ENHANCING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN A THAI CONTEXT

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Abstract: Enhancing autonomous learning for international communication in an English language classroom is a challenge for Thai education as a whole. This study aimed to examine the effects of consciousness-raising instruction (CRI) as a theoretical guidance for autonomous learning in this study and computer-assisted program (CAI) as a tool for self-access learning on Thai learners' autonomous learning for international communication, with three specific purposes: (1) to examine the effects of the CRI and CAI on Thai learners' listening development, (2) to explore the learners' attitudes toward CRI and CAI in enhancing autonomous learning for international communication, and (3) to determine whether CRI and CAI can enhance autonomous learning for international communication in a Thai context effectively. A pretest-posttest, quasi-experimental design with two experiment groups and one control group was used for data collection which lasted twelve weeks. The subjects were ninety students. The elicitation instruments which were constructed based on the *TOEIC Test* (Test of English as International Communication) and the *English Discoveries Program* (a computer-assisted program for English language learning in a classroom and as a self-access) consisted of CRI+CAI, CAI-only, item-by-item and overall pretests and posttests, questionnaire, and journal log. The statistical analysis for quantitative data was ANCOVA. Journal log were used for qualitative data analysis. The results revealed that, first, the subjects' scores of the two experiment groups were significantly higher than those of the control group both on the item-by-item and overall posttests. Of the two experiment groups (CRI+CAI and CAI-only), the posttest scores of the CRI+CAI group were slightly higher than those of the CAI-only group on both item-by-item and overall posttests. Second, the two experiment groups showed more positive attitudes toward autonomous learning than the control group. However, of the two experiment groups, the attitudes of the CRI+CAI group were more positive than those of the CAI-only group. Finally, to enhance autonomous learning for international communication, the instructions should enhance the opportunity to notice the target language and apply what the students noticed into skill practice in various internationally communicative situations.

Introduction

Enhancing the English language for autonomous learning as well as for international communication is a challenge for Thai learners - partly because the language is not spoken outside the classroom but mainly because Thai educational system as a whole is based on the traditional teacher-centered education, despite of the fact that the new direction of learner-centered education has been introduced for more than a decade. To achieve the goals, instructors need to turn from theory to a classroom practice.

Theorists and researchers in autonomous learning (e.g. Wenden, 1991; Little, 1990; Gathercole, 1990; Holec, 1981) suggest that autonomous learning is essential for foreign or second language development.

However, there has been a misconception that autonomous learning is to let the learners study alone with learning tools such as instructions, activities, and computers. In fact, autonomous learning does not means it needs no teacher. It needs a teacher but as a facilitator and the students feel less dependent on teacher. Moreover, autonomous learning of another language still needs theoretical guidance which can facilitate such learning.

The review of prior studies in C-R (e.g. VanPatten, 1990, 1994, 1996; Schmidt, 1990; Leow, 1997; Alanen, 1995; Ellis, 1994; Jourdenais, 1998) reveals that noticing facilitates foreign language acquisition. To verify the C-R theory in a Thai context, I conducted several studies to examine the effects of CRI on Thai university students' skill-getting on various aspects: analytical reading (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2007a), structure and written expressions (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2007b), the language of mass media (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2008a), listening achievement (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2008b), reading for international communication and professions (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2009a), and business English for real-life communication (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2009b). Drawing upon these previous research studies, this present study examined the effects of C-R theory with a wider, deeper, and more practical scope blending with CAI and focusing on autonomous learning for international communication in whether CRI is appropriate for Thai students or not with the following purposes of the study and research questions.

Purposes of the Study

This study examined the effects of consciousness-raising instruction (CRI) on Thai learners' autonomous learning for international communication, with three specific purposes: (1) to examine the effects of the CRI on Thai learners' listening development, (2) to explore the learners' attitudes toward CRI and CAI in enhancing autonomous learning for international communication, and (3) to determine whether the CRI+CAI and CAI-only can enhance autonomous learning for international communication in a Thai context effectively.

