

Special Feature: LD SIG 20th Anniversary Conference

特集：LD SIG 創設 20周年記念大会

The JALT Learner Development SIG's 20th Anniversary Conference, Exploring Learner Development: Practices, Pedagogies, Puzzles and Research, will be held at Gakushuin University, Mejiro, Tokyo, November 23-24 2013.

Invited speakers include Naoko Aoki, Richard Smith, and Kensaku Yoshida. Phil Benson is a Special Guest Speaker, too. We are also honoured to have local guest speakers from Rikuzentakata and Sendai presenting on post-3/11 community-building in Tohoku. And not only teachers and researchers, but also students and educationally oriented NGOs will be taking part to explore with you many different learner development issues.

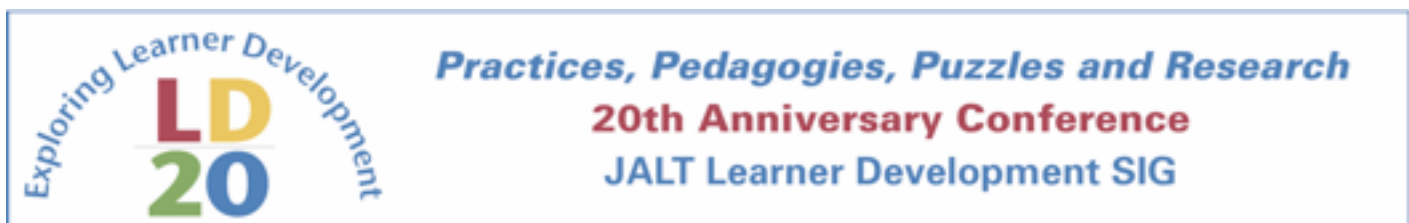
This special two-day conference is jointly sponsored by the JALT Learner Development, Junior Senior High School, and Teachers Helping Teachers SIGs, with support too from the JALT Tokyo and Yokohama chapters as well as the Education Research Foundation and Gakushuin University.

Please feel free to peruse the full action-packed programme at:
<<http://www.ldsigconference2013.org/conferenceprogramme/>>

We hope to see you there!

Best wishes,

Aiko Minematsu, Alison Stewart, Andy Barfield, Fumiko Murase and Rich Silver,
conference co-chairs, on behalf of the conference organising committee



Exploring teacher-learning: Interview with Richard Smith, Learner Development SIG co-founder

Andy Barfield and Richard Smith



Richard founded the JALT Learner Development SIG in 1993 with Naoko Aoki when he was a lecturer at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He had been writing self-study materials for learning Japanese (Japanese – Language and People, published by the BBC in 1992) and originally came to learner development and learner autonomy that way, via reflection on his own learning of languages. In 2000 Richard moved back to the UK to start work at the University of Warwick. He is currently the coordinator of IATEFL’s Research SIG and co-convenor with Alice Chik and Naoko Aoki of the AILA Research Network on Learner Autonomy.

Andy: Richard—many thanks for doing this interview for Learning Learning. We’re very much looking forward to seeing you in November at the conference. I’d like to start by asking you how you originally came to be interested in ‘learner development’, and how the SIG started out.

Richard: Thanks, Andy. I’m really looking forward to coming back to Japan for the 20th birthday of LD SIG! Looking back, I think it was mainly because of my own experience of learning languages autonomously—especially Japanese—that I had the idea for the SIG in the first place. By 1993, when we founded the SIG, I’d been in Japan quite a long time—about seven or eight years—and I’d been getting more interested in Japanese language learning. That’s mainly because I’d been writing materials—one book that was never published was going to be a communicative course book for classroom use and the other one, which was published by the BBC, was for self-study. Because the BBC book was for self-study, my co-author—Trevor Hughes Parry—and I decided to include some guidance (‘learner training content’, if you like). Well, by talking to some friends who’d started using the book, we soon realized that this guidance wasn’t really adequate—and we decided to facilitate a workshop at the Omiya JALT conference in, I think, 1991 or 1992 where learners who were also English teachers could share their ideas and feelings. We titled this workshop ‘Japanese for lazy people’ (making a bit of fun both of ourselves and of *Japanese for Busy People*, the title of a very popular JSL/JFL coursebook). The workshop was much better attended than we’d expected, and lots and lots of interesting ideas came from participants for using the environment we were living in to learn the language. Out of that we decided to gather people’s addresses and start up a newsletter for learners of Japanese in Japan, which we called *Learner to Learner* (the title of the Omiya conference having been ‘Teacher to Teacher’)! Well, two things that happened then were that some teachers of Japanese heard about the newsletter and started to get interested; and, second, there started to be some talk of teaching in the newsletter, and how one’s own language learning could affect that. In fact, I think it’s around this time that I started to get my own students to discuss together what they were doing or could do outside class to learn English—just as we’d done in the Omiya workshop for Japanese.

So, out of this, I came up with the idea for a SIG—and developed the idea with Naoko and others. I think right at the beginning we were quite consciously and in a way subversively bringing together two groups in particular—learners and teachers of Japanese—to develop new ideas, especially about learning

outside formal environments. It was all a kind of interesting symbiosis, generating new insights for our teaching, but primarily—at first at least—out of a genuine desire to improve our own learning experience as well. And I'd extend that beyond language learning to mean teacher-learning within a teachers' association more broadly—Naoko and I, and you, and Hugh [Nicoll] and others, were all interested in bringing about what Hugh later called a 'velvet revolution' in the way JALT operated—and we were, I think, innovative in the ways we tried to do things bilingually in meetings, formed our committees, planned events, and so on.

