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Miyu Nishimoto

OSHaberi English Coaching
info[at]oshaberi03[dot]com



Ivan Lombardi

Learning Learning editorial team
ivan[at]u-fukui[dot]ac[dot]jp



English Language Learning Landscapes on Social Media: An Interview With *Eigo Otaku* Miyu

Ivan writes: On a scorching day in late July, I had the pleasure to interview Miyu, a passionate learner of English and one of the most popular content creators on social media in Japan with her English learning experience channels and English coaching business. The original plan was to chat about Miyu's personal story as a learner of English. Two hours of talking later, and we had covered topics as diverse as: approaching English language teaching and learning on different social media platforms; creating content designed to reach hundreds of thousands of people versus individually tailored instruction; dealing with the expectations of her subscribers; navigating the social media influencer culture; studying and living in another country, and many more. What follows is a small excerpt of our conversation, but I hope it will be enough to open a small window into Miyu's world and how she engages with learner development on a scale that I did not realize was even possible.

Ivan: Hi Miyu! Thank you for making time for this interview. I haven't seen you in a couple of years since you graduated, but I imagine you have been busy. Weekly, if not daily, I receive a notification that you posted something on one of your social media channels. So, who are you, and how would you introduce yourself to the readers of *Learning Learning*?

Miyu: I get this kind of question a lot! Whenever asked, I say that I am a content creator on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. My channels focus on English language learning tips, experiences, and reflections on language learning. But I also have my own business teaching English – in person, before COVID, and online since then.

Ivan: Your trademark online is *eigo otaku*, which is a label I find very interesting. Where does that come from?

Miyu: When I first began my social media activities, I didn't want to call myself an English teacher or a coach, because at that time I had no confidence to do so or qualifications for that matter. I had, however, a passion for English, and this is what I wanted to emphasize. Also, I am Japanese, and *otaku* is a well-known Japanese word for someone who is passionate about a topic. That's who I am, an *eigo otaku*. I love English, I love to absorb things related to English, from the language to culture in English-speaking countries and beyond. Opening my social media channels was a way to share what I liked and reach out to other learners of English.

Ivan: This interview will appear in *Learning Learning*, a publication focusing on learner development. When I watch your videos on YouTube, I feel you are on a lifelong mission to learn English. Do you think this is a fair assessment?

Miyu: Yes, definitely. I'm not going to stop learning until I die. The journey never ends!

Ivan: How did this journey start, then? Can you walk us through some of the milestones of your experience as an English language learner?

Miyu: The first milestone has to be going to New Zealand when I was 16. That was my first time out of Japan and using English in daily conversation, that is not based on a textbook or with English teachers. The college I stayed at had three Japanese people, but we were not allowed to use Japanese – that was a school rule. During that time, I felt like I started using a different part of my brain when using English. When I was in Japan, and that was the first year of high school, I felt like I was really good at English and performed well in all the exams. But once I moved to New Zealand and tried to speak English I couldn't speak at all. The conversation flow was too fast, even beyond my expectations. I was really surprised. I had to change the way I engage with English, and started focusing on learning pronunciation and useful vocabulary in different real-life situations. This made me change my English learning goal, from getting a good score on tests to reaching a level of conversational ability that would feel natural to an English speaker.



Video: [Miyu on switching from a “Japanese brain” to an “English brain”](#)

Ivan: Dare I say this was the beginning of your independent language learning journey?

Miyu: I guess so. During my university years, I went on a study holiday in Cebu, Philippines. My purpose was to prepare for IELTS, as I needed a score of 6.5 to join a study abroad program in the United States. That was never possible because of COVID, but the experience in the Philippines was instrumental in improving my English writing, which had been my weakest point. And I did achieve a score of 7.5, eventually.

Ivan: What happened after COVID, then?

Miyu: I went to Australia for one year for an internship. This is when I realized that I could use English normally, except for those work-related situations for which I lacked the technical words, which my manager never failed to point out. When in Australia, speaking English started feeling automatic. I did

not need to prepare ahead before speaking. I wasn't trying to be good at English, it just felt natural. I used English to live my life, hang out with my friends, and talk to my host family. It did not feel hard to use English anymore, and it did not feel like studying.

Ivan: What your milestones seem to have in common is that they all happened outside of Japan. In your opinion, is going abroad instrumental to learning English?

Miyu: What I can say is that I would not have had a similar experience by staying in Japan. When you are outside of your country, out of your comfort zone, your mindset easily changes, right? You have to commit, because going abroad is expensive, if you are working you must quit your job or pause your studies if you are a student. I started my own English teaching business before going to Australia, and I had to stop all activities for a year and sacrificed my income to join that internship. This fosters the mindset of "Oh, I have to do this! I have to commit to this experience to the fullest". In Japan, I would have had many more distractions.

Ivan: Your commitment to learning English makes you a role model for other learners of English, especially in Japan. What advice would you like to give to a learner who is struggling with English?

