LD SIG Grant Awardees: Essays on Research Interests
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Learner Autonomy from the Perspective of a Teaching Assistant
ティーチング・アシスタントの立場からみた学習者オートノミー

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Key words: 授業助手, 学習アドバイザー, ニアピアロールモデル, 自律学習性)

In this paper, I would like to introduce the research I conducted in a learner autonomy class at Meisei University with my colleague, Bill Mboutsiadis. I will also reflect on how I have become more autonomous, as a teacher and learner. The word *autonomy* means different things to different people. However, to me, it suggests "the students take on responsibility for their own learning" (Cook, 2008, p. 118).

Five years ago, I went to study abroad in Sacramento, California for one year. I became curious about many things and started to seek out various situations where I could learn English. Returning to Japan, I found a student assistant (SA)/ teaching assistant (TA) system at Meisei University, which I have now been involved in for three years. One of the classes that I have been a SA/TA for is a learner autonomy class. The class runs for 90 minutes, 15 times a semester, and is compulsory for freshmen and sophomores in the Department of International Studies. The teachers are usually native English speakers and the class takes place in a CALL room. The purpose of the class is neither to teach English nor computer skills by themselves, but to help Meisei students to foster autonomous learning independently.

In the first half of the semester, students are introduced to learning strategies (Oxford, 1990), time management, and setting goals for learning. For example, they fill out an online strategy inventory for language learners (SILL) survey (Oxford, 1990) to understand their current learning strategies so that they can be aware of the strategies they use frequently and those they don't. The students are encouraged to use various learning materials which they can utilize in and outside of the class, such as extensive reading, and websites such as English Central. In the second half of the semester, the teacher gets students to set goals and plan their own learning schedule.

During the last 10 minutes of each class, students write blogs reflecting on all the activities they have worked on, the learning materials they have used, and self-evaluation of how much responsibility they are taking toward their own learning. At the end of the semester, students self-evaluate their term mark (A, B, C, D, or F) and then the teacher, assistant, and student negotiate the mark by reviewing the term's work and student's blog. There is no exam; instead, the major evaluation criteria include class attendance, participation, the student's blog, and a final reflective project. For the final project, students create digital comics of their language learning history by using a website named *Bitstrips*. They create

their own avatar, and make an eight-panel comic strip of either positive and/or negative language learning experiences in their past, present, and imagined future. The students need additional time to make their digital language learning history outside of the class. Their past experiences included formal and informal learning environments and experiences. The present experiences reflect on their learning in the class, and anything outside of the campus. Finally, the imagined future describes their L2 possible selves (Dornyei, 2005), their future careers, and lives.

Assessment in an autonomous learning class is a challenging element of the class. In contrast to the conventional way of assessment, Vygotsky's theory, the Zone of Proximal Development and Dynamic Assessment are embedded in the process of assessing students (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). In other words, teacher and assistant scaffold students to find their ZPD. Assisting learners to find what their ZPD is could help them choose the most appropriate and effective learning material/strategy. Learner autonomy can be fostered by using effective strategies, and these differ from learner to learner. Therefore, teachers and assistants help students evaluate learning strategies individually, introducing various new learning methods and materials, in order to develop an individual learning plan.

While working as an assistant, I conducted a survey to collect data on the learners' experiences of having a SA/TA in the learner autonomy class. I found students saw me not only as a translator or a tech person, but as a learning adviser. For instance, to the question, "How did the TA's presence help you to become an autonomous learner?" one student answered, "It was good when he told me some ways to learn English which I didn't know". It is different from other classes, in the sense that the main teacher gives me an opportunity to talk about my own language learning experiences to the class. I believe it is important for them to know how I learned another language as a native Japanese speaker. I found from some of the students comments that they viewed me as a near peer role model for speaking English (Murphy, 2001). Another student commented, "Since the TA is really good at English, I thought I want to be like that and I was able to learn more". Moreover, another student answered, "It was very helpful to know an ideal portrait of what I want to be".

In conclusion, I have been considering the extent to which I can assist students. I believe a TA has a significant impact on how students learn and become more autonomous. It is not always easy to find an answer since it depends on each student's situation. However, consideration of all these issues in advising and interacting with learners helps me to develop my learner autonomy too.

Finally, I presented the study with my co-researcher Bill Mboutsiadis at the Pan-SIG Conference 2012 in Hiroshima with the financial assistance of the LD SIG for which I am thankful. As I have been conducting this research, writing papers, going to conferences with Bill, and meeting and talking with fellow educators, I have been learning about other people's views and research about learner development and autonomy. All of these experiences help me to picture my imagined future self which is to become a good teacher and more autonomous learner. I'd like to continue to participate in various activities, pursue my academic career, and contribute something to the EFL academic field in the future.

