

PeerSpectives

Issue 4, Winter 2009/2010 *An exploratory learning and teaching publication*

How Do People Use These Words? Will Lingle	3
The Dating Game Christopher Murphy	6
Asynchronous Cross-Age Tutoring Tom Gorham	9
PeaceING: Towards a Praxis of Present Participles Gareth Lohead.	14
Perception of Englishes Among Japanese Students Tetsuya Fukuda	17
Narrating a Story of Teaching, Researching, and Writing Mohammed K. Ahmed	20
Fare thee Wells/Parting Thoughts	25
Natsukashi Nick Yates	27
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Student Voice</div>	
Interning at JALT 2009 Koichi Hase	29
Swedish Choice Asako Matsumoto	30
Bullying Chiaki Taura	31
English Only Hitomi Hatano, Takeshi Miyao, Maiko Miyawak	32
Entrance Exams Shota Mito, Koichi Hase, Ayaka Imazeki	33
PeerSpectives Readers Awards	35

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Welcome to the Fourth issue of PeerSpectives Winter 2009/2010

PEERSPECTIVES seeks views from everyone: students, teachers, and school staff. We want to *encourage* more *peering* (verb: to treat those we work with, teach, and learn from as peers and to value their points of view) and collaboration. We can benefit from everyone's ideas and ask important questions about our learning and teaching, research, professional and personal development and *explore* how we could improve our human conditions, around our own campus and more broadly in the world. We also welcome views and news from others in the net-o-sphere.

PeerSpectives seeks short reflective, empirical, humorous, and opinionated articles discussing:

- ways of learning, living and teaching better
- how we can cross disciplinary, cultural, age, and other borders and reap the benefits of our diversity (teacher-student collaborations welcome)

- what we do in learning and teaching and how we do it, with what tools or processes and with what results
- the intertwining of our educational endeavors with the rest of our lives and how we can meaningfully navigate ecological solutions
- book reviews, et cetera... (an important category)

Got a new idea? Send it in. Got a question? Ask it. Did something new, strange, or wonderfully awesome happen in class? Tell us!

Submissions: Note that nothing is automatically accepted, this is a peer edited and negotiated publication. We will give feedback and suggestions for improvement. This is an access publication for all those interested in experimental and experiential education.

Please submit via email attachments with manuscripts single spaced in 12" Times, APA style, 4 pages max (about 2000 words), but shorter the better, with a catchy title—quick reading for busy teachers and students, so KISS (keep it short and simple).

Next Submission Deadline May 15, 2009 Going to press by June 15. Send attached files to: mits@kanda.kuis.ac.jp contact kentofu08@gmail.com to become a reader.



How Do People Use These Words?

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Recently, a student came into my office. He wasn't in one of my classes, he was just looking for an English teacher to give him answers to his questions. On his paper were written a few pairs of similar words and phrases. He wanted to know, what's the difference between "I don't believe it" and "I can't believe it?" English has a wealth of words and phrases that are very similar, but just a little different in meaning and usage. It can be difficult for students to understand when to say a), and when to say b).

I told the student "you've come to the right place" and, on my computer, brought up the website for Brigham Young University's Corpus of Contemporary American English (www.americancorpus.org). It's a free web-based searchable database of language data, over 400 million words from current American TV programs, radio, newspapers and books. This is language as it's being used by native speakers today, and a great tool for students and teachers to answer exactly this type of question.

This website allows you to search for whole phrases, so I did two separate searches for the two phrases "I don't believe it" and "I can't believe it," and clicked "100 entries" to give me a randomized sample. What I got was concordance data presented as 'keyword in context', which is a list of lines of text, with the target phrase in the center of each. Every line came from American newspapers, books, TV shows, and radio shows. Each line is an example of a time someone said or wrote that phrase in English. Looking at the lines together makes it easier to find

patterns in how these words and phrases are used. Scanning over them, I looked for differences in use and context. I gave the student one idea of how they might be different: I said that "I don't believe it" is a bit weaker, while still allowing for the possibility of truth, while "I can't believe it" is a stronger denial of truth. I gave the student two examples of stories he might tell me that would cause me to react with each phrase.

Then I looked more closely at the entries for "I can't believe it." While both appear with similar frequency in the database (671 and 596 entries), they were being used differently. In most cases, "I can't believe it" wasn't being used literally at all. It wasn't being used to express a denial of the truth of something previously said, it was being used to express anger, surprise, or sarcastic mock disbelief, as in "I can't believe it! We actually agree on something!"

As soon as I saw that pattern in the data, I immediately recognized it as perfectly natural and common, but I hadn't thought about using these phrases that way

until I saw the data. (You may point out that “I don’t believe it” is also used to express surprise, but a comparison of the two shows many more examples of “I don’t believe it” being used literally). Here the corpus taught us both something. Language use is open and creative, and the wealth of slightly different synonyms in English, along with the lack of firm usage rules for critical elements like definite and indefinite articles and prepositions can be very frustrating for anyone trying to learn the language.

This student was an exception in that his English level was quite high. Most of my students are at a very elementary level, so how can a corpus website help them? In a previous exercise, I asked students to enter phrases like “I am interested” to see what preposition followed the key word. This works with a few terms, as “I am interested” gives a high number of cases of this phrase with the preposition “in.” Quickly, though, seemingly obvious terms like “I am scared (of)” don’t appear so often in a randomized sample, and the sought-after usage pattern hides in the data. “I’m afraid (of)” is even more elusive, and a quick check for “I’m afraid” turns up quite a few lines where “I’m afraid” is used to soften bad news as in “I’m afraid she’s dead, sir.”

Interesting, but what about low-level students? If they want help with prepositions, they can do a quick comparison of the frequency of different ones to see which one is the most common. It’s only a rough guide, but comparing the number of

occurrences of “at Monday” (44) with “in Monday” (202) and “on Monday” (5656) will leave the learner fairly sure that “on Monday” is the right way to go.

While it’s great to have students taking their own queries to the corpus, it’s not very practical for low-level learners tackling basic grammar and vocabulary. Still here, though, corpus data can provide help to teachers of low-level students. Corpus websites can be used to create handouts with authentic language data, selected by the teacher for comprehensibility, to show a series of phrases using two different terms. It’s possible to engage your students with inductive learning: showing them a series of sentences using two terms, then asking them to decide what the usage differences are. “When” tends to be followed by simple present or past verb forms, whereas “while” tends to be followed by verbs in the present or past progressive, for example. In my experience, students prefer authentic, real-world language data over textbook examples when given the choice.

On the subject of low-level students, it’s interesting that the corpus data can influence our teaching of seemingly basic and firm grammar rules. For example, I’ve been teaching my students for years now to say “there’s” with singular and non-count nouns, and to use “there are” for plural count nouns. Today, though, I add an asterisk to that lesson, and point out that people are increasingly using “there’s” with plurals these days. A

corpus check provides examples from native speakers in respected areas like American National Public Radio and, from the international Bank of English corpus, the London Times, etc.

What's interesting about this is that corpus data show us that what's incorrect today is becoming correct, and likely will be correct in the future, because it is becoming common. This will no doubt raise hackles, and I have my pet peeves of language "misuse" as I'm sure you do, but here is a very important fact about our word definitions and grammar rules themselves: correctness comes from conventionality. To say what is correct is to say what is currently common.

Dr. James Murray and the host of wizened scholars who created the Oxford English dictionary realized this point over a

century ago. They believed their presentation of word meaning and use must be descriptive, not prescriptive. By basing the OED's definitions on current and past usage, in a sense, they created the world's first corpus-based dictionary. All those volunteers painstakingly combing through all available books, compiling all that information on every word in the English language, were asking themselves the same question that that student recently asked me: how do people use these words? We should be attentive to the shifting tides of usage trends, and with tools like free web corpora, finally our students can get good information to help answer these questions themselves.