Andy: 'Learner autonomy' has since become much more of a mainstream central concept than 'learner development'. So, how did 'learner development' get chosen as the name of the SIG? And how do you see now the difference between learner development and learner autonomy? And ... where might teacher autonomy fit in that picture for you?

Richard: Naoko and I—and Hugh—heard about and went to a conference on learner autonomy that was being organized in Hong Kong [the 1994 'Taking Control' conference] and I think that stimulated more talk of learner 'autonomy' in the SIG. We were already aware of some of the work going on around autonomy before that (I'd been particularly interested by some of Henri Holec's writings, for example, when I was doing my MA back in 1988-89), but we were aiming to be very eclectic and inclusive in the early years—partly to build membership—and to include people interested in various things like strategy training, cooperative learning, and the Silent Way and other humanistic 'methods'. That desire to be inclusive was one reason for calling the group the 'Learner Development SIG' and not limiting ourselves to one strand of influence.

Since then, as you mention, 'autonomy' has really become a central concept around which everything else revolves, but I'm a bit regretful sometimes that people talk so much about autonomy as an abstract thing, almost as a kind of religious virtue sometimes (like faith, hope and charity!), and not enough about ourselves, our contexts, our ways of communicating with others in teacher associations, or our practices related to learners as a basis for theory development. I know that people in the Learner Development SIG had a debate a few years ago about changing the name of the SIG ...

Andy: Four years ago (already!) in 2009! That was when we did an online survey about future directions for the SIG. About 60 people responded to the survey, and one of the questions was about the name of the SIG. A whole range of other names got suggested—from Autonomous Learning (AL), Autonomy in Language Education (ALE), and Autonomy in Language Learning (ALL) to Learner Autonomy and Development (LAD), Learner and Teacher Autonomy (LATA) and Learner and Teacher Autonomy & Development (LATAD), and one effect of the survey was that it helped us look beyond just learner autonomy in understanding the diverse interests of SIG members to do with learners and development ... and another was that we decided not to change the name after all!

Richard: Whereas about 10 years ago the IATEFL Learner Independence SIG actually did change its name to the Learner Autonomy SIG... Somehow, 'autonomy' as a buzz-word has come to dominate the field globally, with its high priests and priestesses, exigeses and whatnot. But I sense that the phrase 'learner development' just might stand the test of time in a way that 'autonomy' might not. When we coined this phrase, 'learner development' sounded to us relatively practical and process-oriented—more so than 'learner independence' or 'learner autonomy', which represent ideals but not processes, I think—and I have a hunch that, having become a mainstream academic concept and a 'buzz-word' in the profession,

‘autonomy’ might start to fall from favour soon as fashions change and/or other notions become more academically respectable (for example, ‘agency’ seems to be making quite a bid for power at the moment!).

As for the relationship between teacher and learner autonomy, I feel that’s an abstract, academic—almost theological—question that has arisen because of autonomy becoming more of an academic field, with PhDs being written about it and so on—so I’d prefer not to go into it here if you don’t mind.

Andy: *Things get quickly political—as they inevitably do—but let’s talk about that another time then ... Let’s keep the focus on learner development and teacher development, which for me offered an important connection in the early 1990s within the reflective practitioner paradigm towards what I’d like to call the ‘reflective learner paradigm’ of learner development. How do you see the connections there, Richard?*

Richard: Yes, that’s a useful way of thinking about it too. I should say in this respect that another reason for calling the SIG ‘Learner Development’ in the first place certainly was related to the way people were making a distinction between teacher *development* and teacher *training* at the time—‘training’ being something done ‘to’ teachers and ‘development’ being something they’re more responsible for themselves.

Andy: *That was quite an issue in the Teacher Education SIG too and I remember us talking at the time about different connections between learner development and teacher development.*

Richard: Yes, in LD’s case, ‘learner development’ seemed better, less top-down, than ‘learner training’, for the same kind of reason, especially as we were seeing *ourselves* as learners getting together freely to share feelings and ideas.

I think it’s probable that a lot of people *have* felt they’ve developed positively as reflective practitioners, or as teacher-learners, by being part of the SIG—so I think there’s another connection there—in other words, somehow through being involved in a SIG devoted to learner development there’s been a lot of teacher development going on. Certainly, that was the case for me—I learned a lot through the interactions with other members, which we tried to make as ‘humanistic’ as we could at various events. Then there was my own teaching—and I found that with a focus on learner development there I was certainly developing a lot as a teacher. I think these things are all tied together—I can’t separate what I learned through being in the SIG from what I learned from students—but I know that during the time I was coordinating the SIG with Naoko (the mid- to late 1990s) I learned to focus on others much more than before (that’s a never-ending battle, though, and ego often gets in the way!). I was developing a lot at that time, partly through new kinds of professional discussion within the SIG, partly through new ways of interacting with my students—it’s difficult to separate the two experiences as they went together, but what I can say is that teacher development definitely arose out of learner development in my experience, and probably vice versa!

Andy: *You recently wrote in the Stories of Practices book (Barfield & Delgado, 2013) how you then moved into teacher education at Warwick University and how your approach to that was informed by your work in Japan ...*

Richard: Yes, in a nutshell I found that I was engaging in a kind of learner development (or ‘pedagogy for autonomy’, if you will) in my teacher education work. In fact, I don’t see language teaching, teacher

education, supervising research students or—something I’m doing more and more these days—facilitating workshops for practising teachers as fundamentally different, in the sense that in all of them what’s important for me is starting from where the participants are already and what their hopes, expectations and achievements are, encouraging them to make that explicit, and working with that, rather than coming in with too much of a pre-set agenda and imposing what I think they ‘should’ be learning. Of course there are needs for structure and advice, but the fundamental thing for me in all these activities is building from the bottom up—working with what participants bring to the table as it were.