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Positive Self-Perception of Japanese Language Learners in Groups
グループ学習における日本人言語学習者の肯定的な自己認識

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*Key words:*自己認識、アイデンティティー、自主学習

As a teenager I played the violin in the Colchester Youth Chamber Orchestra, conducted by George Reynolds, a Scottish professional trumpeter. A master of warm strictness, he was the only conductor I knew who insisted that all sections mastered basic breathing techniques. He conducted entire movements with the orchestra miming, his eye contact and wafting wisps of white hair inciting us to be our very best–silently. He always told us, "When you take your seats, you are the best orchestra in the world. So behave like it." So we sat with our backs straight, feet solidly on the floor, attentively awaiting his signal. When we began playing, we were not the greatest orchestra in the world, but we were pretty good nevertheless, once performing in London's Royal Festival Hall.

Why this nostalgic story?

In France, many French people informed me that "the French aren't good at English". In Japan too, I hear a similar chorus about the Japanese, from teachers, colleagues, and friends, all saying something along the lines that, "even after seven years of lessons, the Japanese still can't speak English". However, I have met numerous Japanese with fantastic English communication skills, casting doubt on the validity of this view. Self-identification with a supposedly linguistically inept group negatively impacts language learning in Japan (and France). Reality and perception are not distinct but are complementary and engaged in an evolving symbiotic jig. To change them, I suggest it is easier to shift perception first, steering the dance on an altered trajectory, inevitably leading reality. A shift in perception towards "I am Japanese and we are good at languages" will therefore have a positive effect. Before they say a word, the Japanese are the best English speakers in the world.

Having taught English as a foreign language in France and England, upon arrival in Japan just over two years ago, I immediately realised a change in certain strategies was required. Rarely could I depend on students raising their hands to answer questions, nor could I expect an answer "from anyone" when addressing an open question to the group. Even when I knew

students could answer perfectly, nominating students and employing other techniques (e.g., "Last Man Standing", when standing students gain the right–for themselves and other students in the same row of desks–to sit down, by raising their hands to answer questions) were still required. Even the classic "what did you do during the school holiday?" seldom led to much discussion, since the answer "I studied" has limited scope for development at anywhere below an intermediate level of English. Whereas such strategies can be used in European classrooms to engage students or create a comfortable atmosphere through personal stories or opinions, in my Japanese classrooms they more often led to feelings of awkwardness and tension as students were put on the spot, visibly feeling isolated and unsupported.

Language learners are also human beings and the instinctive empathy we feel towards fellow individuals is embraced when we consider the concepts of agency, autonomy, and learner identity. By contrast, Japanese students are familiar with working as a group (Lewis, 1991; Poole, 2010). Instead of regarding students' unwillingness to stand out individually as a hindrance to language learning, I propose that we should harness the existing strength of the Japanese group (Matsumoto, 1960) and use it towards achieving ambitious learning goals. When a group is formed there is outwardly a general swell towards conformity and harmony (Mizutani, 1981) although individuals maintain personal "inner" motives (Doi, 1973). These two elements are entirely interdependent and may or may not be recognised as distinct (Doi, 1985). Because individuals can influence the group goals and activities, learner autonomy (as part of a group), collaborative learning and motivation are all promoted. As a group identity evolves, lateral relations stemming from the individual's role within the group can encourage self-identification as part of a group that can accomplish demanding language goals. At a Japanese school sports festival, one witnesses what a group of students–united towards a common goal–can achieve. From fabricating costumes, to creating props and choreographing a dance for two hundred students, the result is a stunning spectacle of originality and collaboration.

The orchestra may serve as a useful analogy here. Individual members each have a unique role within the orchestra, some preferring more prominent roles (section leaders or percussion), and others preferring more group oriented roles (strings). Responsibilities vary from supportive, to leading, to solo, to waiting-attentively-for-your-entry. Never did I see a conductor ask a second violin to stand up and perform his part alone in front of the rest of the orchestra; although this did occur in sectional rehearsals. The orchestra's goals of harmony and synchronisation showcase individual talent only as part of the group. A musician knows when their "line" is exposed; there is no getting around the practice required to make it right. Other parts are more hidden, and one can get through them with a few unnoticed mistakes. Likewise, membership in a language learning group creates a genuine need to "do your homework"; or at least, the bare minimum on which teammates will be relying on.