Rules of Thumb are Often All Thumbs!

Jim Lantolf in his plenary at JALT09 panned *rules of thumb* in favor of more scientific concepts (although these, too, may turn out to be *thumbesque* after more research). If you wish to have a chuckle at the expense of unruly thumbs (not your own of course) go to:

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/video/0003-ibeforee.htm>

Or google "ibeforee" and click on the first Merriam Webster link that comes up (for those who hate typing web pages in). N.B. Teachers be warned – this video can cause extreme frustration in students. Viewing only advised for very advanced linguistics students, perhaps in their final semester so they can get a grasp of reality.



The Dating Game: How I Increased Student Intrinsic Motivation through Mediational Tools

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No doubt most language teachers have struggled to increase student motivation. In Japan, students subjected to six years of compulsory grammar translation often fail to see the practical use of learning English. At Fukuoka Institute of Technology (FIT) in Fukuoka, Kyushu, my students struggled not from a low innate aptitude for learning languages but from a severe lack of motivation. Language had been taught to them as an abstract system of rules throughout their junior and senior high school days. They knew grammar rules ad nauseam but couldn't apply what they had learned in productive ways.

How then could I motivate students that had little to no intrinsic motivation (i.e. motivation to learn because of a genuine desire to acquire the language)? Extrinsic motivation in the form of external tools such as quizzes and tests could certainly evoke some response, but I wanted them to enjoy the class, too. Gardner and Smythe (1975, as cited in Gardner, 2001) proposed a model of second language acquisition that focused on learning another language in school. In their model, Gardner and Smythe identified four categories of motivation: Group Specific Attitudes, Course Related Characteristics, Motivational Indices, and Generalized Attitudes. In their model, the variable 'Attitudes Toward the Learning Situation' involved student attitudes toward any feature of the environment in which learning was to take place. In the classroom context, these features could include the teacher, the course, students' understanding how they might use the language in the future, or any of the other numerous factors, both internal and

external, in the classroom. In their Socio-Educational Model, intrinsic motivation is comprised of three elements:

- 1) The motivated individual realizes effort, time and persistence are necessary to learn the language. The learner seeks out opportunities to learn more about the L2.
- 2) The motivated individual wants to achieve his/her goal. In the case of L2 acquisition, near-native fluency is the goal.
- 3) The motivated individual *enjoys* the task of learning the language.

I was assigned to teach two sections of Communicative English to college juniors. Each class consisted of roughly 35 boys aged 19-21. There were no females in the class. 80% of the students were majoring in computer technology or robotics. The other 20% were majoring in environmental conservation. I was told that most of the students had low proficiency in the English language. Just to note, there was no English Department at the university.

English faculty were placed in the Department of Environmental Conservation, thus emphasizing how small the role of English was at the university.

Before the start of the semester, having heard that I would have two classes with roughly 30-40 boys in each class, I brainstormed how I might create a fun thread that would carry the students through the 14 week semester. I wanted to assign students a project that would be fun and help boost motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, through the semester. While threatening students with a failing grade could be a motivational tool, I wanted to build intrinsic motivation in the way Gardner and Smythe outlined in their Socio-Educational Model.

I remembered a conversation with a friend about online dating services. I was surprised to hear that the political satire magazine, the Onion, had a personals section. (<http://personals.theonion.com/>). Considering the class size and the fact that I would be working with a group of male students that were comfortable using technology, the idea of using an online dating service to learn English seemed like a plausible idea.

In the first class, I introduced the course and introduced the personals project that would thread through the semester. I told students that the first ten to fifteen minutes of each class would be spent having randomly selected students give a report of their online encounters. Because the selection of students would be random in each class, students had

to be prepared at anytime to give their report.

In this class, I also taught language that would be useful in the creation of a personals profile. I created my own profile before the class just to get a feel for what language use would be required. As a warm-up activity, students introduced themselves in English to their peers. Students would use these self-introductions for the profile. Students were instructed that this was a semester-long project and journals would have to be kept detailing their experiences using the personals. I let students know that I would be collecting their journals at mid-semester and at the end of the semester.

The second class of the semester was conducted in the computer laboratory. Here I took students step by step through the creation of an online personals profile. All students in the class used the Onion personals service to limit the questions that might come up regarding profile questions. We worked step-by-step through the profile while answering student questions. Students were able to customize their profile according to the kind of relationship they were interested in (e.g. friends, relationship) and the kind of person they were looking for (e.g. smoker, hobbies, interests, etc.).

After these initial two classes, students were expected to regularly network on the personals service and keep a detailed weekly log in English of their online activity. At the start of each class, 2-3 students were called upon randomly to talk about people

they had met online. This semester-long thread noticeably increased student motivation to use English. Students seemed genuinely excited to tell the class in English about their online encounters. Also, I could refer to the students' narratives as a source of humor and model for grammar points arising from students' online conversations. Through this activity, students were given a real-world application for studying English. Now students could apply their knowledge of language in practical, fun ways. Also, using the computer was a comfortable social tool for the students to use English. I felt that the activity motivated students to want to learn more effective ways to communicate their thoughts to their new online friends.

While I am unsure if Gardner and Smythe had online dating in mind when they mapped out their Socio-Educational Model of motivation, the free online service was extremely useful for increasing intrinsic motivation. First, I believe assigning the students this task as a semester-long assignment helped reinforce the first element of the

Socio-Educational Model in that, indeed, time, patience, and perseverance would be necessary to find a date on the online dating service using English. Second, the students realized that near-fluency was the goal in this assignment as fluent communication in English was necessary to communicate with other members of the online dating community. Lastly, students seemed to want to learn how to communicate and genuinely seemed to enjoy using this social tool.

At the time, the personals service on the Onion was free; now there is a 500 yen per month fee for the service. However, a quick Google search draws up several free dating services such as <http://www.datehookup.com/>.

Gardner, R.C. (2001). Integrative motivation and second language acquisition. In Z. Dornyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language acquisition* (Technical Report #23, pp. 1-19). Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.



Celebrate what you want to see more of! People taking risks to learn!

Reaching Difficult Students through Asynchronous Cross-Age Tutoring

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Abstract: This study examines the successful use of asynchronous cross-age tutoring to improve the behavior and academic performance of a class of behaviorally challenged Japanese high school students and their junior high school tutees. The students used digital video cameras and the school's intranet to create original tutoring packages to prepare the tutees for an English proficiency exam.

Furthermore, as a nod to the Horizon Report's repeated calls for innovations in the way that scholarly research is conducted and shared in the 21st century (Johnson, Levine & Smith, 2009), I would like to introduce you to the concept of the video abstract. It is about a minute and a half long, done in the style of a Hollywood movie trailer, and it gives an overview of the first half of the study described in this article. You can view it by visiting the following link (<http://elearninginnovations.yolasite.com/videos.php>) or by searching for "asynchronous cross-age tutoring" on YouTube. If you like what you see and want to continue reading, I welcome you and thank you for your time.

I teach at a mid-sized private Japanese junior-senior high school in Northern Tokyo. When I walked into one of my high school first year English on the first day of the 2009-10 school year, I immediately noticed that something was different. I knew all of the students from teaching them the previous year as third year junior high school students, but it was clear that the class composition had changed. Perhaps in an effort to remove distractions for their more academically successful classmates,

the school administration had decided to consolidate all of the most challenging students into one homeroom class.

The main problem with this class was not an issue of low proficiency. I always tell my students at the beginning of a school year that it doesn't matter at what level they begin, only that they agree to make an honest effort to improve on that level each and every term. Instead, this class had pervasive issues with discipline and respect. In one three-month period, the class had 4 suspensions and a number of broken windows.

Over the course of the first term of the school year, the 39 students in this class formed a group that was loud, disruptive, recalcitrant, disrespectful and largely uninterested in participating in most learning activities. In many ways, it was almost the polar opposite of the ideal learning community that successful teachers strive to foster (Rogoff, 1994).