Andy: So you haven’t moved away from learner development, just incorporated it more widely into different areas of your work? I’d like to ask you about the workshops and other activities you’re involved with these days which involve teacher-research, and working with teachers in developing countries. It seems that the IATEFL Research SIG, which you’re currently co-ordinating, is putting a very strong emphasis on promoting teacher-research. And you’ve recently done some teacher education workshops in Nepal, Chile and Cameroon. Could you talk a little bit about your work there?

Richard: Yes, I do think teacher-research is something worth promoting—it’s been part of my own practice since the late 1990s to gather and analyse students’ perceptions and try to improve things on that basis—then, when I started teaching pre-service MA in ELT students at Warwick University I built an action research experience into one of the modules. I think it’s a good way to help student-teachers take more control of their own learning. So what I’m doing now is broadening that experience out into in-service initiatives. There are constraints on that to do with teachers’ lack of time and scepticism about research, for example, but I’ve been quite encouraged that we’ve had some teachers getting enthusiastic recently and submitting reports to the Research SIG newsletter, *ELT Research*, which show quite clearly that they gained a sense of empowerment through carrying out small-scale teacher-research. I also think the way teacher-research is presented to teachers can be improved so it doesn’t seem so academic, but is rather taken as something relevant to them. In these recent workshops I’ve been working with groups of teachers who face quite difficult circumstances (large classes, few non-human resources, including textbooks, and so on), so it’s been important to consider seriously whether teacher-research really is for them, and, if so, what kind.

In January this year I was in Chile for 5-6 days. It was something that the British Council asked me to go and do, —to give a lecture on practitioner research, and more especially to lead a workshop for 80 Chilean secondary school teachers—a two-day workshop—and to set them off on action research, which would take them through a year basically.

It was based on Tom Connelly’s vision, based on his quite long experience in Chile where he now works for the British Council, and on what he felt was needed in terms of teacher development there for secondary school teachers: rather than more of the same kind of ‘one-off’ teaching ideas workshops, the focus should be on getting teachers involved in their own ongoing practitioner research in their own contexts. Tom had already decided there was going to be a kind of mentoring scheme. He would get four local mentors and also set up a Moodle space to support them through the process, so I thought it was quite exciting that somebody was putting a lot of effort into the sustainability aspect of it. It was quite a challenge too—and I felt it was good for me to try and do it.

Andy: And it involves secondary school teachers deciding to do an action research project for a year?

Richard: Yes—in advance of the school, the teachers were made aware that they’d be expected to commit to a process and not just to the one-off workshop. At the two-day workshop they discussed and identified problems they have with their teaching and—in collaboration with one another and with four mentor tutors—started to develop research questions which could help them to investigate these problems. Some of the most common problems identified included:

- * poor student motivation to learn English
- * difficulty in getting students to speak English in class
- * classroom management issues as a result of having large classes (40+ students)
- * having to deal with different levels of ability within the same class ...

From my side I was trying to present teacher-research so that it would be seen as doable, feasible, realistic. I emphasized to the teachers that this must be something that is relevant to them, and not something to judge in academic terms—teacher-research ‘by and for teachers themselves’, as I’ve been putting it. I was quite happy that at the end of the two days we had come up—I say ‘we’ because it was through discussion with the four mentors and teachers—with something that seemed doable and which, initially, was more about exploring than jumping directly into action.

Andy: And this is what you call ‘Exploratory Action Research’?

Richard: Yes, and of course I have to acknowledge a major debt to Dick Allwright there (e.g., Allwright & Hanks, 2009) I recommended to the teachers that they should engage first in exploration, rather than immediately trying to ‘solve’ problems by taking a new action. An example would be a teacher thinking along these lines: “I may believe that my students lack motivation, for instance, but how can I be sure? Also, there may be some new ideas I’ve heard about that I’d like to try out, but these may not be appropriate, and how will I know anyway if students’ motivation increases as a result? What I need to do first is find out more about my students’ current motivation, exploring questions like ‘How do students feel about learning English in class?’ (‘What do they find motivating?’, ‘What do they find demotivating?’); and ‘What do students think would motivate them to learn English in class?’”.

Andy: How might the initial exploratory part be realized in this example?

Richard: Something like this: getting answers to these questions about motivation, before any action for change is undertaken, might involve having students write about their current motivation (in Spanish or English) so the teacher could look at their writing and try to identify common concerns. This would not only help the teacher decide on changes that are appropriate for her students, but also provide her with a way to compare the situations ‘before’ and ‘after’ any change she does try to introduce. If a teacher engages students like this in a period of exploring a problem before making any deliberate attempt to try to ‘solve’ it, it’s possible that such exploratory research might even itself increase students’ motivation so that ‘action for change’ becomes unnecessary ...

Andy: What have the teachers been doing with their projects since?

Richard: There were some problems with teachers getting going after their summer break in February, and we expected that to some extent—but we're now about two thirds of the way through and I think we're on track with some interesting work emerging that's seen as valuable by the teachers themselves. We're keeping in touch via Facebook and Skype sessions nowadays, and I'll be reporting on the project at next year's IATEFL conference with Paula Rebolledo, one of the mentors.