The uchi内 (inside) and soto外 (outside) distinction (Mizutani, 1981; Fukue, 1988; Doi, 1985) is fundamental here, as foreign languages（外国語）are positioned as soto. By contrast, "as long as one is inside a family or an organization, one can expect its full blessings and benefits" (Fukue, 1988, p. 73). Establishing language learning groups therefore supports individuals, creating a safer context from which to collectively explore the "outer" spheres of foreign languages. If an "English allergy" (Tsuda, 1990) is a "defense mechanism to fight against the fear of identity crisis stemming from excessive or unsuccessful attempts to

acquire English and identify with English speakers" (Kubota, 1998), language learning groups can instead promote collaborative creation of English and identification as Japanese speakers of English.

Although orchestras usually have a conductor, our conductor—George—often left his podium so that we were on our own and forced to listen to each other and really communicate as a group. I teach four senior high students who all studied abroad for 10 months, as part of their participation in the special Nakamura International Course. The school sets a target TOEFL iBT score of 80, with students first taking the test in December of their first year of senior high, just before their departures, and numerous attempts after their return in their third and final year of senior high. I wanted to increase self-directed learning as I left the podium during the summer vacation, so I decided to trial a system whereby students are positioned as a language learning group. I have outlined the basic procedure in the chart below. All materials were received digitally.

Table 1. *Materials*

a.	Calendar for the month (of August)
b.	Numbered activities in four categories (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) *e.g., 13: Listening: Listening to the news*
c.	Numbered resources, corresponding to the activity numbers above *e.g.,13 = http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/home)*
d.	Spreadsheet to record study time (by skill) with a brief description of activity. (The four skills are colour-coded, the weekly total per skill, weekly sum total, and monthly grand total study time are automatically calculated)

Table 2. *Procedure*

1)	After looking at their existing commitments, students individually decide how much time to allot to independent English study (outside of cram school).
2)	Students calculate the total planned study time per week and write this on the calendar.
3)	A "monitor" is nominated for each week and weekly deadlines established and recorded.
4)	All students must email the monitor a) total study time for each skill, b) total study time for the week, and c) the percentage this represents of their planned study (a student planning on studying ten hours who studies eight, notes 80%).

5) The monitor is responsible for contacting any student who is late sending their record. She writes a short report of the group's achievements, and emails it to all members of the group and the teacher(s). This report includes a) the group's sum total of study time for each skill, b) the group's grand total study time, c) the average percentage goal achieved and d) the student who attained the highest percentage of their planned study time

The spreadsheet shows students if they are studying a suitably "balanced diet" while the resources page provides students with a choice, also minimizing time wasted looking for resources. Social obligations are created between group members since a student who fails to complete her target hours lowers the group percentage average. Receiving the group's total study hours may inspire further collective achievement and motivate students to exceed the total the following week. Earlier I stated that reality and perception are mutually interdependent; by making students explicitly aware of how much time they spend studying, the trajectory of perception will be nudged towards the reality that "mastering English takes dedicated practice and we know we are on the right track".

Presently this system's focus lies largely on the language learning process, namely the independent study time required to master a language. In this case, beyond students' TOEFL iBT scores, there was no subsequent performance to be evaluated. This was the first time I have tried out this system and its effectiveness in promoting independent study will be difficult to ascertain. A student survey in October will provide insight into the nuts-and-bolts working of the system itself, and open-ended questions will offer students an opportunity to express how being linked as a group, while studying independently, affected their studies over summer. If feedback is positive, I will consider how this system can be incorporated to accompany both junior (i.e., non-International Course) and senior (The Nakamura International Course) students' learning throughout the school year. Were such a system to be incorporated into year-round learning, it would be logical to add evaluated final performances, such as poster presentations or debates. In that case, from working as a group, my students may begin to experience for themselves that they can be the best English speakers in the world.

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Autonomous Learning: How Can I Help my Students Foster it?
自律学習：学習者オートノミーの育成をどのように支援できるだろうか？

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Key words: 高校英語, 学習者の姿勢, 動機

One day, a few months into the new school year at St. Hilda's School in Tokyo, a first-year female high school student said to me, "It's beginning to get harder and harder to keep up with English classes, and I am getting a negative feeling towards English." I have been wondering what factors lay behind her words.

The classes in the school where I teach are organised according to a curriculum and syllabus in order to help develop the students' English language competence. Due to the introduction of the new curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT), the school syllabus has changed and new teaching methods and activities have been introduced in order to provide the students with more opportunities to listen to and use English in the classroom.