My usual curriculum for this age group gives students quite a bit of freedom in constructing their own original creative writing and skits. However, this level of learner

autonomy did not work very well at all with this group. I quickly discovered that I needed to use a different approach.

Because of my own personal interests in social constructivist learning theories and the use of technology in education, I decided to try a rather large asynchronous blind cross-age tutoring project with this class. In case these terms are new to you, “asynchronous” is a term often used in distance education. It means that two or more of the parties involved in the learning process are participating at different times, such as holding a debate via posts to a discussion board. “Blind” means that there is a level of anonymity between the tutors and tutees, and “Cross-age tutoring” is a specific type of peer tutoring in which the tutors and the tutees are students who are typically separated by two or more grades (Cairo & Craig, 2005).

In this case, my behaviorally challenged high school students would tutor two classes of second year junior high school students to help them increase their scores on the Eiken English proficiency exam. They created digital tutorial videos, homework materials and handouts to use while watching the videos. Then the junior high school students watched the tutorial videos in the school computer lab during their own English class. The entire tutoring project happened without the tutors or the tutees ever meeting face to face.

I chose peer tutoring because it has a proven track record of improving educational outcomes. Cohen (1982) did a meta-analysis of 52 cross-age tutoring studies and Topping (1987) analyzed 10 cross-age tutoring projects, and in both cases, they found consistent academic

gains from the tutoring. Morrison (2004) used cross-age tutoring to improve the behavior of disruptive, at-risk students. Those problem students were put in a position of responsibility when they had to tutor younger students and the improvement in their behavior was notable:

From the start, the girls were engaged and enthusiastic. They attended all the planning meetings-despite their reputations as being unreliable-and took their roles as co-planners very seriously, showing great maturity of attitude. Already they were warming to a certain sense of power and of being able to shape events in school (pp. 222-223).

Furthermore, I also wanted to make use of the Japanese social construct of the *sempai/kohai* (senior/junior) relationship. This ubiquitous social interaction can be found throughout Japanese society: from the largest corporations to elementary school basketball teams. In it, anyone with higher seniority automatically becomes a role-model and a source of advice, support and training. This role of mentor is not only relegated to bosses and coaches, but rather anyone who is more experienced. It is highly likely that all of the students have had experience with the *sempai/kohai* relationship during their time in school. It would be one of the primary factors influencing all of their interactions with students in different grade levels, including in sports teams, club activities, school festivals, and orientation to name a few instances. Because this relationship already has

many elements of peer mentoring it seemed like cross-age tutoring would be a perfect social fit for Japanese students

Another factor that motivated me to do a computer-based tutoring project was that there are big changes on the horizon for structure of Japanese classrooms and I wanted to see how those changes could best aid the students. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) plans to realize the goals of 2006's unsuccessful "e-Japan" project by fiscal year 2015: to connect every elementary, middle and high school public classroom to high speed wireless internet and to ensure that there is a ratio of one laptop computer per every 3.6 students (E-Education Association of Japan, 2006). Through this newer "i-Japan" initiative, MEXT aims to "promote the utilization of digital technology in the classroom, increase the learning motivation and academic ability of children, and improve their ability to utilize information" (E-Education Association of Japan, i-Japan Strategy 2015 section).

Although the future of this initiative is not certain, if MEXT is successful, Japanese classrooms in 2015 will be very different from the ones we see today. Rather than discrete rows of individual students quietly copying their teacher's notes from the blackboard, students will be seated in clusters of 3's and 4's around shared tablet laptops. It is likely they will have webcams, microphones, cloud-based software, stylus inputs and access to a truncated version of the Internet. This will influence how they interact with their teachers and with other students. One such potential interaction is asynchronous cross-age tutoring.

When I first introduced this tutoring project to my high school class, they were completely shocked and incredulous. They vocally protested that they couldn't teach anyone because *their* English ability was too low. Later student surveys revealed that 86% of them had never tutored anyone before.

I anticipated their reluctance, so I had planned to mix multiple incentives into the project. In addition to the social motivation that comes from helping someone less experienced, I also informed them that the quality of their tutoring packages would count for a significant portion of their term grade. I also offered them a reward for creating effective tutoring materials: if the group of junior high students that they tutored were able to increase their scores on the Eiken test, then they could spend a class period watching a movie. If the average score of their tutee group increased by at least 5 points, they would get popcorn to eat during the movie. If their tutee group's average score increased by 10 points or more, then they could choose one of ten flavorings to add to their popcorn.

Initially, I was interested in doing one-to-one tutoring, but the fact that we only had one digital video camera-as opposed to multiple webcams-made that impractical. Instead, I used their scores on a pre-test to divide them into small groups. I used a variation of the PALS (Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies for Reading) approach to form the groups. PALS is a reciprocal peer tutoring system that has been proven effective through rigorous experimental research and has been recognized by the U.S.

Department of Education as an effective educational practice (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

I ranked the students in order of their scores on the pre-test. Then I split that list in half to form one list comprised of the higher performing students and another with the lower performing students. Next, I paired the top three students from both lists to form group A, the following 3 students from both lists to form group B, and so on. By doing this, I avoided grouping all of the highest performers together in one group, and all of the lowest ones in another. The groups were mixed abilities, but there was never too large of a gap between the pre-test scores of the members of any given group (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

The student with the highest score in their group became the group leader. They had the responsibility of coordinating their group's activities and insuring that everyone met their deadlines. Watching the team leaders from the groups that came from the bottom of the two lists turned out to be one of the most rewarding parts of this study. They really blossomed under their newfound responsibilities. As in Morrison's (2004) study, it appears that these increased responsibilities gave the students more control over events in school and a vested interest in the success of their tutees. Morrison suggests that this gives them a positive outlet for the energy that they were previously expending on disruptive negative leadership.

Over the course of the following weeks, the groups planned, designed and created their tutoring materials. Beyond giving them time limits on their videos and page limits for their handouts

and homework, the only instruction that I gave was: "Make it useful for your *kohai*. Create something that you think will help them to learn this material."

At long last, the junior high school students received their tutoring packages. The younger students were divided into groups along the same lines as the high school students were and subsequently paired with their analogous *sempai* group.

The results from the follow-up Eiken test after the tutoring were positive, but it left room for improvement. 77% of the junior high students' scores improved after receiving the tutoring. The average scores across the two junior high classes increased by 4 points on the 65 point test.

On the other hand, the high school students' experience as tutors did not seem to have as strong of an effect on their follow-up test scores. Compared to the junior high students, only 47 % of the high school students' scores improved. There was, however, a marked improvement in their behavior as a whole, and 79% of them reported that they enjoyed doing the tutoring project. Perhaps this was a result of having more of their time and energy diverted from acts of negative leadership into productive acts of responsibility (Morrison, 2004).

I concluded that two factors might have had an impact on the older students' test performance. First, their own scores were not included in determining if they would receive the movie/popcorn incentive. Second, there was no individual accountability between the tutors and the tutees.

Because of this, I decided to do another round of asynchronous cross-age tutoring with the same students in the same groups, but with some significant changes. For the second round of tutoring, the junior high students took on the role of the tutors and the older students would become the tutees. Furthermore, the movie/popcorn incentive would be the same, but it would be based on the averaged scores of the two junior high groups and their analogous high school group. To further cement this feeling of shared responsibility and individual accountability, each student recorded a brief video introduction of themselves in which they shared their name, their score on the second Eiken test, and a pledge to do the best that they could to improve their score.

The results of the third test, after the high school students used the tutoring packages that the younger students created, was impressive to say the least. In the high school class, 83% of the students' scores improved an average of 9.2 points. In one of the junior high classes, 87% of the students' scores improved an average of 9.6 points,

and in the other, 96% of the students' scores improved an average of 11.4 points (See table 1). Bear in mind that these increases are based on a 65 point test and they are improvements over the scores that they received on the second test, not on the original pre-test. If they were compared to the pre-test, the gains would be even greater.

