Honorific Speaking Skills

Table 4 indicates that Japanese honorific speaking skills of students is significantly higher in the post-test than the pre-test. This corresponded to the study by Madsa (2012) who implemented simulation activities in experimental group and compared with control group. Similarly, in the study related to inquiry-based learning conducted by Irawan et al. (2018), the results indicated that inquiry-based learning strategy affected increasing score of speaking ability. Moreover, from the study by Naqvi and Al-Mahrooqi (2016), who conducted student-created video learning, it was found that the project was more or less successful in improving students' language skills as well as subskills such as critical thinking skills, collaborative skills and IT skills. From students' response, it could be a motivating learning activity that engages them and leads to improved learning outcomes. This result is also consistent with the study conducted by Kirkgoz (2011) who found video-recording learning to

Table 4 *t*-test for the total scores of honorific speaking skills in pre-test and post-test

Test type	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-test	20	37.50	4.46	14.25	15.16***	.000
Post-test	20	51.75	2.47			

Note: ****p* < .001.

Table 3 CT scores and level of Japanese honorific speaking skills during the treatment

Test topic	Test type	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	Level of Japanese honorific speaking skills
Reception	CT-1	20	16.15	1.28	Very good
Request	CT-2	20	16.90	1.64	Very good
Telephoning	CT-3	20	16.00	1.73	Very good

significantly develop student's speaking skills and to be motivated by using technology. In this study, it is significant that all students participated in the lessons actively because they were given equal opportunities to study content and get follow-up, and they could keep motivation in the conductive classroom environment resulting from the AL strategies, so that led to enhance Japanese honorific speaking skills. Considering these facts, it demonstrates that Japanese honorific speaking skills could be enhanced through AL activities.

Studying the Level of Confidence about Speaking Japanese Honorifics

Item a and b of Table 5 indicated that through AL activities, students got more confidence to speak Japanese honorifics than ever. In addition, from item d, it was found that they had confidence in speaking honorifics skills of the future. On the other hand, item c indicated that some of them still felt scared of making mistakes and thought that they needed more time to practice speaking

honorifics. This might be related to the limited lesson time. However, the results showed that overall, most students gained a high level of confidence speaking Japanese honorifics through AL activities. In other words, AL could build the confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics in students, too. Like the study by Hanton et al. (2004) and Tridinanti (2018), it can be said that it is important for students to build confidence in speaking the target language, and such will lead to improve the speaking skills, too.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The results from CTs indicated that AL strategy was effective for Japanese honorific speaking skills, especially in the reception, request and telephoning scenes. Moreover, the results from this study revealed that post-test scores in three topics after using AL strategy were all significantly higher than the pre-test scores, so it indicated the students' Japanese honorific speaking skills were

Table 5 Mean and standard deviation for questionnaire about confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics

No	Item	\bar{x}	SD	Level of confidence
a. Language ability confidence				
1	I can speak honorifics well in the reception scene now.	4.10	0.54	High
2	I can speak honorifics well in the request scene now.	3.85	0.65	High
3	I can speak honorifics well in the telephoning scene now.	4.00	0.55	High
4	I can be willing to tell my answers or opinions about honorifics in the class.	3.95	0.74	High
b. Situational confidence				
5	I am a good honorific speaker now.	3.60	0.58	High
6	My pair or group needs me to speak honorifics in the activities.	3.65	0.57	High
7	I don't feel shy to speak honorifics in the class.	4.00	0.77	High
8	I have confidence not to make mistakes about honorifics in the activities.	3.05	0.38	Medium
9	I can keep clam when I have to speak honorifics without preparation in the class.	3.15	0.48	Medium
c. Communication confidence				
10	I have confidence in practicing to speak honorifics to my pair or group member in the activity.	4.20	0.51	High
11	I have confidence in speaking honorifics to my Japanese teacher.	3.75	0.54	High
12	I have confidence in speaking honorifics to other Japanese teachers.	3.60	0.66	High
13	I feel confident when I am speaking honorifics in the class.	3.80	0.60	High
d. Language potential confidence				
14	I think that I will speak honorifics perfectly someday.	4.45	0.67	Highest
15	I think that I will get a great score in honorific speaking test.	3.85	0.57	High
Total		3.80	0.59	High

enhanced through AL. From the analysis of the questionnaire about confidence of speaking Japanese honorifics after using AL, students seem to have high confidence to speak Japanese honorifics. Therefore, it is concluded that AL can be utilized as an effective teaching approach to enhance the student's Japanese honorific speaking skills in Thailand. Further study should be conducted with a lot of sample groups in university or language school in Thailand, comparing those results with those of studies among Thailand, Japan and other countries. In addition, future research can be conducted in two groups: one conducted using AL strategy (experimental group) and another conducted using traditional learning (control group). Then, the results of these need to be compared and the effectiveness of AL should be verified.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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