Miyu: That's a good question. Actually, I receive daily messages from my followers asking for advice. The general feeling I get is that there is so much content on the Internet regarding English learning that people get confused. And if you go to a bookstore, there are tons of vocabulary books, textbooks, and test-taking strategies books. You may be looking for resources that your favorite influencers recommend, but there is no guarantee that those resources are the best for you. The advice I try to give is to understand why you want to learn English, what you want to achieve in English. Only then will you be equipped to find what works best for you and, most importantly, what you enjoy doing. Because unless you're enjoying your studies, you won't really have the motivation to keep working and improve.

Ivan: Do you have any insights into how your followers react to your advice?

Miyu: When I post a video on YouTube, for example, I don't know who is watching it. The statistics tell me my latest video was viewed 179,000 times, but I have no way of knowing all these people personally, talking to them, or giving tailored advice. The best I can do is offer a neatly packaged set of experiences and advice that my audience can relate to. When I have the chance to interact with my followers, via DMs or at fan meetings, the general tone is that people seem to be searching for that one key that will unlock the solution to the struggle. The "best" thing, however, is highly individual, and I don't want to promote any one-size-fits-all approach on social media. When I teach online courses on Zoom, instead, I have the opportunity to survey all participants, before and after the meeting, which makes it easier to identify personal reasons and goals and customize my lessons accordingly.

Ivan: Since you mentioned teaching online courses, shall we talk about your engagement with learner development? In particular, I think our audience would be interested in reading about some success stories you had, and what helped your learners reach their goals.

Miyu: Nowadays I mostly teach English conversation and pronunciation on Zoom, either one-on-one or in trial lessons in a group. What started as a study group with my university friends soon became a job as I channeled my passion for English and the learning process. Through social media, I then expanded online and started an online course supporting English learners. As for success stories... the first that comes to mind is a false beginner, a busy full-time worker who has become really confident in their way of studying English. The first time they attended my course they were saying "I've tried this, I've tried that, but nothing worked for me. Can you tell me the best way to learn English?". Since then, we worked together, not establishing a teacher-student relationship, but rather working together, discovering together. After six months we agreed that this learner needed more vocabulary and more exposure in general, so we explored online resources and a timeline that would fit their schedule. With that, they became really confident in what to do to achieve their goal and, in a

way, they did not need my help anymore. One year later I had the chance to meet this former student in person at a fan meeting in Tokyo. Their English was really good! They worked on expanding their vocabulary, learned more grammar, and confidence tied everything together. I was really impressed.

Ivan: Thank you for sharing this story. Next, I hope you don't mind me asking what are, on the other hand, some challenges or puzzling questions that you still experience when you support English language learners.

Miyu: Sometimes I still don't get what the learners *really* want. It is hard to get an answer to questions like "why do you want to learn English?", "what do you struggle with?", "what is your final learning goal?". Many of my followers, and course takers, seem more preoccupied with the *how* rather than the *why* of language learning. And the questions I am asked more often resemble the kind of questions you would ask ChatGPT for a quick-and-easy response: "how can I become fluent in English?", expecting me to come up with a standardized process. But I am not ChatGPT, and if my students choose my services instead of asking questions to AI, I would rather have them engage in introspection, start a process, and only then figure out a personalized answer to the "how" questions. However, sometimes it is difficult to get this point across. Many learners want a quick and easy answer to their struggles – yet, they pay for a service where they work together with me, a human being, expecting me to behave like an AI chatbot. I find this contradiction quite puzzling, and I am not sure where to go from here.

Ivan: I am not sure this fully pertains to the interview, but do you think this expectation may be related to the influencer culture? After all, one reason why social media are so powerful in connecting people is their immediacy.

Miyu: What I can say in this regard is that there are two patterns to social media content creation. Some influencers are focused on building their business, like an English teaching channel. These channels focus on the number of subscribers or followers to generate money, and I can see how they could use immediacy to give quick and direct answers to their followers. Their goal, after all, is to expand their business. Other influencers are in the game for enjoyment and to share their passion. In my case, I enjoy learning English, I enjoy thinking and talking about the process of learning English. Having become a popular content creator is a side benefit. That allows me to meet more learners who will believe in the kind of approach I try to adopt. It is not as immediate, but it is more human and effective.



Video: [Miyu on the process of learning English](#)

Ivan: Thank you so much for your answers, Miyu. We have talked for almost two hours now, so let me ask you one final, sneaky question. Reflecting on everything we talked about today, which title would you give to this interview?

Miyu: We talked about language learning a lot, so that must be there, right? We also talked about social media, the abundance of learning resources online, changes and trends in learners... would something like “language learning landscapes” work? I like the flow of “L, L, L”.

Ivan: We also talked about your experience as an English language learner at length, so I hope you won't mind me adding your name (which is now a brand name, I guess?) to the title.

Miyu: That makes sense, yeah. Thank you!

Ivan: Thank you – it was brilliant to catch up.