In retrospect, I was absolutely thrilled by the results. This project far exceeded my expectations for its success. But as a teacher, more than the results of any single test, I am very happy about the change in the environment of the high school class. While they might not yet be the image of the perfect learning community—they're still a bit noisy and crazy—the tide is starting to turn. They were focused and diligent during the project, and when the third term starts, I can point to the results of this tutoring and say to my challenging students: "Look at what you can accomplish when you put your mind to it and work together. What goals do you want to achieve this term?"

Table 1: Improvements in test scores made after the second round of tutoring compared to the test scores after the first round of tutoring.

	High School Students	Jr. High School Students (Class A)	Jr. High School Students (Class B)
Percentage of students whose scores improved	83%	87%	96%
Average increase of score on the 65 point English proficiency exam	+9.2 Points	+9.6 Points	+11.4 Points

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PeaceING: Towards a Praxis of Present Participles

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Peace is a noun: we can have peace, enjoy peace, make it, build it, be blessed with it and keep it safe. War is also a noun: we can make war, endure war, go to it and be scarred by it. For peace, that is where the syntactic expression ends but war is also a verb: we war with others, war against drugs and on terror. War even seems to be a physical place, the destination on a roadmap, the warpath. News media frequently report the conflict of warring parties. Peace should be a verb too. Let's embolden it as a present participle!

Imagine that we “can peace”. Verb the noun. Shakespeare did so often and new words emboldened the English language with sparkling expression. What would it be like

“to peace” with each other? With ourselves? What could it mean to be a **peaceING** party? Expressions like “at peace” connote resignation, even death. That's not what I'm

imagining! How about a peacepath instead, that connotes the Dao or the Way, a way of life and a life practise, much like the practise of Zen or the way of higher education?

Ideals sparkle too but can be rather flighty. How can we ground them in good theory and grow strong praxis? Let me suggest five peacepaths: **restorING**, **educatING**, **buildING**, **raisING** and **juggING**. The first path, **restoring**, refers to restorative justice. This is a creative response to crime, “that makes the people affected by the crime the focus of the process.”¹ Whereas retribution deals exclusively with the past, restoration looks at the present needs of all those involved with a view towards the future.

Educating can take us in various directions. Peace education is one of them. There exists a global network of peace movements and initiatives for peace education, including Canadian Centres for Teaching Peace. CCTP highlights the importance of “peacebuilding, which tries to motivate students to... be peaceful.”²

I want to suggest a praxis of language **building** for peace. At the recent KOTESOL 2009 conference in Seoul, Jeannette Littlemore pointed to the communicative importance of figurative thinking, particularly the role of metaphor in debate and in performing heuristic functions. Steven Pinker uses the container metaphor of language, “in which we

1

<http://www.restorativejustice.org.nz/cms/default.aspx>

2

<http://www.peace.ca/peaceeducationtheory.htm>

conceive of ideas as objects, sentences as containers and communication as a kind of sending, as when we say we gather our ideas to put them into words and if our words aren't empty or hollow we might get these ideas across to a listener who can unpack our words to extract their content.”³ This field of figurative thought is fertile with peaceING possibilities! Diane Larsen-Freeman's *Teaching Language: From Grammar to Grammaticing* is of interest.⁴ This posits grammaring as a skill, rather than a set of rules. Larsen-Freeman proposes consciousness raising, output practice and feedback as necessary for grammaring skill acquisition. To make a new present participle in order to express ourselves in a new way would show great skill indeed!

Raising consciousness applies also to things that can aid us in making peace and in making it a present participle. Karen Armstrong approaches this from a monotheistic perspective, giving pride of place to compassion - the ability to feel with the other.⁵ Bob Thurman discusses compassion in practical terms from a Buddhist perspective⁶ and Robert Wright offers a social scientific point of view, drawing attention to

3

http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_pinker_on_language_and_thought.htm

⁴ Reviewed by Michael Duffy in Korea TESOL Journal 6, 1, 125-7

⁵http://www.ted.com/talks/karen_armstrong_makes_her_ted_prize_wish_the_charter_for_compassion.html

6

http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_thurman_on_compassion.html

the evolutionary importance of nonzero sum game relations.⁷

Finally, we come to **juggling**. This is where theoretical cobwebs are transformed into practical high wires of thrill and skill at learning and teaching! Almost anyone can juggle. I discovered this a few weeks ago at the KOTESOL 2009 conference in Seoul. I found myself tossing colourful juggling balls around during a break after simply asking a question. Once shown that we can all catch things without watching our hands, I tossed up the third ball and then the fourth, and then WOW! With success came praise from the teacher but before that came flow, inherently rewarding.⁸ Next came the praise and I had to move some of that energy so I began teaching others walking past as though I knew what on earth I was doing. Which, of course, I did.

This is the quantum leap in teaching and learning - realizing their symbiosis. I trusted the feeling that I could teach this thing and doing so made me better. The kick made me want to see others alive and kicking. I became the one encouraging others but the mechanism was automatic. Gradually, automated praise gave way as I began enjoying my students' success and this bolstered my own success at teaching as well as juggling. The process was like fire catching on with consciousness,

like water finding least resistance with both eyes open.

Making juggling reachable is revolutionary and seductive. It leads with wonderful felicity to output practise for anyone with two hands and eyes and positive feedback is incarnate in the juggler, not to mention their audience of soon-to-be jugglers and juggling teachers and teacher-students. Anything else is a tweak of technique from a fellow juggler upstream. Perhaps the skill of grammaring could be called juggling buckets of meaning.

I'm imagining a language of peace that includes a present participle. I'm imagining a practise of peaceING that includes sparkling ideals as well as grounded peacepaths such as restoring, educating, building, raising and juggling. I'm warming up to the possibility of a self who peaces daily as a matter of course, not just in the mere absence of war. I'm talking about innovating with words to say what we mean and about juggling those buckets of meaning. Here are some such words:

Baking, Building, Collaborating, Constructing, Conversing, Dreaming, Dining, Devolving (authority), Enabling, Encouraging, Engaging, Extending, Feeding, Freeing, Healing, Holding, Hoping, Including, Innovating, Involving, Juggling, Kindling, Liking, Loving, Negotiating, Nursing, Resourcing, Restoring, Solving, Teaching, Warming, Zooming!

7

http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_wright_the_evolution_of_compassion.html

8

http://www.ted.com/speakers/mihaly_csikszent_mihalyi.html



Perception of Englishes Among Japanese Students in Various Majors

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Introduction

One of my Australian friends once told me a story. She said that when she was teaching at a conversation school, her boss told her to speak with an American accent, instead of an Australian accent. The boss claimed that it was because most Japanese students want to learn American English. Her story made me wonder whether we Japanese prefer American English, because, though I had been learning English for many years, I just wanted to become able to speak any English good enough to communicate with non-Japanese speakers. So several years ago, I started to do some research on how Japanese students perceive American English and other versions.

Some researchers have asked Japanese English learners their perception of the varieties of English, and the results show that most Japanese students prefer American or British English to non-native versions. But none of the researches asked the preference between American English and British English. So, I decided to ask university students the question.

The results of the survey indicate a preference of varying degrees for American English among Japanese learners of English but do *not* support the view that most students want teachers to sound American.

Background

Over the years, some researchers have asked Japanese high school and university students their perception of the varieties

of English (e.g., Chiba, Matsuura and Yamamoto, 1995; Matsuda, 2003; Yoshikawa, 2005). Their results showed native accents were perceived more positively than non-native speakers. This finding is interesting, but the question whether American English is preferred to British English was yet to be answered. These previous studies were done with mainly English majors, so the results may not reflect the general perception among all students in Japan. After all, the majority of Japanese students do not major in English. So I thought of the idea of asking students in various majors what type of English they preferred. Also, I thought that it would be interesting to see whether there was any difference between the English they would like to speak in the future and the English they would like their teachers to speak. There may be some students who want to speak a certain type of English but do not necessarily want their teachers to use that type.