Andy: *And what have you been doing in Nepal and Cameroon?*

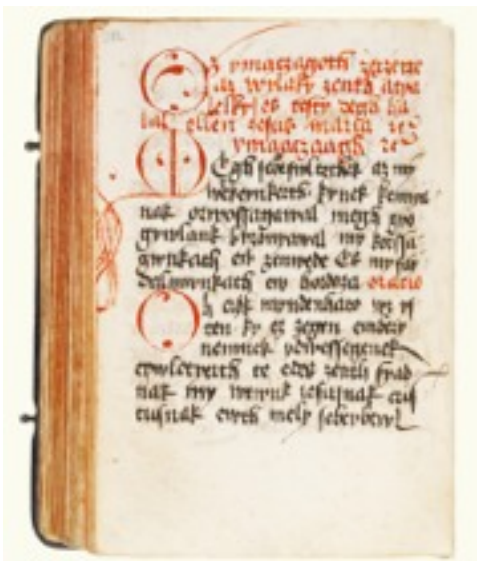
Richard: That's been work with teachers at national teacher association conferences—it's not been explicitly autonomy or teacher-research related, but what I've been talking about with teachers has been teaching in difficult circumstances and about what research within a particular network I've been coordinating can help them with—the network is called 'TELC'—'Teaching English in Large Classes'—and it brings together teachers and researchers from a wide range of developing country contexts. Actually, on reflection, this work is implicitly autonomy-oriented in that we're building resources and insights from the bottom up, including from teacher-research, and that's the approach I've been advocating and trying to put into practice at the workshops too.

Andy: *It sounds all very interesting and I hope we have a chance to hear more about this from you at the 20th anniversary conference in November --*

Richard: I'm very excited about the conference and about discussing learner and teacher development, and teacher-research, with the participants! I'm looking forward, too, to learning more about some of the important work that's been going on in the SIG in recent years. See you in November!

References

- Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
 Barfield, A., & Delgado-Alvarado, N. (2013) (Eds.). *Autonomy in language learning: Stories of practices* [Kindle version]. Canterbury, UK: IATEFL.



Interview with Professor Kensaku Yoshida

Aiko Minematsu and Kensaku Yoshida



峰松愛子: 吉田先生が英語教育の分野に足を踏み入れたきっかけは何だったのですか？

吉田研作教授: 高校時代に、後輩の中学生が英語弁論大会に出るのでスピーチ原稿を書く段階から指導をしていた。その後輩が当時の高松宮杯で全国2位に入賞したために全生徒の前で表彰されることになり、その時に先生が「よしけん（注：吉田先生のニックネーム）がいなかったらこの生徒は入賞できなかった」と僕の名前を出して褒めてくれて、それがとても嬉しかった。それがきっかけで英語の弁論だけでなく英語劇を自分も一緒にやりながら後輩や同輩を指導するようになり、教えるのは楽しい、英語の先生になりたい、と思うようになった。

そこで、英語の先生になるためには何が必要か、学校の外国人の先生に質問したところ「これから先生になる人は言語学の知識が必要」と言われたので言語学が勉強できると思った上智大学の英語学科に進学した。大学では言語学サークルを立ち上げて言語学の勉強をしたり、当時の国際学部（注：現国際教養学部）と「国際部セミナー」という、英語で環境や教育などの社会問題に関するシンポジウムを開催したり、STP（注：Summer Teaching Programの略。大学生が夏休み中、様々な地域で中学生に英語を教えるプログラム）を立ち上げたり、セツルメント活動を通して子供達に勉強を教えたりした。全ては英語の教師になるため、幅広い知識を身につけるためだった。

しかし教育実習に行ってみると、出身の中高が受験校だったのもあり、生徒はできる子ばかりで面白みがないと感じた。その後孤児院で働くことを考えたりもしたが、大学の先生達に「やることを決めていないのだったら大学院に行きなさい」と言われ、ぎりぎり大学院の入試に出願した。それで修士を出る頃になって「現場で教えるのも良いことだけど、これから現場で教える若い先生を育てるのも大事なことだ」と言われた。その時に初めてteacher trainingという分野があることを知り、腑に落ちた感じがした。

大学院を修了してから上智大学で助手として教えるようになり、その後ミシガン大学で博士課程を修了した。その頃にはすでに教え子や後輩達で英語の教師になっている人達がいた。そのような現場にいる人達の要望があり、当時の学科長のニッセル先生の協力を借りてASTE（注：Association of Sophian Teachers of Englishの略、上智大学英語教員研究会）を1981年に立ち上げた。ASTEに参加してくれる現場の英語の先生達の話聞くことは僕にとってはとても大きなことで、そこで現場の話聞いて自分のやりたいことや、やるべきことが段々と明確になっていった。それがきっかけで今まで色々と英語教育に携わって

きた。

峰松: 英語の先生になりたい、というお気持ちが先生の原点にある訳ですね。学部時代から数多くの会をご自分で立ち上げて来られていますが、そういう新しいことを始めるのがお好きなのですか？

吉田教授: 好きというよりは、自分のやりたい事を実際にやる場がないから作ってきたという感じ。そういう点では今やっていることもあまり変わっていない。自分でやらないと気が済まない、というところが強いのかもしれない。

峰松: 先生はいつも教育現場から離れないで研究を続けていらっしゃる印象ですが、その点は意識されているのですか？

吉田教授: その点は意識している。僕にとっての原点はASTEの発表の後に参加者が皆でお茶を飲んで談笑するとき。そこからすごく学んでいる。現場で何が起きているのかが聞けるし、それがきっかけで授業を見に行ったり、模擬授業をしたり、という活動に繋がっている。僕も教育実習に行ったので現場経験がまったくない訳ではないけれども、やはり現場の中学高校で現在何が起きているのかを知らない。だからいつもASTEで勉強させてもらっている。

峰松: 30年以上ASTEを続けてこられて、特に気づいたことや印象に残っていることはありますか？

吉田教授: 特に一つというのはないが、現場で起きていることと理論や教育法で研究している内容のギャップを感じる。ASTEを始めた最初の頃は「こんなにも違うのか」と思った。当時から、自分が研究を通して学んだ新しい考えや理論と、現場で起きていることを絶えず照合しながら行き来をしてきた気がする。だから僕が現場に提案するものは現実的なものが多いと思っている。