Traditionally, the Japanese classroom is teacher-centered, and each class consists of many students (from about 35 to 45 students in general) with differing levels of English competence. Students are not usually given the opportunity to take charge of their own learning. Teachers, including myself, tend to be perplexed at how to deal with large mixed level groups and find such conditions taxing. Speaking of my own classes, students who are all to take the entrance examinations in a few years, are required not only to learn how to read English newspaper and magazine articles, essays, and so on, but also to increase their knowledge of many grammatical rules, apply them to their practice of English conversation or English essay writing, and do all of this at the same pace. This may be why some students feel that it's difficult to keep up with the class. In addition, they are required to take numerous weekly mini-tests as well as term examinations, whose marks directly affect their grades. That is, the results of the tests tend to give the students a positive or negative attitude towards learning English. Those who have failed to achieve good results have particularly negative attitudes towards English, asking why it is that they have to study English even though they are Japanese and don't have to use English in their daily lives.

However, at the same time, the students do like to use English when they communicate with people from foreign countries. Last week, my colleague and I took some of the students to the tourist district of Asakusa so that they could interview foreign tourists in English. Every student tried to make full use of what they had learned in their classes in order to communicate. When they made themselves understood in English, they seemed extremely happy and felt what they had learned was really meaningful, which was in turn an

extremely good experience. As a result of our trip to Asakusa, some of the students developed a more positive attitude towards English, and some said they intended to increase their contact with English by listening to music, watching movies, and reading books and newspapers.

Finding a way to connect such positive feelings of students with their current classes is something I would like to explore further. However, it is not a simple matter to construct these "perfect conditions" to improve all students' motivation, as McCombs and Pope (1994) assume is possible. In fact, studies have shown that learners cannot foster autonomy only in isolation, but need social interaction with a teacher and other learners in the classroom. Little (1999), for example, has said that it is necessary for teachers to provide learners with group work, where learners who are not working with teachers are able to gain motivation from frequently exchanging ideas with other group members. Dam (1999) has also mentioned that the teacher's involvement produces a powerful effect on learners' taking responsibility for the whole process, from choosing their goals to assessing their own motivation. According to Ushioda (2012), it is beneficial for the teacher to create an environment where learners can learn a language by means of interaction with the teacher and other learners and where they can be praised or encouraged by the teacher. Thinking of these studies in relation to my own classes, it may be necessary for me to create the kind of classroom environment where the students can socialize and shape their motivation, and where I can support and encourage the students wherever I can by giving them opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. But are these measures really enough? What else do I have to do to improve my classes?

In order to make my classes better and more organized, I have returned to graduate school to study English Language Teaching in more depth. Studying while working as a full-time teacher and taking care of two boys (a five-year-old and a one-year-old) is quite challenging, but I find time to read, which broadens my horizons and enables me to look at my classes from different perspectives. I spend a great deal of my personal time doing background reading. The more I read books on English language teaching and recall my 15 years of teaching at a private girl's school, the more I think it necessary for teachers to help learners voluntarily continue studying and utilizing English even outside the classroom. This is why I applied for a Learner Development SIG Grant this year, which I am happy to have been awarded. Unfortunately, I have not being able to join the monthly meetings, but I am very grateful that I have been given the opportunity to study the field of learner development and to make improvements to my classes by attending conferences or events.

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Each element in the 4Cs framework and each item of the principles mentioned above is bound to be familiar to language teachers who have been engaged in TESOL or applied linguistics for some time. However, for me, the key attraction of CLIL is that it "organically" integrates and packages the theoretical elements and principles for "synergy" so as to create and provide high-quality language education for learners (Ikeda et al., 2011). It is this aspect of CLIL that has attracted me the most, while realizing that it is hard to "juggle" all the 10 principles within any particular context so as to provide optimum conditions for learning. In my own experience, some students tend to get demotivated by grammar-focused instruction for tests and superficial communication activities in non-meaningful contexts. However, after introducing a CLIL approach, they become interested in the content itself and the language classroom becomes a place for improving not only their language, but their thinking skills as well.

Learner Autonomy in Collaborative Learning Through a CLIL Approach

I have participated in the collaborative learning group since I became an LD SIG grant awardee in 2012. The group discussions always give me a lot of suggestions or insights into how collaborative learning could have an effect on language learning. Also, some of the members are very interested in and actually conduct their classes with a content focus. Thanks to the collaborative learning in the group, I have become especially interested in learner autonomy in collaborative learning.

According to Little (n.d), with regard to the definition of learner autonomy, "there is a consensus that the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others". With the aim of helping the students in my Tourism classes, I have been exploring ways of improving the students' learner autonomy in collaborative learning through a CLIL approach. Besides a textbook, the students are conducting a portfolio project which utilizes authentic, tourism-related materials that they have collected as a basis for discussion in class and reflection on their self-learning process.

At this point in time, it appears that the project is stimulating the students to become more interested in the tourist industry through these connections with "reality". This makes them more curious about peers' ideas, and I am hoping that the class discussions that ensue will play a part in promoting their language learning. I would like to explore the effects of the CLIL approach on my students further and hope to share results and implications of my research in the near future.

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