Population and Subjects

The population of this study was ninety English majors who enrolled in these two courses: BE. 1101 (English

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Communication) and BE. 3103 (Intercultural Communication in Business) in the first semester of the academic year 2009. The students who studied abroad and/or tried the ***TOEIC Test*** were excluded.

Design of the Study

A pretest and posttest experimental design with two experiment groups (CRI+CAI and CAI-only) and one control group was used in this study. The CRI+CAI received all these factors: CRI, CAI, and a teacher as facilitator. The CAI-only received none of the factors as group 1, except CAI. The control group received none of the factors as the two experiment groups. While the two groups received listening instructions, this group received reading instructions instead.

Variables

The variables in this study fell into three groups: independent, covariate, and dependent. The independent variables were the CRI+CAI, the CAI-only, and the reading instructions. The covariates were the item-by-item and overall pretests. The dependent variables were the item-by-item and overall posttests.

Instruments

The contents of CRI+CAI and the CAI-only were drawn from the listening part of *Advanced 1-3* in the *English Discoveries Program*, computer-assisted instructions for self-access learning with a focus on listening development. The contents consisted of business, travel, ads, and so on. Below were the samples of CRI and CAI.

CRI+CAI for Experiment Group 1

The CRI+CAI was constructed in order to achieve these two purposes: (1) to raise the learners' consciousness by specifically drawing their attention with task direction to search for and notice the clues to the target feature in various linguistic contexts, and (2) to enable the learners to autonomously apply what they consciously noticed in the various linguistic contexts to other naturally occurring linguistic contexts and internationally communicative situations by themselves. To achieve these purposes, the CRI+CAI followed these three steps: before, during, and after the training condition.

Step 1: Before Training

To draw the learners' consciousness to the clues, the subjects in group 1 were prepared to focus on these points: (1) people and actions, (2) people and situations in a specific place (3) people or things and situations in a general place, (4) geography. Also, they were trained to focus on: (1) general questions about the speaker, action, place, and relating topics; and (2) specific questions about time and reasons, plan and problem, idea and suggestion, and opinion. Lastly, they were trained these strategies: understanding the instructions, previewing and predicting, listening for specific information.

Step 2: During

Then the subjects were prepared to identify the following: (1) the gist of statement, conversation, and talk; (2) people, numbers, date, and time; (3) specific factual information; (4) speaker roles; (5) relationships between ideas or pieces of information such as cause and effect, order of events, and comparison; and (6) when a speaker is expressing fact, opinion, or assumption.

Step 3: After Training

Finally, they were given a set of questions and clues used for drawing the subjects' conscious attention to the answers of the each question. Below was a sample of the CRI with questions and clues to the answers constructed based on the contents in the *English Discoveries Program*.

Below was a sample of CRI+CAI

Listening: Answering Machine-Business

Hi, Denise! This is Ms. Marx. I won't be coming into the office today; I need a day off. I'd be grateful if you could do a few things. First, type the letter to Mr. Thompson that I left on your desk. You'll notice that I crossed out the second paragraph. Please remember to use office stationery. ...

Questions

Listen carefully and answer the questions.

1. Who is calling?
2. What does Denise need to do?

Clues

Notice the underlined clues to the questions mentioned above.

1. Line 1 This is <u>Ms. Marx</u>.
2. Line 3 First, <u>type the letter to Mr. Thompson.</u>

CAI-only for Group 2

Unlike Group 1, the subjects in this group received CAI which consisted of scripts and questions of the listening contents instead. They were given neither the before-during-after training condition nor the clues to the answers. They first practiced the listening instruction and then answered the questions. Below was a sample of CAI-only.

Reading Instruction for Control Group

This reading instruction was assigned to the control group only. While the two experiment groups were given the CRI+CAI and the CAI-only, the subjects in this group were given reading instruction, then listened to the script and finally answered the questions.