Survey

Based on the previous studies, I made a questionnaire about the preferences of American English and other kinds. Two of the questions I put to survey respondents are as follows, each followed by a blank in which they could write their comments freely. These questions were translated into Japanese and the participants were provided with a bilingual questionnaire. A brief explanation of “Inner Circle” was also added.

Question 1: Which kind of English would you like to speak in the future?

- American English
- British English
- Any kind of English in the Inner Circle
- I don't care.

Question 2: Which kind of English would you like your teacher to use?

- American English
- British English
- Any kind of English in the Inner Circle
- I don't care.

Participants

I asked my students these questions and my friends who are also teachers of English kindly offered to carry out the survey in their classes. In total, 339 university students from six universities in the Tokyo area participated. Of those students 155 (46%) major in languages, mainly English, or international communication, and 184 (54%) major in other fields, such as economics, law, science, and engineering.

Results and Discussion

One interesting finding is that there is a significant difference between the results of question 1 and question 2. 43% of the participants answered that they would like to speak American English in the future, while only 36% of them answered they would like their teachers to use American English. They do not care so much about the kind of English their teachers speak as they do about the English they would like to speak in the future. Some of the comments made by students suggest reasons why there is such a difference. One student answered that he would like to speak the American version in the future, but he said he didn't mind what kind of English his teacher speaks because, “In TOEIC,

American, British, Australian, and Canadian Englishes are used equally.” From this comment, it is understood that he wants to be exposed to varieties of English in order to prepare for TOEIC. Another student answered in the same way, because “Every kind of English helps me to study English.”

Another finding is that more language majors like to speak American English than non-language majors. 38% of the non-language majors said that they wanted to speak American English, while 48% of the language majors answered likewise. A few more of the students’ comments are helpful to understand this tendency. An engineering major wrote, “I am not so good at English as to know the difference.” Some other students answered similarly, and I used to be the same. When I was a university student, I think I knew there was a difference, but I was not sure what it was. Another student, a law major, wrote, “The pronunciation

doesn’t have to be perfect as long as I am making myself understood.” Actually, that is how I feel even today. As long as people can understand me, I don’t care how I sound. Yoshikawa (2005) suggested that the more English ability people have may lead to a stronger preference for traditional native versions, and I think I have confirmed his hypothesis to some extent.

Conclusion

From this survey, it can be said that it is unnecessary for English teachers to try to pronounce English like Americans, since only one third of the students say they would like their teachers to use American English. Many students would like to speak American English in the future, but the number of students who want their teachers to speak that way is not as large as we may think. Also, it is worth remembering that non-language majors do not care as much about the types of English as language majors do. Many students even said they don’t know the difference between American English and other versions, and some of them want to be exposed to a variety of Englishes.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Joe Falout, Maria Trovela, Tim Murphey, and Yoshifumi Fukada, who conducted the survey in some of their classes.

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The Efficiency Column

Do you have suggestions for improving the way we work, teach, or learn? Do you just like to rant? Do you sometimes feel a bit overloaded? Write for the Efficiency Column! Help us all be more efficient (see page 23 "About Erasmus" for a near rant.)

Disclaimer: *Each author's content and ranting is her or his own and not necessarily that of PeerSpectives, KUIS, their relatives, those from the same country or office, or this planet.*

As Wayne Gretzky said, "100 % of the shots you don't take don't go in."

Asking may be a moment's embarrassment, not asking may be a lifelong regret.

聞くは一時の恥、聞かぬは一生の恥。

Kiku wa itoki no haji, Kikanu wa issho no haji

Go ahead. Give it a shot!

Narrating a Story of Teaching, Researching, and Writing

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I wish to narrate here a story concerning a specific professional experience of mine. I will narrate this story in three parts: as a teacher, as a researcher, and as a writer of this narrative for publication in *PeerSpectives*. The view I wish to share is that teaching and researching are intimately connected activities, that a human action is embedded in specific contexts that involve one or more participants as agents who operate with mediational means, and that narrative is a significant mediational means. Above all, all these elements are connected to each other in a dialectical manner. I know I am using a series of terms here that need clarification. I will illustrate them in the course of my narrative. In the end, I wish to be able to reveal multiple layers underlying this act of narrating that I am engaging in.

Let me first narrate my story as a teacher. I teach a cross-cultural communication course at an English medium university in Japan for graduate level students who come from numerous countries. The university is small; it has a

residential campus where students live in a multicultural environment. Cross-cultural interactions and experiences become visible features of campus life from the moment students arrive at the university. The course I teach fits in well with

this multicultural setting. Students take this course with much interest; they are keen to apply what they learn from the course to their daily cross-cultural interactions in their campus life right away.

The topic of cultural identity is a major focus of this course. The aim is to develop a personalized understanding of how complex the issue of identity can be. I introduce some non-essentialist definitions of cultural identity in the class from selected readings in literature, such as cultural identity is “self as defined by national culture and self as defined by the global supermarket” (Matthews, 2008); it is “the link between the personal and the social” and “a tension between how much control I have in constructing my identities and how much control or constraint is exercised over me” (The Open University, n.d.). In short, cultural identity is presented as something “constructed, multiple, hybrid, and dynamic” (for a literature review of this perspective, see Ha, 2008). Following this conceptual beginning, students engage in interactive discussions on a series of cross-cultural dialogs, critical incidents, and critical situations. These provide concrete examples of cross-cultural conflicts related to identity issues, and are taken from published literature (see Storti, 1994; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Holliday et al., 2004). They help students understand definitions of cultural identity introduced in the class in more concrete forms. Students also refer to their own experiences in

light of these concepts and examples.

An important phase in this process then follows. Students are asked to write a short paper on their own cultural identities. They are expected to write it in a personalized narrative form while incorporating the concepts of identity to present and explain their own identities to others. They are expected to share their narratives with other students in the class. I read the narrative accounts of their individual identities as the instructor and give my comments and reactions.

I enjoy teaching this course. I feel rewarded when students make positive comments about the course, comments like how they better understood themselves and others as a result of this process, how they felt closer to their classmates in the course outside the classroom, and how they felt they developed greater cross-cultural sensitivity. At the same time, they tell me it was not easy to write the paper, and how they struggled to express their identities in writing, but how they felt satisfied in the end.

Let me move on to another side of this narrative, i.e., the research side. As a researcher, I wish to understand this particular activity of writing narratives from a theoretical perspective I have appropriated as my research orientation. I utilize the Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) to design the pedagogical approach underlying this course and to

interpret the activities my students and I engage in.

Two key SCT ideas—one theoretical and the other pedagogical—become important for my research study here: mediated action and concept-based teaching. I should briefly define these interrelated concepts. According to Wertsch (1998), a foremost Vygotskian scholar in the West, “almost all human action is mediated action” (p.25). In other words, if we try to interpret an action by a human being, we should also look at the mediational means the human being is operating with. These mediational means can be artifacts, concepts, and/or activities, encompassing physical, psychological, and social dimensions. More importantly, it is the dialectic between the human agent and the mediational means that matters, or in Wertsch’s (1998) words, the “irreducible tension” between the two. In other words, the relationship between the agent and the mediational means is characterized by dynamic tension that could be called dialectical. When we try to interpret a human action as mediated action in this sense, we need to look at the dynamics between both the agent and the mediational means as the basic unit of analysis. Such dynamics produce development at different levels and may significantly transform both the agent and the mediational means in course of time.

