

## Summary Writing from Aural Input: (How) Can an Online Learning Module Help to Foster Students' Skills for this Complex Task?

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### Abstract

How can a complex task like writing a summary from aural input be effectively supported by an online learning environment? How can this complex task be broken up into measurable units for experimental research? These are the two key questions of the presented preliminary study for a doctoral thesis. In this experimental study, 10 students of the applied linguistics bachelor programme (CEF-level B2-C1) at University College Ghent carried out two tasks of an online learning module on summarizing aural input respectively writing a coherent text. Writing a coherent summary from aural input is a common task in translation bachelor programmes that combines several language and cognitive skills. From a pedagogical point of view, mediating the "overwhelming cognitive overload" in summarizing tasks is important to maximize student performance (Kirkland & Saunders 1991). We aim to find out to what extent an online learning module can play this mediation role by carefully scaffolding the student, while guiding him in the development / discovery of language use strategies.

The module used in the experiment is part of the online language learning package DUO (Deutsch- Uni Online) developed specifically for an academic target group. It is designed for self study supported by an online tutor and forum. The didactic framework of DUO is based on problem solving and guided instruction, with scaffolding playing an essential role in the task design. The activities of the students during the experiment were recorded through think-aloud protocols, video and keystroke logging. As strategy use is of paramount importance for the execution of a complex task and varies considerably between individual students, it was one of the main concerns in this study. We observed the students' actual strategy use and matched these observations against their self-reported use of strategies obtained from a pre-test questionnaire which is based on the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (Oxford 1990). We found that most students seemed to have a well-developed metacognitive awareness of their own strategy use, although there were some interesting instances of mismatch. Besides strategy use, we highlight some other issues, like the role of self-correction in writing and the different levels of online literacy, even among this relatively homogeneous group of "Net-geners".

Starting from this preliminary study, a methodological framework for the experimental setup of a doctoral thesis will be developed. The objective of this thesis is to investigate the impact of the underlying pedagogical approach (instructivist vs. socio-constructivist) of an online learning environment on the language acquisition process. The specific task used in the experiment is a written summary of aural input.