Pretests

The Item-by-Item Pretest

The listening item-by-item pretest drawn from *advanced 1-3* were designed to test listening comprehension based on guidelines in the before-during-after training condition. The test consisted of 100 questions. Below was a sample of item-by-item pretest**.**

Listening: Answering Machine-Ads

<u>Listen carefully and answer the questions</u>.

1. What service does this advertisement provide?
2. What advantages will you get at the expense of this service?

The Overall Pretest

The overall pretests, based on the listening part of *TOEIC* test, contained short conversation and small talk. The test consisted of 50 questions including short conversation and small talk**.** Below were samples of overall pretests**.**

Conversation

Why did the secretary quit?

(A) Bad working conditions

(B) Little advancement potential

(C) Lack of vacation time

(D) Low wages

Short Talk

What does the company want to increase?

(A) The amount of electricity and gas used

(B) The price of electric and gas service

(C) The number of commercial offices

(D) The number of customers

Posttests

The item-by-item pretest and overall posttests were constructed in parallel with the pretests. Below was a sample of item-by-item posttests**.**

Questionnaire

To elicit the attitudes toward the practice, the students were asked these questions:

Instructions: Tick (/) your answer.

1. How much do you think the language practice in this study can enhance autonomous learning effectively?

___ Very much ___Much ___ A little ___Very little ___Not at all

2. How much do you think the language practice in this study can't enhance autonomous learning effectively?

___ Very much ___Much ___ A little ___Very little ___Not at all

Journal log

Journal log asked the students to express their opinions toward the enhancement of autonomous learning in this study. The guideline questions were:

What, if any, were the strong points of the practice?

What, if any, were the weak points of the practice?

Data Collection

This study employed a pretest-posttest experimental design. In general, the two experiment groups followed these procedures: pretest, task or treatment, and posttest of each point. The data collection lasted twelve weeks. All groups were assigned to complete the procedures in thirty minutes.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity check in this study followed these steps. First, the instruments which had been constructed based on the purposes of research study were sent to five judges for content validity check. The contents were then adjusted to their advice. Then, these instruments were tried out with thirty students who were the population of the study for construct validity check. Finally, the instruments were tested by Alpha Cronbach Coefficient for reliability check. The result (0.760) indicated moderate reliability.

Scoring Procedure and Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of scoring procedure and statistical analysis. In the scoring procedure, counts of pretest and posttest scores on listening achievement were compared. 1 point was given every time when the subjects could give a correct answer and 0 if they could not. In the statistical analysis, means and standard deviation were used for describing the data and an ANCOVA analysis performed on the data in order to compare the differences among the three groups.

Results

Research Question 1: Do the different types of exposure to input as manipulated by the presence or absence of the CRI and CAI have different effects on learners' listening achievement? The performance assessment of listening achievement by item-by-item and overall pretests and posttest administered to the subjects before and after the experiment and during CRI+CAI and CAI-only each week were shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Overall Posttest Means Scores (and Standard Deviations) on Item-by-item Test

	CRI+CAI	CAI-only	Control
English Discoveries	78.5667	44.3667	62.6333
	(5.74566)	(6.74912)	(6.45666)

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for item-by-item test for the listeners' scores on the **English Discoveries** test. The means scores indicated that the CRI+CAI and CAI-only groups performed significantly better than the control group. Of the two experiment groups, the CRI+CAI performed slightly better than the CAI-only. The ANCOVA analysis on the total score on posttest yielded a significant main effect for CRI+CAI, $F(3, 30) = 35.895$, $p < .005$, for CAI-only, $F(3, 30) = 27.253$, $p < .005$, and $F(3, 30) = 25.720$, $p < .005$. The effect of the interaction between pretest and posttest of the groups was statistically significant.

Table 2: Overall Posttest Means Scores (and Standard Deviations) on Overall Test

	CRI+CAI	CAI-only	Control
TOEIC	36.0000	28.4667	19.4000
	(4.04287)	(3.92809)	(2.35767)

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for overall test for the listeners' scores on the ***TOEIC*** test. The means scores indicated that the CRI+CAI and CAI-only groups performed significantly better than the control group. Of the two experiment groups, the CRI+CAI performed slightly better than the CAI-only. The ANCOVA analysis on the total score on posttest yielded a significant main effect for CRI+CAI, $F(3, 30) = 11.844$, $p < .005$, for CAI-only, $F(3, 30) = 9.473$, $p < .005$, and $F(3, 30) = 3.029$, $p < .005$. The effect of the interaction between pretest and posttest of the groups was statistically significant.