Let me give a couple of examples. The first is the notable example of pole vaulting that Wertsch (1998) gives from the world

of sports. Pole vaulting is a mediated action involving the vaulter and the pole. A complete understanding of pole vaulting performance has to consider both the agent and the mediational means in a dynamic relationship: the pole provides the means to the vaulter but the vaulter uses his skills to use the pole. Any success or failure in pole vaulting needs to consider the dynamic tension between the vaulter and the pole. In other words, pole vaulting performance should not be attributed exclusively to the vaulter or the pole. Historically, as Wertsch explains, both the vaulter’s performance and the pole’s composition and construction have gone through strategic transformations in the world of sports as a result of the dynamic tension between the agent and the mediational means.

Let us consider another example from our world of research. As a researcher, I may administer a carefully designed questionnaire to my students and find responses that show me some significant qualitative changes in the attitudes and thoughts of my students. However, in terms of mediated action, it is essential that I not only look at students’ responses, but also how and what I asked the students to respond to. I should look at the dynamic tension between the mediation I provided and the response of the students to that mediation. The mediational means in this example (the design and content of the questions) could be seen as conceptual. In short, most

human action is mediated action in this sense.

On the pedagogical side, concept-based teaching in SCT begins with the abstract and then moves on to the concrete. In other words, “learners are presented with systematic conceptual knowledge...and are then encouraged, with guidance, to proceduralize knowledge in concrete circumstances that are relevant to their own interests” (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008, p. 285). In the context of my classroom-based research study, I introduce the definitions of cultural identity as an attempt to start with theoretical thinking. This is followed by a concretization phase during which my students discuss a series of examples concerning identity issues. They also refer to their own personal experiences during the discussions. I play a mediating role in these discussions by carefully asking questions and making comments.

The subsequent phase, in which each student has to write a paper on his or her cultural identity, becomes a significant phase in this mediated action process. The concepts of cultural identity introduced in the class and the narrative form of writing serve as the mediational means. In fact, narrative is considered as a significant form of symbolic mediation in SCT (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Wertsch 1998, 2004). To give a common example, if we ask our students to tell us about their language learning experiences, or if we ask them to narrate their

language learning histories, narrating for them becomes a mediational means to construct their identities. If the students have to write their histories, the act of narrating in writing creates other levels of dynamic tension between the demands of written narratives and their life experiences.

The students in my course make attempts to create a coherent account of their lives by narrating their cultural identities in writing. During the process of writing, they struggle in their decisions on what to include and what to exclude from their life stories. They know their narrative accounts will be read by their teacher and other classmates; hence, they want to be sure they present what they want others to think of them. The definitions of identity they are expected to incorporate in their narratives make them reconceptualize their life stories. Narrating is “*linguaging*,” as Swain (2006) may put it, i.e., “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (p. 98). Significantly, the students’ act of narrating “identity [can be] conceived as a form of action that is first and foremost rhetorical, concerned with persuading others (and oneself) about who one is and what one values...” (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 91).

In short, in my course, narrating for my students became an act of constructing their individual identities with rhetorical purposes in mind, focusing on their own selves and others. The activity of writing a narrative paper was

mediated action involving each student on one hand as the agent, and on the other hand the surrounding mediational means, i.e., the teacher, the other students, the concepts, the narrative form, and the activities before and after the writing process. What mattered most was the dialectics, or the dynamic tensions, among all these elements. In my course, I found a diversity of voices in my students' narratives. Some narratives skillfully appropriated the concepts of cultural identity introduced in the class, while some other narratives exhibited a sense of compromise. In one particular narrative, even a voice of resistance or indifference might have been expressed towards my concept-based pedagogy and the use of narrative as a mediational means. Reading my student narratives also changed my own perceptions and images of individual students. Other students reported similar changes.

I wish to bring back my narrative to where I started from. Narrating this story of my professional experience helps me create coherence and find meanings in my professional experience in terms of teaching and researching. It is an account of my practical teaching as well as conceptual researching. There is a dynamic tension between the two, and this act of narrating helps me resolve the tension and move forward. My teaching helps me do research, and my research helps me

reconceptualize my teaching. I have a rhetorical purpose in mind in narrating this story: I wish to convince others (e.g., peers reading this narrative in *PeerSpectives*) about the validity of my teaching and researching both in terms of pedagogy and theoretical conceptualization; at the same time, I wish to deepen my own sense of coherence and confidence in what I am doing and talking about.

There is yet one more layer in narrating this story. I wrote an earlier version of this paper for *PeerSpectives*, and I got constructive questions and suggestions from an anonymous reviewer. The editor also provided a follow-up note based on the reviewer's comments. Their comments necessitated some changes in the earlier draft. The reviewer's feedback, along with the editor's note, served as a mediational means for me, creating a dynamic tension between me as the writer and my perceptions of the anonymous reviewer as the reader. By revising and incorporating the reviewer's comments, my revised version has been qualitatively changed in my view. As I tried to incorporate the suggestions I received, I actively thought, but my thinking echoed other voices. My revised narrative now appropriates the voices of the reviewer and the editor in some significant ways. My narrative incorporates multiple voices in this sense!

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Parting Thoughts

It's that time of the year again when many teachers in the ELI will be moving on to new places. We asked this year's departing teachers to tell us about their future plans, and to share some advice for incoming ELI-ers. Here's what they said:

Roman Delgado

* Future Plans:

Become an ascetic in the desert of the UAE or continue being an INGLORIOUS.... gaijin, at some other unlucky Japanese university. As yet undecided.

* Advice:

Follow the rules...

* Parting Thoughts:

It's a really great job, cherish the 2 (or possibly) 4 years you've got.

Jenn Holland

1. What are your future plans?

I am planning to travel for about 6 months and end up in South America. I'd like to find a teaching job there, or I may go back to the U.S., attend culinary school and become a pastry chef.

2. *What advice can you offer to the next batch of newcomers to the ELI?*

Ask questions - ELLers are generally very friendly. Speak up if you're not happy about something. If you don't like research, learn to or find another job. Take time for yourself even if work is crazy. Be sweet to Nana, Ayumi and Maki. If you're a teacher, learn about the SALC and encourage your students to talk to the Learning Advisors.

3. *Any other parting thoughts?*

I will miss all of the wonderful friends I've made here. Thanks for the memories. :o)

Andrew Kidd

Words parted:

1. *What are your future plans?*

Next year I'll be doing a Graduate Diploma of Education in Brisbane with a view to becoming a high school teacher in the areas of History, Spanish and ESL.

2. *What advice can you offer to the next batch of newcomers to the ELI?*

'Publish or perish' is the name of the game. Use the opportunities you're given here and meet with the research consultants. Ask lots of questions and don't feel like you should know everything already. There's probably another teacher who's been here longer than you and who has less an idea of what's going on.

3. *Any parting thoughts?*

This is an environment where you can achieve as much or as little as you want to. Two, three, or four years

will go by so fast you won't have time to kick yourself for wasting time.

Julie Matsubara

1. *What are your future plans?*

I won't know exactly what I'll be doing until Spring 2010.

2. *What advice can you offer to the next batch of newcomers to the ELI?*

My one piece of advice would probably be: Don't lose perspective, the big picture. As my favorite quote goes, "Beginnings are scary, endings usually sad, but it's what's in the middle that counts."

3. *Any other parting thoughts?*

Will miss Kanda very much.

Alun Roger

1. *What are your future plans?*

I'm lucky enough to be joining the team at Sojo down in Kumamoto. I think the potential for a decade's worth of work (4 at KUIS, possible 6 at Sojo) in the university EFL world in Japan is pretty comforting for those who might be more concerned with employment security. I think this is especially true for exiting KUIS members who are usually still working towards doctorates and therefore unable to go for tenure positions.

2. *What advice can you offer to the next batch of newcomers to the ELI?*

Four years goes extremely quickly. If you're thinking of staying on the university circuit in Japan then you need to be thinking about your future employability from year one.

From my recent experiences in the job hunt there are 2 very important things you should be trying to add to your CV- publications and Japanese language skills.