自分がASTEで発表するときもASTEの参加者に知ってもらいたいというものもあるが、同時に意見してもらえるので随分助かっている。例えばコミュニケーション・アプローチの話をして現場の様々な障害、たとえば入試対策というものが現実問題としてあるという声を聞いて、それを解消するにはどんなことができるのか、ということを改めて考えることができる。

ASTEは、研究者と現場の教師がお互い支え合ってギブアンドテイクしている場。一方的にこちらから知識を与えるのではなく、現場の悩みや問題点を聞くことができ、こちらからも最新の理論やアプローチの話ができる。おそらくASTEで議論していることは日本の英語教育の議論の最先端を行っていると、そのような議論が可能な場であるからこそ、これまでASTEが続いてきたのだと思う。

峰松: 先生にとって現場の声を聞くことに大きな意味があるのですね。そういった研究と実践のギャップの

狭間にいらして、とても面白いポジションにいらっしゃると感じます。先生にとって、より影響力があるのは研究と実践とどちらだと思いますか？

吉田教授: 研究の中には、僕が思い描いていたことを実証してくれるものもある。例えば、最近読んだ博士論文のためのある研究でnon-nativeとしての英語を使っている学生ほど英語力に自信があり、英語力が低い学生ほどnativeのような英語をモデルとしているという結果を見た。このように思っていたことがデータになると「やった」と思うし、このデータを使えると感じる。これは研究の中でできること。逆に、現場には実証はないかもしれないが、事象がある。現場で起きている事象を見て、喚起されることや改めて考えさせられることがある。だから研究でも現場で起きていることも、両方合わさって意味があると思う。

峰松: それでは、これからの20年で日本の英語教育はどうなっていくと思われませんか？

吉田教授: 4技能を使うことを重視する英語教育、コミュニケーションとしての英語が必要となってくると思う。僕は今後20年でこれに遅れをとったら日本は沈没すると思っている。コミュニケーションというとオーラルコミュニケーションをイメージしがちだけれども、それだけではなくて4技能を使うということが必要。そうでないとグローバル社会の中では日本人はやっていけない。だから2020年のオリンピックが東京になったのは良かったし、コミュニケーションとしての外国語教育にとって良いきっかけとなると思う。これから20年間というのは後ろを向くことは最早できないところまで来ているのだから、英語を使って国際的に活躍できる人材を育成することを目標として前進していく必要がある。

峰松: 4技能の重要性は随分長い間言われているのに、なかなか現場では形にならないように感じます。その要因は何だと思われませんか？

吉田教授: やはり一番大きな要因の一つは、入試が4技能の力をテストしていないこと。入試のほとんどがリーディングで、それに加えて少しリスニングがあるくらいなら結局は読解をするために必要な文法や和訳重視の言語知識を教えることになってしまう。ただ大学の入試問題も、徐々に言語知識を問うものが減り言語活動を求める試験も増えてきてはいる。そういう意味でも4技能の評価が含まれているTEAP（注：Test of English for Academic Purposes。上智大学で次年度より一般入試の一部で採用する予定の英語能力判定試験）の波及効果には期待している。もう一つの要因は外国語を使う場が日本で少ないこと。ただこれも、東京オリンピックが決まったことなどからも今後増えていくのではないかと思う。

峰松: 教育現場にいと、入試だけでなく英語の先生達の意識もなかなか変わりづらいと感じるのですが？

吉田教授: 先生達の意識を変えるのは一番難しいと思う。だからこそ経験をするのは重要で、英語の先生

自身が英語を使ってコミュニケーションする経験をしなければならない。Non-nativeとして英語を使ってコミュニケーションするという経験がないと英語力に自信を持ちづらいし、コミュニケーションとしての英語は教えられない。

以前、ある高校の英語の先生から「どうしたら英語の発音が良くなるか」と聞かれたが、それに対して答えたのが「英語で人とコミュニケーションするのが良い」ということだった。機械的に発音を練習するよりは、人と話していれば自然と通じる発音になる。先生達の意識は変えづらいからこそ、言語体験を通してコミュニケーションとしての英語の意識を高める必要がある。

あともう一つは、先生達に「なぜ英語の教師になったのか」と問いかけること。たとえ中学の時に英語が嫌いだった人も、何かしら英語を学ぶのが楽しいと思った瞬間があるはずだから、その体験を思い起こすことで英語に対する意識に変化があるのでは。

峰松: 学習者も教師も、コミュニケーションツールとしての英語を体験する必要があるということですね。本日はどうもありがとうございました。

Eds.

Many thanks to Aiko Minematsu for the interview with Professor Yoshida! As well as arranging the interview, she very kindly took the time to translate it into English for us, see below.

Aiko: *What prompted you to become involved in the field of English education?*

Prof. Yoshida: As a high school student, I used to teach the younger students in my English Speaking Society (ESS) and helped them write up and deliver speeches. One of the junior high school students I helped came in second in the All Japan Junior High School English Speech Contest for the Prince Takamatsu trophy. When he was awarded in the school assembly, one of the teachers referred to me, telling the whole school that without my help, the student wouldn't have won that prize. That made me very happy, and motivated me to coach the members of the ESS club, helping with not only their speeches but performing English plays with them as well. I became aware of the joys of teaching and this made me want to become an English teacher.

When I asked one of the native-speaking English teachers what I needed to do to become an English teacher, he told me that I should study linguistics. So I enrolled in the Department of English Language and Area Studies at Sophia University. In university, I was active in starting various groups and projects; I founded a linguistics study group, organized a symposium in English focusing on social issues, started the Summer Training Program (STP), where university students travel to different areas of Japan to teach

English to junior high school students, and taught children as part of my student settlement volunteer activity. The purpose for all of my activities was for my future goal: to become an English teacher. I wanted to acquire the skills and knowledge I needed to become a good teacher.

