A Failed Attempt to Compare “Super Sairi” and Regular New Dynamic English Classes

Michael ‘Rube’ Redfield

Introduction

This is the fifth paper in a series assessing CALL and the CAI instructional software package, NewDynamicEnglish. In the first paper (Redfield and Campbell, 1999), we found that at Osaka University of Economics the NDE program was every bit as effective as regular EFL instruction. These results were replicated in the next two studies (Redfield and Layne, 2000, Redfield, Bunday, and Nuefer, 2001). In the forth study, we found NDE to work as well as a dedicated web search program over the course of a single semester (Redfield and Levin, 2001). The present paper was designed to see how NDE works with a very large class of sairi (repeater) students. Would NDE work as well with 115 learners with proven (by their college record) English learning liabilities?

The Study

Design. The original idea for the study was to compare one of the new, 2002/3 ‘super sairi classes with a carefully matched regular required English course also using NDE. The experimental group (super sairi) was an Eigo 2 sairi upperclassmen class, meeting on Wednesday mornings, first period, and taught by the researcher. A Tuesday first period required sophomore English class, Eigo IV, also taught by the researcher, was chosen to act as the control group. Both groups undertook the same NDE program. In order to obtain credit for the class, all learners were required to complete at least 20 hours of instructional work directly with the NDE program. In addition, they were to work on at least three of the four levels in the program, completing 70% of the activities with at least a 70% accuracy rate. There were the same conditions used in the previous studies in this series. All learners were required to take the NDE level one Mastery Test as a pre-test measure of English ability, and the NDE level two Mastery Test as a posttest measure. Here is where the problems began.

Problems with the design. The design envisioned both groups of learners diligently coming to class, taking the Mastery tests, and then working on the NDE program at their own pace. In the past, OUE students had done just this, taking responsibility for their own learning and making measurable progress (see the references for the other studies in the
In the present study, the regular students enrolled in the sophomore required English course (control group) did just that. The super sairi students, however, failed to show up for class at all (for the most part). There were students in the classroom each week, but they were rarely the same students. Every week I had to re-instruct the class on how to use the computers (unfortunately they were Windows Japanese machines instead of the urgently requested Macintosh computers, running the multilingual OSX, making this aspect of instruction immensely more difficult), how to run NDE, how to find the Mastery tests, and what they needed to do to successfully pass the course. This pattern continued throughout the year, with students coming to class for the first time even during the final class in December.

Under such circumstances, it was impossible to objectively compare pre and posttest data from the students. Most sairi students never completed the pre-test, much less the NDE program. Other measures had to be found therefore in order to complete the study. In the end, attendance, number of hours using NDE, number of students completing the class requirements (and therefore passing the course) and average NDE level worked on were selected as comparison variables.

**Method**

**Subjects.** OUE students enrolled in the Wednesday first period Eigo 2 sairi class were selected as the experimental group (N=115). The control group consisted of students enrolled in the first period Tuesday morning required Eigo IV class (N=47).

**Data collection.** All the relevant data (attendance, number of hours using NDE, number of students completing the class requirements and average NDE level) was automatically recorded by the NDE Records Manager. The last day for completing the course requirements was set at January 30, 2003. On that day the researcher transferred all relevant data (also used to determine course grades) to an MO disk, and analyzed it using FileMaker-Pro and JMP for the Macintosh computer.

**Results**

All 47 of the regular class students attended class at least once (with 45 attending regularly), averaging 23:05 hours per student actually working on NDE. Of these 47, 43 completed all the course requirements (with two narrowly failing. Only 70 (out of 115) of the sairi students attended class even once, with 45 students never coming at all. Of the students with at least one attendance, the average number of hours spent on the program was 11:40, far short of the twenty hours required to pass the course. As a results, only 30 of the 115 sairi students were able to gain academic credit for the class.

Only on the average NDE level worked on were the two groups similar. The regular class average level was 1.3, compared to 1.2 for the sairi attendees. A Wilcoxon Ranked Sums procedure indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the
groups average level, \( p = .7693 \). These results are a little disappointing, in that one would hope that the control group, with twice as many hours spend on NDE, would have advanced to a higher level. See table one for a numerical summary of all the measured variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>group</th>
<th>enrolled</th>
<th>passed</th>
<th>attended</th>
<th>ave. hours</th>
<th>ave. level*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sairi</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11:40</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regular</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23:05</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*non significant, \( p = .7693 \)

Discussion

The study as such turned out to be a failure. There was no way to objectively compare the learning between the regular and super sairi classes. The reason for this logistical. The sairi learners did not come to class regularly (or at all) and therefore did not take the pre and posttests, nor for the most part, complete the NDE program. Although one group of upperclassmen managed to attend regularly first period in the morning, the other did not. 45 of the sairi group never appeared in class, while 40 more did not do enough to pass even the minimum requirements (many of these students attended only once or twice over the whole year). 43 out of the 47 control group learners passed the course (and if the results of the previous four studies hold true in this case, learned a fair amount of English), but only 30 out 115 managed to do the same.

In the past, certain sairi classes did just as well as regular classes (Mason and Redfield, 1996). What was the problem with this super sairi class? The control group managed to attend first period, so why couldn’t the sairis? “Job hunting” can hardly be an excuse, because class was over at 10:30, and the students were allowed to use the computer lab at other times as well in order to complete the requirements. One would think that students finding jobs would be especially concerned about graduation, for which passing this class was a requirement. Besides, only a minority of students were (non) graduating seniors.

I do not have the answers to any of the questions posted above. I would have liked to ask the sairi students themselves why they did not attend, but since those who did not pass were also those that did not attend, that turned out to be impossible.

Conclusion

The only conclusion I can draw from this failed study is that I would very grateful if OUE dropped the super sairi class after this year. It is not serving its purpose, neither educationally nor as a vehicle towards graduation.
References