Most places want to see a minimum of 3 publications. The submission process can be lengthy and someone who has 3 publications forthcoming but nothing in the bag at interview might sound alarm bells!

Interviews often have a Japanese language section which could be anything from "please introduce yourself in Japanese" to "Explain an aspect of Japanese culture in Japanese" to "Compare and contrast TOEFL and TOEIC and explain the benefits and drawbacks of each for the university student in Japanese"!!! So dust off those hiragana flip cards...

Chris Stillwell

1. *What are your future plans?*

I'm looking forward to continuing to work with several other ELI teachers in a new English program in Kumamoto.

2. *What advice can you offer to the next batch of newcomers to the ELI?*

Never forget that the great thing about teaching is that you are surrounded by

other teachers, people with different experiences and insights. If you can find a way to tap into that, you are well on your way to making the most of working with 50+ other ELI teachers, as well as experienced teachers throughout the rest of the university.

3. *Any other parting thoughts?*

When I visit other places and talk about Kanda, people are always impressed by the situation we have- motivated students, experienced peers, and plenty of resources and support. It's good to appreciate what we have, and to make the most of it!

Chris Wyle

I want to thank all my students and the great people I've met here over the past 4 years at KUIS. I've been very happy to get to know you, forge great relationships and learn from you as well - I'm a richer person for it. Enjoy your remaining years at Kanda, use your time to the fullest, experience as much as you can and continue learning new things, even after you leave! All the best, Chris W.

Natsukashii: A nostalgic look back in the rearview mirror.

Nick Yates

I'm Nick, an Aussie who taught at KUIS for three years. I recently moved to teach in the Middle East where things are a lot different. When asked to write an article, I thought about the top 5 things I missed since leaving Japan and KUIS.

#5 Japanese Rice
It's just not the same. There's no other rice quite like Japanese rice. It's sticky,

easy to pick up with other food, perfect for chopsticks. I never thought I'd be saying it because rice was never important to my diet, but yep, I miss Japanese rice. I've had Japanese food in other countries and without the sticky rice, it's just not the same.

#4 Bicycles and Public Transportation
To me, there's something alluring about bicycles and efficient public transport. Perhaps it's the environmentalist in me. I loved the healthy lifestyle of riding to KUIS each day, a night out, and the train station. And the train system in Japan, love it! At worst, trains coming once every ten minutes on a suburban line. In the heart of Tokyo, once every two minutes in peak hour. You just can't beat it. My only gripe was the stale B.O. smell mixed with cigarettes of the salaryman.

#3 Orderliness
Ever been to China? India? The Middle East? Once you have, you'll love and appreciate the orderliness of Japanese society. Everyone forms lines and waits their turn. Rarely do you get queue jumpers. I felt a little robotic when I was in Japan but it's only when I would leave to another country that isn't as "polite" that I really appreciated Japan. In China, we were waiting to buy train tickets in lines formed by solid metal railings and people would still attempt to jump ahead of us. In India, personal space was non-existent and people would slap down money in front of you thinking that that act would mean they were in front of you. Here in the Middle East, it's simply chaotic.

#2 Climate

Ask a foreigner and they might say Japan has 4 seasons. Ask a Japanese person and they may just throw a curve ball and include the cherry blossom season and the rainy season. Regardless, whatever season you like, Japan has it. Me, I loved March - June and late September - November. My absolute favorite, if I was living next to a snow resort area, was powder snow season. Every time I headed snowboarding I was in bliss. The Japanese powder snow was so lush to ride, so forgiving to stack on, and just so nice to ride. I remember snowboarding in the back country off the peak of Hirafu in Niseko, Hokkaido and it was like I was riding on silk. It was just so easy to carve a turn out in the deep powder.

#1 KUIS Environment

Teachers: appreciate the motivated students at KUIS. Students: Thanks for being motivated! I don't know what it is about KUIS students, they are fairly motivated and will complete a good majority of the work that is assigned to them. Maybe it's the fact that generally students came to the university to study a foreign language which helps, perhaps it's the KUIS study environment or indeed it could be the work ethic in the Japanese culture. Regardless, they're awesome. Also I miss the food available at the KUIS cafeterias. I never thought that I would say it, I want a Kanda-don! When you really think about it, food in Japan can be dirt cheap and there's really something for everyone. Forget about paying too many British pounds for a soggy deep fried fish and chips, forget about that expensive Thai food in Sydney. Love the cheap Japanese food while you can.

AAAL The 2010 conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) will be held March 6 - 9 at the Sheraton Atlanta Hotel, Atlanta, GA. The 2010 AAAL conference will serve as a meeting place for applied linguists to generate ideas, cross disciplinary boundaries, and disseminate research about issues and concerns in language policy, second language acquisition, language pedagogy and assessment, discourse analysis and other areas of applied linguistics.

Plenary Speakers

M. A. K. Halliday, University of Sydney, Putting linguistic theory to work

Diane Larsen-Freeman, UM, Complex, dynamic systems:transdisciplinary?

Mary McGroarty, N. Arizona U., Orientations and ideologies in language policies

Lourdes Ortega, University of Hawaii, The bilingual turn in SLA

Michael Tomasello, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, University of Leipzig, Constructing a language

Richard Young, University of Wisconsin - Madison, Discursive practice in language learning and teaching

Interning at JALT 2009 (Japan Association for Language Teaching)

Koichi Hase English Department 3rd year

From December 20th to the 23rd, I participated in the JALT convention as an intern. I will write a reflection from a student's perspective. I hope this will be helpful for students who would like to do this next year.

This year, JALT was held in Shizuoka. To tell the truth, I had absolutely no idea about JALT. The only thing I knew was I would have many opportunities to talk with native speakers. Before I decided to participate in JALT, I was not as motivated to learn English compared to the last two years. This was because I had a vague sense of fear about my future and I could not concentrate on studying English. Many students might have this kind of idea as they become 3rd and 4th year students. For such students, I want to recommend taking part in JALT because doing this internship gave me the pleasure of English.

I had various jobs. Intern coordinators parceled out different kinds of jobs to us everyday. For example, I worked as a room manager and at the registration and information desks. Specifically, room managers were supposed to make presentations smoother by keeping time and helping presenters. Of course, many presenters were unknown to me. Therefore, I needed to explain my job to presenters in English, and satisfy their requests as soon as I was asked. I was not always doing a good job, but presenters could not afford to consider that I was not professional. They all seemed to be nervous so, I did have to work too hard. It was very different for me to speak English in such an atmosphere. In fact, I heard some complaints about our job. However, I

was really satisfied when people thanked me. The information desk was more confusing. I needed to know how visitors could get to the place where they wanted to go. Some rooms were difficult to find and the directions were difficult to explain; it was good practice. Although I did not have so many chances to see presentations, needless to say, they were serious presentations. What I was impressed with was that participants asked many questions during presentations. Because of the activeness, it was difficult to keep the time.

I went to Shizuoka by shinkansen and, accordingly, I stayed in a ryokan for three days with other intern students. Sharing information about a variety of things was also interesting. I spoke

English a lot, even at the ryokan, because exchange students stayed together. They were all nice, and the coordination among interns was totally good. Sometimes, we discussed what we could do ourselves to do our job more efficiently.

Through the experience, I found English itself to be interesting to me. I may have thought that English was just a tool for the future. However, I started to study English, because I liked it. At JALT, I spoke and listened to English so much with a fresh feeling. The pleasure of doing it gave me of a good memory of English. If you are tired of studying English, interning with JALT would be a good chance to remember why you study English—to really use it.

The Swedish Choice

Reported by Asako Matsumoto (2nd year)

Northern Europe is famous for welfare states such as Sweden. Their education systems are different from Japan. First of all, a lot of people lead a happy life in Sweden because of sufficient social security. The welfare state provides education, healthcare, pensions and unemployment insurance.