But when I finally went back to my high school as a pre-service teacher to complete my teaching practicum, it seemed different from what I had imagined. The students in my high school were high-achievers, and their aims were to pass the university entrance exams. After finishing my teaching practicum, I thought about working for an orphanage, but my teachers advised me to go on to pursue a higher degree in graduate school. So I enrolled in the MA program at Sophia. When I was about to complete the MA program, one of my teachers said to me, “Teaching is a profound job but training future teachers is just as important.” That was when I first came across the existence of an area devoted to teacher training, and it just clicked with me.

I started to teach as an assistant at Sophia, and went on to the doctorate program at the University of Michigan. By that time, some of my former students and classmates at Sophia had already started teaching English in secondary schools in Japan. Some of them asked me to start a study group for Sophia alumni teachers, and with the help of Professor Nissel, who was the head of the department at Sophia then, I set up the Association of Sophian Teachers of English (ASTE) in 1981, which is a study group for English teachers from Sophia and still continues to be an active group for sharing teaching practices and research findings. Listening to the stories shared by teachers who come to the ASTE meetings was, and still is, crucial for me. The stories that I hear from these teachers have helped me conceptualize my goals and become aware of the practical needs in the classroom. This is how I came to be active in the field of English education.

Aiko: Your research always seems to be practical. Is this something you have kept in mind especially?

Prof. Yoshida: Yes, that is something I have always been aware of. For me, the basis of my research comes from the conversations I have after the ASTE meetings, when all the participants get together and just chat. I learn so much from the teachers there. I can learn about what is happening in schools and in classrooms around the country, and some teachers ask me to come and observe their classes, or even give mock lessons in their schools. I feel like I am always learning from the teachers at ASTE, because although I do have teaching experience from my teaching practicum, I don’t know much about what is actually happening in schools.

Aiko: So you have continued the ASTE meetings for more than 30 years now, which is amazing. Is there anything that has made a strong impression on you over the years?

Prof. Yoshida: I can’t put it down to one thing, but I do feel a gap between the latest research or theories in the field and actual teaching practices. When I first started ASTE, I was surprised at how different research and practice were. Since then, I think that I have always gone back and forth between the new theories that come up and what really goes on in the classrooms, trying to balance them out and analyzing them. So I feel that the things I propose are pretty practical.

When I do a presentation at ASTE meetings, I do it not only because I want to share my ideas but also because I want to hear what teachers have to say. For example, when I talked about the communicative

approach, the teachers shared with me the various barriers that they face in their classrooms, especially the preparation for entrance exams. From there, I was able to go back and think about how we can overcome such barriers.

In the ASTE meetings, we all have something to give and take from each other, and it's not a place for transcending information. We listen to the confines and issues we face in the classroom, and share new concepts in the field. I think that the discussions we have at ASTE is the most up-to-date in the English language teaching field in Japan, and this organic atmosphere has made it possible for us to continue the meetings for such a long time.

Aiko: You're in a very special position, with research on one hand and practices on the other. In your opinion, which do you think affects you more, research findings or teaching practices?

Prof. Yoshida: There are findings in research that validates my thoughts and ideas. For example, a graduate student conducted a study demonstrating how students who are exposed to nonnative Englishes on a regular basis are more confident with their English skills than those who see native speakers as models of English users. When I saw the data for this, I was happy because this was something I had been thinking about. Such proof can only be found through research. Classrooms may not provide proof, but they provide specific cases. There are things that can be found through studying these cases. So I think that research and practice go hand in hand, and are meaningful when both are considered together.

Aiko: What kind of path do you think the English education in Japan will take in the next 20 years?

Prof. Yoshida: The idea of English as a communication tool, and a stronger emphasis on using the four skills is going to be a necessity. In my opinion, if this is not realized in the next 20 years, Japan will sink. When we think of English as a communication tool, we tend to think in terms of oral communication, but it's important to think of communication in terms of using all four skills; otherwise, the Japanese will not be able to survive in the global society. So I think it is good that Tokyo is hosting the Olympics in 2020, because this may work as a good chance to encourage and promote international understanding in education. We cannot go back in time and must move forward to foster students that can be successful internationally.

Aiko: It seems that the importance of the four skills has been discussed for a while now, but not so much seems to have been put into practice in reality in actual classrooms and schools. What may be the factors that prevent change?

Prof. Yoshida: The major factor is that entrance exams do not test the four skills. Most entrance exams focus on reading, with a little bit of listening included. But with the primary focus on reading, the result is that teachers focus on translation and grammar in their teaching. Of course, the entrance exams are changing gradually, and there are more exams that require students to perform in the language rather than test their linguistic knowledge. I am hopeful of the washback effect that new four-skills entrance examination at Sophia University, the Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP), which will be implemented in 2015) may have. Another factor is that there aren't many opportunities for students to use English in Japan, but I think this situation may gradually change. With the Olympic games being held in Tokyo in 2020, we will

probably have more chances and needs for using the language.

Aiko: I agree that the entrance exams have major influences on teachers' beliefs, and from my experience teaching in high schools, I feel that teachers' beliefs do not change so easily. What are your thoughts on Japanese teachers of English?

Prof. Yoshida: Teachers' beliefs are the most difficult to change. That's why I believe that Japanese teachers should experience using English as a communication tool. It is so important to actually experience this. If teachers do not have the experience to communicate in English as a nonnative speaker, it is difficult for them to have confidence in their English competency, and moreover, they won't be able to teach English as a communication tool.