Interestingly, the results of the *Item-by-item* test were consistent with those of overall test. The CRI+CAI performed slightly better than the CAI-only but performed significantly better than the control group.

Research Question 2: Do the different types of exposure to input as manipulated by the presence or absence of the CRI and CAI have different effects on learners' attitudes toward autonomous learning? The results of questionnaire were shown in the following table.

Table 3: Percentages (and Raw Scores) of Learners' Attitudes toward Autonomous Learning

	Very much	Much	A little	Very little	Not at all
CRI+CAI	32.3	41.9	16.1	6.5	0.0
	(10)	(13)	(5)	(2)	(0)
CAI-only	19.4	45.2	16.1	16.1	0.0
	(6)	(14)	(5)	(5)	(0)
Control	12.9	12.9	38.7	25.8	6.5
	(4)	(4)	(12)	(8)	(2)

The learners in each group expressed their positive attitudes towards autonomous learning as follows: CRI+CAI (74.2%; $n = 23$), CAI-only (64.6%; $n = 20$), control group (25.8%; $n = 8$) respectively. This indicated that the majority of the learners in the CRI+CAI and CAI-only groups had positive attitudes towards autonomous learning.

Research Question 3: What is an effective way to enhance learners' autonomous learning for international communication in a Thai context? The learners were assigned to respond to the questions through writing, the researcher qualitatively analyzed and drew out the main points. The following are some samples.

"I feel less dependent on my instructor and rely on my own. I apply what I noticed to other contexts and this made learning challenging. Now I observe, compare, contrast, and think more. Of course, I have more confidence to communicate in English and wish to improve it."

(Learner A, CRI+CAI group)

"I need someone to help me. Only computer does not help much. The computer is a good tool if you have good background. "

(Learner B, CAI-only group)

"I feel discouraged. English is too difficult for me. I can not learn anything neither with an instructor nor on my own."

(Learner C, control group)

The majority of learners in the CRI+CAI group responded that CRI+CAI is an effective way to enhance their autonomous learning. As indicated in research questions 1 and 2, CRI+CAI had significant effects on the learners' listening achievement and they expressed their positive attitudes toward autonomous learning. All these, therefore, led to the conclusion for research question 3 that an effective way to enhance learners' autonomous learning is to allow more opportunity to notice and apply what the learners noticed in various linguistic contexts on their own with the use of CAI as a tool and the role of an instructor as a facilitator as shown through CRI+CAI.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study suggested four major findings based on the research question of the study. First, CRI+CAI had a significant effect on learners' listening achievement as shown that their posttest scores on the item-by-item and overall tests were significantly higher than the CAI-only and control groups. Second, CRI+CAI was more effective for enhancing autonomous learning than the other two groups. Third, the learners' attitudes toward autonomous learning appeared more positive. Finally, allowing learners opportunity to notice the target language in various contexts is effective for enhancing autonomous language learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study were consistent with those of the prior study (VanPatten, 1990, 1994, 1996; Schmidt, 1990; Leow, 1997; Alanen, 1995; Ellis, 1994; Jourdenais, 1998; Sa-ngiamwibool, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b). As indicated in this study, the greater the level of noticing and applying, the greater the chances of

successful learning of a target language in communication. Thus, practitioners need to design instructions that can enhance the learners' ability to apply what they noticed in various linguistic contexts on their own.

Implications and Recommendations

To enhance autonomous learning for international communication, the instructions should provide learners opportunity to apply what they noticed into practice and maximize noticing ability and opportunity to use it autonomously. Future study may replicate with different subjects, other skills, and various situational contexts.

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