Some of these services are paid for via government insurance programs while others are paid for by taxes. (What is a, 2009) The citizens have to pay high taxes for these services.

We see big differences in the amount of money spent for education. “Japan ranked second from last for its ratio of spending on education among 28 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2006”

(OECD Japan Trails, 2009) Japan spends just 3.3 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product on schools and other educational institutions while, Sweden’s ratio is 6.2 percent (OECD Japan Trails, 2009). The budget that the government prepares shows their interest for schooling.

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Bullying at schools

Reported by Chiaki Taura (2nd year)

Students experience bullying at school from their friends or classmates. I report on two articles about bullying. The first article is from the *BBC News*. According to the article, the government surveyed how many children experienced bullying in England. 47 percent of 14-year-old students said they experienced bullying, about half. And the writer said that the most common type of bullying is name calling and cyber bullying these days. Recently, most households have a computer with the Internet, and many children have their own mobile phones. So they can use the Internet easier than before. It is one source of bullying. And the victims cannot know who badmouths them easily.

The second article is from the *Chosun Ilbo*, which is a Korean newspaper, but is about Japanese bullying. A large number of students commit suicide because of bullying these days. The problem is serious, because students who are victims of bullying hide the bullying, so teachers cannot find out easily.

Recently, the government said they recognized the cycle of school bullying, so they implemented guidance manuals for teachers, the school board of education, and every school, in cooperation with parents and local committees.

Bullying sometimes causes serious problems. Also these experiences remain bad memories in children's minds for a long time. They are hurt for life. Therefore we should think about the bullying problem more seriously. And we have to reduce the problem gradually.

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ENGLISH ONLY

Hitomi Hatano, Takeshi Miyao, Maiko Miyawaki (1st year)

(Excerpt from research analyses on students' language learning histories)
Recommendations to students, teachers, and MEXT

The first recommendation for students is that just sitting at your desk does not work. Actually it is important for you to do assignments and hand them in. However, besides that, there are a lot of things you can do to learn English and enjoy learning. If you communicate with your classmates, teachers or foreign people in English, we are sure you will notice the real enjoyment of English. Talking with people who are from different countries and knowing other cultures through English are really wonderful. You might find it hard to say what you want and you might be afraid or ashamed of mistakes at first. Those feelings are very natural for language learners. Therefore, the second thing is that mistakes are not bad. If you never make mistakes when you learn something, you can gain nothing. We can learn from mistakes. Please remember this phrase, "Mistakes are learning steps". Finally, we can also tell you that studying is not what you do alone. Friends are your best partners to learn with. To share your ideas and discuss them means to help each other and interact with each other. The more you learn English, the better you like English, we promise.

Based upon our data, we recommend that teachers change the style of classes from teacher-centered to student-centered. Most students feel that teacher-centered style is dull. Teacher-centered style means that students sit at their desk and just listen to what teachers say, read textbooks or do assignments. This style might be easy for teachers, but not for students because they can study grammar, vocabulary and so on from textbooks by themselves. It is to communicate in English that they cannot do by themselves. Thus, teachers might give them opportunities to talk with classmates in English in class. Even if they study English hard, it will be meaningless unless they use it as a communication tool. Therefore, teachers might introduce various activities with phrases or expressions related to their daily life. Lastly, if teachers make the classroom environment in English or teach English in English, students will feel closer to English and like it more.

According to our data, students' motivations depend on the way of teaching. For English education and JHS and HS teachers, MEXT might reconsider the present guidelines. We think that classes of English should be more

communicative. Now, JHS and HS have reading class, writing class, speed reading class, oral communication class and so on. We hope MEXT will increase the number of classes that focus on orally communicating in English. In addition to that, it is necessary to train more competent teachers. Teachers should teach students not only grammar or vocabulary but also how to learn English, which means to help them to be good learners. What is important is to raise the level of English classes. Finally, we can say that students are motivated when they talk with foreign people from our data. Therefore, MEXT should introduce more ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) and

make environments where students can talk with foreigners more, such as SALCs (Self Access Learning Centers) and retreats

Conclusion

We found that students were motivated when they were talking with people in English. Also, they felt bored with teacher-centered style because they had no chance to use English during the classes. We think that speaking English helps students to learn English with joy and it is necessary for them to feel close to English by communicating with native speakers. Thus, we recommend “ENGLISH-ONLY” classes in Japan and we hope that the “ENGLISH-ONLY” environments increase in Japanese universities.

Improving Entrance Exams in Japan

By Shota Mito, Koichi Hase, Ayaka Imazeki (3rd & 4th Years)

How Can We Improve the System? (excerpt from a longer paper)

It is obvious that the current entrance exam system needs improving and does not evaluate students well. How can we change and improve the current entrance exam system? We would like to suggest some possibilities.

What can we do to improve Japanese entrance exams? Firstly, making interview tests longer is important. Even if it costs much, it will be good for schools to choose students in the future. Students are the ones who mostly make schools what they are and schools should be care to select wisely, based on students' real personalities, potential and willingness to study. We think interview tests do a better job as an entrance exam. We think that a

paper-based entrance exam system, as most schools have now, is not effective. Instead of the paper based test, we should have more interview tests and something that requires students' critical thinking skills, creativity and problem solving skills so that it can evaluate students more deeply.

Secondly, it is helpful to follow the basic idea of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (<http://www.apa.org/science/progra>

[ms/testing/standards.aspx](#)) which is adopted in the United States because it evaluates students' personalities and communication skills more than Japanese tests. It will be consequently better than the existent test system. Thirdly, it is necessary to change the entire focus of schools on entrance exams. Schools put a priority on how they can let students pass entrance exams. Thus, schools make students study for the entrance exams in early stages in spite of the fact that students want to study different things. As long as this tendency exists, it is difficult to improve the system.

Moreover, we think that universities should have some tests for graduation and make their graduation more difficult. In Japan, sometimes students don't need to write even a graduation thesis if they have enough credits. It is very easy to graduate, and students may not make much effort in their college life. That's a big problem. It is ridiculous that students expend so much energy on entrance exams and may acquire little from their university life.

If it is difficult to graduate from university, students will make a great effort to study subjects that each university teaches technically, and we honestly believe that it will help students to survive the modern world. In addition, if we can reduce people's burden of the entrance exam, the life is going to be better, and many students who really want to study can get an opportunity to study. Reconsidering the entrance exam system and the very basis of education can help Japanese society

to develop with great young human resources.

Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS)

We had an interview with staff at our university, Kanda University of International Studies, to find out our university's entrance exam system. Finally, we want to share something from here.

KUIS's goal is to bring together students who have various skills. For example, some have great speaking skills, others have great writing skills. And, KUIS gets these students in different ways, for example, recommendation examinations from some high schools or self recommended exams, using the center test and written examination. So, they can gather students who have different skills. Also, they take about 60% of the new students from interview exams and thus can have a better look at the whole person. Still we think the interviews and evaluations would be better if they were longer. At present, the students know many of the questions they will be asked and prepare the special phrases and words for this examination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current Japanese entrance exam system has many problems, and it might be changed in several ways. Japanese universities should have more interview tests to know their students' real personalities, potential, abilities and willingness to study. We should reconsider the focus of study, and change the idea that many people have that entrance exams are

everything. Changing the attitude toward the entrance exams is definitely one of the key points that we should care about to change the current system. The current system has a bad impact on the human condition in Japan.

There are many countries that have entrance exam systems. Some are good, and some are similar to Japan. However, all countries that we mentioned have both some good points and bad points of course. Japan should learn from some other countries and should improve its own system.

Entrance exams should be a chance for everyone who really wants to get a higher education. Therefore, the system of the entrance exam shouldn't have negative points that disturb people. We honestly believe that we can make the system better. We hope Japan will be one of the best countries that has a great higher education system, and a country in which people really want to learn can learn what they want to.

"Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing"
<http://www.apa.org/science/programs/testing/standards.aspx>

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