Recently, a high school English teacher asked me how he could improve his English pronunciation. So I told him that he should speak to people in English. If you speak to people, you will naturally come to understand what works and what doesn't. I believe this is a better learning strategy than mechanical practice or drilling. In order for teachers to believe in teaching communicatively, they need to get hands-on experience in using English for communication.

Another thing is to ask teachers why they became English teachers in the first place. They must have had some kind of positive experience with English in the past, which they may have forgotten over the years. Being reminded of such experiences may affect their beliefs as well.

Aiko: Thank you so much for your input, Professor Yoshida.

Interview with Phil Benson

Mike Nix and Phil Benson



Phil Benson is a Professor in Linguistics and Director of the Centre for Popular Culture in the Humanities at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. His main research interest is in autonomy and informal language learning. Recently he has been developing this interest in the area of second language users engagement with new media, and he is currently studying YouTube as a globalized space for translingual and transcultural learning. Phil has been a friend of the JALT LD-SIG since the early 1990s and is keen to explore opportunities for collaborative work on autonomy and informal learning across Asia.

Mike: *You've been involved with the Learner Development SIG since its early days, Phil, so it's great that you can join us for the 20th Anniversary Conference as a Special Guest Speaker. You've talked several times at previous JALT conferences about learner autonomy, which is obviously what people know you best for. This time, though, you want to think about translanguaging and learning using digital media, especially You Tube. To start with, could you tell us a bit about what has sparked your interest in these newer areas of research?*

Phil: I think we have to keep up with the times! A lot of the theoretical research that we rely on in work in

learner autonomy was done 20 or 30 years ago. Henri Holec and David Little are still good sources and I think it is fair to say that not a great deal has been added to what they have to say on the theoretical side. I am not saying that there is nothing that can be added, more that the more important work may well be in the area of applications - what is often called 'autonomous learning' as opposed to learner autonomy. As a teacher in the classroom I have kept up with the work on classroom autonomy, but I have always looked at autonomy more from the perspective of language learning beyond the classroom. This is where the interest in digital media comes in.

I am really interested in how the globalization of social media may be changing the face of language learning beyond the classroom. Only a few years ago teachers in Hong Kong were complaining that their students had few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Nowadays, if you take a look at the average Hong Kong student's Facebook, you see that they have friends all over the world and they are communicating both in Chinese and English on a daily basis. They are also spending a lot of time on YouTube, watching videos in English and Chinese. No doubt they are using English to do other things online as well, but at the moment I see Facebook and YouTube as the sites where most is going on. The problem is - it's a research problem really - that after years of saying that students have to use a foreign languages outside the classroom to learn it properly, now people are questioning whether they are learning anything when they use it in social media.

So my interest is specifically in trying to establish how we might show evidence that learning is actually taking place. There are a few ways you could approach that, but the one I am focusing on right now is to look at the comments people leave on YouTube videos that involve translanguaging and to use discourse analysis techniques to dig out evidence of language and intercultural learning.

Mike: *Thinking about how we might develop the theoretical bases of learner autonomy that were set out 20 or 30 years ago is a great project for the LD SIG at its 20th anniversary conference, and raises lots of interesting questions we can return to. For now, though, could you explain what you mean by translanguaging and what looking at it can tell us about language learning and use through YouTube?*

Phil: People are generally using translanguaging to talk about situations where more than one language is being used and these languages are brought into some kind of relationship with each other. Code-switching is the example that will be most familiar from sociolinguistics, but translanguaging is something bigger than that. It could include, for example, subtitling a video in another language, speaking in a foreign language when people expect you to speak your first language (or vice versa), or even just using one language to talk about another language. The point about translanguaging, I think, is that it represents a more informal and more fluid way of looking at foreign language learning and use as involving both the foreign language and a first language, and perhaps other languages as well. In online interaction, translanguaging also seems to be the characteristic context for language learning. If the context involves translanguaging (on YouTube that could mean, for example, a fansubbed video), then you start to get comments or discussions about language and that is where the learning may begin.

Mike: *Could you explain a bit more about what fansubbing is?*

Phil: Yes, fansubbing is an interesting area of informal foreign language use/learning. Basically, it involves 'unofficial' subtitling of dramas, animations, or music videos in another language. The most popular at the moment seem to be English subtitled versions of Korean and Japanese drama series. The people who do this work in teams and try to get their versions out within a few days of them being broadcast in Korea and Japan. They are not professionals, just Korean and Japanese speakers who want to use their English language skills (or vice versa). In fact, these kinds of fansubs are not usually circulated on YouTube (if you want to know where, search for 'fansub' on the Internet). Fansubbed music videos are quite common on YouTube, though, and one that I have published some research on is 'Beijing Welcomes You', which was the official song for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. One version of this was subtitled by a Chinese schoolgirl and it attracted a lot of comments on language issues.

Mike: *I'm wondering what kind of insights and challenges a focus on translanguaging raises for thinking theoretically about autonomy in language learning, and if these should apply to classroom-based learning as well as learning outside the classroom. For me, it's interesting that work by people like Canagarajah and Pennycook suggests that the kind of fluid, informal use of multiple languages, which you refer to, has always been characteristic of actual language use in many societies and contexts, and is also becoming more and more important even in societies, like Japan, that have often been regarded as essentially 'monolingual', as a result of migration, globalisation and the growth of digital media. And yet approaches to autonomous language learning, especially in the classroom, are usually based very much on developing monolingual, not translanguaging, competence. This is reflected for example in David Little's emphasis on appropriate target language use as a principle of successful language learner/user autonomy. Use of other languages is accepted, if at all, only insofar as it enables learning of the 'target language'. Is there a danger of a disconnect between a monoglossic school knowledge about language use and the more heteroglossic action knowledge that people increasingly draw on to participate effectively in inter- and intra-national communication?*

Phil: Well, I have never really been in favour of 'target language only' teaching. I also think that, to some extent, it is a rationalisation of the value that the EFL industry puts on 'native speaker' teachers (who often don't speak the students' first languages). Of course, it is important that learners get chance to use the target language, but classrooms are not always the best place for that. I would also agree that the idea of translanguaging breaks down the idea of separate or self-contained language competences. I think that in practical terms, the ability to switch and negotiate differences among the languages you speak is a very important one, that is often suppressed rather than encouraged in language teaching. I think that we also need to look more closely at the value that learners place on knowing a little bit of several languages nowadays. This is all very much concerned with how we need to think about the development of autonomy in theoretical terms, because it is very much a matter of attending to what learners want learn of languages.

Mike: *What are some other key areas in which you feel we need to build on, or perhaps reconstruct, the theories of autonomy we have had been working with for 20 or 30 years now? The book you co-edited with Lucy Cooker recently*

on The Applied Linguistic Individual¹ suggests, for example, that there is a lot of useful work being done now to develop a more dialectical understanding of individual-social and agency-structure relations in autonomous language learning and use, but also still lots of puzzles to explore there.

Phil: That book actually has origins in the ILA conference that was held at Kanda University several years ago. Lucy and I were interested in several papers that were presented that involve discussion of sociocultural theory and issues of agency and identity. I am interested that we have consistently emphasized that autonomy involves social interaction and interdependence (David Little and Ema Ushioda have led the way there), while at the same time we are criticized for 'individualism' by social theorists who talk a lot about agency and identity and often rely on individual case studies in their research. The dichotomy that social theorists are drawing between autonomy and agency is false one, for me, but I also believe there is a lot more that we could do to incorporate the notion of identity into our thinking. To me, this is a matter of taking a wider view of language learning and its roles in people's lives. How does learning a foreign language change you as a person in the world, and how do we factor that into the idea of controlling your learning? When we think about language learning as a process of identity development, I think that we also have to think of it as both a social and an individual process. The theoretical problem is how to get those two sides of the process to work together, rather than to insist on the social or individual side alone.

Mike: *Maybe another aspect of this wider view is the possibility for people to change, not just themselves, but also the world around them as part of their learning and use of languages. This might be in terms of linguistic agency with, for example, people choosing to speak lingua franca Englishes that challenge the authority of native speaker varieties, or creating new hybrid forms of online communication through the kind of translanguaging you have discussed. Another approach, which the 20th anniversary conference will explore, is around social activism, such as NGO and volunteer work by language students and teachers, and connections between autonomy and global issues and critical pedagogies. What do you make of developing autonomy into a more overtly critical or activist engagement with the world in this way?*

Phil: Certainly, I think that autonomy is about having some degree of control over what you learn of a language and the purposes that you put it to. Possibly that is the most important aspect, because if you don't have that, other kinds of choices may be false. There is some connection here with world Englishes or lingua franca Englishes, but also with issues of language diversity and language rights. I am looking forward to learn more about how people in Japan are linking language learning with activist engagement. I am a little bit hesitant to go in that direction myself. In the past, I was very interested in links between autonomy and critical pedagogies, but in the end, I felt that critical pedagogies too easily becomes a matter of pushing students in the direction of certain ideologies or ways of thinking. I recall one recent article by Stephen Brookfield, who used to write about critical self-directed learning. He had finally decided that self-directed learning was not a good idea, because learners would come up with the wrong ways of thinking. He was talking about racist ways of thinking, for example, and we would probably all agree with him on that. But at the same time, I have the feeling that autonomy, from a teacher's perspective, must be largely

about trusting students. If they are given genuine choices, they will make good choices. So I would like to see a version of critical pedagogy that incorporates that kind of trust.

Mike: *Are there any other areas of thinking about autonomy you feel we need to renew or develop, or connections we should be making beyond the field of autonomy itself, at this point 20 years after the founding of the LD SIG and after three decades or so of work on learner autonomy?*

Phil: Well, we have covered a lot already! I would just sum that up by saying that autonomy is an interesting concept in that it can give us quite a stable point from which to view the kinds of changes that are taking place in the world of language learning. I don't feel that the concept itself needs redefining, in the way that people are redefining learning strategies or motivation, for example. What we do need to do is think about how ideas of choice, decision-making and control over language and learning are relevant to new situations.

Mike: *Finally, I wanted to end by situating the discussion much more specifically and asking you what a key challenge or issue, connected to the development of autonomy, is for you in your own teaching. For me, a big puzzle is how to create space within the English classroom for students to translanguage between English and Japanese in ways they feel are useful for researching and thinking critically about issues of concern to them, at the same time as they take more control over how to develop their English. What is a question or issue in your own practice that interests or preoccupies you at the moment?*

Phil: The situations I usually teach in often present quite substantial challenges to autonomy: content required by a course outline that has to go through a committee to be changed; pre-determined assessment tasks, large classes, prescribed outcomes, large lecture-format classes, and so on. In addition, if you go too far in the direction of student control, the students themselves would feel that they are missing out on something. So in my own teaching, I still face a lot of the basic challenges. How much can I get away with? How can I keep the students on my side? Generally speaking, the students I teach appreciate more freedom, but at the same time they worry about assessments and covering everything on the schedule. These are very basic challenges that don't really go away, because you have to deal with them every time you see new faces in the classroom!

¹ Benson, P., & Cooker, L. (Eds.), (2013). *The applied linguistic individual: Sociocultural approaches to identity, agency and autonomy*. Sheffield: Equinox